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**University of Southampton**

Faculty of Faculty of Arts and Humanities

History

**The Violence of 'Non-Violence': A Socio-Technical Study of the Ethnocultural  
Politics and Strategies of New Right Identitarianism**

by

**Emily Burden**

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

June 2023



# University of Southampton

Faculty of Arts and Humanities

History

Doctor of Philosophy in Web Science

## **The Violence of 'Non-Violence': A Socio-Technical Study of the Ethnocultural Politics and Strategies of New Right Identitarianism**

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Prior to live-streaming his deadly attack on two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, Brenton Tarrant uploaded a manifesto online rooted in 'identitarian' narratives. Promoting the defence of European identity against the threat of a foreign 'invasion', identitarianism is a transnational intellectual and activist movement that, significantly, does not advocate violence. Instead, identitarians utilise the web and its related technologies to engage in a 'metapolitical' strategy, advancing 'softer' and less explicitly hateful ideals – such as 'identity', 'values', and 'culture' – in an attempt to normalise an ideology that has ethnic separatism at its core. The danger of identitarianism and its New Right separatist politics lies in its capacity to mobilise a transnational collective, appeal to a broad range of audiences, and facilitate the inclusion of harmful narratives into mainstream discourse. Through a digital ethnographic and discourse-analytic study of the identitarian–New Right online ecosystem, this research seeks to contribute to understandings of far-right mobilisation online and develop a more nuanced understanding of the nature of the threat posed by 'non-violent' manifestations of far-right extremism.



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## Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship

Print name: Emily Burden

Title of thesis: The Violence of 'Non-Violence': A Socio-Technical Study of the Ethnocultural Politics and Strategies of New Right Identitarianism

I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. None of this work has been published before submission

Signature: E. Burden ..... Date: 2 June 2023 .....



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To my parents, I cannot put into words everything you have done for me to make this possible.

To Paddy, for keeping me sane while writing a PhD during a national lockdown.

And to Ruby, for a being brilliant friend.

With the oversight of my main supervisor, editorial advice has been sought. No changes of intellectual content were made as a result of this advice.



## Abbreviations

AZ	Action Zealandia
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
CL	Corpus Linguistics
DHA	Discourse-Historical Approach
IE	Identity England
LM	Local Matters
NR	New Right





# Chapter 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Research Problem and Rationale for Project

With a number of violent attacks in Europe and beyond in recent years, far-right extremism has increasingly become an important area of research among academics and policymakers alike. Notably, this research has primarily been framed in the context of violent extremism, with stakeholders focusing predominantly upon far-right groups and actors who conduct or openly espouse violent actions and hateful narratives. However, while terrorism and wider physical violence are certainly a product of far-right ideology and activism, 'non-violent' strategies are playing an increasingly central role in far-right 'solutions' to perceived threats. Hence, it is crucial to consider not only the dangers of illegal behaviours (terrorism, hate speech, and violence) but also those which are 'non-violent' but nevertheless are underpinned by illegitimacy and immorality (e.g. viewing or treating other groups as inferior). Removing physical violence as the necessary threshold for 'extremism' and quantifying the 'threat' posed is vital for recognising the heterogeneous nature of the far right, in both ideology and tactics. This project does not intend to engage in detailed conceptual debates but to show that violence is no longer the only line on which to define extremism. That is, 'harm' needs to be understood in a different and broader way; extremist beliefs and behaviours can inflict a range of (physical and social) harms at the individual, group, and societal level, from undermining social cohesion to threatening inclusive democracy.

Describing a group's strategy as 'non-violent' does not mean that physical violence is not a possible consequence. Seemingly 'moderate' far-right discourse that does not advocate violence certainly has the capacity to create an environment *conducive* to physical violence. This was demonstrated by the deadly attack on two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, on 15 March 2019, where 50 people were killed and many others critically injured. The attack was streamed live on Facebook by the perpetrator, Brenton Tarrant, and was then quickly shared across social media platforms. Tarrant wrote a manifesto – entitled 'The Great Replacement' – which was rooted in narratives perpetuated by the identitarians, a transnational intellectual and activist movement focused on preserving a collective 'European' (ethnocultural) identity perceived to be threatened by globalism, multiculturalism and resulting mass immigration. Significantly, identitarianism does not actively promote violence, nor seek direct electoral support (though this has not prevented some identitarians engaging in electoral politics). Instead, the movement engages in a 'metapolitical' strategy – 'a war of ideas' – against the sociopolitical and cultural system in which it operates. Metapolitics can be summarised as an approach focused on 'shifting

## Chapter 1

the accepted topics, terms, and positions of public discussion so as to create a social and political environment more open and potentially accepting, of its ideology. It comes from a belief that this is required before electoral and policy support for their views is possible.<sup>1</sup> Put simply, it is expanding what is sayable to affect what is doable.

As part of this 'normalisation' strategy, identitarian groups carry out a highly mediated form of intellectual activism, ranging from flash mobs and media campaigns to banner drops and podcasts. In its defence of European civilisation against 'the Great Replacement' by 'non-Europeans', it aims to return Europe to its prior glory in the modern world. This future return to an imagined past is based on a doctrine of ethnopluralism, which rejects liberal multiculturalism in favour of the strict spatial separation and geopolitical division of people according to ethnic and cultural criteria. Once a social and political environment has been created that is more open and accepting of its ideology, it can push for policies such as remigrating 'non-Europeans'. The movement claims that, if enacted, it would be peaceful. However, it is hard to envision how these policies could be voluntary and implemented without some element of force.

Drawing from the European 'New Right' – a school of thought that formally denounces neo-Nazism, both in discourse and strategy – identitarian discourse often advances 'softer' and less explicitly hateful ideals such as 'European values', 'identity' and 'culture'. The danger of the movement lies in its capacity to appeal to a broad range of audiences – from individuals with a propensity for violence and view physical violence as the only feasible response, to the everyday voter – and facilitate the normalisation of harmful narratives into mainstream discourse. Identitarianism has become a transnational ideology, finding adherents around the world, including a growing influence in North America among the alt-right. More broadly, this suggests increasing cohesion in far-right ideology globally, and that identitarianism is providing fertile ground for mobilisation and cooperation across countries.

This research has broad applications for social media platforms and policymakers seeking to develop a better understanding of the online harms landscape, and how malicious actors are utilising the web (alongside offline spaces) to achieve their (meta)political goals.

## 1.2 Structure of the Thesis

Chapter 2 will highlight the research problem in more detail, identifying the 'gap' in the literature that it seeks to fill. Doing so will reinforce the threat that emanates from non-violent

---

<sup>1</sup> Murdoch and Mulhall, 'From Banners to Bullet: The International Identitarian Movement', 8.

manifestations of the extreme right, and thus the value of placing identitarianism at the centre of empirical analysis. Chapter 3 will outline the theoretical and methodological approach the thesis undertakes: a digital ethnographic and discourse-analytic study, based on the discourse-historical approach.

Chapter 4-7 will form the empirical analysis of the thesis. The chapters will take a sociotechnical approach and incorporate a close discourse analysis of three under-researched case studies – Identity England (Chapter 4), Action Zealanda (Chapter 5) and Local Matters (Chapter 6). The first half of Chapter 7 will bring together the empirical analyses presented in Chapters 4 to 6 to discuss the similarities and differences between the groups. It will argue that exclusionary discourse manifests itself in manifold ways, with each group revealing that – through a variety of topics and sites – extreme-right ‘blood and soil’ discourse has been recontextualised. It will also illustrate that, while mobilising a traditional blood and soil nationalist appeal alongside an alliance to a broader supranational attachment may appear contradictory, this combination generates a synergy that is constructive to the far-right metapolitical agenda. The second half of Chapter 7 will build on this line of reasoning further through an analysis of Arktos Media, a hybrid digital/print far-right publishing house. This will illustrate that while IE, AZ and LM may not individually pose a significant societal threat, when viewed as part of broader, global metapolitical network of far-right actors, the potential ‘harm’ (physical and social) emanating from this manifestation of the far right becomes clear.

Chapter 8 concludes the thesis by emphasising the significant societal and policy implications of this study. Namely, the inherent contradictions of the NR’s ‘non-violent’, but ultimately, dangerous strategy that seeks to normalise an exclusionary (ethnopluralist worldview) that is underpinned by blood and soil politics. This chapter will also outline suggestions for further research.



## Chapter 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

Utilising the web and its related technologies, the far right is engaging in a ‘metapolitical’ battle – a ‘war of ideas’ – to normalise an ideology that has ethnic separatism at its core. It is against this background that this thesis aims to develop a more nuanced understanding of ‘non-violent’ manifestations of the extreme far right and the ways in which this ‘normalisation’ strategy is mobilised through various forms of online and offline activism.

This chapter reviews existing literature on far-right extremism to identify gaps that this thesis aims to fill. Doing so will reveal that the contribution of this project is twofold: empirical and methodological. Firstly, existing research on identitarianism has primarily focused on the Generation Identity ‘brand’, and so it is crucial to expand the empirical scope and look at a broader range of identitarian actors and groups. Secondly, it will take existing analyses further theoretically and methodologically by examining not only the thematic content produced but the discursive strategies and patterns underlying these frames, too. While explicitly hateful beliefs are more easily deconstructed, prevailing indirect and ‘coded’ discourses require close and critical reading in order to understand their implied exclusionary meanings. The chapter concludes by specifying the thesis’ aim and the research questions it seeks to investigate. It will begin by ‘unpacking’ the far right and interrogating the concept of ‘extremism’.

### 2.2 Unpacking Far-Right Extremism

#### 2.2.1 What Is the Far Right?

The far right is not a homogenous group defined by a single ideology or narrative; it is a highly diverse movement consisting of a broad landscape of actors with different ideologies, aims and ways of operating. At its ideological core, however, the far right is united in by its ‘nativist’ ideology, described by Mudde as:

an ideology that holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group (‘the nation’) and that non-native (or ‘alien’) elements, whether persons or ideas, are fundamentally threatening to the homogeneous nation-state [...] The basis of

## Chapter 2

the nativist distinction can be multifold – including ethnic, racial, and religious prejudices, which are often combined in one form or another.<sup>2</sup>

In summary, then, the far right can be conceptualised as a ‘container term’ for actors who promote a nativist agenda and exclusionary beliefs.<sup>3</sup> As will be discussed, for some far-right actors, however, the concept of nativism as defined in terms of the ‘nation’ obfuscates the layeredness of identity. That is, the nation is not the only spatial frame but it consists of various levels including ‘Europeanness’.

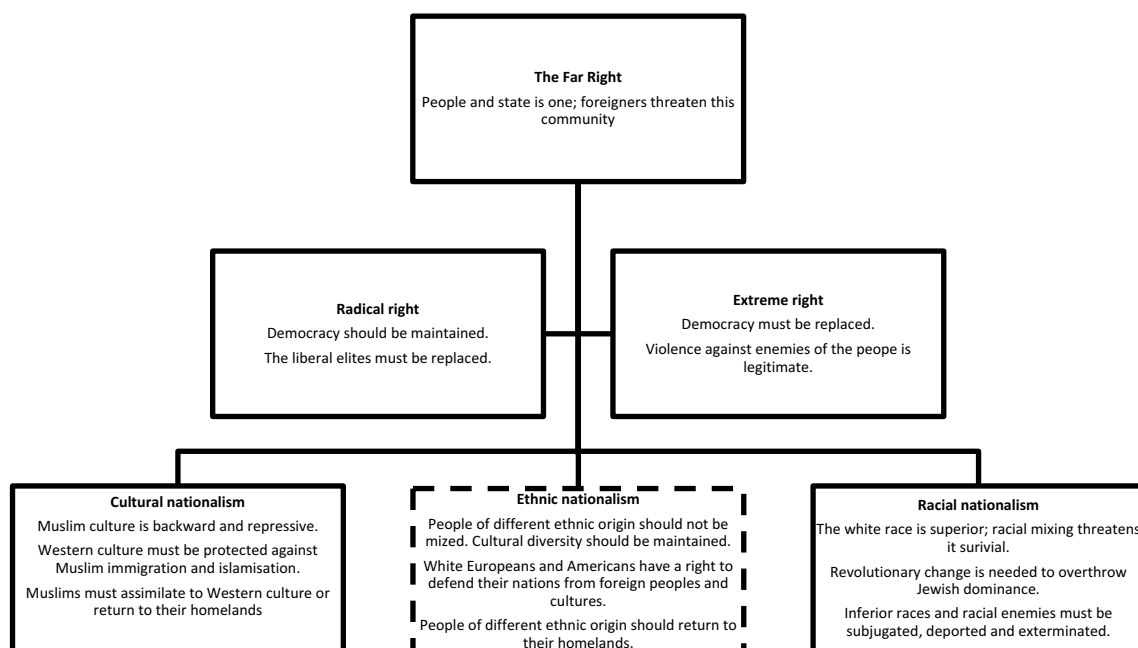
The far right itself has been divided into two sub-groups – the ‘radical right’ and ‘extreme right’. These two opposing ends of the far-right spectrum are generally conceptualised by scholars in this way: the former works within the framework of democracy, while the latter rejects democracy, is more overt in its racism, and has a propensity towards violence and other non-conventional means to achieve its goals.<sup>4</sup> In order to provide a more nuanced approach to characterising the far right, Bjørgo and Ravndal outline three ‘far-right ‘families’, consisting of cultural nationalists (radical-right populist parties and movements against immigration and Islam), ethnic nationalists (exemplified by the identitarian movement in Europe) and racial nationalists (based on ideas of racial purity and embracing totalitarian principles) (see Figure 2.1). The authors stress that these categories are ideal types, and groups and individuals do not always fit neatly into one of these categories, with wings or individuals leaning towards one of the other types, as well as the potential for collaboration between groups from different ideological camps.

---

<sup>2</sup> Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*, 4.

<sup>3</sup> Lee, ‘Overview of the Far-Right’.

<sup>4</sup> Bjørgo and Ravndal, ‘Extreme-Right Violence and Terrorism: Concepts, Patterns, and Responses’, 2.

Figure 2.1 Model of the Far Right.<sup>5</sup>

### 2.2.2 What Is Extreme?

Evidently, the distinction between ‘radical’ and ‘extreme’ is not clear-cut, with the boundaries between the two becoming increasingly blurred (particularly when it comes to ethnic-nationalist groups).<sup>6</sup> This is demonstrated by Lee, who says that attitudes towards democracy can differ across both ‘radical’ and ‘extreme’ groups and ideologies, and thus should be treated with caution.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, Berger maintains that definitions of extremism, particularly in policy circles, are largely framed in the context of violent extremism, yet, while ‘violence is the most destructive, escalatory, and irrevocable expression of the extremist paradigm [...] not all extremist movements begin and end with violence’.<sup>8</sup> For various reasons, he explains, ‘[i]t is much more difficult and problematic to define extremism outside of the context of violence, primarily because “extremist” is a politically freighted term that is often used in a mainstream context to define opponents’ views.’<sup>9</sup> Such discussions lead to another contested concept – ‘terrorism’ – which Berger notes must be disentangled from extremism, as, while they often travel in tandem,

<sup>5</sup> Adapted from Bjørge and Ravndal, ‘Extreme-Right Violence and Terrorism: Concepts, Patterns, and Responses’.

<sup>6</sup> Ahmed and Pisiou, ‘How Extreme Is the European Far Right? Investigating Overlaps in the German Far-Right Scene on Twitter’; Fielitz and Laloire, *Trouble on the Far Right: Contemporary Right-Wing Strategies and Practices in Europe*.

<sup>7</sup> Lee, ‘Overview of the Far-Right’.

<sup>8</sup> Berger, *Extremism*, 41.

<sup>9</sup> Berger, ‘Extremist Construction of Identity: How Escalating Demands for Legitimacy Shape and Define In Group and Out-Group Dynamics’, 5.

they are not synonymous. The researcher distinguishes between terrorism as a tactic and extremism as a spectrum of beliefs, as opposed to a fixed destination.<sup>10</sup>

### 2.2.2.1 'Non-violent' but Dangerous

A comparative study conducted by the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change (2019) of two seemingly contrasting far-right actors – 'non-violent' far-right groups, and Anders Breivik (the perpetrator of the 2011 attacks in Norway) – showed that, although there is a difference in the 'justification of violence' (whether or not the actors incite or call for violence or illegality), there is significant ideological overlap between them on 'dangerous divisive narrative'. These findings reveal that 'violence is no longer the only line on which to define extremism' and that these ideologies can inspire wider social harms beyond violence. Thus, there is a need 'to develop criteria for determining the definition of nonviolent, but nevertheless dangerous, extremism'.<sup>11</sup>

Similar arguments are made by the UK Commission for Countering Extremism, which has claimed that policy concerns about extremism have traditionally focused on reducing violence when, in fact, the harms of extremism are far wider than this, including a broader social impact such as undermining social cohesion.<sup>12</sup> Drawing from commissioned research on public perceptions of extremism, the *Challenging Hateful Extremism* (2019) report found an emerging consensus that extremism consists of three key aspects: a set of *beliefs* and a set of *behaviours* (that enact or are drawn from those beliefs) that cause or are likely to cause *harms*.<sup>13</sup> Notably, the commissioned research by the Policy Institute at King's College London revealed that, despite consensus on the idea that extremism involves beliefs and behaviours, 'disagreement increases as behaviours move away from illegality (e.g., around terrorism and violence) and towards illegitimacy and immorality (e.g., viewing or treating other groups as inferior)'.<sup>14</sup> The UK Commission thus emphasises a broader conceptualisation of extremism where 'harm' includes 'the marginalisation of groups (including groups with a protected characteristic), as well as the longer-term damage that extremism causes to country's social fabric and democracy'.<sup>15</sup> With this in mind, the more recent Commission report (2021) reflected on previous findings and identified a new category of extremist activity – 'hateful extremism' – presented as one of three harmful behaviours that lie

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<sup>10</sup> Berger, *Extremism*, 30.

<sup>11</sup> Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, 'Narratives of Hate: The Spectrum of Far-Right Worldviews in the UK', 11.

<sup>12</sup> Commission for Countering Extremism, 'Three Years on: Achievements and Reflections'; Commission for Countering Extremism, 'Challenging Hateful Extremism'.

<sup>13</sup> Commission for Countering Extremism, 'Challenging Hateful Extremism'.

<sup>14</sup> Wilkinson, van Rij, and Ipsos MORI, 'An Analysis of the Commission for Countering Extremism's Call for Evidence: Public Understanding of Extremism', 9.

<sup>15</sup> Commission for Countering Extremism, 'Challenging Hateful Extremism', 26.



outside of democratic debate, alongside terrorism and violent extremism, and restriction of rights and freedoms. Hateful extremism is defined as:

Activity or materials directed at an out-group who are perceived as a threat to an in-group, who are motivated by or intending to advance a political, religious or racial supremacist ideology:

- a. To create a climate conducive to hate crime, terrorism or other violence;
- b. Attempt to erode or destroy the fundamental rights and freedoms of our democratic society as protected under Article 17 of Schedule 1 to the Human Rights Act 1998.<sup>16</sup>

Hateful extremist activity is understood here within the context of Berger's conceptualisation of extremism – 'the belief that an in-group's success or survival can never be separated from the need for hostile action against an out-group'.<sup>17</sup> This definition – particularly its focus on creating environments *conducive* to hate crimes, terrorism and violence – underscores the need for considering the dangers of non-violent extremism and the merits of adopting a 'social harm' approach. This approach has been put forward in criminology to shed light on behaviours that, while may not necessarily infringe a specific law, break an accepted code of behaviour.<sup>18</sup> This includes, for instance, dissemination of potentially dangerous or fraudulent health information online.<sup>19</sup> The social harm perspective thus helps researchers move beyond the overly strict boundaries of criminology which often focuses on crimes. Hillyard and Tombs stress how the term 'crime' excludes many serious harms that are ignored by criminal law, or that are seen as marginal to the dominant policy, legal, enforcement and even academic agendas. The authors claim that looking at 'harms' as opposed to 'crimes' is particularly cogent when it comes to online behaviour, where the misalignment between the two is particularly evident.<sup>20</sup>

Employing a social harm perspective not only draws attention to actions, victims, and perpetrators that are otherwise neglected by the criminal justice system but also recognises that 'low-impact' acts can lead to large aggregated losses and significant harm. In the context of this thesis, it sheds light on far-right actors who, while may not necessarily operate outside of the law – i.e promoting illegal hate speech or inciting violence – have the capacity to inflict very real (physical or symbolic) harm on their victims. For example, far-right beliefs and behaviours that

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<sup>16</sup> Commission for Countering Extremism, 'Three Years on: Achievements and Reflections'.

<sup>17</sup> Berger, *Extremism*, 39.

<sup>18</sup> Davies, *The Palgrave Handbook of Social Harm*.

<sup>19</sup> Lavorgna and Miles, 'Science Denial and Medical Misinformation in Pandemic Times: A Psycho-Criminological Analysis'.

<sup>20</sup> Hillyard and Tombs, 'From "Crime" to Social Harm?'

## Chapter 2

move away from illegality still have serious implications and consequences, such as threats to inclusive democracy, national values, or the wellbeing of minority and targeted groups. It can also have negative consequences for social cohesion, on a sense of belonging for targeted group members, or trust in institutions.

The dichotomy between illegal and 'legal but harmful' content is a key area of criticism surrounding the UK government's Online Safety Bill which is currently progressing through parliament. In the UK, and internationally, there is an evolving and interrelated landscape of online regulations. The Online Safety Bill has been put forward by the government to tackle online harms, and a regulatory body – Ofcom – has been appointed to protect users on social media platforms and hold platforms accountable for what is happening in their spaces. The Bill has undergone various iterations as it progresses through parliament, however at the time of writing, it aims to protect all users from illegal content while also protecting children from content that is 'legal but harmful'. The inclusion of this principal (and subsequent removal in the case of adults) has been subject to debate, on the one hand, from those who are concerned about its implications for freedom of expression, while others, particularly actors within the child protection sector, are concerned that removing the 'legal but harmful' principle has implications not only for adults, but children, too.<sup>21</sup>

Given the inclusion of a New Zealand based group in this study it is important to also provide a brief overview of the national and online platform policy contexts in which the far-right mobilises. While the far-right scene is not new in New Zealand, it does not have an extensive history of terrorist attacks.<sup>22</sup> The Christchurch terrorist attack on 15 March thus highlighted the profound impact of online extremism in the New Zealand, with the subsequent Royal Commission of Inquiry on the attack painting a clear picture of a terrorist embedded within an international online extremist ecosystem. Following the attack, New Zealand, alongside France launched the global implementation of the 'Christchurch Call to Action' to eliminate terrorist and violent extremist content online. Moreover, on 25 July 2022, the New Zealand Code of Practice for Online Safety and Harms was launched by Netsafe and NZTech. The code obligates tech company signatories to actively reduce harmful content in seven harm categories - child sexual exploitation and abuse, bullying and harassment, hate speech, incitement of violence, violent or graphic content, misinformation, and disinformation - on their relevant digital services in New Zealand. Notably,

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<sup>21</sup> Vibert, 'Internet Matters' submission to the Public Bill Committee for the Online Safety Bill'

<sup>22</sup> Comerford, Guhl, and Miller. 'Understanding the New Zealand Online Extremist Ecosystem'.

however, it is a voluntary code and self-regulatory – unlike the statutory duty of care proposed as law in other comparative jurisdictions such as the UK and Australia.<sup>23</sup>

It should also be noted that New Zealand has recently withdrawn plans to change its hate speech laws that were put forward as a result of recommendations from the Royal Commission of Inquiry after the Christchurch attacks. Proposed in 2021, the reforms proved controversial, with the government struggling to define what kind of speech would reach the threshold for prosecution. While progressive groups criticised it for not offering broad enough protections to women, LGBTQI, and disability communities, others argued it encroached on freedom of speech. New Zealand's current hate speech laws cover race, but not gender, sexuality, or religion. The proposed laws had initially increased protections for all of those groups but were then watered down to cover only religion.<sup>24</sup> As Chapter Five will demonstrate in detail, New Zealand's colonial-settler context also offers nuances and separate challenges to other parts of the world.

### 2.2.2.2 Mainstreaming Extremism

Physical violence should not be the threshold for which the potential threat posed by far-right actors; '[t]o protect the eligible in-group from the crisis caused by the out-group', non-violent strategies play a fundamental role in some far-right extremist 'solutions' to perceived threats.<sup>25</sup> In a discussion of the four main strategies employed by far-right groups in the UK – electioneering, protest, normalisation and violence – Lee claims that, while terrorism and wider physical violence are a product of far-right activism, they are rarely endorsed by actors.<sup>26</sup> Increasingly, strategies of normalisation are being employed – often described as shifting the 'Overton window' or 'metapolitics' – which seek to change the boundaries of acceptable public debate within democratic strategies and 'mainstream' narratives previously thought of as extreme.<sup>27</sup>

The theoretical groundwork for a metapolitical approach to far-right politics was laid by a movement known as the Nouvelle Droite (the New Right – hereafter NR), which emerged in the late 1960s in response to the neo-Marxist student protest movements against capitalism, consumerism and traditional French social and political institutions.<sup>28</sup> The NR is a 'school of thought' derived from the ideas of the French far-right philosopher Alain de Benoist and his ethnonationalist think tank GRECE (Groupement de recherche et d'études pour la civilisation

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<sup>23</sup> Tan, 'Social Media Platforms Duty of Care - Regulating Online Hate Speech.'

<sup>24</sup> McClure, 'New Zealand government under fire after shelving Christchurch hate speech reforms'

<sup>25</sup> Berger, *Extremism*, 99.

<sup>26</sup> Lee, 'Overview of the Far-Right'.

<sup>27</sup> Miller-Idriss, *Hate in the Homeland*, 45.

<sup>28</sup> Murdoch and Mulhall, 'From Banners to Bullet: The International Identitarian Movement'.

européenne – Research and Study Group for European Civilization), an organisation founded in France in 1968. Following the ideas of Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, and his insistence on the ‘power of ideas and the need for an organic intellectual vanguard to change mentalities’, NR sought to create a movement that would be intellectual through the dissemination of its ideas via publishing houses, conferences and journals.<sup>29</sup> As will be shown in Section 2.5, this process of mainstreaming relies on various strategies that are far beyond the traditional conception of far-right metapolitics, playing out in various spaces, including online, where the far right has made extensive use of the web and its related technologies and platforms.<sup>30</sup>

## 2.3 Empirical Gap: The Identitarian Movement

### 2.3.1 The Violence of ‘Non-violence’

The case of Brenton Tarrant, who conducted a deadly attack on two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, on 15 March 2019, illustrates how seemingly non-violent ‘normalisation’ strategies can lead to physically violent consequences. While far-right terrorists such as Tarrant are often described as ‘lone actors’, even where they have acted alone, Lee contends, ‘their beliefs and actions have been shaped by ties to the wider far-right milieu’.<sup>31</sup> Tarrant’s manifesto, entitled ‘The Great Replacement’, was rooted in narratives perpetuated by the identitarians, an intellectual and activist ethnonationalist movement that does not actively promote violence. Instead, it favours a ‘non-violent’ highly mediatised metapolitical approach – ‘a war of ideas’ – against the sociopolitical and cultural system in which it operates. Identitarianism focuses on the defence of European ‘identity’, ‘culture’ and ‘values’, which are perceived to be threatened by globalism, liberalism, immigration and Islam. While the emphasis placed on different aspects of the ‘civilisational crisis’ may vary across the identitarian spectrum, all participants ‘share a calamitous diagnosis and a radical critique of the current state of Europe’ and ‘the struggle to keep alive what they perceive to be the real European identity’.<sup>32</sup>

In response to this foreign ‘invasion’ and supposed displacement of European peoples, the movement calls for a set of policies under the banner of ‘remigration’. Despite its proponents’ rejection that this is simply a euphemism for ‘ethnic cleansing’, such policies would ultimately involve the lowering of the living conditions for ‘non-Europeans’, or even their forced expulsion.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Zúquete, *The Identitarians: The Movement against Globalism and Islam in Europe*, 39.

<sup>30</sup> Maly, ‘New Right Metapolitics and the Algorithmic Activism of Schild & Vrienden’.

<sup>31</sup> Lee, ‘Overview of the Far-Right’, 18.

<sup>32</sup> Zúquete, *The Identitarians: The Movement against Globalism and Islam in Europe*, 3.

<sup>33</sup> Murdoch and Mulhall, ‘From Banners to Bullet: The International Identitarian Movement’.

Before this can be achieved, however, identitarians believe they must first play the long game of cultural influence, creating a social and political environment more open and potentially accepting of its ideology. Only after this discursive shift occurs on what is 'sayable' will electoral and policy support for their views be possible.<sup>34</sup>

The identitarian movement as it is known today first emerged in France in 2002 with the formation of Identitarian Youths (Jeunesses Identitaires) and consolidated in 2003 with the creation of Bloc Identitaire. It was not until the autumn of 2012, however, that the movement fully entered public consciousness, with the French far-right youth movement – Generation Identity (Génération Identitaire) – issuing a 'declaration of war' in a video published on YouTube. The video, accompanied by dramatic music and featuring monochrome close-ups of a succession of young faces, was translated in many languages and went viral. The voices claimed:

We are Generation Identity [...] We are the generation of ethnic fracture, of the total failure of integration, the generation of forced crossbreeding [...] We have closed your history books to find our own memory once again. We have stopped believing that Abdul is our brother, the planet our village and humanity our family. We have discovered that we have roots and ancestors—and thus a future. Our only inheritance is our blood, our soil, and our identity. We are the heirs of our destiny [...] You will not convince us with a condescending glance, youth employment programs and a pat on the shoulder: for us, life is a struggle.<sup>35</sup>

Since then, a formal network of branches across Europe has emerged, as well as adherents across the world completely independent of Generation Identity.<sup>36</sup>

### 2.3.1.1 The Identitarian Threat

Due to the discrepancy between the image identitarians draw of themselves and the 'real danger that emanates from them', identitarianism has been qualified as a 'major political danger'.<sup>37</sup> The identitarians' 'dark account of contemporary European life' has a broad mobilising appeal; compared to neo-Nazi groups, the authors explain, identitarianism has the potential not only to attract young adults 'with a ring-wing extremist spirit' but also connect to the conservative spectrum.<sup>38</sup> Ahmed and Pisiu further this, showing that the movement has been categorised as

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<sup>34</sup> Murdoch and Mulhall, 'From Banners to Bullet: The International Identitarian Movement', 8.

<sup>35</sup> Generation Identity, 'A Declaration of War from the Generation of National Identity'.

<sup>36</sup> Murdoch and Mulhall, 'From Banners to Bullet: The International Identitarian Movement'.

<sup>37</sup> Bruns, Glösel, and Strobl, 'More than Just an Online Phenomenon: Roots, Characteristics and Strategies of the 'Identitarian Movement'.

<sup>38</sup> Zúquete, *The Identitarians: The Movement against Globalism and Islam in Europe*, 171.

right-wing extremist ‘with fascist features in terms of theory, aesthetics, rhetoric and style’, as well as right-wing radical.<sup>39</sup> This is because, like right-wing populists, ‘the Identitarians appear to have abandoned race theories, whilst focusing on soft issues such as patriotism and family values, and due to their hip appearance.’<sup>40</sup> The Identitarians even advocate European values and a European culture, which is a rather unusual show of solidarity for a traditionally nationalist ideology.’ Hence, as touched upon previously, this conceptualisation of identity moves beyond the national framework and instead towards one that incorporates various levels. This, it will be shown, has significant implications for the mobilisation of trans-local network and activism. Valencia-García thus describes movements such as the identitarians as ‘zombie fascism’; that is, ‘one that we are hesitant to recognise as fascism; in some ways it is more gnarly and in others it is more aesthetic—covering something ugly with flashy branding. Fascism was supposed to be dead—with the exception of some fringe elements. It was never dead but was undead. It just crawled underground and waited.’<sup>41</sup>

Despite the potential threat emanating from the identitarian ideology and its ‘non-violent’ sociotechnical activism, unlike other contemporary far-right movements – such as the alt-right – it is a relatively underexplored phenomenon. Moreover, many of the existing discursive analyses on the identitarian movement – both academic and policy – are focused on the Generation Identity ‘brand’.<sup>42</sup> While Generation Identity is the largest and most-well known identitarian network, identitarianism is much broader than this; it has emerged as a transnational ideology, composed of vast network of organisations and figures directly or loosely associated with the movement, that mobilise around a shared conception of European identity.<sup>43</sup>

Zúquete, who has written the most extensive account of the movement, stresses that it is vital the identitarian phenomenon is not simplistically dismissed by scholars, politicians or media as a marginal movement. He argues that ‘many of the socio-cultural trends that feed it – above all, the perception of an ongoing multicultural and multi-ethnic transformation of traditional European societies and the related “sense of threat” to traditional European values and identities that it provokes – are likely to continue in the coming decades. So, too, will the identitarian

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<sup>39</sup> Ahmed and Psoiu, ‘How Extreme Is the European Far Right? Investigating Overlaps in the German Far-Right Scene on Twitter’.

<sup>40</sup> Ahmed and Psoiu, ‘How Extreme Is the European Far Right? Investigating Overlaps in the German Far-Right Scene on Twitter’.

<sup>41</sup> Valencia-García, *Far-Right Revisionism and the End of History*, 23.

<sup>42</sup> Guenther et al., ‘Strategic Framing and Social Media Engagement’; Richards, ‘A Philosophical and Historical Analysis of “Generation Identity”’; Nissen, ‘The Trans-European Mobilization of “Generation Identity”’; Blum, ‘Men in the Battle for the Brains’.

<sup>43</sup> Murdoch and Mulhall, ‘From Banners to Bullet: The International Identitarian Movement’.

ethnocultural backlash'.<sup>44</sup> More broadly, Zienkowski contends that discursive analyses of (democratic and undemocratic) metapolitical projects – or 'normalisation' strategies – are important, as 'metapolitical debates potentially reshape the structure of the public realm as well as the entities, borders and processes that constitute it'.<sup>45</sup> With this in mind, it is clear that the identitarian metapolitical project and its discursive construction of inclusion of some and exclusion of others are important objects of analysis that require greater empirical focus.

## 2.4 Far-Right Ideology

### 2.4.1 Exclusion and Hierarchy

Ideology has been defined as 'the mental frameworks used by individuals to make sense of the world, and encompasses beliefs, ideas and values'.<sup>46</sup> Arguably, however, ideology cannot be limited to 'mental frameworks' that are used by individuals. A potent conceptualisation of ideology must also include the material dimension. That is, ideologies are not only ideas 'but producers and structures in which those ideas are embedded'. For this reason, Jahedi, Abdullah and Mukundan, claim that in critical discourse studies 'ideologies' are not viewed 'as a nebulous of realm of "ideas" but as tied to material practices embedded in social institutions'.<sup>47</sup>

At their core, all far-right ideological beliefs share exclusionary and hierarchal ideals that 'establish clear lines of superiority according to race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, religion and sexuality'.<sup>48</sup> Yet, as alluded to briefly in Section 2.2, the ways in which actors define 'we' in relation to 'them', and how these self–other boundaries are expressed, vary between different far-right 'families'.<sup>49</sup> While racial nationalists take race as the central organising principle between the 'self' and 'other', ethnonationalists, including the identitarians, have attempted to break away from traditional notions of exclusionary difference, instead employing culture and identity as markers of belonging.<sup>50</sup> This conception of identity is based on the NR's supposedly 'anti-racist' doctrine of ethnopluralism, which promotes the belief that all ethnic groups have a common interest in defending their 'right to difference'.<sup>51</sup> Following interwar fascism, the NR sought to establish itself as an alternative 'school of thought', replacing overt discussions of 'race' and superiority with

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<sup>44</sup> Zúquete, *The Identitarians: The Movement against Globalism and Islam in Europe*, xiii.

<sup>45</sup> Zienkowski, 'Politics and the Political in Critical Discourse Studies', 131.

<sup>46</sup> Lee, 'Overview of the Far-Right', 3.

<sup>47</sup> Jahedi, Abdullah, and Mukundan, 'An Overview of Focal Approaches of Critical Discourse Analysis', 28.

<sup>48</sup> Miller-Idriss, *Hate in the Homeland*, 6.

<sup>49</sup> Bjørge and Ravndal, 'Extreme-Right Violence and Terrorism: Concepts, Patterns, and Responses'.

<sup>50</sup> Lee, 'Overview of the Far-Right'.

<sup>51</sup> Camus and Lebourg, *Far-Right Politics in Europe*, 130.

coded terms such as 'European identity', 'culture', 'values' and 'heritage'.<sup>52</sup> Western modernity and liberalism, this line of thought maintains, has eradicated collective identities and traditional culture, and thus a quest for the recovery of a mythical 'European identity' is necessary.<sup>53</sup>

The collective psychological ownership over territory by 'ethnic Europeans' is the core mobilising narrative underpinning identitarianism; in the words of Zúquete, '[t]he prologue to the twenty-first century European Identitarian current of thought is the overriding emphasis on the group's ethnocultural worth, the urgency to preserve it and the setting of boundaries between the in-group, those who belong to the people (ultimately ethnic Europeans), and those who do not belong to the people, the out-group (non-Europeans)'.<sup>54</sup> Identitarians regard bio-ethnic kinship as the basis for a collective European identity, that is, 'those who belong in Europe belong by *right of blood and lineage*, not on the basis of birth of any given European territory' (emphasis added).<sup>55</sup> Conversely, 'non-Europeans' are viewed as detrimental to the continent's native population through their negative influence on European identity and culture.

Unlike biological racism, ethnopluralism does not explicitly outline a hierarchy of cultures or ethnic classifications. Instead, it insists that ethnic diversity is valuable and should be maintained; *however*, in order to preserve these unique norms, cultures and characteristics, ethnopluralism calls for the replacement of liberal multiculturalism with the strict spatial separation and geopolitical division of people according to ethnic and cultural criteria. Despite a discursive rejection of traditional racial nationalism, the NR thinking rigidly ties culture to ethnicity and so, as Schlembach argues, 'it "biologises" and "essentialises" cultures to such an extent that they are turned into the functional equivalents of race'.<sup>56</sup> The reality is, then, that in much of NR literature Europeans are deemed superior, based on claims of cultural purity. Ultimately, then, even if coated in 'anti-racist' ethnopluralist principles, identitarians perceive their roots in the context of blood, soil and identity.

Identitarians have challenged the 'extremist' label, contending that they are, in fact, 'natives' and 'patriots'. Its proponents have even argued that identitarianism would ultimately protect young people from extremism and radicalisation: 'We will not allow this generation of young patriots to be pushed into the right-wing extremist scene, and thus into a devil's circle of violence, hate, and

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<sup>52</sup> Schlembach, 'Alain De Benoist's Anti-Political Philosophy Beyond Left And Right: Non-Emancipatory Responses to Globalisation and Crisis'.

<sup>53</sup> Salzborn, 'Renaissance of the New Right in Germany?'

<sup>54</sup> Zúquete, *The Identitarians: The Movement against Globalism and Islam in Europe*, 11.

<sup>55</sup> Zúquete, *The Identitarians: The Movement against Globalism and Islam in Europe*, 367.

<sup>56</sup> Schlembach, 'Alain De Benoist's Anti-Political Philosophy Beyond Left And Right: Non-Emancipatory Responses to Globalisation and Crisis'.



extremism, through the prohibition of thought and speech, exclusion and incitement. To give these young people a meaningful and positive way of expressing their legitimate anger beyond senseless violence and ideological madness has become a central concern for me.<sup>57</sup> The strong emphasis on ethnicity has now largely been abandoned by the NR, with de Benoist criticising prominent identitarian writer (and former NR intellectual) Guillaume Faye for championing ethnocentrism – ‘the mobilizing conviction, distinct to all long-living peoples, that they belong to something superior and that they must conserve their ethnic identity, if they are to endure in history’.<sup>58</sup> According to de Benoist, the NR is centred on the ‘defence of identity in a positive and open way’ and not as an excuse to ‘inspire the most aggressive xenophobia’.<sup>59</sup> Thus, while much of the literature focuses on the role of de Benoist and his ideological influences on identitarianism, it is Faye who coined new words, developed concepts, and projected scenarios that are now an intrinsic part of the identitarian language of combat for the battle of Europe.<sup>60</sup>

It is important to note here that the emphasis placed on the relationship between culture, race and ethnicity – or the ways in which actors’ express racial consciousness – is not viewed with the same intensity across the identitarian spectrum.<sup>61</sup> Where actors fall on the continuum between racialism (explicitly talking about race) and pragmatism (implicitly in terms of ethnoculturalism) depends on a range of strategic, ideological and geographical factors. Drawing heavily from NR thought and, more recently, identitarianism, the alt-right is a far-right counter-hegemonic movement that also weaponises culture for metapolitical gains, distinguishing itself ‘from bygone generations of racist movements preoccupied with the political process or violent revolution’.<sup>62</sup> Scholars have contended that, while identitarianism and the alt-right are separate movements, there are large areas of ideological crossover, with some within the alt-right increasingly embracing the terminology, identity and tactics of the identitarian movement. For instance, alt-right figurehead Richard Spencer openly describes himself as ‘identitarian’, while Greg Johnson is the founder of the online publishing house and website ‘Counter-Currents’, which aims to create ‘a space for a dialogue in which a new intellectual movement, a North American New Right, might emerge’.<sup>63</sup> In the UK, identitarian and NR themes have been deployed by extreme far-right organisations such as ‘Patriotic Alternative’ as they attempt to strategically rebrand their anti-

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<sup>57</sup> Zúquete, *The Identitarians: The Movement against Globalism and Islam in Europe*, 84.

<sup>58</sup> Zúquete, *The Identitarians: The Movement against Globalism and Islam in Europe*, 13.

<sup>59</sup> Zúquete, *The Identitarians: The Movement against Globalism and Islam in Europe*, 10.

<sup>60</sup> Maly, ‘Guillaume Faye’s Legacy’.

<sup>61</sup> Zúquete, *The Identitarians: The Movement against Globalism and Islam in Europe*.

<sup>62</sup> Hermansson et al, *The International Alt-Right: Fascism for the 21st Century?* 107.

<sup>63</sup> Johnson, ‘North American New Right’.

Semitic and white nationalist ideology as a defence of 'indigenous' Europeans against their 'Great Replacement'.<sup>64</sup>

There are notable geographical differences among these groups, with the alt-right more openly advocating white identity politics. The reasoning for this is put forward by alt-right actor Jared Taylor, who explains that 'Americans have no choice but to speak in terms of race as our unifying factor, whereas European nationalists can emphasize language, history, and culture without specifically talking about race'.<sup>65</sup> The danger of identitarianism thus lies in its use of NR ideals to 'soften' an extremist stance that has ethnic separatism at its core, and thus potentially facilitating the inclusion of xenophobic and racist ideas into mainstream. As will be shown below, the ideological cohesion and diversity of New Right identitarianism is explained by its manifestation as a trans-local, polycentric and layered movement that rests on a network of digital and non-digital infrastructures.<sup>66</sup>

#### 2.4.2 Nationalism, Territory and Identity

As the above discussion illustrates, exerting control over physical territory is at the centre of far-right exclusionary visions and practices. There exists a vast scholarship – particularly in the field of human geography – that has traced the connections between nationalism, territory and identity. Most notably, Anderson developed the notion of 'imagined communities' to capture the ways in which national identities and territories are created across communities of people who have never met.<sup>67</sup> The significance of territory and geography in far-right ideology, and their intersections with identity, belonging, and appeals to defend the 'homeland' against the 'other', has been extensively analysed by Miller-Idriss.<sup>68</sup> The researcher argues that spaces of belonging, nationalist geographies and (white) territories are constantly invoked by far-right groups and individuals. For the far right there exists a 'a sacred and eternal bond that ties geographic space to racial, ethnical, and cultural groups'.<sup>69</sup> National communities are imagined in racially defined ways, with clear guidelines for who belongs and who does not. Through a nativist lens, the homeland is thus understood as a biological and ecological concept, 'linking a sense of belonging to the body – through the related term "heartland" – and the home'.<sup>70</sup> In its far-right formulation, then, ecology is combines both ethnic and environmental dimensions.

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<sup>64</sup> Murdoch and Mulhall, 'From Banners to Bullet: The International Identitarian Movement'.

<sup>65</sup> Zúquete, *The Identitarians: The Movement against Globalism and Islam in Europe*, 296.

<sup>66</sup> Blommaert, *The Sociolinguistics of Globalization*.

<sup>67</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*.

<sup>68</sup> Miller-Idriss, *Hate in the Homeland*, 29.

<sup>69</sup> Miller-Idriss, *Hate in the Homeland*, 30.

<sup>70</sup> Miller-Idriss, *Hate in the Homeland*, 34.

### 2.4.2.1 The Far Right and Ecologism

Forchtner argues that discourse concerned with the natural environment is a common theme in far-right ideology that is often overlooked and thus requires greater attention.<sup>71</sup> While far-right concerns with the natural environment vary depending on where they fall on the far-right spectrum, they are united in the promotion of an exclusionary ideology through an ecological framework underpinned by ideals about racialised territory and sacred national space, or what Miller-Idriss describes as the ‘greening of hate’.<sup>72</sup> Forchtner maintains that articulations and meanings attributed to the natural environment are not inherent in nature itself but are fundamentally linked to ideology and historical and contemporary far-right concerns.<sup>73</sup> Put differently, environmental communication is not always simply a strategic endeavour to connect to broader audience and increase appeal; rather, it is deeply linked to the ‘heartland’ and the far-right worldview.

The link between the far right and the natural environment is thus a profound, ideologically driven one with a long historical tally – even though it is not regularly discussed in detail, as environmentalism has increasingly ‘migrated’ towards the political left and been viewed in inclusive, universalist terms since the 1970s.<sup>74</sup> However, scholars of nationalism have rightly argued that nature has been viewed as providing an authentic reservoir of meaning and that the nation is not simply living *on* the land but is interwoven *with* the homeland.<sup>75</sup> While this implies neither that every far-right actor is an environmentalist nor that the far right’s relationship with the natural environment is limited to ecofascism, concerns over the natural environment have indeed long been present in Western far-right thought.<sup>76</sup>

Existing research on far-right mobilisation primarily focuses on psychological approaches to individuals’ cognitive ‘radicalisation’ or organisational strategies. As a result, Miller-Idriss claims, exclusionary ideas about the homeland and their deep links to ideas about rootedness, ownership, space and place have been overlooked.<sup>77</sup> Placing the notions of space and place and the centre of analysis, the scholar contends, will draw researchers’ attention to claims about geographic entitlement, belonging and exclusion, and everyday engagement in ordinary spaces

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<sup>71</sup> Forchtner, *The Far Right and the Environment Politics: Discourse and Communication*.

<sup>72</sup> Miller-Idriss, *Hate in the Homeland*, 38; Forchtner, *The Far Right and the Environment Politics: Discourse and Communication*, 217.

<sup>73</sup> Forchtner, *The Far Right and the Environment Politics: Discourse and Communication*.

<sup>74</sup> Forchtner, ‘Nation, Nature, Purity’.

<sup>75</sup> Smith, *Ethno-Symbolism*; Forchtner and Lubarda, ‘Scepticisms and Beyond?’

<sup>76</sup> Forchtner, *The Far Right and the Environment Politics: Discourse and Communication*.

<sup>77</sup> Miller-Idriss, *Hate in the Homeland*, 29.

and places. Such analyses, Miller-Idriss adds, should focus on real and symbolic geographies, as well as the local, national, virtual and youth cultural spaces and places that create and sustain them.<sup>78</sup>

Lubarda has sought to address the gap by developing a coherent framework – ‘far-right ecologism’ (FRE) – for prospective empirical enquiries into the ecological dimensions (and related ideas about rootedness, space and place) underpinning far-right ideology.<sup>79</sup> Notably, Lubarda claims that ‘eco-fascism’ is ‘insufficient and fails to account for the multifarious (and yet distinctive) ideological views of how perceptions of the environment inform the far-right worldview. The notion of “Far-Right Ecologism” (FRE) incorporates the broader right-wing spectrum in its ideological morphology.’

The notion of *blood and soil* – the value of ‘rootedness’ – is at the core of FRE. The idea of rooted beings ‘assumes an indivisible unity of living creatures and the environment in which they dwell (or of the blood and soil), forged under the influence of the anti-enlightenment traditionalism, disparaging Christianity, capitalism, economic utilitarianism, hyper-consumption and rampant tourism’.<sup>80</sup> FRE outlines a holistic worldview through three fundamental elements: organicism (the notion of nation, culture and nature in a holistic union as a single organism), spiritualism (from the polytheism or paganism of the eco-fascists, to Christian ecologists’ view of nature as God’s gift) and naturalism (viewing nature as a blueprint for social order). The holistic outlook reflected in spirituality and organicism implicitly assumes the unity of the natural and social world, pointing to the centrality of (social) naturalism.<sup>81</sup>

Relevant adjacent and peripheral concepts to this conceptual core are Manichean distinctions between ‘good’ and ‘evil’ (good nationalists vs. ‘evil’ capitalists/liberals), nostalgia (for example, calls for a return or a ‘rebirth’ of the imagined ecological polity of the past by fostering ‘traditional’ practices such as family farming), autarky, mysticism and authority (survivalism or decentralisation through a ‘family of families’). These elements may constitute FRE as a heuristic device that enables the identification of distinctive features of the far-right groups under scrutiny.

Narratives of human–nature relations are a core feature of the identitarian ideology that is underpinned by the NR’s conception of the ‘right to difference’, understood as each living being having its place in the ecosystem, and living in strict separation to protect the ‘heartland’ from foreign elements that could threaten the naturally existing cohesion. Nativism has thus been

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<sup>78</sup> Miller-Idriss, *Hate in the Homeland*.

<sup>79</sup> Lubarda, ‘Beyond Ecofascism?’

<sup>80</sup> Lubarda, ‘Beyond Ecofascism?’, 7.

<sup>81</sup> Lubarda, ‘Beyond Ecofascism?’

naturalised by far-right actors, presenting an imaginary of purity, order and stability that can only be achieved by establishing clear boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’.<sup>82</sup> As argued by Fortchner, ‘for the extreme right, nature is not multicultural, but biodiverse: diversity both on a global plane (different species/ecosystems existing side by side instead of being intermingled) as well as internally (a stable, “naturally” evolved diversity)’.<sup>83</sup>

#### 2.4.2.2 Transnationalisation of the Far Right

The concept of the ‘homeland’ (and the spaces and places within it) is central to identitarian construction and mobilisation of a collective ‘European’ identity. As put by Zúquete, identitarian attachment to a collective (ethnocultural) identity is ‘not thought out as an abstraction or a simple social construction but felt as something more profound, primordial, tied to *space, territory, memory, and ethnicity*, that must be revitalized today’ (emphasis added).<sup>84</sup> In their work on the trans-European mobilisation of Generation Identity, Nissen has shown how groups ‘expand the borders of the “heartland” to the entire European continent, while simultaneously emphasising their own national identities’.<sup>85</sup> The identitarian understanding of ‘identity’ consists thus of three interdependent layers: the regional, the national and, more broadly, a wider civilisational bond. In this way, ‘European’ is employed by actors in an ethnocultural sense, as opposed to geographical; while the fortification of national boundaries for their host nations is promoted, ‘we’ all belong to the same overarching (European) cultural sphere. Thus, while mobilising a traditional blood and soil nationalist appeal alongside an alliance to a broader supranational attachment may appear contradictory, the national and the supranational (civilisational) entity are not two incommensurable and mutually exclusive alternatives; instead, today, ‘the supranational impulse cohabits peacefully with the traditional nationalist prioritisation of the nation as a unique social community and political entity’.<sup>86</sup> Rather than ideological tension, then, they are actively conflated and combined, and this combination generates a synergy that is constructive to the far-right metapolitical agenda.

As will be shown below, the ideological cohesion and diversity of NR identitarianism is explained by its manifestation as a trans-local, polycentric and layered movement that rests on a network of digital and non-digital infrastructures.

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<sup>82</sup> Fortchner, ‘Nation, Nature, Purity’.

<sup>83</sup> Fortchner, ‘Nation, Nature, Purity’, 300.

<sup>84</sup> Zúquete, *The Identitarians: The Movement against Globalism and Islam in Europe*, 1.

<sup>85</sup> Nissen, ‘The Trans-European Mobilization of “Generation Identity”’, 86.

<sup>86</sup> Bassin, ‘“Real Europe” Civilizationism and the Far Right in Eastern Europe’, 16.

Ultimately, Maly argues, to truly understand the trans-local dimension of identitarian activism, researchers need to overcome ‘methodological nationalism’ and examine how various spatiotemporal scales interact with each other.<sup>87</sup> Nissen notes that the paradoxical nature of transnational identity construction in relation to far-right nationalists make it a rarely explored far-right phenomenon.<sup>88</sup> Yet, fuelled by a wider civilisational bond, there is increased cohesion in far-right ideology, and thus understanding the transnational dimension of exclusionary ethnocultural politics is more important than ever. Similarly, Mlejnková argues that, while existing research pays attention to the contribution of the web in the transnationalisation of far-right narratives and collective identity, less attention is paid to the ideological level of transnationalisation. That is, how do far-right groups, such as identitarians, solve the issue of identity on the transnational level practically? This involves, Mlejnková, shows, transforming the ethnonationalist message to a transnational one, and translating the national needs into transnational ones.<sup>89</sup>

This is not to say, however, that the technical dimension should be discarded from analysis, with digitalisation and high globalisation giving birth ‘to new forms of nationalist activism further complicating the ties between space, place, identity and nationalistic activism’.<sup>90</sup> With social media platforms and mobile devices increasingly dissolving social, spatial and temporal boundaries, individuals are now able to connect with people, places and events that do not necessarily share the same sociospatial setting, transforming users’ experience of social phenomena and facilitating the formation of ‘imagined collectives’ constituted as what boyd describes as ‘networked publics’.<sup>91</sup>

In their analysis of the transnationalisation of the far right, Froio and Ganesh argue that the web constitutes a crucial tool for the facilitation of the construction of cross-border collective identities and interpretative frames.<sup>92</sup> Yet, the authors contend that, ‘while online spaces and modes of communication facilitate these cooperative engagements and have significantly reduced burdens to transnational collaboration, they are not the root cause of the collaboration — rather, those collaborations are motivated by shared, global ideologies based in common understandings about a threat to “white civilization” from immigration and demographic change’.

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<sup>87</sup> Maly, ‘New Right Metapolitics and the Algorithmic Activism of Schild & Vrienden’.

<sup>88</sup> Nissen, ‘The Trans-European Mobilization of “Generation Identity”’.

<sup>89</sup> Mlejnková, ‘The Transnationalization of Ethno-Nationalism’.

<sup>90</sup> Maly, ‘New Right Metapolitics and the Algorithmic Activism of Schild & Vrienden’.

<sup>91</sup> Thompson, ‘Mediated Interaction in the Digital Age’; boyd, ‘Social Network Sites as Networked Publics: Affordances, Dynamics, and Implications’.

<sup>92</sup> Froio and Ganesh, ‘The Transnationalisation of Far Right Discourse on Twitter’.

<sup>93</sup> This rejects a technological determinist perspective and reinforces the sociotechnical one that will be discussed below: it is the symbiotic relationship between the technical and common discursive issues that provides fertile ground for mobilisation and organisational cooperation across countries. In the context of identitarianism, the web has played a critical role in the transnationalisation of ideas, forming and negotiating in-group/out-group boundaries, and mobilising a collective ethnocultural identity that can attract a wider audience beyond the frontiers of physical territory and the European continent.

A notable example of this, Hodge and Hallgrimsdottir have shown, is the alt-right movement, which, despite being largely aterritorial by nature, retains an abiding preoccupation in its discourse for an imagined pan-European culture.<sup>94</sup> Echoing Miller-Idriss's call for greater deployment of spatial perspectives in far-right research, the authors maintain that, even in communities that exist almost exclusively online, questions of location – space, geography and boundary – remain salient. In a similar manner to identitarians, the alt-right holds geopolitical concerns over defending cultural or ethnic homelands. It rejects globalisation and multiculturalism, and challenges the increasingly blurred boundaries between the social categories of race, gender, sexuality and class.<sup>95</sup> Hodge and Hallgrimsdottir thus place particular emphasis on the concept of 'borders', which they argue is of necessity in any discussions of territoriality and the management or control of space.<sup>96</sup>

Like many of the reactionary social movements of the 21st century, the alt-right 'rely on aterritorial data networks to survive, recruit, and reproduce'. Hodge and Hallgrimsdottir stress that, although many of the far-right activities take place online, this does not mean it is simply 'stateless' or 'placeless'; instead, new virtual geographies are created 'which transform how a nation is conceptualised and creates a new imagined community that spans borders'.<sup>97</sup> Online networks thus represent a 'global borderland', where 'the physicality of borders become abstractions, and where *discursive boundaries* – spaces where the acceptance or rejection of patterns of speech are negotiated – have become the new frontiers' (emphasis added).<sup>98</sup> Far-right actors, including the alt-right, are using cultural objects – such as memes – to signal membership of their ideology and perform 'border maintenance' between 'us' and 'them'. Hodge and Hallgrimsdottir suggest that some online spaces challenge alt-right encroachment – for example,

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<sup>93</sup> Miller-Idriss, *Hate in the Homeland*, 21.

<sup>94</sup> Hodge and Hallgrimsdottir, 'Networks of Hate'.

<sup>95</sup> Miller-Idriss, *Hate in the Homeland*.

<sup>96</sup> Hodge and Hallgrimsdottir, 'Networks of Hate', 572.

<sup>97</sup> Hodge and Hallgrimsdottir, 'Networks of Hate', 572.

<sup>98</sup> Hodge and Hallgrimsdottir, 'Networks of Hate', 563.

through content moderation – while others, such as fringe platforms, enable or even facilitate far-right bordering activities.<sup>99</sup>

The spaces and places in which far-right mobilisation occurs will be explored further in Section 2.5, but for now the discussion will turn to common themes underpinning far-right discourses of inclusion and exclusion produced and circulated in these spaces.

### **2.4.3 Common Ideological Themes**

Research shows that the far-right homogenised ideal, based on an exclusionary and hierarchal ideology, is constructed, legitimised and mobilised through several core themes or ‘crisis’ narratives.<sup>100</sup> These common themes play a key role in how far-right actors set the boundaries between who belongs – the ‘in-group’ – and those who do not belong – ‘the out-group’.

### **2.4.4 Loss, Existential Threat and Dystopian Conspiracy Theories**

Far-right exclusionary ideologies are often embedded within a framework of existential threat to the dominant group. This mobilising narrative promotes the notion that the out-group is posing a threat to the continued survival of the in-group and the loss of their unquestioned place at the top of the hierarchy.<sup>101</sup>

The perception of loss of ‘our’ physical and cultural space is expressed by prominent identitarian writer Dominique Venner, who claims that, ‘for the first time in their multi-millennial history, the European peoples do not prevail over their own space, neither spiritually, politically, nor ethnically’.<sup>102</sup> Globalisation, multiculturalism and resulting mass immigration are viewed by identitarians as threatening European identity and culture. These threats, Nissen has shown, are divided into demographic, cultural, security and economic threat dimensions.<sup>103</sup> Certain religious and ethnic groups – particularly Muslims and Islam – are presented as being culturally incompatible with the West, with promotions of fears about the ‘Islamisation’ of Europe and the inherent violence (as demonstrated by terrorist attacks) of multicultural societies.

Claims of a demographic crisis caused by globalisation and mass immigration are often explained and driven by three overlapping alarmist dystopian conspiracy theories: ‘the Great Replacement’

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<sup>99</sup> Hodge and Hallgrimsdottir, ‘Networks of Hate’.

<sup>100</sup> Berger, ‘Extremist Construction of Identity: How Escalating Demands for Legitimacy Shape and Define InGroup and Out-Group Dynamics’; Lee, ‘Overview of the Far-Right’.

<sup>101</sup> Berger, *Extremism*.

<sup>102</sup> Zúquete, *The Identitarians: The Movement against Globalism and Islam in Europe*, 1.

<sup>103</sup> Nissen, ‘The Trans-European Mobilization of “Generation Identity”’.



(used globally), ‘white genocide’ (used primarily in North America), and ‘Eurabia’ (used predominantly in Europe). Dystopia, Berger explains, is the belief that out-groups have successfully orientated society to disadvantage the in-group.<sup>104</sup> These narratives are thus dystopian in that they ‘imagine a frightening future of decline, degradation, or chaos’, and hence promote an urgent need to defend against ‘foreign invasion’ and restore sacred national space, territory and homelands.<sup>105</sup> Coined by French scholar Renaud Camus in 2011, the Great Replacement argues ‘that there is an international, global plan orchestrated by national and global elites to replace white, European populations with non-white ones’.<sup>106</sup> Identitarians are the main proponents of this alarmist narrative, which underpins their discourse on immigration and its detrimental impact on Europe. As put by Zúquete, ‘the fear is not that Europe will not emerge unscathed from this development; the fear is that Europe will not emerge at all. It will be a new entity, a new people, and a new post-European civilisation’.<sup>107</sup>

By the time the narrative of the Great Replacement had emerged, the conspiracy of a ‘white genocide’ had already been popularised by white supremacists. This conspiracy promotes the idea that immigration and resulting violence against white people has led to white populations dying out. In the North American context, these theories are underlaid with anti-Semitism. A parallel theory of demographic replacement in Europe – ‘Eurabia’ – was also in existence by 2011; devised by British author Bat Ye’or, the theory claims that, in order to expand the territory in the Caliphate, Muslims are deliberately working Europeans through immigration and high birth rates.<sup>108</sup>

#### 2.4.5 Anti-establishment

The strategic value of conspiracy theories lies in their ability to provide a simplified way of making sense of perceived injustices and imminent threats, clearly identify far-right enemies, and thus further solidify self–other boundaries. Anti-elite narratives feature prominently here: while certain ethnic groups are presented as threatening ‘the people’ and ‘the homeland’, the liberal elite are ultimately responsible due to endangering ‘us’ through the promotion of immigration, multiculturalism and globalism. Issues such as Islamisation are not viewed as root causes, then, but the ‘side’ effect of an orchestrated conspiracy by the elites. Although it will be shown how

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<sup>104</sup> Berger, *Extremism*, 66.

<sup>105</sup> Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream: Commercialization and Far Right Youth Culture in Germany*, 9.

<sup>106</sup> Zúquete, *The Identitarians: The Movement against Globalism and Islam in Europe*, 401.

<sup>107</sup> Zúquete, *The Identitarians: The Movement against Globalism and Islam in Europe*, 367.

<sup>108</sup> Miller-Idriss, *Hate in the Homeland*, 9.

much of far-right discourse is rooted in myth and disinformation, in recent years these theories have become grounded in real political dynamics and demographic change, and so established facts are being interpreted as further evidence of orchestrated efforts of an elite few and their efforts to hide the 'truth'.<sup>109</sup> This is similarly argued by Maly, who states that the far right 'carefully construct an aura of "evidence-based" discourse to construct their very own idiosyncratic political narrative on the basis of assembling facts, fiction, lies, and news taken out of context and re-contextualized in a very different narrative'.<sup>110</sup>

Combatting political correctness and the loss of freedom of speech – tools of the Great Replacement – are common threads in these debates, with far-right actors believing liberal political correctness is preventing a range of issues being spoken about, and thus hindering the ability to change the status quo.<sup>111</sup> The term 'political correctness' entered popular lexicon in the United States in the late 1980s due to public debates on college campuses. In essence, Hughes explains, 'the political correctness debate has been about naming, or rather renaming', the aim being 'to remove or attempt to suppress from public discourse semantically impacted aspects of cultural difference which have become objects of prejudice or hurtful language'.<sup>112</sup> The goal of a metapolitical strategy, therefore, is to challenge dominant interpretations of events and social dynamics.

In a thematic analysis of President Donald Trump's anti-political correctness rhetoric, Shafer shows how exclusionary discourse has been normalised under the guise of 'truth telling' and 'logic'. The researcher claims that supporters 'are encouraged to believe they are speaking objective truths about issues like immigration to the dismay of the "politically correct," who either intentionally obscure truth for political gain or have not yet faced up to reality'.<sup>113</sup> Political correctness is interpreted here as a ridged dichotomy: 'it would seem there is little room for inclusive and progressive ways of speaking; either you speak the blunt (white) truth or you speak politically savvy inclusive language'.<sup>114</sup> Furthering this, McRobbie describes how the growing concern over the idea of political correctness entails 'some sense in which quite reasonable and acceptable ideas like gender equality, ideas which most people would now find acceptable, have been somehow distorted, taken too far, abused and turned into something monstrous, dogmatic, and authoritarian'.<sup>115</sup> Within this discourse, 'alternative facts' have been deployed that serve to

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<sup>109</sup> Miller-Idriss, *Hate in the Homeland*.

<sup>110</sup> Maly, 'New Right Metapolitics and the Algorithmic Activism of Schild & Vrienden', 17.

<sup>111</sup> Zúquete, *The Identitarians: The Movement against Globalism and Islam in Europe*.

<sup>112</sup> Hughes, *Political Correctness: A History of Semantics and Culture*, 15, 45.

<sup>113</sup> Gantt Shafer, 'Donald Trump's "Political Incorrectness"', 1.

<sup>114</sup> Gantt Shafer, 'Donald Trump's "Political Incorrectness"', 2.

<sup>115</sup> McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change*, 37.

create ‘alternative discourse worlds and alternative truths, seemingly excluding the very possibility of compromise, negotiation, deliberation and so forth’.<sup>116</sup> Debates over political correctness reinforce the centrality of discursive boundaries in the metapolitical battle; in order to shift what is ‘doable’, the far right must first challenge what is ‘sayable’.

#### 2.4.6 Memory Politics

Existential threats and fears of uncertain futures are supported by discourse that ties contemporary lives to nostalgic pasts and utopian futures. Examining the intertwined role of memory and cultural heritage in far-right populist discourse, De Cesari and Kaya (2020, p. 2) contend that ‘nostalgic deprivation’ – ‘an existential feeling of loss triggered by the crumbling of established notions of nation, identity, culture, and heritage in the age of globalization’ – should be taken seriously.<sup>117</sup> The deployment of nostalgia in far-right mobilisation has been examined in detail by Valencia-García, who illustrates its role (alongside historical denial; belief in cyclical, or teleological history; declination narratives; mythologisation; ahistoricism; and popular public memoir) in the creation of ‘alt-histories’ – alternative imaginings to the historical past. Re/writing of history, the researcher argues, has become a significant aspect of far-right identity politics; in order to legitimise their present (exclusionary) agenda and future visions, most far-right actors propose and mobilise revisions and counter-narratives to accepted understandings of history, fact and narrative.<sup>118</sup>

As part of their metapolitical strategy, identitarians mobilise a nostalgic return to a golden age of Europe in modern times, where Europe will consist of ethnically homogenous communities, all belonging to the European cultural sphere. The future in this sense is approached in terms of ‘primordial, ancestral values, revitalised and regenerated’.<sup>119</sup> A prime example of how history is appropriated, revised and repurposed for nationalist purposes is the identitarian references to the Christian ‘Reconquista’ of the Iberian Peninsula in 1492. This recounts the foundational myth propagated by the fascist regime of Francisco Franco, in which the Kingdom of Spain, after 700 years of occupation, depended on a cleansing of Muslim and Jewish heritage. Valencia-García challenges this interpretation of events, as, while Granada was indeed conquered, this ‘historical’ account misses the fact that Iberia, even before this foreign ‘invasion’, was already a religiously diverse territory. The myth of the reconquest thus imposes a historical fiction onto Spain and is dependent upon an imagining of the past that simply never was, but has become accepted as

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<sup>116</sup> Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: The Shameless Normalization of Far-Right Discourse*, 72.

<sup>117</sup> Cesari and Kaya, *European Memory in Populism: Representations of Self and Other*, 2.

<sup>118</sup> Valencia-García, *Far-Right Revisionism and the End of History*.

<sup>119</sup> Zúquete, *The Identitarians: The Movement against Globalism and Islam in Europe*, 295.

truth by many in Spain.<sup>120</sup> Through varied myths and alt-histories, far-right actors present themselves as ‘the next in the long line of Europe’s staunchest defender’. Generation Identity’s (2012) ‘Declaration of War’ video posted online illustrates this eagerness, promising not only war but a memory war – saying ‘we reject your history books and redefine our memory’.<sup>121</sup> This is further illustrated by the adoption of the lambda symbol by the group, which is equivalent to the letter ‘L’ for Lacedemon, the city-state of Sparta as it was known in ancient Greece.<sup>122</sup>

Blum argues that far-right mythologies reveal a significant link between gender identity, culture, race and power, yet research on the extreme right has neglected ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ as ideological issues and identity-forming moments.<sup>123</sup> Through her exploration of the construction of masculinity by Generation Identity, the scholar shows that alt-histories often feature masculine warriors and heroic knights. As such, the masculinity ideal is based on classical conceptions of heterosexual, strong men, while women play the role of ‘traditional homemakers’.<sup>124</sup>

In sum, this section has highlighted a range of core themes found in far-right ideology. Miller-Idriss warns that the spectrum of emotions stirred up in these narratives – negativity, anger and resentment – as well as more positive discourse on desire for belonging, meaning and purpose – is a dangerous formula for recruitment to far-right extremism.<sup>125</sup>

## 2.5 Spaces of Far-Right Mobilisation

Far-right extremist mobilisation is playing out in various online and offline spaces, and thus research into far-right extremism must consider not only what is being said but also *where*.

### 2.5.1 The Far Right Online

From meme-making to disinformation, the web has become a lynchpin of far-right organisation, activism and communication of exclusionary narratives. Baele et al. characterise the far right online as comprising a ‘dynamic and rapidly evolving ecosystem’, noting its size, breadth and heterogeneity.<sup>126</sup> This includes the use of both mainstream digital media, such as Twitter, YouTube, Facebook and Instagram, and niche websites, platforms and boards.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Valencia-García, *Far-Right Revisionism and the End of History*.

<sup>121</sup> Generation Identity, ‘A Declaration of War from the Generation of National Identity’.

<sup>122</sup> Valencia-García, *Far-Right Revisionism and the End of History*.

<sup>123</sup> Blum, ‘Men in the Battle for the Brains’.

<sup>124</sup> Blum, ‘Men in the Battle for the Brains’, 329.

<sup>125</sup> Miller-Idriss, *Hate in the Homeland*.

<sup>126</sup> Baele, Brace, and Coan, ‘Uncovering the Far-Right Online Ecosystem’, 20.

<sup>127</sup> Froio and Ganesh, ‘The Transnationalisation of Far Right Discourse on Twitter’.

Section 2.4.2 revealed the analytical value of engaging with the geographical concepts of space, place and boundaries for examining the connections between nationalism, territory and identity. Playing a fundamental role in shaping knowledge of people, places and events around us, social media platforms and online practices have become key sites for such analyses.<sup>128</sup> Researchers are questioning: what kind of spaces are produced, at what scale do they operate, how are they produced, and for what purpose?<sup>129</sup> Most importantly, they are asking how the production, imagination and experience of space are bound up with power/knowledge. Informed by social theory, the relational theory of space views it not as absolute or a distance to be measured but as socially constructed, coming into existence because of social processes and phenomena.<sup>130</sup> This ontological claim is most clearly advocated in the work of French sociologist-philosopher Lefebvre, who rejects space as a pre-existing, neutral given but sees it as a complex, ongoing social product that influences spatial actions and perceptions.<sup>131</sup> Hayward has noted the need for greater engagement with sociotechnical and spatial theory for improving criminological enquiry into crime on the web; unlike geography, where geographical perspective space is understood as a product of power relations and cultural and social dynamics, criminology, Hayward claims, has all ‘too often approached space as an inert, empty “container” within which events unfold’.<sup>132</sup>

Through a Lefebvrian interpretation, therefore, the web and its related technologies are mediating forces in shaping how space is produced, imagined and experienced.<sup>133</sup> This has led to the need for scholars to (re)theorise the space–society–technology relationship, with many concluding that the real–virtual conceptual binaries are unhelpful in a digital society where the ‘online’ and ‘offline’ are not separate entities but continuously interacting in the creation of our lifeworld.<sup>134</sup> In other words, networked technologies are not merely interfaces to the online world; rather, they are mediators in the subjective experiencing of the world around us, reorganising how information flows and how individuals interreact with information and each other.<sup>135</sup>

Conceptualising space in this way provides a useful basis for developing an understanding of the relationship between space, power and identity in the context of extreme far-right activism. Discursive and mobilisation power, in what Chadwick describes as the ‘hybrid media system’, ‘is

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<sup>128</sup> Ash, Kitchin, and Leszczynski, ‘Digital Turn, Digital Geographies?’, 149.

<sup>129</sup> Kirsch, ‘The Incredible Shrinking World?’

<sup>130</sup> Ash, Kitchin, and Leszczynski, ‘Digital Turn, Digital Geographies?’

<sup>131</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.

<sup>132</sup> Hayward, ‘Five Spaces of Cultural Criminology’.

<sup>133</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.

<sup>134</sup> Graham, ‘The End of Geography or the Explosion of Place?’; Boos, *Inhabiting Cyberspace and Emerging Cyberplaces: The Case of Siena, Italy*.

<sup>135</sup> Leszczynski, ‘Spatial Media/Tion’.

exercised by those who are successfully able to create, tap, or steer information flows in ways that suit their goals and in ways that modify, enable, or disable the agency of others, across and between a range of older and newer media setting.<sup>136</sup> Hence, as Dolata contends, the social web and its platforms cannot be understood merely as neutral vessels that citizens use for a variety of purposes; rather, 'their technical protocols, interface designs, default settings, features and algorithms structure and characterize the online activities of their users in a variety of ways'.<sup>137</sup>

The mutual co-constitution between technology, people and practice in far-right (meta)politics is captured by Maly with the concept of 'algorithmic activism', which emphasises that 'contemporary digital activism is not only about producing discourse in the (passive) hope that it will circulate and get picked up.<sup>138</sup> It is also very much about *actively organising* uptake within the digital environments.' In this way, far-right practices online are best understood as sociotechnical assemblages, and thus a digital ethnographic approach must consider how 'the technological properties of the online world (persistence, searchability, replicability, scalability, algorithmically constructed reality) shape online interactions and are taken into account in the understanding of the processes of meaning making'.<sup>139</sup> Put differently, research engaging with digital metapolitical strategies must engage with the spaces and places – the 'geography of hate' – where far-right ideologies intersect, and the ways in which these ideas and narratives are constructed and circulate in these spaces.<sup>140</sup>

### 2.5.2 Digital Metapolitics

While the intellectual dimension of metapolitics remains a central component of the identitarian battle for cultural influence, the NR's metapolitical vision has been stretched: 'metapolitics 2.0' constitutes a range of tactics, employed in a range of (online and offline) spaces by various actors.<sup>141</sup> Valencia-García's study of the identitarian online publishing house Arktos shows how the traditional conception of metapolitics is now embedded in digital culture, alongside podcasts, blogs, memes and live-streams.<sup>142</sup> Digital technologies, the scholar illustrates, are advantageous for the 'war of ideas', with major NR and identitarian works being translated into many different languages and circulated online to new audiences.

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<sup>136</sup> Chadwick, *The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power*, 285.

<sup>137</sup> Dolata, 'Social Movements and the Internet. The Sociotechnical Constitution of Collective Action.', 15.

<sup>138</sup> Maly, 'New Right Metapolitics and the Algorithmic Activism of Schild & Vrienden', 2.

<sup>139</sup> Chadwick, *The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power*, 110–12; Maly, 'New Right Metapolitics and the Algorithmic Activism of Schild & Vrienden', 2.

<sup>140</sup> Miller-Idriss, *Hate in the Homeland*, 48.

<sup>141</sup> Maly, 'New Right Metapolitics and the Algorithmic Activism of Schild & Vrienden'.

<sup>142</sup> Valencia-García, *Far-Right Revisionism and the End of History*.

Moreover, Maly's digital ethnographic case study of far-right vlogger Brittany Pettibone reveals that a new network of actors are participating in the far-right culture and information war. Through practices of influencer culture, individuals such as Pettibone are able to (meta)politicise seemingly non-political 'self-help' content.<sup>143</sup> As an overwhelmingly 'brand conscious' movement that seeks to attract digitally native and centre-right mainstream populations, digital media thus allows identitarians and related NR actors to normalise and aestheticise politics.<sup>144</sup>

## 2.6 Reclaiming Space

Through an examination of the spatial domains of far-right extremism, Miller-Idriss found that mobilisation occurs through 'quotidian, flexible engagements in mainstream-style physical and virtual spaces'.<sup>145</sup> The author explains that the far right is a set of narratives and ideas that mainstream youth and adults increasingly encounter in their everyday lives; extremist messages 'are not limited to violent manifestos', nor are they 'only a destination to be arrived at through deliberate and targeted searches and travel to particular places'; they are 'also carried in banal and everyday ways, from the dog-walker's t-shirt in the neighbourhood park to the paper flyers hanging on a campus bulletin board'.<sup>146</sup>

Imposing identitarian spatiality on a 'hostile' environment is viewed as a precondition for wider retaking of European identity. As put by Zúquete, '[i]dentitarians are territorial. Their struggle for identity, therefore, transcends the virtual battlefield and expresses itself in physical territory, in autonomous spaces, in urban areas, in the streets at large. They assert their presence, and often reclaim lost territory (abandoned to neglect, to insecurity, to criminality, and so on).' Offline activism is thus equally important to the identitarian 'struggle'.<sup>147</sup> Drawing inspiration from progressive movements, identitarian actors and groups use tactics more usually associated with the left, including media campaigns, stunts and banner drops.<sup>148</sup> Intertwined with online activities, these aim to intensify their communicational reach and bring attention to the 'real problems'. Media guerrilla tactics – 'metapolitics with a punch' – have become a key tactic for some identitarian actors. Attracting widespread international coverage, in 2017 various partnered branches of Generation Identity organised the "Defend Europe" mission in the Mediterranean, in

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<sup>143</sup> Maly, 'Metapolitical New Right Influencers'.

<sup>144</sup> Zúquete, *The Identitarians: The Movement against Globalism and Islam in Europe*.

<sup>145</sup> Miller-Idriss, *Hate in the Homeland*, 26.

<sup>146</sup> Miller-Idriss, *Hate in the Homeland*, 162–63.

<sup>147</sup> Zúquete, *The Identitarians: The Movement against Globalism and Islam in Europe*, 57.

<sup>148</sup> Richards, 'A Philosophical and Historical Analysis of "Generation Identity"'.

which the groups chartered a boat that sought to hamper the rescue of refugees. Other – more low-budget examples – include the donning of pig masks in halal-only fast-food restaurants.<sup>149</sup>

## 2.7 Theorising Identity and Inclusion/Exclusion

Having established that discursive boundaries are the new frontiers in which the far-right (meta)political battle is being fought, it is important to examine the most suitable methodological approach for analysing how these boundaries are formed and (re)negotiated. At present, research into the discursive aspect of identitarianism has predominantly been limited to frame analyses of thematic content.<sup>150</sup> While this is useful for understanding *what* social realities are constructed by far-right actors, such analyses neglect the question of *how*.

Researchers within the fields of linguistics and critical discourse analysis have developed a useful methodological and conceptual framework for doing precisely this – the discourse historical approach (DHA). With a focus on the discursive construction of identity and its related processes of inclusion and exclusion, the DHA emerges as a valuable framework for examining a movement in which identity claims play a central role in its ideology. Interdisciplinary in character, the DHA is rooted in linguistics and has been widely applied in research on identity, strategies of discrimination and othering, and normalisation. DHA recognises that various dimensions of language and communication – both explicit and implicit – can be employed to achieve the inclusion of some and the exclusion of ‘others’. Its aim is to deconstruct prevailing indirect and ‘coded’ forms of discrimination in order to understand their implied exclusionary meanings.<sup>151</sup> Most importantly, then, it not only pays attention to the thematic content of frames produced, but also the discursive strategies supporting them. In the context of this thesis, this paves the way for understanding how the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion are formed and (re)negotiated by uncovering the discursive meaning-making strategies and the (implicit and explicit) articulations of exclusion driven by an ethnonationalist agenda. A detailed outline of the DHA and how it will be applied to the thesis’ empirical analyses will be provided in Chapter 3.

## 2.8 Aim and Research Questions

To summarise, this chapter has illustrated the importance of understanding non-violent manifestations of the far right, and thus the value of placing identitarian ideology, discourse and

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<sup>149</sup> Zúquete, *The Identitarians: The Movement against Globalism and Islam in Europe*.

<sup>150</sup> Richards, ‘A Philosophical and Historical Analysis of “Generation Identity”’; Nissen, ‘The Trans-European Mobilization of “Generation Identity”’.

<sup>151</sup> Reisigl and Wodak, *Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetorics of Racism and Antisemitism*.



related actors at the centre of empirical analysis. Ultimately, in providing fertile ground for further mobilisation and organisational cooperation across countries, the wide-ranging threat posed by identitarianism should not be understated. Through an effective sociotechnical strategy, identitarians are mobilising a collective European ‘ethnocultural’ identity and providing the ideological glue that is tying together an increasingly cohesive, networked and transnational extreme right. Addressing the historical situatedness of identitarian ideology and strategy showed how the movement’s conceptions of identity and ‘non-violent’ metapolitics are influenced by the NR. This is important as it reveals an exclusionary far-right ideology and effective sociotechnical activism that is built on longstanding NR ideas that predate the identitarian movement (and affiliated groups and actors), and thus it is likely that such ideas will outlive it, too. It is against this background that this thesis will now conduct a digital ethnographic and discourse-analytic study of three identitarian groups.

This thesis aims to develop a more nuanced understanding of ‘non-violent’ manifestations of the extreme far right and the ways in which a metapolitical project is mobilised through various forms of online and offline activism. In particular, it will investigate how a European (ethnocultural) is functionalised by identitarians with the aim of, on the one hand, constructing the ‘real’ Europeans and, on the other, of excluding all the ‘others’ who are considered as not belonging to the respective group. Informed by an interdisciplinary sociotechnical perspective, it will conduct a qualitative critical discourse analysis of content produced and circulated online by select case studies. Examining the various discourse topics that make up this ideology, as well as the discourse strategies used to negotiate these identified topics, will uncover how exclusionary discourse manifests itself in manifold ways.

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the grounds upon which exclusionary discourses and practices are framed and justified?
2. What discursive strategies are employed to justify and legitimise these self–other constructions?
3. What discursive strategies are advanced in the transnational mobilisation of New Right identitarianism?
4. What is the role of the web (technologically, legally etc.) and its platforms in how discourse and knowledge claims are produced, circulated and consumed?



## Chapter 3 Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

Exclusionary beliefs, it was shown in Chapter 2, are not always overt but often embedded in a complex configuration that is embedded within a context to defend a European (ethnocultural) identity. It showed that identity construction is based on the formation of sameness and difference (positive-self and negative-other constructions), and it is these (symbolic and discursive) 'boundaries' that are the frontiers in which the New Right (NR) identitarian (meta)political battle is being fought.

This chapter will provide an overview of the methodology employed throughout the thesis – namely, digital ethnography and the discourse-historical approach (DHA) to critical discourse analysis (CDA) – to achieve this goal and to address the specific research questions. Situated within a qualitative social constructionist paradigm, it required employing research methods that enable non-participant observation of online spaces and the sociotechnical practices. Informed by an interdisciplinary sociotechnical perspective, it conducted a digital ethnographic and discourse-analytic study of the NR network and metapolitical project. More specifically, it conducted a qualitative critical discourse analysis using existing approaches to collective identity and exclusionary discourse of content produced and circulated online by select case studies.

The chapter begins by examining the selection of analytical tools offered by DHA to explain why it is the most appropriate the framework to address the research aim and questions. This will be followed by a more detailed discussion on the methodological choices and strategies used to collect and analyse the relevant data at the macro, meso and micro levels. Justification for the five selected case studies will also be presented here, explaining that they are instructive case studies of a broader far-right extremist threat picture.

### 3.2 The Discourse-Historical Approach

Choices of methodology are driven by research questions, as well as by theoretical consideration. The aim of the empirical investigation was to develop a more nuanced understanding of 'non-violent' manifestations of the extreme far right and the ways in which a metapolitical project is mobilised through various forms of online and offline activism. Thus, this required exploring how 'identity' is functionalised with the aim of, on the one hand, constructing the 'real' people and, on the other, of excluding all the 'others' who are considered not to belong to the respective group.

In order to stimulate a deeper level of theoretical investigation, this study oriented itself to a selection of analytical tools offered by critical discourse scholars from the DHA. By drawing on the DHA and its methodological and theoretical framework, it was able to uncover the discursive strategies employed in the negotiation and construction of an ethnocultural identity and its related processes of inclusion and exclusion. Examining the various discourse topics that make up the identitarian expression of the NR, as well as the strategies used to negotiate these identified topics, uncovered how the exclusionary ideology manifests itself in manifold ways.

As it was discussed in Chapter 2, this thesis takes existing analyses further by focusing on not only the thematic content of frames produced but also the discursive strategies supporting them. Doing so paved the way for understanding *how* these boundaries of inclusion and exclusion are formed and (re)negotiated by uncovering the discursive meaning-making strategies and the implicit and explicit articulations of exclusion driven by an ethnonationalist agenda. The following discussion will outline the discourse-analytical tools employed in the study. But, first, it is important to note the relevant basic assumptions of the approach.

### 3.2.1 Basic Assumptions

The DHA understands nations as mental constructs, as ‘imagined communities’, that are presented in the minds and memories of the subjects. These can become very influential ideas, as this thesis will show, with some serious consequences.<sup>152</sup> It assumes that national identities are discursively produced, reproduced, transformed and destructed, and that the discursive construction of nations and national identities is linked with the construction of difference/distinctiveness and uniqueness. Lastly, racism/discrimination/exclusion is viewed as manifesting itself discursively. In the words of Reisigl and Wodak: ‘racist beliefs and opinions and produced and reproduced by means of discourse.’ Through discourse, ‘discriminatory exclusionary practices are prepared, promulgated and legitimised’.<sup>153</sup>

### 3.2.2 The Concept of Context

The DHA allows relating the macro- and meso-level of contextualisation to the micro-level analyses of text. Such analyses consist primarily of two levels: the first, called ‘entry-level analysis’, focuses on the thematic dimension of texts and aims to map out the contents of analysed texts and assign them to particular discourses. The key analytical categories of thematic

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<sup>152</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*; De Cillia, Reisigl, and Wodak, ‘The Discursive Construction of National Identities’.

<sup>153</sup> Reisigl and Wodak, *Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetorics of Racism and Antisemitism*, 4.

analyses are ‘discourse topics’, which ‘conceptually summarize the text and specify its most important information’.<sup>154</sup> The second level is the ‘in-depth analysis’, which is informed by the research questions and includes analysing the genre (e.g. homepage, tweet, blog post), and deconstructing the discursive practices and strategies, as well as other means of linguistic realisation.<sup>155</sup>

Importantly, DHA stresses the importance of understanding that texts, as they related to structured knowledge (discourses) are realised in specific genres and thus must be viewed in terms of their situatedness. That is, texts cannot be fully understood without considering different layers of *context*. DHA proposes a four-level model of context that includes:

- the immediate text or internal co-text;
- the intertextual and interdiscursive relationship between utterances, texts, genres and discourses;
- the extra-linguistic social/sociological variables and institutional frames of a specific ‘context of situation’; and
- the broader socio-political and historical contexts, which the discursive practices are embedded in and related to.<sup>156</sup>

The DHA thus deploys an interdisciplinary framework to analyse discourse as ‘a dynamic semiotic entity that is open to reinterpretation and continuation’.<sup>157</sup> The historical outlook of DHA encourages researchers to investigate how texts, discourse and genres relate to socio-political change both synchronically and diachronically. It focuses on establishing *intertextuality* and *interdiscursivity* - through explicit references or allusions - and how this text is taken out of its original context and *recontextualised* in different spaces and by different actors. In terms of practical analysis, intertextual and interdiscursive references allow analysts to investigate the purposes and effects of the new meanings acquired by (re)contextualised contents. In the context of this thesis, one of the objectives of this analysis was to examine identitarian ideology and discourse patterns that signify talk about in-group-out-group identity in terms of nation, ethnicity and ‘race’. Such tools were particularly useful for thus analysing less explicit exclusionary discourse and how seemingly isolated representations are part of broader far-right narratives.

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<sup>154</sup> Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: The Shameless Normalization of Far-Right Discourse*, 73.

<sup>155</sup> Reisigl and Wodak, *Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetorics of Racism and Antisemitism*

<sup>156</sup> Reisigl and Wodak, *Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetorics of Racism and Antisemitism*

<sup>157</sup> Reisigl, ‘The Discourse-Historical Approach’, 27.

### 3.2.3 Discursive Construction of National Identity

Analytically the DHA distinguishes between three interrelated dimensions 1) topics 2) strategies and 3) linguistic means and forms of realisation. With regards to the former, research undertaken by Reisigl and Wodak distinguishes five major thematic areas in the discursive construction of national identity:

- 1) the idea of a *homo nationalis* and a *homo externus*;
- 2) the narration and construction of a common political past;
- 3) the discursive construction of a common culture;
- 4) the discursive construction of a common present and future; and
- 5) the discursive construction of a 'national body'.<sup>158</sup>

The importance of these thematic areas (and their contents) in relation to this thesis' empirical study will be discussed in Section 3.5 of this chapter.

### 3.2.4 Discursive Construction of In-Groups and Out-Groups: Positive-Self and Negative-Other Presentation

The discursive construction of national identity is based on the formation of *sameness and difference*. Thus, examining the discursive strategies involved in the construction of in-groups and out-groups is another important dimension examined by the DHA. Reisigl and Wodak explain that by 'strategy' they mean 'a plan of practices (including discursive practices) adopted to achieve a particular social, political, psychological or linguistic aim.'<sup>159</sup> As demonstrated in Table 3.1, the DHA systematically goes through five questions to approach various discursive features and strategies involved in the linguistic realisation of sameness/difference, and the construction of discursive boundaries between 'us' and 'them'.

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<sup>158</sup> Reisigl and Wodak, *Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetorics of Racism and Antisemitism*, 30

<sup>159</sup> Reisigl and Wodak, *Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetorics of Racism and Antisemitism*, 44.

Table 3.1 Discursive Strategies in the Discourse-Historical Approach <sup>160</sup>

<i>Questions to approach discursive features</i>	<i>Discursive strategies</i>	<i>Purpose</i>
How are persons, objects, phenomena, events, processes and actions named and referred to linguistically in the discourse in question?	<b>referential/nomination</b>	discursive construction of social actors, objects, phenomena, events, processes and actions
What characteristics or qualities are attributed to social actors, objects, phenomena, events, processes and actions mentioned in the discourse?	<b>predication</b>	discursive characterisation of social actors, objects, phenomena, events processes and actions (e.g., positively or negatively)
What arguments are employed in discourse?	<b>argumentation</b>	persuading addressees of the validity of specific claims of truth and normative rightness
From what perspective are these nominations, attributions, arguments expressed?	<b>perspectivisation</b>	positioning the speaker's or writer's point of view and expressing involvement or distance
Are the respective utterances articulated overtly, are they intensified or mitigated?	<b>mitigation and intensification</b>	modifying the illocutionary force of utterances in respect to their epistemic or deontic status

Referential (or nomination) strategies are used to construct in-groups and out-groups. This includes the deployment of linguistic devices such as membership categorisation and metaphors. Secondly, and often social actors as individuals, group members or groups as a whole are linguistically characterised through predications. Predicational strategies may, for example, be

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<sup>160</sup> Adapted from Reisigl, 'The Discourse-Historical Approach', 52.

realised as evaluative attributions of negative and positive traits in the linguistic form of implicit or explicit predicates. These strategies aim at labelling social actors more or less positively or negatively.

For example, the body politics metaphor is an underlying conceptual metaphor commonly found to structure political discourse. An entailment of the body politic metaphor is that nations, like bodies, are vulnerable to harm. This entailment is frequently exploited in discriminatory discourse where it serves to justify policies of exclusion.<sup>161</sup> Moreover, contained in the predications in the legitimisation of anti-immigration discourse, actors often rely 'proximisation strategies'. For Cap, proximisation is defined 'as a forced construal operation meant to evoke closeness of the external threat, to solicit legitimisation of preventive means.'<sup>162</sup> The scenario is presented by the speaker from the perspective of the self, situated socially as a member of the in-group as well as geographically in the location of the in-group, and thus there is an inherently deictic dimension to this pattern of conceptualisation.<sup>163</sup> Such discourse has been shown to rely on spatial proximation strategies in which the 'other', constructed as physically and culturally distant, is construed as moving towards and arriving in the country of the ingroup to present a threat to their corporeal selves and/or their cultural identity. Similarly, the strategy of temporal proximisation presents the problem as current and accumulating, thereby suggesting the need for immediate mitigation.<sup>164</sup>

Positive-self and negative-other presentation requires justification and legitimation strategies. The DHA focuses on argumentation theory, more specifically the theory of topoi. For Reisigl and Wodak, topoi (topos in singular) are content-related warrants which can be expressed as conditional 'conclusion rules'. The conclusion is not spelled out. It is implicit in the argument. An initial, explicit or inferable, premise presupposes a particular conclusion.<sup>165</sup> Wodak identifies a set of topoi in which predications in immigration discourse function as first premises.<sup>166</sup> Within these topoi, typical associations are constructed which function as first premises in arguments justifying exclusionary social and political practices (see Table 3.2).

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<sup>161</sup> Musolff, *Metaphor, Nation and the Holocaust*.

<sup>162</sup> Cap, "'We Don't Want Any Immigrants or Terrorists Here'", 385.

<sup>163</sup> Hart and Winter, 'Gesture and Legitimation in the Anti-Immigration Discourse of Nigel Farage'.

<sup>164</sup> Hart, 'Deixis, Distance and Proximization'.

<sup>165</sup> Reisigl and Wodak, *Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetorics of Racism and Antisemitism*.

<sup>166</sup> Wodak, "'Us" and "Them": Inclusion and Exclusion – Discrimination via Discourse'.



Table 3.2 Select List of Content-Related Topoi in Debates about Immigration<sup>167</sup>

<b>Topos</b>	<b>Premise and conditional 'conclusion rules'</b>
<i>Burden</i>	The out-group need to be supported by the in-group (Based on the conditional: 'if a person, an institution or a country is burdened by specific problems, one should act in order to diminish these burdens')
<i>Culture</i>	The out-group have different norms and values to the in-group and are unable to assimilate (Based on the conditional: 'because the culture of a specific group of people is as it is, specific problems arise in specific situations')
<i>Danger</i>	The out-group are dangerous (Based on the conditional: 'if a political action or decision bears specific dangerous, threatening consequences, one should not perform it')
<i>Disadvantage</i>	The out-group bring no advantage/are of no use to the in-group (Based on the conditional: 'if the out-group offer no advantage to the in-group, then their presence within the group is pointless and should be prevented').
<i>Disease</i>	The out-group are dirty and carry infectious diseases (Based on the conditional: 'if a political action or decision bears specific dangerous, threatening consequences, one should not perform it')
<i>Displacement</i>	The out-group will eventually outnumber and/or dominate the in-group and they get privileged access to limited socio-economic resources over and above the in-group (Based on the conditional: 'the topos of displacement can be paraphrased with the following conditional: if the out-group are given preferential access to socioeconomic resources resources over and above the in-group, then action should be taken to redress this imbalance')
<i>Exploitation</i>	The out-group exploit the welfare system of the in-group (Based on the conditional: 'if the right to or offer of assistance is exploited, then that right should be changed or the offer withdrawn and action against the exploiters should be taken')

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<sup>167</sup> Adapted from Hart, *Critical Discourse Analysis and Cognitive Science*, 67.

### 3.2.4.1 Politics of Denial

The final legitimisation strategy to mention is the ‘politics of denial’ which manifests itself as positive self-presentation. Speakers often seek to justify the practice of exclusion without employing overt rhetoric, however overt denials of exclusion have been shown to involve two presuppositions. First, they presuppose the existence of ‘real’ prejudice. In this regard, the existence of extreme, outwardly fascist groups enables the actors to present their own rhetoric as being unprejudiced – by comparison. Second, speakers, in denying practices of exclusion, will claim that their criticisms of minority group members are ‘factual’, ‘objective’ and ‘reasonable’, rather than based upon stereotypes, and will accordingly employ a range of discursive strategies of legitimisation.<sup>168</sup>

Another way in which denial is rhetorically expressed is through transferring the discussion from issues about race to concern matters of cultural threats. This discursive deracialisation of far-right rhetoric is warranted through depictions of the ‘other’ as inherently incompatible with the in-group. The final typical to justification strategy to mention is claiming victimhood via victim–perpetrator reversal. Here, actors will reverse claims and accuse the ‘other’ of racism.<sup>169</sup>

As Section 3.5.2 will discuss, the abovementioned manifestations of the rhetoric of exclusion (the discursive construction of in-groups and out-groups which relates to strategies of positive-self and negative-other presentation; strategies of justification and legitimation of exclusionary practices through argumentative devices; and the ‘denial of racism’) were all explored as part of this thesis’ empirical investigation.<sup>170</sup>

### 3.2.5 Implementing the Discourse-Historical Approach

A thorough discourse-historical analysis ideally follows an eight-stage programme. Typically, the eight steps are implemented recursively:

1. Activation and consultation of preceding theoretical knowledge (i.e. reading and discussion of previous research).
2. Systematic collection of data and context information (depending on the research question, various discourses and discursive events, social fields as well as actors, semiotic media, genres and texts are focused on).

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<sup>168</sup> Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: The Shameless Normalization of Far-Right Discourse*.

<sup>169</sup> van Dijk, ‘Discourse and the Denial of Racism’.

<sup>170</sup> Wodak, ‘“Us” and “Them”: Inclusion and Exclusion – Discrimination via Discourse’.

3. Selection and preparation of data for specific analyses (selection and downsizing of data according to relevant criteria, transcription of tape recordings etc.).
4. Specification of the research question and formulation of assumptions (on the basis of a literature review and a first skimming of the data).
5. Qualitative pilot analysis (allows testing categories and first assumptions as well as the further specification of assumptions).
6. Detailed case studies (of a whole range of data, primarily qualitative, but in part also quantitative).
7. Formulation of critique (interpretation of results, taking into account the relevant context knowledge and referring to the three dimensions of critique).
8. Application of the detailed analytical results (if possible, the results might be applied or proposed for application).<sup>171</sup>

A detailed discussion on the methodological choices and strategies used to collect and analyse the relevant data at the macro, meso and micro levels is where the discussion will now turn.

### 3.3 Data Collection

#### 3.3.1 Gathering Discursive Data and Research on the Context

Following consultation of previous knowledge about the problem in question in Chapter 2, discursive data and context information were systematically collected. The DHA employs a triangulatory approach to gathering data, which means collecting a variety of empirical data and background information. Thus, taking a multimodal, triangulatory approach to data gathering, the data collected included various genres, including social media (tweets), websites, blog posts and podcasts.

Playing a key role in deconstructing meanings of discourse, DHA pays particular attention to 'context' in its discourse analytical process.<sup>172</sup> It takes into account four 'levels of context' that are used as heuristic devices in critical analyses – each of these was considered during the data collection stage as well as during analysis.<sup>173</sup>

At the early stages of the process, the research population consisted of individuals, groups and online networks loosely and directly associated with the NR, as well as those interacting with the

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<sup>171</sup> Reisigl, 'The Discourse-Historical Approach'.

<sup>172</sup> Wodak and Meyer, *Methods of Critical Discourse Studies*.

<sup>173</sup> Reisigl and Wodak, *Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetorics of Racism and Antisemitism*.

## Chapter 3

movement. This included groups and actors who do not explicitly identify as identitarian but who nevertheless promote what have been identified in this study as NR identitarian ethnocultural politics.

NR identitarian (and related) networks were mapped, and data (English-language text, images, videos and audio) produced by these groups and individuals across social media platforms (i.e. Twitter, Instagram, YouTube) and the surface web was collected (i.e. alternative far-right media and far-right organisation websites). The data was collected either manually through screenshots or using NCapture, a web-browser extension for Chrome that enables users to gather web content to import into NVivo. Most web pages can be captured as PDFs, while it is also possible to capture some pages from Twitter and YouTube as datasets, videos and pictures. All of this data was stored and organised in NVivo. An automated transcription service provided by NVivo was used to transcribe selected podcasts. Given that this thesis sought to show how extreme discourse is being mobilised in increasingly strategically implicit ways, in everyday sites and spaces, the focus was on mainstream social media sites and websites. The assumption was that this discourse will have a broader audience and hence have a more 'palatable' front that could then be deconstructed to reveal an underlying exclusionary agenda.

Initially, purposive sampling was employed for the data collection stage. This was used to select data from online spaces that were convenient, as well as selecting samples based on prior knowledge of far-right extremism. Doing so enabled data to be collected thoughtfully and in correspondence with the proposed research questions. The project also incorporated snowball sampling as this is the most suitable technique when members of the population are difficult to locate. It began with social media accounts or sites that the author of this thesis was already aware of and from here they were able to identify more relevant data by following links, searching the followers or connections of the account in question, or any accounts who may be commenting on these posts. Relevant actors were also found via 'anti-fascist' sites (for instance, the Anti-Fascist Research Collective) that monitor the activity of far-right groups – this was particularly useful, for example, for discovering that former members of Generation Identity UK (dissolved in January 2020) had started infiltrating seemingly 'environmental' organisations – namely the UK-based Local Matters.

It is important to note here that not all of the groups selected explicitly identify as identitarian, and thus prior knowledge of NR identitarianism – particularly contextual information such the intertextual and interdiscursive relationship between utterances, texts, genres and discourses – was required when making the selection. For example, having identified Guillaume Faye and his publication *Why We Fight: Manifesto of the European Resistance* as highly influential to

identitarian thought, studying this provided a detailed understanding of the key concepts and practices underpinning identitarianism.

Collecting information of the sociotechnical environment in which the data was collected also formed a key aspect of the research. Taking into consideration the different levels of hyper-intertextuality – such as hyperlinked texts – enabled discovery of far-right actors that the author had not previously come across, while also hinting to the underlying ideologies of groups. The advantage of using NCapture and screenshots, therefore, was the ability to return to these platforms during the analysis in the (partly) ‘original’ environment in which they were initially encountered.

While the data was actively extracted between May 2020 to May 2022, the study also collected data that was published prior to this date. In most cases this went back to 2019 when all three case studies first posted on their websites. Moreover, while some websites or Twitter accounts were removed (after the data collection period), the author had archived these on NVivo.

### **3.3.2 Case Study Selection**

With the research population relatively broad at the early stages of the data collection process it was necessary to refine it by carefully selecting case studies for detailed analysis. Having identified in Chapter 2 that the empirical focus of existing research has predominantly centred on content produced by the Generation Identity ‘brand’, it was vital to ensure that the case study selection was reflective of the broad actors that make up the network and discourse topics that make up identitarianism. While each of these groups explicitly disavow violence, the group’s discourse has the potential to create an exclusionary environment that is conducive to symbolic and physical violence. With this in mind, the following case studies were selected based on their ability to demonstrate the breadth of manifestations of the ideology and the continuum from explicit to indirect linguistic forms of exclusion. Limiting the case study selection to three groups meant that there was sufficient time and space for detailed analysis of each.

It is important to note here that this thesis used the term identitarianism to refer to an expression of NR ideology, and its proponents as identitarians. It used the term NR when referring to the entire movement of individuals, groups and actors (such as the alt-right) who adhere to NR ideals and strategy.

### **3.3.2.1 Identity England**

The first case study examined was Identity England (IE). The group launched in October 2020 and stems from the UK branch of the pan-European youth organisation Generation Identity (GI). Unlike GI, Identity England is open to all age groups; however, its discourse is comparable to the youth organisation. IE was thus selected as the first case study based on its similarities to the GI 'brand' and most explicit embodiment of Guillaume Faye's identitarian project. This will lay the ideological groundwork for the next two chapters and case studies. The analysis focused on data collected from the group's website (including 28 blog posts in total) and its Twitter account which is now suspended. It collected the data from twitter using NCapture and exported it into NVivo for analysis (the time frame was from IE's first published tweet on 8 March 2020 until 13 August 2021 – 539 tweets in total).

### **3.3.2.2 Action Zealandia**

New Zealand-based 'Action Zealandia' (AZ) is a male-only NR group that mixes 'European identity' politics with environmentalism and ethnonationalism. It disavows violence in favour of 'self-improvement, community building, and propaganda and promotes physical fitness and a healthy lifestyle.' AZ was also valuable for demonstrating the transnationalisation of NR identitarianism. While this is a New Zealand-based group that mobilises around highly localised grievances, it simultaneously promotes and defends the protection of a *European* New Zealand Identity and connects with other far-right actors around the globe. Data was collected and analysed from the group's website and primarily consisted of lengthy blog posts (around 46 in total), as well as podcasts (around 3 hours in total).

### **3.3.2.3 Local Matters**

Unlike IE and AZ, Local Matters does not explicitly identify as identitarian – in fact, it reverently denies connections to the ideology. Yet, this thesis justified its inclusion, firstly, due to initial reports online by the Anti-Fascist Research Collective that its founding members are former members of Generation Identity. Secondly, a detailed analysis of the group's website, Twitter and manifesto confirmed a preoccupation (less explicitly than the previous two groups, but a preoccupation nonetheless) with NR identitarian issues. The group is unique in its coded ideals through environmental-focused discourse. The data collected included a print-copy of the group's manifesto (94 pages), around 27 blog posts, and tweets. It collected the data from twitter using NCapture and exported it into NVivo for analysis (the time frame was from LM's first published tweet on 11 October 2020 to 9 November 2021 – 471 tweets in total).

#### **3.3.2.4 Discussion**

The first part of this chapter will bring together the empirical analyses presented in the case study chapters above to discuss in detail the cohesion, as well as the diversity, amongst these groups. The second half of this chapter will examine the hybrid digital/print far-right publishing house Arktos Media. This will primarily consider the contours of the web's sociotechnical affordances of Arktos as opposed to an analysis of the ideological content itself.

#### **3.3.3 Ethics**

This research received ethical approval from Southampton University's Ethics and Research Governance Online (ERGO). As detailed in Appendix A, a range of ethical considerations were taken into account. This study recognises the challenges posed by social media research, as well as the specific issues related to data collection from platforms such as Twitter.<sup>174</sup>

##### **3.3.3.1 Conditions around the Use of Data**

Participants were not aware that they were taking part in this research due to the sensitive nature of the area to be studied. Taking this into consideration, selected participants had to have publicly far-right views; have public social media accounts that can be accessed by researchers; have agreed to the social media platform's terms and conditions regarding the use of third-party researchers (although the author acknowledges that they might not necessarily be aware that they had agreed to this, even if they had agreed to the platform's terms and conditions). Lastly, users were searching for a wider audience to disseminate these public views via the use of hashtags, comments and links to articles. Thus, this research did not look at any data that would appear not to be looking for a wider audience, or any private accounts, conversations or private groups on any platform.

#### **3.3.4 Management and Storage of Data**

The study created an Excel database for the purpose of storing the anonymised data and the provenance of this data. All data collected was stored on the author's University of Southampton laptop, which is password-protected. Only the author had access to this laptop and data, as well as the author's supervisors, should they ask to look at the data collected. Any data that was

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<sup>174</sup> Ahmed, Bath, and Demartini, 'Using Twitter as a Data Source: An Overview of Ethical, Legal, and Methodological Challenges'.

collected during this study will not be used in future studies. The data will be destroyed by being permanently deleted from the laptop upon completion of the project in November 2022.

This study was only interested in the content of the images/texts/videos. Data was collected manually through screenshots or using NCapture and all identifiable personal information was removed during analysis, thus ensuring that participants would be anonymised during the data collection process.

While most of the data was easily accessible on groups' websites or social media platforms, Local Matters' 'manifesto' was only available as a physical printed copy that was sold on its website for £10. Thus, once the data from the book had been analysed and transferred to the author's laptop, the material was destroyed to ensure that it was not circulated. Prior to this, however, the physical copy was stored in a location locked with a key that only the author had access to.

### **3.3.5 Minimising Other Ethical Risks**

All extremism-related material and data was accessed using the University of Southampton's network and stored securely on its networked storage using a password-protected university-appointed laptop. The data collection and analysis were conducted in the UK and no copies will be kept in any other location. The author kept a record of the sites accessed and material from this storage was not disseminated or exchanged with others. The material will only be stored for as long as required to conduct the research and will be destroyed upon completion. The research was observational only and did not actively seek to elicit information from the research population. The author is aware that the data collected and analysed will be culturally or socially sensitive. In order to provide a comprehensive analysis of this data, this will not be censored in my presentation of results; however, readers will be warned about the nature of the content.

It was necessary to take into consideration the risks of ordering the physical copy of Local Matters' manifesto online and getting it delivered. Owing to the nature of this research, providing personal details was avoided where possible. For instance, a virtual 'post box' service was used that enabled the book to be first delivered anonymously to this PO box under a user ID and then forwarded to the author from there.

## **3.4 Research Limitations**

The methodological approach taken has limitations that need to be acknowledged, in terms of both the data and the analytical approach adopted.



Firstly, owing to limited time constraints, the data used necessarily depicts only a partial view of the object of analysis for reasons such as: the study only examined English-language texts from UK- and New Zealand-based groups, and data was only collected from Twitter accounts and websites. This thesis does recognise that there is a broad range of platforms (such as Telegram and Gab) used by the select case studies that were not accessed, as well as various other social actors and discourse (such as commentary by mass media, individual unaffiliated actors, and commentary generated by other participants in reaction to initial posts) participating in the mobilisation of NR identitarianism. Nevertheless, the sources that were used provided rich and detailed data that was sufficient for the time and space available for this thesis. Moreover, the case studies were strategically selected to ensure that the research demonstrated various manifestations of NR identitarianism. Chapter 8 will address these limitations in more detail and propose suggestions for further research.

Secondly, discourse analysis has the inherent limitation that it relies on the researchers' own interpretations of the meaning of the text. However, as Willis argues, the goal of a social constructivist framework that aligns itself with the interpretive paradigm is to value subjectivity: 'interpretivists eschew the idea that objective research on human behaviour is possible'.<sup>175</sup> There are many advantages to using DHA as the selected discourse-analytic approach, with its strengths including the principle of triangulation, which implies a quasi-kaleidoscopic move towards the research object and enables the grasp of many different facets of the object under investigation, and its interdisciplinary orientation, which allows disciplinary restrictions to be avoided.<sup>176</sup>

### 3.5 Data Analysis

The data collected was approached with a theoretical framework that draws from DHA. This approach, Section 3.2 outlined, consists primarily of two levels: the first, called 'entry-level analysis' and the second, called 'in-depth analysis'.

#### 3.5.1 Entry-Level Analysis

The 'entry-level' analysis involved coding the collected data into 'discourse topics' (themes and sub-themes) that coalesce around identity, and the related processes of inclusion and exclusion. This was achieved through a mixture of inductive and deductive processing, with the list of thematic topics initially identified by broader empirical and theoretical literature and refined

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<sup>175</sup> Willis, *Foundations of Qualitative Research*, 210

<sup>176</sup> Reisigl and Wodak, *Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetorics of Racism and Antisemitism*.

during the data collection stage. The five major thematic areas devised by Reisigl and Wodak (as summarised in Section 3.2.3) were particularly useful starting points for the development of a matrix of topics.<sup>177</sup> The authors relate these topics primarily to the discursive construction of 'national' identity, which is based on the formation of sameness and difference. As previously discussed, however, with an increasingly global far-right, analyses need to move beyond the 'nation' as the sole unit of analysis. Chapter 2 showed how 'Europeanness' has emerged as the primary deictic through which boundaries are being drawn; that is, European civilisation must be constructed, saved and fought for in order to save the 'national' and 'regional' cultures. With this in mind, while this thesis employed the terms '*Homo nationalis*' and 'national body' in its analysis, it was done so with a conceptual understanding of a multi-layered, three-tiered conception of identity.

Having been identified as the most thematically important in the mobilisation of a collective (ethnocultural) identity and positive-self and negative-other presentation, the empirical analyses were organised under the following discourse topics:

- 1) the idea of a *homo nationalis* and a *homo externus*;
- 2) the narration and construction of a common political past;
- 3) the discursive construction of a common culture;
- 4) the discursive construction of a common present and future; and
- 5) the discursive construction of a 'national body'.<sup>178</sup>

*Homo nationalis*. The thematic analysis of a '*Homo nationalis*' revolved around the 'traits' considered important in the self-construction of the community. For instance, how are Europeanness and Englishness defined? How is the in-group and its members constructed in relation to outsiders? In the context of this thesis, the homogenous collective was defined according to essentialist, ethnocultural traits.

*National body*. The construction of the nation state that the members inhabit – the 'national body' – played a key role in discursive constructions that emphasise *national uniqueness and (inner) homogeneity* and downplay *heterogeneity and difference* within the population. Simultaneously, they also focus on *differences from members of other nations*, often resorting to stereotyping and singularisation.<sup>179</sup> The case studies examined constructed the ideal *Homo*

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<sup>177</sup> Reisigl and Wodak, *Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetorics of Racism and Antisemitism*.

<sup>178</sup> Reisigl and Wodak, *Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetorics of Racism and Antisemitism*, 30

<sup>179</sup> De Cillia, Reisigl, and Wodak, 'The Discursive Construction of National Identities'.

*nationalis* as (white) ‘natives’, in which members of the (imagined) community are related by blood (and soil). This ideal was opposed to a negative imaginary of an ethnocultural identity that is compromised, colonised by migrant and other minority ‘others’, and ruled by (foreign) elites, incapable of action or emancipation.

The link between *Homo nationalis* and the national body – particularly in relation to body politics – is important; a ‘people’, in this articulation, are understood in essentialist terms, as a single ‘organic’ body that is ‘rooted’ (by blood) in the national body. As Wodak and Rheindorf explain, it is the integration of *Homo nationalis* and the national body that ‘characterizes the discourse of the far and extreme right [...] becoming the focal point of discursive practices and argumentative patterns and serving related constructions of “us” versus “them”’.<sup>180</sup> It is on this conceptual level that this thesis engaged with far-right identitarian discourses, tracing body politics through (racialised) articulations of a threatened and compromised body that must be protected and restored.

Discursive constructions of an organically conceived community in relation to ‘outsiders’ and a feared loss of an assumed cultural and biological homogeneity were shown to rely on constructions of a common culture, a common political present and future, and a common political past.

*Common culture.* The scope of analysis was extended to self-presentation that is less overtly political – that is, those elements that constitute the ‘ideal extreme-right subject’ or what Kølvråa and Forchtner term the ‘cultural imaginary’.<sup>181</sup> That is, through ‘everyday’ and lifestyle components (sport, eating and drinking habits, clothing, and so on), the ‘ideal extreme-right subject’ can ensure order and stability of the ‘ecosystem’.

*Common political present and future.* The thematic contents of the construction of a common political present and future were explored in terms of current and future political problems, crises and dangers, and future political objectives and political virtues.<sup>182</sup> This included sub-topics related to immigration, migrants and asylum seekers, anti-establishment, and metapolitical activism.

*Common political past.* Lastly, the construction of a common political past revolved around elements including ‘myth memories’ of ‘golden ages’ that are to be celebrated and commemorated; the fantasy of a pure, homogenous people, and of pristine, ancestral homelands

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<sup>180</sup> Rheindorf and Wodak, “‘Austria First’ Revisited”, 303.

<sup>181</sup> Kølvråa and Forchtner, ‘Cultural Imaginaries of the Extreme Right’.

<sup>182</sup> Reisigl and Wodak, *Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetorics of Racism and Antisemitism*.

that are perceived as the object of collective attachment and intimate devotion and (potential) rebirth.<sup>183</sup>

It should be noted that the case studies examined do not all endorse these contents equally; however, these contents can be largely generalised and typify the manifestation of NR identitarianism. For example, the sub-topic of 'gender politics' features prominently in case study two (Action Zealania), while (protection of) the natural environment is a significant discourse topic in case both studies two and three (Action Zealania and Local Matters) but not case study one (Identity England). This was useful for showing the various manifestations and discourse topics that make up NR identitarianism.

### 3.5.1.1 Data Selection and Down-Sampling

During the entry-level analysis, more data was coded than time restraints would allow to be analysed in detail. This required imposing further restrictions in order to attain a corpus that was manageable. Criteria such as representativity/typicality, (intertextual or interdiscursive) impact, salience, and originality of data with respect to the research question helped to downsize the data.<sup>184</sup>

### 3.5.1.2 Integrating Quantitative Methods with the DHA

While DHA grew out of traditions of linguistic, sociological and ethnographic/linguistic-anthropological approaches that were predominantly qualitative, steps have since been taken to integrate methods borrowed from corpus linguistics (CL) into the DHA as well as related approaches to critical discourse studies.<sup>185</sup> This form of triangulation, of combining close qualitative readings with a CL approach, has been described by Baker et al. as a 'useful methodology synergy'.<sup>186</sup> Using the corpus manager and text analysis software Sketch Engine, this study integrated quantitative methods associated with CL to provide insights into discursive patterns across the data sets and pinpoints areas of interest for closer analysis. That is, emerging patterns (e.g. keywords, collocations) lead to the examination of their (expanded) concordances or, when needed, the examination of whole texts. Notably, corpus analysis tends to focus on lexical patterns and collocations, and so the approach is mostly 'lexical', which is most productive when accounting for what DHA calls 'referential' strategies (less so for predicational strategies).

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<sup>183</sup> Sicurella, 'Speaking for the Nation: A Critical Discourse Study of Intellectuals and Nationalism in the Post-Yugoslav Context'.

<sup>184</sup> Reisigl, 'The Discourse-Historical Approach'.

<sup>185</sup> Hart, *Critical Discourse Analysis and Cognitive Science*.

<sup>186</sup> Baker et al., 'A Useful Methodological Synergy?'

CL methods on their own are thus limited; they are not well-suited to analysing phenomena at the level of discursive strategies and phenomena above the lexical level. For this reason, the foundation of the thesis's analyses remained qualitative, with DHA able to facilitate detailed analysis, taking into account larger amounts of textual context as well as the structure and characteristics of the employed genres.<sup>187</sup>

### 3.5.2 In-Depth Analysis

In line with existing research in critical-discourse studies on the discursive construction of a national identity, the results of this study showed that the integration of '*Homo nationalis*' and the 'national body' characterise the discourse of the select case studies, emerging as the focal point of discursive practices and serving related constructions of 'us' versus 'them'.<sup>188</sup> In order to interrogate the ecological dimension underpinning these constructions and related ethnopluralist worldview, Lubarda's analytical framework 'far-right ecogism' (FRE) was operationalised.<sup>189</sup>

As was conveyed in Chapter 2, in its identitarian formulation, ecology is understood as having both environmental and ethnic dimensions, and thus the notion of *blood and soil* is at the core of the FRE framework. It conveys a holistic (ethnopluralist) worldview in which the discursive construction of a collective (ethnocultural) identity is articulated around, but not limited to, three fundamental elements: spirituality, organicism (the notion of nation, culture and nature in a holistic union as a single organism) and naturalism (viewing nature as a blueprint for social order). Put differently, these values play a fundamental role in how the identitarian groups examined understand themselves and the 'other'. They proved thematically important in constructing essentialist understandings of 'us' – a homogenous collective that is 'rooted' (by blood) in the soil of the national body. This national body, the groups argue, must be protected against the 'other' who threatens 'our' identity and culture. It is on this conceptual level that this thesis engaged with far right discourse.<sup>190</sup>

Using the analytical toolkit provided by the DHA outlined in Section 3.2, the in-depth analysis was able to examine, in detail, the various manifestations of the rhetoric of exclusion: on the discursive construction of in-groups and out-groups which relates to strategies of positive-self and negative-other presentation; on strategies of justification and legitimation of exclusionary practices through argumentative devices; and finally on the 'denial of racism' which frequently

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<sup>187</sup> Hart, *Critical Discourse Analysis and Cognitive Science*.

<sup>188</sup> Wodak, 'Re/Nationalising EU-Rope: National Identities, Right-Wing Populism, and Border- and Body-Politics', 105.

<sup>189</sup> Lubarda, 'Beyond Ecofascism?'

<sup>190</sup> Lubarda, 'Beyond Ecofascism?'

accompanies and introduces exclusionary rhetoric.<sup>191</sup> The analysis primarily focused on patterns of nomination (how events/objects/persons are referred to) and predication (what characteristics are attributed to them), as well as the argumentation strategies.

By analysing three distinct identitarian groups, the thesis was able to deconstruct the varied arguments deployed in the justification for exclusionary practices (ethnopluralist policies) and thus reveal the manifold ways in which far-right actors recontextualise the extreme right's (blood and soil) imaginary.

As a final note on the terminology used in this study, it is important to mention that, rather than using the heavily contested terms of 'discrimination', or 'racism', this thesis, following Wodak's work, employs 'inclusion' and 'exclusion' as relevant theoretical notions. The scholar proposes the following definition of processes of inclusion and exclusion:

'[I]nclusion' and 'exclusion' are to be understood as the fundamental construction of 'in-groups' and 'out-groups' in various public spaces, structurally and discursively, as the basis for, and with varying impact on conflicts, integration, negotiation, decision-making and the genesis of racism and anti-Semitism. The conflicting processes which define or change borders and which, for example, define who is 'inside' Europe or who stays 'outside' Europe can be labelled as 'inclusion' and 'exclusion'. These processes relate to constructions of 'identity' and 'identity politics' in very complex ways and also reveal who (which person or group) has the power to define and construct such categories.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Wodak, "'Us' and 'Them': Inclusion and Exclusion – Discrimination via Discourse'.

<sup>192</sup> Wodak, "'Us' and 'Them': Inclusion and Exclusion – Discrimination via Discourse'.

## Chapter 4 Identity England

### 4.1 Introduction

Launched in October 2020, Identity England (IE) stems from the UK branch of the pan-European youth organisation Generation Identity (GI). According to the anti-fascist organisation Hope Not Hate, GI UK was condemned and expelled in 2018 from the wider European movement for allegedly holding extremist views. This emerged following its leader, Benjamin Jones, platforming YouTuber Colin Robertson (aka Millennial Woes) at the GI UK conference despite the objections of European GI leaders.<sup>193</sup> While Ben Jones is not associated with IE, the group is led by GI London's regional leader, Charlie Fox.

IE identifies as a 'a patriotic, metapolitical activist organisation' that advocates 'healthy, alternative activism that aims to safeguard the native English people and their interests'. It describes its philosophy as 'one of meaningful and peaceful campaigning for, and promotion of, English identity and culture'.<sup>194</sup> It is 'also [a proponent] of strong local communities and the environment' and advocates for 'organic democracy and political reform'.<sup>195</sup> IE is anti-globalist and anti-immigration, blaming the (liberal) establishment for the perceived negative impact of mass immigration and resulting Islamisation. IE's metapolitical strategy has been translated into offline activism, such as dropping banners in public spaces to handing out anti-Islamic leaflets on the high street. It also includes activities on its social media accounts such as Twitter (where its account is now suspended) and blog posts on its website. Here its offline activities are remediated, and a range of topics – from the threat of 'Islamic' grooming gangs in the UK to free speech and censorship – are discussed.

This chapter discusses key findings from a digital ethnographic discursive analysis of IE's website and Twitter account. It examines the various discourse topics that make up the group's exclusionary ideology, as well as the strategies used to negotiate these topics in the mobilisation of an ethnocultural identity and ethnopluralist worldview.

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<sup>193</sup> Mulhall, 'Generation Identity UK Isolated and in Crisis'.

<sup>194</sup> Identity England, 'About Us'.

<sup>195</sup> Identity England, 'Frequently Asked Questions'.

IE has been selected as the first case study based on its similarities to the GI 'brand' and most explicit embodiment of Guillaume Faye's identitarian project. This will lay the ideological groundwork for the next two chapters and case studies.

## 4.2 Discursive Construction of (Ethnocultural) Identity

Chapter 2 revealed that exclusionary NR identitarian discourse and ideology are often embedded within a context of vows to defend ethnocultural 'European' identity and mobilise an ethnopluralist worldview and related principles. Identity construction, it was established, is based on the formation of sameness and difference (positive-self and negative-other constructions), and it is these (symbolic and discursive) 'boundaries' - between 'us' and 'them' - that are the frontiers in which the identitarian (meta)political battle is being fought.

The following analysis is organised into discourse topics identified as the most thematically important in IE's mobilisation of ethnocultural identity and positive-self and negative-other presentations. It uncovers how in-group and out-group discursive boundaries are formed and (re)negotiated through various forms of online and offline actions. Using the discourse-historical approach (DHA), the analysis primarily focuses on nomination (how events/objects/persons are referred to) and predication (what characteristics are attributed to them), as well as the argumentation strategies concerning the justification and legitimisation of specific claims (see Chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion of the DHA).

### 4.2.1 *Homo Nationalis* and the National Body

The integration of '*Homo nationalis*' and the 'national body' characterise the discourse of IE, becoming the focal point of discursive practices and serving related constructions of 'us' versus 'them'.<sup>196</sup> These constructions are underpinned by Lubarda's (blood and soil) values of 'organicism' (the notion of nation, culture and nature in a holistic union as a single organism), 'spiritualism', and 'naturalism' (viewing nature as a blueprint for social order) which proved thematically important in IE's essentialist constructions of the 'in-group' as a homogenous collective that is 'rooted' (by blood) in the soil of the national body.<sup>197</sup> This national body is

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<sup>196</sup> Wodak, 'Re/Nationalising EU-Rope: National Identities, Right-Wing Populism, and Border- and Body-Politics', 105.

<sup>197</sup> Lubarda, 'Beyond Ecofascism?'



presented as threatened by the out-group – namely, the Muslim ‘other’ – who is eroding ‘our’ identity and culture. Thus, the national body must be protected through exclusionary ethnopluralist measures and policies. It is on this conceptual level – tracing body politics through racialised articulations of the ‘national body’ – that this chapter engages with the IE’s discourse and the thematic areas identified (see chapter 3.5.2 for a more detailed overview of the conceptual framework).<sup>198</sup>

#### 4.2.1.1 Organicism, Spirituality and Naturalism

IE’s conception of identity, as the following extract illustrates, is not confined to a national framework, but rather, has various spatiotemporal frames, at the regional, national and civilisational levels:

As Identitarians we understand that ethno-cultural identities in the British Isles and beyond are *multifaceted*. English Identity is comprised of a chain that spirals up from our localities (village, parish, town, suburb, city) and on up to the loyalties expressed for our *counties and regions*, further still to the *national level*. But for us, the chain doesn’t stop there – it travels on to the *civilisational sphere*. We believe in a very real European union – not centred in Brussels but spanning from the Atlantic to the Urals and beyond – a *brotherhood* of closely related peoples, part of a greater *meta-ethnic family* with a common, continental home. We celebrate *Englishness* within a *European framework*. (emphasis added)<sup>199</sup>

The metaphor presented of English identity as comprised of a ‘chain’ – spiralling from the regional level to the national and civilisational sphere – represents a three-tier conceptualisation of identity, emphasising that, while local and national attachments are important, it is membership in, and loyalty to, a European civilisation that is most significant. In other words, it is the European civilisation that must be constructed, saved and fought for in order to save the ‘national’ and ‘regional’ cultures.

Reference to Englishness (within a European framework) as ‘a brotherhood of closely related peoples, part of a greater meta-ethnic family’ points to the essentialist understandings of identity as organically conceived (by blood). Notions of naturalised decent are emphasised throughout the dataset, with one blog post stating, for example, that the English ‘most certainly ARE an

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<sup>198</sup> Lubarda, ‘Beyond Ecofascism?’

<sup>199</sup> Identity England, ‘One Hundred Englands’.

indigenous people, native to, and occurring *naturally* in one place for generations’ (emphasis added). Those ‘pushing the progressive agenda’, that is, globalism and multiculturalism, ‘have distorted Englishness merely into something anyone can pick up and try on – a badge, a commodity that can change its spots from one day to the next; a civic, bland, false identity’.<sup>200</sup> The metaphor of a ‘badge’ is used to convey that access to the deictic centre – Englishness and Europeanness – is presented not as something that can simply be obtained – for example, through citizenship – but through vague cultural and ethnic categories such as ‘ancestry’ and ‘belonging’. Similarly, in a blog post criticising the Scottish Nationalists for deconstructing ‘the very idea of the nation state and national identity itself’, IE argues against claims of national identity not being ‘about who you are or where you are from’.<sup>201</sup> Emotional attachment also plays a role in defining in-group membership, for instance in references to ‘tribal *sentiment*’ and ‘a sense of ancient identity they *feel in their bones*, sowed into their hearts when they were children’ (emphasis added).<sup>202</sup>

Englishness and Europeanness as ethnocultural phenomena are illustrated more explicitly by IE in its definition of ‘community’: ‘A group whose *organic* bonds are animated by the sentiment of belonging, homogeneity, heritage, and wanting to live together and share the same *destiny*’ (emphasis added).<sup>203</sup> This definition is a direct quote taken from Faye’s metapolitical dictionary *Why We Fight* and hints to the organicism–spirituality nexus and the related notion of ‘rootedness’ that will be explored in more detail below.<sup>204</sup> The ideological influence of Faye – and the NR more broadly – is made clear in a page describing the group’s ‘Philosophy’, which states that it is ‘inspired by the philosophy and worldview of the European New Right’. Pointing to ‘thinkers such as Alain de Benoist and Guillaume Faye’, IE describes the NR as ‘a philosophical school that fundamentally aims to secure the interests of European people, with great respect to all ethno-cultures that comprise it.’<sup>205</sup> The organicism–spirituality nexus is employed in another post that claims: ‘As Identitarians, we believe that *demographics are destiny*’ (emphasis added).<sup>206</sup> That is, the ‘in-group’ – who belongs and who does not – is ‘naturally’ derived by a spiritual deity.

Moreover, a post titled ‘England Rising?’ discusses how Englishness ‘provides a far stronger foundational basis for identity’ than Britishness that – unlike the ‘organic element’ of Englishness, and its ‘ethnocultural root (or germen as Guillaume Faye put it)’ – is ‘grafted on’. This argument is

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<sup>200</sup> Identity England, ‘The English: Indigenous for 1500 Years’.

<sup>201</sup> Identity England, ‘Nationalists: Don’t Be Fooled by the SNP!’

<sup>202</sup> Identity England, ‘Nationalists: Don’t Be Fooled by the SNP!’.

<sup>203</sup> Identity England, ‘Community’.

<sup>204</sup> Faye, *Why We Fight. Manifesto of the European Resistance*.

<sup>205</sup> Identity England, ‘Philosophy’.

<sup>206</sup> Identity England, ‘Demographics Are Destiny – Our Poster Action in Slough’.

made in the context of the English and Scottish Parliaments passing the Acts of Union creating the United Kingdom of Great Britain in 1707.<sup>207</sup> Taking a closer look at references to an ‘ethno-cultural root’ and ‘germen’, Faye defines the latter concept in his book as:

A people’s or civilisation’s biological root — the core of ethnicity — upon which everything else rests. In Latin, germen means ‘germ’, ‘seed’. If a culture is lost, recovery is possible. When the biological germen is destroyed, nothing is possible. The germen is comparable to a tree’s roots. If the trunk is damaged or the foliage cut down, the tree can recover. But not if its roots are lost. The comparison holds for civilisations. The germen represents a people’s ethno-biological roots; the trunk represents the popular culture, the foliage the civilisation. Nothing is lost if the germen, the roots, are saved.<sup>208</sup>

The metaphor of a tree presented here is reflected in IE’s logo (see Figure 4.1), consisting of the forementioned ‘roots’, ‘trunk’ and ‘foliage’. In placing emphasis on the ‘rooted’ nature of the in-group, it becomes even more evident that IE promotes the naturalist logic of ‘situatedness’ and that everything, and everyone, has its ‘place’ in the ecosystem. Significantly, the Greek lambda symbol is also incorporated into the logo; adopted first by Generation Identity as its emblem, this is a reference to the symbol originally painted on the shields of the Spartan army that fought down a Persian army that outnumbered them at the Battle of Thermopylae in the fifth century BC.<sup>209</sup> The Lambda sign has thus become a symbol of resilience and determination to defend the homeland. a notion that is reflected in the group’s ‘Declaration of War’ posted on YouTube in 2012: ‘The Lambda, painted on proud Spartans’ shield, is our symbol. Don’t you understand what this means? *We will not back down, we will not give in*’ (emphasis added).<sup>210</sup> Arguably, the Lambda image are not drawn from historical sources, but from *300*, a popular comic book adapted into a film in 2006. As part of the identitarian metapolitical agenda to make its movement accessible and attractive, videos disseminated by Generation Identity borrowed heavily from the film’s visual aesthetics and its depictions of peril and courage it represents.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Identity England, ‘England Rising?’

<sup>208</sup> Faye, *Why We Fight. Manifesto of the European Resistance*, 148–49.

<sup>209</sup> Wilhelmsen, ‘Heroic Past and Anticipated Futures’.

<sup>210</sup> Generation Identity, ‘A Declaration of War from The Generation of National Identity’

<sup>211</sup> Šima, ‘From Identity Politics to the Identitarian Movement’.



Figure 4.1 Identity England's  
logo

The tree metaphor is employed again in a blog post that describes the English 'as an old, familiar variety with a *long lineage* and *distinguishing features*: in culture, language, art, costume, custom, beliefs, stories, ways and vibes [...] We are the new shoots of growth on an *old oak* with a mighty trunk and strong roots in a place called England' (emphasis added).<sup>212</sup> The predication of 'distinguishing features' serves to discursively construct the 'us' as possessing unique national behaviours. The past, present and future are tied together with the juxtaposition of the current generation being the 'new shoots of growth on an old oak'. This notion of 'rootedness' and related predications of the 'bond' between a land and the people is significant one and emphasises the symbiotic relationship between blood, soil and a (family) tree. Understandings of an 'organic community' that is 'rooted' in place presents the notion that 'the people' are not simply living *on* the land but are interwoven *with* the 'homeland', underscoring the central role that 'nature' and the 'natural environment' play in ethnonationalist ideology and actively (re)producing symbolic boundaries between the in-group and the out-group.

The results support the notion that, in the ethnonationalist worldview, concepts such as 'homeland' are biological and ecological concepts. In this way, predicated by IE as the 'natural home' – 'the collective motherland' of Europeans, 'including the English in England', and with 'tribes' operating 'through time and space' – Europe is conceived by IE as a bio-ethnic entity.<sup>213</sup> References to an 'ancestral claim' by those who 'lived on these isles for millennia' intensifies the temporal dimension underlying 'belonging' and the significance of 'place' in collective identity.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> Identity England, 'The English: Indigenous for 1500 Years'.

<sup>213</sup> Miller-Idriss, *Hate in the Homeland*, 29.

<sup>214</sup> Identity England, 'About Us'.

History, IE claims, ‘overlaps and moulds a people organically out of their ancestral lands’.<sup>215</sup> This enhances the notion of a organic community that that is intrinsically linked to, and shaped by, the land. This supports the notion in Chapter 2 that terms such as ‘homeland’ and ‘motherland’ are biological and ecological concepts, thus making Europe, in the identitarian imaginary, a bio-ethnic entity.

#### 4.2.2 Biodiversity and Ethnopluralism

Ethnopluralist discourse is often embedded in discourse of biodiversity, reproducing a political vision that centres on the allegedly ‘natural’ condition of human inequality. In IE’s ethnopluralist view, then, the presumed wholeness (organicism) articulates (ethno) cultures as separable containers), indicating that those ‘alien’ to the habitat, are potentially damaging to the ecosystem. Hence, the far right utilises the logic of social naturalism to advocate for the expulsion of ‘foreign’ species, e.g. anti-immigration policies to maintain the compositional equilibrium. As summarised by Fortchner: ‘For the extreme right, nature is not multicultural, but biodiverse: diversity both on a global plane (different species/ecosystems existing side by side instead of being intermingled) as well as internally (a stable, “naturally” evolved diversity). The former points in particular to the ethno-pluralist “right to difference”, while the latter looks to an authentic diversity in which every animal and plant has its place.’<sup>216</sup> Put simply, ‘we’ must protect the ‘natural’ order, stability and purity of the ecosystem – defined at regional, national and civilisational levels – against perceived threats.

IE’s emphasis on the importance of ‘local and regional distinctiveness’ illustrates an acceptance of stable, supposedly naturally evolved diversity within the in-group. For instance, the group claims: ‘IE are all for diversity. We have had all the diversity we could need for millennia: through a local, regional, national and civilisational framework – Englishness as part of our great European civilisation.’<sup>217</sup> This reinforces that the IE’s conceptualisation of ‘diversity’ is viewed within the discourse of biodiversity and its related notion of ethnopluralism, where membership of this (ethnocultural) community – both socially and physically – is restricted. Diversity, the group argues, is reflected in the significant regional differences: ‘England isn’t one uniform entity from the Channel to the Cheviots’; instead, ‘Englishness is heterogeneous too in our *bio-cultural regions* like Exmoor, Dartmoor, the Weald, New Forest, Forest of Dean, Black Country, Potteries, the Broads and Fens, Yorkshire Moors and Dales, the Lakes and everywhere else in between’

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<sup>215</sup> Identity England, ‘Ethno-Culture: The Real Class Act’.

<sup>216</sup> Fortchner, ‘Nation, Nature, Purity’, 300.

<sup>217</sup> Identity England, ‘Decolonise England – Our Latest Action in Whitechapel’.

(emphasis added).<sup>218</sup> The locations selected here are significant, as they specifically focus on areas of countryside, protected lands, and national parks. As will be discussed throughout this chapter, the idealised 'natural' sites of countryside are juxtaposed with the 'unnatural' and artificial city life and urbanised areas, which are representative of the 'foreign' elements and instability that comes with globalism and multiculturalism.

The supranational dimensions of identity – that is, a broader European framework – means 'that small numbers of similar peoples can live peacefully as minorities within a dominant group's historic homeland', and thus 'English Identitarians do not advocate remigration for Bedford's established Italian community'.<sup>219</sup> This reiterates that group membership, in 'our' social, cultural and physical space, is based on a three-tier conceptualisation of identity. Hence, while IE argues that 'we do not promote the rigidity of the ethnostate', those who are permitted to live within the 'homeland' form part of the same ethnocultural sphere.<sup>220</sup> The quantification of 'small numbers' of '*similar* peoples' emphasises that, even among those who are like 'us', there must be a limit on those who can enter the dominant group's deictic centre, thus implying the hierarchy of regional and national identity above the civilisational. It also links back to temporal and spatial significance of identity – that those who are not 'rooted' or 'established' do not belong.

Promotion of diversity in clearly defined separate spaces is promoted in this claim: 'Ultimately as English Identitarians we seek a world of self-determination for all peoples with their *own space*' (emphasis added).<sup>221</sup> The (supposedly anti-racist) defence here is that it is '*all* peoples' are entitled to self-determination, yet this is juxtaposed with an emphasis on 'English' identitarians, and the need for 'their own space'. Similarly, the About Us section on the group's website states that, 'Fundamentally, we believe in the natural right to self-determination for the English people in their ancestral homeland, as is accepted for native peoples outside of Europe'.<sup>222</sup> The adjective 'native' is used frequently by IE in conjunction with the collective in-group, the 'people'; notably, in this extract, 'native' is also used in reference to the 'other'. Yet, while nominations of explicit dissimulation are not used in this case – i.e. 'native' peoples as opposed to 'foreign' peoples – there are clear spatial boundaries drawn between 'English people in their ancestral homeland' and those 'native peoples *outside* of Europe' (emphasis added). This implicit strategy of denying exclusion, in which 'equality' is emphasised between 'us' and 'them', is a prominent pattern

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<sup>218</sup> Identity England, 'One Hundred Englands'.

<sup>219</sup> Identity England, 'No Case to Answer – Us and the Old Right'.

<sup>220</sup> Identity England, 'No Case to Answer – Us and the Old Right'.

<sup>221</sup> Identity England, 'The English: Indigenous for 1500 Years'.

<sup>222</sup> Identity England, 'About Us'.

identified. Nevertheless, as previously stated, ethnopluralist discourse, in fact, strives to reinforce the 'natural' *inequality* between various communities (biologically and culturally defined).

### 4.2.3 Remigration and Decolonisation

Discourses of decolonisation and indigeneity (a political perspective that asserts the rights and sovereignty of indigenous people), while mostly associated with the anti-racist left, have become subject to right-wing interpretations. This is most explicitly evidenced in a blog post discussing IE's action against Tower Hamlets Council's installation of Bengali signage at Whitechapel station in East London. Alongside commentary on the activism is a photograph of the signage that has been replaced by a banner stating 'DECOLONISE ENGLAND'.<sup>223</sup> From wishing readers on Twitter 'Happy Indigenous Peoples Day to all the English folk out there' to declarations that 'We are the English and England is OUR land. We will reclaim it', IE deploys the language and tropes of the postcolonial and indigenist left, often in combination with ecological themes.<sup>224</sup>

Decolonisation is envisioned to be implemented through a policy of 'remigration', with tweets claiming that the policy of '#Remigration' 'must be adopted if we are to have a future for an English England, and a European Europe'.<sup>225</sup> An article posted on the group's website entitled 'Europe and Islam: The only fair solution; separation' makes more explicit the connotations between immigration, decolonisation and ecological discourse:

A peaceful separation. Phased, humane and diplomatic remigration with clear borders drawn. Impossible? No – the job of Identitarians is to clear a space where a new political will to carry this through can emerge. We want to see the Tiber Zow clear and clean.<sup>226</sup>

The policy of remigration is predicated as being a 'peaceful separation', that would be 'phased' and 'humane'. This is juxtaposed with the more violent imagery implied by the reference to 'Tiber Zow', an intertextual reference to Enoch Powell's 'River of Blood' speech. On 20 April 1968, Powell, a leading member of the Conservative Party in the UK Parliament, said that, if immigration to Britain from the country's former colonies continued, a violent clash between white and black communities was inevitable. 'As I look ahead,' Powell said, 'I am filled with foreboding; like the Roman, I seem to see the River Tiber foaming with much blood,' an allusion to a line in Virgil's *Aeneid*. He maintained that it would not be enough to close Britain's borders – some of the immigrants already settled in the country would need to be sent 'home'. If not, he declared,

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<sup>223</sup> Identity England, 'Decolonise England – Our Latest Action in Whitechapel'.

<sup>224</sup> Identity England, '@identityeng'.

<sup>225</sup> Identity England, '@identityeng'.

<sup>226</sup> Identity England, 'Europe and Islam: The Only Fair Solution; Separation'.

attributing a quote to one of his constituents, 'in this country, in 15 or 20 years' time, the black man will have the whip hand over the white man'.<sup>227</sup> The metaphor here, of wanting to see the Tiber Zow 'clear and clean', implies intergroup relations as blood impurity, thus reiterating the view of an ecosystem that is biodiverse; that is, every animal and plant has its place, and changes to this arrangement can only have detrimental effects to the purity, order and stability of the nation.

#### 4.2.4 Normalising Ethnopluralism

Despite hopes by IE for the eventual implementation of remigration – 'the political procedure by which immigration can be stopped and reversed' – the group stresses that the process is not yet possible – 'simply because the political culture needed to do so, does not exist'.<sup>228</sup> A metapolitical approach – that is, shifting the political culture to one in which ethnopluralist principles are socially acceptable – is required. The influence of Faye to the group's strategic approach is revealed by a direct quote presented on IE's website: metapolitics is '[t]he social diffusion of ideas and cultural values for the sake of provoking a profound, long term, political transformation'.<sup>229</sup> These values, as IE's discourse reveals, 'are communal by default' and 'comprise the interests of *English people*'.<sup>230</sup> The use of the adjective 'profound' and the temporal reference to 'long term' highlight the significant change that metapolitics aims to achieve. Yet, as Maly points out, metapolitics is more than just a long-term political-ideological strategy. Metapolitics gives 'an aura of intellectualism and *moderation*, despite the very radical anti-Enlightenment nature of the project'.<sup>231</sup> In the words of IE itself, the group's metapolitical approach is summarised as the following:

IE operates in the *space outside of politics* and seeks to *shape the political climate* in its own image, though not for the sake of itself. Our aim is to effectively introduce ideas and concepts with the aim of *changing the culture and mindset of normal people* who believe these ideas as paramount. From here, we look to see a change in political party policy catering to the culture shift of the people. (emphasis added)<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Powell, 'Enoch Powell's "River of Blood" Speech'.

<sup>228</sup> Identity England, 'Demographics Are Destiny – Our Poster Action in Slough'.

<sup>229</sup> Identity England, 'Metapolitics'.

<sup>230</sup> Identity England, 'Community'.

<sup>231</sup> Maly, 'New Right Metapolitics and the Algorithmic Activism of Schild & Vrienden', 6.

<sup>232</sup> Identity England, 'Metapolitics'.



In other words, it seeks to shift the political paradigm ‘to where Identitarian, ethnopluralist ideas are included and debated’.<sup>233</sup> IE aims to disseminate these ideas and cultural values – thus ‘winning the *battle of ideas*’ – through ‘carefully organised and rigorous activism’ (emphasis added).<sup>234</sup> This metapolitical activism is driven by the construction and mobilisation of a collective (ethnocultural) identity that is in need of protection.

While the online space is recognised as an important metapolitical sphere, in ‘metapolitics 2.0’ the spatial domains in which activism occurs are not limited to offline or online activism but through ‘quotidian, flexible engagements in mainstream-style physical and virtual spaces’ (Miller-Idriss, 2020, p. 26). Analysis reveals the importance to IE’s activism of everyday engagement in ordinary spaces and places, with the group stressing the importance of making ‘your love of your homeland and your people count in the *real world*’ (emphasis added).<sup>235</sup> Similarly:

Identitarians recognise the high importance of the Internet – it’s the medium where we sought answers to globalism and where many of us came by the movement; but it should never be the sum of our activism. The globalists will always mark our card online, and while we will always try to reach as many of our people as we can in this way, *the net is no substitute for real world activism*; building strong patriotic networks, communities, solidarity and fraternities. (emphasis added)<sup>236</sup>

The online/offline nexus is demonstrated by IE’s remediation of its offline activism on its website and social media platforms. Activism by IE includes a variety of activities that are conducted in everyday spaces and places from ‘public engagement via our teams on the high street, banner drops, patriotic networking events, community outreach and so on’.<sup>237</sup> This activism – such as banner drops and posting stickers on lamp posts – is part of imposing NR spatiality on a ‘hostile’ environment, which is viewed as a precondition for wider retaking of European identity. As put by Zúquete, ‘[i]dentitarians are territorial. Their struggle for identity, therefore, transcends the virtual battlefield and expresses itself in physical territory, in autonomous spaces, in urban areas, in the streets at large. They assert their presence, and often reclaim lost territory (abandoned to neglect, to insecurity, to criminality, and so on).’<sup>238</sup> Intertwined with online activities, these offline activities aim to intensify their communicational reach and bring attention to the ‘real problems’ in society. Analysis shows IE’s recognition of

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<sup>233</sup> Identity England, ‘Identity England Launches in London’.

<sup>234</sup> Identity England, ‘No Case to Answer – Us and the Old Right’.

<sup>235</sup> Identity England, ‘No Case to Answer – Us and the Old Right’.

<sup>236</sup> Identity England, ‘The Game of Cat and Mouse’.

<sup>237</sup> Identity England, ‘About Us’.

<sup>238</sup> Zúquete, *The Identitarians: The Movement against Globalism and Islam in Europe*, 57.

mainstream digital media – such as Twitter – playing an important role in the remediation of this offline activism. For instance, IE claims that it will ‘utilise big tech social platforms to propagate our ideas [...] because naturally we want to reach as many eyes as possible’.<sup>239</sup> Furthermore, in a blog post describing the group’s actions, it states that:

Our Whitechapel action quickly went viral – at the time of writing it has been viewed on our social media close on 70,000 times. Our action was simple, peaceful and effective. It drew attention to the continuing process of colonisation in our only homeland. IE is building the patriotic resistance to globalism, the Great Replacement, and the ongoing destruction of English and European culture.<sup>240</sup>

Online tools, Maly, claims, are used by New Right activists to (1) choreograph assembly (2) (re)mediatise that activism, (3) steer the information flow and the production of the message, and (4) gain followers in order to have more leverage for future activism.<sup>241</sup> Discursive and mobilisation power, Chadwick adds, ‘is exercised by those who are successfully able to create, tap, or steer information flows in ways that suit their goals and in ways that modify, enable, or disable the agency of others, across and between a range of older and newer media setting’.<sup>242</sup> Maly claims that metapolitics has an ‘algorithmic activist’ dimension, which captures the mutual co-constitution between technology, people and practice. Contemporary digital activism, the scholar adds, ‘is not only about producing discourse in the (passive) hope that it will circulate and get picked up. It is also very much about *actively organising* uptake within the digital environments.’<sup>243</sup>

The Whitechapel action mentioned in the extract above refers to IE’s covering of a Bengali sign with ‘DECOLONISE ENGLAND’. The group tweeted about this symbolic action, including photographs, and dedicated a blog post to describe the activism. Both platforms included a link to a YouTube video capturing this, including long shots of London, to emphasise cities as representative of diversity and instability. Exclusionary anti-Islam sentiment (a theme that will be discussed in detail in Section 4.5) is also mobilised through posters and leaflets that are handed out in everyday spaces, such as high streets, which are then shared online (see Figure 4.2). Similarly, the group posts images of its members posting stickers on lampposts with the IE’s logo (see Figure 4.3)

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<sup>239</sup> Identity England, ‘The Game of Cat and Mouse’.

<sup>240</sup> Identity England, ‘Decolonise England – Our Latest Action in Whitechapel’.

<sup>241</sup> Maly, ‘New Right Metapolitics and the Algorithmic Activism of Schild & Vrienden’.

<sup>242</sup> Chadwick, *The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power*, 285.

<sup>243</sup> Maly, ‘New Right Metapolitics and the Algorithmic Activism of Schild & Vrienden’, 2.



Figure 4.2 Screenshot of tweet posted by Identity England engaging in offline activism



Figure 4.3 Screenshot of tweet posted by Identity England engaging in offline activism

Moreover, alongside using mainstream platforms to share its offline actions, Twitter is employed by IE to direct digital users to its website for further information and action. For example, one tweet states: 'If you are interested in frontline activism, or would like to help out behind the

scenes, please fill out our application form. Join the patriotic resistance.<sup>244</sup> This tweet then directs the user to IE's website, where more detailed information on the group and its ideology can be found.

The group's use of hashtags on Twitter is also representative of utilising these tools to advance its political-ideological battle. Georgakopoulou, Iversen and Stage show how the narrative strategies of users of digital platforms are not only affected by the metricised affordances; they also adapt their storytelling practices to the algorithmic realities of the platform while at the same time influencing how those realities develop.<sup>245</sup> Compared to its more detailed blog posts, the limited characters allowed on Twitter means that tweets are composed of significantly shorter text. These 'storytelling practices' or the construction of discursive boundaries are adapted to the platform, for example through the use of hashtags, which connect IE's discourse to the wider identitarian NR trans-local network: #DefendEngland, #DefendEurope, #theGreatReplacement, #StoptheInvasion, #BuiltFortressEngland, #FortressEurope, #Resist, #Remigration and #StopTheInvasion.<sup>246</sup> The term 'Fortress Europe', which was once used by the Nazis and has carried negative meanings since 1945, has been recontextualised since the refugee movements of 2015 (i.e. 'protecting the European Union *from* refugees').<sup>247</sup> Cusumano has shown how discourse and practices of human *security* have also been reappropriated to support agendas *restricting* human mobility.<sup>248</sup> For instance, in 2017, the youth organisation 'Defend Europe' strategically portrayed itself as a humanitarian actor by deploying a ship in the Mediterranean with the aim of proving sea rescue NGO's alleged collusion with human smugglers and assisting the Libyan Coast Guard in interdicting migrants. As this thesis will show, progressive concepts such as right and equality are being recontextualised by far right actors in manifold ways.

In order to mobilise (metapolitical) action and support, analysis of discourse reveals a variety of perspectivisation patterns employed by IE to involve the digital user. This is done both explicitly (through imperatives, modalities, and 'you' and 'we' pronouns) and implicitly (through actional statements – which are statements in terms of grammatical structure but indirect realisations of commands in terms of their speech functionality).<sup>249</sup> With regard to the former, discourse in the dataset includes: 'It is *imperative* for identitarians, patriots, nationalists etc to invest in creating brands, organisation and communities that operate with their group interests in mind' (emphasis

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<sup>244</sup> Identity England, '@identityeng'.

<sup>245</sup> Georgakopoulou, Iversen, and Stage, *Quantified Storytelling*.

<sup>246</sup> Identity England, '@identityeng'.

<sup>247</sup> Wodak and Rheindorf, *Identity Politics Past and Present*, 23.

<sup>248</sup> Cusumano, 'Defend(In)g Europe?'

<sup>249</sup> Reisigl and Wodak, *Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetorics of Racism and Antisemitism*.

added).<sup>250</sup> Similarly, a tweet posted by the group states: ‘If u care about England’s & Europe’s future, u *need* to get involved’ (emphasis added).<sup>251</sup> More implicitly, actional statements are employed, such as the following extract from a blog post:

*Everyone has a part to play* and none that is too small. There are many communities in the patriotic scene – choose which one is right for you. If you like where we’re coming from and you agree with our particular standpoints, reach out – we in IE, your country – and Europe need *you*. (emphasis added)<sup>252</sup>

Moreover, various types of involvement that can be taken up are summarised:

*Support* activists like @Steve\_Laws\_

*Speak* to friends, family

*Inform* yourself re globalism, #theGreatReplacement

*Join* an activist group

As the Danes say, ‘*Get active*’, Bliv aktiv<sup>253</sup>

Words and phrases connected to obligation alongside ‘we’ and ‘you’ pronouns are repeated to intensify the importance of the ‘in-group’ – the ‘indigenous English’ – engaging in action:

*We*, the indigenous English, have not only a right to protest this sorry state of affairs, but a *duty* of protest – we have a *duty* to defend our land from all those who might wish to take it and ensure that *we* will not go gentle into that good night. We have a *responsibility* to feel righteous indignation at the state of European politics and we all have a *responsibility* to do everything we can to prevent the demographic replacement of our people. (emphasis added)<sup>254</sup>

Mobilising the reader implicitly also includes the use of rhetorical questions. For example, one blog post emphasises the need to for ‘more patriots with a range of skills or offers of practical help to come forward. If you agree with us, what is stopping you from joining or supporting us?’<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> Identity England, ‘It’s Beginning to Look a Lot Like... an Anti-White Christmas’.

<sup>251</sup> Identity England, ‘@identityeng’.

<sup>252</sup> Identity England, ‘The Game of Cat and Mouse’.

<sup>253</sup> Identity England, ‘@identityeng’.

<sup>254</sup> Identity England, ‘Ethno-Culture: The Real Class Act’.

<sup>255</sup> Identity England, ‘Demographics Are Destiny – Our Poster Action in Slough’.

### 4.3 Common Culture

As discussed in Chapter 2, with a metapolitical aim of ‘mainstreaming’ exclusionary ideology and principles, it is important to extend the scope of analysis of NR identitarian communication to uncover the more banal and everyday ways in which this discourse is mobilised. Results show that ‘everyday’ elements form a vital component of the IE’s ‘metapolitical’ approach, which seeks to change the boundaries of acceptable public debate and normalise its exclusionary ideological agenda and related policies.

The metapoliticisation of the everyday is demonstrated in a post on IE’s website, which claims: ‘The only way for our patriotic message to spread’ is if ‘ordinary people apply their beliefs in a meaningful way, *every day*, into *everything*’ (emphasis added).<sup>256</sup> The spatial and temporal references to ‘every day and ‘everything’ intensifies the importance of seemingly ‘banal’ and apolitical actions in the metapolitical strategy. With regard to specific activities that the reader should engage in, IE suggests getting involved with ‘[a]llotment keeping’ and learning ‘greater self-sufficiency skills’.<sup>257</sup> This highlights IE’s promotion of agrarianism – a philosophical perspective that stresses the primacy of family farming, widespread property ownership, and political decentralisation. Lubarda argues that autarky – an element that is essentially derived from romanticism and envisages atomised, self-sustainable communities – builds on the ‘rootedness’ principle, recalling a profound relationship between the people and the land in which they live.<sup>258</sup> The blog post ‘Green and Pleasant’ discusses this link between agrarianism, autarky and identitarianism:

The ethics and moral outlooks of agrarianism are almost tailor-made for the Identitarian current – a social force seeking to build upon healthy, patriotic identities for all Europeans. When one thinks of Homeland – a reality key to Identitarianism, the vision instinctually conjured up is the rural landscape. The agrarian idea, which seeks to uphold that landscape, fits beautifully within our Identitarian aims and goals.<sup>259</sup>

The agrarian lifestyle is constructed in this extract as holding positive ‘ethics and moral outlooks’ (as opposed to an ideological outlook) in its protection of the landscape. This is emphasised elsewhere in the post, which states that ‘we can look no further than Agrarian philosophy for the moral guidance we need to help us achieve these ideals’ – that is ‘strong communities, loving

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<sup>256</sup> Identity England, ‘Community’.

<sup>257</sup> Identity England, ‘Green and Pleasant’.

<sup>258</sup> Lubarda, ‘Beyond Ecofascism?’

<sup>259</sup> Identity England, ‘Green and Pleasant’.

families, social solidarity, cohesive societies and proud nations'.<sup>260</sup> Additionally, the 'Homeland', as has been established, is a concept linked to ethnoculture, ecology, and territory, and thus, as this quote shows, protecting the in-group's bio-cultural identity encompasses the protection of the physical natural environment. This also applies to the *built* environment: 'We can also campaign for distinctive Englishness in architecture and urban-planning – and for the "re-humanisation" and greening of our cities.'<sup>261</sup> In other words, ethnocultural identity must be built into the architecture of 'our' space. Nevertheless, as one tweet claims, 'While we can take pride in our cities, it is our countryside that provided our nation's backbone in the past and can do so again. For us it is where England's identity can be reforged.'<sup>262</sup> This emphasises that the nation's landscape is more than sheer matter; it is symbolically charged.

The reader is encouraged to live the agrarian lifestyle themselves while also encouraging 'individuals within and around our movement to consider careers within the agricultural, forestry, conservation, green energy, horticultural and permaculture sectors'.<sup>263</sup> This also includes the implementation of campaigns to 'preserve the character of our village environments against over development (where replacement migration plays a role) and against the erosion of village life and cohesion through young villagers being priced out of the places where they were born and love'.<sup>264</sup> This points to the promotion of stability, purity and the 'ideal extreme-right (ecologically sensitive) subject' through seemingly apolitical topics such as the celebration of nature and idealised figurations of the countryside.<sup>265</sup> Simply experiencing and appreciating the aesthetic dimension of the natural environment is encouraged, with the writer using the collective pronoun 'we' alongside deontic modal verbs connected to obligation, to insist that '*we should get out there* into the countryside and experience the true essence of what we are fighting to safeguard – old England and, by extension, our collective European motherland' (emphasis added).<sup>266</sup>

The organicism–spirituality nexus is identified alongside the notions of 'rootedness' and autarky: for instance, IE states that '[w]e can also aspire to celebrate and promote rural traditions, customs and folklore by holding or attending events with a view to help in our spiritual and cultural wellbeing and development in our opposition to globalist hegemony'.<sup>267</sup> As alluded to

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<sup>260</sup> Identity England, 'Green and Pleasant'.

<sup>261</sup> Identity England, 'One Hundred Englands'.

<sup>262</sup> Identity England, '@identityeng'.

<sup>263</sup> Identity England, 'Green and Pleasant'.

<sup>264</sup> Identity England, 'Green and Pleasant'.

<sup>265</sup> Kølvråa and Forchtner, 'Cultural Imaginaries of the Extreme Right'.

<sup>266</sup> Identity England, 'Green and Pleasant'.

<sup>267</sup> Identity England, 'Green and Pleasant'.

previously, promotion of a self-sustainable lifestyle as an alternative to a consumerist one is, in fact, underscored by an anti-immigration sentiment, which is represented by the unnatural and artificial construction of the city. The farm is personified as 'virtuous' and 'noble', and 'preferential to the alienation that city life can foster'. It implicitly presents these spaces as having 'a strong sense of place, innate and rooted in local and regional identities'. Put differently, rural spaces, and the farming communities that inhabit them, are 'safe' spaces with a homogenous collective. This contrasts to the alienation and negative experiences of city life where stable diversity has been disrupted with multiculturalism and heterogeneity. IE stresses, however, that it does not advocate 'that one and all should, en masse, publicly decry our cities, up sticks and retreat to our respective idylls; we cannot all wander off and become ploughmen'. Instead, identitarians can 'gain ground by advocating for the "greening" of our cities. Let us become champions for the urban farm phenomenon for example.'<sup>268</sup> This implies that, through its ideals, even the 'degenerate' city can eventually emerge as 'pure' and 'ordered' spaces where the homogenous collective can thrive.

The following thematic analysis will show how 'we' – an organic community rooted (by blood) in the national body – is symbolised and reproduced through nostalgia for autarkic communities and *returning* to the 'natural order' of things through traditional agricultural practices.

#### 4.4 Collective Past

Historical myth-making and idealised constructions of the national past play an important role in IE's' legitimisation and reproduction of a collective (ethnocultural) identity and ethnopluralist worldview. Historical revisionism is tied to instantiations of 'nostalgic nationalism', which, when related to ethnonationalism, aims at 'rehabilitating and glorifying ethno-national community models in opposition to cosmopolitan social change by idealising, instrumentalising, and white-washing national histories'.<sup>269</sup>

Alongside the core values of organicism, spirituality and naturalism, the results show that the concepts of nostalgia and autarky (identified as peripheral concepts by Lubarda) are intrinsically linked. As the section above demonstrates, IE expresses nostalgia for autarkic (self-sustainable) communities, while simultaneously mobilising the 'rebirth' of this imagined ecological polity by fostering a return to traditional farming practices. In other words, 'we' must be 're-rooted' into the land by creating an eco-compatible way of life that ensures the sustainability of the common

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<sup>268</sup> Identity England, 'Green and Pleasant'.

<sup>269</sup> Couperus, Tortola, and Rensmann, 'Memory Politics of the Far Right in Europe', 2.



ethnocultural legacy. Importantly, then, nostalgia is a ‘proactive notion’, combining the temporal axis of the past with an imagined and idealised future.<sup>270</sup>

This notion of ‘re-rooting’ is captured by ‘ancestral homeland’, which is perceived to be the object of collective attachment and devotion by the English, ‘who gave their name to, and moulded this landscape for 1500 years [...] Our national story, our rootedness, our germen, a physical seed, is that which ultimately binds us together.’<sup>271</sup> References to ‘ancestors’ and ‘we’ as ‘descendants’, based on ‘direct connections’ to the past, point to heritage and ancestry as the basis for access to the in-group. That is, ‘for identitarians, bio-ethnic kinship – blood and lineage – is regarded as the basis for a collective European identity, as opposed to birth on any given territory, or citizenship. This is emphasised in the statement that we cannot escape our *common tribal origins* that stretch back into unrecorded time, our history shapes us all’ (emphasis added).<sup>272</sup> Similarly, the group points to the ‘history, the DNA studies, the chronicles, the place names, familiarities’ evidencing the English as the ‘indigenous people’. In other words, as part of their metapolitical strategy, identitarians mobilise a nostalgic return to a golden age of Europe in modern times, where Europe will consist of ethnically homogenous communities, all belonging to the European cultural sphere.<sup>273</sup>

The far right’s instrumentalisation and weaponisation of the past take part in and represent the ongoing ‘culture wars’ over national identity, historical legacies and politico-social values.<sup>274</sup> In this way, the far right’s memory politics is not only directed against historical facts that underline idealised narratives about imagined ethnocultural communities; it is simultaneously directed against present-day liberal democracies. The group links together the past, the present and the future to form a triadic process of rebirth.

In a blog post entitled ‘Remembrance Day: A Matter of Historical Memory and National Tradition’, IE suggests that that ‘political class in its current authoritarian guise has sought to sever the relevance of this occasion from the historical memory of our people’ or, ‘at the very least, rewrite it to accommodate everyone who has arrived at our shores since World War Two’.<sup>275</sup> The group thus accuses ‘them’ of rewriting history, which ‘now appears to be up to the interpretation with the many iteration and revisions backed up by a dangerous Liberal ideology’. In a similar manner, another blog post discusses St George’s Day and how, each year, ‘Anti-English cheerleaders for

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<sup>270</sup> Howell, Kitson, and Clowney, ‘Environments Past’.

<sup>271</sup> Identity England, ‘Slaying the Globalist Dragon’.

<sup>272</sup> Identity England, ‘Ethno-Culture: The Real Class Act’.

<sup>273</sup> Identity England, ‘The English: Indigenous for 1500 Years’.

<sup>274</sup> Couperus, Tortola, and Rensmann, ‘Memory Politics of the Far Right in Europe’, 2.

<sup>275</sup> Identity England, ‘Remembrance – a Matter of Historical Memory and National Tradition’.

cosmopolitanism love to point out that our Saint George was a foreigner'. This claim is defended, explaining that:

Indeed, he was – a Roman army soldier of Greek heritage (his mother may have been Palestinian, although other sources say she was Greek like his father). He was in born in Cappadocia, then a Greek outpost in Anatolia. Whatever his real lineage, he was certainly of an early European environment. His very name – Greek in origin – means 'farmer'; an honourable profession that those of us who revolt against the modern world admire far more than some cog in the globalist behemoth. But again, horror of horrors, our detractors say the English cannot claim St. George as we to have to share him with (among others) Georgia, Bulgaria and (gasp) Ethiopia. We have no issue with this, although we cannot help but ask that if having a non-English Saint negates us English as an ancestral, ethno-tribal reality, would the same go for Ethiopians and Bulgarians?<sup>276</sup>

This quote demonstrates a pattern identified throughout the legitimisation of IE's ethnonationalist discourse – the importance of a three-tiered conception of (ethnocultural) identity and its supranational element. It makes the vague claim that, while St George may have been 'non-English', he was 'certainly of an early European environment'.

Sicurella proposes a framework for the variety of elements often involved in the historical narratives in the construction of national cultures and identities. Of these elements, IE primarily draws on, as alluded to previously, (1) the fantasy of pristine, ancestral homelands, as well as (2) 'myth memories' of golden ages and glorious heroes, who are to be celebrated and commemorated.<sup>277</sup> Our 'ancestors' are presented as emulating ideals of sacrifice, dignity and greatness, giving 'their lives for the love they held for their families, communities and nation':

Our ancestors toiled away in some of the worst living conditions imaginable in order to ensure that those who came after simply did not have to. That is our 'privilege' and it would make far less sense to hand it over to people who have nothing to do with that past. This is a direct affront to those that completely sacrificed absolutely everything for their descendants.<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> Identity England, 'Slaying the Globalist Dragon'.

<sup>277</sup> Sicurella, 'Speaking for the Nation: A Critical Discourse Study of Intellectuals and Nationalism in the Post-Yugoslav Context'.

<sup>278</sup> Identity England, 'Remembrance – a Matter of Historical Memory and National Tradition'.

The upscaling of qualities ('the *worst* living conditions imaginable' and 'completely sacrificed *absolutely everything*') intensifies the magnitude of the sacrifices made in the past, and thus emphasises why 'we', the 'descendants', have a responsibility to maintain 'our' collective identity. The devotion of these 'heroes' is under threat by 'replacement migration': 'thousands of years of history will gradually fade and collective memories will disappear – a tragic legacy for our ancestry who built such a mighty world.'<sup>279</sup>

The group asserts that 'our ancestors' did not hold the view that 'diversity' built Britain or that we should accept becoming a minority in our homeland'; instead, 'our forebears scratched the land to build a world worth inheriting [...] with the assumption that we would continue their story – not for some uprooted, materialistic utopia'.<sup>280</sup> The metaphor of plants and soil – 'uprooted' – suggests that the current modern liberal society characterised by globalism and materialism – a supposed 'materialistic utopia' – is not natural – it has been brought in from elsewhere and it does not belong.

Moreover, the notion of needing to 'continue their story' points to a teleological dimension, i.e. the belief that the national community has an intrinsic purpose or mission (a *telos*) entrusted to it by the deity, so that any development is interpreted as a fact of national progress and as fulfilment of the nation's destiny.<sup>281</sup> For example, one post states that '[a]s identitarians, we believe that demographics are destiny', and warns that '[f]or us Europeans, our national and civilisation destinies are being derailed'.<sup>282</sup> Referencing previous 'triumphs', one tweet states that in 'September 1683 an Ottoman Army poised to break into Europe's heartland. It was defeated at the Kahlenberg, Vienna, & Europe was free of Islam's imperialism.' IE claims that '[t]oday we face and threat & we must rekindle the spirit of #1683'. Importantly, however, this is not simply a return to the past but a rebirth; in order to construct 'a reborn, sovereign English state', it is important that the group are not 'shackled by history' (unlike, it must be said, some within patriotic circles). Instead, 'we proudly take inspiration from our antecedents' but remould the ethnonationalist worldview in modern times.

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<sup>279</sup> Identity England, 'Demographics Are Destiny – Our Poster Action in Slough'.

<sup>280</sup> Identity England, 'Green and Pleasant'.

<sup>281</sup> Sicurella, 'Speaking for the Nation: A Critical Discourse Study of Intellectuals and Nationalism in the Post-Yugoslav Context'.

<sup>282</sup> Identity England, 'Demographics Are Destiny – Our Poster Action in Slough'.

## 4.5 Common Political Present and Future

### 4.5.1 Immigration, Migrants and Asylum Seekers

Results show IE's legitimisation of excluding the Muslim 'other' is centred on an overarching frame of European identity and culture that is being 'displaced'. This overlaps with other themes including: the incompatibility of 'foreign' cultures with that of the 'organic' one, and the physical danger posed by these groups. It is possible to identify the deployment of various argumentation strategies in the promotion and justification of IE's anti-immigration and anti-Islam stance.

Previous work within critical discourse studies on far-right rhetoric has identified content-related topoi related to immigration and legitimisation of exclusion that are applicable here.<sup>283</sup> Analysis reveals manifestations, in particular, of the topoi of culture (the out-group are predicated as having different norms and values to the in-group and being unwilling to assimilate), danger and threat, and displacement, which appeal to innate fears of physical harm and loss of territorial control and cultural identity.<sup>284</sup>

#### 4.5.1.1 Cultural Displacement

Analysis of IE reveals that 'the Great Replacement' theory underpins discourse on immigration and its detrimental impact on Europe. Coined by French scholar Renaud Camus in 2011, the conspiracy theory argues that there is an international, global plan orchestrated by national and global elites to replace white, European populations with non-white ones.<sup>285</sup> The strategic value of conspiracy theories lies in their ability to provide a simplified way of making sense of perceived injustices and imminent threats, clearly identify the far right's enemies, and thus further solidify self-other boundaries. IE, for instance, states that, '[w]hilst we do not believe Le Grand Replacement is being deliberately engineered by a shadowy cabinet, from in their secret HQ – it is happening. It is happening for many reasons: social, economic, and environmental, and fuelled by the needs and demands of the global market, big business, and finance.'<sup>286</sup>

The topoi of danger co-occurs with the topoi of displacement, where the danger is displacement. This occurs in several forms: In one form, the out-group is predicated as a threat to the autonomy of the in-group. Discourse around 'invasions', then, simultaneously manifest the topoi of displacement, where invasions can lead to the subordination of the in-group. In another form, the

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<sup>283</sup> Reisigl and Wodak, *Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetorics of Racism and Antisemitism*.

<sup>284</sup> Reisigl and Wodak, *Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetorics of Racism and Antisemitism*, 74–76.

<sup>285</sup> Zúquete, *The Identitarians: The Movement against Globalism and Islam in Europe*.

<sup>286</sup> Identity England, 'Demographics Are Destiny – Our Poster Action in Slough'.

topos of displacement presupposes the topos of culture as well as topos of number. In this form, the out-group is predicated as a threat to the cultural identity of the in-group.<sup>287</sup>

Emphasising the severity of the demographic threat, the website claims that IE ‘is dedicated to bringing patriots across the political spectrum to campaign for the most pressing issue of our time’, that is, ‘the demographic replacement of the English and Europeans’.<sup>288</sup> Moreover, a FAQ page on the group’s website explains that ‘[t]oday’s immigration levels threaten the ethno-cultural identity of our nations with its sheer scale and incompatibility of migrants’.<sup>289</sup> The degree of impact is constructed as extreme through the adjective ‘sheer’, while temporal proximation strategies are used to highlight the immediacy of the threat; for instance, statements claiming that immigration levels ‘continue to break record levels and the White British are on track to becoming a minority in our homeland’.<sup>290</sup> The verb phrase ‘on track to becoming’ suggests that the dystopian future is already set in motion and thus a ‘change in policy’ is crucial.

Alongside urgent warnings on Twitter of the temporal proximity of the threat – such as ‘Time is running out’ – a precise time frame is given in which this dystopian future will become a reality – ‘English people are set to become a minority in their homeland by the 2060’s’.<sup>291</sup> Discourse on the demographic replacement of ‘our’ people and their ethnocultural identity is found to be legitimised using ‘facts’. Although it will be shown how much of far-right discourse is rooted in myth and disinformation, in recent years these theories have become grounded in real political dynamics and demographic change, and so established facts are being interpreted as further evidence of orchestrated efforts of an elite few and their efforts to hide the ‘truth’.<sup>292</sup> This is similarly argued by Maly, who states that the far right ‘carefully construct an aura of “evidence-based” discourse to construct their very own idiosyncratic political narrative on the basis of assembling facts, fiction, lies, and news taken out of context and recontextualized in a very different narrative’.<sup>293</sup> For example, one tweet argues that the ‘#theGreatReplacement is accelerating’, which is supported by (unreferenced) statistics. that:

60% of u.18s in Birmingham are BAME

52% of u. 18s in Hamburg

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<sup>287</sup> Hart, *Critical Discourse Analysis and Cognitive Science*.

<sup>288</sup> Identity England, ‘Community’.

<sup>289</sup> Identity England, ‘Frequently Asked Questions’.

<sup>290</sup> Identity England, ‘Frequently Asked Questions’.

<sup>291</sup> Identity England, ‘About Us’; Identity England, ‘@identityeng’.

<sup>292</sup> Miller-Idriss, *Hate in the Homeland*, 11.

<sup>293</sup> Maly, ‘Metapolitical New Right Influencers’, 17.

35% of people in Stockholm

This is a civilisational crisis.<sup>294</sup>

Official statistics are provided on the group's website, stating that 'According to 2019 figures from the Office for National Statistics and Slough Borough Council, of the 150,000 people who live in Slough, only 46,000 were described as white British – that's only 31% of the population. This figure is a reduction of 3.5% from the 2011 census.'<sup>295</sup> Similarly, in response to accusations that the Great Replacement is a 'conspiracy theory', IE again points to various sources of seemingly legitimate sources to evidence its 'truth telling': it is current United Nations, EU and British government policy. Official statistics, numerous media sources and, more precisely, the work of David Coleman from the University of Oxford further confirm the phenomenon.<sup>296</sup> This discursive strategy of denial seeks to give a 'factual' objective connotations to the argument, and establishes the nature of the claim as based upon external facts rather than (biased) personal convictions.<sup>297</sup>

#### 4.5.1.2 Cultural Incompatibility

Results show the deployment of topoi of danger and of culture in discourse on incompatibility to realise an important strategy in the positive-self and negative-other presentation – dissimilation. The primary target of IE's exclusionary discourse is the (Muslim) other, with 'Islam' and its adherents – predicated as oppressive, intolerant and authoritarian – as being culturally incompatible with the tolerant and democratic European cultures. Discursively removing notions of race from a discussion and transferring concern to matters of cultural is a (de-racialisation) strategy often employed in anti-Islamic discourse to justify practices of exclusion without employing related over-rhetoric, and emphasising positive-self presentation.<sup>298</sup> As Wodak has shown, this rhetoric, used to justify restrictions on immigration and asylum-seeking, has surged in Europe since the 2015 refugee crisis. For example, IE explicitly denies the role of race or 'discrimination of those with foreign origins or ethnicity' driving its anti-immigration stance:

Are you a 'racist' organisation? Absolutely not. We are an organisation whose sole purpose is to promote English identity and love for our homeland. As ethnopluralists by philosophy, we respect all cultures and peoples and strongly believe there is a space for everyone in this world. However as an organisation, we do not wish to see England's rich

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<sup>294</sup> Identity England, '@identityeng'.

<sup>295</sup> Identity England, 'Demographics Are Destiny – Our Poster Action in Slough'.

<sup>296</sup> Identity England, 'Frequently Asked Questions'.

<sup>297</sup> Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: The Shameless Normalization of Far-Right Discourse*.

<sup>298</sup> Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: The Shameless Normalization of Far-Right Discourse*.

culture and identity lost through mass replacement migration. This has nothing to do with 'hatred' or 'racism' or any discrimination of those with foreign origins or ethnicity.<sup>299</sup>

Yet, as was mentioned in Section 2.4.1, despite a discursive rejection of traditional racial nationalism, such thinking rigidly ties culture to ethnicity and so, as Schlembach argues, 'it 'biologises' and 'essentialises' cultures to such an extent that they are turned into the functional equivalents of race.'<sup>300</sup> For instance, IE states that:

Migration has always existed and will continue to do so. It can be beneficial to certain groups, depending on the need of the culture looking to import. Migrants from similar or closely related cultures would have no problem assimilating into our homeland, providing the host culture is dominant. A nation with a dominant culture and overwhelmingly homogenous in favour of its natives is the best way to ensure smooth integration.<sup>301</sup>

This suggests that, while migration can be beneficial, there is a caveat: assimilation of the out-group is only possible if 'they' are culturally close to 'us'. Put differently, the 'host culture' must be 'dominant' so that there is limited risk of difference within society. Repetition of the adjective 'dominant' reinforces the belief in the need for the in-group to operate at the top of the hierarchy, while the use of the noun 'host' implies temporal connotations, i.e. permanent integration is not possible. This narrative is partly justified an intertextual reference to Huntington's 1993 work on the 'clash of civilisations', which is described on the website as 'the engine of history'. Huntington was fundamentally concerned with the impact of inter-civilisational conflicts in both international and national contexts. Huntington claimed that:

The fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future.<sup>302</sup>

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<sup>299</sup> Identity England, 'Frequently Asked Questions'.

<sup>300</sup> Schlembach, 'Alain De Benoist's Anti-Political Philosophy Beyond Left And Right: Non-emancipatory Responses to Globalisation And Crisis'.

<sup>301</sup> Identity England, 'Frequently Asked Questions'.

<sup>302</sup> Huntington, 'The Clash of Civilizations'.

While many scholars were critical of Huntington's thesis some politicians and policymakers were (and still are) favourably influenced (such as US president Donald Trump), particularly as it related to hostility, competition, and conflict between the West and Muslims. Huntington's 'clash of civilisations' paradigm has thus become a key component in the West of many right-wing worldviews.<sup>303</sup>

Predications within the topoi of culture and danger include the attributions of 'alienation, mistrust, and resentment' when 'widely different cultures from different civilisations are forcibly thrown together by our rulers'.<sup>304</sup> In a blog post centred on the 2020 terrorist attack in Nice, France – the author places responsibility for the attack on cultural differences, with the 'Islamic world' predicated as 'wholly incompatible with European civilisation'.<sup>305</sup> The use of the metonym 'Islamic world' here is significant; it is a type of objectivisation – it impersonalises them, presents the Muslim population as a homogenous collective, and emphasises both the interpersonal and spatial differences between Islam and Europe. Criticism is directed at an abstract target here: at Islam as a culture and ideology, not individual Muslims.

Cultural essentialist discourse identified in the data implies that, since these differences are inherent, essential characteristics of cultures, they cannot be overcome, thus the coexistence of Western and Islamic values is impossible. IE goes even further, suggesting that ' swathes of young Muslims feel (rightly) they do not belong in our society and have no place in it'.<sup>306</sup> This distances the group from accusations of exclusion by implying a common ground and agreement between the two groups – 'we' are in agreement with the 'other' – 'they' do not 'belong' in 'our society'.

While (de-racialised) language on cultural incompatibility and protection and defence of 'England's rich culture and identity' features prominently in the group's justification of their (exclusionary) discourse, it is important to note the explicit dissimilation identified in the rhetoric. IE refers, for instance, to 'communities of foreign origins and alien practices': as 'they' are 'not of European origin' 'it is impossible to Europeans to understand completely and live harmoniously with people who have a fundamentally different perception of civilisation'.<sup>307</sup> The use of the xenonym 'alien' is significant in its overt classification of 'non-Europeans' as members of the out-group and thus not belonging within the deictic centre. This is combined with the in-group as being unable to 'live harmoniously' with the 'other', thus implying inevitable hostility and conflict.

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<sup>303</sup> Haynes, 'Introduction'.

<sup>304</sup> Identity England, 'Frequently Asked Questions'.

<sup>305</sup> Identity England, 'Europe and Islam: The Only Fair Solution; Separation'.

<sup>306</sup> Identity England, 'Europe and Islam: The Only Fair Solution; Separation'.

<sup>307</sup> Identity England, 'Europe and Islam: The Only Fair Solution; Separation'.



As the following section will now demonstrate, the topos of danger appeals to innate fears not only of loss of territory and cultural identity but of physical harm too.

#### 4.5.1.3 Violence and Physical Harm

Alongside discourse of cultural incompatibility and threat of cultural displacement or the 'Islamisation' of Europe, exclusion of the Muslim 'other' is also justified by the inherent violence of multicultural societies. For example, on IE's website the nation is referred to metonymically: 'England deserves an inherently patriotic and civil society that remains *recognisable* and *safe* for our descendants' (emphasis added).<sup>308</sup> This implies that any form of difference within society – that is, changes to the demographic makeup – will render civil society unrecognisable and thus 'unsafe'.

IE – and far-right groups more broadly – illustrate this inherent violence by the prevalence of terrorist attacks in Europe. For example, in reference to the 2020 terrorist attack in Nice, the author of a blog post states it was 'reportedly carried out by a Tunisian "refugee"'.<sup>309</sup> Similarly to the above analysis, 'reportedly' is strategically used to distance the author from the accusation, and thus give a 'factual' objective connotation to the argument, rather than (biased) personal convictions. Moreover, the use of inverted commas around 'refugee' (i.e. 'refugee') is used to imply duplicity and attribute actors with the immoral agenda of false residence claims. Elsewhere, criminal qualities are attributed to the out-group, with the nominalisation of migrants and asylum seekers as 'illegals'.<sup>310</sup>

The post continues, stating that this 'appalling atrocity is the latest in a tragic round of salvos on French soil, and the second in the span of only a few weeks', but 'be in no doubt that it was explicitly intended as an attack on the European people and their civilisation'.<sup>311</sup> Reference to 'French soil' is a spatial proximation strategy used to highlight that 'they' have entered 'our' deictic centre, thus emphasising the imminent physical danger posed by the 'other'. This is combined with the temporal proximation of 'the second in the span of only a few weeks' to enhance the imminence of this ongoing threat. Moreover, reference to 'European people and their entire civilisation' draws boundaries between 'us' and 'them', illustrating IE's three-tier conception of identity that moves beyond the national framework to a supranational level. Finally, as demonstrated by 'tragic round of salvos' and the nomination of 'attack', the topos of danger (as is often the case in far-right rhetoric) is manifested in the metaphorical strategy of

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<sup>308</sup> Identity England, 'Community'.

<sup>309</sup> Identity England, 'Europe and Islam: The Only Fair Solution; Separation'.

<sup>310</sup> Identity England, '@identityeng'.

<sup>311</sup> Identity England, 'Europe and Islam: The Only Fair Solution; Separation'.

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militarisation, whereby immigration is represented as a physical act of aggression by the out-group.

In response to the perceived danger, IE calls on the UK government to take action against the dangerous 'other':

IE call on the UK government to immediately retract their pledge to resettle undocumented Afghan 'refugees'

Such a reckless disregard for the safety of our people cannot be tolerated

The rise of the Taliban will embolden Islamists worldwide

We must #DefendEngland<sup>312</sup>

This extract implicitly links Afghan 'refugees' to the Islamic fundamentalist group the Taliban, while engaging the reader through the imperative 'We must #DefendEngland'. More explicitly, another tweet reads:

Kick them out!

Today, Identitarian activists interrupted a group of islamists right in the centre of Copenhagen, as they were spreading propaganda for the 'religion of peace'.

We cannot in any way accept that islamist groups infest our public spaces.

The actional statement 'Kick them out!' is combined with the metaphor of disease/infection in which 'Islamists' are predicated as 'infesting' public spaces', a frequently employed rhetorical strategy for presenting (Muslim) immigration as an epidemic.<sup>313</sup> This metaphor is also employed in a blog post on the Nice terrorist attack that claims that 'If this situation is left to fester, we fear the horrors of Nice will be repeated ten-thousand-fold'.<sup>314</sup> The verb phrase 'left to fester' further confirms that the 'other' has breached the deictic centres and thus if it is not dealt with the 'epidemic' will worsen and grow more intense. Lastly, this extract implicitly suggests that Islam is not the 'religion of peace' but one of violence and conflict.

Alongside attributions of terrorist violence, Islam and its adherents are explicitly linked to child sex exploitation. In the data, this is constructed and legitimised in the context of prominent 'grooming gangs' in Rochdale in Greater Manchester, UK, between 2008 and 2010. Like many

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<sup>312</sup> Identity England, '@identityeng'.

<sup>313</sup> Reisigl and Wodak, *Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetorics of Racism and Antisemitism*.

<sup>314</sup> Identity England, 'Europe and Islam: The Only Fair Solution; Separation'.

other far-right commentators, race and religion play a defining role in IE's discussion of child sex exploitation, with the victims being white and the perpetrators being Muslims of British Pakistani or Afghan origin. For example, a blog posted on IE's website *Rochdale Anti-Grooming Action* suggests that its activism in Rochdale (such as leaflets – see Figure 4.4) is 'to warn the public that grooming gangs are still operating in the area'.<sup>315</sup> This statement is justified through the deployment of statistics – a strategy, as already demonstrated, that is used frequently by IE.<sup>316</sup> The post claims that the Asian population in the 2011 census 'was given as 27.5%'; however, 'after leafletting the town centre, we believe the 2021 figures will be far greater'. This implies that its 'observation' on the increased presence of Asian people is linked to the ongoing presence of 'grooming gangs'. The racial dimension is highlighted further with reference to 'the two men convicted in 2012 as part of a Rochdale based grooming gang' who are 'both of dual UK-Pakistani citizenship'. Citizenship, it has already been noted, does not enable access to 'in-group' membership. Even more explicitly, the post states that: 'We know, sadly, that sexual abuse is present in every community, but the instances of perpetrators with Pakistani backgrounds speak for themselves.'<sup>317</sup> Given the emotive nature of child sex exploitation (as evidenced by the formation of vigilante 'paedophile hunter' groups across the UK) it is thus unsurprising that it is used to mobilise the group's ethnonationalist agenda.<sup>318</sup>



Figure 4.4 Screenshot of leaflet created by Identity England, taken from a tweet

<sup>315</sup> Identity England, 'Rochdale Anti-Grooming Action'.

<sup>316</sup> Identity England, 'Rochdale Anti-Grooming Action'.

<sup>317</sup> Identity England, 'Rochdale Anti-Grooming Action'.

<sup>318</sup> Purshouse, "Paedophile Hunters", Criminal Procedure, and Fundamental Human Rights'.

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Describing the ‘positive response’ received while speaking to the ‘local folk about these ongoing horrific crimes’, the author implies that it is not only IE that holds these safety concerns but the broader public, too. It goes on to say that ‘one middle-aged gentleman even took a bundle of our leaflets “to post through my neighbour’s doors”, shaking our hands and telling us to “keep up the good work”’, to convey there is wider public support for the group’s agenda.<sup>319</sup> The post argues that the ‘loss of a high-trust cohesive society’ is ‘inevitable when communities with greatly differing cultural norms live side-by-side’, a fact that is ‘unfair and detrimental to all ethnic groups, including South Asians’. Claims such as this, in which the ‘other’ is also constructed as negatively impacting from multiculturalism, are significant in the context of the group’s politics of denial.

As demonstrated by the following extracts, various tweets posted on IE’s account directly attribute violence to Muslim migrants, asylum seekers and Islamic ‘cultural practices’:

Change the population of a country & you change that country.

Mass immigration has given us Islamist terror, FGM, polygamy, racist rape gangs, sharia, jihad, and...

... this utter vileness, this terror<sup>320</sup>

Significantly, within this discourse, IE discusses issues of gender and women’s rights, such as references to the practice of ‘FGM’ (female genital mutilation). This reflects narratives propagated elsewhere by the far right, particularly on debates around the ‘headscarf’ (the hijab, which covers hair and sometimes shoulders, and the burqas, which covers hair, face and the entire body) as symbols of uncivilised, barbaric Islam and of the oppressed woman who should be liberated by the rules of Western culture. Along this line of reasoning, the West faces a two-fold responsibility: firstly, to empower and liberate oppressed Muslim women who wear the ‘headscarf’ not by choice, but oppression, and secondly, to protect ‘our’ women from oppression by Islam. This discourse is often contradictory, emphasising traditional family values (which position women primarily as mothers, caring for children and their families), while also endorsing ‘freedom for (Muslim) women’.<sup>321</sup> Ultimately, far-right debates on issues of gender and women’s rights are driven by broader anti-globalisation and anti-immigration agendas. Cloaking these exclusionary

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<sup>319</sup> Identity England, ‘Rochdale Anti-Grooming Action’.

<sup>320</sup> Identity England, ‘@identityeng’.

<sup>321</sup> Berg, ‘Between Anti-Feminism and Ethnicized Sexism’; Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: The Shameless Normalization of Far-Right Discourse*, 208.

agendas with calls to liberate women from perceived oppression, however, enables far-right speakers to broaden their appeal.

In order to legitimise IE's claims, various tweets provide link to reputable news sources. For instance, the above-mentioned tweet links to an article titled 'Sarah Hussein: Tribute to Bury Woman Found on Fire in Street'. Moreover, the following tweet links to a BBC article titled 'Channel Crossings: Hundreds More Migrants Reach UK after Record Day':

No one knows who these people are.

Some will be like the 'asylum seekers' who:

dismembered Lorraine Cox

beheaded Samuel Paty

killed Emily Jones

beheaded church goers in Nice

killed 3 Reading men

gave us the M'Chester Arena bomber.

A price to pay, in blood<sup>322</sup>

This recontextualisation of the article implicitly links migrants to murders listed in the tweet. Similarly, another tweet links to a *Daily Mail* article titled 'Revealed: Somali Knifeman Who Killed Three People at Random While Yelling "Allahu Akbar" in German Terror Attack "Came to Europe as a Refugee in 2015"'. The tweet states:

To the fanatical open borders activists; those who proclaim 'refugees welcome', this is what YOU are welcoming.

Europe is becoming an increasingly dangerous place for European people to live.

Our homelands are under attack.

We need #Remigration.<sup>323</sup>

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<sup>322</sup> Identity England, '@identityeng'.

<sup>323</sup> Identity England, '@identityeng'.

The topos of danger is manifested here with the metaphorical strategy of militarisation through the implication that '[o]ur homelands are under attack' by 'refugees'. As is alluded to here, and will be discussed further in Section 4.5.2, liberalism and its adherents are attributed the blame, with liberal social actors nominated as 'fanatical open borders activists'. Other mobilisation strategies employed include the use of attaching visuals to tweets, such as images of the (white) victims of crimes committed by the Muslim 'other':

Vienna

This is Leonie

She was 13

4 Afghan 'asylum seekers' are accused of drugging, raping & murdering her.

1 of the suspects was on the run for 34 days

He was arrested in London

Another one who entered UK, probably via Calais, the Channel...<sup>324</sup>

This is a proximation strategy that constructs a victim who is 'like us', and thus brings the victim (and thus the threat of the 'other') 'closer' to the reader. There are many other examples in the dataset that emphasise that (1) victims of many violent attacks are against (white) British people or 'white English children' and (2) perpetrators of the attacks are not 'white British' but 'colonisers' and 'racist rape gangs'. This points to an 'anti-white' narrative – a theme explored in the next section – with statements that violence 'is a BAME issue' and questions such as 'Why is this not classed as a "race hate" murder?'<sup>325</sup> Ultimately, the thematic areas of cultural displacement, cultural incompatibility, and risk of physical harm and violence all serve to construct the positive presentation of the self and negative presentation of the other, in which the threats in society arise when those from 'outside' the deictic centre come 'inside'.

#### 4.5.2 Anti-establishment

As mentioned previously, while immigrants are viewed as the main threat to the maintenance of European identity, blame is mainly attributed by IE to national governments (and in some cases European governments), the liberal elite and pro-migrant actors. In other words, the main

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<sup>324</sup> Identity England, '@identityeng'.

<sup>325</sup> Identity England, '@identityeng'.

'enemy' is those who, in their appeals to pluralism and egalitarianism, do not counter third-country immigration to the UK and Europe. It has been argued that villainisation of liberal actors is an adoption of the 'decade-old' extreme-right motif of constructing 'a left-wing, anti-national hegemony'.<sup>326</sup> Hence, by constructing a Manichean worldview in which the protectionist 'us' is juxtaposed with a progressive and social-liberal 'them', IE aims to sow public distrust in policies promoting multiculturalism, and, in the long term, claiming societal hegemony.<sup>327</sup>

#### 4.5.2.1 Anti-Political Correctness

Underlying anti-establishment discourse is the theme of '(anti-)political correctness'. Political correctness is viewed as a tool of the 'Great Replacement', preventing a range of issues being spoken about and thus hindering the ability for actors to change the status quo.<sup>328</sup> Within the far right more broadly, then, anti-political correctness is a strategy of 'being intentionally and legitimately politically incorrect' against the so-called liberal elites and establishment.<sup>329</sup> Debates over political correctness are part of the far right's broader strategy of justifying exclusionary practices, disassociating itself from its fascist roots and rebutting 'extremist' claims. Put differently, the (meta)political battle seeks to draw new discursive and symbolic boundaries; in order to shift what is 'doable', the far right must first challenge what is 'sayable'.

With this in mind, normalising its ethnopluralist worldview requires creating a 're-information sphere' where, in the words of Nilsson, "'real" representative democracy rules (i.e., where the white majority can be recognised as such), it is where freedom of expression is cherished (i.e., where the supposed truth about feminism, Muslims, Jews, etc., can be told); it is where racism is taken seriously' and, finally, it is where the supposed threat of demographic replacement is taken seriously.<sup>330</sup>

##### 4.5.2.1.1 Taking the Threat Seriously

The existing political system – liberalism – is 'not capable not capable of addressing the most pertinent issues affecting England and her people through its own incompetent ideologies'.<sup>331</sup> The (liberal) establishment is compared to a 'hostile adversary', while Europe is presented as 'being under attack', with 'our political elites [...] part of the cause'.<sup>332</sup> As was shown previously,

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<sup>326</sup> Nissen, 'The Trans-European Mobilization of "Generation Identity"', 6.

<sup>327</sup> Nissen, 'The Trans-European Mobilization of "Generation Identity"'.  
<sup>328</sup> Zúquete, *The Identitarians: The Movement against Globalism and Islam in Europe*.

<sup>329</sup> Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: The Shameless Normalization of Far-Right Discourse*.

<sup>330</sup> Nilsson, "'The New Extreme Right"', 97.

<sup>331</sup> Identity England, 'Community'.

<sup>332</sup> Identity England, 'Rochdale Anti-Grooming Action'.

metaphors such as this are frequently employed in the negative predicational qualification of migrants and of the alleged effects of immigration.

Moreover, consider the following retweet by IE's leader, Charlie Fox:

Who do we blame for these attacks? The barbarians inside the gates, or the gatekeepers? Until the peoples of Europe reject Liberalism, the gatekeepers will continue to import Islam and its murderous ideology. The debate must urgently shift towards #Remigration.<sup>333</sup>

Here, liberalists are constructed as the 'gatekeepers' on the 'inside' of the deictic centre, enabling the 'barbarians' from the 'outside'. Categorising Muslims in this way is an example of explicit dissimulation in which Islam and its adherents are predicated as uncivilised and violent. Similarly, elsewhere, while Muslim 'others' are viewed as 'colonisers', the 'globalist politicians, anti-English leftists in 'elite' institutions are constructed as 'collaborators' who are 'facilitating an invasion of England and Europe' and 'accelerating the replacement of European populations in their own homelands'. Immigration has been 'weaponised', and both 'legal & illegal' means are used in the mobilisation of '#theGreatReplacement'.<sup>334</sup>

By creating social distance and thus emphasising difference, IE attempt to solidify the boundaries between 'us' and 'them'. For instance:

Every day the 'elites' separate themselves further from the people, & expect that the people continue to obey, continue to pay taxes, offer up their sons and daughters for globalist wars. 'What do the great unwashed, the gammon, know?', they say, at their dinner parties.<sup>335</sup>

Research has shown how the broader anti-lockdown sentiment during the COVID-19 global pandemic was leveraged by far-right actors to enter mainstream discourse.<sup>336</sup> While responses by the far right varied and were dependent on the motivations of the group and their supporters, many were embedded within the core far right anti-establishment message. IE's discourse falls within narratives which claimed restrictions were attempts by an elite to control the population. For example, the pandemic is presented by IE as being 'weaponised' by corporate elites and the government through 'tracking and monitoring'. In this reading of events, the government is using

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<sup>333</sup> Identity England, '@identityeng'.

<sup>334</sup> Identity England, '@identityeng'.

<sup>335</sup> Identity England, '@identityeng'.

<sup>336</sup> Ariza, 'From the Fringes to the Forefront: How Far-Right Movements Across the Globe Have Reacted to Covid-19'.



the pandemic to mobilise ‘replacement migration’ and destroy ‘our’ way of life.<sup>337</sup> A tweet posted by IE, for instance, states that the goal of the COVID-19 response and immigration more broadly is: ‘[d]estruction of the family’, ‘[d]estruction of the family. Destruction of nations, #theGreatReplacement’ and ‘deracinated, impoverished, dependent peoples’.<sup>338</sup> Similarly, another tweet claims that ‘globalist politicians have seized the opportunity to introduce new methods of control’. Directly addressing the reader using the personal pronoun ‘you’, it says that ‘[t]he intention is to control you, while they continue to party, to enjoy all the freedoms they want to take from you’. The reader is then told to ‘Take a choice: Resist, or comply’. This tweet is in relation to the revelations of ‘gatherings’ on government premises during COVID-19 restrictions, which is used to further support IE’s negative construction of a political establishment that is filled with ‘an entire generation of jokers, liars, incompetents & hypocrites’.<sup>339</sup> Responses to the pandemic thus played into the hands of the far right who span the situation in ways that lent credibility to their narrative.

In contrast to the liberal establishment, IE constructs itself as taking the threat of demographic replacement seriously, in the knowledge that ‘our immediate tasks are to focus on the promotion, nurturing and protection of our European ethno-identities and cultures’.<sup>340</sup> Identitarianism is promoted as the only ‘cure for the decay’. ‘Our civilisation’, IE claims, has become ‘*spiritually weak*’ and thus, unlike ‘a globalist modernity bereft of a soul’, agrarianism, coupled with environmentalism, is a ‘positive ideal’ that can ‘provide our movement with a guiding credo that can appeal to millions of people’.<sup>341</sup> IE urges ‘*every good and well-meaning native European to accept that the social experiment of “multiculturalism” – an ideology pushed by the utopian radicals of the 1960s who later emerged as Europe’s liberal political ruling class, has proved a manifest failure*’.<sup>342</sup> The use of ‘good and well-meaning’ implies that the issue is a moral one – and that supporting ethnopluralism and its related policies is an obvious choice for ‘us/ good people’ against ‘them/evil’.

#### 4.5.2.1.2 Real Representative Democracy

IE seeks to replace liberal democracy in favour of ‘organic democracy’, where seemingly ‘real’ representative democracy rules. As previously mentioned, IE explicitly notes that its thinking aligns with, and is inspired by, the NR and thinkers such as Faye, holding the belief ‘[...] that an

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<sup>337</sup> Identity England, ‘@identityeng’.

<sup>338</sup> Identity England, ‘@identityeng’.

<sup>339</sup> Identity England, ‘@identityeng’; BBC News, ‘Downing Street Parties: What Covid Rules Were Broken?’

<sup>340</sup> Identity England, ‘Green and Pleasant’.

<sup>341</sup> Identity England, ‘Green and Pleasant’.

<sup>342</sup> Identity England, ‘Europe and Islam: The Only Fair Solution; Separation’.

alternative form of thought expression and application to our civilisation is required to move it away from its current decline'.<sup>343</sup> In this way, democracy – in line with the NR understanding – is based on the identity of an ethnically homogenous people. IE stresses that it is not anti-democratic, but instead that '[i]t's obvious to Identitarians that democracy can *only* work within an *ethnocentric* framework'. (emphasis added)<sup>344</sup> This notion is further explained in Faye's 'metapolitical dictionary', which maintains that:

The notion of allowing aliens to vote negates the very idea of the nation and democracy. The participation of everyone in the exercise of power, in making political decisions affecting the whole, is possible only within a human ensemble possessing the same values, memories, and culture. A multi-racial, multi-confessional society can in no case be democratic, since it lacks commonly shared references.<sup>345</sup>

In this way, identitarianism and its ethnopluralist ideals are constructed as the only path to ensuring that any semblance of 'real' democracy can be upheld. Linked to this line of reasoning, and as part of IE's positive self-presentation, is the argument that the left-right paradigm has been 'rendered meaningless, and increasingly irrelevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century' and that today 'the real dichotomy is between the global and the national, the universal and the particular, the cosmopolitan versus the tribal'.<sup>346</sup> IE contends that it is not a political party but a 'metapolitical grouping' that espouses ethnopluralist philosophy and advocates organic democracy.<sup>347</sup> It considers itself a 'rallying point for patriots across the political spectrum' and aims 'to establish a broad patriotic consensus across all political inclinations'.<sup>348</sup> Nominating 'us' as 'patriots' is a significant aspect of the politics of denial: 'we' are patriotic, not exclusionary. By transcending the left-right divide, IE stresses that its members are not right-wing 'extremists' but simply 'patriots' who recognise 'the innate *value* of peoples and cultures' (emphasis added).<sup>349</sup> It explicitly distances itself from the 'Old Right', posting a tweet that states: 'The establishment lump Identitarians with the Old Right because it is the clearest ways for our enemies to defuse and delegitimise our winning ideas.' More explicitly, a blog post posted on its website states:

It is an unfortunate fact of life for Identitarians to be routinely labelled as extremists, Neo-Nazis, Fascists – you name it – whether it's from the mainstream media, academia,

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<sup>343</sup> Identity England, 'Philosophy'.

<sup>344</sup> Identity England, 'Decolonise England – Our Latest Action in Whitechapel'.

<sup>345</sup> Faye, *Why We Fight. Manifesto of the European Resistance*, 112–13.

<sup>346</sup> Identity England, 'No Case to Answer – Us and the Old Right'.

<sup>347</sup> Identity England, 'Identity England Launches in London'.

<sup>348</sup> Identity England, 'Frequently Asked Questions'.

<sup>349</sup> Identity England, 'No Case to Answer – Us and the Old Right'.

or the militants of Antifa. These accusations are so ludicrous that for us, they have become water off a duck's back. However, these tags, if thrown enough times can stick, so it is only right that we should be able to refute it.<sup>350</sup>

Moreover, IE argues that, while the identitarian view that 'England should remain predominantly English' would 'count as extremism to your average member of Antifa', to 'most fair-minded people it would seem the perfectly moderate position that it is'. Antifa – anti-fascist groups – are negatively constructed in the discourse identified, and thus this argument draws a discursive boundary between 'us' – 'fair-minded people' – and 'them' – the 'radicals'. This is a denial strategy that promotes the viewpoint as common knowledge: it is a 'perfectly moderate position' that is shared by 'most' people. Similarly, it makes pejorative references to modern liberal society – 'Clown World' – and those within it as 'detractors' that continue to 'smear us'.<sup>351</sup> IE confidently states that 'our ideas have can and will gain traction among *millions* of decent people throughout the West'. The quantification of 'millions' emphasises the supposed global and wide spread support for Identitarian ideals.<sup>352</sup> This reality, IE claims, is evidence that 'we are not cartoonish far-right or extremists but instead represent the *happy medium*' (emphasis added).<sup>353</sup> Lastly, the group argues that rejection of these 'illusory assumptions' of connections to the Old Right is not simply a way of trying to construct itself in a positive light; rather, drawing from this ideology is illogical for the success of their movement: 'why would we want to associate ourselves with outdated ideologies that have proved themselves such abject failures?'<sup>354</sup> This shows that associating itself with the Old Right holds no strategic value for IE, both in terms of its need to present itself as 'moderate' and in the face of evidence of past limited success.

The FAQ section on the group's website is also focused on combatting 'extremist' claims, and attempts to distance itself slightly from GI, stating that it 'is an entirely independent organisation'. In the same paragraph it reiterates its aim of maintaining 'nonviolent and pro-democratic activism' that is also 'respectable and relatable'.<sup>355</sup> There is a sense here that IE is attempting to present itself as more 'inclusive' than GI which 'remains a wholly youth activist organisation'. IE, on the other hand, is 'open to people of all ages' and is 'open to working with anybody provided they are compatible with our organisational principles'. While this suggests that potential supporters and activists must adhere to its 'non-violent and pro-democratic activism', it also

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<sup>350</sup> Identity England, 'No Case to Answer – Us and the Old Right'.

<sup>351</sup> Identity England, 'No Case to Answer – Us and the Old Right'.

<sup>352</sup> Identity England, 'No Case to Answer – Us and the Old Right'.

<sup>353</sup> Identity England, 'No Case to Answer – Us and the Old Right'.

<sup>354</sup> Identity England, 'No Case to Answer – Us and the Old Right'.

<sup>355</sup> Identity England, 'Frequently Asked Questions'.

subtly implies that actors must be ‘compatible’ with ethnopluralist principles – in other words, they must be a part of the ‘in-group’ – native Europeans. This ethnopluralist dimension is highlighted more specifically under the question ‘who can join the organisation?’; it explains in more detail that ‘anyone [can join] who agrees to meet our organisational principles’ and ‘fundamentally wishes to stop replacement-level migration and globalisation. There are plenty of reasons to oppose replacement-level migration with its inherent consequences, such as Islamisation.’ It then concludes with ‘softer’ and more positive discourse, suggesting that ‘People who are not content with the mainstream political climate and wish to discuss the more pressing issues in a productive and healthy manner, are always welcome’.<sup>356</sup>

#### 4.5.2.1.3 Freedom of Speech and ‘Truth Telling’

The defence of freedom of speech also forms part of the anti-establishment discourse, with IE ‘dedicated to raising awareness and encouraging free debate’ on the ‘existential and civilisational issue of replacement migration’.<sup>357</sup> It seeks ‘to provide an outlet and framework in which ordinary English people can express their ethno-culture in a healthy manner, a true counter-culture with meaningful purpose’.<sup>358</sup> Shafer has shown how exclusionary discourse has been normalised under the guise of ‘truth telling’ and ‘logic’. The researcher claims that supporters ‘are encouraged to believe they are speaking objective truths about issues like immigration to the dismay of the “politically correct,” who either intentionally obscure truth for political gain or have not yet faced up to reality’.<sup>359</sup> In this way, political correctness is interpreted as a ridged dichotomy: ‘it would seem there is little room for inclusive and progressive ways of speaking; either you speak the blunt (white) truth, or you speak politically savvy inclusive language’.<sup>360</sup>

Various actors alongside the liberal establishment – including the mainstream media – are viewed as ‘willing collaborators in the colonisation of our homelands’.<sup>361</sup> The BBC, for instance, is presented in a tweet as a ‘first rate propaganda machine supporting #theGreatReplacement. This is discussed further on IE’s website, which addresses the question ‘Why does the media call you “far-right extremists”?’ The response states that anybody who ‘criticises replacement migration and/ or anything against liberal democracy will be considered an ‘extremist’’. In other words, the media ‘label us as this simply because we do not agree with them and intend to stifle any

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<sup>356</sup> Identity England, ‘Frequently Asked Questions’.

<sup>357</sup> Identity England, ‘Frequently Asked Questions’.

<sup>358</sup> Identity England, ‘Community’.

<sup>359</sup> Gantt Shafer, ‘Donald Trump’s “Political Incorrectness”’, 1.

<sup>360</sup> Gantt Shafer, ‘Donald Trump’s “Political Incorrectness”’, 2.

<sup>361</sup> Identity England, ‘@identityeng’.

meaningful debate around this topic.<sup>362</sup> ‘People’s opinions are shaped by what they can see and hear’, IE contend, and thus ‘alternative media’ and metapolitical activism more broadly, are key components in ‘our fight to reclaim the narrative’.<sup>363</sup>

With many far-right accounts being removed by mainstream sites such as Facebook and Twitter (at the time of writing IE’s Twitter account has been suspended), alternative social media platforms are also playing a role in the metapolitical battle. IE contend that ‘big tech’ are ‘waging a war of censorship against Europeans who advocate for the interests of their own people’. Groups such as IE pre-empt this removal by directing followers to alternative platforms where the ‘truth’ can be told:

While we are able [...] Identity England will continue to utilise the big-tech social media platforms to propagate our ideas [...] We are prepared though, to be de-platformed at any time, which is why we support the alt-tech projects. We applaud the alternative platforms standing up to big-tech hegemony and we currently run accounts on Gab, Minds, Telegram and MeWe as well as the usual big-tech platforms.<sup>364</sup>

As it will be explored further in Chapter 7, the effectiveness of content moderation and de-platforming has been questioned, not only due to the fact that actors have alternative spaces to go to, but also how these measures are used to support the far-right narrative that anyone who dissents from the ‘politically correct’ liberal elite’s globalist narrative is censored by ‘big tech platforms’.<sup>365</sup> Defining the boundaries between ‘legal’ and ‘illegal discourse’ brings to the fore many contentious and complex moral, ethical and legal issues, meaning that groups like IE are able to claim that its discourse and ‘peaceful’ activism remains ‘entirely within the constraints of the law’.<sup>366</sup> To reiterate, however, while far-right discourse may not reach the threshold for being ‘illegal’, or even appearing overtly exclusionary, this does not mean it is not harmful. Despite this, in line with its metapolitical project IE reassures the reader by stating that the label of extremist ‘*clearly* holds no credence’ and thus such (false) accusations should not prevent ‘you’ from ‘informing yourself and acting upon that information’ (emphasis added).<sup>367</sup> The use of ‘information’ implies that his ethnonationalist discourse is ‘factual’, objective and common-sense knowledge.

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<sup>362</sup> Identity England, ‘Frequently Asked Questions’.

<sup>363</sup> Identity England, ‘@identityeng’.

<sup>364</sup> Identity England, ‘The Game of Cat and Mouse’.

<sup>365</sup> Identity England, ‘The Game of Cat and Mouse’.

<sup>366</sup> Identity England, ‘Frequently Asked Questions’; Vidgen, Burden, and Margetts, ‘Understanding Online Hate: VSP Regulation and the Broader Context’.

<sup>367</sup> Identity England, ‘Frequently Asked Questions’.

#### 4.5.2.2 Anti-White Agenda

As previously shown, as part of their metapolitical defence of ethnopluralism, identitarians reappropriate language of equality and diversity, arguing that ethnopluralism is ‘true’ multiculturalism and that any sort of meaningful human diversity requires preservation of difference. It is against this ‘moral’ framework that is evoked by ethnopluralist discourse that liberalism and its ‘anti-racist’ agenda is constructed as ‘racist’ and unjust:

The consequences of liberal metapolitics can be seen throughout society, ethnic group-think or political mobilization for Europeans is fiercely condemned as ‘immoral’, even though the same standard does not apply to non-Europeans. Liberals fabricate racial injustices within western society, ignoring and facilitating the *real injustice* that is the replacement of native European peoples because of the false dichotomy between the perceived white oppressor and the non-European victim. There is a belief that these two roles are fundamental to the respective people groups. *This concept alone is far more ‘racist’ than any ethnopluralist notion of living independently, freely and maintaining ethnic sovereignty and the right to self-determination for all peoples (emphasis added).*

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In this example, in contrast to the concept of multiculturalism and its facilitation of the ‘real injustice that is the replacement of native European peoples’ the ‘ethnopluralist notion’ is described using positive language around ‘living independently’ and ‘freely’. Notably, IE are strategic here in their use of ‘non-European’ to describe the ‘perceived victim’. Yet, the racial underpinnings are made clear with its juxtaposition to the ‘perceived *white* oppressor’ as well as an understanding that ‘Europeanness’ in the identitarian formulation is not geographically defined, but *biologically* (emphasis added). IE also construct various other actors as driving the globalist agenda, including the mainstream media, with ‘anti-white advertising’ that presents ‘a negative representation of white people and unrealistic interracial relationships’.<sup>369</sup>

As illustrated above, exclusion is justified by IE through reversing accusations of racism to the ‘collaborators’ of demographic replacement – the liberal establishment, the mainstream media, and the ‘anti-racists’ more broadly.<sup>370</sup> van Dijk argues that victim-perpetrator reversal is an effective denial strategy that entails the speaker accusing ‘them’ as having abandoned ‘the people’ in favour of multicultural agendas, thus de facto succumbing to racism towards ‘our’

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<sup>368</sup> Identity England, ‘Liberalism: The Doctrine of Guilt’.

<sup>369</sup> Identity England, ‘It’s Beginning to Look a Lot Like... an Anti-White Christmas’.

<sup>370</sup> van Dijk, ‘Discourse and the Denial of Racism’.

people. Doing so, van Dijk maintains, not only allows the speaker to deny and reverse racism, but also to rhetorically position themselves as protectors of and speaking on behalf of this ‘forsaken people’ amidst the alleged threats of multiculturalism and immigrants. Put differently, negatively constructing the liberal ‘other’ in this way is strategically implicated in the positive self-presentation of IE and thus its ideals and worldview.

Importantly, IE’s ‘anti-white’ discourse and construction of the in-group as ‘victims’ must be viewed within the context of the far-right’s response to the global Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests and the resulting proliferation in discussions about race, colonialism and imperial legacies following the killing of George Floyd by a Minnesota police officer in May 2020. Many far-right actors took this as an opportunity to talk about race, which manifested in the spread of the ‘White Lives Matter’ slogan. While first emerging in the US in 2015, it was not until these large-scale protests that it was popularised. The broad mobilising appeal and usage of this slogan (beyond far-right groups and actors) rests on the fact that, decontextualised, it is inoffensive. Yet, in context, it represents a negation of the structural and systemic racism in the need to highlight the value of non-white lives.<sup>371</sup>

The above notion is demonstrated in a post titled ‘Being White is Not a Hate Crime’, which expresses how the group are ‘outraged’ at the ‘Orwellian response’ from Hampshire Constabulary who have been treating stickers stating ‘It’s Okay to be White’ as a ‘hate incident’.<sup>372</sup> IE reject these accusations and contend that the phrase ‘It’s Okay to be White’ is not ‘hate’ but instead ‘love’; nor is it proof of ‘supremacy’ but ‘pride’. The group maintain that the stickers simply state a ‘benign, unobjectionable statement’ and that the police are ‘of the opinion that being white isn’t only NOT okay – it’s positively hateful.’<sup>373</sup> In sum, using an indisputably true statement, namely that white lives do indeed matter, IE construct its ethnonationalist agenda within a moral framework and discourse on equality

## 4.6 Concluding Remarks

To conclude, this chapter conducted a discourse-analytic and ethnographic study of IE to examine the strategies involved in the discursive construction of a collective (ethnocultural) identity, and the legitimisation and mobilisation of an exclusionary ethnonationalist worldview. Employing the thesis’s conceptual and methodological framework (the DHA and FRE), it revealed how Old Right politics are reappropriated by IE through ethnonationalist discourse and interpretations of

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<sup>371</sup> HOPE not hate, ‘The Far-Right Backlash Against the Black Lives Matter Movement’

<sup>372</sup> Identity England, ‘Being White Is Not a Hate Crime’

<sup>373</sup> Identity England, ‘Being White Is Not a Hate Crime’

## Chapter 4

concepts such as right (to difference), (bio)diversity, values, and equality. This forms part of the group's metapolitical strategy, which seeks to normalise its discourse and thus make the socio-political environment more conducive to its ethnopluralist ideals. In this way, IE are relatively careful in the language it uses, and primarily nominate the in-group as 'English' or 'European' as opposed to using explicit racialised discourse.

Despite seemingly 'moderate' discourse, however, it was shown how 'we' the 'people' are, in fact, defined by blood (and soil), with rhetoric employed such as 'heritage' and 'ethno-cultural root'. In relation to this, the analysis illustrated the complex dynamics between identity, space and territory, with 'us' being formed of three interrelated levels – regional, national and supra-national identity. 'Europeanness' is thus understood as a bio-ethnic entity, as opposed to a geographical one. This collective (ethno-cultural) identity is perceived to be threatened by 'non-Europeans', namely Islam and its adherents, with the group justifying its exclusionary agenda on the basis of loss of territorial control and cultural identity, cultural incompatibility, fears of physical harm. From leveraging emotive issues such as child sexual exploitation to more 'banal' topics on allotment keeping and careers in ecology, a wide range of topics were shown to (meta)politicised by IE. This discourse has the potential to inflict significant (social and physical) harm on its targets and further fuel a growing anti-Muslim sentiment in Europe that has led to Muslims being targets of hate speech, violent attacks, and religious profiling. It also threatens the well-being of Muslim minority communities more broadly and has a negative impact on a sense of belonging.

As the next two chapters will illustrate further, recontextualisation as a means through which to strategically articulate an underlying exclusionary agenda is significant for understanding why 'peaceful' and 'non-violent' metapolitical projects need further investigation.



## Chapter 5 Action Zealandia

### 5.1 Introduction

Action Zealandia (AZ) is a male-only ‘movement of young nationalists dedicated to the revitalisation of our people [European New Zealanders], culture, environment and community’.<sup>374</sup> Its emergence has been linked to the Dominion Movement, a far-right group that was shut down following the Christchurch terror attack in 2019. It has various factions across New Zealand and has become the country’s leading identitarian group. AZ mobilises against the perceived demographic replacement of ‘our people’ caused by multiculturalism and resulting mass migration. The targets of this exclusionary discourse are migrants and ethnic minorities (particularly the country’s indigenous Māori population). Additionally, and equally concerning, is the targeting of the LGBTQI+ community and related policies. It disavows violence in favour of ‘self-improvement’, ‘community building’, and propaganda that promotes physical fitness and a healthy lifestyle.<sup>375</sup> AZ engages in metapolitical activism through various form of online and offline action, including ‘stickering’, outdoor training exercises (such as hiking and martial arts), and clean-up operations. Recontextualising extreme-right beliefs through seemingly ‘non-political’ sites and articulations of nature and ‘self-improvement’ is a crucial part of AZ’s ‘normalisation’ strategy. Moreover, in order to ‘intelligently explicate its outlook’, the group publishes lengthy articles and podcasts on topics related to ‘non-revisionist New Zealand, history, economics and politics’.<sup>376</sup>

While this is a New Zealand-based group that mobilises around highly localised grievances, it simultaneously promotes and defends the protection of a *European* identity within New Zealand and connects with other far-right actors across the globe. At the time of writing, all of the group’s mainstream platforms have been removed, including the website that formed the focus of this study. The extent of the membership is unclear; however, it has been estimated previously to be around 50–100 people.<sup>377</sup> A recently published article details an eighteen-month infiltration of AZ by one of its authors from 2019 to 2021.<sup>378</sup> With AZ as its case-study, it examines the relative importance of face-to-face group interaction and physically isolated internet-based radicalisation in driving individuals towards extremist violence. It found, for example, that AZ’s members are

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<sup>374</sup> Action-Zealandia, ‘Homepage’.

<sup>375</sup> Action-Zealandia, ‘Ideals’.

<sup>376</sup> Action-Zealandia, ‘Action Zealandia Within the Context of the Right’.

<sup>377</sup> Allchorn, ‘From Gangs to Groupuscules and Solo-Actor Terrorism: New Zealand Radical Right Narratives and Counter-Narratives In The Context of the Christchurch Attack’.

<sup>378</sup> Halpin and Wilson, ‘How Online Interaction Radicalises While Group Involvement Restrains’.

'unfit, ill-disciplined' and scheduled 'in-person' events were often 'highly disorganised'.<sup>379</sup> Yet, the authors conclude that even if extremist groups such as AZ do not pursue violence themselves, they still pose a 'grave threat' to society. While isolated individuals radicalising online is the most common pathways to mass causality terrorism, groups such as AZ have 'grander and long-term goals'. As this thesis has shown, this goal is a metapolitical one which seeks to gradually shift the attitudes and boundaries of what is generally deemed to be acceptable democratic speech and establish their own cultural and political hegemony.<sup>380</sup> As Halpin and Wilson rightly argue, it is the impact on democracy and effect on intergroup relations where the greatest impact lies.

This chapter discusses key findings from a discursive analysis and ethnographic study of AZ's website and a select few podcast episodes. It examines the various discourse topics that make up the group's exclusionary ideology, as well as the strategies used to negotiate these topics in the mobilisation of an ethnocultural identity and ethnopluralist worldview.

## 5.2 Discursive Construction of (Ethnocultural) Identity

AZ's exclusionary discourse and mobilisation of an ethnopluralist worldview is embedded within a context of vows to defend a 'European New Zealander' identity. The following analysis is organised into the discourse topics identified as the most thematically important in AZ's mobilisation of a collective (ethnocultural) identity and positive-self and negative-other presentations. This will illustrate how, as part of AZ's 'normalisation' project, in-group and out-group discursive boundaries are formed and (re)negotiated through various forms of online and offline action.

### 5.2.1 *Homo Nationalis* and the National Body

As discussed in detail in Section 3.5.2, at the conceptual level, this thesis traces body politics through far-right (racialised) articulations of the national body. That is, by deploying the discourse-historical approach the chapter deconstructs how AZ discursively mobilise the 'in-group' as a homogenous collective that is 'rooted' (by blood) in the soil of the national body. This national body, AZ maintain, is threatened by the out-group – namely, the non-European 'other' – who is eroding 'our' identity and culture. To reiterate, such discourse subscribes to a framework termed by Lubarda as 'far-right ecogism' which, at its core, reflects a (blood and soil) politics.

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<sup>379</sup> Halpin and Wilson, 'How Online Interaction Radicalises While Group Involvement Restrains', 28.

<sup>380</sup> boyd, 'Social Network Sites as Networked Publics: Affordances, Dynamics, and Implications'.

This framework proposes three core values: ‘organicism’ (the notion of nation, culture and nature in a holistic union as a single organism), ‘spiritualism’, and ‘naturalism’ (viewing nature as a blueprint for social order).<sup>381</sup>

### 5.2.1.1 Organicism, Spiritualism and Naturalism

Ecological discourse plays a key role in mobilising AZ’s ethnonationalist ideology and actively (re)producing symbolic boundaries between the in-group and the out-group. For instance, the spiritual and biological link of a people – ‘rooted’ – to the soil is expressed in the article ‘Anti-immigration as Uniqueness’, which states: ‘This is where you are naturally suited to be and where you belong [...] This land’s soil, plants, animals and weather, *combined with the expression of your genes in such an environment*, made you who and what you are’ (emphasis added).<sup>382</sup> The results thus show that the ‘in-group’ is defined in essentialist terms; that is, ‘belonging’ is based on combination of space, territory and (ethnocultural) identity. This is further demonstrated through the use of the biological and ecological concept of ‘homeland’, which AZ claims is what ‘unites us all and gives us a unified goal and direction. The nation is the greatest extent of our community.’<sup>383</sup> Importantly, while attachment to the nation and (as will be shown) fortification of national boundaries is promoted, alliance to a broader supranational ‘European’ attachment is simultaneously mobilised.

AZ provides a ‘definition of us as a people’ as specifically ‘*White New Zealanders*’, an ‘authentic identity grounded in 170 years of history and lived experience’ (emphasis added).<sup>384</sup> Similarly, answering the question of who ‘we’ are, the group claim that: ‘We are New Zealanders, in the literal, actual meaning of the term, informed by the historical and sociological connotations of what a New Zealander is. We are citizens of a settler nation-state founded by people predominantly from the British Isles, and we conceive of New Zealand as being nothing else.’<sup>385</sup> As will be shown throughout this chapter, such racialised articulations of the national body – and ‘what a New Zealander is’ – must be viewed within the context of the tension between the country’s indigenous Māori and Pākehā (settlers of European descent) population.

AZ asserts that it that it is ‘imperative’ that ‘we’ as ‘*Europeans, as New Zealanders* [...] acknowledge our existence as being a single cell in a far, far greater and more important

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<sup>381</sup> Lubarda, ‘Beyond Ecofascism?’

<sup>382</sup> Action-Zealandia, ‘Anti-Immigration as Respect for Your Uniqueness’.

<sup>383</sup> Action-Zealandia, ‘Ideals’.

<sup>384</sup> Action-Zealandia, ‘Our Raison D’etre’.

<sup>385</sup> Action-Zealandia, ‘Our Raison D’etre’.

organism' (emphasis added).<sup>386</sup> It is believed that in order to save 'national' and 'regional' cultures, protection of the European civilisation is vital: 'We care deeply about the future of Europeans wherever they may be, which is to say that we care about *Whites and Western Civilisation*, and we believe our civilisation can be carried forward only by the *biological descendants* of the people who created it' (emphasis added).<sup>387</sup> This quote illustrates the role of ancestry and heritage (blood) as the basis for the civilisational bond between 'Europeans'. Similarly, AZ stresses 'the British component to the NZ nativist heritage'; 'we' are rooted by 'British blood'.<sup>388</sup> In this way, then, Europe is conceived of as a bio-ethnic entity, with 'our' identity consisting of multiple layers. Metaphorically ascribing 'collective bodies' as a 'single cell' is illustrative of an extreme-right ecological perspective that, according to Forchtner, 'signifies an organic and unifying world view, a holistic perspective according to which organisms should be understood in terms of their embeddedness in an interdependent system'.<sup>389</sup> Such discourse focuses on a desire for purity, order, and stability of the ecosystem in which 'we' are embedded.

The essentialist understanding of New Zealand 'Europeanness' as organically conceived is reflected in comparisons to the familial structure: 'The human desire for sense of ethnic identity is part of human nature. It evolves out of the same set of altruistic genes that serve the need for a family, a family structure and social organisation. It evolved in order to replicate genes more effectively, which is what evolution is all about.'<sup>390</sup> The importance placed on effectively 'replicating genes' links to the desire for maintaining an ethnically 'pure' homogenous collective.

Moreover, references to '[s]trong men' as 'the foundation of strong communities and successful families', and thus a goal of creating a 'positive community and brotherhood of young European New Zealanders', the family metaphor points to the gendered dimension of constructions of the national body.<sup>391</sup> As previous research has shown, and will be evidenced further throughout this chapter, (anti)-gender politics play a significant role in articulations of the 'national body' as threatened and compromised body that must be protected and restored. Put differently, the idealised national qualities are gendered, with masculinity intersecting with nationalism and identity in important ways.

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<sup>386</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'From Dusk Til' Dawn: The Spirit of Europe Must Rise'.

<sup>387</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'Words as Weapons'.

<sup>388</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'Action Zealandia Within the Context of the Right'.

<sup>389</sup> Forchtner, 'Nation, Nature, Purity', 286.

<sup>390</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'Race Differences, Genetic Similarity and Ethnic Nationalism'.

<sup>391</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'Ideals'.

### 5.2.1.2 Ethnopluralism and Biodiversity

The above-mentioned ecological discourse is employed by AZ to legitimise and mobilise the ethnonationalist doctrine of ethnopluralism, which rejects liberal multiculturalism in favour of the strict spatial separation and geopolitical division of people according to ethnic and cultural criteria. This supposed ‘anti-racist’ doctrine promotes the belief that all ethnic groups have a common interest in defending their ‘right to difference’.<sup>392</sup>

Emphasis on spatial separation is demonstrated in the claim by AZ that ‘[w]e are dedicated to *carving out* for our people a place in this chaotic maelstrom’.<sup>393</sup> Through an ethnopluralist lens, then, ‘*Exclusion isn’t oppression, it’s merely asserting that others don’t have equal rights of access to what is yours*’ (emphasis added).<sup>394</sup> Ethnopluralist discourse, research shows, is often embedded in discourse of biodiversity, reproducing a political vision that centres on the allegedly ‘natural’ condition of human inequality. Promotion of diversity in clearly defined separate spaces is further demonstrated in the following extract:

Paradoxically, and contrary to popular belief, our diversity is our greatest strength; it is just not the diversity of the world’s races being mixed together that makes us strong, but rather the opposite. Each group’s differences, by definition, place them at odds with the others’, and places them on a *natural hierarchy*. Each group, broadly speaking, excels in some areas while lagging in others. This is a *natural diversity* which made us who we are and, if we are to exist in accordance with nature’s hierarchy, *we should remain within it*. (emphasis added)<sup>395</sup>

The same article goes on to emphasise the need to maintain internal ‘purity’, claiming that ‘things will never exist again as unique entities if they become mixed together’.<sup>396</sup> Such constructions serve to emphasise national uniqueness and (inner) homogeneity and downplay heterogeneity and difference within the population. Simultaneously, they also focus on differences from members of other nations, often resorting to stereotyping and singularisation.<sup>397</sup> Similarly, intergroup relations are negatively predicated using this metaphor: ‘As with malignancies in an individual’s body, individual cells in a greater organism must combat malignancies for the

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<sup>392</sup> Camus and Lebourg, *Far-Right Politics in Europe*, 163.

<sup>393</sup> Action-Zealandia, ‘Action Reports’.

<sup>394</sup> Action-Zealandia, ‘That Conversation about Race’.

<sup>395</sup> Action-Zealandia, ‘Anti-Immigration as Respect for Your Uniqueness’.

<sup>396</sup> Action-Zealandia, ‘Anti-Immigration as Respect for Your Uniqueness’.

<sup>397</sup> Wodak, ‘“Us” and “Them”: Inclusion and Exclusion – Discrimination via Discourse’.

betterment of the organism as a whole.<sup>398</sup> Metaphors of disease are frequently employed in far-right discourse to represent intergroup contacts as infection that need to be combatted for the ‘health’ of the national body. Ultimately, then, ‘[t]he only coexistence is by *separation*’, which is achieved through ethnopluralist principles and policies (emphasis added).<sup>399</sup>

As will be shown, the discursive construction of the ideal (white) ‘European New Zealanders’, rooted (by blood) in the national body, is opposed to a negative imaginary of ‘outsiders’ and a feared loss of an assumed European cultural and biological homogeneity. These positive-self and negative-other presentations rely on interrelated constructions of a common culture, a common political present and future, and a common political past.

## 5.2.2 Normalising Ethnopluralism

To ensure that AZ’s ethnopluralist principles can be implemented, it first needs to mobilise a metapolitical strategy; that, is change the boundaries of acceptable public debate to ‘normalise’ its exclusionary ideological agenda and related policies. ‘We are engaged’, AZ explains, ‘in a struggle of metapolitics, of *jamming the narrative* and fighting for the ability to present an alternative future to our people, one which doesn’t involve our eventual demographic displacement and socio-political disenfranchisement’.<sup>400</sup> Survival of the West requires protecting ‘our people and Culture’, through cultivating ‘a nationalist sentiment *easily digestible* by the majority of our people’ (emphasis added).<sup>401</sup> In other words, the group’s struggle is one of ‘ideas’; that is, discursive boundaries – making the previously ‘unsayable’ sayable – is the frontier in which the identitarian ‘battle’ of cultural hegemony is being fought.

### 5.2.2.1 Mobilising Metapolitical Action

As reflected in the name of the group itself, the purpose of AZ is a call for *action* against perceived demographic replacement. Analysis – particularly of AZ’s monthly ‘Action Reports’ – shows a variety of perspectivisation patterns employed by AZ to involve the digital user and mobilise metapolitical action. This is done both explicitly (through imperatives, modalities, and ‘you’ and ‘we’ pronouns) and implicitly (through actional statements – which are statements in terms of grammatical structure but indirect realisations of commands in terms of their speech functionality). For instance, AZ claims: ‘We may be a brotherhood, but we are not a clique. Our mission and goals serve the interests of every young white man of character; and if that is you, we

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<sup>398</sup> Action-Zealandia, ‘From Dusk Til’ Dawn: The Spirit of Europe Must Rise’.

<sup>399</sup> Action-Zealandia, ‘That Conversation about Race’.

<sup>400</sup> Action-Zealandia, ‘Our Raison D’etre’.

<sup>401</sup> Action-Zealandia, ‘Loving the Struggle’.

extend our hand warmly to you, brother, to join us.’<sup>402</sup> This example addresses the reader explicitly through the personal pronoun ‘you’. The intended audience is clarified as ‘every young white man of character’, who is addressed ‘warmly’ as ‘brother’ and is commanded to partake using the implicit actional statement ‘join us’. As discussed previously, the in-group – the European ‘community’ is frequently categorised using the collective ‘family’ and related nominations:

Helping your community and nation as you would your *immediate family* creates a support structure around you. *Every person* plays a role in group cohesion and by supporting local manufacturers and businesses you help to create the structure that is essential to group success. Support your *brothers and sisters* and you will help yourself. (emphasis added)<sup>403</sup>

In this example, ‘your community and nation’ is regarded as having significance equal to ‘your immediate family’, which combines with the implicit actional statement ‘Every person plays a role’ to mobilise engagement. Equating ‘everyday’ actions – such as ‘supporting local’ – to ‘group success’ is an important facet of the ‘normalisation’ strategy and one that will be explored in the following section. More explicit language related to ‘battle’ is also used on the site with the actional statement: ‘We *fight* for the vitality of our culture. We *fight* for our future’ (emphasis added).<sup>404</sup> Another pattern identified is addressing the reader through rhetorical questions:

[I]s your comfort in this very moment, or your morally self-righteous displays of empathy toward outgroups in other parts of the world, worth more than the future of your people and respect for your history? *We must* strive to maintain ourselves and build stronger communities for our people. The action we take in this life will reverberate on the walls of eternity. (emphasis added)<sup>405</sup>

The rhetorical question is employed alongside the explicit command ‘We must’, a deontic modal verb that is connected to obligation and necessity. The use of the pronoun ‘we’ implies inclusivity, in which the reader is part of the ‘in-group’. The metaphor and temporal reference ‘walls of eternity’ emphasises the long-lasting and profound impact that present-day action will have in the future. Similar connotations are drawn from the claim that: ‘Each and every one of us is *destined* to play a role in the future of our people. If the *spirit* of our people is to travel beyond the material and toward the sun, *forever moving forward*, we must face our demons, face our struggles, and

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<sup>402</sup> Action-Zealandia, ‘Action Reports’.

<sup>403</sup> Action-Zealandia, ‘Support Local’.

<sup>404</sup> Action-Zealandia, ‘From Dusk Til’ Dawn: The Spirit of Europe Must Rise’.

<sup>405</sup> Action-Zealandia, ‘Anti-Immigration as Respect for Your Uniqueness’.

take action' (emphasis added).<sup>406</sup> Emphasis on 'destiny', 'spirit' and 'moving forward' points to a teleological dimension i.e. the belief that the national community has an intrinsic purpose or mission (a telos) entrusted to it by the deity, so that any development is interpreted as a fact of national progress and as fulfilment of the nation's destiny.<sup>407</sup>

The following section will show how the mobilisation of AZ's 'normalisation' strategy involves the recontextualisation of extreme-right imaginaries through discourse on self-improvement, nature and (protecting) the natural environment.

## 5.3 Common Culture

### 5.3.1 The Ideal (Masculine) Extreme-Right Subject

Common culture was shown to be thematically important for examining how the (racialised and gendered) national body is mobilised through the promotion of seemingly non-political sites and articulations. Results show that everyday culture and lifestyle discourse is (meta)politicised through dominant notions of masculinity and its intersections with ethnocultural identity. These are elements that constitute the 'ideal extreme-right subject' – or what Kølvråa and Forchtner term the 'cultural imaginary'. As put by the authors, 'Our focus on cultural imaginaries therefore looks at precisely how a wide variety of objects and phenomena [...] are imagined as part of a lived cultural context, of a directly practised communality and personal lifestyle, in such a way that it effectively constitutes the "ideal extreme-right subject"'.<sup>408</sup> The cultural imaginary of such groups, they argue, 'constitutes a different, potentially subtler, surface on which they are able, for example, to (re)inscribe the rejection of 'racial' or left-wing Others so central to their politico-ideological universe'.

AZ nominates itself as a male-only 'fraternity' and so 'membership isn't open to women'.<sup>409</sup>

Emphasis is thus placed on constructing an ideal (masculine) everyday culture and lifestyle (sport, eating and drinking habits, clothing, and so on) that is vital for the (physical and mental) health of both the individual body, and the national body more broadly. This is made explicit on a webpage outlining 'our raison d'être':

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<sup>406</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'Covid-19 and Looking Upward: The Malignancy of Modernity'.

<sup>407</sup> Sicurella, 'Speaking for the Nation: A Critical Discourse Study of Intellectuals and Nationalism in the Post-Yugoslav Context'.

<sup>408</sup> Kølvråa and Forchtner, 'Cultural Imaginaries of the Extreme Right', 232.

<sup>409</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'FAQ'.



We seek to build a new generation of capable, *young white men* who will assume the mantle of *re-taking control* of our own country. This starts on an individual level. By refining one's own *mental and physical agility*, he is able to contribute better to the collective effort. (emphasis added)<sup>410</sup>

'Self-improvement' is articulated as the 'first ideal' of AZ, and so 'If you are a degenerate in any way you will not be allowed to take part in membership'.<sup>411</sup> It then explicitly outlines its expectations of the 'ideal extreme-right subject' as individuals that are 'physically fit, independent thinkers':

We encourage activities that both keep the body and mind healthy, such as bushwalks, sports, reading books, and writing. Having fit and educated men will shape the success of the movement. Any individuals that partake in self-destructive behaviours such as drug use and sexual deviancy will never be allowed to partake in the movement.<sup>412</sup>

Moreover, AZ suggests engaging in sports, such as boxing, keeping fit in the gym, and outdoor activities such as hiking. While some of the ideals promoted by AZ – such as anti-drug and fitness elements – would be encouraged by nation states as positive activities to ensure a healthy 'national body', when combined with a subtle undertone of combat, and in-group/out-group dynamics, an underlying ethnonationalist agenda emerges.

The role of the body in far-right-extremist self-conception and subcultures and metapolitics has been explored by Miller-Idriss.<sup>413</sup> The scholar argues that these groups, by idealising male strength and physicality, play on emotional impulses that appeal to marginalised men in particular: the desire for male comradeship and belonging, and the urge to express anger and frustration at mainstream society.<sup>414</sup> Attention to physical fitness and the (male) body in this way is not new, with an emphasis of a 'national citizenry that literally embodies and displays the national self as the far right imagines it', having been part of the historical legacy of many far-right movements. In particular, combat sports such as boxing have been used to channel ideologies and narratives about national defence, military-style discipline, masculinity and physical fitness to mainstream

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<sup>410</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'Our Raison D'etre'.

<sup>411</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'Ideals'.

<sup>412</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'Ideals'.

<sup>413</sup> Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream: Commercialization and Far Right Youth Culture in Germany*.

<sup>414</sup> Miller-Idriss, 163; Miller-Idriss, *Hate in the Homeland*.

markets.<sup>415</sup> In other words, articulations of idealised national (masculine) traits are realised through a self-improvement narrative.

### 5.3.2 Remediation of Offline Activism

AZ's 'Action Reports' of the group's (metapolitical) activities provide further insight into the idealised (male) national body.<sup>416</sup> As discussed in Chapter 2, in 'metapolitics 2.0' the spatial domains in which activism occurs are not limited to offline or online activism but through 'quotidian, flexible engagements in mainstream-style physical and virtual spaces'.<sup>417</sup> This is demonstrated by AZ's remediatisation of its offline activism on the website's monthly 'Action Reports'. These reports show images of groups of young men with blurred faces exercising, hiking, collecting litter, and posing with New Zealand flags (see Figure 5.1) and historical monuments. It also includes stickering and posterage in the high street and urbanised areas, as well as the countryside. Both of these spaces, it will be shown, hold significance in the ideology and discourse of the group. Discourse published in these reports explicitly recognises that, while the online space is an important metaphorical sphere, everyday engagement in ordinary spaces and places is also required:

It must also be stressed that you cannot rely on social media to share ideas. *Meet and organise in real life* and share articles and books with your friends and acquaintances. Unfortunately, the former public squares of social media are no longer public and will de-platform you if you raise too much criticism of the current system. Luckily, de-platforming someone from real life is much harder. Start organising. (emphasis added)<sup>418</sup>

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<sup>415</sup> Miller-Idriss, *Hate in the Homeland*, 95.

<sup>416</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'Action Reports'.

<sup>417</sup> Miller-Idriss, *Hate in the Homeland*, 26.

<sup>418</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'Social Media Censorship of Dissidents'.



Figure 5.1 Screenshot of image taken from 'Action Report' on Action Zealandia's website

Figures 5.2 and 5.3 show examples of the groups poster/sticker activities. Alongside Figure 5.3 is text that reads: 'Our nation-wide poster and sticker campaign continues to gain momentum throughout New Zealand; recently *garnering high-profile media attention*. Through this medium we *spread the essential message* of our movement in *distilled, eye-catching public art*.' Alongside having strategic metapolitical value, the activities are also constructed as a positive 'pastime' for members: 'These activities are popular among our lads, allowing the creatively gifted to *flex their muscles*, and serving as an active – and sometimes exhilarating – pastime for all' (emphasis added).<sup>419</sup>

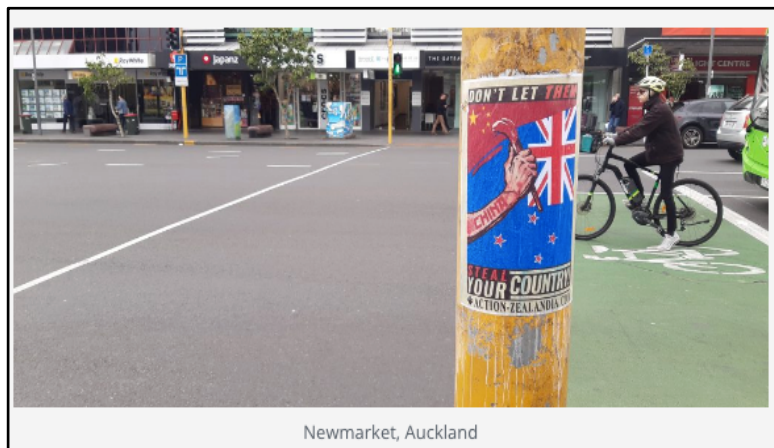


Figure 5.2 Screenshot of image taken from 'Action Report' on Action Zealandia's website

<sup>419</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'Action Reports'.



Figure 5.3 Screenshot of images from an ‘Action Report’ on Action Zealanda’s website

As discussed in Section 2.6, this activism is part of imposing NR identitarian spatiality on a ‘hostile’ environment, which is viewed as a precondition for wider retaking of European identity. As put by Zúquete, ‘Identitarians are territorial. Their struggle for identity, therefore, transcends the virtual battlefield and expresses itself in physical territory, in autonomous spaces, in urban areas, in the streets at large.’<sup>420</sup> Intertwined with online activities, these offline activities aim to intensify their communicational reach and bring attention to the ‘real problems’ in society. The cycle of activities on the online–offline nexus is the essence of sociotechnical activism. An article written by the former leader of Black Order, Kerry Bolton, for example, discusses the ‘over-riding advantage of the internet’, if ‘discipline and quality are maintained’, is ‘the ability to inexpensively create one’s own media which can have a relatively large outreach’.<sup>421</sup>

Other activities discussed in the reports include ‘graffiti clean ups’. While these initially appear non-political, the text accompanying Figure 5.4 reads:

Ugly graffiti tells us a simple message – that we live in an ugly society. Action Zealanda *men* will always fulfil their civic duty in *looking after our community and local environment*. Below are some examples of the techniques we’ve been using, and the results they produce. Although our efforts in cleaning the streets are welcomed by most people, some left-wing reactionaries tore down our ‘cleaned by AZ’ stickers and

<sup>420</sup> Zúquete, *The Identitarians: The Movement against Globalism and Islam in Europe*, 57.

<sup>421</sup> Action-Zealandia, ‘Action Zealandia Within the Context of the Right’.

retagged the areas we previously cleaned. Its obvious these people don't want to improve their communities. (emphasis added)<sup>422</sup>

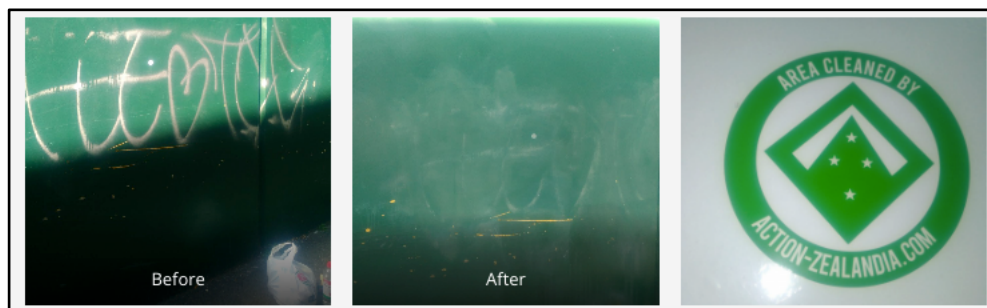


Figure 5.4 Image of a graffiti 'clean-up' activity, taken from an Action Report

As demonstrated throughout this thesis, and confirmed by the extract above, notions of (men) protecting the national body – the 'homeland' – play a key role AZ's mobilisation of an ethnocultural identity. Additionally, Figure 5.4 displays a sticker acknowledging that it was cleaned by AZ, confirming that it is part of the wider metapolitical campaign aimed at garnering attention to the group.

Also included in the group's 'Action Reports' are descriptions and photos of the members engaging in physical activities – such as 'fitness focused' events, 'camping' and 'boxing on the beach'.<sup>423</sup> The text published alongside Figure 5.5 reads:

Fitness fun – Later in the month the Auckland boys met again for another fitness focused event. This was a beep test followed by pushups, situps and pullups. Some members in particular displayed impressive endurance. Overall, the group showed a good fitness level and this activity set a benchmark for future individual improvement. Our largest fitness gathering to date, we look forward to seeing progress collectively and individually among our members as we push each other to do our best. Following this was a boisterous social dinner where newer and more-established members made connections and shared ideas and visions for the future. Much bantz ensued.<sup>424</sup>

<sup>422</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'Action Reports'.

<sup>423</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'Action Reports'.

<sup>424</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'Action Reports'.



Figure 5.5 Images taken from 'Action Reports' posted on Action Zealandia's website



Figure 5.6 Images taken from 'Action Reports' posted on Action Zealandia's website

The discourse presented here is illustrative of Miller-Idriss's point regarding the far right mobilising youth in terms of physical fitness, strength and defence against threats to European civilisation, but also related to ideals of solidarity and belonging.<sup>425</sup> 'Community-building' is another of the group's core 'ideals', with the goal 'to create a *positive community and brotherhood* of young European New Zealanders. Free from drugs, vice and other negative influences' (emphasis added).<sup>426</sup> Notions of solidarity are further expressed in the Action Reports; for instance, 'A great deal of comradeship was built throughout the day of walking, with healthy encouragement and banter abounding between the members, as they encouraged each other to achieve their goal'.

Comparing this seemingly non-political '*fitness focused*' discourse with the war imagery conveyed by declarations that 'We fight for the future' uncovers the metapolitical dimension of the activism. Similarly, the following example expresses deep military connotations in terms of 'brotherhood'. For instance: 'Exposed to snow, rain, clouds, and extremely strong winds, they marched onwards through the tussock towards their objective. Despite several members' inexperience with braving such rough terrain and climate, *no member was left behind*, and they

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<sup>425</sup> Miller-Idriss, *Hate in the Homeland*.

<sup>426</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'Ideals'.

pushed through to the base of the summit' (emphasis added).<sup>427</sup> This raises important societal issues – such as the negative elements of the 'male malaise' – that are not within the scope of this thesis to discuss in detail but should be noted. In AZ's view, a 'positive' vision of masculinity is not compatible with gender equality or multicultural societies. Deep structural problems are leaving males vulnerable to extreme and damaging discourse; however, as this case study demonstrates, structural problems are being constructed as race and gender issues. As will be shown, in the ethnopluralist vision of AZ, gender and sexuality relations play a prominent role in the struggle for ethnic homogeneity

The positive-self construction of AZ's activities as key to 'our overall well-being and spiritual health' ties in with a recurring strategy used throughout the dataset in an attempt to 'normalise' its discourse: the denial of exclusion. AZ provides an 'authentic brotherhood' in an 'atomised, anti-male society' and 'provides a profoundly fulfilling alternative to the pitiful and vapid existence prescribed by mainstream society as a default to young white men'.<sup>428</sup> This discourse presents the group's activities as a 'productive and positive avenue for masculine energy'. For instance, in an article entitled 'How We Can Help Prevent Mass Shooters', the author suggests that perpetrators such as that of the El Paso attack 'are the exact opposite to the guys that adhere to our teachings in the best possible way'. 'Our goal is to build a community of Europeans who are both mentally and physically healthy people, a group which differentiates from the way of being in modern societies that create mass shooters.'<sup>429</sup>

The group criticises claims that 'we're "extremists" who are radicalising people' and are engaged in 'toxic masculinity'. It rebuts these assertions arguing that AZ views '[d]eath, senseless violence and cowardly acts as *counterproductive*' and 'these are acts that would never be encouraged or endorsed by our members as it is *against our core ethos*' (emphasis added).<sup>430</sup> The solution of mass shootings requires getting 'more young men to start adhering to nationalist teachings, to start embracing life and thereby become a life-affirming force of nature'. Put differently, following AZ's ethnonationalist ideals will *prevent* violence and extremism in society, not mobilise it. Another aspect of the group's denial strategy is an emphasis on the distinction 'between a nationalist organisation that plants trees, cleans up rubbish, removes tags, goes tramping, and other such activities as it builds a community, to an organised criminal racket'. AZ thus constructs 'us' – ethnonationalists – as 'patriots' who 'do not have the power or money, but we do have the

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<sup>427</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'Action Reports'.

<sup>428</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'Action Reports'.

<sup>429</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'How Can We Help Prevent Mass Shootings?'

<sup>430</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'How Can We Help Prevent Mass Shootings?'

inclination to better ourselves, our friends, our families, and our lands'.<sup>431</sup> Presupposing the existence of 'real' danger and violence from 'organised criminals' enables AZ to present their activities as 'harmless' and peaceful in comparison. Yet, as has been shown already, articulating idealised national (masculine) traits within the context of *nature* and 'caring for the land' has significant ideological underpinnings. Put differently, the 'purity' of the national body is celebrated through nature.

Alongside descriptions of members trekking up regional parks and contemplating 'the rich and varied natural beauty we enjoy as New Zealanders', AZ promotes the importance of sustainability and 'buying local'. It points readers to specific outlets and providers, with categories ranging from clothing and banking to food and drink.<sup>432</sup> As the next section will now demonstrate, nostalgia for (autarkic) self-sustainable communities is expressed in the context of mobilising the 'rebirth' of a 'golden age' through traditional farming practices.

## 5.4 Common Political Past

Historical myth-making and idealised constructions of the national past play an important role in AZ's advancement of its exclusionary discourse and ideology. In sum, as part of its metapolitical strategy, AZ mobilises a nostalgic return to a golden age in modern times, where New Zealand will consist of ethnically homogenous communities, all belonging to the European cultural sphere.

### 5.4.1 A Return to Autarkic Communities

Autarky and nostalgia, both peripheral concepts in Lubarda's FRE framework, were identified in AZ's discursive constructions of a common political past. The autarkic element is essentially derived from romanticism, envisaging atomised, self-sustainable communities in which 'we' are the 'caretakers' of 'our' nation and are in control of resources.<sup>433</sup> In AZ's ethnopluralist worldview, then, autarky is a key value for how society should be organised to maintain a 'pure' and ordered 'ecosystem'.

'Rural New Zealand', AZ states, 'has been the backbone of this nation since its inception.' Yet, today 'we see our farms increasingly run by big corporations, instead of independent, family owned and operated enterprises'. Current practices are predicated as 'destructive' in terms of

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<sup>431</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'New Zealand's Gang Problem'.

<sup>432</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'Support Local'.

<sup>433</sup> Lubarda, 'Beyond Ecofascism?'



both ‘inferior, cheaper products from other countries’ and the negative impact on farmers at a personal level. Farmers ‘are not living the wholesome, family orientated lives they used to’; isolation and lack of support, AZ claims, coupled with ‘the added economic and financial pressures in this new age of globalised agriculture’, has led to an increase in suicide rates.<sup>434</sup> While many of AZ’s assertions regarding the negative well-being of farmers is a genuine societal concern, this study, and existing research on the far right, shows that representations of traditional agriculture and farmers are linked to deeply conservative constructions of the national body.<sup>435</sup> In the case of AZ, the discourse is underscored by an anti-globalist critique that, as will be shown, is ultimately driven by a wider exclusionary ethnonationalist agenda. That is, one that does not want ‘foreign’ products – or people – entering the deictic centre. This discourse thus illustrates that that nostalgia moves beyond mere escapism, and is in fact a ‘proactive notion’.<sup>436</sup>

#### 5.4.2 New Zealand’s Colonial Past

Another topic thematically important in AZ’s discourse is that on New Zealand’s colonial past, and how mainstream narratives undermining the European basis of the country. This discourse illustrates how the instrumentalisation of the past represents the far right’s ongoing ‘culture wars’ over national identity, historical legacies and politico-social values.<sup>437</sup>

With this in mind, It is important to note here the country-specific context in which AZ’s discourse is articulated. New Zealand consists of both indigenous Māori population and those of ‘European descent’ (termed Pākehā). Existing research has identified patterns in stories of New Zealand colonisation and relations with Māori, a narrative that operates in justifying and legitimating colonial domination and sustaining negative affective contexts for Māori.<sup>438</sup> This narrative constructs the Pākehā as the ordinary and normal citizen and culture of New Zealand. Māori, on the other hand, are portrayed as inherently criminal or violent, as primitive, and as having privileges status over ‘us’, the socially and politically dominant group.<sup>439</sup>

An article entitled ‘Ancient Aryans’ focuses on the ethnic origins of the national populations, outlining the historical ‘accounts’ of early explorers visiting country and the ‘true history of our

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<sup>434</sup> Action-Zealandia, ‘Globalist Agriculture and the Decline of Rural New Zealand’.

<sup>435</sup> Wodak, ‘Re/Nationalising EU-Rope: National Identities, Right-Wing Populism, and Border- and Body-Politics’; Barbosa et al., ‘What Kills the Agricultural Worker?’

<sup>436</sup> Howell, Kitson, and Clowney, ‘Environments Past’.

<sup>437</sup> Barkhoff and Leerssen, *National Stereotyping, Identity Politics, European Crises*.

<sup>438</sup> Nairn and McCreanor, “‘Time for a Troll’; the Standard Story Propping up the Colonial State’.

<sup>439</sup> Barnes et al., ‘Anti-Māori Themes in New Zealand Journalism—toward Alternative Practice’.

race in this country'. It explains, for example, that the French explorer Captain Julien Crozet wrote in his diary that there were three kinds of men in this country:

The first of the three races were what he classed as the *true native race*, with yellowy-white skin, straight black hair and the greatest average height. The second people were darker, shorter, and with more frizzled hair, and the third of the race he referred to as 'true negroes'. Crozet was very clear in his diary when he wrote that he was most certain that the *whites* are the *true Aborigines, or native inhabitants* of New Zealand, and he gave a description of their appearance. (emphasis added)<sup>440</sup>

The 'authenticity of the historical accounts and generally covered up evidence' is assumed in the article. For instance, the use of 'very clear' in this example connects to the domains of knowledge and suggests that the captain's 'observation' of the in-group – 'whites' – as the 'true Aborigines' of New Zealand – is a valid claim. Contrastingly, while the in-group is referenced according to its place of origin using originyms, the out-group is categorised under the referential strategy of primitivisation. For example, the use of 'barbarians' to describe 'them' denotes a lack of civilisation.

Alongside the ethnic origins of the population is an emphasis on the interrelated relationship between territory, space and ethnocultural identity. The language used denotes possession with statements such as 'Our *claim* to New Zealand' and 'it is our sovereign right to decide what shape our country takes in the future, and the vision we articulate in Action Zealandia is of a homeland: cohesive, peaceful, coherent' (emphasis added).<sup>441</sup> Discourse conveys the significance of the territory belonging to the 'people', as 'their' homeland, and it is this ancestral claim that legitimises the in-group's right to construct it to their desired (ethnopluralist) politico-socio reality.

Such 'claims' over territory are based on notions of sacrifice, discourse that links to another prominent topic identified in the data: myth memories of glorious heroes. 'Our ancestors', AZ states, 'built this country for us through blood, sweat, and tears.' Similarly, outlining 'our *raison d'être*', it states that:

Through the *daily sacrifices* of hundreds of thousands over seventeen decades, we enjoy an unsurpassed quality of life and an abundance of material wealth. What we recognise is that this astounding achievement didn't spring out of nowhere. It is a direct reflection

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<sup>440</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'Ancient Aryans?'

<sup>441</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'Our Raison D'être'.

of the *distinctive qualities* of the ethnocultural group which settled New Zealand. We simply have no illusions as to why New Zealand is what it is: our people settled this place, and the milk and honey we enjoy is a reflection of the capabilities of our people. There is no malice or ill-will inherent in such a statement. (emphasis added)<sup>442</sup>

In this extract, the present day's 'unsurpassed quality of life and abundance of material wealth' is attributed to the past sacrifices of 'our' (white European) ethnocultural group and its 'distinctive qualities'. AZ lists admirable population traits and virtues during this era 'such as faith, honour, symbolism, nationhood and spirituality'. The significance of this 'sacrifice' is intensified through quantifiers of 'hundreds of thousands' and temporal references to 'over seventeen decades'. It is these sacrifices that legitimise exclusion.

AZ accuses 'anti-white people' of rewriting and ignoring 'this history of various waves of white settlers': 'To admit that whites had even possibly come ashore earlier than 1769, let alone before the Maori, would throw away the bulk of their "anti-colonial" narratives, which award complete ownership of this country to the *so-called natives* (as well as all the *apparently "oppressed" minorities*), and leaving the whites dispossessed.'<sup>443</sup> The discourse presumes the rightness of the colonising institutions, practices and beliefs, with Māori victimhood characterised as 'anti-white', with intentional 'erasure of Our shared history'.<sup>444</sup> This is discussed in relation to the country's criticism of its colonial past, leading to the removal of statues (such as those of Captain Cook), and changing of place names. While 'ethno-masochists and white-haters on the left [...] seek to destroy their memory, their reputation, and their statues', AZ views 'our ancestors' as 'heroes of our New Zealand European history'.<sup>445</sup>

AZ argues that contemporary (white) citizens should not be held accountable for past treatment of Māori. Yet, much of the discourse seeks to delegitimise the narrative as 'Maori mythology' and 'invented colonial crimes'.<sup>446</sup> AZ rejects the 'one sided narrative', arguing that 'the narrative of the Māori as a victim' is 'on shaky ground'. For instance, it describes how articles are being published on a mainstream news site 'blithering on about the Treaty of Waitangi and how bad the poor Maori have it, how the evil British came and oppressed the peaceful locals and stole all the land by force, etc.' Similarly, it refers to the '*supposed crimes of our ancestors, our apparent trickery and the supposed theft of Māori land, the phoney victims of British oppression*' (emphasis

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<sup>442</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'Our Raison D'etre'.

<sup>443</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'Ancient Aryans?'

<sup>444</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'New Zealand, History, Race and Self-Overcoming'.

<sup>445</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'Anti-White Iconoclasts'.

<sup>446</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'Anti-White Iconoclasts'.

added).<sup>447</sup> AZ rejects depictions of Māori as ‘guardians of the land, living in harmony with nature in their island paradise’ and, instead, it claims that:

They weren’t so much guardians of the land as they were wardens. Within two centuries of the Maori arrival in New Zealand, more than 40% of the country’s forests had been cleared; even before the white man arrived many native species had been driven to extinction. The land was not shared in what would today be considered a ‘hippy commune’, there were strict hierarchies, there was slavery, there was war.<sup>448</sup>

The group also contends that, ‘[o]n top of these inter-tribal conflicts, the Māori had a long history of killing foreigners’, and provides several examples of such violence and the ‘righteous’ struggles with these tribes.<sup>449</sup> This includes repeated references to Māori as a ‘tribe of murdering cannibal savages’.<sup>450</sup> AZ argues that it was, in fact, ‘us’ who were victims of violent attacks from ‘them’ and it was self-defence. Both self-presentation of victimhood and negative-other presentation of ‘racism’ forms part of the victim–perpetrator reversal strategy. Anti-Māori (alongside other non-European ethnic minorities) sentiment, which constructs the ‘collective’ as inherently violent and culturally incompatible with white majority of ‘British’ decedents, will be explained more fully in the following section.

## 5.5 Common Political Present and Future

The results show that a ‘common political present and future’ is thematically important in AZ’s mobilisation of a shared (ethnocultural) identity and exclusionary ideology. The overarching frame consists of AZ as part of the wider defence of the ethnically ‘pure’ European population, fighting simultaneously against migrant and minority ‘others’, and proponents of liberalist ideals. While the former is presented an external ‘invading’ force, ultimately it is the liberal elite who are the ‘enemy’, setting in motion the pending social rupture from globalisation and resulting mass immigration and multiculturalism. This threat must be combatted at a metapolitical level, through both online and offline activism.

AZ’s mobilisation of an (ethnocultural) identity is based on the formation of sameness *and* difference and thus the following section will examine in more detail the negative ‘other’

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<sup>447</sup> Action-Zealandia, ‘Remembrance’.

<sup>448</sup> Action-Zealandia, ‘Remembrance’.

<sup>449</sup> Action-Zealandia, ‘Remembrance’.

<sup>450</sup> Action-Zealandia, ‘Cook250’.

constructions and strategies used in the legitimisation of an exclusionary ethnopluralist worldview.

### 5.5.1 Migrants and Ethnic Minorities

The primary targets of AZ's exclusionary discourse and negative representations are Māori, migrants, and Asian and Jewish people. Negative attributions of the non-European 'out-group' are legitimised through argumentation strategies. Within critical discourse analysis, content-related topoi have been identified in far-right rhetoric related to immigration and the legitimisation of exclusion.<sup>451</sup> Analysis of AZ reveals manifestations of these topoi, in particular the topoi of culture, danger and threat, displacement and disease. These in turn appeal to innate fears of physical harm, loss of territorial control and cultural identity, and infection from transmittable diseases. They are all based on the same conditional: 'if a political action or decision bears specific dangerous, threatening consequences, one should not perform it'.<sup>452</sup> Or, alternatively formulated, 'if there are specific dangers and threats, one should do something against them'. Put simply, the overarching frame of a European identity and culture under threat is divisible into three overlapping cultural, demographic and security dimensions.<sup>453</sup>

#### 5.5.1.1 Security

An article on 'New Zealand's Gang Problem' explicitly attributes organised crime to 'non-white' people and, more specifically, Māori and Polynesian:

Every non-white demographic is strongly represented in the worst parts of the criminal underbelly of this country [...] Of course, these gangs are almost entirely populated by Maori and Polynesian peoples. The *savagery and tribalism* of these groups are *naturally appealing* to such peoples (emphasis added).<sup>454</sup>

The exclusion of the 'other' is justified by the inherent violence and cultural incompatibility of multicultural societies. The topos of danger is manifested here using criminonyms, realised through nominations such as 'gangs'. This social problematisation strategy is a frequent linguistic phenomenon in far-right rhetoric more broadly, representing actors as sources of social problems, as perpetrators involved in situations of social conflict, disturbance or criminal activity. This is enhanced using 'savagery' and 'tribalism' to depict Māori and Polynesian peoples as primitive and

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<sup>451</sup> Reisigl and Wodak, *Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetorics of Racism and Antisemitism*.

<sup>452</sup> Reisigl and Wodak, *Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetorics of Racism and Antisemitism*, 75.

<sup>453</sup> Nissen, 'The Trans-European Mobilization of "Generation Identity"'.  
<sup>454</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'New Zealand's Gang Problem'.

culturally inferior to the European 'in-group'. It employs dehumanising language to describe the 'biggest gangs in New Zealand', who 'are all exclusively Maori pacific islander, or at least shall we say, men of dubious ancestry. Especially the mongrel mob, true to their name, pride themselves on being at least part Maori.'<sup>455</sup> The topos of danger is integrated here with the strategy of claiming victimhood via with victim–perpetrator reversal.

The 'naturalisation' of these negative characteristics is supported and legitimised by official statistics: 'One need only look at the New Zealand Government's crime statistics to see that the general population of Maori, despite being only 15% population, make up 51% of all violent crime in the country.'<sup>456</sup> Alongside official statistics, AZ also draws from academic scholarship to 'better understand why different racial groups in New Zealand have different outcomes'.<sup>457</sup> As will be discussed more fully in the next section, AZ positions racist opinions as legitimate facts that are being censored by the liberal media and politically correct culture. This is a self-defensive discursive strategy that seeks to give a 'factual' objective connotation to the given arguments. This politics of denial achieved through empiricist discourse that establishes the nature of a claim as based upon external facts, rather than personal conviction.

An article entitled 'The Myth of Multiculturalism' reappropriates reputable scholarly analyses of demographics, race, immigration, crime and identity to justify its exclusionary stance towards immigrants and ethnic minorities.<sup>458</sup> The author references 'a new peer reviewed study from conducted by Peter Thisted Dinesen and Merlin Schaeffer from the University of Copenhagen, and Kim Mannemar Sønderskov from Aarhus University' that 'has found a direct link between increased ethnic diversity and a collapse in social trust'. It draws on the topos of danger and states, in its own words, that 'the study was conducted after a massive influx of migrant immigration into Western Europe, bringing with it waves of knife crime to London, Muslim rape gangs in Germany and requiring the creation of no-go zones for the police and local public all over the continent'. The post closes with an emphasis on the 'validity' of the group's anti-immigration claims and practices of exclusion: 'The data *clearly shows* that most people prefer to be amongst people like themselves. This is a *completely healthy, normal mindset* that shouldn't be demonised' (emphasis added).<sup>459</sup> The use of 'clearly' enhances the obviousness of the conclusion, and that their views are 'normal' as they are in line with academic evidence. The reappropriation of

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<sup>455</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'New Zealand's Gang Problem'.

<sup>456</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'New Zealand's Gang Problem'.

<sup>457</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'Race Differences, Genetic Similarity and Ethnic Nationalism'.

<sup>458</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'The Myth of Multiculturalism'.

<sup>459</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'The Myth of Multiculturalism'.

academic sources for ideological purposes is evident upon reading the full journal article, which concludes, in contrast to AZ's 'interpretation', that:

On average, social trust is thus lower in more ethnically diverse contexts. That being said, the rather modest size of the relationship also implies that *apocalyptic claims* regarding the *severe threat* of ethnic diversity for social trust in contemporary societies are *exaggerated*. (emphasis added)<sup>460</sup>

This quotation reveals that Dinesen, Schaeffer and Sønderskov's study does not, in fact, support AZ's argument on diversity and its threat to social cohesion. While most of the sources in the above-mentioned article are scholarly ones, embedded in the discussion are quotes taken from a right-wing alternative news site. It quotes *Summit News* founder Paul Joseph Watson, who states: "Diversity is our strength" is a glib, onerous, empty aphorism that is shoved down our throats as a piece of received wisdom that only racists would deny' and '[i]t may be politically correct, but has no basis in actual reality'.<sup>461</sup> The notion of political correctness and truth telling will be explored further in Section 5.5.4.

Notably, most of the discourse identified in the dataset employs the rhetoric of 'human biodiversity' and social characteristics (e.g. culture, security) to justify ethnopluralism; however, several articles on the website – 'Debunking Common Arguments against Race' and 'Race Differences' – employ more explicit pseudo-science discourse.<sup>462</sup> Race science emphasises the biological constituent of race, and emphasises human racial differences, particularly those believed to affect intelligence and educational achievement. Despite strong scientific evidence that race has little biological basis at all, AZ argues that 'race' is 'a coherent biological category'.<sup>463</sup>

The group claims that there exists 'evidence that clearly disproves this ridiculous idea that ethnic nationalism is some backwards ill thought-out ideology', and instead 'is an ideology that is very compatible with human nature, and the nationalists worldview is backed by a mountain of credible scientific evidence'.<sup>464</sup> In this way, genetics are shown to 'play an important role in race differences, and the different overall outcomes between different ethnic and racial groups'.<sup>465</sup> This so-called 'evidence' focuses on differences in intelligence and personality between races and

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<sup>460</sup> Dinesen, Schaeffer, and Sønderskov, 'Ethnic Diversity and Social Trust', 457.

<sup>461</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'The Myth of Multiculturalism'.

<sup>462</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'Debunking Common Arguments Against Race'; Action-Zealandia, 'Race Differences, Genetic Similarity and Ethnic Nationalism'.

<sup>463</sup> Rosenberg et al., 'Genetic Structure of Human Populations'; Action-Zealandia, 'Debunking Common Arguments Against Race'.

<sup>464</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'Race Differences, Genetic Similarity and Ethnic Nationalism'.

<sup>465</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'Race Differences, Genetic Similarity and Ethnic Nationalism'.

is used to explain the negative attributes – such as violence and propensity for criminal activity – among certain ethnicities. It references, for instance, Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray's 1994 book *The Bell Curve* as evidence that poor people, particularly poor black people, are inherently less intelligent than white or Asian people.<sup>466</sup> *The Bell Curve* argued that IQ is primarily genetic and is unevenly distributed across racial groups because of genetic differences that result in lower cognitive ability, or intelligence, on average, among Blacks. The book became a bestseller, widely discussed in the mainstream media and in scholarly and public policy circles, even though it was critiqued and largely discredited for 'spinning' data, exaggerating findings, drawing faulty conclusions, and relying heavily on a small group of race scientists as source. AZ emphasises the uncivilised nature of some groups using said sources, claiming that, '[w]hile Asians developed complex societies in Asia, and Europeans produced complex civilizations in Europe, Black Africans and Polynesians did not'.<sup>467</sup> With regard to racial differences and personality:

Studies find that *Blacks are more aggressive* and outgoing than Europeans, while Europeans are more aggressive and outgoing than Asians. *Blacks also have more mental instability* than Europeans. *Black rates of drug and alcohol abuse are higher*. Again, Asians are under-represented in most mental health statistics, with the only exception being that Asians are higher in social anxiety than both Europeans and Blacks. (emphasis added)<sup>468</sup>

Addressing criticisms of the term 'race' as 'racist', AZ claims that it 'amounts to a so-called "fact-value conflation." That a person presents something as being a "fact" has no bearing at all on his "values." Facts are value-neutral.' This link to the practice of denial in which the author detaches themselves from the claim by portraying the opinions as 'value-neutral' facts.<sup>469</sup>

The topos of danger also co-occurs with the topos of disease, where disease presents a danger of contagion. According to Sontag, 'epidemic diseases usually elicit a call to ban the entry of foreigners, immigration. And xenophobic propaganda has always depicted immigrants as bearers of diseases.'<sup>470</sup> In the context of the global COVID-19 pandemic, AZ and the far right more broadly have drawn on the topoi of disease to legitimise anti-immigration discourse and, in particular, anti-Asian sentiment.<sup>471</sup> For example, an article published on AZ's website states that, '[h]ad it not

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<sup>466</sup> Herrnstein, and Murray, *The Bell Curve*.

<sup>467</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'Race Differences, Genetic Similarity and Ethnic Nationalism'.

<sup>468</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'Race Differences, Genetic Similarity and Ethnic Nationalism'.

<sup>469</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'Dubunking Common Arguments Against Race'.

<sup>470</sup> Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor ; and, AIDS and Its Metaphors*, 147.

<sup>471</sup> Ariza, 'From the Fringes to the Forefront: How Far-Right Movements Across the Globe Have Reacted to Covid-19'.



been for the likes of consumerist jet-setters and migration from far-off places, the virus would likely have not reached New Zealand's shores at all'.<sup>472</sup> The use of spatial proximation to 'far-off places' and spatial references to 'New Zealand's shores' reinforces that 'we' should not let 'them' from the 'outside' enter the deictic centre. The article personifies the virus explicitly as the 'Chinese menace', and suggests it provides New Zealanders 'with the opportunity to change direction and move away from becoming a Chinese-Asian dominated region of the world'.<sup>473</sup> This links to another key topos that manifested in the discourse on immigration and ethnic minorities, the topos of displacement.

### 5.5.2 Cultural Displacement

Claims of a demographic crisis caused by globalisation and mass immigration are explained and driven by two overlapping alarmist dystopian conspiracy theories: 'the Great Replacement' and 'White Genocide' (used primarily in North America) (as discussed in Section 2.4.4). The topos of danger co-occurs with the topos of displacement, where the danger is displacement. This occurs in several forms: in one form, the out-group is predicated as a threat to the autonomy of the in-group. Discourse around 'invasions', then, simultaneously manifest the topos of displacement, where invasions can lead to the subordination of the in-group. In another form, the topos of displacement presupposes the topos of culture as well as topos of number. In this form, the out-group is predicated as a threat to the cultural identity of the in-group.<sup>474</sup> For instance, an article entitled 'Words as Weapons' describes diversity as 'slow suicide':

Today whites are supposed to welcome displacement; we're supposed to believe that we should open our homelands to every kind of *outsider*, all in the name of diversity. Of course, some of us know better. Every day more and more of us know better. We know that *diversity, for us, is a slow suicide*, and we refuse to help build a future in which our children will be minorities: perhaps hated minorities in the nations our ancestors built. (emphasis added)<sup>475</sup>

The reference to 'outsider' is an example of a metaphor of spatiality; this realises it is a de-spatialisation strategy that is primarily ordered around the symbolically and evaluatively loaded binary oppositions of 'internal' versus 'external'.<sup>476</sup> The 'insiders', in this example, are overtly nominated as 'whites'. Similarly, expression of loss and threat is emphasised through de-

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<sup>472</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'Covid-19 and Looking Upward: The Malignancy of Modernity'.

<sup>473</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'Covid-19 and Looking Upward: The Malignancy of Modernity'.

<sup>474</sup> Hart, *Critical Discourse Analysis and Cognitive Science*.

<sup>475</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'Words as Weapons'.

<sup>476</sup> Reisigl and Wodak, *Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetorics of Racism and Antisemitism*, 59.

spatialisation strategies, such as fears about being ‘replaced by outgroups’ – Māori and other ethnic minorities.<sup>477</sup> AZ also employs a natural disaster metaphor, describing how, following the passing of the Immigration Amendment Act in 1961 and the Treaty of Friendship, ‘the flood began’. This has been shown to be a stereotypical metaphor used by the far right in the negative referential construction and predicational qualification of mass migration and its alleged effects.<sup>478</sup>

Multiculturalism is predicated by the group as ‘destructive’ and ‘genocidal’, with AZ arguing that, if ‘difference’ is not maintained – that is, through ethnic and spatial separation – a dystopian future is likely. The article asks the reader: ‘What will those of the native population have left once they have been all but replaced ethnically and racially? Their homelands will resemble large, foreign metropolises without hope of a return to what once was.’<sup>479</sup> This example draws on the various temporal axis to construct a dystopian future that, unless acted upon *now*, will become a reality that cannot be reversed.

Anti-Asian sentiment is also expressed in the rhetoric on cultural displacement. For instance, AZ discusses the importance of New Zealanders needing to ‘reorient themselves in a world less dominated by global trade to one more focused on national self-sufficiency as well as trade partners that represent less of a threat to our people and culture’.<sup>480</sup> It claims that China views New Zealand ‘simply as a means to controlling the region’ that it will ‘improve our overall wellbeing by ridding ourselves of their lingering stench’.<sup>481</sup> The use of metonymic toponyms where place stands for population (i.e. China) realise the spatialisation strategy; in the construction of boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’, actors are depersonalised and objectivised.

The dehumanisation of the Chinese ‘other’ is further constructed through the explicit negative predication of ‘ridding ourselves of their lingering stench’. Moreover, the topos of culture is employed to realise the referential strategy of dissimilation; the Chinese ‘other’ is predicated as having different norms and values to the in-group and thus culturally incompatible. For instance, AZ states that the ‘Chinaman ignores his disgusting environment because he does not care for his homeland’ (see Figure 5.7). Within this discourse AZ also expresses derogatory comments about Chinese people’s supposed eating habits, describing the ‘Cruel, soulless Chinese treatment of dogs which are to be eaten. The Chinese are known to cook dogs – along with other animals alive

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<sup>477</sup> Action-Zealandia, ‘Anti-Immigration as Respect for Your Uniqueness’.

<sup>478</sup> Reisigl and Wodak, *Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetorics of Racism and Antisemitism*.

<sup>479</sup> Action-Zealandia, ‘Anti-Immigration as Respect for Your Uniqueness’.

<sup>480</sup> Action-Zealandia, ‘New Zealand, China and Liberal Democracy’.

<sup>481</sup> Action-Zealandia, ‘New Zealand, China and Liberal Democracy’.

to supposedly heighten the flavour.<sup>482</sup> During the COVID-19 pandemic, anti-Asian sentiment was found to have proliferated more broadly, with 'eating habits' becoming a prominent topic.<sup>483</sup>



Figure 5.7 Screenshot of image from Action Zealandia's website

AZ discourse on dystopian conspiracy theories is also underlaid with anti-Semitism. For example, in an article entitled 'The Jewish Elephant in the Room', AZ explicitly references the replacement theory, claiming that '[a]nother theme we are not allowed to notice apparently is the disproportionate influence Jews have in the media and culture and when we do it's a conspiracy theory'.<sup>484</sup> This draws on a key anti-Semitic stereotypical representation of 'Jews as powerful', where they are portrayed as powerful actors aiming for world domination.<sup>485</sup> Similarly, the article asks states that 'the Jews do seem disproportionately overrepresented in certain positions of power and influence that allow them to steer our Nations in ways unfavourable to us'.<sup>486</sup>

The same article depicts another anti-Semitic stereotypical representation of 'Jews as exploiters of victimhood': 'Jews continue to enmesh themselves into our societies via their nepotism and tribalistic cohesion, while denouncing it as racism in Whites, through the imposition of their cultural narrative. Are there even Institutes for Whites in Israel?'<sup>487</sup> Furthering this, the article states: 'And we are being led by the nose on the back of spurious accusations, using a *certain event* from the twentieth century as our original sin, for which there will never be atonement' (emphasis added).<sup>488</sup> While this example does not explicitly deny the Holocaust, the

<sup>482</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'New Zealand, China and Liberal Democracy'.

<sup>483</sup> Li et al., 'Constructing and Communicating COVID-19 Stigma on Twitter'.

<sup>484</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'The Jewish Elephant in The Room'.

<sup>485</sup> Haanshuus and Ihlebæk, 'Recontextualising the News'.

<sup>486</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'The Jewish Elephant in The Room'.

<sup>487</sup> Haanshuus and Ihlebæk, 'Recontextualising the News'.

<sup>488</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'The Jewish Elephant in The Room'.

representation of 'Jews as exploiters of victimhood' trivialises or denies that Jews have been victims of violence of hate and focuses on how they deliberately exaggerate and exploit their (historical) status as victims.<sup>489</sup>

### 5.5.3 Anti-gender Politics

Another target of AZ's exclusionary discourse is gender politics, particularly LGBTQI+ and related policies. Anti-gender politics – or what is referred to by far-right actors as gender 'ideology' – play a significant role in articulations of the 'national body' as a threatened and compromised body that must be protected and restored. Alternative gender constructions are cast as a leftist conspiracy to undermine masculinity and, ultimately, the nation as family. In the gender politics of New Zealand, 'we' must preserve traditional gender roles, concepts of family and a national body that is 'white' and 'pure'. This manifests in the topoi of danger and displacement, with pro-LGBTQI+ discourse and policies predicated as a threat to 'our' ethnocultural identity. In line with existing research on the far right and gender, AZ constructs a specific threat scenario on multiple levels.

1. The 'traditional family', as a heterosexual marriage with children, is attacked and abolished by a gender ideology that is present in all areas of life (work, school, science).
2. Gender ideology contradicts people's perception of gender and sex and endangers the natural development of gender and sexuality in children.
3. The 'traditional family' ensures the continued existence of the 'pure people', which is precisely what is threatened by the existence of gender ideology.
4. The governing parties promote the instruments of gender ideology and thus the abolition of 'their own people'.<sup>490</sup>

For instance, AZ mobilises discourse against the Ministry of Education's relationships and sexuality education for 'being committed to teaching children that gender is not predicated and can be contrary to male/female biological sex'. It questions: 'What kind of Government is it that attempts to induce little boys and girls to question their gender, and try to determine a life-course at such an age?'<sup>491</sup> Alternative gender constructions, and related legislation and school curriculums, are conveyed as a conspiracy to promote the liberalist agenda: these are 'designed to "convert" on

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<sup>489</sup> Botsch and Kopke, 'A Case Study of Anti-Semitism in the Language and Politics of the Contemporary Far Right in Germany'.

<sup>490</sup> Berg, 'Between Anti-Feminism and Ethnicized Sexism'.

<sup>491</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'The Criminalisation of Parental Objections to Transgenderism'.

the basis of an ideology; to recondition especially the young according to a doctrinal vision of New Zealand as “inclusive” and “tolerant”.<sup>492</sup> Such inclusion and tolerance undermine ‘the rights and duties of parents, and the *sanctity of the organic family*’ (emphasis added).<sup>493</sup> Dismantling the ‘natural’ gender binaries is thus viewed as an existential threat to the purity of the national body.

Another article focuses on the ‘problem’ of ‘normalising the existence of the “transgender” to the young minds of today’: the sharing and embracing of such topics ‘in our schools, in our media, in our society [...] Why it’s simply ghastly.’<sup>494</sup> The discourse negatively predicates transgenderism as ‘not natural and goes against norms’; it is ‘a game of pretend’ that is harmful to the individual. AZ references high suicide rates as evidence of this threat but makes clear that transgenderism is not only endangering the individual but, most importantly, ‘our society’ as a whole. It claims that ‘roleplaying’ is ‘dangerous to society and women in particular’, and that ‘most of these trans “women” invade female spaces such as locker rooms, bathrooms – private areas that can leave women exposed or vulnerable’. It furthers this, adding that ‘their roleplaying is nothing more than shallow, sickening, and demeaning misogyny’. The article asserts that transgender surgeries are a ‘risky mimicry, that can involve terrible infections bestowed to the transitioner. And there is never any guarantee that such a surgery will go smoothly despite its life-changing effects, the most glaring of which is sterilisation.’<sup>495</sup>

The theme of reproduction emerges again in the contention that there are natural differences in the ‘human biological form’ of men and women, with: ‘The distribution of fat on a woman’s body, fitted for the purpose of giving birth – whilst men are more apt to store excess fat in the upper body – giving them superior strength in that area.’<sup>496</sup> Discourse on a women’s biological ‘purpose’ is further illustrated in an article that rejects women’s rights to an abortion, with AZ arguing that: ‘The idea that killing your own unborn child is an inherent right of all women is abhorrent. The view that the transient whims of a woman are more important than the life of her (along with the father’s) own baby is, in our view, the pinnacle of solipsism and is a wholly unsavoury perspective for an individual to have.’<sup>497</sup>

The notion that abortion is being treated ‘as a women’s rights cause rather than something much grander in scale’ points to an identitarian stance against individualism, which is made explicit in the conclusion of the article:

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<sup>492</sup> Action-Zealandia, ‘The Criminalisation of Parental Objections to Transgenderism’.

<sup>493</sup> Action-Zealandia, ‘The Criminalisation of Parental Objections to Transgenderism’.

<sup>494</sup> Action-Zealandia, ‘Transparency on Male-to-Female Transgenderism’.

<sup>495</sup> Action-Zealandia, ‘Transparency on Male-to-Female Transgenderism’.

<sup>496</sup> Action-Zealandia, ‘Abortion in New Zealand’.

<sup>497</sup> Action-Zealandia, ‘Abortion in New Zealand’.

As a people, New Zealanders must begin to perceive their existence to be a part of something greater, and not simply ego-based, individual existence. *There is no individual without the group.* Every individual must take action to support the group, and treating ourselves and others as if they are disposable products to be used for transient pleasure is not supportive by any stretch of the imagination. Take action and play your part in creating a healthier and stronger nation. (emphasis added)<sup>498</sup>

Ecological discourse, as has already been discussed, plays a key role in mobilising AZ's ethnonationalist ideology and actively (re)producing symbolic boundaries between the in-group and the out-group. The above extract illustrates the extreme right's ecological perspective of 'an organic and unifying world view, a holistic perspective according to which organisms should be understood in terms of their embeddedness in an interdependent system'.<sup>499</sup>

Ultimately, for (European) civilisation to end, two things are presented as needing to happen: 'the destruction of our moral values and the delegitimization of Whites as a people with their own racial and territorial interests'.<sup>500</sup> Essential to preventing this, and thus protecting 'our' ethnocultural identity, is the maintenance of highly conservative gender, cultural and sexuality norms:

*The institutions of family and marriage are the most desired targets, as destroying these allows our enemies to directly assault the next generations of Whites* (indoctrinating children) and mold them to pursue goals and life-styles that are self-destructive. As for our history and Culture, these are *brownwashed and feminized* into an amorphous fiction, also aimed at the young that have no other frame of reference. (emphasis added)<sup>501</sup>

The predication of a history and culture that is 'brownwashed and feminized' emphasises the gendered and ethnicised concept of 'the people'. That is, AZ promotes a 'natural' understanding of gender and sexuality – represented by the normative (heterosexual and white) family – in the defence of the 'pure' people.

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<sup>498</sup> Action-Zealandia.

<sup>499</sup> Forchtner, 'Nation, Nature, Purity', 286.

<sup>500</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'Loving the Struggle'.

<sup>501</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'Loving the Struggle'.

#### 5.5.4 Anti-establishment

While migrants and ethnic minorities are constructed as the ‘enemy’ threatening the maintenance of the New Zealand European identity, blame is ultimately attributed to the government and left-wing elite due to their role in driving liberal multiculturalism and resulting mass migrations.

##### 5.5.4.1 (Anti)-political Correctness

Underlying anti-establishment discourse is the theme of ‘(anti-)political correctness’. Political correctness is viewed as a tool of the ‘Great Replacement’, preventing a range of issues being spoken about and thus hindering the ability for actors to change the status quo.<sup>502</sup> Within the far right more broadly, then, anti-political correctness is a strategy of ‘being intentionally and legitimately politically incorrect’ against the so-called liberal elites and establishment.<sup>503</sup>

Debates over political correctness are part of the far right’s broader strategy of justifying exclusionary practices, disassociating itself from its fascist roots and rebutting ‘extremist’ claims. Put differently, the (meta)political battle seeks to draw new discursive and symbolic boundaries; to shift what is ‘doable’, the far right must first challenge what is ‘sayable’. With this in mind, normalising its ethnopluralist worldview requires creating a ‘re-information sphere’ where so-called ‘real’ representative democracy rules, freedom of expression is cherished, where racism is taken seriously, and where the supposed threat of demographic replacement is taken seriously.<sup>504</sup> These dynamics are captured in the following statement on AZ’s website:

One truth about New Zealand is that, like all Western countries, the institutions which govern our society are under the near-complete control of the noxious, corrosive, and suicidal dogma alluded to above. This pernicious tapestry of lies, mainstream adherence to which is only maintained by rigid enforcement by the establishment through ostracism and gaslighting, is defined by a core set of shibboleths: that white people are inherently and uniquely morally inferior, that ‘diversity’ is both inevitable and immoral to oppose on any grounds, that the degradation of our culture into mindless consumerism, atomisation (under the guise of individual liberty), and selfishness is to be lauded, and that any longing a person feels for a society based on order, cohesion and

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<sup>502</sup> Zúquete, *The Identitarians: The Movement against Globalism and Islam in Europe*.

<sup>503</sup> Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: The Shameless Normalization of Far-Right Discourse*.

<sup>504</sup> Nilsson, “‘The New Extreme Right’”, 97.

traditional values is at best laughable and at worst a dangerous or even fascistic impulse.<sup>505</sup>

#### 5.5.4.1.1 Taking the Threat of Displacement Seriously

One of the key narratives identified in the topic of anti-political correctness is the claim that ‘we’ – AZ and the ‘dissident right’ more broadly – are incorrectly labelled as ‘white supremacists’ and ‘extremists’ for simply ‘wanting to survive’ and protect ‘our’ European identity. According to this line of reasoning, it is those making such accusations – the ‘corrupt’ liberal elite and establishment – who are the dangerous ones: ‘European identity is under threat within New Zealand’ and ‘they’ are facilitating the demographic replacement ‘by putting money before the needs of the people’.<sup>506</sup> ‘Our sense of community,’ AZ’s homepage states, ‘has faced a targeted attack from the government, media and major corporations, by gradually replacing our traditional values with those of consumerism.’ It contends that the ‘standard condescending terms like “extremist” and “misinformation” are used ‘to describe everyone/everything that does not agree with their narrative’.<sup>507</sup> This relates to two previously mentioned strategies of denying exclusionary practices; de-racialisation and claiming victimhood through victim–perpetrator reversal. Firstly, discriminatory practices towards immigrants or minorities can be warranted through arguments related to the nation or cultural threats as opposed to racial ones. The speaker may appeal to the protection of national borders and preservation of a national identity of ‘the people’ in order to justify restrictions on immigration and asylum-seeking.

The government are negatively constructed as pursuing ‘nation wrecking policies which set the trajectory of society into a death spiral’. This is demonstrated in New Zealand, AZ argues, ‘through the quiet maintenance of an immigration system geared, deliberately or as a by-product, toward rendering the historical founding stock of New Zealand an ethnic minority within a few generations, in the nation our ancestors founded and bequeathed to us exclusively’. The ‘one and only purpose of globalism’ is ‘White extinction’. What New Zealand needs ‘is to move away from this liberal democratic system which is fostering our eventual demise’.<sup>508</sup> Liberal democracy is personified as sinking ‘its noxious, disease-ridden teeth into every orifice and vein of each traditional culture, steadily moulding them into solely material-based incarnations, through a kind of reification, to create malleability which eventually renders them servile to the culture-rot that

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<sup>505</sup> Action-Zealandia, ‘Our Raison D’etre’.

<sup>506</sup> Action-Zealandia, ‘Words as Weapons’.

<sup>507</sup> Action-Zealandia, ‘Homepage’.

<sup>508</sup> Action-Zealandia, ‘Our Raison D’etre’.



is the modern time in which we face'.<sup>509</sup> This discourse relies on victim–perpetrator reversal where 'we' are the ones in danger and in need of protection against the liberalist 'other'.

In juxtaposition to the imagery above, which likens democracy to a disease and 'unnatural', AZ positively constructs its ethnopluralist preferences as 'normal, healthy, and universal'. The group 'promotes a healthy White identity and working to reawaken a normal racial consciousness amongst our people'.<sup>510</sup> The frequent deployment of 'normal' and 'healthy' in the group's discourse is significant in relation to the group's aim of 'normalising' its worldview. Within this discourse, overt denial of exclusion is also found. This involves discussion of extreme, outwardly fascist groups to present their own rhetoric as being unprejudiced – by comparison.<sup>511</sup> This is demonstrated in an article that claims that:

Our opponents have words for us, but they're all slurs, white supremacist is their favourite. Anti-Whites like it because it's supposed to make you think of slavery and lynching; they want to make us sound morally loathsome. Neo-Nazi is another particularly egregious slur because it conjures up thoughts of extreme authoritarianism and mass murder. And then, of course, there's racist. Racism, a word which previously connoted the want to preserve races, is now used as both a pejorative and a red herring.<sup>512</sup>

In contrast to the 'morally loathsome' depiction of AZ by the liberalist other, the group provides a positive representation of its activism; it will be conducted 'intelligently, reasonably and calmly', and emphasises that '[w]e reject violence and terrorism as being directly counter-productive to these aims, as well as immoral'.

#### **5.5.4.1.2 Anti-white Agenda**

AZ also brings attention to a supposed anti-white agenda underlying the displacement by the 'other', and the need to openly acknowledge and counter it. Within this anti-white narrative, 'white people are evil, and everything that represents white people, history or culture must be destroyed'.<sup>513</sup> Exclusion is justified here through reversing racism to the 'collaborators' – the liberal establishment, the mainstream media, and 'anti-racists' more broadly. Again, this realises

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<sup>509</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'New Zealand, History, Race and Self-Overcoming'.

<sup>510</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'Words as Weapons'.

<sup>511</sup> Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: The Shameless Normalization of Far-Right Discourse*.

<sup>512</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'Words as Weapons'.

<sup>513</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'Anti-White Iconoclasts'.

the strategy of victim–perpetrator reversal, where it is ‘us’ who are the passive victims of racism.

In an article entitled ‘That Conversation about Race’, AZ argues that:

This idea of Systemic Racism against non-Whites is so easy to debunk that it should be embarrassing to drone about it by now, but here we go. What rights do these ‘minorities’ not have? Legal representation? Political choice? Are their socio-political ambitions thwarted because of the color of their skin? Are financial institutions actively excluding them from loans with different criteria and credit scores than they apply to Whites? I know the answer to these and so do you. And so do our enemies; that’s why their accusations are vague and subjective. If there is one definition for White Privilege it should be ‘the privilege of taking responsibility for non-White failure and dysfunction’.<sup>514</sup>

The extract concludes that ‘the only real System Racism one can point to is against Whites!’

Another argument employed here is that ethnopluralist principles are not considered ‘exclusionary’ when employed by other ethnicities, particularly Māoris:

Our refusal to commit suicide is, of course, healthy and normal [...] However, these days whites are the only people for whom wanting to survive is not considered normal. Think of it this way: what do you call a Māori person who prefers Māori culture, listens to Māori music and prefers to be around other Māori? A Māori. But, antithetically, what do our detractors call a White person who prefers Western culture, listens to classical music and prefers to be around white people? A white supremacist.<sup>515</sup>

#### **5.5.4.1.3 Freedom of Speech and Truth Telling**

Interlinked with the discourse on displacement above is the defence of freedom of speech and ‘truth telling’. Within this narrative, AZ presents itself as embarking ‘on a journey to discover the truth’. Shafer has shown how exclusionary discourse has been normalised under the guise of ‘truth telling’ and ‘logic’. The researcher claims that supporters ‘are encouraged to believe they are speaking objective truths about issues like immigration to the dismay of the “politically correct,” who either intentionally obscure truth for political gain or have not yet faced up to reality’.<sup>516</sup> In this way, political correctness is interpreted as a ridged dichotomy: ‘it would seem there is little room for inclusive and progressive ways of speaking; either you speak the blunt (white) truth, or you speak politically savvy inclusive language’.<sup>517</sup>

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<sup>514</sup> Action-Zealandia, ‘That Conversation about Race’.

<sup>515</sup> Action-Zealandia, ‘That Conversation about Race’.

<sup>516</sup> Gantt Shafer, ‘Donald Trump’s “Political Incorrectness”’, 1.

<sup>517</sup> Gantt Shafer, ‘Donald Trump’s “Political Incorrectness”’, 2.

AZ conveys the protective measures that must be put in place when ‘speaking out against ills of our society such as multiculturalism, international capitalism, consumerism and European displacement’, further adding to the victimhood narrative.<sup>518</sup> For example, an article explains why ‘we conceal our identity via the use of masks, blurring of faces in videos and photos and the adoption of pseudonyms and aliases’:

Unfortunately, when you speak out against the current establishment, or have dissenting views in any way, the government and other politically motivated groups may seek to do us and our families harm. This measure is to protect the safety of our members, their families and their employment.<sup>519</sup>

Anonymity is presented as a ‘strength’, with members being ‘able to take part in actions we would otherwise not’. This conveys a narrative in which AZ must engage in self-defence simply for speaking the ‘truth’. The group also speaks of its (ethnonationalist) positions as ‘just’ and ‘true’, and that it is ‘committed to advancing our legitimate interests’.<sup>520</sup> These positions, it was shown in Section 3.2.4.1, are often presented as legitimate facts through the reappropriation of reputable academic scholarship. Yet, at the same time, AZ explicitly criticises academic elites and scholarly expertise, and thus fact-based knowledge. In an article exploring ‘New Zealand’s Gang Problem’, it contends that ‘[t]he hypocrisy in academia is astounding because according to some university lecturers Action Zealandia is no different from a gang’. The author argues that ‘[t]his moral, cultural, and institution hypocrisy is undoubtedly socio-politically motivated in order to forward a particular agenda and social ethos; however, it is nonetheless a tragic injustice’.<sup>521</sup> This further illustrates how particular discourse is used and deemed ‘legitimate’ when it is convenient to their ethnopluralist agenda, while, at other times, facts are downgraded to the status of opinion, to so-called ‘alternative facts’.

The ‘media apparatus’ is viewed as maintaining ‘near-total control over the accepted narrative’ and so achieving the group’s aims of ‘presenting an alternative to the prevailing self-destructive orthodoxy’ requires ‘either reining in these organisations or operating independently of them to disseminate our message’.<sup>522</sup> This refers to alternative news and information sources such as the far-right publishing house Arktos that will be analysed in Chapter 7. Similarly, big tech is predicated as part of the politically correct apparatus that is ‘silencing dissident thought’. This is evidenced with ‘the recent wave of bans, de-platforming and demonetisations that have

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<sup>518</sup> Action-Zealandia, ‘Anonymity in Action Zealandia’.

<sup>519</sup> Action-Zealandia, ‘Anonymity in Action Zealandia’.

<sup>520</sup> Action-Zealandia, ‘“Splintered Realities”: How NZ Media and Government Lost Its Way’.

<sup>521</sup> Action-Zealandia, ‘New Zealand’s Gang Problem’.

<sup>522</sup> Action-Zealandia, ‘Our Raison D’etre’.

happened on YouTube and other social media sites'.<sup>523</sup> Such actions are understood to be taken by 'rootless globalists' to stop ideas such as nationalism and anti-globalism from becoming popular. The attribution of 'rootless' is used in relation to the symbiotic relationship between territory, space and identity, which the liberalist 'other' is viewed as compromising for its ideological agenda. Again, the solution to this is use of 'alternatives to the current social media giants', such as 'BitChute (alternative YouTube) and Gab (alternative Twitter)' that 'currently don't arbitrarily remove dissident voices'.<sup>524</sup>

This is also addressed in the previously mentioned article on mass shootings, with AZ claiming that deplatforming and censoring those 'who want ethnical legal solutions' leads 'unstable people' to 'begin to think violence is the only solution'. Thus, anyone 'who's serious about stopping such killings needs to talk to those of us who understand the crisis of white dispossession and want peaceful political solutions'. This implies that, while AZ does not agree with violence, it is possible to understand how it can become an option for some if 'we' are unable to tell the 'truth' about the 'crisis of white dispossession'.<sup>525</sup> Such discourse is part of the group's positive-self presentation and legitimisation of exclusionary discourse employed under the guise of 'truth telling'.

## 5.6 Concluding Remarks

To conclude, this chapter conducted a discourse-analytic and ethnographic study of AZ to examine the strategies involved in discursive construction of a collective (ethnocultural) identity, and the legitimisation and mobilisation of an exclusionary ethnopluralist worldview. Employing the thesis's conceptual and methodological framework (the DHA and FRE), it revealed constructions of an ideal (male) national body that is 'white', heteronormative and (physically and mentally) able to protect 'our' ethnocultural identity against perceived threats, namely the non-European 'other' and liberalists. These positive-self and negative-other presentations form part of AZ's metapolitical strategy, which seeks to normalise its exclusionary ideology and discourse, with the eventual aim of enacting the ethnonationalist principle of ethnopluralism.

Legitimate structural problems in society – from the 'male malaise' to isolation among agricultural workers – are constructed by AZ as race and gender issues. Moreover, while this chapter evidenced examples of explicitly racialised and (anti-)gender discourse, it also revealed how extreme-right (blood and soil) beliefs are being recontextualised through seemingly banal or 'non-

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<sup>523</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'Social Media Censorship of Dissidents'.

<sup>524</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'Social Media Censorship of Dissidents'.

<sup>525</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'How Can We Help Prevent Mass Shootings?'

political' sites and articulations of self-improvement, nature and (protection of) the natural environment. This discourse was expressed not only in the articles posted on AZ's website but also through its offline activities – from camping and hiking to litter picking – all of which were remediated online. The group's normalisation strategy was also shown to include discursive strategies of 'denial', which serve the function of positive-self presentation and the legitimisation and justification of its exclusionary content. These findings further underscore the need to pay attention to the dangers posed by 'non-violent' groups; in the context of AZ, its discourse has the potential to inflict a range of (social and physical) harms on its targets – namely migrants and ethnic minorities (particularly Asian people and the country's indigenous Māori population), as well as the LGBTQI+ community. This is particularly concerning given the limited protections offered by existing hate speech laws in New Zealand; at present its law covers race, but not gender, sexuality, or religion. Changes were proposed in 2021 to increase protections to all these groups, however they have recently been withdrawn.

The disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on the Māori, Pacific and other marginalised communities because of a lack of inclusion and participation is a primary example of the wide range of harms that can result from the exclusionary discourse explored in this chapter.<sup>526</sup> As this discourse becomes increasingly mainstreamed it has the potential to further entrench the structural disadvantages and inequalities of these groups.

Finally, while AZ is a New Zealand-based group that mobilises around highly localised grievances, it simultaneously promotes and defends the protection of a European identity within New Zealand and connects with other far-right actors across the globe. AZ is thus a prime example of the increasing cohesion in far-right ideology. Fuelled by a wider civilisational bond, this case study illustrates the polycentric and layered nature of the identitarian movement, which rests on a network of digital and non-digital infrastructures. The trans-local dimension of identitarianism is a significant point, and one that will be discussed further in Chapter 7.

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<sup>526</sup> Morgan et al., 'How socially cohesive was New Zealand's first lockdown period from the perspective of culturally diverse older New Zealanders?'



## Chapter 6 Local Matters

### 6.1 Introduction

Established in March 2020, Local Matters (LM) is ‘a localist organisation, made up of volunteers passionate about England and localism, who work to promote regionalism as well as environmentalism and the success of small businesses’.<sup>527</sup> The group is active on mainstream social media platforms, including Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, using these platforms to discuss issues related to ‘localism’, protection of the natural environment, economic solidarity and sustainable practices. Additionally, it has a website and a Spotify podcast that broadcasts monthly. Its activism includes unveiling banners in shopping centres, distributing leaflets, litter picking, and cleaning memorials.

Despite initial appearances and attempts to place itself within the broader environmentalist movement, research by VICE and the Anti-Fascist collective revealed that LM has a radically different agenda from those groups it hopes to emulate.<sup>528</sup> It was discovered that the founders of LM are, in fact, former Generation Identity UK members who sought to make identitarianism more palatable. With this in mind, this chapter is going to present the results from a close discourse analysis of LM’s website, Twitter account, and physical manifesto, *Localism: Manifesto for a Twenty-First Century England*. Examining the various platforms through the thesis’s conceptual framework will reveal inconsistencies in its discourse and further uncover the ideological agenda behind the group’s activities and ideals. Localism, in other words, is shown to be underpinned by an exclusionary ethnoculturalist worldview.

### 6.2 Discursive Construction of Ethnocultural Identity

LM’s discursive mobilisation and justification of exclusionary ethnoculturalist policies is embedded within a context of vows to defend a collective (ethnocultural) identity. The following analysis is organised into the discourse topics identified as the most thematically important in the discursive construction of this identity. Based on positive-self and negative-other presentations, it will show how, as part of LM’s metapolitical strategy, discursive boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’ are formed and (re)negotiated through various forms of online and offline actions.

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<sup>527</sup> Local Matters, ‘Homepage’.

<sup>528</sup> Childs, ‘Local Green Group Actually a Front for Far-Right Activists’.

### 6.2.1 *Homo Nationalis* and the National Body

At the conceptual level, this chapter engages with LM's discourse by tracing body politics through far-right (racialised) articulations of the national body. Put differently, by adopting the discourse-historical approach (DHA - see chapter 3.5.2 for a detailed overview) the chapter deconstructs how LM discursively mobilise the 'in-group' as a homogenous collective that is 'rooted' (by blood) in the soil of the national body. This body, LM maintain, is threatened by the out-group – namely, the migrant 'other' – who is eroding 'our' identity and culture. Such discourse, it will be shown, subscribes to Lubarda's far right ecogism (FRE) framework which proposes three core values: 'organicism' (the notion of nation, culture and nature in a holistic union as a single organism), 'spiritualism', and 'naturalism' (viewing nature as a blueprint for social order).<sup>529</sup> At its core, Lubarda argues, this framework and the values it seeks to restore, is reflective of Old Right (blood and soil) politics.

#### 6.2.1.1 Spirituality, Organicism, Naturalism

In contrast to the group's more 'moderate' Twitter account and (for the most part) its website, LM's manifesto, *Manifesto for a Twenty-First Century England* – explicitly outlines the group's ideological position and (ethnopluralist) ideals.<sup>530</sup> The manifesto is divided into two parts: 'Localist Positions' and 'Localist Ideals' and states that 'organicist philosophy is at the heart of Localism'. In a chapter titled 'For the Right to Difference: Against Homogenisation and Individualism', LM emphasises that the community is an 'organic group' and that people 'must understand their role in the *social whole*' (emphasis added).<sup>531</sup> Moreover, its authors claim that 'We thrive when we work closely together with those *similar to us*, taking meaning from the cooperation and the contribution to something bigger than ourselves' (emphasis added).<sup>532</sup> This discourse conveys a view of society as a complete, organised and homogeneous living being, which, as will be shown, is underscored throughout the book to mobilise a collective (ethnocultural) identity and ethnopluralist worldview.

The 'community' is biologically and culturally defined. Essentialist understandings of the '*Homo nationalis*' is reflected in the organicism–spiritualism nexus, which for LM is expressed as a mystical connection between an ethnic group and their soil, formed over generations. For

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<sup>529</sup> Lubarda, 'Beyond Ecofascism?'

<sup>530</sup> Shaw et al., *Localism: Manifesto for a Twenty-First Century England*.

<sup>531</sup> Shaw et al., 'For The Right to Difference; Against Homogenisation and Individualism'.

<sup>532</sup> Shaw et al., 'For Cohesive Communities; Against Overpopulation'.



instance, in a chapter titled 'Cultural Renaissance' the manifesto states: 'Localists are deeply rooted in the *sense of heritage and destiny* shared by their cultural kin [...] that shaped their communities for thousands of years' (emphasis added).<sup>533</sup> Discourse on an organically conceived community is repeated throughout the book, conveying (vague) idealised national qualities that are implicitly ethnicised; for example, it predicates 'the English' as a '*distinct people of a shared heritage*' (emphasis added).<sup>534</sup>

Similarly, in reference to the significance of 'regional identities', the chapter 'For Strong Identities: Against Global Homogeneity' states that: 'A nation is not granted its qualities by chance of its place in geography, but by the shared history of its people. *Our regional identities are as natural to England as her hills and rivers*, and they will be restored through our natural communities and people' (emphasis added). The metaphor presented here reflects the belief in the social as 'naturalised' and the intrinsic spiritual and biological link of a people to the soil of the 'homeland'. References to 'English identity' and culture, alongside distinct 'regional' identities, demonstrate that, while the 'local community' is presented as 'the primary and most important political and economic entity', significance is placed also on rediscovering and protecting 'our' national and supranational identity.<sup>535</sup> When it comes to engaging in international relations, for example, 'we must step away and act independently for English, British and European interests'.<sup>536</sup> The collective (ethnocultural) identity is thus conceptualised by three levels, as explicitly stated in the manifesto:

The colourful mosaic of identities that characterises humanity must be preserved. For this reason, we oppose all forms of global homogenisation, whether through hyper-consumerism, cultural imperialism or mass immigration. *Identities are layered by locality, region, nation and continent*. Therefore, simultaneously, *we belong to our town, our county, England, Britain and Europe*. These smaller scale identities cannot flourish if their boundaries are ignored, ultimately becoming inhabited en masse by people who are not of these identities. (emphasis added)<sup>537</sup>

LM is thus not tied to one spatial frame, revealing the global dimension of seemingly local activism. This extract also points to the preservation of the nation as akin to the conservation of biodiversity, with 'people who are not of these identities' – that is, English, British, or European –

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<sup>533</sup> Shaw et al., 'Cultural Renaissance'.

<sup>534</sup> Shaw et al., 'For Strong Identities; Against Global Homogeneity'.

<sup>535</sup> Shaw et al., 'Defining Localism'.

<sup>536</sup> Shaw et al., 'For Self-Determination; Against Americanisation'.

<sup>537</sup> Shaw et al., 'For Strong Identities; Against Global Homogeneity'.

as implicitly analogous to invasive, non-native species.<sup>538</sup> As will now be shown, following the naturalist logic – nations are containers where ‘species’ live in equilibrium and form an ecosystem. Section 6.5 will show how anything that challenges the established creed of ‘natural’ must be prevented from entering.

### 6.2.1.2 Ethnopluralism and Biodiversity

In LM’s ethnopluralist view, the presumed wholeness (organicism), articulates cultures as separable containers, indicating that some cultures, alien to the habitat, are incompetent for protecting the environment. Hence, the far right utilises the logic of social naturalism to advocate for the expulsion of foreign species, e.g. anti-immigration policies to maintain the compositional equilibrium. Put simply, ‘we’ must protect the ‘natural’ order, stability and purity of the ecosystem – defined at regional, national and civilisational levels – against perceived threats.

The group’s subscription to ethnopluralism is underscored in the following extract:

As Localists we stand for the *right to difference* and for people to maintain cultural hegemony in their own regions and nations [...] Countless individuals in Europe support the right to self-determination for Scots, Catalans, Basques, et cetera. This right applies to all peoples of the world. *A pluralist worldview that affirms the natural diversity of humanity in all of its cultural, political and ethnic forms* must replace the *unnatural, anti-human, universalist world view* that would have us believe that every person is interchangeable, as is the view of the capitalist oligarchs regarding faceless consumers. (emphasis added)<sup>539</sup>

An ethnopluralist policy is promoted as anti-racist, with the group claiming that ‘all peoples possess legitimate ways of life and that these variations of our existence should not only be conserved but celebrated. Rather than refer to others as “uncivilised”, Localists, as pluralists, understand and respect separate cultures and ways of living’.<sup>540</sup> Globally, then, the ‘natural’ boundaries between the ‘in-group’ and ‘out-group’ should be maintained, with different ecosystems existing side by side instead of being intermingled. Internally, however, stable ‘naturally’ evolved diversity and difference between members of the community or ‘ecosystem’ is promoted. For instance, emphasis is placed on restoring ‘regional differences’; through ‘their rich regional expressions’, LM claim, the English have been – ‘in all sorts of subtle and organic ways – a

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<sup>538</sup> Shaw et al, ‘For Strong Identities; Against Global Homogeneity’.

<sup>539</sup> Shaw et al., ‘For The Right to Difference; Against Homogenisation and Individualism’.

<sup>540</sup> Shaw et al., ‘International Relations’.

fountain of real cultural diversity'.<sup>541</sup> That is, while liberal multiculturalism is a threat to the ecosystem, biodiversity should be encouraged. This would be achieved through the creation of what LM call a 'localist England', which 'would take the form of an organic constellation of regional autonomies, not imposed from above but culturally rediscovered by culturally distinct communities.'<sup>542</sup> Consequently, it advocates for a federalist state, with 'organic' regions such as Kent and Cornwall holding political autonomy. These are already defined by cultural borders and 'would begin to solidify as concrete political borders defining the frontiers of new autonomies'.<sup>543</sup>

Ultimately, this 'radical restructuring' of a 'Localist England' will 'require new worldviews that can see the world in plurality and not universality'.<sup>544</sup> This points to metapolitical approach of LM – the normalisation of its ethnopluralist worldview through online and offline actions.

### 6.2.2 Metapolitical Strategy

As will be shown, a collective (ethnocultural) identity is discursively constructed and legitimised by various strategies. This is part of LM's mobilisation of a metapolitical approach that seeks to change the boundaries of acceptable public debate and normalise its exclusionary ideological agenda and related policies.

Explicit references to metapolitical action provide important insights into the group's approach. Such references are made predominantly in its manifesto, though the website's homepage mentions that LM is a 'team of researchers, writers and artists' who support efforts 'in the foundation of a strong counter-cultural force' and 'bringing new ideas beyond the paradigm of left and right'.<sup>545</sup> In a chapter titled 'Achieving Localism', the manifesto states the importance of shifting 'the Overton window' in ensuring the enactment of its 'localist' policies in England. That is, 'a model which describes how the public perception of certain political ideas shifts over time – which can be pushed in desired directions via metapolitics – intellectual and cultural activism that challenges the "cultural hegemony" of society'.<sup>546</sup> In other words, 'Once the ideas are socially accepted, then they must become politically accepted, as the politicians who claim to represent us must pursue the policies which their voters demand'. The use of 'claim' here is significant as it highlights that the group does not currently feel that it lives under a representative democracy. This is furthered by its support for 'direct democracy' which, in line with the NR's thinking,

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<sup>541</sup> Shaw et al., 'Regionalism'.

<sup>542</sup> Shaw et al., 'Regionalism'.

<sup>543</sup> Shaw et al., 'Regionalism'.

<sup>544</sup> Shaw et al., 'Defining Localism'.

<sup>545</sup> Local Matters, 'Homepage'.

<sup>546</sup> Shaw et al., 'Achieving Localism'.

believes that 'real' representative democracy is only possible with an ethnically homogenous collective.<sup>547</sup>

In the same chapter, LM states that its core tenet of 'environmentalism' is 'widely accepted', while 'other elements' are at 'different stages of their metapolitical journey'.<sup>548</sup> This 'acceptance', of course, has little to do with the group, but is worded in this way to gain legitimacy from the growing support for environmental causes. This is not to suggest that the ecological dimension of the discourse is simply a strategic endeavour, however, for, as has been emphasised already, the values of organicism, spirituality and naturalism form a holistic *worldview* of LM. Nevertheless, it does reveal a recognition by the group of the advantage of environmental communication providing access to the mainstream as an already socially acceptable topic.

### 6.2.2.1 Hybrid Media System

While this chapter seeks to show the value of close textual analysis, it is important to note the *sociotechnical* dimension of this mobilisation.

Notably, LM makes effective use of mainstream platforms, such as Twitter, Instagram and streaming site Spotify, while also making use of 'older' media. LM's manifesto, for instance, is only available in physical format, and must be purchased on its website. It provides important insights into the group's ideology, as well as the far right's 'hybrid media system' more broadly.<sup>549</sup>

Evidently, LM recognises how print can, at times, be more effective than digital technology. On the one hand, it could be argued that physical copies of its manifesto allude to an attempt to engage with a broader base, such as older users who are less comfortable interacting online. This is supported by the fact that LM are shown to have copies of this book (presumably to sell) while its members hand out leaflets to the public on the high street (see Figure 6.1). Also, a QR code can be found at the back of the book which, when scanned using a smartphone camera, takes the user directly to LM's website.

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<sup>547</sup> Shaw et al., 'Democracy'; Faye, *Why We Fight. Manifesto of the European Resistance*, 112–13.

<sup>548</sup> Shaw et al., 'Achieving Localism'.

<sup>549</sup> Chadwick, *The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power*.



Figure 6.1 Screenshot of tweet posted by Local Matters

On the other hand, it is possible to reason that by limiting access to the manifesto in this way, the more ‘extreme’ discourse promoted by the group is less easily accessible and is intended for a more selective audience, and thus enabling the appearance of ‘continuity’ and ‘transparency’ that it is so keen to emphasise. This argument is implied in the group’s ‘2021 Review’ post on its website:

Through our activism, we bring attention to specific problems or resolutions. From this point, the audience can learn further by discovering our hundreds of social media posts. Then, greater detail is found in the dozens of articles on our website, which finally lead to the book, thus connecting all ailments and antidotes together in one singular ideological stance.<sup>550</sup>

LM’s expectations of a particular ‘pathway’ that digital users will follow in the uptake of its content is illustrated here, with individuals initially coming across LM’s activism and social media, website and then, finally, its book, where its (ethnopluralist) ‘ideological stance’ is most explicitly articulated. LM recognises the importance of developing their ‘online presence through social media and digital content’.<sup>551</sup> Discursive and mobilisation power, Chadwick claims, ‘is exercised by those who are successfully able to create, tap, or steer information flows in ways that suit their

<sup>550</sup> Local Matters, ‘2021 Review’.

<sup>551</sup> Local Matters, ‘2020 Review’.

goals and in ways that modify, enable, or disable the agency of others, across and between a range of older and newer media setting'.<sup>552</sup> Maly claims that metapolitics has an 'algorithmic activist' dimension, which captures the mutual co-constitution between technology, people and practice. Contemporary digital activism, the scholar adds, 'is not only about producing discourse in the (passive) hope that it will circulate and get picked up. It is also very much about *actively organising* uptake within the digital environments.'<sup>553</sup> In this way, platforms such as Twitter play a key role in users' initial exposure to LM, which actively organises uptake through various sociotechnical means.

In its advancement of a metapolitical strategy, LM provides links to its website for 'greater detail', while also making use of Twitter's hashtag tool. Unlike the longer posts on its website, the limited character count on Twitter means that 'tweets' are restricted and thus the group must adapt its discourse to this space. In this way, hashtags add another important dimension to LM's recontextualisation of extreme right discourse. For instance, results showed how its tweets are tagged with environment-related hashtags such as '#environmentalism, #nature, #ecology, #environment, #sustainable, #shoplocal, #wildlife, #green and #wildlife. It also engages with topics such as mental health and #internationalwomensday, employing hashtags such as #MentalHealthAwareness, #mentalhealth and #wellness, while also including those related to #Localism and #England. Arguably, LM are not 'hijacking' these hashtags, as most of the content is relevant enough. Consider the following tweet for example, which asks Twitter users: 'What's your favourite native British animal? Let us know!'<sup>554</sup> However, while relevant, this does not take away from the fact that there is an underlying agenda to LM's engagement with these topics and conversations. As it will be discussed below, seemingly non-political issues such as 'self-help' and 'well-being' have, in manifold ways, been metapoliticised by the far-right. Another related observation to note here is LM retweeting liberal media accounts such as *The Guardian*, while also requesting that mainstream environmentalist groups such as Greenpeace UK 'share' their campaigns. In this instance the campaign being promoted is one that is not directly connected to the group itself, however individuals who also wish to 'save the Waterloo Dock' may come across LM's content as a result.

Analysis shows a variety of perspectivisation patterns employed by LM to address users and mobilise metapolitical action. This is done both explicitly (through imperatives, modalities, and 'you' and 'we' pronouns) and implicitly (through actional statements – which are statements in

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<sup>552</sup> Chadwick, *The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power*, 285.

<sup>553</sup> Maly, 'New Right Metapolitics and the Algorithmic Activism of Schild & Vrienden'.

<sup>554</sup> Local Matters, '@localmattersENG'.

terms of grammatical structure but indirect realisations of commands in terms of their speech functionality). The more explicit commands were found on Twitter, for instance:

Local Matters flying the banner at the #NHS100K march in #Manchester.

No More London Rule!

*Get out on the street!* DM us to get involved.<sup>555</sup>

Similarly: ‘*Come join* Local Matters in Manchester as we march for democracy #wewillALLbetheere’ and ‘If your located near the Sussex Downs tomorrow, *go out* and *join* the mass trespass! All English men and women should have easy access to their land. #RightToRoam’ (emphasis added).<sup>556</sup> The use of the ethnonym ‘English’ is significant here – particularly as such rhetoric is less prominent on this platform – making it clear that the call to action is directed at the ‘in-group’ – ‘English men and women’ as it is ‘their’ (‘our’) land. This is echoed in the preface of LM’s manifesto, which states: ‘This book is written from the *perspective of Englishmen* [...] The purpose of the following text is to summarise and bring together all core ideological elements and key concepts of Localism, and to serve as a *call to action* for *like-minded* readers’ (emphasis added).<sup>557</sup> Such discourse implies that ‘like-minded’ readers are categorised as ‘English’ people and/or those who follow LM’s (ethnopluralist) ideals.

### 6.2.2.2 Remediation of Offline Activism

As alluded to already, the spatial domains of ‘metapolitics 2.0’ are not limited to offline or online activism but through ‘real life and digital activism’.<sup>558</sup> This is demonstrated by LM’s remediation of its offline activities. For instance, in its description of its protest against ‘abusive global labour markers which supplies fast-fashion outlets such as Primark’, LM points to the importance of strategically utilising content captured from these offline activities to intensify the communicational reach and impact of its activism:

This action was also well received online. There are many elements involved in an action, far more than simply holding a banner and posting a photograph of it in a tweet, and we are fortunate to have such a great team who *utilise the content of the action to its full potential*. Both actions were promoted with photographs alongside a dedicated

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<sup>555</sup> Local Matters, ‘@localmattersENG’.

<sup>556</sup> Local Matters, ‘@localmattersENG’.

<sup>557</sup> Shaw et al., ‘Preface’.

<sup>558</sup> Local Matters, ‘Smaller Scale Democracies Help to Overcome Colonial Mistakes’.

video, with write-ups on our website and promotion across all of our social media platforms. (emphasis added)<sup>559</sup>

For some activities – such as banner drops, postering and leafletting – the aim is to impose NR identitarian spatiality on a ‘hostile’ environment (see Figures 6.2, 6.3, and 6.4). In the words of LM, ‘moulding of a radical counterculture centred around Localist themes’ requires actions such as ‘the domination of physical space through stickers and posters’.<sup>560</sup> Actions such as this, as well as ‘picking litter’, although small, ‘are certainly not insignificant’, as these ‘small, individual efforts chip away at everything we fight against’.<sup>561</sup> This shows that extremist messages are not only carried in manifestos – nor are they ‘only a destination to be arrived at through deliberate and targeted searches and travel to particular places’ are also carried in more banal everyday ways – from flyers being given on the high street to posters in bus stops.<sup>562</sup>



Figure 6.2 Screenshot of image posted on Local Matters' website

<sup>559</sup> Local Matters, ‘2020 Review’.

<sup>560</sup> Shaw et al., ‘Achieving Localism’.

<sup>561</sup> Local Matters, ‘2020 Review’.

<sup>562</sup> Miller-Idriss, *Hate in the Homeland*, 162–63.





Figure 6.3 Screenshots of tweets posted by Local Matters



Figure 6.4 Screenshots of tweet posted by Local Matters

Included in this activism is cleaning memorials, with the group compiling a ‘how to’ article ‘for anyone who would like to contribute to these efforts in the future’.<sup>563</sup> The post implies that the general upkeep of these memorials is related to ongoing ‘culture wars’ over national identity, historical legacies and politico-social values. For example, the post states that: ‘Controversy can

<sup>563</sup> Local Matters, ‘Cleaning Memorials – Lest We Forget’.

surround some statues and memories but our heroes of war, no matter what, died for us and for future generations regardless of the rights and wrongs of the wars they fought in.’ This highlights that in debates over memory, LM is on the side of the far-right more broadly, who seek to combat a perceived rewriting of ‘our’ history.

Activism such as that described here highlights the importance of extending the scope of analysis to less overtly political elements of self-presentation that constitute the ‘ideal extreme-right subject’ or what Kølvrå and Forchtner term the ‘cultural imaginary’.<sup>564</sup> As the following analysis will now show, LM’s construction of an idealised ‘*Homo nationalis*’ incorporates ideas about everyday culture and lifestyle that, as alluded to already, focuses on an ideal extreme-right, *ecologically sensitive* subject.<sup>565</sup>

## 6.3 Common Culture

### 6.3.1 The Ideal Extreme-Right (Ecologically Sensitive) Subject

Through everyday lifestyle choices, such as exercise and eating habits, LM promotes a seemingly progressive environmentalist concern for protecting the natural environment. When viewed as ‘stand-alone’ discourse, much of the rhetoric, particularly on its website and Twitter account, comes across as seemingly benign agricultural and environmental matters, with articles posted on topics from the industrialisation of agriculture to green energy and waste management.<sup>566</sup> Yet, close analysis of different genres and discourse reveals ethnopluralist logic underpinning the ‘everyday’ component. Put differently, the ideal subject is a so-called ‘localist’ who aims for purity, order, and stability of the ecosystem. LM’s homepage, for instance, identifies ‘Environmentalism’ as a key feature of localism: ‘Whilst we not only face a global climate crisis, we must be the *caretakers of England’s own environment. From looking after our parks to rewilding projects, it is up to us to keep England’s land green and pleasant*’ (emphasis added).<sup>567</sup> Existing research on the role of the natural environment on ‘British identity’ shows that the notion of ‘green and pleasant’ land – taken from a William Blake poem – has been recontextualised by the far right.<sup>568</sup> As will be shown in Section 6.5.2, the countryside is viewed as an idealised space in which its inhabitants represent purity, while cities, by contrast, are artificial, unnatural constructions.

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<sup>564</sup> Kølvrå and Forchtner, ‘Cultural Imaginaries of the Extreme Right’.

<sup>565</sup> Kølvrå and Forchtner, ‘Cultural Imaginaries of the Extreme Right’.

<sup>566</sup> Local Matters, ‘Energy of the Future’.

<sup>567</sup> Local Matters, ‘Homepage’.

<sup>568</sup> Forchtner, *The Far Right and the Environment Politics: Discourse and Communication*.

At the individual level, LM claims that ‘you’ should consider localist consumption habits, promoting a symbiotic link between ‘a nation of strong communities’ and prioritisation of ‘buying local’.<sup>569</sup> The philosophy of localism, the manifesto claims, ‘impels us to change our lifestyle on a personal level in pursuit of a greener existence’. As a society, ‘we must move away from consumerism, from single-use products, from non-degradable plastics, from items shipped from across the planet, from all unnatural and unsustainable practices before our only England and our only Earth are irrecoverably damaged’. Eating habits also form part of this discourse, with LM encouraging a ‘shift in dietary habits away from excessive meat consumption’.<sup>570</sup> The group’s concern with ‘hyper-consumerism’ and its impact on the environment is arguably a valid one, however when viewed within the context of LM’s discourse as a whole, it becomes clear that there is an underlying ethnonationalist agenda driving its debates on these topics. That is, it is more than simply the case of a clash between those who care about (protection of) the natural environment, and those who do not. Rather, questions of sustainability and consumption are, in fact, ethno-cultural in nature.

Looking after one’s physical and mental well-being is also mobilised. For example, an article centred on obesity claims that ‘there is not enough being done within social and cultural circles’ to prevent obesity.<sup>571</sup> LM emphasises ‘the importance of physical training for modern man’, of ‘becoming the caretakers of our physical – and thus, metaphysical – bodies’ which are intrinsically linked. This can be achieved through two primary methods:

The first is as follows: We must *forge bodies of power and endurance through physical exercise*, be that running, hiking, swimming, strength training, rowing, cycling, climbing etc. On this great isle, we are lucky to have areas of natural beauty, such as the Lake District and Peak District – areas that we should celebrate and protect at all costs – and areas that are perfect for the expansion of our minds and bodies.

[...]

The second is *literally placing ourselves within the natural world*. Walk through unowned space – as in, that which belongs to no one but nature itself – and contemplate its majesty. Forests, mountains, plains, and grassland; anything and everything that allows you to inhabit an area of the physical world untampered and uncontrolled by humans.<sup>572</sup>

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<sup>569</sup> Local Matters, ‘Buying Local’.

<sup>570</sup> Shaw et al., ‘Environmentalism’.

<sup>571</sup> Local Matters, ‘The Obesity Crisis Is Getting Worse’.

<sup>572</sup> Local Matters, ‘The Importance of Physical Training for the Modern Man’.

As discussed previously, attention to physical fitness and the (predominantly male) body in this way is not new, with an emphasis on a 'national citizenry that literally embodies and displays the national self as the far right imagines it' having been part of the historical legacy of many far-right movements.<sup>573</sup> For example, LM implores the reader: 'Do not live ordinarily, do not allow your body to fall into such disrepair as is so common in modern society now. Reject the mediocrity that plagues our society and fashion yourself into a living, breathing work of art that challenges the hostile world it was born into.'<sup>574</sup> Thus, while 'the body' is not a particularly prominent topic in the data, the relationship between 'our' physical/mental well-being and the environment is nevertheless significant. That is, maintaining the 'health' of the body and environment is symbiotic to ensuring the overall 'health' of the national body. In the above quote, for example, the body is presented as a reflection of the future 'we' seek to bring about, while obesity and lack of care for well-being is reflective of modern values and a society that is in 'disrepair'. Doing so enables 'you' to 'challenge' the 'hostile world'.

LM directly addresses the reader directly using 'you' pronouns, for instance by encouraging digital users to read to listen to its podcast for understanding 'how you can apply Localism to your day to day life'.<sup>575</sup> More implicitly, the group also employs rhetorical questions related to topics of well-being: 'Has rampant consumerism and a throw away culture really brought any further happiness to our lives? #Localism #Environmentalism #Consumerism #Capitalism #Happiness #Wellbeing'.<sup>576</sup> This tweet demonstrates a strategic mobilisation of hashtags to prolong the visibility of a post and tap into new audiences – in this case – individuals interested in self-help to environmentalism – may be exposed to LM's content. While it is not within the scope of this thesis to include all of the platforms that LM engages with, it is important to note that further research into the group's effective use of these spaces – for instance, through its creation of infographics on Instagram – is needed.

Furthering the present discussion on sustainable practice and the ideal 'ecologically sensitive' subject, the following section will now discuss how the homogenous 'collective' – rooted (by blood) in the national body – is symbolised and reproduced through nostalgia for autarkic communities and traditional agricultural practices. Returning to these, it will show, represents a restoration of the 'natural order' and maintenance of 'our' ethnocultural legacy.

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<sup>573</sup> Miller-Idriss, *Hate in the Homeland*, 95.

<sup>574</sup> Local Matters, 'The Importance of Physical Training for the Modern Man'.

<sup>575</sup> Local Matters, '@localmattersENG'.

<sup>576</sup> Local Matters, '@localmattersENG'.

## 6.4 Common Political Past

Historical myth-making and idealised constructions of the national past play an important role in LM's legitimisation and reproduction of a collective (ethnocultural) identity and ethnopluralist worldview. Sicurella proposes a framework for the variety of elements often involved in the historical narratives in the construction of national cultures and identities. Of these elements, LM primarily draws on (1) the fantasy of pristine, ancestral homelands, which are perceived as the object of collective attachment and intimate devotion, and (2) 'myth memories' of golden ages.<sup>577</sup> As touched on in Section 6.3, LM constructs a binary between an idealised, pristine, self-sufficient and virtuous rural world and ongoing cultural decadence and industrialisation. In discourse on a 'common past', expression of the loss of an entire way of life due to the threats posed by the modern and industrialised world is combined with emphasis on restoring the past through traditional farming. For instance, in the blog post, 'The Tragedy of Industrial Agriculture' the 'idyllic vision of Britain's agricultural past' is described:

Gone is the rolling, half-wild pastureland featured in any rural painting more than a century old. In its place, featureless fields devoid of wildlife can be found. The *idyllic vision* of Britain's agricultural past is one of traditional farming: lambing gravid ewes before dawn, overturning soil by ox and plough at midday and reaping the final ears of wheat by moonlight, depending on the season. (emphasis added)<sup>578</sup>

This extract points to the temporal axis of the past, present and future, or, in other words, what *was*, what *is*, and what could *be*. The group express nostalgia for autarkic (self-sustainable) communities, while simultaneously mobilising the 'rebirth' of this imagined ecological polity by fostering a return to traditional farming practices. Nostalgia and autarky are both (peripheral) concepts in Lubarda's framework for 'far-right ecologism' and were found to have a symbiotic relationship with the core values of organicism, spirituality and naturalism.<sup>579</sup> The autarkic element is essentially derived from romanticism, envisaging atomised, self-sustainable communities, in which 'we' are the 'caretakers of England's own environment' and are in control of resources.<sup>580</sup> In this way, Lubarda argues, autarky builds on the 'rootedness' principle, recalling a profound relationship between the people and the land in which they live.<sup>581</sup> Discourse on

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<sup>577</sup> Sicurella, 'Speaking for the Nation: A Critical Discourse Study of Intellectuals and Nationalism in the Post-Yugoslav Context'.

<sup>578</sup> Local Matters, 'The Tragedy of Industrial Agriculture'.

<sup>579</sup> Lubarda, 'Beyond Ecofascism?'

<sup>580</sup> Local Matters, 'The Importance of Physical Training for the Modern Man'.

<sup>581</sup> Lubarda, 'Beyond Ecofascism?'

reviving the 'golden age' thus illustrates that nostalgia moves beyond mere escapism and is, in fact, a 'proactive notion'.<sup>582</sup> In the words of Miller-Idriss, 'national myths work to mediate not only the imagined past but also an imagined—and idealized—future, integrating sacred collective memory with aspirational future glory'.<sup>583</sup>

Emphasis on 'rootedness' and rekindling 'spirituality' points to another element in Sicurella's framework of historical narratives; a teleological dimension i.e. the belief that the national community has an intrinsic purpose or mission (a *telos*) entrusted to it by the deity, so that any development is interpreted as a fact of national progress and as fulfilment of the nation's destiny.<sup>584</sup> Consider the following quote, for example:

In a shift away from rural villages and mining towns into urbanised cityscapes, England has not only lost its manufacturing or its *spirituality* but a part of itself in the form of communities formed around these *roots*. England's urbanising towns and cities, without the bonds of traditional communities, need to recreate the communal spirits which they currently lack.<sup>585</sup>

LM claims that its 'conception of the world' is 'partly traditional and partly futurist', and that localists 'are deeply rooted in the sense of *heritage and destiny* shared by their cultural kin and seek to preserve the values that have shaped their communities for thousands of years' (emphasis added).<sup>586</sup> Importantly, LM argues: 'We do not hopelessly pine for a return to the past but navigate the oncoming centuries *guided by history*. Without *roots*, whence it draws its strength, no *tree* can reach for the heavens' (emphasis added).<sup>587</sup> Put differently, the group is laying the groundwork 'for a culture which faces the future rooted in the past'.<sup>588</sup> Through a 'cultural renaissance', it believes it can defend against perceived erosion of 'our' collective (ethno-cultural) identity and return 'to a communal way of life and a reconnection of the English peoples to their homelands'.<sup>589</sup> This reiterates the significance of blood, soil and (family) tree as the basis for in-group membership and that the normalisation of its values – drawn from the past – is vital to creating a future world that is separated according to its exclusionary, ethnonationalist criteria.

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<sup>582</sup> Howell, Kitson, and Clowney, 'Environments Past'.

<sup>583</sup> Miller-Idriss, *Hate in the Homeland*, 37.

<sup>584</sup> Sicurella, 'Speaking for the Nation: A Critical Discourse Study of Intellectuals and Nationalism in the Post-Yugoslav Context'.

<sup>585</sup> Shaw et al., 'For Cohesive Communities; Against Overpopulation'.

<sup>586</sup> Shaw et al., 'Cultural Renaissance'.

<sup>587</sup> Shaw et al., 'Cultural Renaissance'.

<sup>588</sup> Shaw et al., 'For Self-Determination; Against Americanisation'.

<sup>589</sup> Shaw et al., 'For Regional Autonomy; Against Centralisation and Globalisation'.

Traditional, organic family farming is constructed as the pathway to this imagined future. Drawing inspiration from the ‘deep ecology school’, localist environmental policy would combine policies ‘to *regenerate rural communities* inspired by agrarianism’ (emphasis added).<sup>590</sup> A return to ‘traditional agriculture’, LM states, ‘would be a great boon to the environment and a major step in pursuing green public policy’.<sup>591</sup> Reference to ‘green public policy’ here links to the notion of ‘greenwashing’ anti-immigration discourse that was discussed in Section 2.4. As the following analysis will show further, discourse on the (protection of) natural environment is used to legitimise LM’s ethnonationalist logics and related ethnopluralist policies.

## 6.5 Common Political Present and Future

Results show that a ‘common political present and future’ is thematically important in LM’s mobilisation of a shared (ethnocultural) identity and exclusionary ideology. Within this discourse, LM’s homogenised ideal is constructed through positive-self and negative-other presentations. The group presents a failure to maintain ‘natural’ differences as leading to the erosion of regional and broader English identities. While results show that this is driven by a rhetoric of protecting the natural environment against overpopulation from the migrant ‘other’, ultimately, it will be shown, responsibility and blame are attributed to the liberal establishment through its promotion of ‘destructive’ modern forces of globalism, consumerism, multiculturalism and resulting mass migration. For this reason, a localist (ethnopluralist) system is constructed as a necessary replacement for the current sociopolitical order.

### 6.5.1 Immigration and Migrants

Viewing the migrant ‘other’ as implicitly analogous to invasive, non-native species in the ecosystem, LM conceptualises the preservation of the nation as akin to the conservation of ‘biodiversity’. Two themes are identified in LM’s legitimisation of excluding the migrant ‘other’: firstly, that ‘foreign’ cultures are incompatible with the organic cultures of the native English, and, secondly, that immigration is the primary cause of overpopulation, which is detrimental to the natural environment.

Within this discourse, negative attributions are justified and legitimised through argumentation strategies (see Section 3.2). Previous work within critical discourse studies on far-right rhetoric has identified topoi related to immigration and legitimisation of exclusion that are applicable

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<sup>590</sup> Local Matters, ‘The Tragedy of Industrial Agriculture’.

<sup>591</sup> Local Matters, ‘The Tragedy of Industrial Agriculture’.

here.<sup>592</sup> Analysis of LM reveals the migrant ‘other’ as represented negatively within the topos of burden (as a ‘drain’ or ‘strain’ on members, resources and systems of the in-group), the topos of disadvantage (the out-group are predicated as bringing to economic value to the in-group), the topos of culture (the out-group are predicated as having different norms and values to the in-group and being unwilling to assimilate) and, finally, the topoi of danger and displacement, which appeal to innate fears of loss of cultural identity.<sup>593</sup>

Articulations of the population–ecology nexus and cultural incompatibility draw from strategies in the (implicit) discursive denial of exclusion; the former stresses the incompatibility of *social* characteristics, while the latter places emphasis on the forces of globalism, consumerism and immigration policy as threats, as opposed to the migrants themselves.

### 6.5.1.1 Overpopulation

LM negatively constructs the impact of population growth from ‘endless immigration’ as leading to an ‘ecological disaster’, ‘crises’ and a ‘disaster for our country and our planet’.<sup>594</sup> It is ‘no secret that we are in the grip of environmental catastrophe’, one post states, as ‘the need to provide for an ever-expanding population has caused plastic pollution, urbanisation, the decimation of British biodiversity and soil degradation’.<sup>595</sup> Far-right discourse that identifies immigration as the cause of environment degradation and which presents borders as a form of environmental protection or ‘solution’ is conceptualised by Turner and Bailey as ‘ecobordering’.<sup>596</sup> At a time of growing climate migration, the authors argue, ecobordering presents migrants as active threats to environmental sustainability in order to ‘greenwash’ anti-immigration policies. In the case of LM, the discourse first seeks to construct and legitimise (symbolic) boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’. Once these ethnopluralist ideals have been normalised, it hopes that policies involving the spatial separation of geopolitical division of people according to ethnic and cultural criteria can be enacted.

The population–ecology nexus is predicated within the topos of burden, in which migrants are represented as a strain on the resources of the in-group. The topos of burden relies on the conditional: if a person, institution or a country is burdened by specific problems, one should act in order to diminish these burdens.<sup>597</sup> This argumentation scheme is explicitly expressed in this claim: ‘Localists would suggest that when faced with an abyss, we should take a step back. If

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<sup>592</sup> Reisigl and Wodak, *Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetorics of Racism and Antisemitism*.

<sup>593</sup> Reisigl and Wodak, *Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetorics of Racism and Antisemitism*, 74–76.

<sup>594</sup> Shaw et al., ‘For Environmentalism; Against Growth Mania’.

<sup>595</sup> Local Matters, ‘Tunnelling For England’.

<sup>596</sup> Turner and Bailey, ‘“Ecobordering”’.

<sup>597</sup> Reisigl and Wodak, *Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetorics of Racism and Antisemitism*, 76.



increasing the size of a nation increases the difficulties of existing within it, we must realise we have overgrown our optimum size.’<sup>598</sup> Furthermore, a chapter in the manifesto titled ‘For Environmentalism: Against Growth Mania’ states:

The overpopulation of the British Isles is a *significant threat* to the environment. Unprecedented population growth exacerbates the damaging effects of industrial agriculture, urban sprawl and environmental pollution by increasing the number of people contributing to these problems, as well as the volume of products required to sustain this population. (emphasis added)<sup>599</sup>

The out-group is represented as a burden on specific socio-economic resources such as housing: ‘it is no secret that the housing situation in England is in crisis, making the property ladder a very steep climb [...] This is an issue which must be tackled with a multi-pronged approach, with overpopulation being one of its significant contributing factors’ and health services: ‘[...] national welfare infrastructure cannot sustainably manage 633,000 people without British citizenship arriving in the UK every year [...] Therefore, welfare must be provided strictly to those who are citizens, whose families have funded these services for generations.’<sup>600</sup> This is an example of an established strategy used by right-wing actors which points to the existence of very real grievances, but misdirects to the blame to the ‘other’ (in this case, migrants). There is a long tradition of governments constructing migrants as scapegoats, thus blaming immigration for a range of problems, rather than accepting responsibility for its own failures to respond to domestic, political, economic and social crises.<sup>601</sup> In this way, complex structural problems are simplified into an ‘us’ and ‘them’ narrative that is easy to understand by an audience and for actors to reproduce. The construction of migrants as a ‘burden’ by public officials further embeds existing anti-immigration sentiment into mainstream discourse and normalises its usage by far-right groups such as LM.

Like many other far-right groups, the COVID-19 pandemic is also leveraged by IM to support its ‘overpopulation’ narrative, with LM tweeting that ‘Europe’s infrastructure can’t handle the sheer amount of people on the continent. *Covid-19 highlights the dangers of overpopulation.* #Coronavirus #COVID19 #LocalMatters’. (emphasis added)<sup>602</sup> Alongside taking the opportunity to promote anti-globalisation and anti-immigration sentiments, LM is outspoken in its efforts to help local communities during the pandemic. For example, one tweet displays posters that ‘have gone

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<sup>598</sup> Local Matters, ‘A Brief Introduction to the Philosophy of Small’.

<sup>599</sup> Shaw et al., ‘For Environmentalism; Against Growth Mania’.

<sup>600</sup> Shaw et al., ‘For Cohesive Communities; Against Overpopulation’; Shaw et al., ‘Welfare’.

<sup>601</sup> Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: The Shameless Normalization of Far-Right Discourse*

<sup>602</sup> Local Matters, ‘@localmattersENG’.

up around public places, as volunteers do our best to help those in need.’ It provides a phone number to call ‘[i]f you know anyone who needs assistance while self-isolating’.<sup>603</sup> With ‘localism’ at the centre of LM’s ideals, this public display is part of the group’s broader strategy of gaining support by appearing to be embedded in the communities in which it claims to represent and ‘protect’.

Next, the topos of disadvantage is also employed by LM, with the labour market constructed as becoming ‘oversaturated’ due to ‘the largely uncontrolled flow of unskilled labour outweighing the inflow of skilled labour’.<sup>604</sup> Limited food resources are attributed to the population–ecology nexus, with concerns over the decrease in ‘arable land’. ‘From an ecological standpoint’, LM argues, ‘there simply too many people in England’.<sup>605</sup> The emphasis on the argument being driven from an ‘ecological standpoint’ is a perspectivisation strategy used to distance the author from the discourse, and promote it as an objective fact, as opposed to a subjective, exclusionary one. LM references and recontextualises statistics from the UK’s Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) to support claims of the ‘strain’ of immigration on food resources and that, ultimately, ‘overpopulation directly conflicts with the existence of cohesive communities’.<sup>606</sup> The publication cited gives estimates of land use, livestock populations and the agricultural workforce for England in June 2020.<sup>607</sup> Citing DEFRA’s report, LM declares that ‘the total area of arable land in England has decreased by 4% since 2019 and now stands at just over 3.7 million hectares in 2020’.<sup>608</sup> While these statistics on arable land are reflected in DEFRA’s report itself, it does not, however, support LM’s conclusion that ‘the UK can feed a total population of just under 54 million people’, nor does it imply in any way that that ‘immigration’ should be blamed for a shortage of resources. LM thus strategically incorporate and reappropriate reputable sources for ideological purposes.

Scholarly analyses of demographics and immigration are also drawn on as ‘evidence’ of demographic displacement. The topos of danger co-occurs with the topos of displacement, where the danger is displacement, both in terms of the in-group’s autonomy and as a cultural threat. For example, LM refers to statistics from the ‘migration observatory at Oxford University’ and reputable journal articles to support the far-right ‘Great Replacement’ conspiracy theory (see Section 2.4.4) that ‘British people are expected to be a minority in Britain by 2066, or sooner,

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<sup>603</sup> Local Matters, ‘@localmattersENG’.

<sup>604</sup> Shaw et al., ‘For Cohesive Communities; Against Overpopulation’.

<sup>605</sup> Shaw et al., ‘For Cohesive Communities; Against Overpopulation’.

<sup>606</sup> Shaw et al., ‘For Cohesive Communities; Against Overpopulation’.

<sup>607</sup> National Statistics, ‘Farming Statistics - Land Use, Livestock Populations and Agricultural Workforce as at 1 June 2020, England’.

<sup>608</sup> Shaw et al., ‘For Cohesive Communities; Against Overpopulation’.

assuming current population change trends continue'.<sup>609</sup> This alarmist narrative contends that 'The sudden and unprecedented demographic shift is having disastrous effects on the social, political and economic cohesion of England'. The use of 'sudden', 'unprecedented' and 'disastrous' intensifies the danger that 'we' are already in *now*.

LM again strategically distances itself from exclusionary discourse, claiming that 'This is solely a numbers game', this *'is not to blame immigrants* for the environmental ills that we have caused, but, to be environmentally conscious we must heed the warnings that such a bloated population gives us'.<sup>610</sup> The use of the pronoun 'we' when discussing the 'environmental ills that we have caused' is significant in that it does not place sole responsibility for environmental damage on migrants, and thus seeks to mitigate exclusionary undertones. Moreover, while LM claims that 'excessive multiculturalism' should be stopped 'for the sake of all its inhabitants native and foreign, the very reference of categorising 'native' and 'foreign' constructs dissimilation and difference. As will be illustrated in Section 6.5.2, LM does not attribute blame to 'individuals' as 'most would follow this path in search of greater wealth' but 'neo-colonialism', where 'the governments of Europe [...] knowingly open their borders to a foreign workforce in the cynical pursuit of economic growth, preying on human instinct'.<sup>611</sup> Here the liberal establishment is personified as a predator that 'we' must stop so that they 'do not continue to bribe these people to abandon the development of their own countries for the sake of our economic growth'.

The population–ecology nexus is evoked through a Manichean worldview in which 'environmentalists will have to make the difficult moral choice between the environment or mass immigration'.<sup>612</sup> Here, LM strategically constructs action against the perceived threat posed by immigration as a 'moral' choice as opposed to an ideological one. It is framed from the perspective of requiring 'a constant flow of cheap low skilled workers to man the cogs that endlessly and needlessly grow our GDP'. This links to another key discourse in which overpopulation is placing a burden not only on 'our' society but 'theirs' too. This is articulated through a 'brain drain' narrative, in which the international transfer of human capital resources is negatively impacting the country of origin: 'The English are not the only victims of mass migration', LM argues; many countries 'from which these people emigrate are desperate for the return of their citizens, particularly the skilled and educated'.<sup>613</sup>

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<sup>609</sup> Local Matters, 'Mass-Migration Is Hurting the Environment'; Shaw et al., 'For Cohesive Communities; Against Overpopulation'.

<sup>610</sup> Local Matters, 'Mass-Migration Is Hurting the Environment'.

<sup>611</sup> Local Matters, 'Mass-Migration Is Hurting the Environment'.

<sup>612</sup> Local Matters, 'Mass-Migration Is Hurting the Environment'.

<sup>613</sup> Shaw et al., 'For Cohesive Communities; Against Overpopulation'.

[O]ur current system of growth is *exploitative* not only through our *utilisation of foreign labour abroad* but additionally the use of it *nationally*. Our *encouragement of the brain drain* and the importation of skilled labour from overseas is *massively damaging to the countries of origin of economic migrants*. It is paramount that we do not continue to essentially bribe these people to abandon the development of their own countries for the sake of our economic growth. (emphasis added)<sup>614</sup>

LM draws from human rights discourse claiming that the 'neo-colonial economy will lead to further *humanitarian crises* if allowed to continue as these countries will fail to develop amidst rising dangers, locked in a stasis of *poverty*, especially those most affected by the climate crisis' (emphasis added).<sup>615</sup> Within this discourse, the rhetoric of victimhood is also articulated through the rhetoric of exploitation with regard to 'our utilisation of foreign labour abroad'. This is discussed in the context of 'fast fashion', with the group tweeting that:

We cannot sustainably rely on fast fashion - the fragile global web is an abuse of economically-poorer countries, and is no good for us or for them. Reject globalism, reject fast fashion. #globalism #polution #colonialisation #fashion #England.<sup>616</sup>

Fast fashion is predicated by LM as part of the 'international slave economy'.<sup>617</sup> LM demands that '[t]he unfair treatment of labour in the global south should be considered an *offence to humanitarianism* [...] Localists will not tolerate *abuses of workers, communities or the environment* for the sake of consumer products' (emphasis added).<sup>618</sup> LM's offline actions taken in stance of fast fashion are remediated, as shown in Figure 6.5 where members have placed cards in the clothes of high-street retailers they deem guilty of exploitation. In line with the earlier discussion, this brings LM to the attention of a broad audience.

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<sup>614</sup> Shaw et al., 'For English Business; Against Market Globalisation'.

<sup>615</sup> Shaw et al., 'For Cohesive Communities; Against Overpopulation'.

<sup>616</sup> Local Matters, '@localmattersENG'.

<sup>617</sup> Shaw et al., 'National Supply and Demand'.

<sup>618</sup> Shaw et al., 'For English Business; Against Market Globalisation'.



Figure 6.5 Screenshot of tweet posted by Local Matters

This discourse mobilised by LM on fast fashion and exploitation further demonstrates that a wide range of progressive issues – from the environment to human rights – are being employed by the far right to justify the prevention of ‘foreign’ people and products entering ‘our’ deictic centre.<sup>619</sup>

### 6.5.1.2 Culturally Incompatible

While the population–ecology nexus (and related topoi) is the most prominent theme identified in the data, the results show that cultural incompatibility of the out-group – realised through the topoi of danger and culture – is also articulated. In its justification of practices of exclusion, LM employs an established far-right (de-racialisation) strategy: the discursive removal of the notion of race and transfer of concern to matters of culture. For instance, LM claims that:

The rapidly *changing face of England* can be seen *primarily within urban settings*, as population influxes cause these communities to grow at unprecedented levels, as seen in cities such as London and Birmingham. This shift has fundamentally changed the makeup of many communities to the extent that many of them are no longer *authentically English*, not only in their naturally changing values, customs and culture, but in the absence of the English people themselves. (emphasis added)<sup>620</sup>

<sup>619</sup> Schneider, ‘The New Defenders of Human Rights?’

<sup>620</sup> Shaw et al., ‘For Cohesive Communities; Against Overpopulation’.

The personification of England's 'changing face' is significant here, implying how those within the dietic centre *look* is changing, and thus underscoring racialised notions of identity. Essentialist understandings of 'English identity' are further reinforced with the vague statement that a loss in communities who are 'authentically English' is made apparent not only by their 'changing values' customs, and culture, but in the absence of English people themselves'. This implies that membership of the 'in-group' requires more than cultural compatibility but also 'heritage' and 'organic' social bonds.

LM claims that a society where 'people fail to see eye to-eye on fundamental issues such as social rights, family structure and religious beliefs' will lead to 'social unrest' and is 'damaging to the foundations of a peaceful, constructive society, particularly in a democracy where these divergent values increasingly attempt to pull the state in multiple differing directions electorally, in their justified self-interests.'<sup>621</sup> Liberal multiculturalism is thus viewed as 'an unrealistic mirage of cohesive diverse communities, which ignores the desire of people to live amongst people with shared values and customs.'<sup>622</sup> This attempts to further legitimise LM's argument that organic or 'direct democracy' is crucial for an ordered and stable ecosystem.

### 6.5.1.3 Remigration

Organic democracy first requires the implementation of ethnopluralism – where membership of the ethnocultural community is restricted, both socially and physically. The group contends that '[i]t is not enough to only slow or even halt immigration'; instead, 'Localists call for a radical revision of immigration policies including an almost *total moratorium* on mass immigration (emphasis added).'<sup>623</sup> This would be combined with the process of 'remigration', which LM defines as 'the act or process of returning or migrating back to the place of origin', while emphasising that 'remigration policies would consist of support schemes for migrants of all backgrounds to be able to return home should they choose to'.<sup>624</sup>

Further detail is provided in the manifesto regarding how 'return schemes' could work, including 'the deportation of convicted criminals who hold foreign or dual citizenship', as well as offering economic incentives 'to any citizen of England who is foreign-born or of foreign descent to encourage emigration to their country of origin'.<sup>625</sup> This further demonstrates that LM views bio-ethnic kinship as the basis for a collective identity, that is, in the words of Zúquete, 'those who

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<sup>621</sup> Shaw et al., 'For Cohesive Communities; Against Overpopulation'.

<sup>622</sup> Shaw et al., 'For Cohesive Communities; Against Overpopulation'.

<sup>623</sup> Local Matters, 'Our Response to Vice'.

<sup>624</sup> Local Matters, 'Our Response to Vice'.

<sup>625</sup> Shaw et al., 'For Cohesive Communities; Against Overpopulation'.

belong in Europe belong by right of blood and lineage, not on the basis of birth of any given European territory'.<sup>626</sup> The group argues that remigration is 'ultimately necessary to tackle the negative impacts from our migration policy, both for ourselves and the homelands of these migrants'. Again, LM justifies exclusionary ethnopluralist policies on the grounds of helping 'us' and 'them'. The imminence in which these policies should be enacted is intensified with predications that the migrations flows are 'unprecedented' and 'unsustainable'.<sup>627</sup>

As the following section will now illustrate, justification for the mobilisation of exclusionary policies is, first and foremost, embedded in critique the current (liberal) sociopolitical order.

## 6.5.2 Anti-establishment

The results show that LM views the liberal establishment – through its promotion of globalism, consumerism and mass immigration – as responsible for failing to maintain and protect the biodiverse ecosystem and its 'natural' borders. This is articulated primarily through the construction of a Manichean imaginary where 'us/good', with authentic nationalist care for nature, contrasts with 'them/evil', 'liberals' or globalists', the regressive forces of environmentalism.

### 6.5.2.1 Anti-globalism

The 'traditional left–right dichotomy' is presented as 'fading' and being supplanted by 'new political camps and alliances, chiefly of *those in favour of globalism and those opposed to it*' (emphasis added).<sup>628</sup> LM presents England as facing 'environmental crises from its rulers and industrialists', and thus 'we' seek to stand against these 'forces' that are seeking to 'destroy the diversity of all peoples'.<sup>629</sup> Consumerism both 'harms the earth' and 'propels the global homogenisation of cultures and identities'.<sup>630</sup> As opposed to 'following the will of the people', democracy has 'become a buzzword invoked by the liberal establishment to create the perfect alibi to justify totalitarian transgressions against political dissidents nationally and abroad'.<sup>631</sup> For these reasons, liberalism is predicated as 'rootless', which links to the overarching ideological frame promoted by LM: the significance of an organic community that is rooted (by blood) in the

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<sup>626</sup> Zúquete, *The Identitarians: The Movement against Globalism and Islam in Europe*, 367.

<sup>627</sup> Shaw et al., 'For Cohesive Communities; Against Overpopulation'.

<sup>628</sup> Shaw et al., 'Defining Localism'.

<sup>629</sup> Local Matters, 'Tunnelling For England'; Shaw et al., 'For The Right to Difference; Against Homogenisation and Individualism'.

<sup>630</sup> Shaw et al., 'For Humanism; Against Consumerism'; Local Matters, '@localmattersENG'.

<sup>631</sup> Shaw et al., 'For Democracy; Against Bureaucracy and Unaccountability'.

soil of the national body.<sup>632</sup> In other words, LM views liberalism as actively undermining, and working against, the core values underpinning its ethnopluralist worldview – organicism, spirituality and naturalism.<sup>633</sup>

This is further illustrated in the belief that modern forces, particularly urbanisation, are contributing to a spiritual decline: ‘in a shift away from rural villages and mining towns into urbanised city-space, England has not only lost its manufacturing or its *spirituality*, but a part of itself in the form of communities formed around *these roots*.’ Similarly, LM claims that the ‘total rejection of human diversity and right to difference’ has led to ‘the alienation, economic impoverishment and *spiritual dilapidation* of the majority’ (emphasis added).<sup>634</sup> Drawing on a metaphor of disease, LM portray consumerist urban lifestyles and, by extension, the ‘foreign’ elements these forces bring, as an infection which is spreading: ‘The *cancerous growth* of urbanised areas in all parts England is erasing swathes of the English countryside, eroding rural communities and encouraging the adoption of unsustainable, consumerist urban lifestyles’ (emphasis added).<sup>635</sup>

LM dedicates a post to supermarkets and their negative impact on small businesses. The group argues that it is ‘a particularly difficult adversary as it is all too convenient in its vast range of stock in a small space’.<sup>636</sup> Yet, LM warns, there is ‘a very real and very dark price which comes with this’ and that a ‘deeply consumerist mindset’ has been taken on ‘at the expense of our culture’. The supermarket is personified as ‘taking over your home and leaving you subject to its cold calculations on fulfilling your needs as if you were a hamster’.<sup>637</sup> Similarly, ‘the *invasion* of corporations has left local communities in ruins’ (emphasis added).<sup>638</sup> Another post focuses more broadly on shopping in Europe, which was, until recent years, ‘a social activity’.<sup>639</sup> The local shop is constructed as ‘deeply entwined with the social fabric of our small town’ and points to an idealised past as discussed in Section 6.4

The binary between ‘us/good’ and ‘them/evil’ is solidified further with ‘degenerate’ urban living compared to an idealised pastoral life. Unlike the ‘current apparatus of liberalism’, which has failed ‘to provide sufficient protection for cultures, identities, and communities’, LM constructs

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<sup>632</sup> Shaw et al., ‘For The Right to Difference; Against Homogenisation and Individualism’.

<sup>633</sup> Lubarda, ‘Beyond Ecofascism?’

<sup>634</sup> Shaw et al., ‘Defining Localism’.

<sup>635</sup> Shaw et al., ‘For Environmentalism; Against Growth Mania’.

<sup>636</sup> Local Matters, ‘The Supermarket: War on Local Business’.

<sup>637</sup> Local Matters, ‘The Supermarket: War on Local Business’.

<sup>638</sup> Shaw et al., ‘For Humanism; Against Consumerism’.

<sup>639</sup> Local Matters, ‘Economics Stole Your Vote’.



their (ethnopluralist) system as being able to provide a purer and more stable alternative.<sup>640</sup> By following the tenets of localism on individual, local and national levels, the manifesto claims, ‘citizens will inevitably find more meaning in their communities and their families’.<sup>641</sup> A localist system, the group state, would be ‘the antithesis of the modern liberal, hyper-capitalist state’.<sup>642</sup> It would ‘prioritise local and small English businesses, services and industries where possible’. Discourse on ‘buying local’ was explored in Section 6.3 on the construction of an ‘ideal’ (far-right) subject and lifestyle, and implicitly connects to the ‘threat’ of a ‘foreign’ influence. For instance, LM discusses items made by ‘community-driven people’ are being replaced by products of corporations ‘based far from the shores of England’.<sup>643</sup> This ‘largely self-enclosed system’ would improve the development of local areas and ‘plug the leaking valve in the economy in the form of foreign imports’.<sup>644</sup> Ultimately, ‘radically reshaping our democracy away from centralisation’ will make ‘life worth living while avoiding disaster’.<sup>645</sup> Reference to a ‘self-enclosed system’ conveys a naturalist logic, in which nations are containers where ‘species’ live in equilibrium and form an ecosystem. Anything that challenges the established creed of ‘natural’ – in this case ‘foreign’ imports – must be prevented from entering.

#### 6.5.2.2 Anti-political Correctness

The results also found the theme of (anti)political correctness within anti-establishment discourse. As demonstrated in Section 2.4.4, political correctness is viewed by the far right as a tool of the ‘Great Replacement’, preventing a range of issues being spoken about and thus hindering the ability of actors to change the status quo. Debates over political correctness are part of the far right’s broader strategy of justifying exclusionary practices, disassociating itself from its fascist roots and rebutting ‘extremist’ claims. LM’s metapolitical battle seeks to draw new discursive boundaries of ‘acceptable’ speech and thus shift what is ‘doable’. Like many far-right actors, then, LM seeks to normalise its exclusionary ethnopluralist worldview under the guise of ‘truth telling’ and defending freedom of speech.<sup>646</sup>

‘Freedom of expression’ is a key ‘localist ideal’ in the group’s manifesto, which criticises liberalism for changing ‘the way in which ideas are discussed and expressed’.<sup>647</sup> LM contends that ‘except for the English’ it is ‘right for every culture to have pride in itself, its heritage and history’, as ‘to

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<sup>640</sup> Shaw et al., ‘Defining Localism’.

<sup>641</sup> Shaw et al., ‘For Humanism; Against Consumerism’.

<sup>642</sup> Shaw et al., ‘For Environmentalism; Against Growth Mania’.

<sup>643</sup> Shaw et al., ‘For Humanism; Against Consumerism’.

<sup>644</sup> Shaw et al., ‘For Environmentalism; Against Growth Mania’.

<sup>645</sup> Shaw et al., ‘For Humanism; Against Consumerism’.

<sup>646</sup> Nilsson, “‘The New Extreme Right’”; Gantt Shafer, ‘Donald Trump’s “Political Incorrectness”’.

<sup>647</sup> Shaw et al., ‘Freedom of Expression’.

assert one's English identity is viewed with suspicion and often met with accusations of racism'.<sup>648</sup> The group points to the existence of a liberal echo chamber, in which '[i]deas outside of liberalism have been stigmatised for questioning the status quo, leaving breathing room only for political views which support the current system'. Censorship has 'led to circular recycled ideas to be the only socially and politically acceptable ideas'.<sup>649</sup> LM also claims that the 'media hysterically twists the narrative of any dissenting idea in order to weaponise public opinion'.<sup>650</sup>

For these reasons, LM claims that 'localists value true freedom of expression outside of inciting direct violence towards another person or group' as '[f]ree minds and free language are paramount for political adaptability to the crises that will face England in its future'.<sup>651</sup> The group's non-violent stance is discussed in the manifesto, attributing violence as 'morally deplorable', but also an ineffective strategy with limited success. The *strategic* value of non-violence, however, appears to be the most significant reason for the denouncement of violence, with LM claiming that regardless of 'the value of the proposed ideas connecting them to acts of violence only increases the challenge of their promotion and because metapolitics is completely dependent on public opinion, violence cannot play a part in Localist activism'.<sup>652</sup>

Politicians and journalists are predicated as 'liberal extremists'. Employing the negative term 'extremist' is a strategic move in the 'politics of denial' and positive-self presentation.<sup>653</sup> This presupposes the existence of 'real' prejudice or harmful actions: 'we' are simply having an '[h]onest discussion' about a range of issues – such as 'today's lack of social cohesion, ecological crisis, massification and corporatisation of everything natural' – 'all of which are destructive to England'.<sup>654</sup>

Evidently, positive-self presentation is important to LM. For instance, a Twitter thread and blog article is dedicated to responding to claims made by news site VICE that the organisation is 'identitarian'.<sup>655</sup> LM explicitly denies extreme-right associations and ideology, arguing that '[w]e can definitively state that we are not "identitarian", nor are we "a front" for any other movement or ideology. We certainly do not condone racism or authoritarianism. 1/5'.<sup>656</sup> Notably, the thread argues that '[w]e state our beliefs truthfully and consistently throughout all platforms. A minority

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<sup>648</sup> Shaw et al., 'For Strong Identities; Against Global Homogeneity'.

<sup>649</sup> Shaw et al., 'Freedom of Expression'.

<sup>650</sup> Shaw et al., 'Freedom of Expression'.

<sup>651</sup> Shaw et al., 'Freedom of Expression'.

<sup>652</sup> Shaw et al., 'Achieving Localism'.

<sup>653</sup> Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: The Shameless Normalization of Far-Right Discourse*.

<sup>654</sup> Shaw et al., 'Freedom of Expression'.

<sup>655</sup> Local Matters, 'Our Response to Vice'.

<sup>656</sup> Local Matters, '@localmattersENG'.

of LM volunteers have previously been associated with an identitarian movement, who have all since denounced the organisation and its ideology. No member of LM is an identitarian. 2/5.<sup>657</sup> Yet, as this chapter has sought to demonstrate, LM's discourse is certainly not consistent across its platforms. As expected, it defends itself by contending that such '[s]lander and misrepresentation is expected if you do not subscribe to liberalism 5/5'.<sup>658</sup>

The group expands on this on its website, explaining that it 'does not tolerate any form of hatred towards any racial, ethnic or religious group, and in fact seeks to enforce the *equality of human dignity*' (emphasis added).<sup>659</sup> In other words, it is arguing that, if anything, its (ethnopluralist) ideals are *anti-racist*. Additionally, the group stresses that democracy is 'one of our core values' and thus to claim that 'LM is somehow a proponent of fascism is frankly ridiculous'.<sup>660</sup> Yet, what LM fails to also mention here is that its understanding of democracy – direct democracy – is based on the identity of a homogenous people and thus by definition is exclusionary. Moreover, LM claims that we 'find ourselves comfortably in the company of amazing people such as Vandana Shiva, George Orwell, Adam Smith, Ford Maddox-Ford, and Arundhati Roy'.<sup>661</sup> Here LM references environmental activists, as well as 'anti-fascist' authors such as George Orwell, to enhance positive presentation of the 'self'.

## 6.6 Concluding Remarks

To conclude, this chapter conducted a discourse-analytic and ethnographic study of LM to examine the strategies involved in the discursive construction of a collective (ethnocultural) identity, and the legitimisation and mobilisation of an ethnopluralist worldview. It showed how LM coded its exclusionary agenda and anti-immigration stance in discourse on 'overpopulation' and its perceived negative impact on the environment.

By employing the thesis' theoretical framework, the chapter was able to expose how LM have reappropriated extreme right politics through seemingly moderate discourse and concepts, from 'rights' to equality. Crucial to uncovering this was the initial finding of organicism, spirituality and naturalism as core values underpinning how LM views itself and others. Put differently, it revealed how its articulations of nature and localism are defined by a (blood and soil) worldview in which

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<sup>657</sup> Local Matters, '@localmattersENG'.

<sup>658</sup> Local Matters, '@localmattersENG'.

<sup>659</sup> Local Matters, 'Our Response to Vice'.

<sup>660</sup> Local Matters, 'Our Response to Vice'.

<sup>661</sup> Local Matters, 'Our Response to Vice'.

## Chapter 6

the land and 'the (English and European) people', are interconnected in important and exclusionary ways.

Establishing inter-textual and inter-discursive relationships was thus particularly important for analysing this case study; when viewed in isolation, some of its discourse – from sustainability to buying local – appears seemingly progressive. Most significantly, the group's argument that 'overpopulation' – caused by mass immigration – is a 'burden' on 'our' socio-economic resources, was underscored by very real issues affecting society. As the analysis showed, rather than speaking about these issues as the *structural* problems that they are, LM place the blame on the migrant 'other', constructing a simplified narrative that is easily understood and reproduced to legitimise its exclusionary 'localist' ideology. The danger of this discourse comes from its contribution – in a strategically implicit way – to an existing climate of hostility towards migrants. Anti-immigration sentiment has the potential to inflict a range of (physical and social harms) on its targets, ranging from incidents of hate speech to broader negative implications for their sense of belonging and well-being.

From posting tweets to selling its book to passers-by in local high-streets, LM makes use of both digital and analogue means to disseminate its message, and is a prime example of how online and offline spaces are interacting in significant ways to sustain and grow the identitarian trans-local network. The following chapter will analyse the hybrid digital/print media system in more detail through an analysis far-right publishing house, Arktos Media.

## Chapter 7 Discussion

### 7.1 Introduction

Chapters 4 to 6 presented the results of a close digital ethnographic and discourse-analytic study of three identitarian groups – Identity England (IE), Action Zealania (AZ) and Local Matters (LM). These case studies revealed that, while identitarianism manifests itself in manifold ways and through various topics, ultimately its adherents are reappropriating Nazi ‘blood and soil’ politics within the context of vows to defend and maintain a collective (ethnocultural) ‘European’ identity. The first part of this chapter brings together the empirical analyses presented in these chapters to discuss in detail the cohesion, as well as the diversity, amongst these groups. Doing so will address the thesis’s research questions in more detail, in particular that which asks: what discursive strategies are advanced in the transnational mobilisation of identitarianism? This will illustrate that, while mobilising a traditional blood and soil nationalist appeal alongside an alliance to a broader supranational attachment may appear contradictory, the national and the supranational (civilisational) entity are not two incommensurable and mutually exclusive alternatives. Instead, today ‘the supranational impulse cohabits peacefully with the traditional nationalist prioritisation of the nation as a unique social community and political entity’.<sup>662</sup> Rather than ideological tension, then, they are actively conflated and combined, and this combination generates a synergy that is constructive to the far-right metapolitical agenda.

The second half of this chapter will examine the hybrid digital/print far-right publishing house Arktos Media to emphasise that, while IE, AZ and LM may not individually pose a significant societal threat, when viewed as part of broader, global metapolitical network of far-right actors, the potential ‘harm’ emanating from this manifestation of the far right becomes clear. This remaining section will primarily consider the contours of the web’s sociotechnical affordances of Arktos Media, as opposed to an analysis of the ideological content itself.

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<sup>662</sup> Bassin, “‘Real Europe’ Civilizationism and the Far Right in Eastern Europe’, 16.

## 7.2 Convergence and Divergence: Identity England, Action Zealandia, and Local Matters

### 7.2.1 Reappropriation of Blood and Soil Politics

While Chapters 4-6 showed that there are certainly differences between the identitarian groups analysed – as will be made explicit below – IE, AZ and LM are united in their mobilisation around a perceived threatened collective (ethnocultural) identity and culture. In the words of Zúquete, '[t]he prologue to the twenty-first-century European Identitarian current of thought is the overriding emphasis on the group's ethnocultural worth, the urgency to preserve it, and the setting of boundaries between the in-group, those who belong to the people (ultimately ethnic Europeans), and those who do not belong to the people, the out-group (non-Europeans)'.<sup>663</sup> In doing so, the groups mobilise Old Right ideals through New Right (NR) concepts, tactics and strategy. That is, while each case study was shown to reject Old Right associations both in terms of ideology and its violent strategy, close discursive analyses uncovered an adoption of 'blood and soil' politics – a discredited notion used by Old Right thinkers from French ultranationalist Charles Maurras to Adolf Hitler. This was shown to be reappropriated through NR discourse on equality and 'right to difference', as well as far-right interpretations of concepts such as biodiversity, deep ecology, indigenism and bioregionalism.

Underpinned by the ethnonationalist principle of ethnopluralism, all groups envision the defeat of the liberal democratic status quo and the erection of homogenous ethnostates. Implementing this vision requires an (in principle) non-violent metapolitical strategy – a 'cultural war' or 'battle of ideas' – to change 'hearts and minds' on issues related to racial identity, the future of liberal democracy, immigration and multiculturalism, and global capitalism. Put differently, metapolitics is a prelude to this forementioned post-liberal and racial order, seeking first to reshape the historical image of the far right away from neo-Nazism and other like-minded white supremacist ideologies with a penchant for displays of violence. Only once the sociopolitical environment is more accepting of these exclusionary ethnopluralist principles can supposedly 'peaceful' and 'voluntary' policies such as remigration be set in motion.

Results showed variations in the content and strategies used to realise specific content employed in the discursive construction of a collective (ethnocultural) identity (based on positive-self and negative-other presentations) and mobilisation of an ethnopluralist worldview. While IE and AZ

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<sup>663</sup> Zúquete, *The Identitarians: The Movement against Globalism and Islam in Europe*, 12.

actively promote the influence of NR and identitarian thinking to their ideology, LM, on the other hand, was shown to rebut accusations of group ties with identitarianism. Yet, analyses of various sources, and a deconstruction of its discourse, revealed both explicit mentions to NR thinker Alain de Benoist and NR ideals, as well as a more implicit and subtle association with the core values (as outlined by Lubarda) – organicism, spirituality and naturalism – underpinning ‘blood and soil’ politics.<sup>664</sup> In other words, analyses revealed that these values were important to all of the groups in how society should be organised, that is, an exclusionary, post-liberal order with the constructions of homogenous ethnostates.

Stereotypical metaphors of genetic material were employed by all groups, as well as metaphors of plants and soil, in the predicational qualification of ‘blood and soil’ ancestry. That is, seemingly social/cultural traditions and traits were represented as genetic material, while migration and its effects were viewed as part of ‘rootless’ ideology, or ‘uprooting’ the in-group from the homeland. This relates to the recurring deployment of a family metaphor which articulates the community as organically conceived (by blood), for instance as a ‘meta-ethnic family’ or a ‘brotherhood of closely related peoples’. Put differently, analysis revealed an abiding presence of biological factors within the groups avowed project of cultural preservation – where expressions of culture represent the efflorescence of genetic and racial potencies, inflected by social, historical and geographic factors (i.e. ‘bioculture’).<sup>665</sup>

A notable difference amongst the discourse and cases looked at was the ways in which ‘we’ – the threatened ‘in-group’ – and ‘them’ – were articulated and defined. While there was cohesion in the understanding of the ‘internal’ enemy – the (liberal) establishment – as having ultimate responsibility for ‘our’ ethnocultural erosion, the ‘external’ antagonist was dependent on the case study and context. The target of AZ’s discourse, for instance, was primarily the indigenous Māori population, but it also expressed anti-Semitic and anti-Chinese sentiment. Conversely, IE was predominantly focused on a perceived threat from Islam and its adherents, while LM mainly discussed the demographic threat in relation to immigration more broadly, as opposed to the migrants themselves. Alongside the differences of targets, then, were distinct differences in the ways in which racial consciousness was expressed in the discourse. As Chapter 2 discussed, where identitarian actors fall on the continuum, between racialism (explicitly talking about race) and pragmatism (implicitly in terms of ethnoculturalism), depends on a range of strategic, ideological and geographical factors.<sup>666</sup> AZ could arguably be placed at the higher end of this spectrum, while

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<sup>664</sup> Lubarda, ‘Beyond Ecofascism?’

<sup>665</sup> Feola, ‘Metapolitics and Demographic Anxiety on the New Right’.

<sup>666</sup> Zúquete, *The Identitarians: The Movement against Globalism and Islam in Europe*.

IE would be somewhere in the middle and LM at the lower, more moderate end. AZ was the most explicit in expressing the relationship between ethnicity, race and culture, with overt references to 'white' and 'black'. While IE was shown to make references to 'white British', racial consciousness was shown not to be expressed with the same intensity as AZ, which openly discusses and supports race science, viewing race as a 'coherent biological concept'. Lastly, while essentialist understandings of identity were articulated by LM, it was nevertheless the most subtle in its articulation of identity as an ethnocultural phenomenon and justification for exclusionary practices.

The argumentation schemes (topoi) employed by the case studies to justify negative predications of the 'other' are ones that are often found in far-right rhetoric on debates over immigration: the topos of burden (as a 'drain' or 'strain' on members, resources and systems of the in-group), the topos of disadvantage (the out-group are predicated as bringing to economic value to the in-group), the topos of culture (the out-group are predicated as having different norms and values to the in-group and being unwilling to assimilate) and, finally, the topoi of danger and displacement, which appeal to innate fears of loss of cultural identity.<sup>667</sup> In its justification for its anti-immigration stance, LM does not explicitly characterise the out-group based on ethnicity or religion. Instead, LM recontextualises its exclusionary worldview through the discourse on 'overpopulation' and its impact on the environment. Within this discourse, various argumentation schemes (topoi) are employed on the *social* impact of immigration (e.g. protecting jobs, concern about welfare benefits) and *cultural* incompatibilities and differences (immigrants lack 'cultural competences'; 'they do not want to integrate'). Both AZ and IE also focus on cultural incompatibilities; however, in contrast to LM, justification is also based on the predication of non-Europeans as inherently violent. Positive-self presentation often manifested in the 'politics of denial' – strategies that are well established in far-right rhetoric.<sup>668</sup> This varied from discourse that explicitly addressed and rejected accusations of 'extremism' to more implicit approaches, such as recontextualising legitimate scholarly sources, and actors presenting their opinions and exclusionary discourse as 'common knowledge'. These strategies form part of the broader metapolitical project, both in terms of actors' wanting to position their ideals within accepted 'mainstream' discourse to appear as 'moderate' and reasonable, while simultaneously seeking to *shift* what is considered 'sayable' in this arena.

An important point to note is that, in their justification for exclusionary practices, all groups addressed various sociopolitical challenges that are a genuine concern for many, and which are

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<sup>667</sup> Reisigl and Wodak, *Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetorics of Racism and Antisemitism*, 74–76.

<sup>668</sup> Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: The Shameless Normalization of Far-Right Discourse*.



related to very real multitude of fears and disaffection. With this in mind, it is important when analysing far-right movements to recognise that actors realise, combine and integrate content in many genres across relevant social domains, target specific audiences and adapt to specific contexts. This point is made mostly clearly when looking at the metapoliticisation of seemingly non-political topics by far-right actors such as self-help and well-being. Employing context as a key analytical tool enabled this thesis to explain how the select case studies recontextualise (often) real and legitimate structural concerns as race (and gender) issues. It is not only political autonomy that drives nationalism but emotional impulses related to collective identity, belonging, resistance and rebellion, and thus, at a time of financial and environmental crises, deconstructing these narratives and reinforcing (and attempting to address) societal issues as the *structural* problems that they are, as opposed to racial ones, is vital.

### 7.2.2 Contradictions of ‘Non-violence’

Another important and related point to note here is the contradictions of IE’s, AZ’s and LM’s ‘non-violent’ approach. Firstly, remigration – a euphemism for ‘ethnic cleansing’ – would ultimately involve the lowering of the living conditions for ‘non-Europeans’, or even their forced expulsion. Nevertheless, the implementation of homogenous ethnostates, while a concern, is currently further removed from the imminent threat to immigrants and ethnic minorities by the normalisation of discourse previously deemed ‘extreme’. This shift has very real consequences, both in terms of ‘everyday’ harm and treatment and in the broader acceptance of exclusionary immigration policies and practices. Equally concerning, as will be emphasised in the second half of this chapter, is that this metapolitical battle against perceived demographic replacement is not limited to small or national individual groups, actors or even identitarian groups; it forms part of an increasingly cohesive far-right and *global* NR metapolitical struggle. This must be understood, as this thesis has sought to demonstrate, as a complex sociotechnical phenomenon. That is, the process of normalisation involves a combination of both the discourse – ‘meaning-making’ – by NR adherents and the affordances of technology and the ways in which these are utilised by actors. A crucial aspect of this is the ways in which ‘identity’ is constructed at various levels (regional, national and supranational), thus fuelling a wider civilisational bond amongst the actors’ broad mobilising appeal. In this way, identitarianism is providing fertile ground for mobilisation and cooperation across countries.

## 7.3 Transnational Mobilisation of Identitarianism

The ideological cohesion and diversity of identitarianism discussed in the first half of this chapter is explained by its manifestation as a trans-local, polycentric and layered movement that rests on

a network of digital and non-digital infrastructures.<sup>669</sup> In other words, it rests on the significant interaction between technology, people and practice. In order to mobilise ethnonationalist politics at a transnational level, identitarians discursively construct a collective identity organised around 'Europeanness' (in a bio-cultural sense as opposed to a geographical one). For example, the empirical analyses revealed an emphasis on 'European identity', 'European civilisation' (IE) and 'European New Zealanders' (AZ). LM did not refer to the supranational 'European' element as much as IE and AZ did, with the prevailing collective predominantly defined in regional and national terms. Nevertheless, a supranational attachment to a 'European' identity is still presented as an important facet in its understanding of identity and means of defence against the perceived threat.

The discursive construction of a three-tiered conception of identity is combined with the technical affordances of the web, which enables direct and indirect diffusion of materials to a wide range of audiences and establishing contacts across the far-right network. In the context of thesis, this is evidenced by online activism (and remediation of offline actions) across a variety of social media platforms. More direct interaction between far-right groups can also be seen in interviews that are shared online both through podcasts and written articles. A notable example comes from an analysis of AZ's podcast 'Voice of Zealandia' which is used to 'interview guests from all over the world, discuss current events in the New Zealand political landscape, and help to keep nationalism alive in this country'. In one episode, for example, the group interview Mark Collett, leader of Patriotic Alternative, a UK-based extreme-right group.<sup>670</sup> As mentioned in Chapter 2, identitarian and NR themes have been deployed by Patriotic Alternative as it attempts to strategically rebrand its anti-Semitic and white nationalist ideology as a defence of 'indigenous' Europeans against their 'Great Replacement'.<sup>671</sup> Some key observations from this episode include discussion topics on 'the future of nationalist activism and organisation'. The AZ interviewers clearly view Patriotic Alternative as influential and recognise the potential impact of international cooperation amongst groups. For instance, AZ comment on how Collett's appearance on the show will 'increase viewership' and 'street credit'. Collett agrees that a vital part of cooperation is helping smaller organisations and lesser-known actors in bringing their content to the attention of a broader network.<sup>672</sup>

When discussing the importance of offline activism and interaction in general, AZ hint at the possibility of its group meeting up, in person, with Patriotic Alternative. While Collett responds

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<sup>669</sup> Blommaert, *The Sociolinguistics of Globalization*.

<sup>670</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'Voice of Zealandia - Conversation with Mark Collett of Patriotic Alternative'.

<sup>671</sup> Murdoch and Mulhall, 'From Banners to Bullet: The International Identitarian Movement'.

<sup>672</sup> Action-Zealandia, 'Voice of Zealandia - Conversation with Mark Collett of Patriotic Alternative'.

that this would be impractical at the time, given the physical distance between the groups and the limited resources to fund this, both agree that ultimately, in terms of transnational mobilisation and interaction, the online space, for now, is sufficient for effective far-right networking. This reiterates the point that, despite ideological and strategic differences, the far right is united globally due to a shared belief that ‘we all [white people] face the same problems’.<sup>673</sup> In sum, it is this ideological core – a collective (ethno-cultural) identity and perceived threat of replacement – combined with the affordances of the web, that has enabled cooperation between groups such as New Zealand based AZ and UK-based Patriotic alternative.

The above analysis demonstrates that there is a complex digital ecology of platforms, blogs and websites supporting the ongoing global metapolitical strategy which seeks to gradually shift the attitudes and boundaries of what is generally deemed to be acceptable democratic speech and establish their own cultural and political hegemony.<sup>674</sup> These networks represent a ‘global borderland’, where ‘the physicality of borders become abstractions, and where *discursive boundaries* — spaces where the acceptance or rejection of patterns of speech are negotiated — have become the new frontiers’ (emphasis added).<sup>675</sup> A particularly significant entity in the international far-right ecosystem is Arktos Media, a hybrid digital/print far-right publishing house. As the analysis below will now highlight further, while IE, AZ and LM may not individually pose a significant societal threat, when viewed as part of broader, global metapolitical network of far-right actors the potential societal ‘harm’ and danger emanating from this manifestation of the far right become clear.

### 7.3.1 Arktos

Founded in November in 2009 and officially launched on 1 May 2010, Arktos claims to have published more than 170 titles in 16 languages and circulated them globally, both through its own website and through distribution channels.<sup>676</sup> Tracing the evolution of a small Danish company in 2005 called Integral Tradition Publishing (ITP) to its inheritor company, Arktos Media, Valencia-García claims that this evolution ‘represents a seismic shift of far-right ideologies from the periphery to the center, quite literally moving from Denmark to a Hare Krishna base in India to right-wing Hungary, and eventually settling somewhere between London and Washington D.C— with employees and contributors scattered globally’.<sup>677</sup> Headed by far-right nationalist Daniel

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<sup>673</sup> Action-Zealandia, ‘Voice of Zealandia - Conversation with Mark Collett of Patriotic Alternative’.

<sup>674</sup> boyd, ‘Social Network Sites as Networked Publics: Affordances, Dynamics, and Implications’.

<sup>675</sup> Hodge and Hallgrimsdottir, ‘Networks of Hate’, 563.

<sup>676</sup> Arktos, ‘About Arktos’.

<sup>677</sup> Valencia-García, ‘The Rise and Fall of the Far Right in the Digital Age’, 305.

Friberg, Arktos has played (and continues to play) a significant role in the rise of an anti-democratic, anti-liberal, anti-globalist, anti-modern, global network, and the increasing normalisation of far-right extremism.<sup>678</sup>

Arktos's website states that it 'does not propagate any specific ideology, system of beliefs or viewpoint, nor do we seek consistency. Rather, we want to provide a voice for individuals and viewpoints who are often overlooked by the mainstream, but who offer original and challenging alternatives to our prevailing culture that cannot be found elsewhere.'<sup>679</sup> The publishing house views itself as 'offering fodder for the minds of those who envision a world that is different from the one we inhabit today, but are uncertain of exactly what shape it will take. We leave it to the Fates to decide which of these seeds will bear fruit in the future.' Yet, despite ideological differences amongst the authors and supporters of Arktos, what is clear is that they are united in a war against equality, (liberal) democracy and pluralism, and thus the shape they envision the world to take is an exclusionary and racialised one.

While it is not within the scope of this chapter to explore the full ideological content of Arktos in depth, it is important to note some key discursive observations in relation to links between the discourse of the publishing house and the previous empirical analyses. For example, outlining the values Arktos expects from its volunteers (for whom tasks include 'translation, editing, proof-reading, cover design; preparing promotional materials like banners and flyers; and distributing these materials on the internet'), it emphasises that, 'while we don't expect every volunteer to believe in exactly the same thing [...] there is a "golden thread" that runs through our volunteers' different approaches'.<sup>680</sup> Examples include:

- **Traditional values:** we try to imbibe traditional values like honesty, integrity, and idealism. Our volunteers are polite and respectful and they give their time and energy for a higher cause.
- **Environmentalism:** our volunteers care about the Earth and are opposed to the current destruction of the environment and the exploitation and mistreatment of animals.
- **Spirituality:** most of our volunteers acknowledge the existence of a supreme, metaphysical reality, or God, and search for or follow a genuine spiritual path.

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<sup>678</sup> Valencia-García, 'The Rise and Fall of the Far Right in the Digital Age'.

<sup>679</sup> Arktos, 'About Arktos'.

<sup>680</sup> Arktos, 'For Contributors'.

- **Rejection of modern norms:** many of our volunteers eliminate or minimize their interaction with modern phenomena like consumerism, senseless and unrestricted hedonism, hypocritical human rights culture, and so forth.<sup>681</sup>

From spiritualism to environmentalism, this list echoes core values examined in Chapters 4–6 that underpin a ‘blood and soil’ politics.<sup>682</sup> A brief look at the articles (cum-blog posts) on the website reveals similar themes here, too. Articles are categorised into topics such as: spiritualism, organic state, immigration, ethnicity, history, left/right paradigm, capitalism and culture. Articles range from titles such as ‘Majorities, Farming and the Environment’ to ‘How Critical Theorists Respond to Criticism: A Case Study on the Banality of Leftist Academe’. With the intention of presenting itself as a legitimate ‘intellectual’ output of far-right materials, it is thus no surprise that identitarians such as Guillaume Faye are promoted by Arktos as thinkers fundamental to its metapolitical project. Arktos’s catalogue of books are devised into fiction, philosophy, politics and social sciences, religion and spirituality, and history, and, alongside what it considers ‘essential’ reading (including Faye and Alain de Benoist), titles include *The Blackening of Europe*, *The War on Gender* and *The Decline of the West*. Ultimately, though, all of these are part of ‘the long game, with the singular goal in mind: re-writing history by proposing a fascistic future’.<sup>683</sup> That is, Arktos intends to legitimate alternative visions of the past, the present and future and integrate them into the mainstream.

As illustrated in the ‘About’ section of Arktos’s website, the books it publishes and the ideology it promotes can be described as a nexus between the European New Right, American alt-right and Russian nationalism:

Arktos has established itself as the principal publisher in English of the writings of the European ‘New Right’ school of political thought (including original translations of works by its luminaries Alain de Benoist, Guillaume Faye and Pierre Krebs). We have also issued the first translations into English of the prominent Russian geopolitical thinker Alexander Dugin, who has served as an adviser to Vladimir Putin, as well as several works by the noted Italian traditionalist philosopher, Julius Evo.<sup>684</sup>

As was briefly mentioned in Chapter 2, scholars have contended that, while identitarianism and the alt-right are separate movements, there are large areas of ideological crossover, the alt-right increasingly embracing the terminology, identity and tactics of the identitarian movement.

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<sup>681</sup> Arktos, ‘For Contributors’.

<sup>682</sup> Lubarda, ‘Beyond Ecofascism?’

<sup>683</sup> Valencia-García, ‘The Rise and Fall of the Far Right in the Digital Age’, 309.

<sup>684</sup> Arktos, ‘About Arktos’.

Ultimately, both are engaged in a defence against demographic displacement of (white) civilisation and they weaponise culture for metapolitical gains, with adherents distinguishing themselves ‘from bygone generations of racist movements preoccupied with the political process or violent revolution’.<sup>685</sup> Not only is Arktos an extensive publisher of far-right intellectual output, then, but it also organises a ‘political salon’ that unites various actors from the European transnational far-right ecosystem.<sup>686</sup> A core facet explaining this emergence is its effective use of the hybrid media system, which has served to ‘unite the right’ and act as an intellectual bridge for previously untranslated works to reach a broad range of audiences. Serving as primary publishers and translators for the Generation Identity brand, Valencia-García has shown how, despite the group having considerable online following in 2017, it played an important role in funding the publication of short, accessible and aesthetically pleasing volumes that helped to make identitarianism more appealing and understandable to European audiences.

In an article exploring the legacy of Guillaume Faye, Maly argues that despite a focus in existing literature on thinker Alain de Benoist, the influence of Faye’s ideas in today’s identitarian thought and activism cannot be underestimated.<sup>687</sup> The author contends that Faye’s status within the ‘global new right’ is the result of his works being translated and distributed by Arktos. This paved the way for the re-mediatisation of Faye’s ideas – particularly those articulated in his so-called ‘metapolitical dictionary’ – by numerous NR and identitarian actors using new media and targeting new audiences.<sup>688</sup>

Arktos combines the traditional intellectual dimensions of the NR through publications (in both digital and print formats) but also forms part of a wider ecosystem that seeks to stimulate further discussions between its authors and the wider far-right community. This is enacted through its Interregnum ‘political salon’ via its YouTube channel and its subscribers, the Interregnum page and connected podcast profile on its website, as well as contributions and comments on the journal it hosts.<sup>689</sup> The Arktos website itself is a mono-directional and static communication channel (apart from the comments sections under articles formatted as blog entries), while the ‘Interregnum’ podcast page links the user to listen on Spreaker, RSS feed and Odysee. This page is introduced as featuring ‘Discussions on Literature, Philosophy, and Metapolitics, from the Time between Orders’.<sup>690</sup> The phrase ‘between orders’ suggests that the focus is on preparing for a new

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<sup>685</sup> Hermansson et al., *The International Alt-Right: Fascism for the 21st Century?*, 107.

<sup>686</sup> Norocel, ‘Gendering Web2.0 Sociotechnical Affordances of Far-Right Metapolitics’.

<sup>687</sup> Maly, ‘Guillaume Faye’s Legacy’.

<sup>688</sup> Faye, *Why We Fight. Manifesto of the European Resistance*.

<sup>689</sup> Norocel, ‘Gendering Web2.0 Sociotechnical Affordances of Far-Right Metapolitics’.

<sup>690</sup> Arktos, ‘Interregnum’.

(ethnopluralist) word order. The page also promotes the 'Interregnum' YouTube channel, which predominantly features interviews, which are also curated as podcasts. It appears to have the greatest level engagement and thus plays a key role in the process of building a digital far-right community.<sup>691</sup>

Alt-right figures such as Jared Taylor feature prominently on Arktos's YouTube channel and podcast. Other contributions are made to Arktos's metapolitical project in the form of book reviews posted by various far-right actors and entities on their respective sites and platforms, as well on Arktos's own website. This includes influential far-right YouTubers such as 'The Golden One' or alternative news site American Renaissance. The former is the pseudonym of Marcus Follin, a Swedish far-right nationalist, who is a self-proclaimed 'alpha' who considers himself an identitarian. Follin's YouTube videos, in a manner similar to the groups analysed in this thesis, recontextualise traditional values and the identitarian worldview through personal topics such as fatherhood to more general ones on fitness, nutrition, training videos and video game walkthroughs.<sup>692</sup> Follin also has his own clothing line and brand, 'Legio Gloria', which sells products ranging from MMA and gym clothing to gym equipment and 'Merino wool'.<sup>693</sup> Follin has even authored his own 75,000-word book, which is published on the site. Combining the seemingly non-political content with dedicated content on politics, activism and the aforementioned book reviews, Follin is bringing the theoretical synthesis to potentially new audience.

The influence of Follin is illustrated by a revelation made by Son of Europe (a member of the far-right Flemish identitarian movement Schild & Vrienden) that Follin played a pivotal role in his process of 'red-pilling' (a term popular within the alt-right that refers to coming to see the 'truth' of alt-right claims), particularly his 'Wild Hunt Challenge', which 'aimed at reinforcing positive behaviours in young men'.<sup>694</sup> More broadly, Follin is part of the growing 'mano-sphere' – misogynistic communities that vary from anti-feminism to more explicit, violent rhetoric towards women – and reiterates the need to examine the intersection between gender and far-right politics.<sup>695</sup> Gender was shown to play a particularly important role in AZ's discursive construction of the (masculine) national body, while a digital ethnographic study of Arktos by Norocel highlights the ways in which 'far-right performances of masculinity consolidate digital fraternities

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<sup>691</sup> Norocel, 'Gendering Web2.0 Sociotechnical Affordances of Far-Right Metapolitics'.

<sup>692</sup> Maly, "The Golden One," a Metapolitical Influencer'.

<sup>693</sup> Legio Gloria, 'Webshop'.

<sup>694</sup> Maly, "The Golden One," a Metapolitical Influencer'.

<sup>695</sup> Ging, 'Alphas, Betas, and Incels'.

around a shared transnational far-right ethos of the underdog “us”.<sup>696</sup> Follin, then, is tapping into an audience of ‘Angry White Men’, as Kimmel calls it, an increasingly substantial electorate and thus a very powerful and profitable niche.<sup>697</sup>

With regards to Arktos’s published works themselves, as a hybrid publishing house it has carved a place for itself in both the digital and physical world, having considerable reach not only among its target audience but a broader one, too. Evidently, intellectual outputs, in both digital and print formats (LM’s printer manifesto being a prime example), remain valuable in far-right circles.<sup>698</sup> Most concerning is its presence in mainstream, spaces, both online and offline. On its website, Arktos has in place various incentives to gain new readership and buyers of its works, for instance bulk buying discounts for retailers.<sup>699</sup> Arktos-published books can be found in both print and e-book formats on sites such as Amazon, as well as high-street book shops Waterstones and WH Smith. This becomes even more alarming in the context of existing research that reveals how the algorithms on online book retailers such as Amazon play a role boosting radicalisation, and exposure to extremist content and conspiracy theories. That is, algorithmically driven recommendations to direct potential customers who have shown interest in one book towards other, similar books.

A study on Amazon’s book sales platform by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) shows the dangerous consequences of online book retailers using algorithms at scale for content curation and recommendation extend far beyond social media platforms.<sup>700</sup> The report expresses that while in most cases a recommendation algorithm is a harmless feature that helps users to discover new books, in the context of extremist content, this can rapidly become problematic, driving users towards more and more extreme beliefs or factually wrong information. The authors state that: ‘[...] for conspiracy theorists, white nationalists and curious users perhaps only dipping a toe in the murky waters of extremist or conspiratorial content, these recommendations can serve as a gateway into a broader universe of conspiracy theories and misinformation, or to increasingly radical far-right and white nationalist content.’<sup>701</sup> With regards to the ways in which Amazon’s algorithms can direct users towards potentially harmful content, it points to a number of specific features, such as: ‘Customers who bought this item also bought’, ‘Customers who

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<sup>696</sup> Norocel, ‘Gendering Web2.0 Sociotechnical Affordances of Far-Right Metapolitics’, 1.

<sup>697</sup> Kimmel, *Angry White Men. American Masculinity at the End of an Era*.

<sup>698</sup> Shaw et al., *Localism: Manifesto for a Twenty-First Century England*.

<sup>699</sup> Arktos, ‘Information for Retailers’.

<sup>700</sup> Thomas, ‘Recommended Reading: Amazon’s Algorithms, Conspiracy Theories and Extremist Literature’.

<sup>701</sup> Thomas, ‘Recommended Reading: Amazon’s Algorithms, Conspiracy Theories and Extremist Literature’, 6.



viewed this item also viewed’, ‘What other items do customers view after viewing this item?’ and paid ads, which are sometimes billed as ‘Products related to this item’. The ISD report maintains that the outcome of this is platform inadvertently but actively promoting conspiracy theories and extremism to its customers. In short, it creates a far-right ‘filter bubble’ without the potential for counter-narratives. The question of how best to address issues such as this, and the mainstreaming of far right more broadly, is where the discussion will now turn.

## 7.4 Addressing the Mainstreaming of the Far Right

This thesis raises practical questions on how society can best address the normalisation of far-right ideas. For instance, the removal of far-right discourse online is a complex issue particularly when it comes to more ‘covert’ or less explicit forms of exclusionary discourse or ‘harmful content’, bringing to the fore numerous ethical and social concerns such as freedom of expression, privacy and fairness.<sup>702</sup> Similar concerns are raised in ISD’s briefing on Amazon’s book sales platform, which contends that banning books is a contentious issue, and innately (and reasonably) stirs fears of censorship. Authoritarian regimes throughout history, its author points out, have themselves relied on the banning of books to protect their causes and power structures. In January 2021, Amazon removed the white supremacist novel *The Turner Diaries* from its site, yet, according to the ISD report, when users who searched for ‘turner diaries’ on Amazon were instead directed towards *The Anarchist’s Cookbook*, a well-known guide for DIY bomb-making.<sup>703</sup> Arguably, the debate must go beyond the mere hosting of these products. The concern here is not the algorithms themselves, as Amazon is transparent in how its algorithms operate and how they derive the conclusions they come to. The issue is the lack of forethought in how and if they should be applied to products that promote potentially harmful material.<sup>704</sup> Perhaps a solution, then, is turning off recommendations entirely for these products. Of course, this raises even further questions on what should be deemed as ‘harmful’.

### 7.4.1 Counterspeech

With regards to content moderation online more broadly, it is important to have in place mechanisms that move beyond ‘removal’ for this often plays into the far-right narrative of liberal political correctness, and contentious issues of free speech and censorship. One way in which content can be challenged and contested without needing to constrain freedom of expression is

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<sup>702</sup> Vidgen, Burden, and Margetts, ‘Understanding Online Hate: VSP Regulation and the Broader Context’.

<sup>703</sup> Thomas, ‘Recommended Reading: Amazon’s Algorithms, Conspiracy Theories and Extremist Literature’.

<sup>704</sup> Thomas, ‘Recommended Reading: Amazon’s Algorithms, Conspiracy Theories and Extremist Literature’.

counterspeech – understood as content which challenges, undermines, or otherwise criticises and calls out hateful content – is a possible solution.<sup>705</sup> Counterspeech can take many forms, including pointing the logical inconsistencies in hateful messages and providing facts.<sup>706</sup> It can also include the use of bots to automatically generate counterspeech which, it should be noted, has its own ethnical and social considerations.<sup>707</sup> A crucial step in the right direction is thus providing young people and adults with the skills to critically evaluate online technologies and recognise extremist content themselves.

#### 7.4.2 Media Literacy

Researchers at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue argue that: ‘Rather than solely focusing efforts to stop young people coming into contact with these views, we need to give them the critical thinking and media literacy skills to see through them’.<sup>708</sup> Media literacy is an important strategy in countering the normalisation of extreme right narratives. It can be defined as: ‘the ability to use, understand and create media and communications in a variety of contexts’.<sup>709</sup> The advantage of media literacy is that it has the potential to increase users’ resilience and critical faculties which could, in turn, enable them to counter and challenge not only extremist content, but a wide range ‘online harms’. It can take many forms, such as providing users with training and information about being online to changing the design and functionality of online platforms. Section 8.1 will illustrate the roles of schools in this training.

Berg argues that narratives must be dealt with analytically, and ascription, homogenisation and generalisation must be identified and challenged.<sup>710</sup> In relation to some of the discourse topics analysed in this thesis, the scholar contends that acculturation of racist images linked to gender must be deconstructed, dismantling the images of both the ‘oppressed woman wearing headscarves’ and the ‘migrant perpetrator of violence’. Terms such as ‘women’s rights’ and ‘feminist’, Berg rightly stresses, should not be handed over to the far right and their interpretations.<sup>711</sup> As this thesis has shown, sexism and misogyny must be identified as a structural problem, and not a personal and cultural problem of a particular (racially defined) collective.

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<sup>705</sup> Vidgen, Burden, and Margetts, ‘Understanding Online Hate: VSP Regulation and the Broader Context’.

<sup>706</sup> Garland et al., ‘Impact and Dynamics of Hate and Counter Speech Online’.

<sup>707</sup> Munger, ‘Tweetment Effects on the Tweeted: Experimentally Reducing Racist Harassment’.

<sup>708</sup> Reynolds, ‘Defeating Hate Speech Online’.

<sup>709</sup> Buckingham et al., ‘The Media Literacy of Children and Young People: A Review of the Research Literature on Behalf of Ofcom’, 2.

<sup>710</sup> Berg, ‘Between Anti-Feminism and Ethnicized Sexism’.

<sup>711</sup> Berg, ‘Between Anti-Feminism and Ethnicized Sexism’.

## 7.5 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has shown how, through the discursive mobilisation of a collective (ethno-cultural) identity (at regional, national and supra-national levels), identitarian actors are mobilising a traditional blood and soil nationalist appeal alongside a supranational attachment. It demonstrated that despite the differences amongst the case studies analysed, they are united in an overriding concern to defend the 'European' civilisational sphere. Most importantly, through an analysis of Arktos Media, it was stressed that while at an individual level, IE, LM, and AZ may not pose a significant threat, when viewed within the context of the broader network of far-right actors, the discursive and mobilisation power their metapolitical project intensifies.

Finally, countering the mainstreaming of the far right is a complex issue and one that goes beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss in detail. However, this chapter highlighted how practical measures, such as media literacy, could prove particularly useful for tackling the seemingly innocuous or 'moderate' content that has been analysed in this thesis. As the case-studies explored in this thesis have demonstrated, far-right actors are finding ways to reappropriate the extreme right imaginary through various sites and articulations. This has been shown to be the case in the context of offline spaces, too, where the banning of particular clothing brands, logos or symbols are found not only to be ineffective but further fuel 'the game-playing culture of the clever code modification, as youth and clothing producers find ever-new ways to manipulate symbols.'<sup>712</sup> In sum, then, it is crucial for the public to develop an understanding of prevailing far-right concepts and narratives to enable them to critically dissect, challenge, and counter extreme content if/when they encounter it online and offline.

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<sup>712</sup> Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream: Commercialization and Far Right Youth Culture in Germany*, 192.



## Chapter 8 Conclusion

'Non-violent' strategies are playing an increasingly central role in far-right extremist 'solutions' to perceived threats (namely the displacement of 'our' (white) identity and culture). While terrorism and wider physical violence are certainly a product of far-right ideology and activism, they are now rarely endorsed by actors. Instead, strategies of 'normalisation' are being employed, which seek to change the boundaries of acceptable public debate within democratic strategies and 'mainstream' narratives previously thought of as extreme. Despite this, much of the existing empirical research on extremism takes a narrow view of 'harm', focusing predominantly on illegality (e.g., terrorism and hate speech) and thus neglecting behaviours which move towards illegitimacy and immorality (e.g., viewing or treating other groups as inferior). Conversely, adopting a social harm perspective, this thesis did not view violence and non-violence as mutually exclusive concepts, but interrelated. Doing so shed light on the dangers of 'non-violent' manifestations of the extreme right, such as identitarianism.

Analyses revealed that the danger of identitarian groups lie in their strategic cloaking of racist and anti-gender ideas within structural concerns to broaden their appeal, while simultaneously reproducing them in banal ways, through a variety of mundane and seemingly innocuous topics. This revealed a more complex far-right landscape in which the spectrum between so-called violent and non-violent groups are increasingly blurred, with a wide range of harms (both physical and social) being a possible consequence. The harmful impact of this content - which can manifest at the individual, group and societal level - ranges from undermining social cohesion, the wellbeing of minority and targeted groups, and threats to inclusive democracy more broadly. It is also important to note the proximity of ostensibly non-violent exclusionary ideas to those that are more directly inciting violence. i.e., in the social media ecosystem and information architectures of online spaces, where online users can follow hyperlinks and recommendations from algorithms, it is possible that non-violent exclusionary rhetoric can open up rabbit holes to radicalisation to more violent groups and movements.

This thesis refines existing methodological approaches by moving beyond surface level analyses of themes and instead delving deeper into the discourse being examined. Discursive boundaries have become the new frontier in which the far-right 'battle' is being fought and thus analysing how these boundaries are formed and (re)negotiated is crucial to understanding the various types of 'harm' that extremism can inflict beyond physical violence. In order to do this, this study conducted a qualitative critical discourse analysis of content produced and circulated online by

three under-researched but nevertheless problematic identitarian groups – Identity England (IE – Chapter 4), Action Zealanda (AZ – Chapter 5) and Local Matters (LM – Chapter 6).

By combining the discourse-historical approach (DHA) with Lubarda's 'far-right ecologism' (FRE) framework, the thesis uncovered the ways in which extreme-right discourse and ideology – underpinned by blood and soil politics – are constructed and legitimised in the context of vows to defend and maintain a collective (ethnocultural) identity. Guided by the thesis' research questions, the empirical analyses investigated how 'identity' is functionalised by the groups with the aim of, on the one hand, constructing the 'real' Europeans and, on the other, of excluding all the 'Others' who are considered as not belonging to the respective group.

Examination of two key thematic areas in the discursive construction of national identities – '*Homo nationalis*' and the 'national body' – revealed an important conceptual link that would guide the empirical analyses of exclusionary constructions of 'us' and 'them'. That is, a 'people' are understood in essentialist terms as a single 'organic' body that is 'rooted' (by blood) in the national body. This (racialised and often gendered) body is articulated as threatened and compromised body, hence it must be protected and restored. This was shown to be mediated by key discourse topics of a common past, present, future and culture, all of which coalesce around a shared conception of an (ethnocultural) identity and its discourse of inclusion and exclusion.

Using the analytical toolkit provided by the DHA, the in-depth empirical analyses examined various manifestations of the rhetoric of exclusion: on the discursive construction of in-groups and out-groups which relates to strategies of positive-self and negative-other presentation; on strategies of justification and legitimation of exclusionary practices through argumentative devices; and finally on the 'denial of racism' that frequently accompanies and introduces exclusionary rhetoric.<sup>713</sup> Doing so uncovered the discursive meaning-making strategies and the implicit and explicit articulations of exclusion driven by an ethnonationalist agenda.

Ethnopluralist discourse and its mobilisation of a 'right to difference' was shown to take older Nazi themes around organic agriculture, blood and soil, and reappropriate them through discourse on equality and diversity, as well as ethnonationalist interpretations of concepts such as biodiversity, deep ecology, indigenism and bioregionalism. Such discourse evokes a moral framework, with moral grounds, that any sort of meaningful human diversity and equality requires preservation of difference and 'situatedness'. In other words, ethnopluralism is presented as 'true' multiculturalism, and language of equality is reappropriated to furnish a

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<sup>713</sup> Wodak, "'Us" and "Them": Inclusion and Exclusion – Discrimination via Discourse'.

metapolitical defence of ethnopluralism.<sup>714</sup> This discourse is underscored by an ecological perspective, with groups invoking discourse on ‘biodiversity’ to argue for group differences in ‘natural’ capacities for a stable ecosystem. By placing an emphasis on the ‘rooted’ nature of species, each group promotes a naturalist logic of ‘situatedness’ – in showing how everything has its place, identitarians envisage nature as a blueprint for the social order. Following this logic, nations are containers where authentic species live in an equilibrium, thus forming an authentic ecosystem. At the same time, naturalist logic also goes against anything supposedly challenging the established creed of ‘natural’ or ‘normal’, for instance espousing anti-immigration or anti-LGBTIQ+ attitude.<sup>715</sup> In this way, deep ecology fears for habitat loss and species extinction are translated into fears about the displacement of ‘indigenous’ people by ‘invasive species’.

With the above-mentioned framework in mind, the thesis was able to expose another key dimension underlying the identitarian ‘normalisation’ strategy: the metapoliticisation of seemingly non-political or banal topics. Examining the various discourse topics that make up identitarianism as well as the discourse strategies used to negotiate these topics uncovered how exclusionary discourse manifests itself in manifold ways.

The final chapter of this thesis examined the differences and similarities between IE, LM, and AZ. This highlighted the broad mobilising appeal of identitarianism, and how individual groups (such as those looked at here) need to be situated within the wider far right network and metapolitical project. This leads to the most important point to emerge from this thesis: the normative language of the public sphere is being reconstituted as part of an ongoing, committed and global strategy to serve exclusionary aims.<sup>716</sup> Thus, while proponents of identitarianism and NR discourse and ideology disassociate themselves from the Old Right, claiming instead to promote a ‘non-violent’ approach, it is vital to continuously deconstruct and expose this discourse for what it really is and the very real immediate and long-term ‘harm’ (in both a symbolic and physical sense) that it can inflict on society.

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<sup>714</sup> Feola, ‘Metapolitics and Demographic Anxiety on the New Right’.

<sup>715</sup> Lubarda, ‘Beyond Ecofascism?’

<sup>716</sup> Feola, ‘Metapolitics and Demographic Anxiety on the New Right’.

## 8.1 Future Research

Owing to limited time and space constraints, this thesis (as briefly noted in Chapter 3) has limitations in terms of the data analysed. This final section will thus suggest some perspectives for future research.

Firstly, focusing specifically on the content published on a select few case studies and platforms, the empirical analyses depict only a partial view of the broad range of social actors, discourses and technologies involved in the mainstreaming of far-right ideology and discourse. Further research in the domain should thus examine a broader set of sources for data including alternative social media platforms such as Gab. This would provide valuable insight into how discourse is recontextualised across different sites.

Second, future research should include a deeper analysis of the scalability of the research sites looked at in terms of the broader far-right network in which the group is embedded. Tackling hateful content online – particularly less-explicit ‘grey area’ content – poses fundamental social, ethical and technological challenges that require both qualitative and quantitative understandings. Therefore, future work should also include large-scale data analysis. The identitarian movement is transnational, decentralised and composed of many networks, leaders and groups, producing vast amounts of data across many different platforms. While qualitative methods provide rich and nuanced insights, a small-scale approach alone is ill-suited to fully understanding their activity. Combining domain expertise and qualitative insights with scalable computational approaches would enable researchers to further address important research questions, such as how identitarian content moves from the extreme right to the mainstream.

Next, identified during the early stages of data collection for this thesis and briefly mentioned in Chapter 7, a closer examination of the extreme-right group Patriotic Alternative would provide further insights into how identitarian themes have been deployed to strategically rebrand anti-Semitic and white nationalist ideology as a defence of ‘indigenous’ Europeans against their ‘Great Replacement’.<sup>717</sup> Founded in September 2019 by Mark Collett (a former British National Party official), its website describes the group as ‘a community building and activism group’ whose ‘aim is to raise awareness of issues such as the demographic decline of native Britons in the United Kingdom, the environmental impact of mass immigration and the indoctrination and political bias taking place in British schools’.<sup>718</sup> This latter point highlights a notable aspect of Patriotic Alternative’s metapolitical activism: reshaping the education system to its alternative

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<sup>717</sup> Murdoch and Mulhall, ‘From Banners To Bullet: The International Identitarian Movement’.

<sup>718</sup> Patriotic Alternative, ‘About Patriotic Alternative’.



(exclusionary) worldview. Its website promotes its ‘alternative curriculum’, providing ‘objective’ resources, projects and texts to ‘help your child to develop and grow in their knowledge and understanding of Western culture and to appreciate their rich ancestral heritage’.<sup>719</sup> It also highlights to parents that they are ‘under no legal obligation to send [their] child to school’, and provides a list of downloadable documents for starting the process of homeschooling, including a template for notifying a child’s school of their removal. With Patriotic Alternative focusing its efforts on children from a very young age – ‘early years to key stage 4’ (up to 16 years old) – this would contribute to existing work on the intersection between young people and the far right.<sup>720</sup>

Finally, while the significance of imagery was briefly noted in this thesis, the textual aspect of discourse has been the primary focus. Considering the visual character of patterns of normalisation by identitarian groups is equally important. The methodological and theoretical approach taken in this thesis (DHA) provides valuable tools for deconstructing exclusionary visual meanings. This is demonstrated by existing work undertaken by Richardson and Wodak, who applied DHA to investigate the explicit and indirect rhetorical and argumentative devices employed by the far right to construct fear of foreigners, migrants and asylum seekers, and to convince readers of their potential danger.<sup>721</sup>

Europa Invicta stands out as a particularly useful case study for examining how images are used in the discursive construction of identities and related processes of inclusion and exclusion. The identitarian group disseminates high-quality visuals (photos and videos) of (white) men, women and children in outdoor settings on its various platforms. Its website emphasises the importance of seeing ‘European beauty’ through visuals, as opposed to other practices such as meme-making or alternative news.<sup>722</sup> Masculinity, femininity and the sanctity of traditional family and values are at the forefront of discourse on the ‘homeland’, and its linked account – Madame Europa – focuses on similar topics but through a more ‘feminine’ lens, as well as anti-feminist debates. Notably, and linked to the above discussion on young people and the far right, Europa Invicta has been used as an example in a toolkit for teachers as part of a project co-funded by the European Commission, entitled *Prevention of Youth Radicalisation Through Self-Awareness on Cognitive Biases* (PRECOBIAS).<sup>723</sup> With the aim of ‘making students more resilient to extremist content

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<sup>719</sup> Patriotic Alternative, ‘Alternative Curriculum’.

<sup>720</sup> Miller-Idriss, *Hate in the Homeland*; Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream: Commercialization and Far Right Youth Culture in Germany*.

<sup>721</sup> Richardson and Wodak, ‘The Impact of Visual Racism: Visual Arguments in Political Leaflets of Austrian and British Far-Right Parties’.

<sup>722</sup> Europa Invicta, ‘Homepage’.

<sup>723</sup> Bouko, Krempská, and Kucińska, ‘Making Students More Resilient to Extremist Content Online: Critical Thinking Skills and Self-Awareness of Cognitive Biases’.

online', this provides teachers with a toolkit for young people (at secondary school, ages 11–16 in the UK) to 'increase their students' self-awareness by revealing the mental processes and cognitive biases that underlie their interpretations and analyses of the (social) media content they come across. This user-centred approach aims to prevent radicalisation in the long term.'<sup>724</sup>

Europa Invicta's visuals are included in the resources, with tasks posed for students such as:

Discuss with the students how rosy retrospection was exploited in these pictures - explore all the elements that refer to the past, including the word 'bastion', the meaning of Europa Invicta - invincible, unconquered Europe and an idea of a threat or an attack involved in it - a crisis construct, and its logo - the symbol of the phoenix rising from the ashes, reborn. Explore also the elements that convey the mood of the pictures (e.g. the use of enhanced colours, architecture etc.).<sup>725</sup>

This 'toolkit' also relates to the analysis in Chapter 7 on how society can best address the mainstreaming of the far right. In particular, the importance of moving beyond often counter effective measures such as removing content, and instead placing an emphasis on media literacy training. At a time when extremist and hateful content is becoming strategically implicit, it is important for young people (and adults, as illustrated by the analysis of Amazon in Section 7.31) to develop the skills necessary to view this seemingly innocuous discourse through a critical lens and, as this thesis has sought to do, deconstruct the underlying exclusionary (and often racialised) meanings.

In sum, this research has broad applications for social media platforms and policymakers hoping to develop a better understanding of the online harms landscape, and how malicious actors are strategically utilising the web for nefarious means. In particular, it has implications for policy related to online safety which, given that the Online Safety Bill is currently progressing through parliament in the UK, is particularly timely. For example, the thesis' argument that hateful expression that is legal is nonetheless harmful relates to, and supports, ongoing debates around the importance of including the 'legal but harmful' principle in the Bill and underscores the need for policymakers and other stakeholders to understand 'harm' in a different and broader way. In practice, regulating 'grey area' content raises both technological and ethical challenges, and so content moderation is not the 'silver bullet' to countering extremism. Instead, it is vital that emphasis is also placed on preventative measures, such as media literacy initiatives, so that young

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<sup>724</sup> Bouko, Krempaská, and Kucińska, 'Making Students More Resilient to Extremist Content Online: Critical Thinking Skills and Self-Awareness of Cognitive Biases', 5.

<sup>725</sup> Bouko, Krempaská, and Kucińska, 'Making Students More Resilient to Extremist Content Online: Critical Thinking Skills and Self-Awareness of Cognitive Biases', 135.

people and adults can develop the necessary skillset to critically evaluate exclusionary content and the technologies they are using. Ultimately, as this study shows, countering extremism (and online harms more broadly) relies not only on government and social media input and participation, but various actors across society, from teachers and schools to civil society groups. Understanding the roles that they can play and the preventative measures that can be put in place is an important next step.



## Appendix A Ethics Application Form

### Ethics Application Form for SECONDARY DATA ANALYSIS

*Please consult the guidance at the end of this form before completing and submitting your application.*

1. **Name(s):** Emily Burden

2. **Current Position:** PhD Web Science student

3. **Contact Details:**

**Division:** History Department, Faculty of Arts and Humanities

**Email:** elb1g13@soton.ac.uk

**Phone:** 07825183408

4. **Is your research being conducted as part of an education qualification?**

Yes  No

5. **If Yes, please give the name of your supervisor:**

Dr Christopher Fuller

6. **Title of your research project / study:**

Far-Right Extremism Online: A Socio-Technical Analysis

7. **Briefly describe the rationale, aims, design and research questions of your research**

I am applying for ethics approval for my PhD research project, a qualitative study into far-right extremism online.

*In view of the ongoing and increasing violent and non-violent far-right extremism and related hate speech and racism across Europe and beyond, the aim of this study is to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the conceptual, theoretical and empirical underpinnings of mediated far-right extremism. In order to do this, it is necessary to grapple with the discursive,*

organisational and strategic complexity of contemporary far-right extremism from a socio-technical perspective.

*Often the term 'far-right' is used without an appreciation of the differences between various far-right 'families' (cultural nationalism, ethnic nationalism, racial nationalism) and thus there is a need to develop deeper knowledge of the points of convergence and divergence between them. This will be achieved through an investigation into a range of questions relating to strategy, mobilisation, social organisation and wider consequences. For example:*

- **What new understandings can be gained from examining far-right extremism online through an interdisciplinary socio-technical perspective?**
- **How are political/knowledge claims advanced and legitimised in mediated far-right extremist discourse?** This will include an examination into the shift in far-right discourse from explicit and overtly fascist worldviews to a 'culture war' characterised by arguments on identity and knowledge. In other words, it will question how far-right actors have attempted to 'normalise' extremist ideas, as well as the role of online platforms themselves (technologically, legally ect) in how 'knowledge' is produced, circulated and consumed.
- **To what extent has there been a shift to a 'post-organisational' far-right landscape?** In other words, to what extent is the far-right being driven by personalities and peer-to-peer online engagement, rather than organisations and ideology?
- **What are the implications for the 'normalisation' of far-right extremist discourse on the perceptions and acceptability norms of hate speech?**

*This study is situated within a qualitative social constructionist paradigm and requires employing research methods that enable non-participant observation of online spaces and examination of far-right discourse (text, images and videos). Critical discourse analysis is the most appropriate method for such an endeavour and thus it will conduct discourse analysis on data collected from social media forums and surface web platforms. Data collected will be organised into codes/sub-codes (discourses); this will be achieved through a mixture of inductive and deductive processing, with codes initially identified by broader empirical and theoretical literature and refined during the data collection stage. The analysis will be informed by an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that takes an interpretivist epistemological position.*

#### **8. Describe the data you wish to analyse**

*Please give details of the title of the dataset, nature of data subjects (e.g. individuals or organisations), thematic focus and country/countries covered. Indicate whether the data are qualitative or quantitative, survey data, administrative data or other types of data.*

*Identify the source from where you will be obtaining the data (including a web address where appropriate).*

*I will be collecting and analysing qualitative data from social media platforms (for example, Twitter, Reddit, Facebook, Tumblr, YouTube, 4chan) and surface web platforms (for example, alternative far-right media and far-right organisation websites). This data will consist of (English-language) images/memes, videos and texts. The data will not be collected using any web scraping tools but through manually screenshotting the data.*

The research population will be social media users or groups with open far-right views, individuals or groups that post on the surface web including blogs, and individuals who comment on these sites. Initially, I will employ purposive sampling for the data collection stage. This will be used to select data from online spaces that are convenient, as well as selecting samples based on my prior knowledge of far-right extremism. Doing so will enable data to be collected thoughtfully and in correspondence with my proposed research questions. I will also incorporate snowball sampling as this is the most suitable technique when members of the population are difficult to locate. I will thus start with social media accounts or sites that I am already aware of and from here will be able to identify more relevant data by following links, searching the followers or connections of the account in question, or any people who may be commenting on posts with far-right views.

At this stage of the process I am unable to determine exactly how much data I will be analysing as I am unsure how many posts, tweets, comments, blogs, or web pages I will have access to or hold relevant data for my research questions. Data will be collected periodically from the beginning of the research period and end when there is sufficient data collected for a strong analysis to critically review and to make a well-grounded argument.

**9. What are the terms and conditions around the use of the data? Did data subjects give consent for their data to be re-used? If not, on what basis is re-use of the data justified?**

*Please state what (if any) conditions the data archive imposes (e.g. registration, signing of confidentiality agreement, specific training etc.). In many cases the data controller will have given explicit permission for data re-use. Please explain how you justify the use of data if approval and consents for the original data collection and re-use are not in place. This may be the case where, for example, the original data collection predated requirements for ethics review or occurred in a jurisdiction where explicit consent and approval are not required.*

## Appendix A

Participants will not be aware that they are taking part in this research due to the sensitive nature of the area to be studied and thus participants must have publicly far-right views; have public social media accounts that can be accessed by researchers; must have agreed to the social media platform's terms and conditions regarding the use of third party researchers (although I am aware that they might not necessarily be aware that they have agreed to this, even if they have agreed to the platform's terms and conditions). Lastly, they are going to be searching for a wider audience to disseminate these public views via the use of hashtags, comments, links to articles. I will not be looking at any data that would appear not to be looking for a wider audience, or any private accounts, conversations or private groups on any platform. I am not going to use any data from anyone who's account has been deleted or has removed their postings during the time this research is undertaken.

### 10. Do you intend to use personal data

([https://ico.org.uk/media/1549/determining\\_what\\_is\\_personal\\_data\\_quick\\_reference\\_guide.pdf](https://ico.org.uk/media/1549/determining_what_is_personal_data_quick_reference_guide.pdf)) or sensitive personal data

(<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/29/section/2>) as defined by the Data Protection Act (even if the data are publicly available)?

Yes  No

If YES, please specify what personal data will be included and why.

### 11. Do you intend to link two or more datasets?

*Data linkage refers to merging of information from two or more sources of data to consolidate facts concerning an individual or an event that are not available in any separate record. Please note that for the purposes of research ethics we are not interested in the merging of different waves of a particular survey, or the merging of data from different countries for the same survey.*

Yes  No

If YES, please give details of which datasets will be linked and for what purposes.

### 12. How will you store and manage the data before and during the analysis? What will happen with the data at the end of the project?



*Personal data should be stored on a password protected, University of Southampton network or computer. If this is not possible, data may be on the University's Microsoft OneDrive accessed through your University email address. If you are using sensitive / special category personal data, you should be aware that this may need to be stored more securely. If you have questions about the storage of research data please contact [researchdata@soton.ac.uk](mailto:researchdata@soton.ac.uk)*

I am going to create an excel database for the purpose of storing the anonymised data and the provenance of this data. All data collected will be stored on my University of Southampton laptop which is password protected. Only I will have access to this laptop and data, as well as my supervisors, should they request to look at the data collected.

Any data that is collected during this study will not be used in future studies. The data will be destroyed by being permanently deleted from my laptop upon completion of the project.

**13. How will you minimise the risk that data subjects (individuals or organisations) could be identified in your presentation of results?**

*Please consider whether disclosive ID codes have been used (e.g. date of birth) and whether it is theoretically possible to identify individuals by combining characteristics (e.g. widow in Hampshire with 14 children) or by combining datasets. How will you protect individuals' anonymity in your analysis and dissemination?*

I am interested only in the content of the images/texts/videos. To collect this data, I will take a print screen of the relevant material and ensure that all identifiable personal information is removed during analysis (for example, removing twitter handles) and thus ensuring that participants will be anonymised during the data collection process.

**14. What other ethical risks are raised by your research, and how do you intend to manage these?**

*Issues may arise due to the nature of the research you intend to undertake and/or the subject matter of the data. Examples include: data or analysis that are culturally or socially sensitive; data relating to criminal activity, including terrorism, and security sensitive issues.*

All extremism-related material and data will be accessed using the University of Southampton's network and stored securely on its networked storage using my password protected University appointed laptop. The data collection and analysis will be conducted in the UK and no copies will be kept in any other location. I will keep a record of the sites accessed and material from this store

## Appendix A

will not be disseminated or exchanged with others. The material will only be stored for as long as required to conduct the research and will be destroyed upon completion.

The research will be observational only and will not actively seek to elicit information from the research population.

I am aware that the data collected and analysed will be culturally or socially sensitive. In order to provide a comprehensive analysis of this data, this will not be censored in my presentation of results, however it will warn readers about the nature of the content.

**15. Please outline any other information that you feel may be relevant to this submission.**

*For example, will you be using the services or facilities of ONS, ADRN, or HSCIC and/or are you obtaining ethical review from NRES (through IRAS) or other? Please confirm whether the data being used are already in the public domain.*

**16. Please indicate if you, your supervisor or a member of the study team/research group are a data controller and/or data processor in relation to the data you intend to use as defined by the Data Protection Act, and confirm that you/they understand your/their respective responsibilities (<https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-data-protection/key-definitions/>).**





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