Counter-protestors hold Anti-Trump placards in Costa Mesa, California, 28 April 2016.
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At the time of publication, the ‘Brexit’ vote to leave the European Union continues to send socio-economic shockwaves across Britain – and indeed beyond. Inseparable from society and economy, of course, there is the politics: Britain’s Prime Minister, David Cameron, resigned hours after the unexpected result, leaving the future leadership and direction of the Conservatives uncertain; the opposition Labour Party is engulfed in a fallout that might yet split the party down the middle; even the dissolution of the UK – Scottish independence above all, but questions over Northern Ireland’s future are also emerging – seems to be on the cards. Main proponents of the historic victory to leave the EU, who were fairly homogenous in their refusal to present concrete plans for what happens next, have started to melt away: Tory ‘Brexiteers’ (Boris Johnson, Michael Gove) have gone silent through intrigue; and even Nigel Farage of UKIP has resigned – despite revealing in xenophobic rhetoric and images (see below, released within hours of voting, depicting non-EU refugees in Slovakia) in the lead-up to the 23 June referendum:

This ‘mainstreaming’ of far-right prejudice is a key strand of the work undertaken by CFAPS – but there are also others deserving mention in this short overview. Since our inception in 2013, Britain’s first research centre dedicated to the study of fascism and its sometimes violent opposition has hosted several international events, including on fascist ideology past and present. This includes professional and public engagement on the ideology, historical development and socio-political of these groups, both in Britain and internationally. CFAPS’s remit also extends to analysis of hate crimes and expressions of racial/religious prejudice, thus encouraging better historical and contemporary understandings of radical right praxis.

One of these initiatives, undertaken in partnership with Faith Matters, the third sector organisation that monitors anti-Muslim attacks and supports victims of hate crime, was to analyse Islamophobic incidents reported to Tell MAMA (Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks) between 2012 and 2015. Amongst the widely-reported findings in our annual reports, three general insights merit reiteration here in light of a final, noxious fallout from ‘Brexit’: namely, the ‘surge’ in hate crimes against foreigners and BME individuals in Britain – including an unprecedented 289 attacks reported on 25 June alone, and an overall rise of 42% (an increase of 915 reports in the second half of June, totalling 3,076 reported hate crimes):

1. While some hate crime – like other types of crime – can be ‘opportunistic’ (i.e. owing to contextual factors or circumstances), there seem to be a hard core of potentially repeat-perpetrators who are politically motivated on the basis of racism, far-right ideology and the like.

2. It is increasingly accepted that ‘trigger’ events – say, acts of jihadi Islamist terrorism –can cause a direct ‘spike’ in hate crimes (in above example, a rise in attacks against Muslims having no connection to such actions). Where our reports had previously identified these in terms of ‘cumulative extremism’ – a phenomenon whereby radical groups feed off the rhetoric or political violence of their extremist opposition (in the case above, the radical right) – the aftermath of the ‘Brexit’ vote strongly suggests that such a ‘trigger’ need not be an act of terrorism or political violence. Although quickly gaining policy traction, more work on ‘cumulative extremism’ is urgently needed.

3. To get a picture of the scale and geography of the problem, above all, police forces in the United Kingdom are urged to disaggregate hate crimes and urge greater reporting. Several police forces, including the Met and Manchester forces, already separately record hate crimes and incidents by ethnicity; disability; religion (Jewish and Muslim); sexuality; and an ‘other’ category (which has previously been applied to hate attacks on Goths, but could be easily extended to attacks on nationality). Here too, academic scholarship has a major part of play in public awareness and action on hate crimes in Britain today.

These are only a few of the timely and applicable suggestions derivings from our research on anti-Muslim hate crimes (all three reports, as well as previous Newsletters, are available on the CFAPS website www.tees.ac.uk/cfaps. Alongside internationally-recognised research on the history of fascism and anti-fascism, then, is a publically-facing strand of distinguished policy engagement and recommendations.
A representative taste of the way in which a better understanding of the far-right, both historically and contemporaneously, is offered by members of CFAPS is exemplified by this newsletter. One of our postgraduate Research Associates, William Allchorn, a doctoral student at the University of Leeds, skilfully organised and edited this third issue, comprising ‘snapshots’ of our current research. The structure is broadly chronological, with Dr Henry Mead considering a case of a putative ‘proto-fascist’ ideologue – a term in currency once more with the American presidential aspirations of the demagogic Donald Trump – in belle époque Europe, Ramiro de Maetzu. Dr Jorge Dagnino then surveys the ‘Fascist mystique’ in Italy, the birthplace of fully-fledged fascist ideology in the interwar years; this is followed by a primary source document on one of the wartime realities of fascist rule in Nazi-occupied Europe: the death camp Treblinka. Chris Webb, who has participated in CFAPS-affiliated Holocaust Memorial Day events and undergraduate study trips to Holocaust sites in Poland, here reproduces a chilling eyewitness account from Elias Rosenberg, in an excepted translation from testimony given on 24 December 1947. Focussing on persisting anti-Semitism in Britain from that same year, Paul Stocker – soon to submit his doctoral thesis (with our congratulations) – offers a revealing archival look at National Archives holdings on the League of Ex-Combat Servicemen.

Moving to contemporary events, Fabian Sieber – who provided an enormous assistance in the preparation of John Pollard’s and my 2016 Patterns of Prejudice special issue, ‘Fascist Ideologues’, deriving from CFAPS’s launch conference in 2013 – then examines the recently elected Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS) government in Poland in light of approaches to right-wing populism. Their actions in government have raised concerns at home and abroad, as has the now-international ‘counter-jihad’ movement, PEGIDA (Patriotische Europäer Gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes).

Dr Andreas Önnefors understands the German origins of PEGIDA to lie in a more direct and confrontational form of right-wing populism in his contribution, while another CFAPS doctoral student, Robert May, next looks at the recently-launched British arm of this street movement, led by Steven Yaxley-Lennon (aka ‘Tommy Robinson’). Through a close reading of Lennon’s revealing memoirs May finds that, cosmetics aside (silent marches, bans on drinking), little is new under the sun from the co-founder of the English Defence League (EDL). The EDL still staggers on today without him, emboldened by angry responses by counter-protesters in some instances, and mollified by engaging policing in others – if not always at unpredictable, costly demonstrations – as Allchorn reveals in his doctorally-derived discussion here.

Likewise, another soon-to-submit CFAPS postgraduate (also with our congregations!), Alex Carter, offers a much-needed survey of right-wing terrorism in postwar Britain. One of the potential risks he identifies vis-à-vis neo-Nazi terrorism is that of ‘cumulative extremism’, the subject of his thesis and, as the final contribution to this newsletter by Dr Mark Littler explains, a key contribution to contemporary research and public policy made by CFAPS. It is through this work – as also pointed up by the penultimate text reprinted here, my interview on Trump and fascism with Mic.com’s Zeeshan Aleem – that the Centre for Fascist, Anti-fascist and Post-fascist Studies will contribute to, and often lead, both scholarly and public understandings of a far-right now nearly a century old.

Professor Matthew Feldman
In this capacity as foreign correspondent for several Spanish newspapers, the Spanish political theorist Ramiro de Maeztu made a number of visits to London between 1905 and 1919.

A member of the dissident ‘generation of 1898’ – who mourned Spain’s defeat in the Spanish-American War, and criticised the constitutional monarchy prior to its fall in 1931 – Maeztu was open to radical new politics, and found in Edwardian London signs of a new political and moral theory that proved agreeable to his conservative Catholic instincts. Ironically, he found these ideas on the radical left – specifically in the school of ‘Guild Socialism’ associated with the radical British journal, the New Age. A famously multi-vocal and experimental forum, the New Age proved an ideal venue for Maeztu; through its editor, A.R. Orage, he also became acquainted with numerous figures within the political and artistic avant-garde – networks that would later go on to generate both cultural modernism and forms of proto-fascist ideology, as well as more nuanced strands of libertarian and communitarian thought that have remained part of British intellectual life to the present day.1

One of the key principles exchanged through these networks was the Guild idea, which looked back to a medieval concept of social function as a guide to self-organisation. From 1907, it was developed into a coherent doctrine by Orage and his close colleagues Arthur Penty and S.G. Hobson; later it was refined by G.D.H. Cole and his colleagues at the Labour Research Department. Sharing ideas with all these writers, Maeztu adopted Guild socialism with enthusiasm and lent it his support, adding a new complexity of moral logic, one strongly influenced by his Catholic faith.

Maeztu’s support delighted Orage. Accordingly the New Age gave Maeztu generous space to publish numerous articles – enough to gather and publish as a seminal book, Authority, Liberty and Function in Light of the War (1916).2 The title reflects a distinction Maeztu was making between German and British wartime outlooks, those of ‘Authority’ and ‘Liberty’, respectively. This contrasted with his proposal for a third way, associated with the principle of ‘Function’.3

Maeztu’s text was highly influential on British socialism; it has proved an ideal venue for and experimental forum, the New Age circle. Sharing ideas with all these writers, Maeztu adopted Guild socialism with enthusiasm and lent it his support, adding a new complexity of moral logic, one strongly influenced by his Catholic faith.

Ramiro de Maeztu compiled his book via a joint case against British and German political cultures, which he characterised in broad terms as ‘liberal’ and ‘authoritarian’, respectively. He made the case that the latter’s exaggerated claims to temporal authority were born of the same humanist error as the seemingly converse British myth of ‘liberty’. On one hand was an illusion of the goodness of human actions when orchestrated by an elite; and on the other, an illusion of the goodness of humanity when left to its own devices. Single-minded belief in either principle were, for Maeztu, forms of romanticism.7 As the basis for ‘third way’ politics, the principle of ‘function’ would instead permit the subordination of all parts of society to a transcendent value system. Each individual, recognising their place and role in an ordered society, would willingly participate in this harmonious whole.8

Another key influence on Maeztu at the New Age was the British intellectual T.E. Hulme who, although he called himself a Tory, had become a central participant in the New Age circle, sharing much with Orage, including an interest in the Syndicalism of Georges Sorel. Maeztu’s and Hulme’s articles for the New Age echoed each other, moreover, reflecting frequent conversations. The latter were often in the company of Orage, who commented on their exchanges in his editorials. Hulme had, by 1916, attacked romanticism, recommending instead a form of ‘classicist… anti-humanism’ in arguing for a renewal of ‘Tory’ values, underpinned by a sense of ‘original sin’.9

While Orage expressed admiration for Maeztu’s refinement of Guild socialism, and for Hulme’s conservative ethic, he quite early on objected to the hint in both men’s work of an underpinning neglect of individuals. For example, in the debate over the ‘primacy of things’, Orage wrote:

Some things at some time […] are of more importance than some men. But at other times some men are more important than some things. Everything depends upon time, place, and circumstance […] To assume beforehand that either is always to be preferred is to abdicate the office of moral judgment and to put ourselves in a kind of mortmain to an authoritarian theory. Men must be tested by things, things must be tested by men; for neither can be measured, as to their value, in their OWN terms.10

For Orage, too firm an insistence upon the principle of ‘Original Sin’ risked the emergence of an ‘authoritarian theory’. It therefore had to be counterbalanced by a sense of the sanctity of human life. This was where his emphasis upon redemption was significant. There had to be a means by which individuals and society grew towards some kind of goal – or at least felt that they could. In political terms the subordination of individuals to collective causes was, for Orage, an effective means for individual flourishing. To ignore this was to neglect the whole raison d’être of the Guild economic approach.

Orage was consistent in this high evaluation of individual freedom across his later political writing. Thus, he called Mussolini’s fascism a ‘corruption’ of the principles he had worked to develop before the war.11 Maeztu’s misstep, by contrast, was a conspicuous flaw in a logic Orage otherwise admired. There was a subtle difference between the kind of social equilibrium desired by Orage on one hand, and the hints at something darker underlying the principle of ‘function’ by Maeztu on the other. When a younger faction of Guild Socialists led by G.D.H. Cole rejected Orage’s state-led version of the doctrine in pursuit of a truly pluralistic system, this decision was motivated in part by unease with the notion of subordinating individuality.12


2 R. de Maetzu’s book devotes each of its three parts to these ideas, the first dealing with ‘Authority and Power’, mostly concentrating on German political culture (pp. 11-101); the second dealing with ‘Liberty and Happiness’, commenting on British liberalism (pp. 107-92); and the third setting out Maetzu’s theory of ‘Function and Values’ (pp. 195-282). See: R. de Maetzu, *Authority, Liberty and Function in the Light of the War: A Critique of Authority and Liberty as the Foundations of the Modern State and an Attempt to Base Societies on the Principle of Function* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1916).

3 Maetzu was shot on 29 October 1936 near Madrid; for further details, see C.B Arredondo, *Quixotism: The Imaginative Denial of Spain’s Loss of Empire* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2005), p. 91.


5 R. de Maetzu, ‘The Jealousy of the Guilds’, *New Age*, 16/26 (29 April 1915), 687-88; see also Authority, pp. 195-203.


10 On O. Por’s fascist connections, and his correspondence with Pound, see T. Redman, * Ezra Pound and Italian Fascism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 18, 123, 156, 169, 175.


Fascism's Political Mystique: Some Considerations

Dr Jorge Dagnino

Italian Fascism posited the supremacy of the nation over the individual, with the former viewed as an agent to harness the growth of mass society. For many, this constituted the rise of a new civilisation – one characterised by the unfettering of man's potential and for a 'new and higher spiritualism'.

Such a reborn society would arise from a synthesis of classical liberal and socialist confrontations with the anomies of modern civilisation. These had, in turn, fragmented the historic unity of men and women. Hence, besides the myth of national rebirth, Fascism in Italy also projected a new civilisational order and a new type of person characterised by an integral and wholesome vision of life, one that was directed towards the universal, the absolute, and the primacy of intangible, spiritual values. All of this was a veritable Fascist mystique.

For many Fascists, therefore, at the core of the perceived crisis of Western civilisation laid the disintegration of what it truly meant to be human. For them, traditional religions and the many philosophical systems had, by the time of the Great War, lost their affective power to touch the sacred, buttressed by a nostalgia for the absolute and certain in an ever-changing world. Modern culture, which had given birth to liberalism, Bolshevism, scientism, relativism, pacifism and democracy ultimately meant, in the words of one Fascist ideologue, 'killing the Transcendent and limiting human life to its merely terrestrial expressions and thus has prepared the negation of sanctity, heroism and war'. In this way, the result had been the debasement of man, whose 'spiritual, religious, hierarchical and heroic nature' had been erased, leaving in its place a caricature of humanity: 'the abstract individual, the irreligious, pacifist and democrat'.

Central to the Fascist mystique was that of a 'new man' bathed in extreme right values. This included notions of secular transcendence, in which the citizen expressed a specific spirituality, one which consisted in 'his will to not die but to be a moment of the universal, of the eternal'. This universality was to be realised in one which consisted in 'his will to not die but to be a moment of transcendence, in which the citizen expressed a specific spirituality, relativism, pacificism and democracy ultimately meant, in the words of one Fascist ideologue, 'killing the Transcendent and limiting human life to its merely terrestrial expressions and thus has prepared the negation of sanctity, heroism and war'. In this way, the result had been the debasement of man, whose 'spiritual, religious, hierarchical and heroic nature' had been erased, leaving in its place a caricature of humanity: 'the abstract individual, the irreligious, pacifist and democrat'.

Of course, many were at pains in coherently defining just what the 'Fascist mystique' was. However, this should not lead to the simplistic conclusion that it was just another empty slogan in the Fascist arsenal. Rather, many activists saw in this mystique a supra-rational form of knowledge. In this sense, with all the ambiguities this process entailed, it was a utopian effort to cognitively change Italians. Through this mystique, they sought to overcome rationalistic knowledge in order to arrive at a superior form of existence. Moreover, several ideologues attempted to differentiate this 'new' form of knowledge from the conventional religious sense of mysticism. The new, secular mystique had to meet the demands of twentieth century people. Above all, amongst Fascist ideologues there was the tendency to highlight how contemporary man was searching for a 'more enlightened rationality' in which to realise the self, eradicating individualism while placing the individual within a higher stage of ontological meaning. Indeed, the Fascist mystique represented a new conception of man and his relationship to the world, in which the aim was to 're-establish once again the connections between the transcendent mystery and our modernity and, in general, with all the realities that since the Renaissance to this day have been created and discovered'. The Fascist mystique thus understood was a collective instrument of 'Italianness' for the forging of an alternative modernity to benefit the re-born nation. This was not to be confused with an orgy of the irrational or the atavistic. Indeed, for the founder of the School of Fascist Mystique, Niccolò Giani, Fascism's political mystique resolved the drama of modern humanity with its quest for a wholesome vision of life; by remembering that the people of his age could 'not forget the beauty of dreams'. In other words, this revolutionary Fascist mystique was 'reason that becomes dream', a universal and objective truth – which, aligned with the power of myth, 'acquires the power to forge history' – whose end-point was to finally overcoming rationalism and its so-called 'idols'.

5 G.S. Spinetti, ‘Nostra mística’, *Gerarchia*, February 1938. *Gerarchia* was Mussolini’s ‘personal’ journal.
8 G. Niccolò, ‘La mistica come dottrina del Fascismo’, *Dottorina Fascista*, April 1938.
I was in Warsaw until 1942, when the first deportations started on the 15 July 1942. I too was transported with my mother and three sisters on the 20 August 1942 – where to we did not know at that moment. 6,000 people went on this transport and the train consisted of 60 wagons, so that means 100 people were in each wagon.

The transport went to the notorious death camp Treblinka, as we noticed during the journey. It was a camp approximately 83 kilometres distance from Warsaw, in the middle of a wood. At the start the camp covered an area of about 4 square kilometres and was very isolated. The next village was around 1 kilometre away from the camp – it was called Kutaki, Wolka Wignoowska. The camp was built in 1941, by Jews, who had to clear the required area. These Jews were killed later.

We had barely reached the camp when SS men and Ukrainian guards with whips forced us out of the wagons and we had to sit down on the ground with our luggage, arranged in rows, men and women separated. An incredible crowd had already gathered before our arrival, which had to wait like us. As we later learned we all had to await death. After some time two SS-men arrived, the name of one of them was [Kurt] Franz, he was an SS-Oberscharführer, Matthes. I do not remember the name of the second. Franz was called ‘Lalka’ [Doll], because he was so handsome. These two pointed with the handles of their whips to a few men, who had to form a special group. I also want to add, that it was strictly forbidden to say a single word. So I was surprised even more, when suddenly somebody whispered to me, “Get a broom and rescue yourself.” At first I had no idea what this meant, but then I instinctively grabbed a broom, which stood nearby and started to clean the wagons from which we were unloaded. I also urged my uncle who was sitting beside me to do the same. We worked from 8 to 12 am then we were chased back into the camp, where we noticed during the journey. It was a camp approximately 83 square kilometres distance from Warsaw, in the middle of a wood. At the start the camp covered an area of about 4 square kilometres and was very isolated. The next village was around 1 kilometre away from the camp – it was called Kutaki, Wolka Wignoowska. The camp was built in 1941, by Jews, who had to clear the required area. These Jews were killed later.

We were chased to a pile of shoes and given the task to sort them out, because the shoes of men, women and children were all mixed, and at the same time, we had to look to see if some of them contained hidden valuable objects. We worked from 8 to 12 am then we were chased back into the camp, where we had to queue for food at a kitchen. Most of us were not hungry, since during the morning, we had eaten enough of the food thrown away, of course without the knowledge of the Ukrainians. We wanted only to drink and so queued at a well, which was on the square in front of the kitchen. Not far away from this place I noticed a hole, perhaps 60 metres long, 7 to 8 metres wide and 4 metres deep, which was half-filled with corpses. This hole, which I learned later, was nicknamed the ‘Lazarett’ [Field Hospital], had there people were shot who could not work or were sick.

I, too, noticed people going into the ‘bath’ and watched them for a while, looking for people that I knew amongst them. It was a day with oppressive heat, and when some women were calling for water, I tried to reach them with a bowl full of water, to refresh them a bit. An acquaintance who was in the camp already for some time, led me to the border of the camp, which was built out of a wall of planted trees, and which was so thick, that nobody could see what was happening outside. He led me to a hidden gap, where we saw a strange picture; we saw 100 completely naked people who walked in a circle, to a destination we could not see. When I gave my comrade a questioning look, he whispered that all the people were going to their deaths. He could not tell me more, since he also did not know more.

While I again sorted out clothing a SS-Scharführer approached and demanded 30 volunteers for ‘easy work’. Since I was afraid that we would be punished if we did not volunteer, I joined the group of volunteers and also convinced my uncle to do the same. We were chased at a run in the same direction as the people who were condemned to death. Because we thought the same fate awaited us, like those who had to walk this way before us, we were paralysed with fear and some of us hesitated to move. But blows with butts by the SS chased us on towards a green hedge. Suddenly a gate, around 2 meters high, which was hidden before, was opened and we moved on. We were in Camp II, the so-called death camp.

The first thing we noticed was a building which was made out of crude bricks, which had more or less the appearance of a tall barn. This was the gas chambers, in which un-counted people died a horrible death, as I later learned. The building had three sections which were nearly as high as a normal living room. The floor and half of the walls were covered with red tiles made of stone, so that the blood which often covered the walls could not be seen.

There was a small window on the ceiling which was closed airtight and could not be opened – through that window the man who regulated the flow of gas looked. There was also a shower on the ceiling which was not connected with a water pipe. Since it was very dark in the chambers, no one could see the few tubes on the walls which had a diameter of around 5 centimeters through which the gas – it was the exhaust fumes of a single diesel engine – was transported into the room: 400 people were forced in one room. Since they could not move, because of the lack of space, it was impossible that they could fall down or show some kind of resistance.

The Ukrainians were interested in chasing as many people as possible into the gas chambers in one round, since in that case they needed less gas and the victims suffocated more quickly. Normally the gas was piped into the chamber for 20 minutes, and then they waited an additional quarter of an hour until the last ‘death rattle’ of the dying could not be heard any longer. The already mentioned ‘Tube’ which led to the chambers, was flanked by trees to the right and left, so that nobody could see from the outside what happened on the narrow path. There was a small hut on the way to the ‘bath’ in which an SS man and a Ukrainian were standing. They ordered the passing people to raise their hands up and searched if anyone still had any valuable objects hidden. It was promised that the things would be returned to the owners when they returned from the ‘bath’. A Ukrainian sat by a small table in the hut, he was called ‘Ivan’ and he was feared for his extraordinary brutality. It was his task to start the gassing and to check the electric turbines.
After the people were forced into the chambers, so that no one more could find a place, a heavy oaken door, which was hermetically sealed with felt, was closed and blocked with two beams, so that it was impossible to open them. Then ‘Ivan’ pumped the gas in. This Ukrainian took special pleasure in injuring people; he harassed women the most. He cut off the noses and ears of elderly Jews, whom he disliked; hit women in the thighs or their sexual organs with a sabre, raped young women or pretty girls. If one of us did not work exactly as he wanted, he attacked them with a huge iron pipe and crushed their skulls or mutilated them with a knife. He also loved to beat people he had forced to put their heads between two tight wires, with the result that the miserable people strangled themselves whilst they writhed in pain.

‘Ivan’ was the only Ukrainian who was allowed to visit the nearby village without special approval, where he got alcohol and food. He had an aide called Nikolai, who caused a lot of misery too.

Since you could not see through the window in the roof of the gas chamber, if the people inside were already dead, during every gassing two Germans stood at the rear doors, which could only be seen from the outside and waited until they could not hear any noise from inside. Then the rear doors were opened and the bodies of the gassed people removed. Since we were standing relatively near to the rear doors the smoke inside after the rear doors were opened intoxicated some of us for a short time, whilst some others nearly lost consciousness in horror when they saw the scene inside the chamber. But blows from the SS guards woke them up quickly.

The corpses of the murdered people looked horrible. The bodies were swollen a lot, the skin grey-white and it was so easy to remove that it often hung down in lumps. The eyes were nearly swollen out of their heads and their tongues were sticking out of their mouths.

Now it was our task to carry the dead on wooden stretchers, at a run, to a hole, which was around 120 metres long, 15 metres wide and 6 metres deep, which already contained tens of thousands of corpses, when I arrived in the death camp. The normal load for two men, using a stretcher, was a dead adult. If the dead was especially light or a child, then we had to carry two. If someone did not do it in this way and this was noticed by one of the SS guards, the two men who had committed this ‘crime’ had to march back, grab the double load and return to the hole, at the run, where they were shot and thrown into the hole together with the dead.

On our way to the gas chambers we had to pass through a row of SS men and Ukrainians, each of them was armed with a whip and they beat us furiously. You had to remain upright, not fall down under the force of the blows, otherwise you were lost. A German dressed in white was standing on the edge of the hole, around 32 years old, who had to oversee that the corpses were thrown in the hole in the correct way. This meant the dead must stay where they were thrown, laying long, not rolling away. If they hit the ground in an incorrect way, the carriers received 25 blows with a whip. If the carriers had finished their work, they had to gallop back like horses, just to amuse the watching guards.

There were ‘dentists’ standing at a distance of around 10 meters each behind the ramp, which led from the rear doors out of the gas chambers, and they had the task to knock out gold teeth or dental bridges from the corpses with a small hammer. The teeth were thrown into a bowl of water that had been provided. When the bowl was full, the gold was sorted in lots and sent to the first camp.

A short time after new gas chambers were built with the capacity up to 12,000 people. To spare gas, the chambers were built very low, so taller people could only stand inside if they bent down. Sometimes it happened in the larger chambers, where the gas mainly poured to the ceiling, that a few children stayed alive. The children were taken to the hole and mercilessly shot by the guards. It happened often that the German on watch duty was too lazy to draw his pistol; he called a Ukrainian guard and ordered him to shoot the Jews.

1 This date is incorrect. The deportations from Warsaw started on 22 July 1942.
2 Later on Eliahu stated that he arrived in Treblinka the day Max Bielas was attacked. This was 11 September 1942.
3 This date is incorrect here. The Treblinka death camp was constructed from the spring of 1942.
4 Given as ‘Matthias’ in the original statement; this is incorrect: it was Heinrich Arthur Matthes.
5 This was Ivan Marchenko (Ivan the Terrible) who was last seen in Italy in 1945. Clearly, he was not killed in the Treblinka uprising.
6 Nikolay Shalayev, who was also responsible for turning on the motors that gassed the Jews, survived the war.
After Britain gained formal control of Palestine in 1923 following General Allenby’s victory on Christmas 1917, the question of Zionism has been an important one in British political life. Much contemporary anti-Zionism, at least since the Six-Day War in 1967, has been identified with the political left. Indeed, since the election of hard-left critic of Israeli policies, Jeremy Corbyn, as Labour leader in September 2015, the issue is likely to stimulate much more public discussion in coming months and years.

During Britain’s League of Nations mandate over the territory of Palestine (1923-1948), the staunchest anti-Zionists were on the far-right. The anti-Semitic publishing group The Britons, founded in 1919, saw the quest for a Jewish national home as part of a global Jewish conspiracy to destroy the British Empire from within, as did the National Socialist-inspired Imperial Fascist League (1929-1940). Sir Oswald Mosley’s British Union of Fascists (BUF) (1932-1940), the largest radical right group between the wars, similarly advanced anti-Semitic arguments and championed the rights of Arabs in the face of alleged Jewish oppression in Palestine.

The 1930s witness bitter violence and tensions between colonial authorities, Arabs, and Jews over the question of Jewish the decade, with the British authorities taking an undoubtedly pro-Arab turn in policy by restricting Jewish immigration in 1939. It all this posed headaches before 1945, following the Second World War the Palestine question became acutely important. The Nazi occupation of Europe and the Holocaust had vastly increased the number of Jewish refugees seeking sanctuary in Palestine. Moreover, the end of the Second World War also saw a resumption of hostilities against Britain by Zionist organisations such as the Irgun, which had temporarily ceased hostilities for the duration of the war as the British and its Allies fought Nazi Germany. Terrorists targeted British soldiers, administrators, and policemen in the middle 1940s. The deadliest attack occurred in July 1946, when the Irgun bombed the King David Hotel in Jerusalem, killing 91 people and injuring scores of others. Another case of Israeli attacks on British soldiers was the Sergeants Affair in July 1947, where two British soldiers were murdered and then hung in public, with the area surrounding their corpses booby-trapped. This grotesque event led to international outrage, and, in Britain, led to a wave of anti-Semitic violence that briefly afflicted the country. At this time, anti-Jewish riots were witnessed in Liverpool, Manchester and Glasgow.

Despite being totally discredited in Britain after 1945 – when the Allies were victorious in ‘fighting fascism’ – the far-right nevertheless sought to exploit this brief period of tension. For example, the British League of Ex-Servicemen (BLXS) had been founded before the end of the war by fascist internees; by 1946, it was under the control of former BUF activist, Jeffrey Hamm. The BLXS were quick to utilise Zionist terrorism in order to promote domestic anti-Semitism – clearly seeing violence against British soldiers as a potential spring board. The National Archives in Kew contains some highly useful documents gathered by Special Branch – undoubtedly concerned about the apparent return of fascism – on the BLXS and, in particular, their response to the situation in Palestine.

The chief strategy of the BLXS was not to highlight violence against British soldiers per se, but sought to implicate British Jewry in Zionist violence in Palestine. A speech by the prominent activist Ronald Hargrave claimed that ‘these terrorists are being aided and abetted by people at home’, while Zionist organisations in Britain were ‘muder organisations, financing Jewish terrorists in Palestine, to murder our boys and girls in cold flesh and blood’. In another meeting, Duke Pile made the link between events in Palestine and domestic ‘Zionists’ – which was clearly meant to be indistinguishable from ‘Jews’ – arguing that there was ‘only one way to stop the murder of our lads in Palestine and that way is to arrest and charge with treason those people in this country who are aiding or abetting these murderers.’

The BLXS rejected Jewish claims to Palestine in a manner similar to the interwar radical right, but were less interested in promoting the Arab view, like the Arabist Robert Gordon Canning had done in his role as Foreign Affairs Spokesman at the BUF. By May 1946, Hamm had sought to make connections with Arab leaders in Palestine in order to collaborate, especially around the issue of anti-Semitism. A mutual friend introduced Hamm to the Secretary of the Arab League, Musa Alami in the hope that he could win the support of his many thousands of followers. Hamm tried to persuade Alami to start ‘generalised pogroms’ in Palestine in order to bring matters to public attention in Britain, where, he calculated, the Arabs would ‘win the sympathy of a large but inarticulate portion of the English population.’ According to this view, ‘thousands of Englishmen favoured the Arabs but were prevented from saying so by the Jewish control of the media,’ and the BLXS Special Branch, who were monitoring Hamm closely, recognised the clear anti-Semitic intent of Hamm’s activities. Thus, one Special Branch report noted that he was ‘out to stir up trouble’ for Hamm.

The Sergeants Affair in July 1947 led to a very brief period of popularity for the BLXS centred upon East London – the locale with the highest concentration of Jews in Britain. Over 500 people attended a meeting on 31 July 1947 in Hackney, for instance, and over 600 on Hereford Street three days later. Prior to this, attendance was not even half that. However, it would be wrong to see that the very public murder of British soldiers changed or radicalised the BLXS’ view on the Palestine situation. Indeed, much of the most anti-Semitic rhetoric can actually be seen before the event. For example, in late May 1947, Jeffrey Hamm publicly bellowed that a mass execution of Jews should take place in Palestine: ‘there is one way to safeguard the lives of British troops in Palestine - martial law, execution, the bullet and the hangman’s rope. That is the way to deal with Jewish thugs’. John Spicer, another BLXS ideologue, argued even more ominously that ‘it is high time we put our own house in order. The thing goes further back than Palestine’. Spicer called for ‘a cleansing campaign [whereby] we want to cleanse the British country and the British Empire for good and all time of the alien filth and the scum and the traitors that reside here in this country’.

From the Archives: The British League of Ex-Servicemen and the Palestine Question in 1947

Paul Stocker

Paul Stocker
It seemed to the BLXS that, following anti-Jewish riots in Britain, the public may have finally embraced political anti-Semitism. For example, activist Harold Robison proclaimed his delight that, "at long last the people of Britain themselves are waking up […] It is very comforting to me because it means we have far more supporters than I ever hoped that we had". Yet the BLXS lacked the resources, organisational acumen, and the ambition to create a national movement able to challenge conventional political parties. Perhaps more importantly, they were unable to overcome the monstrous image of fascism, which existed in Britain following the Second World War. Therefore, whilst they rode the coat tails of a brief surge in anti-Semitism in the wake of events in Palestine in the years leading to the establishment of the state of Israel on 14 May 1948, they were never able to build upon this localised breakthrough, nor able to extend their reach beyond East London.

2 Ibid., p. 2.
3 KV6/4, 22 May 1946.
4 Ibid.
5 KV6/4, 3 June 1946, F3 18/6.
6 Ibid., p. 3.
7 Ibid., p. 2.
8 Ibid.
A Prime Example: Poland and the Effects of Right-Wing Populist Government Participation

Fabian Sieber

Since October 2015, Poland is once more amongst countries where right-wing populist parties are in charge. The Law and Justice party (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość – PiS) holds a majority in both chambers, the Sejm and the Senate, and additionally controls the Presidency of Poland. Through this phalanx of institutions, PiS implemented several laws, which experts and observers see as both critical and dangerous for Poland’s democratic system.

At the same time, major cities have become accustomed to huge demonstrations against the government every weekend.1 Put simply, Poland has become a prime example of the effects of right-wing populist governance. Using the case of Poland, this article will therefore examine how right-wing populist parties can have chilling effects upon media rights and lead to the polarisation of society.

First off, modern democracies are media democracies. One attribute of populism is to achieve a maximum of voter support through favourable media coverage. This means that right-wing populist parties are much more dependent upon how the media talk about them than mainstream parties. Media coverage is indispensable for them.2 While in opposition, they achieve this through what Aristotle Kallis has called ‘taboo-breaking’,3 as well as reliance upon the charismatic leader, polarising rhetoric and playing the victim – while minorities and the establishment are the whipping boys. PiS’s time in opposition, without the need for constructive work, proved to be a very comfortable position. Will this change with the duties of governing?

Poland has been criticised for the rapid change in media laws and staffing changes to public media agencies. Looking at other cases of right-wing populist governments – particularly those in contemporary Hungary – this behaviour is neither surprising nor inconsequential. While in government, the ‘establishment’ cannot be held responsible for mistakes as before. In response there are three visible strategies of the new government: First is looking for a scapegoat, which is often played by the European Union (this was also visible in Austria in 2000).4 Second is to label the opposition ‘traitors’, who are betraying the country.5 Third is to influence the media to report on your terms. The latter kind of influence is visible in Poland,6 where laws have been changed to exert more control over public media; for example, by installing PiS activists into key positions. In this way, the effect on press freedom in Poland by a right-wing populist party in government can be described as dangerous.

This results in a follow-on consequence of right-wing populist governance: a growing polarisation of society. While some argue that PiS’s participation in government will integrate disaffected voters, the opposite view is more compelling. In fact, the participation of right-wing populist parties in government typically correlates with a growing polarisation between political camps – as exemplified by huge anti-government demonstrations in contemporary Poland.7

Following Chantal Mouffe,8 the reason for this polarisation can be primarily found in the treatment of political opponents and the rejection – or at least demural - of democratic norms. Democratic systems have long transitioned from attacks on political enemies (who have to be eliminated in its physical form), to civil disagreement with political opponents (who have legitimate rights and opinions). In contrast, right-wing populist governments often deny these rights to the opposition. In Poland today, even the rights of the parliament can be infringed. The opposition in Poland, for example, complains that important laws are passed in the middle of the night, without appropriate parliamentary discussion. Neither in the congressional plenum, nor in the smaller committees, are laws being properly discussed. This is despite the fact that discussion about a new constitution and a new, fourth republic, was recently initiated by PiS. (This is similar to what happened in Hungary in recent years.) Accordingly, the new constitution was not and would not be the result of consensus between political groups, but instead reflects the specific political values of PiS.9 Normally, the rules and parameters of constitutionalism must be shared by all political actors, while policy decisions need to be revocable by successive governments, in theory at least. This does not seem to be the case in Poland under PiS rule.

More troublingly, the treatment of political opponents is calcifying into a rhetoric of ‘betrayal’. Criticising the government is equated with treason against the whole country. State-owned media are losing their independence, while political criticism is construed as an attack upon Polish people and the country itself. Indeed, PiS rejection of constitutional laws, associations, the rights of parliament and existing norms are visible and growing.

Finally, developments in Poland suggest that the integration of right-wing populism has not helped to integrate or depolarise the political system. While in government, such parties – in Poland and elsewhere – are using political power to entrench specific values and exclude opposition critiques. The system of checks and balances is consistently ignored while the media, civil service and judiciary collectively warn of a ‘power grab’ by PiS. Fundamental democratic rules like the separation of powers, rights for the political opponents and press freedom are ignored. Given this state of affairs, it is unlikely that demonstrations against the Polish government will stop, nor that mainstream political parties will forge a consensus.

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Provoked by global political events, in autumn 2014 a small group of friends around Dresden, in eastern Germany, connected via Facebook to spark off an initiative that, at its peak, brought around 25,000 people onto the streets each week. Under the banner of PEGIDA, (the acronym of Patriotische Europäer Gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes), the movement has continuously mobilised popular disaffection with current political affairs in Germany.

Throughout 2014 and 2015, PEGIDA also significantly extended its reach – which has grown to between twenty and thirty sister-organisations within and outside of Germany. The aim of this article is to introduce recent German studies into Anglophone discourse on this movement. The leading researchers on PEGIDA, Professor Hans Vorländer of the Technical University of Dresden and his team, have carried out diligent observations at rallies. These have been published in one original study (2015), followed by the first meta-study of the movement (2016). The latter, importantly, assembles and samples the results from all hitherto available empirical studies on PEGIDA, and compares it to established findings of research on right-wing extremism, populism and anti-establishment political cultures. A key finding emerging from their research has been to discover the conceptual nebulosity that characterises PEGIDA as a ‘movement of indignation’ – and hence makes it difficult to analyse a clear ‘programme’ or ‘ideology’. Rather than producing a solid statement or charter, the movement operates within a liquid ‘word cloud’ of concepts, symbols, and statements. Within this word cloud, sometimes conflicting or contradictory concepts are expressed, echoing viewpoints voiced in populist protest-parties and movements, popular conspiracies, or the realm of more radical views such as those held by the counter-jihad-movement and radical right parties. It is precisely this diffuse, aggregate state that constitutes a principal challenge in the conceptual or ideological analysis of PEGIDA. Vorländer and his team have also concluded that a majority of so-called ‘Pegidistas’ share a transformative experience, referring to the change of political systems from state communism until 1989, to a society ruled by law and new constitutional arrangements established over the last quarter of a century. Solidly based upon empirical methods familiar to quantitative social sciences, the research carried out by Vorländer and his team has advanced several compelling conclusions. Initially, most commentators assumed that support for PEGIDA was recruited from the lower strata of society: supporters with no or low income, structurally excluded from the labour market, and with little prospects for the future. However, repeated socio-demographic studies have concluded that this is simply not the case. Instead, the largest foothold can be found amongst ‘the middle-class of Dresden and Saxony and its fragile segments’; namely, predominantly male, between 30 and 60, employed (or self-employed), with a relative high level of education and income, and with final degrees in either the natural sciences or engineering. Other significant features that unite PEGIDA activists are a lack of religious and party affiliation. However, most Pegidistas express direct support for the recently-launched German protest party, Alternative für Deutschland (AID). Surprisingly, concepts evoked by the name of the movement were not offered as motives by protestors. The main reason was ‘a general sense of distance between politicians and people’. This was on par with ‘discontent with asylum policies’, followed by ‘discontent with media coverage’ and ‘discontent with the political system of the German Federal Republic’. Considerably fewer identified ‘discontent with migration and integration policies’ and in even fewer still ‘reservations against Islam’. Thus it appears that the divide between ruler and ruled (or ‘elite critique’) has led to a deep sense of alienation – one catalysed by the cluster of migration, refugee and asylum politics. The combination of high levels of emotionality, a confrontational attitude, and according to Vorländer and his co-authors, the successful attempt to unfold communicative power on prominent squares and streets in Germany has come together to create an organisation of a new kind, a ‘right-wing populist movement of indignation’.

Based upon an analysis of the writings and rallies by PEGIDA up to early 2015, historian Wolfgang Beng concludes that the movement shows an ‘uneasiness’ through multiple rejections: of complex structures (as typical for modern society); of supra-national political organisations (rather than traditional statehood); of globalisation; and of modern developments in society (such as individualism, self-responsibility, and the interaction of cultures). Instead, one’s personal identity is strengthened against the ‘other’, and calls are made for law and order, a strong state (with elements of direct participation), social homogeneity and attention from (but simultaneous disdain towards) traditional elites.

How far has PEGIDA furthered a re-semantisation (and thus what I claim to be a form of ‘radicalisation’) of political language? Basic concepts have undergone a rapid re-definition and change of their meaning. This is something that already can be seen in relation to the very name of the movement: what is implied by being patriotic, European, against ‘Islamisisation’ and what does the ‘Occident’ exactly refer to? PEGIDA is characterised by (or even consciously promotes) a considerable conceptual fuzziness. But it is still possible to empirically identify a cluster of concepts that resonate clearly with the Islamophobic and notoriously conspiracist narrative of post-9/11 counter-Jihadism. This cluster of concepts echoes political ideas solidly rooted in a conservative-authoritarian tradition promoted by its contemporary vanguard; namely, the ‘Identitarian’ movement of the European ‘nouvelle droite’.

By constantly and stubbornly pushing and expanding the limits of what is possible to frame, a normalisation of previously extreme positions is currently emerging in Germany, not only among familiar stakeholders, but also in social and traditional media. By the start of 2016 measures taken and propositions made by German politicians, as well as signs of full recognition in the media of typical PEGIDA positions – still heavily stigmatised in late 2014 – auger the formation of a new social consensus around what was formerly at the radical margins of German society and politics – suggesting a lasting impact for the burgeoning anti-Islam, anti-refugee movement. One visible outcome of this development are the results of regional elections in Germany in March 2016, where the populist protest party AfD in some constituencies reached double-digit electoral support. Yet that being said, research into PEGIDA is currently scarce. My project, a study focusing upon discursive practices and the use of language in the movement, will be published in the near future (scheduled for 2017).

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1 The two most recent studies are H. Vorländer, M. Herold, and S. Schäller, Wer geht zu PEGIDA und warum? Eine empirische Untersuchung von PEGIDA-Demonstranten in Dresden, Schriften zur Verfassungs- und Demokratieforschung 1/2015, (Dresden: ZVD, 2015), and by the same authors: PEGIDA: Entwicklung, Zusammensetzung und Deutung einer Empörungsbewegung (Berlin: Springer, 2016).


Returning to Far-Right Activism: ‘Tommy Robinson’ and PEGIDA UK

Robert May

Following the recent ‘migrant crisis’, a surge of support for nationalist movements has erupted across Europe. In France the Front National came close to winning control over large parts of the country, while nationalist parties in Germany, Austria, Denmark, Finland, Hungary, Sweden and Italy have not only experienced rapid growth in their vote share but have also seen increased seats in office. These electoral successes have been accompanied by a new, pan-European, anti-Islamic street movement, PEGIDA.1

Founded in Germany, the group has now spread to several European countries, including Britain. The focus of this article is on PEGIDA’s UK chapter and the group’s founder, Stephen Yaxley-Lennon, commonly known as ‘Tommy Robinson’.

Before his involvement with PEGIDA, Lennon, 33, led a colourful life. A son of Irish migrants, he grew up in Luton, Bedfordshire, where ‘trouble was never far away’.2 He and his ‘lads’ were involved in frequent scuffles with local Muslims.2 He later became drawn into football-related violence, branding himself a Luton Town football hooligan.4 The reason for this was that he had ‘found a group of men who watched my back [and] who I shared a bond with’.2 Yet Lennon was not just the average football thug. In July 2011, he was convicted of leading a brawl involving 100 football fans. A police constable at the trial said ‘[Lennon] was a prominent person at the front of the group, giving a “come on then” gesture…I could see he was being looked at; he was holding the line of the Luton fans’. The court also heard how the defendant was ‘egging on’ the conflict and ‘upping the ante’.5 Lennon continued this behaviour as the face of Britain’s largest far-right street movement in the twenty-first century, the English Defence League (EDL).

While still undertaking his ‘football lifestyle’, Lennon co-founded, with his Mother’s cousin Kevin Carroll,7 the street protest movement in 2009. The group emerged from angry scenes in Luton, when a small group of Muslims affiliated with Anjem Choudary protested at a homecoming parade of soldiers returning from Afghanistan.8 By the summer of 2009, several EDL ‘divisions’ had been created across the country, often run by football ‘supporters’.9 Their mission statement, according to Lennon, was to ‘stand up against Islamic extremists’.10 Yet his rhetoric often failed to distinguish between radical Islam and the vast majority more moderate Muslims. For example, Lennon stated that ‘Islam is a disease – not a religion of peace’ – and that it ‘rules with fear and trepidation’.11 Moreover, he described Muslim sections of his hometown as an ‘Islamic ghetto’ and ‘a terrorist area’.12 Ironically, Lennon also argued that Muslims do not integrate, despite claiming to have Muslim friends and several Muslims at his wedding.13 It merits noting that at one time he was also a member of the neo-fascist British National Party (BNP).

Lennon stipulated that the EDL had ‘no militant undertone’ and would ‘peacefully protest’.14 A search on YouTube for ‘EDL march’ will soon debunk that myth. Lennon himself is far from ‘peaceful’ and ‘non-militant’ at his rallies. For example, at the Walthamstow march in September 2012, Lennon was clearly trying to incite EDL opposition by making confrontational gestures towards them, including yelling phrases like ‘let’s have it’ and abusive insults.15 Lennon left the EDL in October 2013 for a somewhat surprising venture, joining the counter extremism think tank Quilliam later that same month. At his first press conference, Lennon sat between two former Islamist extremists and denounced street protest, claiming that it is not the way to progress.16 According to his autobiography, the lure of money in exchange for joining Quilliam was too good to refuse.17 Lennon apologised for helping to create a culture of ‘us and them’ and said ‘I’m sorry, I’m sorry’ for blaming ‘every single Muslim’ for ‘getting away’ with the London 7/7 attacks, and for branding Islam a fascist and violent religion.18 However, when the funding decreased, Lennon, who would also serve time in prison for fraud, left the foundation. His apologies appear to be short-lived, however. Lennon is now back to street-based activism but, with PEGIDA UK, his anti-Islam rhetoric has returned with a vengeance. The recent increase of refugees fleeing to Europe from Middle East and African warzones has provided him with another opportunity to attack the Muslim community in the UK. Lennon now champions the banning of Mosques, Muslim faith schools and even Muslim migration. He asserts that education is being ‘overrun with Islam’ and claims that his own daughter has been ‘indoctrinated’ by her school. According to Lennon, ‘Britain would be a better country without Muslims’, claiming that no good has come from Islam.19 However, PEGIDA UK is not (yet) a carbon copy of the EDL. Lennon promises that his new movement’s trademark will be ‘silent marches’, with no alcohol at demonstrations, no face coverings, and no EDL-type opposition-baiting.20 To date, several silent rallies have been held but attendees have yet to exceed several hundred. Lennon says that this is down to fear. He argues that people are scared to attend for their safety, or for the risk of losing employment. The real reason, in Lennon’s eyes, is due to denial of free speech in the UK.21 The future of Lennon and PEGIDA UK is difficult to predict. Much is largely dependent upon the social climate of Europe. If more Muslims continue to arrive and are accused of (sexual) crimes, or if further terrorist attacks are perpetrated by Muslim fundamentalists on European, particularly British, soil, then Lennon’s mission of hate will continue. Judging by his attitude and past actions, incarceration or hospitalisation are again plausible outcomes. Lennon has even predicted his own murder.22 However, what does seem unlikely is that Lennon will not willingly leave his life as an anti-Muslim street activist: his ego will not let him; unless, of course, he is offered money to do so.
PEGIDA stands for 'Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes'; translated into English as Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the West.


Ibid., Location 907 and 1354.

Ibid., Location 1355.


As asserted in Robinson, Location 1635.


'60 Minutes: EDL Tommy Robinson and Islamic Extremism', YouTube, available at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=IT7fUNIdufI [accessed: 11/03/2016] clips 1'53"-1'58" and 2'25"-2'29".

'EDL leader Tommy Robinson takes on rapper Akala', clips 2'35"-2'38" and 3'52"-3'57".

'EDL goon on Newsnight, part 1', YouTube, available at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=gysMBg5G02Q&spfreload=10&bpctr=1460918508 [accessed: 11/03/2016] clip 2'57"-3'03".

See 'OFFICIAL EDL - EDL Walthamstow 01/09/12' and 'OFFICIAL EDL - EDL Walthamstow 01/09/12 - Video 2', YouTube, both respectively available at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=avQ8YO0ne4y and www.youtube.com/watch?v=6aZgTqWnnb [accessed: 10/03/2016].

'Tommy Robinson explains leaving the EDL on Newsnight', YouTube, available at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=PV55do6ZqFE [accessible: 10/03/2016] clip 0.45-1.16.

Robinson, Location 4508.

On 14 November 2015, 80 demonstrators assembled in the Hall Ings area of Bradford. The protest – put on by the anti-Muslim umbrella group, the English Defence League (EDL) – was sparsely attended and paled in comparison to previous protest events in the city. What was significant about this latest protest, however, was the number of arrests. Despite a low turnout, it was actually higher than the EDL’s inaugural, August 2010 Bradford demonstration. Moreover, offences were also of a more serious quality – with several EDL protestors being arrested for inciting racial hatred, breaches of the peace and public order offences.

This article will look at what influences public disorder at EDL protests. First, it will look at policing responses and the bearing that different strategies of public order policing have on disorder. It will then go on to consider other factors, internal and external, to a far-right movement that might explain and shape so-called ‘breaches of the peace’. Finally, this article will advocate a ‘combined’ model that incorporates both policing, movement, and external dynamics into a broader explanation of disorder when applied to far-right protests.

EDL Policing Responses: Between Confrontation and Consensus?

Policing responses have been a fringe but important aspect of EDL studies. One seminal work on public order and policing responses to the EDL was penned by a Birmingham criminologist, James Treadwell, in a 2014 chapter on the subject.1 There, Treadwell tries to draw a link between public disorder and ‘two distinct styles of policing’ following the EDL’s inception in 2009. The first style of policing is ‘a more heavy-handed and largely prohibitive’ approach that sought to ‘robustly contain’ the EDL. Such policing tactics were evidenced at earlier EDL demonstrations and led to higher arrests counts. The second was a ‘much more neutral, non-confrontational approach, premised largely on […] a less confrontational public order maintenance strategy.’2 This was used at EDL demonstrations from 2012 onwards and ‘seemingly coincided with a fall in the number of arrests’ at EDL demonstrations.3

This link between policing strategy and disorder at EDL protests is borne out by the evidence. In October 2010, for example, Leicester hosted its first and most disorderly EDL protest, which saw 13 arrests made as police tried to contain and corral protestors. In contrast, when a more consensual style of public order policing was adopted in the city at an EDL demonstration two years later, the arrest count dropped to zero. Another example – taken from my own doctoral research – is Birmingham. Between August 2009 and October 2014, the West Midlands City experienced six large-scale EDL demonstrations. In Birmingham, whilst political responses to the EDL’s demonstration became more robust and exclusionary as time wore on, policing responses actually tracked an inverse path – with a less confrontational, more consultative, and less high-profile policing response at subsequent EDL demonstrations. The effect of this was noticeable – successfully reducing the level of arrests from 90 in September 2009 to just 10 in October 2014. As one might expect, the only aberration to this trend was when Senior Police Officers at West Midlands Police decided to revert back to a higher-scale and more confrontational policing response in July 2013 – leading to over 30 arrests and a return to disorder in the Birmingham.

Simply Policing? Other Factors influencing Disorder at Far-Right Protests

Yet caution is needed in making straightforward links between public order policing strategies and disorder at far-right demonstrations. Yes, the strategies used by policing bodies are important, but it is also necessary to acknowledge that disorder can be influenced and catalysed by other external factors. In the Birmingham case, for example, it was not just a change in policing style that saw disorder drop-off at the EDL’s 2011 and 2014 protests, but the fact that the EDL presented a ‘softer target’ – the protest movement had been splintered in the former and leaderless in the latter cases. Moreover, in July 2013 – the EDL’s most disorderly Birmingham protest since 2009 – it could be said that contextual events surrounding the demonstration were just as influential as the policing response was in arousing disorder. For example, the 2013 protest came in the wake of the Woolwich terror attacks earlier that summer, and an attempted bombing of another EDL protest in Dudley the previous year. This ‘heightened’ context therefore goes some way in explaining why disorder can erupt – quite apart from even the best laid plans.

In addition, it is also instructive to consider the role of counter-rallies and anti-fascist protests in fuelling disorder. In a few significant cases, it has been the actions of the EDL’s most ‘avowed opponents’ that have led to high arrest counts and instances of disorder. In Tower Hamlets, for example, a September 2013 EDL protest saw nearly 300 anti-fascists – largely from Anti-Fascist Network - being arrested after a breach of march conditions.4 Furthermore, at the EDL’s first major demonstration in the borough in September 2011, 44 EDL activists were arrested for their own safety when 100 local teenagers launched an attack on one of the group’s buses after the demonstration.5 This is not to say that anti-minority groups, such as the EDL, should go unopposed – far from it. It is, however, to suggest that anti-fascist organisations should think carefully and thoroughly about their tactics when approaching such groups.

Conclusion

Through the case of the EDL, then, this article has argued that myriad factors need to be considered when assessing the actual and potential scale of disorder at far-right demonstrations. Poor or misjudged policing responses are not the solo factor in deciding disorder at far-right protests. Instead, policymakers, senior police officers and academics should factor in both external events and internal processes within a movement. This more nuanced, ‘combined’ model still suggests that the style and substance of public order policing response is important but that we also need to look at intra-group dynamics, contextual events, and the role of counter-protests. This is an enhancement and not a critique of James Treadwell’s excellent work on the subject, and suggests that the quality and quantity of arrests at the EDL’s latest protest in Bradford was not so much down to a poor policing response but to the deteriorating state of the EDL as a far-right protest outfit.

2 Ibid., p.128.

3 Ibid.


Right-Wing Terrorism, Public Disorder & Hate Crime in the UK: A Historical Perspective

Alex Carter

The threat that the far-right poses to civil society changes across time and space. In Britain this threat has generally been in the form of hate crime and public disorder, yet over the past two decades there has been a shift towards solo-actor terrorism. By examining far-right groups in the UK in the post-war period this article explores the drivers of this change; namely, how membership of extremist groups combined with proliferation of far-right networks created by the internet can create a pathway to radicalisation which ends in acts of terror.

The two most significant far-right groups in England in the post-war period have been the National Front (NF), founded in 1967; and the British National Party (BNP), founded in 1982. Between the growth of the former across the 1970s and the decline of the latter since 2009 there has been a largely consistent cycle of street mobilisations, hate crime and political violence. The NF gained much publicity by organising intentionally incendiary marches through areas with large non-white populations – with predictable results. The counter-demonstrations were often violent, thereby handing the NF propaganda material. Throughout this period, incidents of racially-motivated attacks increased. Similarly, in the 1990s, the BNP raised its profile after leading a series of marches, particularly in East London where they had established a political presence, which descended into serious breaches of public order following clashes with locals and anti-fascists. Further, between 1991 and 1993 three BME young men, Rolan Adams, Rohit Duggal and Stephen Lawrence, were killed by fascists. Further, between 1991 and 1993 three BME young men, Rolan Adams, Rohit Duggal and Stephen Lawrence, were killed by fascists. The main threat to civil society from the presence of the far-right in Britain since the 1960s, then, has tended toward public disorder and hate crime, rather than acts of terrorism.

This trend persisted until the 1990s. In 1992, a new neo-Nazi group with openly paramilitary pretensions called Combat 18 (C18) emerged. Throughout the mid-1990s they engaged in a series of violent attacks, which gave them a reputation as a terrorist group. These included firebombing a number of buildings, publications and fanzines with hit-lists containing the names and addresses of left-wing activists, gay clubs, people they saw as ‘race traitors’, and still later, publishing bomb-making blueprints containing instructions to ‘Bomb the Bastards’. In 1997, C18 leader Will Browning went still further, and arranged for a number of letter-bombs to be sent to England from sympathisers in Europe, targeting people for their political affiliations or for being ‘race traitors’. Fortunately, acting on information provided by Scotland Yard, Swedish police intercepted the bombs before they caused any damage. Just as it seemed the terrorist threat was fading, in April 1999, David Copeland planted three bombs in predominantly non-white and gay areas of London. Copeland has been described as a solo-actor terrorist, as it is all but certain that he planned and carried out his attacks with no-one else’s direct involvement. Since this incident, there have been a number of other attempts to commit terrorist attacks by solo-actors. In June 2008, Martyn Gilbert was sentenced to 16 years in prison after police found a wide assortment of weapons, including nail-bombs in his flat, together with a note that read: ‘I am sick and tired of hearing nationalists talking of killing Muslims, blowing up mosques and fighting back only to see these acts of resistance fail. The time has come to stop the talking and start to act.’ The same year, Nathan Worrell, a member of the Ku Klux Klan, was imprisoned for possession of material for terrorist purposes. In the summer of 2009, Neil Lewington was convicted for ‘planning a racist terror campaign’ after police found a ‘bomb-making factory’ at his home. More recently, Pavlo Lapshyn was jailed for 40 years in 2013 for the racially motivated murder of Mohammed Saleem and for planting bombs at three mosques.

The threat of far-right groups’ role in hate crimes and public disorder has by no means waned. A major contribution to this changing pattern of mobilisation must be the development and proliferation of the internet. A key observation from Terrorism Studies is that even solo-actor terrorists are rarely entirely acting alone, in that they ‘rely on the moral and sometimes tactical support of enablers, which can occur indirectly by people who provide inspiration for political violence’. The internet has facilitated access to these networks, possibly making pathways to radicalisation easier for potential solo-actor terrorists; while David Copeland made these connections in a face-to-face manner – he was a member of the BNP and the National Socialist Movement (NSM) – he nevertheless learned how to make his nail bombs via the internet. It may now be much easier for people to do both. Far-right sites, such as the Gates of Vienna and Stormfront, allow for networks of international scope to be developed, through which ideas and tactics may be shared. According to research carried out by the Southern Poverty Law Centre, registered users of the Stormfront website have been involved in over 100 murders, giving the site the dubious honour of being the ‘murder capital of the internet.’ It seems that the combination of contact with extremist groups and the new freedom of access to ‘networks of support’ provided by the internet is a key factor in the relatively recent growth of far-right terrorism in Britain. In 2012 the UK House of Commons’ Home Affairs Select Committee released a report entitled ‘The Roots of Violent Radicalisation’, in which they stated that they had ‘received persuasive evidence about the potential threat from extreme far-right terrorism’. The foregoing discussion reinforces this view. While public disorder and hate crimes remain a very real threat, there is clearly a need for analysts to be more sensitive to the possible pathways to terrorism which engagement with the far-right can facilitate.
4 *The Herald* (Glasgow), 26 August 1997.
9 *The Times*, 26 October 2013, p. 16.
Interview with Zeeshan Aleem for Policy.Mic (Mic.com)

Professor Matthew Feldman

Is Donald Trump a fascist?

In the wake of the relentlessly polemical presidential candidate’s pledge to ban the immigration of Muslims into the United States, the question has been floated by countless media outlets.

The answer to that question, when presented to experts, has more often than not been “no”.

Trump’s anti-immigrant rhetoric, his acceptance of violence at his rallies and his consideration of a special database for registering American Muslims have combined into a blend of nativism and authoritarianism unique in today’s Republican presidential field. But his campaign still lacks what a number of scholars consider to be the hallmark qualities of fascism, such as an explicit commitment to overthrowing democratic institutions.

Yet most of these responses have focused on how Trump compares to European fascism. This is not without reason — it was Europe, not the United States, that was torn apart by popular fascist movements in the 20th century, and continues to be vexed by the possibility of their rise again to this day.

But the United States does have its own history of fascist movements and quasi-fascist movements. While relatively small, these movements did leave their mark on American politics, and took on a different form than those inspired directly by Hitler or Mussolini.

To place Trump’s rhetoric in the context of the U.S.’s experience with fascism, Mic spoke with Matthew Feldman, a historian and director of the Centre for Fascist, Anti-fascist and Post-fascist Studies, a program at Teesside University in the U.K. which “examines the historical development of far-right politics and culture.” Feldman described the unique ways in which fascism has manifested in American history, and the complicated lineage of the ideology that dates back to the early 20th century.

He said Trump’s ideas don’t emanate from its classic traditions, but they do resemble the ideologies of the radical right from some of the darker chapters of the nation’s past, some of which could arguably be considered precursors to fascism. For Feldman, whether Trump meets a formal definition doesn’t change the fact that his ideas are dangerous.

The following interview has been lightly edited for clarity and brevity:

Policy.Mic: A lot of people in American politics are calling Donald Trump a fascist. What do you think of that characterization?

Matthew Feldman (MF): I think it’s mistaken, based on the evidence we have and our understanding of fascists, which is largely agreed upon among scholars. When identifying fascism, we’re talking about a revolution from the right that is comprehensive and simultaneously economic, cultural and political – what one scholar would call “palingenesis”, or a “rebirth from decadence”. I don’t think that’s what we’re seeing.

Yes, there are some [fascist-sounding] things about Trump when seen in a particular light, such as his slogan, “Make America Great Again”. But what I really want to stress is that’s not the same thing as overthrowing liberal democratic regimes, which is really the hallmark of classic fascist movements, which sprouted up like poisonous mushrooms across Europe and outside after World War I. That’s a really important period, because of the widespread violence and death that came with World War I.

Mic: One striking example of American exceptionalism in history was its immunity to the communist and fascist mass movements that swept across Europe in the 20th century. But doesn’t America have its own history of fascist figures and movements?

MF: I think in terms of the classically fascist movements, America’s was rather small. The main one was the Silver Shirts in the 1930s. That was a movement of 15,000 or so people led by William Dudley Pelley, which advocated for what Pelley called a “silver revolution”. He ran on a third-party ticket and tried to set himself up as a dictator. It was more laughable than anything. Some of these guys did get involved in conspiracies. In San Diego they were apparently trying to take over a military base.

So we might associate them with classic fascism, by which I mean dressing up in shirts, having a paramilitary movement, perhaps being anti-Semitic – although I don’t believe that’s at the definitional core of fascism. I think that that’s the kind of stuff we’re looking at historically.

Certainly there were a number of other fascist movements and parties, but the key difference between pre-1945 fascism and post-1945 fascism is that, after 1945, very few people on the extreme and revolutionary right would call themselves fascists.

Mic: If we’re tracing the genealogy of American fascism, do you think Trump’s campaign follows from these precedents in any way?

MF: I do think they’re qualitatively different. When we’re talking about Donald Trump, I think we can use a term like far-right, even radical right populist, but not fascist. The far-right is ultimately reformist, while fascism is ultimately revolutionary.

The key word for me is “populist”. Yes, Trump is worth billions, but he’s attempting to reach out to the common woman and man. He’s doing that through his 5 million Twitter followers, and because pretty much everything that falls out of his mouth is newsworthy. He’s very good at using social and mass media.
When thinking of historical parallels — Americans that might be considered far-right populists or near-fascists — Father Coughlin comes to mind. He was a Roman Catholic priest who started out promoting social justice on national radio in 1930, and eventually gained an audience of over 30 million listeners. He wasn’t just looking to support the middle class or the upper class or working class, but trying to build a movement across classes.

Coughlin became increasingly anti-Semitic, and used his platform to support a group called the Christian Front, which was accused by the FBI of trying to stage a coup d’état in 1940. These guys might not have been running around in jackboots, but I think if your definition of fascism is running around in jackboots, we’re not going to see many after 1945. Fascists also know their history.

Henry Ford serialized the Dearborn Independent, almost 100 issues of anti-Semitic bile that ultimately were published as the International Jew. He’s also the guy that was popularizing the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. Huey Long, the so-called Kingfish, was governor of Louisiana and later a senator in the 1930s, who had a trans-class populist appeal through demagogic appeals on the radio and in his charismatic speeches.

Another one is Charles Lindbergh, who was part of “America First”. He really played on a lot of the same types of noxious scapegoating of certain people, and played around with conspiracy theories. I think that celebrity status, that notoriety — we could see it in Ford, we could see it in Lindbergh. It sets America off.

Another thing we can see shared by those movements is the scapegoating of out-groups or ethnic and religious minorities. But that is not something that only fascists do. In the U.S., just 50 or 60 years ago, black people were treated as second-class citizens, if not worse. Scapegoating or treating other people like parasites or subhuman is certainly not the sole preserve of fascism, but I do think that we can talk about the far-right, and in this I would include Donald Trump, as wanting a kind of “illiberal democracy”. It’s easy to say, “Trump’s not a fascist, let’s congratulate ourselves on the strength of the democratic system” — well, the democratic system has also historically discriminated against other groups.

Words and hate speech can have consequences. I don’t know if we would’ve seen some of the more troubling scenes of, for example, a homeless man beaten up, as someone says, “Oh, Trump is right about Mexicans”. There was a Muslim man looking for planning permission for a mosque in Fredericksburg, Virginia, and someone stood up and basically said, “All Muslims are terrorists, you guys need to leave this country, this is outrageous.” I wonder if those sentiments would’ve been able to reach the mainstream without being pushed by Trump. Also, other people in the room aren’t shocked, don’t stand up, some of them applaud, some of them sit in silence — that making bystanders of people is an important part of mainstreaming of these types of prejudices.

It’s important to say that for the first time in a long time, various different faces of the revolutionary right, the neo-Nazis, the KKK and others all see in Trump something that they absolutely do not see in any of the other candidate. He is still within the democratic family broadly, but they absolutely see someone that they can do business with. And that’s alarming, frankly.
Cumulative Extremism Online: Social Media, the Far-Right, and the post-Paris spike (that wasn’t)

Dr Mark Littler

The concept of ‘Cumulative Extremism’ has continued to grow in media and policy salience over the last 18 months. From Busher and Macklin’s exploration of its conceptual limitations and weaknesses, to increased policy acceptance on the interconnected nature of community tensions, and the allocation of greater resources for programmes promoting cohesion; the last year has truly seen cumulative extremism move from niche academic interest to mainstream public concern.1

Sadly, however, the increase in interest has not been driven by entirely academic concerns. The last 12 months have seen a rise in the number of terrorist incidents and violent hate crime that have provided further reasons – if more were needed – to better understand and ameliorate a relationship that has profound consequences for everyone.

Writing in the 2015 CFAPS newsletter, I offered a brief overview of an empirical test of cumulative extremism undertaken by Prof. Matthew Feldman and myself in our report on the 2014/2015 Tell MAMA data.2 Looking at anti-Muslim incidents in the 7 days before and after a number of high profile acts of jihadi Islamist terrorism, we showed a rise in reporting that was amongst the first empirical tests of cumulative extremism. While our approach has been subject to a number of methodological critiques – the most serious of which stems from systemic weaknesses in the Tell MAMA data – our results nevertheless highlighted a number of important research questions that merit further attention.

In particular, by showing significant variance in rates of offline hate crime following each of the three different terrorist attacks in our analysis, we hinted at some of the complexity underlying cumulative extremism, and the existence of a relationship moderated by previously unexplored factors – including media framing and potentially non-violent ‘trigger’ events.

In explaining the failure of some attacks to generate a significant offline ‘spike’, we suggested that media coverage – or lack thereof – might influence the level of the cumulative extremism response, with the low rates of anti-Muslim hate crime evident where media coverage was characterised by under-reporting and the down-playing of Islamist motivations. This contrasted vividly with the aftermath of attacks receiving a greater volume of media attention framing that emphasised the centrality of Islamist motivations.

While such a linkage would seem logical, it has a number of serious limitations, perhaps the most obvious of which is that it cannot fully explain why anti-Muslim action by the far-right also seems to spike in the aftermath of terrorist attacks (a point highlighted in earlier CFAPS reports).3 Previous work on the far-right’s patterns of media consumption has stressed their rejection of mainstream media narratives/sources; their enthusiastic embrace of conspiracy and ‘counter narratives’; and their reliance on ‘alternative news’ accessed online and through social media.

If this is the case, then mainstream media coverage of acts of Jihadi Islamist terrorism should not, alone, have a direct effect upon involvement in hate crime. Rather, any response should depend on the presentation of ‘news’ in the online networks trusted by the far-right.

In a paper to be published shortly, Kathy Kondor and I have attempted to develop this idea further, exploring the impact of acts of Islamist terrorism – in our analysis, our case study is the Paris attacks in December 2015 – on the volume and tone of anti-Muslim content presented on the official social media accounts of a number of major far-right groups.

Our content analysis painted a surprising picture: in respect of each of the groups we considered, there was no evidence of a significant increase in either the overall volume of activity, or in the presence of anti-Muslim content, in the 7 days following the Paris attacks.

While this is surprising, several explanations are possible. These range from existing research overplaying the far-right’s hostility to the mainstream media to the increasing importance of user-to-user content and the democratising effect of social media. What remains clear, however, is that the relationship is certainly less direct than was initially thought. Indeed, our findings challenge the existence of a simple causal pathway, highlighting the need both for more complex theoretical models – capable of accommodating a broader range of factors moderating cumulative extremism – and more empirical research with which to test them. It is the latter task to which a number of scholars associated with CFAPS will be enthusiastically committing ourselves in the months and years to come.


Feldman, M. ‘I received the first media request while the Bataclan siege was still happening. I declined.’ Times Higher Education Blog. November 2015. Online at: www.timeshighereducation.com/blog/i-received-first-media-request-while-bataclan-siege-was-still-happening-i-declined#comment-form.


Feldman, M. Interviews and coverage on anti-Muslim prejudice monitoring – deriving from the CFAPS report of June 2015 – with the following: BBC One News; LBC radio; The Guardian, Independent, and Cosmopolitan; and the website Left Foot Forward, The Daily Mail, MSN; and International Business Times.


Online interviews and texts
Presentations and public engagements


Alessio, D. Keynote speaker: New Zealand and South Pacific Studies Annual Conference (Natural History Museum and University of Vienna, Austria). Summer 2015.


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