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Humour, Hate Crimes and British Radical Right Users on Twitter: A longitudinal Post-Brexit study

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Humour, Hate Crimes and British Radical Right Users on Twitter: A longitudinal Post-Brexit study

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Introduction

This dissertation discusses the behavior of UK radical right users on Twitter throughout June 2017, June 2018 and June 2019. The overall study is directed towards a better comprehension of how these ideologized users behave online as well as to see whether they use humour as a moral tool for proselytizing. This research originates from the recognition of the importance of online dynamics and humour during the Presidential elections of 2016 in the United States where radical right trolls proved to be a decisive factor. My dissertation especially explores the extent to which internet memes used by the UK radical right can influence and affect the ideas of mainstream users. Furthermore, I will also demonstrate how extreme politically biased messages become normalized when couched in a humourous guise.

Two main occurrences influenced the development of this study. My first idea was that hate speech online might be correlated to hate crimes in the material world. My second intuition was that what Shaller and Park (2011) label a person's "behavioral immune system" coupled with the emotion of disgust might be the prime motivating factor for hate crimes as well as functioning as a bedrock for the evolution of humour as a moral tool. Significantly, 2020, the final year of my research and writing, was characterized by a sequence of events that greatly accelerated and even confirmed the body of literature behind my study.

Based on a robust dataset of tweets collected throughout the months of June 2017, 2018 and 2019, I carried out a qualitative analysis using an approach that focuses on Jonathan Haidt's (2012) framework of Moral Foundations. Results that emerged from my analysis show that radical right users on Twitter make up a disharmonious galaxy of people who adopt a variety of linguistic techniques to propagate their views. Significantly, humour widely considered to be an effective key to unlocking the meaning of larger social, political and on-going cultural processes, is pervasive in my database. A new kind of computer-mediated humour, or "e-humour", consisting of so-called "memes" (i.e. image macros combined with captions) represents an extremely volatile and rapidly evolving instrument of communication. Shifman defines internet memes as "units of popular culture that are circulated, imitated, and transformed by individual internet users, creating a shared cultural experience" (2013: 367), a useful definition if we hypothesize that memes may well shape the mindsets, form of behavior and actions of certain social groups. While many memes can be considered "innocent" and harmless in both form and content, more recently, Shifman (2014) argues

that many others reflect the more "caustic" views of radical minorities. In fact, it would appear that so-called "radical right" groups worldwide adopt humourous memes to disseminate racist, anti-Semitic, sexist, homophobic, and generally violent messages. With the term "radical right" I am referring to people and internet users with right wing to far-right ideologies who reject mainstream conservatism. The radical right encompasses the traditional far right but differentiates itself by adopting the internet for communication in new and ever-evolving ways. The situation in the UK is especially interesting because since the outcome of the Brexit referendum and the triggering of Article 50 there has been a surge in hate crimes across the nation[1]. As I will show in this dissertation, it would appear that so-called radical users adopt humour (Simon et al, 2016: 52) to convey their specific online culture through memes, trolling, gifs and a wide variety of comic techniques.

Advances in technology, the widespread use of mobile electronic media and globalization have led Slevin to affirm that "our foot is in both worlds" (2000: 7), referring to how, at present, we function in both real and internet-based environments. Concerning humour, Kuipers (2005) has suggested that since 9/11 jokes, a traditionally oral form of humour, may have largely migrated to an on-line environment. With regards to the joke form, just as traditional oral jokes reflect society's anxieties with authority (Davies 1998), e.g. jokes against social stagnation in soviet Russia, jokes about Brexit in the UK and jokes about Trump, we can assume that internet memes mirror similar attitudes and concerns through new media. Shifman (2007: 203) claims that these "new forms of humour, combined with political correctness rules, create a new, implicit kind of ethnic humour" suggesting that they may propose different moral codes in language and communication between the stakeholders of a given online community. Contemporary memes, in fact, reflect a certain point of view, a perspective that is sometimes considered modern and unorthodox. If, until recently, the correlation between active political engagement and memes, especially for the far right was a whimsical scientific theory at best, today it should perhaps be taken more seriously, as argued by Wilson (2017), "irony has a strategic function. It allows people to disclaim commitment to far-right ideas while still espousing them".

Humour scholar Davies claims that humour is a thermometer rather than a thermostat of a society's attitudes and values (1998). This dissertation will attempt to reevaluate such a perspective in light of technological progress. Urry (2005: 245) points out that "complexity analyses seem to capture the ways in which 'mobilisation' involves flows of emotional or charged energy that occurs within social movements, flows involving nonlinear switches in organization that can occur once a threshold is

[1] "Record hate crimes after EU referendum". 2017. *BBC News*. Available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-38976087>. Last accessed 27 May 2017.

passed". For example, key events, such as the murder of politician Jo Cox and the appearance of the racist graffito "Deus vult" found in a mosque in Cumbernauld, can be traced and analysed in light of the memetic activity in radical right groups that are present in new media. Vernadsky's (1938) elaboration of the noosphere, i.e. the sphere of consciousness and mental activity in relation to human evolution, is relevant to this regard in order to fully understand the mental processes of the audience (users), in this case, the "normalisation" of memes which are an integral part of the discourse of the British radical right. Moreover, the viral expansion of memes linked to the radical right imaginary will be monitored in an attempt to create a theoretical model that will elaborate further not only meme fitness but also on external factors that contribute to the spread of a particular meme.

This dissertation will begin by providing a comprehensive and methodical review of the existing literature concerning the three main themes touched upon in the present study, namely, humour, the radical right and memetics. Following an overview of the history of humour and its conceptualization as a moral phenomenon, the first chapter will also explore the psychological roots of radical right beliefs and present both an all-inclusive overview of analytical work on the radical right and authors from the radical right, with a focus on the so-called '*nouvelle droite*'. Furthermore, the first chapter will also focus on a discussion of memetics and forms of online activism, especially on Twitter.

Chapter Two presents a detailed description of the methodology employed in my study in the form of a research protocol, the final goal of which is create a set of analyzable datasets. It describes how I collected and processed the data I use in the project, starting from how I gathered a robust sample of tweets and how I compressed them into a workable sample. I also describe how I built a timeline of hate crimes, how I implemented Jonathan Haidt's framework of Moral Foundation, and finally how I synthesized the gathered tweets and linked them to my timeline of hate crimes. This process allowed me to properly evaluate the moral 'colour' in which different users see events occurring in the real world on a certain day. The way users expressed themselves on line can help us find a reasonable way to evaluate how Conservative users perceive morality while immersed in online interactions.

Chapters Three, Four and Five respectively present the results of a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the three datasets of tweets that I collected in June 2017, 2018 and 2019. Of course, these three datasets contain different tweets, yet they display numerous common features. Several trends evolved coherently throughout the three years revealing the connections between real events that occurred in the selected three month/year timeframe. The focus of my analysis is based on mechanisms of humour contained in these tweets such as in reactions to a terrorist attack in June 2017, and the role that online interaction plays in the radicalization of Conservative users.

This dissertation contributes to the ever-evolving knowledge of how on-line memes are used in new media in terms of language, cultural globalization and political extremism. Memes spread rapidly and disappear just as quickly but it is likely that such forms of online humour, especially in the radical right galaxy, through anonymity, distance and isolation may influence the behaviour of other users. The focus of my project is to unveil how and why such rapid expansion can suddenly explode in terms of popularity highlighting how fringe ideas run the risk of becoming mainstream.

On a practical level, the outcomes of this project will be of value to NGOs fighting racism, experts who study the radicalization of modern youth as well as NATO experts who are starting to address the nascent strategic studies subfield of Memeological Warfare (Gramer, 2017). In fact, as correlations between internet based activity and violent events in real life emerge, they will provide an important step in moving scholarly research on the topic forward. Patterns that may emerge from a stage by stage analysis of a sample of tweets may improve the overall understanding of the behavior of memes used by radicalized internet users. The analysis of the collected data, such as tweets, memes, videos etc., will be the first step in creating a possible theoretical model that can innovatively address the political implications of the viral power of memes as units of culture. Moreover, cross-cultural contaminations between memes used by the British radical right and actors of the global radical right will be examined to see if a Noösphere of the global right is really starting to form.

Chapter 1
Humour, British radical right and the New Media

1.0 Humour Theories

In the wide literature pertaining to humour, the subject is defined in a number of different yet simultaneously, somewhat similar ways. According to a classic definition, Koestler defines humour as a stimulation that tends to elicit "the laughter reflex" ([1963] 1970: 5) and likewise, the Oxford English Dictionary states that it is "the quality of being amusing or comic, especially as expressed in literature or speech". More recently, Veatch affirms that "there exists a certain psychological state which tends to produce laughter, which is the natural phenomenon or process of "humour", or "humour perception" (1998: 161). The words that Winston Churchill once used to describe Russia are also fitting to the challenge of defining humour: "it is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma". The acceptance of humour as a mystery, be it philosophical or sociological, seems an important starting point to understand the complexity of this endeavour.

Humour is a universal phenomenon and has been tackled in virtually all disciplines of the humanities such as history, philosophy, linguistics, psychology, anthropology and political science as well as hard sciences such as neurosciences, medicine and biology. The literature to date seems to agree that humour permeates all facets of human life and behaviour. In fact, the entertainment industry, for example, from theatre to film and from newspapers to Youtube is full of examples of humour that span from comedies to political cartoons. What it is broadly defined as "humour" is a recent definition of a wide collection of phenomena, such as smiling, laughter or instances of ridicule, that date back at least to the 18th Century. The first part of this chapter will consist of a thorough even though limited review of the existing theories on humour. Several humour scholars have provided such overviews before, in a much more established and recognized way (e.g. Raskin, 1985; Attardo, 2001; Figueroa-Dorrego and Larkin-Galinanes, 2009) yet, "the aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity" (Wittgeinstein, [1953] 1958: 50). However, it seems necessary for the overall goal of this study to re-discuss the paradigmatic, or the definitions, of what constitute the reality of a scientific discussion to investigate humour in a rigorous manner. Thomas Kuhn affirmed that "a paradigm is prerequisite to perception itself. What a man sees depends both upon what he looks at and also upon his previous visual-conceptual experience has taught him

to see" (1970: 113). Humour is a phenomenon that in this study, following Kuhn's proposition, will be observed from different perspectives to attempt to see it through new eyes. Consequently, this careful and limited re-collection of theories of humour will allow us to create transparent rules of engagement and an operative definition of humour for the study itself.

The second part of this chapter will focus on the link between humour and morality, the logical consequence of three aspects of humour that will be discussed, namely its role in cultural evolution, humour as psychological embodiment and humour as moral detachment. There appears to be a misguided or even better, a superficial notion, even among fellow scholars, that the humorous cannot be serious or that humour is not worthy of scientifically rigorous consideration. The interesting aspect of this initial analysis of humour is that its universality of topics coincides with serious and tragic aspects of existence. Sypher (1956: 193-194) prophetically wrote "at the heart of the 19th century Dostoyevsky discovered this, and Soren Kierkegaard spoke as a modern man when he wrote that the comic and the tragic touch one another at the absolute point of infinity – at the extremes of human experience, that is". While jokes are not the object of this study, they are the expression of verbal humour on which humour scholarship has focused the most and whose structure and performance follow the non-written rules of story telling.

Humour is acted out in the forum for action. Jokes themselves, for example, can be confidently defined as a form of poetry especially in their wide variety of linguistic forms (Chiaro, 1992: 123). Timing is another shared quality that can observed in the popular humour (Davies, 1998: 47). In fact, jokes exist "half way between performance and conversation" (Chiaro, 2018: 14). This initial attempt to introduce humour will then start with the words of the American cartoonist James Thurber: "Humour is a kind of emotional chaos told about calmly and quietly in retrospect". (Thurber in Eastman, 1936: 342-343) Therefore, the stable and commonly recognized notion of humour seems to find its status as a form of tension between the known and the unknown, chaos and calm; both as a phenomenon to investigate and in the initial challenge of finding a coherent definition. In his avant-garde novel, *Murphy*, Beckett proposes that "in the beginning there was the pun". Beyond any doubt, humour is an elusive phenomenon.

This brief introduction to the following review of the existing theories of humour is meant to prepare and hopefully provide some analytical tools for the reader as ultimately, it is through a thorough approach to existing theories that it is possible to unpack such a kaleidoscopic subject as humour.

1.1 Traditional Theories of Humour

1.1.1 Superiority theory

Superiority theories see humour as expressed through feelings of dominance over others and through shame at our own inadequacies. Classic theories on humour are based on this view. Perks (2012: 126) states that "the ancient philosophers provided the most support for superiority theory, explaining why humorous scorn is psychologically appealing and articulating an ethical hierarchy of jests". In the Greek world humour was perceived as the exaggerated and inflated self-image of laughter which render others ridiculous as we "mix pleasure with pain, since we mix it with envy" (Plato, *Philebus*: 50a). For example, for the Greeks, scornful humour was meant to overpower those with polluted blood such as the inhabitants of the colonies on the edge of the Greek Civilization. Davies reports populations of Miletus in Asia Minor and Abdera in Thrace as the target of such humour (1998: 47). Plato (*Laws*, 8: 831c) sees humour as a confusing feeling derived from amusement at the expense of people who lack self-knowledge asserting that "every man individually is most ready to learn and to practice; but all else he laughs to scorn". Self-ignorance involves someone picturing themselves as better than they really are. This foolishness is what creates comic figures at whose expense of humour is aimed. Therefore, according to Plato, culture had to be purified from humour as "no serious attention shall ever be paid to it, nor shall any free man or free woman be seen learning it […] lest the public taste should be debased by the repeated exhibition of any one piece of vulgarity" (*Laws*, 7: 816e). Therefore, humour was deemed by Plato a dangerous practice for the development of society.

Roman thought on humour closely followed the Greek philosophers. Cicero retained humour to be applied to "unseemly or ugly" including the "physically disabled" (*De Orator II*: ch. 59). His views on the boundaries of humour are only in "the limits of license" (*ibidem*). Likewise, according to Irvine (2009: 147), Seneca "points approvingly to Cato's use of humour to deflect a particularly grievous insult". Quintilian underlines the importance of what the target of humour represents as "we try either to make others the subject of laughter, or ourselves, or something that is foreign to both" (*Institutes* VI, III: 23). Greco-Roman thought was closely connected to the successive Christian writings on the subject. God laughs at the wicked who are, by definition, inferior people. Their fate is to be vanquished as they "plot against the righteous, and gnash their teeth at them; but the Lord laughs at the wicked, for he sees that their day is coming" (Ps. 37:12-13, *New International Version*[2]).

[2] *The Holy Bible*, 2011, New International Version, Biblica.

Figueroa-Dorrego and Larkin-Galinanes (2009: 49) assert that Christian religion halted study and discussion of the phenomenon as "they rejected it and held it back for centuries". Humour was thought to be an unholy instrument which corrupted its wielder. It is only one thousand years later, when the Renaissance and Protestantism successfully challenged Catholicism from different angles, that the scholarly discussion about humour resumed.

Descartes recognizes that there are other reasons for humour beyond disgust and scorn for the inferior. He affirmed "joy can't cause laughter except when it is moderate and mixed with an element of wonder or hatred" (1649 [1911]: art. 125). Descartes sees a biological reason for the emergence of humour that melded two qualities of blood sent to the spleen, one thick with joy and another thin with sadness, which is why we might feel sad after laughing as the two emotions are closely linked. Overall, Descartes considers the product of humour as an expression of malice:

> Derision or scorn is a sort of joy mingled with hatred, which proceeds from our perceiving some small evil in a person whom we consider to be deserving of it; we have hatred for this evil, we have joy in seeing it in him who is deserving of it; […] for, desiring to see all others held in as low estimation as themselves, they are truly rejoiced at the evils that befall them, and they hold them deserving of these. (1649 [2011]: art. 178–179)

It is Hobbes who laid down the true foundations of the superiority tradition. His main argument on humour was that individuals were affected by a feeling of elevation when they observe the tragedies of others:

> Sudden glory, is the passion which makes those grimaces called laughter; and is caused either by some sudden act of their own, that pleases them; or by the apprehension of some deformed thing in another, by comparison whereof they suddenly applaud themselves. ([1651] 1968: 125)

Hobbes shares Plato's critical view on humour. Great characters do not need to engage in humour as they are happily focused on their endeavours. Hobbes see humour as a quality of flawed people, in fact:

> It is incident most to them,· that are conscious of the fewest abilities in themselves; who are forced to keep themselves in their own favour, by observing the imperfections of o~her men~ And therefore much Laughter at the defects of others, is a signe of Pusillanimity. (*ibidem*)

The centuries that followed were ripe with different authors who followed in the superiority tradition. The wave of the great revolutions, the American Revolution in 1776 and the French one in 1792, were a contest between reason and passion. The debate on humour was part of this wider debate.

According to Lee (1968: 95-6), Rousseau considered the capacity to crack verbal humour as cruel, superficial, insensitive and insincere. Personal reasons were a significant part of Rousseau's views on humour as "he felt excluded, moreover, from the subtle innuendos exchanged in the accepted jargon of Paris society" (Lee, 1968: 97). According to Roche (2002/2003: 412) Hegel also retained in his less considered works on comedy that "the comic self focuses his energies on himself and his private interests and desires". Hegel views knowledge as the fruit of the evolving mind which is in opposition with reality. Humour is an obstacle in this rational dialectic. Hegelian argument on humour is based on this central proposition:

> Humour is not set the task of developing and shaping a topic objectively and in a way appropriate to the essential nature of the topic, and, in this development, using its own means to articulate the topic and round it off artistically […] and the presentation is only a sporting with the topics, a derangement and perversion of the material, and a rambling to and fro, a criss-cross movement of subjective expressions, views, and attitudes. ([1835] 1975: 600-601)

Hegel sees humour as an opportunity for the artist for self-aggrandisement. He retains that "the main thing remains the hither and thither course of the humour which uses every topic only to emphasize the subjective wit of the author" (*ibidem*: 601). Poets such as Baudelaire also developed views on humour. His argument is that the outcome of humour "is essentially satanic and mark their (humans) difference to animals by stating their superiority to them" ([1855] 2008: 20). Eventually scholars started to cover different categories of humour for an explanation based on superiority. Bain retains that seeing someone degraded in comparison to our perspective makes them intrinsically humourous. He affirms that "the occasion of the Ludicrous is the Degradation of some person or interest, possessing dignity, in circumstances that excite no other strong emotion" (1865: 248). Bain saw the possibility to discover humour usage in "classes, parties, systems, opinions, institutions, and even inanimate things that by personification have contracted associations of dignity" (*ibidem*: 249). Superiority theories in the 20th century were further consolidated around the notions of group and affiliation.

A biological interpretation of superiority theory started to form itself in the writings of Ludovici in 1932. Laughter which follows humour is produced solely as an expression of supreme adaptation and showing one's teeth equals a display of dominance as reported in Morreal (1983: 7). Wolff, Smith and Murray (1934: 344), on the other hand, introduced the concept of affiliation objects which are part of the psychological self and that it is consequential that there will be an improvement of one's self esteem in provoking and being afflicted by the disparagement of the members of the unaffiliated out-group. Albert Rapp follows the same line of reasoning based on the concept of the "thrashing laughter". His phylogenetic theory was organised around the evolution of laughter as triumph in

battle, through derision and taunting, to more cerebral jokes, sarcastic questions and riddles (1949: 81-96). This approach to the superiority-based origins of humour was divided between scholars who recognized its merits and others who continued to refine their methodology and thinking.

Zillmann and Bryant (1980: 1) claim that mirth, their own term for humour, is shaped by the fact that "negative dispositions led to greater mirth reactions to the misfortune than neutral dispositions whether or not humour cues were associated with than misfortune". More recent studies focus on identity maintenance and disparagement humour. Those who support disparagement humour see it as the ability to formulate prejudice and avoid the consequences of unsuitable behaviour defined as "aversive racism ambiguity" (Gaertner et al., 2004: 7). Ferguson and Ford provide a thought-provoking aspect for future research and suggest that we:

> …can extend these findings by more directly investigating whether disparagement humour influences social judgment and behaviour by releasing suppressed prejudice […] For instance, a African-American with hostile feelings toward a White-American might feel free to express the hostilities upon exposure to humour that disparages Whites. (2008: 305)

The developments from this perspective provide an insight into the social role of humour from the superiority perspective. Disparagement humour analysis allows us to see when a group of males for example, will characterize an individual or outgroup members, females in this case, based on the meta-contrast principle of the ratio of the average similarity of the males to females over the average similarity of males of other males. Studies on disparagement humour focus not only on how this type of humour affects groups, personal identity and prejudices, but they are also crucial to understanding and creating instruments to prevent the nefarious aspects of the particularly vitriolic superiority humour based on racism, rape, torture, sadism and terminal illness.

Superiority theory remains an important theoretical framework to interpret humour. Sexist, racist and humour based on the disparagement of the physical attributes of others reinforce this view of "us against them" which promotes an invitation for one group to mock another. This theory is currently seen with reasonable doubt by its critics who assert that people can practice humour without any feeling of superiority. It is arguable that:

> The superiority theory as the view that superiority is necessary and sufficient, or even merely either necessary or sufficient, for laughter, it is an implausible theory, a straw-man that, instead of providing insight into the nature and value of humour and comic amusement, stands as an easy target for counterexamples. (Lintott, 2016: 355)

The superiority theory perspective includes an important social aspect as "only audience identification can designate victims and butts" (Gilbert, 1997: 327). Therefore, the "us against them" side of humour can be addressed if we side and laugh, with the victim. Studies on humour as an act of social empowerment can be a valid direction for future studies on superiority theory.

1.1.2 Relief theory

Relief theory provides another account of how humour works based on the suggestion that it creates a frame which releases nervous energy that has built up in the body. Therefore, it describes humour as a tension-release mechanism. The origins of this view are closely connected to the original meaning of "humour" as a fluid, first put forth by the ancient Greek physician, Hippocrates. Humour as the ancient Greeks saw it, described in the Superiority theory section, was portrayed by Hippocrates as a form of madness contaminated by bile. In fact, according to Jones, Withington, Smith and Potter (1923: 175-177), the Greek thinker claimed that "those maddened through bile are noisy, evil-doers and restless, always doing something inopportune". The view of authors such as Descartes who saw humour as a fluid was central until the 17th century when Locke envisioned ideas originating from "fluid and very finely divided matter passing through the channels of the nerves […] never associated with any essence except the perception that they immediately signify" ([1690] 2007: 181). Humour is part of the unified flow of "fluids", which Locke calls "liquors", and asserts that "wit and imagination get a better welcome in the world than dry truth and real knowledge; […] in contexts where we seek pleasure and delight rather than information and improvement" (*ibidem*: 189). Relief theory was centred around the idea that the source of humour is biological.

The first account of humour in its modern sense was provided by Lord Shaftesbury, Anthony Ashley Cooper, (1709: 8) who claimed that "all humour involved some sort of play on words". He adds a description which fits relief theory that "humour will refine itself, as long as we take care not to tamper with it and hold it down by severe discipline and rigorous prohibitions" (*ibidem*). This is one of the first analyses of how repression generates humour in relief terms. In fact, Critchley (2002: 81) underlines that a perception of humour started to form in the 18th century which saw "raillery and ridicule can be defended insofar as they enable instruction in reason by making it pleasurable". Relief theorists started to see humour emerge from restrain imposed through social rules as well as biological self-discipline. More scientific views of relief theory started to emerge based on the principle of pleasure. Herbert Spencer's works focuses on the repressed balance between strong and weak emotions which are liberated through muscular movements. Therefore, his explanation of humour as a physical phenomenon is characterized by:

> The nervous excitement at any moment present to consciousness as feeling must expend itself in some way or other […] laughter is a display of muscular excitement, and so illustrates the general law that feeling passing a certain pitch habitually vents itself in bodily action. ([1860] 1904: 7565-7566)

So, according to Spencer, muscular activity and built up emotions are intertwined in our bodies. He proceeds to underline the role of this link even when humour fails through the fact that:

> …when among several persons who witness the same ludicrous occurrence there are some who do not laugh, it is because there has arisen in them an emotion not participated in by the rest, and which is sufficiently massive to absorb all the nascent excitement. (*ibidem*: 7569)

Spencer laid down the foundations for further developments within relief theory. Dewey, in Spencer's wake, proposed a physical cause of humour. His opinion was that "...laugh is by no means to be viewed from the standpoint of humour […] it marks the ending (that is, the attainment of a unity) of a period of suspense, or expectation, all ending which is sharp and sudden" (1894: 558). It is the accumulation and the discharge of nervous energies that creates humour not the stimuli itself. Dewey underlines that "a large amount of laughter is wholly irrelevant to any joke or witticism […] this sudden relaxation of strain, so far as occurring through the medium of the breathing and vocal apparatus, is laughter" (1894: 559). These biological theories of relief theory will culminate in the psychoanalytical approach. The scholar who left a major impact on relief theory remains Freud.

Freud's theory left a large mark on 20th century culture. Freud's theory of humour is that it works as a psychological defence mechanism in anxious, stressful or difficult situations. When individuals feel sadness, anger, fear or pain they channel it through perceived incongruous elements that allow them to feel amusement that erupts through laughter or smiling or noises. Consequently, the ego, "the Ich", which, according to Freud represents the rational part of the psyche, has to be relaxed to feel pleasure of the release. That is why:

> Reason, critical judgement, suppression – these are the forces against which it fights in succession; it holds fast to the original sources of verbal pleasure […] The pleasure that it produces, whether it is pleasure in play or pleasure in lifting inhibitions, can invariably be traced back to economy in physical expenditure. ([1905] 1976: 189)

Likewise, in his historical analysis of dreams Freud viewed them as blessed enablers of desires ([1900] 1997: 103), and divides the humour in jokes, what Freud defines as "*der Witz*", "the comic" and a wider category of "humour". According to Freud, the display of humour, such as jokes, allows repressed thoughts and feelings to emerge. Freud identified three different techniques of jokes. The first is condensation based on the economy of thought, making the joke as short as possible ([1905]

1976: 48). The second is based on the multiple use of the same material first as a word and then as syllables (*ibidem*: 76). The third technique is based on a double-meaning such as double entendres or a literal interpretation of metaphors ([1905] 1976: 69). These different techniques are used to free nervous energies through:

> …increased expenditure in order to understand it is inhibited in statu nascendi, as it were in the act of being mobilized; it is declared superfluous and is free for use elsewhere or perhaps for discharge by laughter. This would be the way in which, other circumstances being favourable, pleasure in a comic movement is generated - an innervatory expenditure which has become an unusable surplus when a comparison is made with a movement of one's own. (*ibidem*: 284)

Freud proposed re-evaluating the importance of humour which he believed represented an act of conquest of certain emotions. The repression which society casts on an individual is mastered through a liberating joke or comic act. Any new aspect of evolving society reveals new forms of humour to be discovered. He writes:

> The species of humour are extraordinarly variegated according to the nature of emotion which is economized in favour of humour: pity, anger, pain […] kingdom of humour is constantly being enlarged whenever an artist or writer succeeds in submitting some hitherto unconquered emotions to the control of humour. (*ibidem*: 297)

Freud's ideas, used together with Spencer's biological view on humour, represents traditional relief theory and in the following decades a more nuanced approach would be adopted based on these premises.

In the first years of the 20th century, relief theory was built upon the intuitions of Spencer and Freud. Gregory's (1924) research for example was based on the conviction that relief represents a source of humour claiming that:

> …relief is not the whole of laughter, though it is its root and fundamental plan. The discovery of sudden interruption through relaxation of effort merely begins the inquiry into laughter. But it does begin it, and no discussion of laughter that ignores relief or makes it of little account can hope to prosper. (1924: 40)

However, scholars of relief theory soon began to focus on the role of the "play frame", as the following authors proposed, in acknowledging the other through humour. Huizinga sees play as an act that defies seriousness and partially intersects with humour as "laughter, for instance, is in a sense the opposite of seriousness […] children's games, football, and chess are played in profound seriousness; the players have not the slightest inclination to laugh" (1949: 6). He underlines that all the various terms connected to humour emerge from the resistance to other frames as "play, laughter,

folly, wit, jest, joke, the comic, etc. share the characteristic which we had to attribute to play, namely, that of resisting any attempt to reduce it to other terms" (*ibidem*). The building of social rules from the liberation of energy through humour was a conceptual revolution and in 1952 Bateson proposes:

> …that when the joke breaks open and the implicit levels have been touched, have met each other, and oscillation has occurred, the laughter verifies an agreement that this is "unimportant," it is "play," and yet, within the very situation which is defined by the laughter as play, there is a juxtaposition of contrasting polarities, which contrast may be compared to the commission and correction of an error. The laughter lets those who laugh know that there is a common subsumption of how they see the universe. (1952: 15)

As had occurred with Superiority theories previously, the 1960s and 70s, represented the beginning of more nuanced scientific inquiry. The focus from how repressed energy is released shifted to the conditions of humour itself. Rothbart introduced the "arousal model of laughter" based on her analysis of children's humour. She writes that it "describes the expressive consequences of arousal resulting from an individual's experiencing stimulation he does not expect […] A judgment of inconsequentiality is closely related to a playful or joking attitude on the part of the individual" (Rothbart, 1973: 249). An interesting aspect of this model is that it includes both a dissipation of tension and laughter following tension or arousal. These events appear to allow both the release of tension and the reiteration of insightful events for a young child. There is a liberating benefit in humour as "an analysis of the laughter of young children suggests some very real advantages for the animal who laughs" (*ibidem*: 255). Diversely, Berlyne refuses the Spencerian concept of laughter as release of tension. Instead, his humour theory is built on an inverted-U relationship between psychological arousal and subjective pleasure as reported in Herbert and Martin (1986: 7). Another modern aspect of relief theory is the refinement of the role of the play frame that scholars such as Olsen underlined: "pure play is one of the main bases of civilization" (1990: 32). In fact, individuals start a "rebellion against oppressive circumstances and liberation from pressure" (Colletta, 2003: 29) and its use in children can be explained as a liberation from the oppression of parents and authorities.

Relief theory offers interesting insights such as the necessity for the need of a prior frame of mind to the humourous situation that will help appreciate humour and to explain the mechanisms that release psychological tensions through humour. There are also different weaknesses in relief theory as a universal framework of humour. Lippitt points out that "one of the pleasures of nonsense verse is trying, and failing, to make sense of it" (1995: 173). Instead of building up tension often humour is about wasting energy which is part of the pleasure of an individual's humourous experience. Another criticism to classic relief theory is that the double tension Freud sees in the comic act, between the comic object and ourselves, creates unnecessary complexity. The different aspects between the

intersubjective, affective, and symbolic aspect of humour underlines the limits imposed by Freud's one-person model of humour. The greatest difficulty with Freud's view of humour may be a lack of focus of what happens between the listener and the speaker as a united situation instead of two different acts (Newirth, 2006: 557-558).

To conclude, relief theory is rarely employed as a broad explanation of humour because of its psychoanalytical complexities and difficulty in explaining the difference between humorous and non-humourous laughter that both use the same energy. However, Relief theory remains a useful framework to evaluate specific aspects of humour or to observe laughter in tension release situations.

1.1.3 Incongruity theory

Incongruity is considered a fundamental condition for humour and incongruity theory is based on humourous stimuli that pivot on the perception of something incongruous. Therefore, it refers to a set of circumstances that challenge our usual views on reality and everyday expectations to a produce humourous effect. According to Morreall, incongruity refers to "some object of perception or thought that clashes with what we could have expected in a particular set of circumstances" (1987: 6). Elements of the incongruity tradition, as in the case of the verbal humour, can be traced to the ancient world. Aristotle hints that "the effect is produced even by jokes depending upon changes of the letters of a word; this too is a surprise" (*Rhetoric* 3: 11). Cicero too writes that "the most common kind of joke is that in which we expect one thing and another is said; here our own disappointed expectation makes us laugh" (*De Oratore* II: Ch. 63). Since then, surprise and incongruous elements have been widely considered a part of humour and these basic elements were to be refined by the philosophers of the German Idealism movement during the late 18th and early 19th Century.

In his brief discussion of the nature of humour in the *Critique of Judgement* ([1790] 1892) Kant provides examples of incongruity in the unexpected actions and comments of his characters, yet he does not use the term "incongruity". For example in the heir's story, Kant writes:

> The heir of a rich relative wished to arrange for an imposing funeral, but he lamented that he could not properly succeed; "for" (said he) "the more money I give my mourners to look sad, the more cheerful they look! ([1790] 1892: sec. 54)

Kant proposes that humour is characterized by the fact that "the jest must contain something that is capable of deceiving for a moment" (*ibidem*). Kant's analysis underlines the necessity of the disappearance of our expectations into nothing for humour to occur and defines humour as "the talent of being able voluntarily to put oneself into a certain mental disposition, in which everything is judged quite differently from the ordinary way (reversed, in fact)" (*ibidem*).

Schopenhauer also dedicates significant attention to discussing humour from an incongruous perspective. Unlike Kant, he defines humour in terms of a bridge connecting our perception of the object to our abstract rational knowledge of the same object:

> The cause of laughter in every case is simply the sudden perception of the incongruity between a concept and the real objects which have been thought through it in some relation, and laughter itself is just the expression of this incongruity […] All laughter then is occasioned by a paradox, and therefore by unexpected subsumption, whether this is expressed in words or in actions. ([1818/1819] 1909: 95)

Schopenhauer provides several examples of how humour works in funny stories and jokes such as a joke in which the writing on a doctor's tombstone reads: "here like a hero he lies, and those he has slain lie around him" ([1844] 1966: 93). The joke plays on the contrast in the meanings between the social roles of hero and doctor. Someone who heals people is heroic only if as few of his patients as possible die. In short to return to the Schopenhauer's thoughts, "the identity is in the concept, the difference in the reality, but in the case of the pun the difference is in the concepts and the identity in the reality" ([1818/1819] 1909: 98) Kant and Schopenhauer provide the first attempts to provide an explanation to incongruity based humour which paved the way for further discussion by other scholars.

Kierkegaard uses the term "contradiction" to describe the humorous and through the words of Johannes Climacus, his pseudonym in several of his books, he sees humour as a phenomenon in which "the tragic and the comic are the same in as much as both are contradiction, but the tragic is suffering contradiction, and the comic is painless contradiction" ([1846] 1944: 514). Lippitt defines this as "a version of what has become known as the incongruity theory" (2000: 8). Kierkegaard's concept of humour was founded on incongruous contradiction seen as a bridge between ethics and religion. He linked personal growth to the ability of perceiving humour which allows one to transform an ethical perception of the world into a religious one. Kierkegaard sees humour as a way for human beings to bear the enormous contradiction (incongruity) of existence and underlines that "the more the suffering, the more the religious existence; and the suffering persists" ([1846] 1944: 256). Therefore, humour answers a crucial question in Kierkegaard's philosophy: how to obtain truth in the face of the suffering of life. He writes:

> When I was older, I opened my eyes and beheld reality, at which I began to laugh, and since then I have not stopped laughing. I saw that the meaning of life was to secure a livelihood, and that its goal was to secure a high position; that love's rich dream was marriage with an heiress; that friendship's blessing was help in financial difficulties; […] This I saw, and I laughed. ([1843] 1944: 27)

Kierkegaard regarded these "small certainties" as contradictory with what really happens in life seeing humour as an essential ally from a religious perspective. Humour, irony and other comic forms appear in all aspects of human experience to allow a painless transition to wisdom.

The modern approach to incongruity begins in the 20th century. Bergson ([1900] 2005: 31a) defines a comic situation in the following way: "it belongs simultaneously to two altogether independent series of events and is capable of being interpreted in two entirely different meanings at the same time". The French philosopher saw humour as a dynamic force which corrects the rigidity of social life. Bergson famously states that humour manifests itself as "something mechanical encrusted on something living […] we laugh every time a person gives us the impression of being a thing" ([1900] 2005: 19b-20a). Bergson's philosophy paved the way in the following years for other authors. Pirandello, for example, approaches incongruity from the point of view of literature and theatre. Pirandello states that "comedy is a product of the feeling of the opposite generated in the poet from the special activity of reflection" (1908: 152, *my translation*). Instead, according to Pirandello, humour is a higher form of attention and it begins with the transformation of cognition that make a glimpse of another truth available.

> This mood, evoked every time I find myself in front of a truly humourous representation, is of perplexity: I feel as if kept between two states: I would like to laugh, I laugh, but laughter is troublesome and is obstructed by something that is inspired by the representation itself. (*ibidem*: 154, *my translation*)

Pirandello sees humour as based on incongruity as "every feeling, every thought, every movement of the spirit that is born from humour splits immediately in its opposite" (*ibidem*: 160-161, *my translation*). The incongruous emerges because "every yes becomes a no and in the end return to the same meaning of yes" (*ibidem, my translation*). One of the examples Pirandello uses is the morally mediocre Don Abbondio, a character in Alessandro Manzoni's novel *I Promessi Sposi* (*The Betrothed*) because "Don Abbondio is in fact this feeling of incongruity objectified and living; but it is not only comic, but truthfully and deeply humorous" (*ibidem*: 167, *my translation*). Therefore, Pirandello analyzes works of literature and theatre through psychological means to develop an understanding of humour through incongruity.

As incongruity started to be considered a fundamental condition for humour, several scholars explored it in further detail. Monro for example, who introduced the standard analysis that classifies humour theories into superiority, incongruity, and relief theories in the first place (1988), states that humour is "the linking of disparates: the importing into one sphere, of ideas which belong in another […] (is) a good formula for humour" ([1951] 1963: 238). Swabey's discussion on the definition of incongruity is indicative of the wider terminological debate:

> Sometimes the notion that things are incongruous emphasizes chiefly that they are markedly dissimilar or in contrast to one another; […] incongruity may plainly mean contradictory: that two propositions, properties, or states of affairs are opposites in the full sense, so that the denial, absence or falsity of one of them is equivalent to the affirmation, presence, or truth of the other, since between them they exhaust the range of possible alternatives. (1961: 110-111)

Swabey (*ibidem*: 111-121) underlines a contradictory side of incongruity theory, namely the existence of countless possible definitions that are united only by the common denomination of incongruity having unexpectedly opposing qualities. Koestler ([1963] 1970: 8) defines incongruity as "the perceiving of a situation or idea, L, in two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference". He coined the term "bisociation" (*ibidem*: 9) "in order to make a distinction between the routine skills of thinking on a single "plane", as it were, and the creative act […] (which) always operates on more than one plane". In fact, humour works when "the sudden bisociation of an idea or event with two habitually incompatible matrices will produce a comic effect" (*ibidem*: 20) However, from the 1980s onwards, the notion that it is not incongruity itself which triggers humour but the process of resolution begins to gain ground. The study of how this mechanism works prompts the development of increasingly complex incongruity theories of humour.

It is possible to make several notable examples of this surge in scholarly writings. Ziv focuses on humour as "the ability to understand and enjoy messages involving humorous creativity, as well as situations that are incongruous but not menacing" (1984: xi). He provides the example of a young man who was looking for a wife and contacted a "computerized marriage agency". Describing the criteria of what he was looking for in a wife, namely, someone who liked company, water sports, formal dress and that she should be short. The agency sent a penguin. According to Ziv, if a marriage agency sends a horse it is not funny just surprising; a penguin instead is amusing (1984: 80-91). Therefore, a display of humour has to focus on a point of climax, despite the length of the lead-up to the punchline. Humour is thus seen as fundamentally cognitive phenomenon, of thoughts, feelings and patterns, which involves a surprising change in cognition. Morreal develops a theory of humorous amusement of incongruity in four stages:

- Someone experiences a cognitive shift.
- They are in a play mode, disengaged from practical and noetic concerns.
- Instead of reacting with puzzlement negative emotions, they enjoy the cognitive shift.
- Their playful disengagement and their pleasure are expressed in laughter, which signals to others they can relax and enjoy the cognitive shift too. (2009b: 1)

The individual engages in a playful frame and has to change cognitive frame to experience humour. Moreover, humour involves the capacity to appreciate cognitive shifts through ambiguities and incongruities. Morreall states that in some forms of humour:

> …the first part of the stimulus establishes the background, and the second part serves as the punch. In other humour, our mental background is already in place before the stimulus, and the whole stimulus serves as the punch. (2009a: 50)

The enjoyment of these cognitive shifts is part of all modes of entertainment. Morreall defines humour as a part of the aesthetic experience:

> It is not enough to say that humour is the enjoyment of incongruity, then, because humour is only one of the modes in which we enjoy cognitive shifts […] two things distinguish humorous amusement from these six (tragic, grotesque, macabre, horrible, bizarre, and fantastic): playfulness and the tendency to laugh. (2009a: 73)

Incongruity and related cognitive shifts are a part of the larger ludic experience. The prime predictors of humour in incongruity, from a psychological point of view, are a playful frame and the possibility of amusement.

Incongruity tradition remains a solid foundation for scholars of humour. It overcomes the previously discussed flaws of the relief tradition as well as being more suitable in the analysis of wordplay, a notable weakness of the superiority tradition. Latta criticizes incongruity theories with the argument that "incongruity plays only a very slight role in humour, and no role worthy of special mention" (1999: 102). He perceives several theoretical and methodological weaknesses. According to Latta the "humour process hinges not all on the incongruity but rather on the cognitive shift" (*ibidem*: 127) and "the point of view of the subject who experiences humour […] from it no incongruity appears" *(ibidem*: 129). Moreover, he adds a question, "why should laughter have evolved in human beings as a response to the perception of an unthreatening incongruity?" (*ibidem*: 210) Corrigan also provides an insight into the ambiguity of incongruity as "a technique which has been used in all dramatic forms - serious and comic. It is capable of producing dire emotions as well as side-splitting laughter" (1965: 6). The incongruity tradition is a based upon a solid framework whose central idea has certain validity as exemplified in the sources provided and remains a significant instrument for research in the field.

1.2 Modern Theories of Humour

1.2.1 Linguistic theories of Humour

In 1985, Raskin proposes the "Semantic-Script Theory of Humour" as a linguistic theory of humour which, together with Attardo in 1991, is further developed as "the General Theory of Verbal Humour" (GTVH). Raskin's idea is different from traditional linguistic investigations of humour such as Koestler's "bisociation" and other incongruity-based theories discussed previously. Raskin proposes that humour is essentially a semantic phenomenon. The theoretical layout of the GTVH allows for an intuitive analysis of different levels of humorous phenomena as well as providing the necessary flexibility to apply it to different situations. Raskin had already pointed out that "much of verbal humour depends on a partial or complete overlap of two or more scripts all which are compatible with the joke-carrying text" (1979: 332) but later he proposes that:

> A text can be characterized as a single-joke-carrying text if both of the following conditions are justified:
> i) The text is compatible, fully or in part, with two different script
> ii) The two scripts with which the text is compatible are opposite (1985: 99)

Raskin's analysis is based on scripts, namely structured chunks of information, and that "people's semantic competence was organized in bunches of closely related information" (2008: 7). His proposal is that the first part of a joke, represents a "script" which is used for the joke's initial interpretation. Consequently, he suggests that towards the end of a joke this first script is replaced in the recipient's mind by an opposite script, regardless of the complexity of the joke itself. To illustrate his theory, Raskin applies this theoretical framework to a joke which was to become notorious:

> "Is the doctor at home?" the patient asked in his bronchial whisper. "No," the doctor's young and pretty wife whispered in reply. "Come right in." (1985: 117-127)

First, the reader acquires the meaning of the words of the whole joke then, after an initial analysis they intuitively apply the "script rules" identified by Raskin to the text. Afterwards, the reader reaches a conclusion from which the effects of humour emerge, i.e. laughter, shock and indifference. Therefore, from an initial script, or frame, from which the recipient attempts to find the humour in a text, they attempt to activate a second script to initiate the resolution of the joke. The GTVH is a significant leap towards further evolution of how a receiver attempts to understand the humourous elements of a text as it proposes a new foundation of humour. Regarding the premises of the doctor's joke, Attardo concludes:

> …the text is thus found to be compatible almost entirely with two scripts (DOCTOR, LOVER), and the scripts are opposed on the SEX/NO SEX basis. Hence, it fulfils both requirements of the SSTH and is evaluated as humorous. (2001: 22)

The focus of the theory is based on the receiver of humour and their interpretation of the funniness of the text. Attardo's asserts that:

> Humorous texts divide in two classes: those texts that are structurally similar to jokes (i.e., they end in a punch line) and those which are not. […] the latter, which happen to be much more numerous, can be most profitably analyzed as consisting of two elements: a non-humorous narrative and a humorous component, which occurs along the narrative. (2001: 29)

Texts are central to the GTVH approach. The method of analysis proposed by Attardo (2001: 79) is to locate different elements within longer texts and extract two possible humorous elements, jabs and punchlines. There are differences between jab lines and punchlines that need to be acknowledged first. Attardo claims that "jab lines differ from punch lines in that they may occur in any other position in the text […] (they) are humorous elements fully integrated in the narrative in which they appear" (2001: 82). On the contrary punch lines "act as disrupting elements […] the occurrence of a disjunctor (punch line) forces the reader to switch to a second script" (2001: 83). Attardo's view is that the analysis of texts is to be used in harmony with that of jokes.

The GTVH proposes that jokes are organized, as well as understood by the recipient, around six main parameters which are represented by the following "knowledge resources" or KRs:

a) Script opposition – discussed above*
b) Logical mechanism – it is the partial, playful and non-serious resolution of incongruity.
c) Situation – overall manuscript that describes the background in which the events of joke take place.
d) Target – the eventual target of the joke.
e) Narrative Strategy – the way the text is organized in terms of distribution of humorous parts.
f) Language – full phonological, morphological, syntactic and lexical description of the text. (Attardo, 2017: 127-134)

Therefore, GTVH is a theory that focuses on a semantic analysis of humorous texts the aim of which is to better understand how humour is analysed by the recipient.

1.2.2 Cognitive and Psychological theories of Humour

1.2.2.1 Conceptual Blending

Conceptual blending theory, while not extensively applied to humour, has a distinct importance for its profound intuition regarding human cognition. The main argument of the scholars that have

developed this theory is that various components and decisive chains-of-thought from different spheres of cognition are "blended" subconsciously in day-by-day human thought and language:

> We are free to project image-schematic structure onto the target where the target is indeterminate. If wish to convey a causal link between A and B where the relation between A and B is indeterminate, we may say, "B is the child of A." We may say, "Violence is the child of fear," […] we do not violate image-schematic structure in the target, but we do create new image-schematic structure there. (Turner, 1997: 54)

Turner claims that "Conceptual blending is a fundamental instrument of the every-day mind, used in our basic construal of all our realities, from the social to the scientific" (*ibidem*: 93). Fauconnier (1997: 1) expands the concept of conceptual blending installing this notion on mappings that enable the building of meaning and describes mappings as being "at the heart of the unique human cognitive faculty of producing, transferring, and processing meaning" defining conceptual blending as a process that produces "negotiated space building" (*ibidem*: 121). Fauconnier and Turner observe that compression is a crucial quality of human cognition because the different and chaotic aspects of external reality and internal processes are channeled through time, place and identity to arrive at conceptual blending. A human scale dimension achieved this way can be described by "direct action and perception inside familiar frames, typically involving few participants and direct intentionality" (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002: 322). This type of blending allows for eureka moments that are the bedrock for the emergence of art, religion and mathematics. In fact, the evolution of human culture can be defined by what the two scholars label "double-scope blending" because:

> …the history of mathematics shows that the concept of number has been repeatedly revised by creating blends in which we have two (or more) inputs – one with numbers of some kind, the other with elements of some kind. (*ibidem*: 242)

Therefore, the concept of conceptual blending can provide an enriching point of view for humour scholars. For example, Coulson focuses on the analysis of cartoons through the prism of conceptual blending:

> By projecting prominent personalities into new contexts, cartoonists can show us the ridiculous side of a serious situation, or, (as in many of the examples discussed above), the serious side of the ridiculous. […] Moreover, in exploiting the fortuitous structure that arises in blended spaces, humourous examples allow us to test the flexibility of our conceptual system, navigate the space of possible construals, and explore the radically different social and emotional consequences they can trigger. (Coulson, 2003: 77)

The ideas of conceptual blending in relation to humour scholarship are firmly based on Koestler's notion of bisociation. The successful integration of two matrices through blending produces a humorous outcome.

> Koestler's concept of matrices as skills, abilities, and symbolic codes that govern human behavior is compatible with the notion of cognitive models discussed in conceptual blending theory. When seemingly incompatible "matrices" are successfully integrated, the result is often humorous. (Coulson, 2005: 110)

Coulson in discussing the humourous content of several radio talks claims that the presence of successful of act blending, even though the discussed content, is humorous. She underlines:

> For many listeners, the candid (if not earnest) discussion of sex is amusement enough. For others, the juxtaposition of terminology from culturally respected domains of Christianity, Arthurian legends, and Greek mythology with the taboo topic of sex is similarly amusing. For yet others, it is the systematic nature of these juxtapositions that underlies the humour in these remarks. (*ibidem*: 117)

Coulson's proposition is that the blending of the "appropriately inappropriate" create humorous meaning.

> ….humorous conceptualizations that occur in the course of extemporaneous blending are, in part, shaped by the demands of conversational interaction as speakers attempt to blend "appropriately inappropriate" novel structure with contextually evoked concepts. (*ibidem*: 121)

Conceptual blending theory provides a series of advantages for humour studies as "a cognitive linguistic approach indeed provides articulate tools for the analysis of the complex, dynamic and creative issues of (verbal) humour generation and interpretation" (Brône and Feyaerts, 2003: 17). On the other hand, a clear difficulty of conceptual blending lies in the fact the "the question then arises to what extent scaling down or syncopating causal, temporal or other relations plays a constitutive role in establishing the balanced processing difficulty typical for non-bona-fide communication". (*ibidem*: 38). Ultimately, conceptual blending theory seems to depend on the fact that "it is useful to distinguish, if only for analytical purposes, between these different phenomena" (*ibidem*). Nevertheless, conceptual blending provides a holistic framework of useful tools focused on the cognitive aspects of humour.

1.2.2.2 Benign Violation

A little-known theory of humour that holds significant explanatory power is the theory of "benign violation" proposed by Tom Veatch. This theory is based on humour engendered through the violation

of a moral principle that the recipient cares about. Veatch sees morality as essentially what every individual considers "normality" or the "view of the world" of any recipient as the perception of how:

> "Things *should* be" and which the perceiver backs up with some affective -- that is to say, emotional -- commitment, such as a propensity to anger, offense, or fear when it is violated. These principles define the way things are supposed to be, the right way to do things -- that is, the proper arrangement of the natural and social world, and the proper conduct of behavior. (Veatch, 1998: 167)

A humorous violation is the perception from an individual perspective of something that is wrong within "everyday" normality. The affective commitment condition of how the violation can be defined as part of normality is the main requisite of humour. First, Veatch proposes that to successfully violate the individual's "everyday" arrangement in a humorous way the recipient should have a moderate attachment to, or a mild dislike of, the norm that is being violated. Likewise, the shared point of view on a given successful violation is a second element which transforms it into a humorous one. Therefore, according to this theory, normality and violation are the main conditions for humour:

> V - The perceiver has in mind a view of the situation as constituting a violation of some affective commitment of the perceiver to the way something in the situation ought to be. That is, a ``subjective moral principle'' (cf. next section) of the perceiver is violated.
>
> N - The perceiver has in mind a predominating view of the situation as being normal.
>
> Simultaneity - The N and V understandings are present in the mind of the perceiver at the same instant in time. (*ibidem*: 165)

Veatch claims that humour in some way violates moral order underlining that "if one doesn't actually share the values of one's audience, one must at least be able to understand and speak to their values, or the communication will fail or be misinterpreted" (*ibidem*: 167). The partial violation of "subjective moral order" provokes a different degree of response according to different variables which point to how accustomed the recipient is to the violated norm. Veatch underlines that when "a joke points out a violation of some person, group, or practice which is disliked, it seems more funny […] sexist jokes are especially funny to misogynists" (*ibidem*: 170). A violation is perceived as funny if it touches something personal and that is easy to comprehend. Veatch provides effective examples such as the act of ridicule of somebody who is disliked, a colleague at work, or the discovery of a non-harmful secret, such as a child who hides chocolate under the bed. Therefore, a violation can become funny, non-existent or a threat based on these two criteria of being a part of one's life and being simple to understand (*ibidem*: 197). This initial hypothesis offers rules of interaction on how humour works among individuals given the rules of their subjective morality.

Veatch uses the example of elephant jokes to propose a partially different explanation of humour from the classic interpretation based on incongruity. The way someone will react to these jokes is dependent on each individual's notion of "subjective moral order". For this hypothesis, the concept of benign violation emerges if the focus is not on the text itself but on the recipient's values:

> Q: How do you know that an elephant has been in the refrigerator?
> A: There are footprints in the butter dish.
>
> Q: How do you know that two elephants have been in the refrigerator?
> A: There are two sets of footprints in the butter dish.
>
> Q: How do you know that a herd of elephants has been in the refrigerator?
> A: There is a Volkswagen parked in front of your house and there are lots of footprints in the butter dish. (1998: 186)

Veatch argues that children are emotionally attached to certain rules and world view presuppositions, in the case of elephant jokes, these rules pertain to the size of elephants, the perception of dirt and the child's relationship with food. While children still maintain enough psychological distance to laugh about these primitive violations, adults who do not have a similar set of values may be annoyed by these jokes. The emotional attachment to a certain set of rules provides a key element to provoke humour for the benign violation hypothesis.

A decade later, McGraw and Warren elaborate on these ideas from a psychological viewpoint underlining that:

> …potentially benign moral violations tend to elicit laughter and behavioral displays of amusement; […] benign moral violations elicit mixed emotions of amusement and disgust, whereas moral violations that are not benign (i.e., malign violations) tend to elicit strictly negative emotion. (2010: 1142)

According to them, if two interpretations, namely "wrong" and "not wrong", are not present at the same time in a situation, humour cannot happen while different processes that include both interpretations at the same time are represented as humour. In other words, the ambiguous nature of violations is evaluated as simultaneously equally "wrong" and "not wrong" (*ibidem*). If these two interpretations are not simultaneous but follow one another instead, shock or confusion are the effects, not funniness. Ultimately, psychological distance is the last necessary element for humour to occur as well as playing a part to consider the effects of humour on human evolution:

> Distance does increase the humour perceived in highly aversive situations, such as getting hit by a car, closeness increases the humour perceived in mildly aversive situations, such as stubbing a toe. Because distance reduces threat, tragedies fail to be funny when one is too close for comfort, but mishaps fail to be funny when one is too far to care. (2012: 1223)

The human mind creates rules, norms and assumptions about the behavior of others. If such presumptions collapse, these can be seen as benign violations. McGraw considers the act of complaining as an example of a benign violation. McGraw, Warren and Kan (2015: 1154) claim that complaints emerge from interactions between people to liberate themselves and avoid the harmful effects of suppression of angry or sad feelings. They assert that when complaining is humorous it becomes "a behavioral expression of dissatisfaction that elicits a response characterized by the positive emotion of amusement, the appraisal that something is funny, and the tendency to laugh" (*ibidem*: 1155). Their conclusions are that "being humorous facilitates complaining goals related to entertainment, impression management, and raising awareness […] humour is less beneficial to people who complain in search of redress or sympathy" (*ibidem*: 1167). Ridiculousness, playfulness and non-seriousness of humour influence the stretching of the psychological distance between the benign violation and the recipient. To conclude, benign violation theory allows us to investigate the violations of moral norms and the humorous reactions to these transgressions.

1.2.3 Social theory of humour: Christie Davies' "moral axiom"

The final theoretical aspect of humour that I will explore in this study is Davies' sociological perspective that regards humour to be a thermometer of society. This standpoint regards group dynamics, morals and social values and their relationship to humour. Davies utilizes jokes as the main humorous items to be investigated, and is based on joke patterns in different cultures and nations.

> The method that is used throughout this study is to compare differences and similarities in the aggregate patterns of jokes between different nations and to try to match these with the social circumstances of those about whom the jokes are told and their relationship to the jokes tellers. (Davies, [2002] 2017: 4)

Davies' research is based on the commitment to the notion that "all groups and nations are internally differentiated" (*ibidem*) and that every moral and cultural matrix coexists with several fragments that are characteristic of another counter-culture. Humour can be understood through "independent evidence concerning the relevant social and historical circumstances in the society where the jokes were told at the time when they were told" (*ibidem*: 5). Furthermore, Davies suggests that jokes are generally based on dichotomies, on, for example, "two opposed qualities: the jokes about stupid and canny (crafty, calculating and stingy) groups" (*ibidem*: 8). Therefore, it is possible to extract the notion that societies, communities and groups rotate around a central moral axis, built on central hegemonic values, that directly affect humour because "opposed pairs of jokes will exist in a society

that are centered around a dominant moral axis of that society such as a stress on individual achievement through merit" (*ibidem*). Davies sees the language of jokes, and humour overall, as a form of play and suspension:

> The language of jokes is closer to, through different from, that of the stage (another kind of play) than to that of games; it involves the creation of illusion, a form of temporary deception by agreement that does not usually involve a seeking of advantage. (*ibidem*: 13)

Davies makes an analogy with the works of Durkheim on suicide to explain how to better understand humour:

> Durkheim's view that relative suicide rates are social facts to be explained in terms of other social facts is correct. Those of Durkheim's critics who start from the individual and his or her intentions and motives are never able to do more than speculate about purpose and cause and construct clumsy fragmented models. (*ibidem*: 15)

He underlines that jokes do not indicate "real" people but "ideal-typical" characters that represent a widely perceived meta-reality. Providing examples of jokes concerning drunken Scottish clergymen, he recognizes how a tendency of humour is exemplified through specific folklore characters such as the drunk or the fool. He sees "the stricter Presbyterians of the jokes not as typical Scots but as a kind of *ideal-typical* Scots' who had taken sound Scottish principles and virtues to an eccentric and anachronistic extreme" (*ibidem*: 31, *my emphasis*). Davies underlines that "the classic joke on the subject provides a mocking of an entire question conveyed through a stock figure, known for his uninhibited and irresponsible honesty, the drunk" (*ibidem*: 34).

Another important feature of humour from the group perspective is the criticism of ideological excess, Davies points out that "the jokes do not mock the Sabbatarian principle per se but rather the excessive zeal of those who subordinate other principles to it […] rather than the spirit which giveth life" (*ibidem*: 37). That is why humour is so widely present because "jokes are popular and entertaining and saleable to a far greater degree […] Folklore is pyrites, but jokes earn silver" (*ibidem*: 45). This invisible and playful moral struggle challenges "those who belong to an established majority are enclosed in a bubble of their own "normality" and, therefore, see the behavior of minorities as comic deviations" (*ibidem*: 47). Davies presents Jewish humour as an example of counter-culture humour because "Jewish humour is a means of playing with aggression that is launched *in all directions*, for it makes fun of everything and everyone" (*ibidem*: 55, *my emphasis*). Davies' idea is that while humorous items, such as jokes, have a moral value they are also ambiguous because "jokes could

easily be used as a vehicle for a moral comment […] at the price of ambiguity" (*ibidem*: 61). Humour is inevitably suspended, for Davies, between morality and ambiguity.

Characters represented in jokes and humour in general are not a reference to specific persons but have a catalyst role because "duty is a community-generated and community-imposed constraint on a choice […] the jokes do not so much mock Jewish women as *Jewish duty*" (*ibidem*: 86, *my emphasis*). Davies stands firm when he states that ultimately "joking involves *playing with the forbidden*" (*ibidem*, *my emphasis*). "Carnivalesque" humour of confusion exists, for example, in "the Australian humour of chundering within the hard-drinking, all-male group is a way of celebrating disorders, reversal and confusion" (*ibidem*: 93). Humour creates symbolic growth because Davies underlines "richness of imagery, simile and metaphor in humorous Australian vulgarity" (*ibidem*: 100).

The influence of modern values of rationality and increasing economic growth present "another central aspect of the modern world that is a source of jokes, namely the historic growth of control over impulses" (*ibidem*: 103). Davies finds that counter-cultures are "the best position to observe, to exaggerate and to laugh at cultural differences between themselves and their neighbors" (*ibidem*: 104) and provides a joke as an example: "Australian journalist interviewing Mrs. Gandhi. "Excuse me you've got a dirty mark on your forehead." Licks finger and wipes it off" (*ibidem*: 105). Modern civilized behaviour and the rules of etiquette create the necessary tension for humour because "rules become a source of humour when their legitimacy is still accepted but they are in practice frequently broken" (*ibidem*: 106). Davies quotes the case of the Jewish American Princess to underline that competition for success shapes modern humour far more than the ethnic identity of the characters themselves.

> J.A.P. jokes are as much jokes about *class* as about ethnicity […] a variety of cultural and historical forces have placed Jewish women and Australian men in social positions such that each has come to be humourously regarded as residing at the extremes of the social dimension I have described in terms of the contract between control on the one hand and absence or loss of control on the other. (*ibidem*: 107)

Davies states that "the best humour comes from within but the audiences are far more universal" (i*bidem*) and his findings underline that disgust can have an effect on humour based on cultural differences:

> The jokes are a very important diagnostic marker of a key difference between American and British culture, namely that the Americans perceive hygiene as an aspect of reality and as part of their technical mastery over ageing, human-imperfection. (*ibidem*: 123)

Considering that his research focuses on jokes in which targets are considered dirty, e.g. jokes about migrants and about Poles in US, one of the jokes Davies mentions is about Italians: "Do you know why Italians put a lock on their garbage cans? So that their children won't eat between meals" (*ibidem*: 126). He firmly states "the conflicts neither cause the jokes nor are they caused by jokes" (*ibidem*: 128). In fact, such jokes are not affected by aggression because "the *content* of the jokes about people being dirty remains the *same* regardless of levels of hostility" (*ibidem*: 131). For Davies, the vital component for aggression in jokes is not in the humour itself but in the intensity of ideological commitment to an overarching idea because "ideological fanaticism that creates danger for us all not the human search for amusement" (*ibidem*). Davies underlines that humour in itself does not channel aggressive behavior.

Davies sees that the same humorous content can have vastly different uses because the "same identically phrased items can carry a very different set of sentiments depending upon the tone, context, aim and purpose for which they are used" (*ibidem*: 148). Stupidity jokes emerge spontaneously around the center-periphery divide because "those at the edge are in the best position to create jokes and humour at the expense of the idiocy of urban life promoted by the center" (*ibidem*: 149). Protestant and capitalist ethics encourage the emergence of jokes that crystallize in an "American way of expressing disdain for blue-collar worker in a class-based society dominated by a national myth and ideology that denies that social classes exist in America" (*ibidem*: 158). Davies sees society and economy as a fundamental lever to understand humour. He states that successful class mobility leads to a diminishment of humour for a minority group, for example "mobility of the Irish out of their old visible settlement areas into middle-class suburbia in America after World War II was accompanied by the *decline* of stupidity jokes" (*ibidem*: 168). In a reverse of wrongly perceived evident intuition, Davies underlines that "it is not the dissolution of a pattern of stable working-class employment that leads to ethnic stupidity jokes but its persistence" (*ibidem*: 170). Davies expands on humour:

> The more modest claim that people enjoy humorous statements whose nearest serious counterparts would shock others and quite possibly themselves […] Humour is about mock shocks, mock frights and mock aggression and mock rule-breaking. (*ibidem*: 206).

He also emphasizes the lack of jokes during WW2 in which the targets are the Japanese although they were targeted in another humour genre, the hostile political cartoon. According to Davies, visual humour stimuli seem to be prevalent when real and intense hostility exists.

> The Japanese were widely seen in Britain and America as treacherous […] there were only overtly didactic hostile political cartoons which have little humourous impact. They merely use a degree of mocking caricature. (*ibidem*: 211)

Davies disagrees with the "group = one over-arching individual" paradigm as the "central fallacy underlying the displaced aggression thesis is […] treating the social order as if it were like an individual" (*ibidem*). In fact, he states the importance of understanding the offended violence in place of the joker because "analyses in terms of aggression or displaced aggression might be more appropriately applied to those who respond inappropriately to jokes and reply with disproportionate aggression to them" (*ibidem*: 212). Jokes and cartoons about the strategic bombing of German cities during the II World War in the Allied headquarters is an example of what humour does, especially in relation to morality, and why it is often banned. Davies states:

> Ideology had justified what was being done and had concealed it; the joke had in many senses played with the forbidden and had to be banned […] the joke had referred to a subject that those in power di not want mentioned and tweaked a moral issue that disturbed them. (*ibidem*: 217)

Humour and ideology are both irrational fantasies with the crucial difference that while humour is playful, ideology is a deadly serious phenomenon because "the frenzy of anti-Semitism was not built on imaginative jokes […] (but) on a quite different kind of irrational fantasy – on beliefs in Jews poisoning wells" (*ibidem*: 223). According to Davies, the collapse of the Soviet Union was marginally affected by dissident humour as "not that each joke was a tiny revolution with an aggregate effect rather than a series of tiny substitutes for the planning of a real revolution" (*ibidem*: 224). Therefore, for Davies the main paradigm of humour was to see it as a thermometer, or that "the jokes were as usual a thermometer but not a thermostat, a way of gaining insight into the workings of socialist society but not a cause of its demise" (*ibidem*: 225).

The technological race of human societies greatly complicates the understanding of humour because technology greatly accelerates social processes. Investigating the phenomenon of disaster jokes, Davies claims that the technological media revolution that bombarded the public with news about disasters through television encouraged their emergence .

> This element only emerged and fell into place in the 1960s, with the total triumph of television as the medium that provided a new kind of disaster reporting, in which the audience cannot avoid the intrusive pressure of dominating pictures combined with insistent moralistic commentary about how they ought to feel […] This was the crucial new factor that precipitated the new sick disaster jokes based on current events. (Davies, 2003: 19)

He concludes that young people represent a perfect example of this tendency to spread disaster jokes cycles because of their position in society. The moral fluidity of young people channeled by society placed in a "traditional" direction allows them to playfully rebel through humour. Davies underlines that "many young people were clearly responding to being lectured about their moral responsibilities by inventing jokes that mocked their media mentors. Such a response is very common" (*ibidem*: 22). Visual stimuli together with the reinforcement of moral rules seems to create a humorous and mocking response. Davies notices:

> This cynical amusement is then extended to television news reports, whose only claim to truth is that they are showing you the pictures. When the pictures are accompanied by insistent moralizing, instructing the viewer on how to respond to them, it is no wonder that disaster jokes become not only possible, but also popular. (*ibidem*: 25)

While limiting himself to joke-cycles, Davies notices that the internet is a way to expand and increase the spread of disaster jokes because "the internet is an electronic facilitator […] by providing templates for, encouraging emulation among, and granting legitimacy to disaster joke-tellers" (*ibidem*: 33). Most importantly for Davies, internet encourages the emergence of tribalism, both in its positive and negative effects, as "Internet is now enabling them to recreate virtual substitutes for the world they have lost" (*ibidem*: 34). Davies, a convinced libertarian, stresses that it is impossible to understand humour if it is approached exclusively from the currently dominant, as he call it "ideology of liberal egalitarianism" (*ibidem*). For Davies, the further we go towards another moral matrix that can be cultural or even an internal counter-cultural one, the less it is possible to understand occurrences of humour.

> The account given here of jokes suppressed and of jokes that survive that suppression is part of a general story of how the ideology of liberal egalitarianism held by those with power over words and symbols has come to pervade our culture to the point where even those who reject it do not publicly question it. Because those who hold it are powerful, they are able to pretend that this contested ideology constitutes the accepted morality of the society. Those who acknowledge and yet sneak round its prohibitions by telling jokes are always on the edge of being censored. If the jokes of those who enjoy this hegemonic cultural power offend those outside their magic circle of concern, they are of no account and jokes about them can be blared forth with impunity. However those whose jokes offend them will find themselves confined to a merely private space whose boundaries the powerful will then seek to constrict. (Davies, 2004: 14)

The segment of a population that imposes cultural hegemony in a society is a key influence on which jokes are considered funny and why other jokes are distasteful or even dangerous. Nevertheless, jokes never become completely extinct and remain hidden in private spaces. Davies sees this dichotomy of private/societal as a central challenge of studying and understanding humour.

> Davies viewed the ownership of jokes as an element to be used to reveal their meaning. The owner of a joke could be determined by searching for those who originated and publicized the joke. Jokes about Jews in Eastern Europe around the turn of the century were incomprehensible in their original form to non-Jews because the jokes played on special customs […] The groups with the lowest social status were the targets of the most primitive jokes. At the same time, joke-tellers tended to combine ethnicities perceived as foreign into one group. (Brook et al, 2006: 122)

Another of Davies' perspectives regards "carnivals" and their wrongly perceived uniquely harmless and benign nature. Davies points out that "when Bakhtin wrote about the medieval carnival, in many ways he had in mind the popular humour culture of the Soviet Union" (Davies, 2007: 301). Soviet culture of the time was full of parodied and reversed political rituals, slogans and ridiculed communist leaders expressed through jokes. In fact, Davies expands:

> Carnivals may well be benign events that, though the antithesis of the social order, reinforce it. […] Yet can it be shown that this is true of carnivals in general? The regime certainly did not think so, for it fostered blasphemous carnivals got up by communist aktivists as a political weapon. (*ibidem*)

Davies underlines that power does not play an exclusive role in humour but works in parallel to the building of moral communities that are usually encouraged by concrete gains to create an identity. This identity will absorb the jokes of its formation cycle to represent a further resource in its expansion.

> What is far more significant is the speed with which the jokers switch to overt opposition when the power of the oppressor is removed or relaxed, an indication that the jokes were part of a protest but one circumscribed by circumstance. Should there be a shift in the balance of power in favour of the oppressed, far from abandoning their political jokes, they may well make them part of their new and more overt and vigorous forms of resistance. (*ibidem*: 302)

The fall of the Soviet Union represents a central case for Davies' ideas regarding jokes. He underlines that jokes did not have concrete effects on the fall of the Soviet Union and points out:

> Shtromas, who was condemned and criticized at the time, was within six years proved right, and the jokes were part of his case, not as a cause of the collapse, but as a form of protest that indicated a danger that the Sovietologists could not see. […] Between times of overt protest the jokes flourished and lived alongside other totally serious expressions of low-level dissent and of passive resistance, the weapons of the weak. The jokes were the transportable, context-free, pleasurable aspect of this defiance that we know about; the rest was only observed and observable on a large scale by the secret police. The jokes were the tip of an iceberg of discontent. (*ibidem*: 304)

Davies' intuitions on humour as being based on a moral axiom of nations, communities and groups and as a thermometer to observe the evolution of political trajectories, magnified by technological

evolution and visual stimuli when present, allow us to enrich our perspective. This sociological view allows us to understand the evolution of humour and behaviour of counter-culture groups such as the radical right in the United Kingdom.

1.2.4. Summary

The GTVH appears to include elements from all the theoretical frameworks such as the importance of social context (social behaviourism) (see Brone et al, 2006: 212), frame of mind (Relief), the presence of a target in the text (Superiority) and the centrality of the punchline (Incongruity). Additionally, the GTVH seems particularly appropriate to be applied to computational humour, for example in "joke generator", programs that are capable of producing puns and jokes. In fact, Attardo (2017: 61) claims that research in artificial and robotic intelligence should be integrated with research on humour because it will allow us, for example, to revolutionize existing entertainment platforms. However, the theory does have weak points. Attardo himself admits that "there are of course a number of issues that have not been addressed: timing […] still remains a weak spot in the linguistics of humour" (2001: 208). Likewise, Veatch points out that GTVH "can't deal with differences that aren't in the text itself. It does not deal with humour that makes no use of linguistic means -- sight gags and slapstick […] clearly humour is not restricted to jokes" (1998: 183). Furthermore, Veale argues that it is not the joke that forces the humorous experience on the subject, as the double script suggests, but there is already a predisposition to search for humour when it appears:

> What is needed is not a logical mechanism as such, or a logic of oppositions, but a social logic that allows a theory to ground the interpretation in the specific concerns and prejudices of the listener as a social agent. (2004: 425)

However, the GTVH lacks explanatory power for all instances of humour. Brock criticizes the theory through weak points which it does not cover, such as the presence of multiple incongruities that are characterized by compound pairs of oppositions and a script collision which includes different layers of meaning (*ibidem*: 353-354).

Neither does conceptual blending provide a firm answer to the complexities of humour. It seems that conceptual blending can be used a tool to describe one relevant aspect on how the meaning of humorous situations emerges but not as an exclusive explanation, despite claims to the contrary (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002: 147). Glebkin underlines some of the weaknesses of conceptual blending theory starting from the examples used by Fauconnier and Turner:

> Another striking example is "The Debate with Kant." Authors suggest to imagine a contemporary philosopher discussing the issue whether reason is innate capacity when leading a seminar. During that dispute he appeals to Kant as his opponent […] For the authors we have here the two input spaces connected with modern philosopher making claims in English and with Kant thinking and writing German. In the blend we find two philosophers speaking English to discuss ultimate philosophical problems. Thus, the blended space emergent structure in some aspects differs from that of input spaces radically reflecting the novel mental (but not ontological) reality. (2013: 2405)

Adapting the conditions of the cases under analysis to the theory is the single most discussed point of the whole framework. Glebkin points out:

> The key question in this context is whether mental spaces are exclusively mental structures, which have no connection with human perception, or they are based on human sensorimotor experience. Although de jure the authors of conceptual blending theory stress the second opportunity, de facto they work with the first one. (*ibidem*: 2408)

Moreover, Glebkin underlines, as was evident in the case regarding Kant above, that "the second weak point of conceptual blending theory is the lack of cultural-historical analysis as well as the absence of experimental data justifying it" (*ibidem*). Conceptual blending's theoretical framework remains useful, for example, to better grasp the eureka moments that characterize creativity and unique merging of factors in a world of evolving complexity. Utilizing conceptual blending in conjunction with other theoretical frameworks can cover its less developed aspects and maximize its cognitive based point of view.

Likewise, the benign violation hypothesis attracted serious criticism for its superficiality from the authors of SSTH and GTVH. Attardo claims "these are basic, not that exciting things," he said. "the question is what kind of violation? How do you know it is benign?" (Attardo in Snow, 2014). It is self-evident that moral structure varies greatly between individuals both on a personality and socio-moral levels. Often the two concepts are in opposition or do not create humour at all. McGraw himself admits that for example "I really haven't nailed why things that are absurd are funny" (McGraw in Snow, 2014). Raskin judges "benign violation" theory harshly as a "very loose and vague metaphor […] he has no status" (2014: 13). The position of an academic in the scientific community can play a role for the acceptance or refusal of new theories.

Davies' idea of a "Moral axiom" or a "Thermometer" are the foundations on which I shall base the perspective on humour in this study. While Davies specifically focuses on jokes-patterns and does not explore the impact of social networks on humour in sufficient detail, his insights on humorous visual stimuli such as cartoons and the role of internet as an accelerator and facilitator become crucial. Moreover, his ideas of humour as a mirror of the values of a given culture, as well as the tool of the

emergence of ideal-typical humorous characters that blend these given values, provide the critical awareness necessary to approach the use of humour online by British radical right movements.

SSTH, GVTH, "Conceptual blending", "Benign violation" and Davies' "Moral axiom" conclude this overview of humour theories. The literature in the field of Humour Studies provides a basis for the following chapters. In the following section, I will provide an overview of selected literature regarding both the evolution of religions and cultures and in view of existing socio-moral structures.

1.3 The Function of Humour in this thesis

1.3.1 Humour as the Source of the Evolution of Morality

Morality, the body of rules and norms that represent a code of behaviour extracted from widely accepted religious, philosophical and cultural principles, plays a central role in all facets of human behaviour. In this thesis, in which the notion of morality is central, morality is conceived as a societal game involving behaviour conditioned by the evolutionary effectiveness of given norms. It is safe to state that human societies could not prosper without some sort of matrix of shared rules and we should also recognize that "terms like 'developed societies' and 'developing countries' are misleading because *all* human societies are in a state of flux" (Dunning and Hughes, 2013: 28, *my emphasis*). Dunning and Hughes note that Norbert Elias, for example, underlines the role of "smiling, laughing and crying in human communication and social bonding" (*ibidem*) linking these functions, often emerging through humour, in conjunction with morality. Furthermore, 'the body' and 'the emotions' are central to all fields and branches of sociological endeavour (*ibidem*: 42) and one of the first authors to observe this connection with great insight was Hume.

Hume's main argument is that morality is found within and that it is firmly connected to feelings. This logic can be applied to humour as the seriousness or non-seriousness of a situation can be interpreted through the same mechanism. In Hume's writings, humour can be regarded as part of our knowledge about other human beings that can be defined as "moral knowledge". Hume considers moral science as a challenge for a meticulous study about how humans behave and circumscribes the relationship between humour and the sacred as closely related because, with the world view changing from a religious-centric to a scientific-centric one, the sacred ran the risk of being transformed into something ridiculous.

A similar perspective is encountered in the work of Darwin. According to Pallen (2009: 43), it seems that "Darwin kept a list of books to be read and Hume's works feature several times". Time plays a central role in the Darwinian theoretical framework. Darwin states that "a moral being is one who is

capable of comparing his past and future actions or motives, and of approving or disapproving of them" ([1871] 1981: 88). Humour seems to, at least according to the Darwinian perspective, have developed together with the development of social reputation. Darwin underlines the role of humour, especially ridicule, in morality describing the moral sense of his own young son, who "became extremely sensitive to ridicule, and was so suspicious that he often thought people who were laughing and talking together were laughing at him" (1877: 291). Darwin emphasises that "primeval man, at a very remote period, would have been influenced by the praise and blame of his fellows […] the foundation-stone of morality" ([1871] 1981: 165). For Darwin's group-level selection of primitive man is based on continuous negotiations between aggression and empathy. More recently, Polimeni and Reiss (2006: 361), discussing the role of humour during human evolution from a Darwinian perspective, claim that primitive groups are characterized by "language replacing grooming, what mitigates aggressive tendencies between lesser-related individuals? Humour can't control pernicious disputes […] (but) it diminishes the risk of a contentious issue deteriorating to violence".

Darwin claims that humour is included in the moral sphere. It is an adaptation that evolved through natural selection that operates on both the individual and group level. Therefore, humour could have co-evolved with the cultural item defined as reputation within these first proto-moral structures. Within the Darwinian hypothesis, the actions of other members in the group and other groups were characterized by humour, in the form of ridicule, to enforce morality which permitted the gradual development of complex human societies.

There is a striking parallel between the work of Durkheim and the idea of biological 'inheritance' proposed by Darwin ([1871] 2010). Like Darwin, Durkheim assigns a significant role to what can be defined as the affective system (Fisk, 2005: 162-63). Durkheim argues that affects are biological forces that are aroused in different societies by social forces and often mentions humour as a relevant element of these social capacities. According to Miller (1996: 204), Durkheim defines man as a moral being able to innovate existing socio-moral structures to fulfil the ideas of his beliefs and eliminate the perceived obstacles in the rules and moral structure of society (*ibidem*: 260). Humour seems to be a part of this process:

> …not all of morality is formulated in clear precepts. The greater part is diffused. There is a large collective life which is at liberty; all sorts of currents come, go, circulate everywhere, cross and mingle in a thousand different ways, and just because they are constantly mobile are never crystalized in an objective form. Today, a breath of sadness and discouragement descends on society; tomorrow, one of joyous confidence will uplift all hearts. ([Durkheim 1897], 2005: 279)

Durkheim emphasizes that these movements and fluxes can exist without the need to modify existing moral maxims. The contrary is true as well. The morality in which joy, cheer and humour predominate is warped in its fundamental essence and Durkheim criticizes such an unbalanced state of morality:

> …the taste for happy expansiveness must be moderated by the opposite taste; only on this condition will it retain measure and harmonize with reality. It is the same with societies as with individuals. Too cheerful a morality is a loose morality; it is appropriate only to decadent peoples and is found only among them. (*ibidem*: 333)

Durkheim assesses the effects of an excessive use of humour by groups and individuals in the corrosion of moral structures. The effects of cheerfulness may stretch existing moral structures and moral sense becomes unreliable as every sacred element is considered non-serious and it is ridiculed. Durkheim exemplifies this through the charismatic orator who has:

> The curious posture that is so characteristic of a man who is speaking to a crowd—if he has achieved communion with it. His language becomes high-flown in a way that would be ridiculous in ordinary circumstances; […] his very thought becomes impatient of limits and slips easily into every kind of extreme. (*ibidem*: 212)

If the feeling of the sacred can suppress the ridiculous, the contrary is also true and an individual or group with a different moral matrix can challenge the sacred speaker through humour.

This deduction is applied to the origins of morality itself. The moral tension Durkheim sees between human biological nature and our socially acquired moral matrix could be addressed by humour as a connecting social force. If integration into society is too strong, spontaneously emerging humour will weaken these social bonds. Equally, if the collective conscience is weak, humour will eventually characterize forces striving for a more united society. Durkheim emphasizes the need for a shared rhythm, that he calls effervescence, during rituals to enforce the moral rules that characterize the evolutionary process:

> The initial impulse is thereby amplified each time it is echoed, like an avalanche that grows as it goes along […] the effervescence often becomes so intense that it leads to outlandish behavior; the passions unleashed are so torrential that nothing can hold them. People are so far outside the ordinary conditions of life, and so conscious of the fact, that they feel a certain need to set themselves above and beyond ordinary morality ([1912] 1995: 218).

Durkheim formulates the hypothesis that humour probably emerged as group behaviour to protect or change precise aspects of the moral structure, seen in the process of ridiculing the outcast or to uplift the community through moral synergy. Humour was acquired as an individual capacity, through a

gradual process of individualization in western cultures. Following this initial phase, came the creation of the humorous frame through ritual and shared excitement.

The modern individual's inherited humour is described as a private capacity to redefine existing moral rules. Durkheim focused much of his efforts in understanding how the weakening of traditional structures, like the church, family and community, characterized Western society. Mockery towards these structures and positive reinforcement of 'deviant' behaviour through humour was an example of growing power of the individual through scientific advancement. Durkheim proposes that the ambiguity of the sacred and the profane which "instead of contaminating, it sanctifies, […] there is the same contrast between the lucky and the unlucky sacred as between the states of collective euphoria and dysphoria" (*ibidem*: 416-417). Therefore, humour from this angle of analysis represents a product of ecstatic rituals and a way to propose ideas in a humorous frame that allows human beings to subvert concepts considered sacred in wider society. Since the source of morality is not static, it is open to renewal and updating, especially by different individuals and groups with a different moral matrix. Humour is portrayed in Durkheimian thought as one of the paths through which an attempt to uphold or destabilize societal values and norms can be performed.

Geertz explores the ritualistic potential of humour which can in part explain its role in the evolutionary process and its presence in mythical narratives. Cosmogony is a collection of myths in which the creation of the universe is described. These myths that exist in different cultures appear to be characterized by elements of humour. Geertz claims that different societies realize that, in a Copernican transformation of what reality means, through "a ritual, the world as lived and the world as imagined, fused under the agency of a single set of symbolic forms, turn out to be the same world" (1973: 112). Therefore, a ritual is both a way of preservation and simultaneously of changing norms and values. Geertz describes ritual performances in Bali as a cyclic battle between, the Queen of Chaos, Rangda and, the Monster Dragon, Barong. Rangda is a horrific figure with "dead-white hands, from which protrude ten-inch clawlike fingernails, out in front of her and utters unnerving shrieks of metallic laughter" (*ibidem*: 114). Barong instead is "adorned with flowers, sashes, feathers, mirrors, and a comical beard made from human hair" (*ibidem*). The counterpart of chaos and horror is a comic dragon and "if Rangda is a satanic image, Barong is a farcical one, and their clash is a clash (an inconclusive one) between the malignant and the ludicrous" (*ibidem*). This Cosmogony of Good and Evil is a spectacle in which "implacable malice and low comedy pervades the whole performance" (*ibidem*: 115). This ritualistic struggle pervades every aspect of behaviour of whoever participates in the ritual. The boundaries of what is considered acceptable constantly shift during the performance:

> Nor are the humorous and the horrible always kept rigidly separated, as in that strange scene in one section of the cycle in which several minor witches (disciples of Rangda) toss the corpse of a stillborn child around to the wild amusement of the audience; or another, no less strange, in which the sight of a pregnant woman alternating hysterically between tears and laughter while being knocked about by a group of gravediggers, seems for some reason excruciatingly funny. The twin themes of horror and hilarity find their purest expression in the two protagonists and their endless, indecisive struggle for dominance, but they are woven with deliberate intricacy through the whole texture of the drama. (*ibidem*)

Geertz underlines that through a single set of symbols the ritual provides a collection of motivations and moods, an ethical system, and a view of the world. The performance of both mythological figures creates a model for and of aspects of the religious system (*ibidem*: 118). Rangda, who represents fear and horror, is opposed to Barong who "not only induces laughter, he incarnates the Balinese version of the comic spirit […] which, along with fear, is perhaps the dominant motive in their life" (*ibidem*). This theme of horror and fear mirrored in the comic spirit is deeply ingrained in different cultures as an incessant process of constant change. Horror and humour shape the actions of men by shifting the perception of the boundaries of norms. Both emotions are gut-based, with horror provoking gut wrenching disgust that forever change the approach to a dark forest or a cemetery while humour sometimes gradually, sometimes rapidly, diminishes the seriousness of a ritual, a figure or a person.

Another way in which these symbolic aspects survive throughout time can be found in what Geertz defines as common sense. He sees common sense as a widespread and not cohesive way of interpretation of experience. Geertz interprets commons sense as a "cultural system, though not usually a very tightly integrated one, and it rests on the same basis that any other such system rests; the conviction […] of its value and validity" (1983: 76). Geertz identifies several qualities of common sense among which he lists humour that he sees as part of "immethodicalness" (*ibidem*: 90). Geertz's definition is that "common-sense wisdom is shamelessly and unapologetically ad hoc. It comes in epigrams, proverbs, obiter dicta, jokes, anecdotes, contes morals – a clatter of gnomic utterances – not in formal doctrines, axiomized theories, or architectonic dogmas" (*ibidem*). Despite differences between individuals, common sense allows for a practical interpretation of reality, especially through humour. Geertz sees common sense as what remains when articulated symbols systems exhaust their tasks at the basis of organized human societies (*ibidem*: 92). Geertz concludes his analysis of common sense by saying:

> If knowing chalk from cheese, a hawk from a handsaw, or your ass from your elbow ("earthiness" might well have been adduced as another quasi-quality of common sense) is as positive an accomplishment, if perhaps not so lofty a one, as appreciating motets, following a logic proof, keeping the Covenant, or demolishing capitalism. (*ibidem*: 93)

Ultimately, Geertz presents an intrinsically humorous vision of cosmogonic rituals, symbolic activities and basic common sense. Humour creates, dismantles and stretches boundaries of values and norms in human societies.

Haidt's current moral foundations theory will conclude this outline of the role of humour on morality. Moral psychology in detail analyzes the functioning of humour as part of the moral matrices in human societies. Haidt confirms Darwin's intuition that the role humour serves to condemn the failings in the behaviour of others. Haidt affirms:

> It's fun to laugh at a hypocrite, and recent years have given Americans a great deal to laugh at […] a special pleasure in the irony of a moralist brought down for the very moral failings he has condemned. It's the pleasure of a well-told joke. Some jokes are funny as one-liners, but most require three verses: three guys, say, who walk into a bar one at a time, or a priest, a minister, and a rabbi in a lifeboat. The first two set the pattern, and the third violates it. With hypocrisy, the hypocrite's preaching is the setup, the hypocritical action is the punch line. (2006: 59-60)

The ridiculing of a hypocrite allows us to evoke contempt that can be defined as "a moral emotion that gives feelings of moral superiority while asking for nothing in return" (*ibidem*: 60). Haidt underlines that this feeling serves different functions: avoiding anger, overcoming the need for the vengeance, processing the feelings of fear and disgust. Moreover, contempt is ideal for sharing gossip and it spreads like wildfire. Humorously expressed contempt allows people "to show that they share a common moral orientation […] a cynical story that ends with both of you smirking and shaking your heads and voilà, you've got a bond" (*ibidem*). Haidt recalls Peterson and Seligman's classification of the virtues of character to find in "humour a means to transcendence" (*ibidem*: 169) as it allows us to evade the moral imperative linked to boundaries, struggles and shame. Haidt remarks that "humour helps people cope with adversity" (*ibidem*: 208) where it can push individuals and communities to search for meaning embedded in morality. Haidt points out:

> In *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, a gigantic computer built to answer the Holy Question spits out its solution after 7.5 million years of computation: "forty-two." In the closing scene of the movie Monty Python's *The Meaning of Life*, the answer to the Holy Question is handed to the actor Michael Palin (in drag), who reads it aloud: "Try to be nice to people, avoid eating fat, read a good book every now and then, get some walking in, and try to live in harmony with people of all creeds and nations." These answers are funny precisely because they take the form of good answers, yet their content is empty or mundane. These parodies invite us to laugh at ourselves and ask: What was I expecting? (*ibidem*: 216)

The search for answers that are valuable for the individual on a moral level often take on humorous forms. Haidt confirms the role of humour as part of the formation of moral communities, ridicule of the trespassers of moral boundaries and challenging repressive norms. Learning moral norms is often

accomplished through humour. Haidt reports a dialogue on moral judgement between the subject, a father, and his interviewer, a four years old child:

> Interviewer: Well, what would happen if we all pooped in the sink at home? Subject: [pause] I guess we'd all get in trouble. Interviewer: [laughing] Yeah, we'd all get in trouble! (2012: 26)

Haidt invites us to focus on the playful and primitively humorous reshaping of transgressions to avoid punishment (*ibidem*: 27). Innate moral intuition completes cultural learning and rational self-construction of norms. When the punisher is removed in a playful way "the subject still clings to a notion of cosmic justice" (*ibidem*) on how trouble is inevitable. Moral judgement is often expressed in a humorous way or at least is evaluated through the lens of humour. Haidt reports different harmless taboo violations with invented stories as such:

> Julie and Mark, who are sister and brother, are travelling together in France. […] They decide that it would be interesting and fun if they tried making love. […] Julie is already taking birth control pills, but Mark uses a condom too, just to be safe. They both enjoy it, but they decide not to do it again […] Was it wrong for them to have sex? (*ibidem*: 45)

People responding to this narrative tend to generate different reasons why it is wrong and rarely change their opinions. Moreover, this stream of reasons is often confused and humorous:

> Subject: Ok, um […] how old were they? Experimenter: They were college age, around 20 or so. Subject: Oh, oh [looks disappointed]. I don't know, I just…it's just not something you're brought up to do. It's just not – well, I mean I wasn't. I assume most people aren't [laughs]. (*ibidem*: 46)

Haidt claims that rational reasoning in moral judgement is a post hoc secondary process (*ibidem*: 47). He points out that "moral judgement is a cognitive process […] between two different kinds of cognition: intuition and reasoning (*ibidem*: 53). It appears as proven that "automatic processes run the human mind […] like software that has been improved through thousands of product cycles" (*ibidem*). If intuitions are the central pillar of morality, humour seems to play a central role if the attachment of the individual to the violated moral norms are shifting or uncertain.

Haidt provides an example that explains the relationship of psychopaths with morality. Psychopaths can understand but lack "emotions that indicate that they care about other people" (*ibidem*: 72). He reports an interview with a psychopath who had murdered an elderly man: "he's gurgling and making sounds like a stuck pig! [laughs] […] I grab a few beers from the fridge and turn on the TV and fall asleep. The cops woke me up [laughs]" (*ibidem*: 73). As the emotions related to others disappear humorous interpretation can be given to situations which the majority of people will evaluate as

morally abhorrent. Cultural evolution conditions the proper use of humour on the part of the individual as a member of a moral community. Haidt proposes five main foundations of morality:

	Care/Harm	Fairness/ Cheating	Loyalty/ Betrayal	Authority/ Subversion	Sanctity/ Degradation
Adaptive Challenge	Protect and care for children	Reap benefits of two-way partnerships	Form cohesive coalitions	Forge beneficial relationships within hierarchies	Avoid contamination
Original Triggers	Suffering, distress, or neediness expressed by one's child	Cheating, cooperation, deception	Threat or challenge to group	Signs of dominance and submission	Waste products, diseased people
Current Triggers	Baby seals, cute cartoon characters	Marital fidelity, broken vending machines	Sports teams, nations	Bosses, respected professionals	Taboo ideas (communism, racism)
Characteristic Emotions	Compassion	Anger, gratitude, guilt	Group pride, rage at traitors	Respect, fear	Disgust
Relevant Virtues	Caring, kindness	Fairness, justice, trustworthiness	Loyalty, patriotism, self-sacrifice	Obedience, diference	Temperance, chastity, piety, cleanliness

Fig. 1 The five foundations of morality. (Haidt, 2012, 146)

The five moral foundations proposed by Haidt can be divided into two main groups that are representative of two political tribes, given the data Haidt presents. Liberals and progressives, the left-wing spectrum, focus on Care (the cherishing and protecting others) and Fairness (rendering justice due to shared rules). Conservatives and reactionaries, the right-wing spectrum, while having the previous two notions attribute greater value on Loyalty (standing with the group, family and nation), Authority (following tradition and authority) and Sanctity (heightened disgust for foods, actions or moral difference). Libertarians seems to represent a group that follow a unique Liberty foundation, not included by Haidt in this classification, that cares exclusively about personal freedom beyond both tribal matrixes. Two elements need to be specified. First, that for Haidt these moral foundations are biologically prewired, or flexible and "organized in advance of experience" (*ibidem*: 153). Second, this first draft is modified and updated during life, especially childhood, to "produce the diversity of moralities we find across cultures" (*ibidem*). The evolutionary origins of humour in this system of moral foundations can be traced to what Haidt reports as "ecstatic dance" which can be defined as a "biotechnology for dissolving hierarchy and bonding people to each other as a community […] men dress as women, peasants pretend to be nobles, and leaders can be safely mocked" (*ibidem*: 280). Haidt does not specify explicitly what role humour plays but it seems to be integral to this framework based on the moral foundations. Humour, defined as Seriousness/Non-seriousness, could represent the sixth foundation that represents the "amniotic fluid" of morality. The playful violation and the strength of attachment to each foundation's values and rules is differently codified in each culture and political tribe. Following Haidt's classification, Humour as a moral foundation has the following characteristics: Adaptative challenge – Speed of thought and the state of Moral boundaries, rules and norms; Original triggers – Play, Reputation and Carnivalesque ritual;

Current triggers – Comedy, Memes and the Political game; Characteristic emotions – Humour, Surprise and Disgust; Relevant virtues – Sense of humour, Openness to experience and Flexibility of Intelligence.

This brief outline of the literature on the evolutionary role of humour puts forward the idea on how it emerged across the millennia. First, humour surfaced through the gradual emergence of the group capacity to use ridicule, scorn and contempt to uphold a group's values. Second, an increasing individualization of humour occurred through different possible stages: collective ritual, a ritualized role such as the jester that eventually became the modern stand-up comedian and more or less developed individual capacity to act in a humorous way. Hume and Darwin analyze humour in the gossip function of communication as shaping reputation and credibility of moral rules. Durkheim expands on the effects of humour in stretching moral structures as well as focusing on the ritualistic functions of humour as "collective effervescence" and charismatic function. Geertz focuses on rituals and the symbolic significance of humour in a collective moral structure. Haidt collects these ideas in a coherent theory of moral foundations of society to which he adds the notion of the individualized "ecstatic dance".

The next section will discuss humour as a process to be detached from existing values and norms and create new ones.

1.3.2. Humour as a means of Moral Transcendence

In this section I will discuss how humour is portrayed in western thought as an attempt to transcend values and norms. Transcendence, the ability to go beyond, physical and societal reality, is closely connected to humour. Human beings often use humour to overcome moral obstacles and go beyond existential dilemmas, which is why humour becomes a quality of transcendence that, like hope and spirituality, connects us to something larger in the universe (Muller and Ruch, 2011: 372). What follows is a discussion of the thoughts of Nietzche, Bakhtin, Frankl and Kristeva.

1.3.2.1 Friedrich Nietzsche

A philosopher who argues in favour of this interpretation is Nietzsche who places laughter and the humorous as the pillar of his philosophy. He claims humour is a bridge to reach true knowledge as "maybe then laughter will be connected to wisdom, maybe then there will be only a gay science" ([1882] 2008: 63). Moreover, Nietzsche is adamant about the fact that creators of moral systems will be inevitably possessed and changed by humour as "in the long run laughter and reason and nature

will possess each of these great masters of finality" (*ibidem*: 64). Nietzsche claims that humour and "all experiences are moral, even in the sensorial realm" (*ibidem*: 118). The value of laughter and humour is evident in Nietzsche's criticism of Hobbes in *Beyond Good and Evil*:

> As a difference of that philosopher, who being a real Englishman tried to bring laughter in disrepute among all thinking heads […] I would go so far to create a hierarchy of philosophers according to the rank of their laughter […] Gods delight in making fun: even where sacred actions are concerned, it seems they cannot stop laughing. ([1886] 2008: 558)

Nietzsche sees humour as the highest form of human expression. He observes that creation of new meaning, which briefly crystallizes in values and norms before changing again, is unpacked through humour. Moreover, the humorous creation of norms and values is a healthy act for Nietzsche, healing being the other main goal of his philosophy. He points out that "objection, evasion, joyous distrust, and love of irony are signs of health; everything absolute belongs to pathology" (*ibidem*: 484). Clark examines how to define this philosophical approach as a moral system and comments:

> The proper moral attitude, at least as Nietzsche sees it. The moral attitude is that the value of the whole is vitiated by its moral failures, and the whole process is in need of redemption by some morally better future to which it leads. (1990: 286)

This vision is incarnated through Nietzsche's own literary alter-ego, and saviour figure, Zarathustra.

The message of Zarathustra is an idealistic one. He is searching for an "Ubermensch", an over-man, who represents a continuously self-overcoming human existence and the next step in human evolution. Nietzsche underlines that "this secret was uncovered for me by life itself: "here, - she said "I am that which always overcomes myself" ([1885] 2008: 291). Humour, irony and laughter are means to shape what exists into the future. Nietzsche writes that "outsiders and objects of ridicule are for me the current (human beings) […] so I love only the country of my children" (*ibidem*: 294). Zarathustra is seeking to "redeem *this* present" (*ibidem*: 295). Nietzsche describes the qualitative difference between his "Ubermensch" and the best men of his time: "really, you good and righteous! Much is ridiculous in you […] this is my doubt about you and my hidden laugh: I suspect that you will call my superman – the devil" (*ibidem*: 308). Zarathustra points out throughout the text that his mortal foe is the spirit of gravity, the seriousness unredeemed by dancing and a light heart (*ibidem*: 335) that suppresses all the vital aspects of human existence. It is through a humorous act that gravity is defeated by a superman-like being. In a parable, Zarathustra sees a shepherd on the ground with a snake holding fast to the back of his throat so he tries to help by shouting and pulling at the reptile with all his might. Zarathustra shouts at the shepherd, telling him to bite the snake's head off, which

he does, and this act transforms him into "one changed, radiant, laughing! Never yet on earth has a human being laughed as he laughed!" (*ibidem*: 316). The snake represents the spirit of gravity which is overpowered by a moral and *humorous* act, the unexpected and comic biting off the head of snake, creates a laughing being who seems divine to Zarathustra. Nietzsche underlines this point writing that "false is every truth which is not expressed through laughter" (*ibidem*: 347).

In the New Testament, Luke 6:25 condemns laughter in proclaiming "woe to you who laugh now". Christianity created values and norms through abstinence and is full of the "spirit of gravity". On the contrary, Nietzsche's vision of the overman is based on the playfulness, laughter and humour (*ibidem*: 408) from which new ideas and values continuously emerge. Curiously, for the author of the Antichrist, Zarathustra mirrors the crowning of Christ in stating that "this crown of the laughter, the rosary crown: to you, my brothers, I throw this crown! I pronounced laughter holy: you higher men, learn — to laugh!" (*ibidem*: 396). Therefore, Christ's crown of thorns is swapped for the rosary crown of the overman.

1.3.2.2 Mikhail Bakhtin

Bakhtin, one of the principal exponents of the carnivaleque, explores humour in folk culture and divides it into three distinct forms :

1. Ritual spectacles: carnival pageants, comic shows of the marketplace.
2. Comic verbal compositions: parodies both oral and written, in Latin and in the vernacular.
3. Various genres of billingsgate: curses, oaths, popular blazons.

> These three forms of folk humour, reflecting in spite of their variety a single humorous aspect of the world, are closely linked and interwoven in many ways. ([1965] 1984: 5)

Bakhtin separates ancient pagan rituals from humour in the individual. He focuses on the humorous nature of mediaeval folk culture where "civil and social ceremonies and rituals took on a comic aspect as clowns and fools, constant participants in these festivals, mimicked serious rituals" (*ibidem*). The humorous aspect emerges in the figures that embody the spirit of the carnival and transform religious morality. Bakhtin points out that essentially the main goal of the carnival was the presence of "comic cults which laughed and scoffed.at the deity ("ritual laughter") (*ibidem*: 6). These festivals allowed the comic to survive beyond the frame of the carnival as "clowns and fools […] the constant, accredited representatives of the carnival spirit in everyday life out of carnival season" (*ibidem*: 8).

The apotheosis of folk culture was achieved, according to Bakhtin, through a festivity that re-evaluated values and norms and suspended morals:

> Carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal. (*ibidem*: 10)

Bakhtin sees the carnival as a space for people to freely, playfully and humorously re-shape society and its functions. This was possible through "this temporary suspension, both ideal and real, of hierarchical rank created during carnival time a special type of communication" (*ibidem*). This aspect is interesting as it foreshadows the individualization of humour that emerged much later as a form of playful communication that had the same aim. In fact,carnivalesque humour projects a utopian possibility of mockery and playful equality. Bakhtin sees the transformation and individualization of the carnival in the friendly banter culture of conversation between friends:

> When two persons establish friendly relations, the form of their verbal intercourse also changes abruptly; they address each other informally, abusive words are used affectionately, and mutual mockery is permitted. (In formal intercourse only a third person can be mocked.) […] elements of the old ritual of fraternization were preserved in the carnival and were given a deeper meaning. (*ibidem*: 16)

Therefore, there is a mutual influence between the carnival and smaller rituals of humorous interaction. Bakhtin claims that the carnivalesque precedes innovation:

> The principle of laughter and the carnival spirit on which grotesque is based destroys this limited seriousness and all pretense of an extratemporal meaning and unconditional value of necessity. It frees human consciousness, thought, and imagination for new potentialities. For this reason great changes, even in the field of science, are always preceded by a certain carnival consciousness that prepares the way. (*ibidem*: 49)

The act of shaping by the carnivalesque affects norms and values. He remarks:

> The jokes and stories concerned especially material bodily life, and were of a carnival type. Permission to laugh was granted simultaneously with the permission to eat meat […] The theme of birth of the new was organically linked with the theme of death of the old on a gay and degrading level, with the images of a clownish carnivalesque uncrowning. (*ibidem*: 79)

The spirit of the carnival affects authority within a societal framework. There are individuals who become the clownish authority of this process of redefinition. Bakhtin affirms that the opening up of the future is a constant humorous warping of time and space:

> The face of the people of the marketplace looked into the future and laughed, attending the funeral of the past and present. The marketplace feast opposed the protective, timeless stability […] stressed the element of change and renewal. (*ibidem*: 81)

He also recognizes a mutual dependency between the societal body and the moral essence of society. Humour is a central part of this ambiguity and Bakhtin focus on this bodily aspect of this constant transformation:

> The medieval culture of laughter was the drama of bodily life (copulation, birth, growth, eating, drinking, defecation) […] it was the drama of the great generic body of the people, and for this generic body birth and death are not an absolute beginning and end but merely elements of continuous growth and renewal. (*ibidem*: 88)

In Bakhtin's view, political change passes through the carnivalesque. He sees this process in the fact that:

> In such a system the king is the clown. He is elected by all the people and is mocked by all the people […] The abuse and thrashing are equivalent to a change of costume, to a metamorphosis. (*ibidem*: 197)

Change in values and norms or political change pass through the same process of humourous transformation. Bakhtin recognizes the potential of a timeless and irreversible change observable through the carnivalesque, for example, in "the Renaissance is, so to speak, a direct "carnivalization" of human consciousness, philosophy, and literature" (*ibidem*: 273). This carnivalesque activity at all the levels of societal hierarchy translates into "the idea of the deposed higher powers and truths had become part of the nucleus of carnival images" (*ibidem*: 393). What is humorous forms itself from the carnivalesque into the moral structure of society. Bakhtin elevates the humorous through the notion the "carnival celebrates the destruction of the old and the birth of the new world-the new year, the new spring, the new kingdom" (*ibidem*: 410). Bakhtin sees in the carnivalesque and the humorous a process which is "productively active only at the moment of bringing a valid-in-itself truth into communion with actual historical Being" ([1993] 1999: 26). He observes in the carnival the characteristic that "the performed act concentrates, correlates, and resolves within a unitary and unique and, this time, final context both the sense and the fact" (*ibidem*: 29).

Gardiner (1992: 165) argues that subversive humour spreads through society like "… an aggregate body with a characteristic cultural tradition (the carnivalesque), which constitutes a kind of unconscious archetype 'behind the backs'". The individual is affected both as individual and as part of the group as "self-ness is constituted through the operation of a dense and conflicting network of

discourses, cultural and social practices" (*ibidem*). It is possible to conclude affirming that "Bakhtin's view is to conceptualize human beings […] as reflexive agents embodying a range of socially-determined practical capacities, a repertoire of collective skills and resources" (*ibidem*: 166). The way in which the carnival process is embodied through the individual to create the needed change to start the humorous re-shaping of society anew is part of social structures of existing societies.

1.3.2.3 Viktor Frankl

Let us now consider the work of neurologist Viktor Frankl on how humour and irony play a role in creating what he calls "meaning" for human life, an answer to the nihilistic behaviour that erupted into World War II. Frankl's ambition was to create a new perspective on the vital role of humour in such new, horrific, conditions. The end-result of this research lies in Frankl's most renowned work about his own experience in a concentration camp:

> …there were songs, poems, jokes, some with underlying satire regarding the camp. All were meant to help us forget, and they did help. The gatherings were so effective that a few ordinary prisoners went to see the cabaret in spite of their fatigue even though they missed their daily portion of food by going. ([1946] 1992: 52)

When Frankl and other prisoners were moved from Auschwitz to another camp he writes that "we had come, as quickly as possible, to a camp which did not have a "chimney" - unlike Auschwitz. We laughed and cracked jokes" (*ibidem*: 56). Another aspect of this phenomenon is the behaviour towards the privileged prisoners, higher in the hierarchy of the camp:

> The mental reaction of the envious and grumbling majority toward this favored minority found expression in several ways, sometimes in jokes. For instance, I heard one prisoner talk to another about a Capo, saying, "Imagine! I knew that man when he was only the president of a large bank. Isn't it fortunate that he has risen so far in the world?" (*ibidem*: 72)

Frankl emphasizes this capacity to create humour in these circumstances as "one could make a victory of those experiences, turning life into an inner triumph, or one could ignore the challenge and simply vegetate, as did a majority of the prisoners" (*ibidem*: 81). Being able to joke in a death camp provokes the rediscovery of humour to each prisoner. Frankl includes Nietzsche's line of thought:

> Any attempt to restore a man's inner strength in the camp had first to succeed in showing him some future goal. Nietzsche's words, "He who has a why to live for can bear with almost any how," […] it did not really matter what we expected from life, but rather what life expected from us. We needed to stop asking about the meaning of life, and instead to think of ourselves as those who were being questioned by life—daily and hourly. (*ibidem*: 84-85)

Humour and irony play a vital role in maintaining a benevolent detachment even in a place like a concentration camp and Frankl sees human beings not wanting to be happy "but rather in search of a reason to become happy, last but not least, through actualizing the potential meaning inherent and dormant in a given situation" (*ibidem*: 140). He underlines that humour works similarly, in fact "if you want anyone to laugh you have to provide him with a reason, […] in no way is it possible to evoke real laughter by urging him, or having him urge himself, to laugh" (*ibidem*). Frankl integrates humour as part of the broader reason to live to recognize its potential in creating meaning. He underlines that "only man owns the capacity to detach himself from himself. To look at himself out of some perspective or distance" (1967: 147). Moreover, human beings have a developed sense of humour as "no animal is capable of laughing, least of all laughing at itself or about itself" (*ibidem*: 4). Frankl incorporates this elaboration of humour in his therapeutic practice:

> Therapy of psychogenic neuroses, we must, in order to exhaust every possibility, fall back on the no less distinguishing capability of self-distancing, which is seen not least of all in a sense of humour […] a glimpse of self-transcendence and get hold of self-distancing. (2004: 13)

Frankl adopts humour as a therapeutic instrument by adapting patients' values through humour to achieve transcendence. It is "an integral element in Frankl's paradoxical intention procedure", namely, "the deliberate evocation of humour […] the patient must formulate the paradoxical intention belongs to the essence of this technique" (*ibidem*: 19). Frankl's technique is to humorously portray through a paradox, different possible future versions of a patient's personality to reshape the existing pathological state into a new moral structure. It is usual for Frankl's patients that "their anxiety provoking situations would have been confronted, spontaneously and jokingly exaggerated their fear to themselves and with each other" (*ibidem*: 20). Ultimately, Frankl gives a central role to humour as a therapy tool because:

> Patients should learn to look anxiety in the face, indeed to laugh in its face. This requires the courage to be ridiculous. […] Nothing frees patients to achieve this self-distance as does humour. Humour deserves to be called an "existential trait," on the same level as "concern" (Sorge) (M. Heidegger) and love (L. Binswanger). (*ibidem*: 194)

Therefore, Frankl defines humour as an existential trait that allows a human being to transcend to a future version of themselves.

1.3.2.4 Julia Kristeva

Julia Kristeva proposes the potential of humour from the perspective of the abject. She writes that "abjection is a resurrection that has gone through death (of the ego) […] that transforms death drive into a start of life, of new significance" (1982: 15). Kristeva experiments with this concept and describes the witnessing of the abject as a situation that interrupts moral laws. Her analysis of the abject, from the perspective of Dostoyevsky, defines "abjection then wavers between the fading away of all meaning and all humanity, burnt as by flames of a conflagration, and the ecstasy of an ego" (*ibidem*: 18). Old values and norms evaporate through a radical departure of what the word 'human' itself means. Kristeva underlines that "the religious answer to abjection breaks in: defilement, taboo, or sin" (*ibidem*: 48). Rigid boundaries emerge to block the horrid and playful attraction to the abject. Kristeva points out that the ironic self-recognition of a human being as abject creates "a bridge that has been built toward another logic of abjection: […] transgression due to misreading of the Law (*ibidem*: 88). The universal symbolic elements in languages, Kristeva claims, provide an insight in the humorous nature of this process. Kristeva points out that "the gouged-out eye, the wound, the basic incompleteness that conditions the indefinite quest of signifying concatenations […] to joying in the truth of self-division (abjection/sacred)" (*ibidem*: 89). She explores this amoral humorous quality of the abject throughout the writings of Céline:

> Today's universe is divided between boredom (increasingly anguished at the prospect of losing its resources through depletion) or (when the spark of the symbolic is maintained and desire to speak explodes) abjection and piercing laughter. (*ibidem*: 133)

This is the main dichotomy of the moral matrix of Céline's world. Kristeva underlines "his indefensible political stands (fascist, anti-semitic); the true "miracle" of Céline resides in the very experience of one's reading […] and liberating by means of a laughter without complacency yet complicitous" (*ibidem*). Kristeva recreates a critical version of the radical nihilism of Celine through a humorous approach arguing that humour is always lurking to surprisingly emerge when a human being confronts himself with horror while he adapts to a new situation. This humorous ambiguity is a constant part of Kristeva's analysis. This is why she defines the "Céline's effect […] 'a ridiculous little infinite' as tender and packed full of love and cheerful laughter as it is with bitterness, relentless mockery, and a sense of the morrow's impossibility" (*ibidem*: 134-135). The subject is distorted and stretched, a condition in which humour is the only certain element of existence. Kristeva recognizes that "with Céline, such themes always assume at least a double stance between disgust and laughter, apocalypse and carnival" (*ibidem*: 138). This ambiguous position evokes a third element, at a small but unachievable distance, in the sublime composed by a redemptive act or the love of a mother for

a child. Kristeva adds that "Céline's universe is provided, in spite of it all, with an outside, intermittently and held in compassionate mockery" (*ibidem*: 144). The failure to shape a moral world provides "Céline's essential peculiarities, flush with his style – his horrified laughter: the comedy of abjection" (*ibidem*: 204). Kristeva recognizes a radical nihilism in Céline which allows for humour to emerge. In the lack of a moral ideal, humour does not disappear but attempts to extract the ultimate hilarity that shapes morality to re-attempt to annihilate it. Kristeva sees in this humourous tension a search for a glimpse of the truth behind society. She concludes:

> Célinian laughter is a horrified and fascinated exclamation. An apocalyptic laughter […] does not keep to the rigid, that is, moral position of apocalyptic inspiration; it transgresses it, sets its repressed against it – the lower things, sexual matters, what is blasphemous and to which it holds while mocking the law. (*ibidem*: 204-205)

Kristeva recognizes an accumulation of sacred horror from the degenerated ideals at the basis of current moral structures. She desires to make her own "a knowledge undermined by forgetfulness and laughter, an abject knowledge […] let others continue their long march toward idols and truths of all kinds" (*ibidem*: 210). It is implicitly moral as an alternative, obtained through constant ironic detachment and humour, to avoid the pathology of decayed values and oppressive norms. She sees all humour as a ritual exorcism of the disgusting abject that allows a continuous revolution of cultural frames. Kristeva observes an attempt to create new forms of morality through the "phronesis of narrated action: an action constantly renewed and strange, and for those very reasons resurrecting (2001: 95). Therefore, every instance of humour evokes the ultimate potential for action. Kristeva defines this form of action an intimate revolt as "a state of permanent questioning, of transformation, change, [and] an endless probing of appearances" (2002: 120).

If ultimate morality does not exist or else creates pathology, the state of constant humorous tension towards adaptation creates a moral matrix that allows for pleasure, criticism and achieves glimpses of the sublime. Kristeva recognizes that the artist has an obligation "to shape our attitude towards reality" (*ibidem*: 122) through an act of constant moulding of senses, values and norms. According to Sjoholm (2005), Kristeva's "*jouissance*" enjoyment, and humorous enjoyment specifically, allow us to continue to recognize and reshape the existing divide as:

> All transgression involves a return to corporeal process of symbolisation […] The importance of Kristeva lies in her theorisation of the imaginary powers that steer hegemonic formations, and in her emphasis on enjoyment as a mode of being that transgresses the boundaries between ethics (the question of alterity) and politics (the community of differences). (*ibidem*: 87-88)

Ultimately, in Kristeva, the humorous act is the spontaneous attempt to challenge the dominant values and norms to overcome the pathology of society and culture. Sjoholm defines this dynamic process for Kristeva in terms of "a displacing, intimate revolt would dispute the traditional definition of the time of modernity […] allegorical of the transformation of the world itself, and therefore of what is called revolution" (*ibidem*: 94). Kristeva's ideas lead to an artistic revolt, an incessant return that produces "*jouissance*" (*ibidem*: 98) and reverses the humorous and the horrific through constant ironic shaping of new values and norms and the re-evaluation of the old ones.

1.3.2.5 Jordan Peterson

Clinical psychologist Jordan Peterson provides a model of behaviour that sees humour as an ability which gradually evolved to allow human beings, to proceed with a 'light touch' to approach everyday existence. He underlines the existence of two systems of interpretation of reality:

> Our systems of post-experimental thought and our systems of motivation and action therefore co-exist in paradoxical union. One is "up-to-date" – the other, archaic. One is scientific – the other, traditional, even superstitious. We have become atheistic in our description, but remain evidently religious – that is, moral – in our disposition […] This problem has frequently been regarded as tragic (it seems to me, at least, ridiculous). ([1999] 2002: 18-19)

The creation of new meaning proceeded as "man generated imaginative 'hypotheses' about the nature of the 'ideal' human behaviour" (*ibidem*). Humour becomes part of this process of discovery of behaviour though an understanding of what is far from the individual projection of the ideal established through moral principles. Humour is imprinted on the ideals of behaviour of the hero between the known and the unknown: "the knower is the creative explorer, the ego, the I, the eye, the phallus, the plow, the subject, consciousness, the illuminated or enlightened one, the trickster, the fool, the hero, the coward spirit" (*ibidem*).

Narratives, myths and jokes are part of the process of personality development. The accumulation of stories of heroic behaviour create moral structures. Culture was mapped on mythological figures such as the "Great Father […] protection for fools, and impediment to genius, and precondition for genius, and punishment for fools" (*ibidem*: 172). Culture is never certain about humour's role because it exists as an endless attempt to reach balance between repression and protection of the humorous act. According to Peterson, humour is partly the attempted identification with the exploratory hero who challenges the unknown to remake norms and values. Several stories are needed to spark change but the potential to do so is always there. The lack of this effort of identification can have dreadful consequences. For example, it is possible to find a strong repression of humour towards the leaders of authoritarian and totalitarian states. Peterson claims that a process of "absolute identification with

a group means rejection of individual difference […] means repression of individuality, sacrifice of the mythic fool – abandonment of the simple and insufficient younger brother" (*ibidem*: 257). Humorous processes do not disappear completely in such conditions but remain hidden. The long-term effects of this "accumulation" are debatable but Peterson points out:

> This rejection of the process of creative exploration means lack of effortful update of procedural and declarative memory […] the liar is a tyrant, because he cannot stand being a fool. The liar cannot tolerate anomaly, because it provokes anxiety – and the liar does not believe that he can or should withstand anxiety. (*ibidem*: 259)

Authoritarian and totalitarian moral spaces are based on the outsourcing of ridicule and harsh repression. This lack of "funny failure" and "humorous discovery" deprive human beings in this socio-cultural condition of tools of societal change.

Peterson claims that "the true individual, however – the honest fool – stands outside the protective enclave of acceptance, unredeemed […] the necessary leap that makes courageous and creative action possible" (*ibidem*: 262). A mode of being which creates meaning through "humility means, therefore: I am not yet what I could be – an adage both cautious and hopeful" (*ibidem*). Likewise, this adage is humorous as well and defines the capacity to exercise change on the individual system of norms and values while remaining self-aware of personal limitations. This description is applied by Peterson to society:

> The mask each person wears in society is based upon the pretence that the individual is identical with his culture (usually, with the "best elements" of that culture). The fool, hiding behind the mask, is composed of individual deviance, which is deceitfully avoided, lied about, out of fear. This deviant, unlived life contains the worst and the best tendencies of the individual, suppressed by cultural opinion because they threaten the norm. (*ibidem*: 338)

Existing values and norms co-exist with the individual sense of humour that instinctively emerges. An individual through humour attempts to explore the spaces between cultural norms and their own deviance that produces actions of change that are produced through individual sparks of humour. These actions can be broadly approached as "sparks – scintillae – are 'the light in the darkness', the consciousness associated with poorly integrated or even hostile elements of individual personality" (*ibidem*: 339). Ultimately, humour could have observable potential to shape human behaviour because of its rich cultural history that is integrated in the emotional structure of every individual. Humour changes the individual perception of how reality is approached. Peterson claims that humour may characterize ideological confrontation when:

> The speaker endeavours to (1) denigrate or ridicule the viewpoint of anyone holding a contrary position, (2) use selective evidence while doing so and, finally (3) impress the listeners (many of whom are already occupying the same ideological space). (*ibidem*: 245)

Likewise, the social arena adopts humour in a balancing function:

> … people will indicate – by being interested in or bored by what he says, or laughing or not laughing at his jokes, or teasing or ridiculing, or even by lifting an eyebrow […] Everyone is always broadcasting to everyone else their desire to encounter the ideal. (*ibidem*)

According to Peterson, humour is part of how the cultural ideal is projected in society. He points out that humour is in symbiosis with truth in the western cultural ideal: "as truth and humour are often close allies, that combination worked fine" (*ibidem*: 248) and has the potential to change values and norms. Peterson provides an example of a joke about a man's birthday party which is postponed owing to his wife needing brain surgery in which a friend responds by saying "you think you guys have a problem, […] I just bought non-refundable airline tickets to your party!" (*ibidem*: 248). This could be evaluated as a violation or a suspension of social appropriacy. Peterson's judgement is that "his joke was daring, anarchic to the point of recklessness, which is exactly where serious funny occurs […] it was a test of character" (*ibidem*: 248). It is an intrinsic part of the change in norms and values in a given situation, like the joke presented above, to implicitly demand if the individual or individuals with which humour happens are up to the task to reshape widely accepted moral rules. Humour is a source that provides the possibility of projecting a different future, based on different laws, through suspending the present. The first necessary act to create something new is based on sacrificing a part of the present. If this act of humorous suspension envisions a future that is different from what is widely considered normal and inviolable, the goal is to recognise the actors, such as radicals, who initiate the process of reshaping societal values and norms through humour.the actors, such as radicals, who initiate the process of reshaping societal values and norms.

1.3.3 Summary

This section examines humour as a means of moral transcendence by exploring the cultural and psychological aspects of how individuals and groups channel it in order to reshape existing norms. Philosophically, Nietzsche noticed how humour was deeply connected to our perception of the sacred and our attempts to create new values. The emergence of collective rituals such as carnivals offered glimpses of a different society that is bent towards mockery and playful equality instead of collective discipline and obedience of rules. Bakthin shows us how humour is channeled through rituals that

bend existing rigid moral barriers and increase feelings of communality amongst people. Similar rituals of fraternization were enacted through humour in desperate situations such as concentration camps investigated by Frankl who discusses how the latter was possible through jokes and episodes of humorous transcendence. On the other hand, Kristeva argues that humour can become an apocalyptical tool that can destroy and annihilate pre-existing moral structures and can even become blasphemous and be used to challenge existing norms as it focuses on lower aspects of reality. Finally, Peterson introduces a psychological approach to humour as a way to avoid its darker aspects in which each person can become a sort of exploratory hero who investigates reality with a light touch and thereby discover how to interact with everyday norms and reshape them to become the ideal of a noble fool.

1.4. The Radical Right

1.4.1 Radical Right Theory

In this section I will provide a brief an overview of a series of intellectuals who shaped and influenced radical right culture in western society.

The discourse of the radical right is firmly linked to the concept that contemporary society and morality are in decay. According to the radical right, current cultural identity is being polluted by hostile values and the degeneration of once glorious communities is under way. The main pillar of these movements is the idea that the past represents a Golden Age and that the destiny of enlightened men is to reverse current degradation.

Oswald Spengler was a prominent actor of the German neoconservative movement who considered Benito Mussolini, for example, to be a Caesar-like figure in Western culture. Spengler ([1916] 1926: 107) retains that "Culture passes through the age-phases of the individual man. Each has its childhood, youth, manhood and old age" (*ibidem*: 107) highlighting that those who seek and remain addicted to peace and prosperity are the enemies of their race, their nation and history itself. Therefore, it is not governmental structure that matters but the political direction of the nation.

In the aftermath of World War II, the writings of US philosopher Richard M. Weaver influenced many consevatives through his discussions of rhetoric in which he underscores the importance of language as a credible tool for political change:

> The feeling that to have power of language is to have control over things is deeply imbedded in the human mind. We see this in the way men gifted in speech are feared or admired; we see it in the potency ascribed to incantations, interdictions, and curses. (Weaver, [1948] 1984: 148)

Weaver underlines that western language is corrupted by the fact that "people who are so frightened over the existence of prejudice that they are at war with simple predication" (*ibidem*: 153) thereby evoking absolute relativism as a tool to show the transformability of society. Weaver's proposal is to focus on language to ultimately re-brand radical right movements. A concrete use of words is seen as more effective than simple invitations for change:

> To one group "democracy'' means access to the franchise; to another it means economic equality administered by a dictatorship. Or consider the number of contradictory things which have been denominated Fascist. What has happened to the one world of meaning? It has been lost for want of definers. (*ibidem*: 164)

A refined strategy of linguistic re-branding as suggested by Weaver is evident in the work of another white supremacist, Wilmot Robertson's (1981: 9) discussion of the ambiguity between racism and anti-racism:

> The first law of racism is that racism begets racism. Paradoxically, so does antiracism, which focuses so much attention on race and implants it so deeply in the public consciousness that the net amount of racism is actually increased. Antiracism, moreover, permits many people to practice racism vicariously by adopting the cause of every race but their own.

Race is a central concept in radical right movements as "who can prove that racism is not a better clue to the rise and fall of civilizations than economics, religion, organic growth and decay, weather, great men, or even fate?" (*ibidem*). The argument follows that, while minorities can preserve their race, the white majority cannot. Robertson's argument is that "the once dominant Majority has been given the status-and stigma-of inferiority" and that the only form of government able to transform society, and make it flourish, is aristocracy. Robertson affirms that when the majority is contaminated, art degenerates. He claims that this spiritual degeneration is not from the lack of the need for spirituality that is expressed through the majority as "men have made up for it by shifting their innate religiosity to more mundane creeds democracy, liberalism, capitalism, nationalism, fascism, socialism, and communism" (*ibidem*: 261). The lack of appropriate channels for this innate religiosity results in biological and cultural degeneration.

Italian philosopher Giulio Evola, established lasting ideological points for the radical right that are still widely recognized and recited. For example, according to Evola, tradition is the source of societal existence and supreme good:

> Acquire objectively a higher meaning: through obedience, faithfulness, and action in conformity with traditional principles and limitations an invisible force shaped such a life and oriented it toward that

> supernatural axis that in others (in those privileged few at the top of the hierarchy) existed as a state of truth, realization, and light. ([1969] 1995: 54)

The importance of aristocratic superiority is the essence of the spirit of tradition. Conflict is seen as positive, in fact, "in their rising up in arms against each other, Islam and Christianity gave witness to the unity of the traditional spirit" (*ibidem*). Evola's discussion of the role of women portrays extremely traditional values because "a woman realizes herself as such and even rises to the same level reached by a man as warrior and ascetic only as lover and mother" (*ibidem*: 159). Furthermore, Evola attempts to re-discuss the evolutionary process and reverse its Darwinian definition:

> These stocks, instead of evolving, tend to become extinguished, thereby demonstrating themselves to be the degenerate residues of cycles the vital potential of which has long since been exhausted; in other words, they are heterogeneous elements and remnants left behind by the mainstream of humanity. (*ibidem*: 180)

The return of tradition can only occur through a new elite: "a block of men united by a common idea and relentless in action who could give in every country a living witness to the return of the superior human type" (*ibidem*: 342).

1968 sees the revival of the French *Nouvelle Droite*, or 'New Right', through the work of intellecuals such as Tomislav Sunić and Alain De Benoist. According to Sunić "for the New Right the difference between liberalism, socialism, and Communism is almost negligible, because all of these ideologies rest on the premises of universalism, egalitarianism, and the belief in economic progress" ([1990] 2011: 39). This ideological position goes beyond traditional political struggles. The radical right's angle of political attack is that "Economics must be completely subordinated to politics and cultures" (*ibidem*: 51). Sunica focuses on the difference between Anglo-Saxon and European civilizations, an ideological cleavage, in fact "Anglo-Saxon peoples fail to perceive the importance of organic community and the primacy of political over economic factors" (*ibidem*: 53). Sunica sees a useful tool for the radical right in the Gramscian strategy of cultural subversion through which the New Right concedes that the source of political power must be preceded by socio-cultural action. Cultural power is a prerequisite of political power; henceforth, those who are able to leave their imprint on culture will inevitably score points in the political arena. Culture is not just an ornament or a "super-structure" to be delivered piecemeal to the people; it is a vital and indispensable part of human development (*ibidem*: 74) and becomes a battleground between different political forces. Sunica proposes to "promote a counter-culture within the existing liberal institutional framework" (*ibidem*: 76). Still, Sunica's point is that "the New Right insists that is still worth dying for Europe as an

honourable warrior" (*ibidem*: 112) because if radical right warriors will not resist the latest political and immigration patterns, traditional culture and identity will be obliterated:

> A large nation coexisting with a smaller ethnic group within the same body political will gradually come to fear its own historical and national identity will be obliterated by a foreign and alien body unable or unwilling to share the same national, racial and historical consciousness. (*ibidem*: 178)

Sunica underlines that ultimately Liberalism and Communism are a secular product of Judaeo-Christianity. He traces a clear continuity, underlining a supposedly defensive role of Nazism in western culture, in the following direction:

> For the New Right, the secular results of Judaeo-Christianity were egalitarianism, economism and individualism, which in turn merged into "soft" liberal totalitarianism, continued into Communist totalitarianism, and triggered a defence against them in the rise of Nazi totalitarianism. (*ibidem*: 230)

Re-branding of race and racism is one of the main propositions of the radical right, as seen in the writings of another white supremacist, journalist and activist, Jared Taylor who claims that freedom of speech applied to the discourse of race is vital:

> At the very least Americans must be able to talk about race without fear of retribution. If the notion of free speech has any meaning at all, it must apply to the oldest, greatest, most dangerous problem our nation faces. (1992: 14)

According to Taylor, tribalism emerges as a consequence of the battle for the rights of minorities and "blacks learned long ago that whites can be silenced and intimidated by accusing them of racism" (*ibidem*: 61) as he argues that society is silencing whites:

> In this climate, all charges of racism must be taken seriously because they are potentially true. Even if a specific accusation of racism may not be factually true, it is morally true, because of the constant potential for white bigotry. (*ibidem*: 107)

Taylor also claims that western society is changing and replacing whites with people of colour. He points out, for example, that "if movie theatres operated the way our schools do, moviegoers would be forcibly shipped all over town to make sure that all audiences had the right racial mix" (*ibidem*: 207). Taylor's accusation is that double standards, in language, work and that even humour, is enforced upon whites:

> No one has ever been reported to have gotten into trouble for talking about whitey, crackers, rednecks, honkies, buckra, or white trash. The same double standard has emerged in the fact that many familiar ethnic jokes that were once told about non-whites have been recirculated as jokes about blondes. (*ibidem*: 221)

Taylor objects that "whites are forbidden to think in terms of racial identity unless it is to think of ways to promote the interests of other races" (*ibidem*: 237). For him, without racial consciousness the white race is damned. One of the most reliable ways to address these issues, Taylor argues, is mandatory birth control for low class citizens:

> An end to the vicious cycle of reckless procreation is the only solution to the problem of the underclass. Anything else – Head Start, job training, enterprise zones, workfare – may do a little good here and there, but it is a distraction. […] People should not have children they cannot support. (*ibidem*: 352)

This pseudo-social science milieu is at the core of radical right thought in which the concept of democracy, should be overcome. Right wing libertarian economist Hans Hermann Hoppe proposes that even the founders of democracy were thinking about naturally determined aristocratic rule claiming that democracy breeds constant negotiation and chaos:

> Almost all major thinkers had nothing but contempt for democracy. Even the Founding Fathers of the U.S., nowadays considered the model of a democracy, were strictly opposed to it. Without a single exception, they thought of democracy as nothing but mob-rule…. The idea of democracy is immoral as well as uneconomical. As for the moral status of majority rule, it must be pointed out that it allows for A and B to band together to rip off C, C and A in tum joining to rip off B, and then B and C conspiring against A, and so on. (Hoppe, [2001] 2007: 103-4)

According to Hoppe, a spiral of constant competition will turn democracy into a decaying political structure. This increasing degeneration will sign the political, social and biological corruption of its people. To remain pure and functional, a government created on a racial basis should be the ultimate goal of any political transformation. Hoppe proposes that "the answer to this question is the same as that given by the American revolutionaries more than two-hundred years ago: through the creation of free territories and by means of secession" (*ibidem*: 287). Race is particularly relevant for the particularly radicalized authors of the radical right galaxy to maintain the cohesion of Western societies as "it is mechanisms of genetic similarity and, quite possible, a racial/ethnic human kinds module that account ultimately for the staying power of ethnicity as a human grouping" (MacDonald, 2004: xxi). Furthemore, according to this way of thinking, Jewish influence is to be fought to reach the true form of Western societies:

> There is, I believe, a fundamental and non-resolvable friction between Judaism and prototypical Western political and social structure - […] post-Enlightenment Western societies may be the greatest solvent

> Judaism has ever faced, this most recent attempt to fundamentally alter Western societies in a manner conducive to Jewish continuity is the greatest challenge to peculiarly Western forms of social organization and the ethnic interests of the European peoples. (*ibidem*: 332)

Criticism of Jewish influence is inserted by the radical right into a larger sphere of doubt of the current foundations of the Western world. A serious attack on the whole idea of human rights is an imperative to establish this new understanding.

> That is why it seems today as unsuitable, as blasphemous, as scandalous to criticise the ideology of human rights as it was earlier to doubt the existence of God […] one implicitly places their opponents beyond the pale of humanity, since one cannot fight someone who speaks in the name of humanity while remaining human oneself. (De Benoist, [2004] 2011: 25)

This criticism of human rights for De Benoist, a founding member of the *Nouvelle Droite*, is based on the supposed fanaticism of this doctrine. In fact, the radical right sees human rights as a consequence of the neoliberal economic system. According to De Benoist, human rights were not voted by citizens of countries and therefore lack in democratic legitimacy and are a main weakness of this legal and ideological system. Since democratic votes do not go in the direction of human rights, they are therefore immediately rejected as 'irrational' and illegitimate. The same ideology is opposed to the people being consulted, for example by way of a referendum, on subjects considered to be too 'sensitive' (*ibidem*: 147).

These refined legal and philosophical studies on the nature of the western system are parallel to far more controversial studies that seek to embed racial superiority through scientific means. For example, the connection between IQ and race is one of the radical right's favourite ideological techniques to assert racial superiority. For example, Richard Lynn is a psychologist who attempts to provide a clear scientific explanation of the racial hierarchy, the objective of which is to dismantle the validity of the role of the socio-cultural variables to focus on the biological ones:

> If the race differences in IQs in the United States and Britain were solely environmentally determined, we should expect to find different racial hierarchies in other continents. […] The only credible explanation for this consistency is that the lighter-skinned peoples have higher IQs than other peoples, so they are able to dominate them. (Lynn, 2008: 297)

The same logic is applied to the repeal of feminism, for example, Jack Donovan, a masculinist, a socio-political movement that aims to eliminate sexism against men, underlines that "Feminism is the radical notion that men should do whatever women say, so that women can do whatever the hell they want" (2011: 8). He refuses any alternative construct of masculinity as the pale imitation of an ideal.

Donovan uses a natural and biological explanation to question "the idea that we can simply rewrite the script from scratch or re-imagine the male sex role completely to suit the preferences of fashionable ideologies is absurd" (*ibidem*: 27). His list of male qualities directly opposes any questioning of the traditional male role:

> Is it better for a man to be "open" or circumspect? Is it better for a man to be "vulnerable" or invulnerable? Is it better for a man to have high group status or low group status? Is it better for a man to be successful or unsuccessful? Is it better for a man to be tough or delicate? Is it better for a man to be confident or apprehensive? Is it better for a man to be self-reliant or dependent? Is it better for a man to be aggressive or passive? (*ibidem*: 32)

However, the main and most effective radical right narrative remains the ethnic substitution by means of immigration that will eventually lead to the death of the West.

> The strategy of massive immigration from the Third World into western Europe and its accompanying multicultural dogma, is plainly and simply an unethical practice that amounts to the cultural death and eventual genocide of European peoples. (Clare Ellis, 2016: 203)

Great hopes are being placed on the Millenium generation to reverse the trend and transform right wing counter-culture into the main one. According to Langness (2017: 42), this is inevitable because "the elites in politics and the media were not asking them if mass-immigration was something they wanted". Langness claims that racial rivalry is bound to emerge because "BBC quoting white survivors of Hurricane Katrina […] a 'Lord of Flies' style-hell in which black refugees turned on white ones viciously" (*ibidem*: 136). Art and online activism are the new frontier to achieve a dynamism undreamed of that enables the spread of the radical right's message. A new definition of what radical right actually represents is proposed while the focus is on the fact that fascism and its symbolism are just a humorous and ironic elements in the movement. Langness points out that "individuals have playfully adapted the 'fascist' moniker, using terms like 'fashy' to describe certain clothes or haircuts or philosophies" (*ibidem*: 198). This sense of crisis, Langness believes, will attract the Millenium generation:

> More young people, however, will gravitate towards the right, as they realize the falsehoods with which they have been indoctrinated, […] Many of these young people will join organizations like Generation Identitaire and the Soldiers of Odin that are already fighting to preserve Europe. Some will join more extreme groups like the Nordic Resistance Movement and Golden Dawn. Others will turn to political parties like the National Front and the Sweden Democrats. (*ibidem*: 227)

According to this way of thinking, these recruits will wage a cultural war for the soul of the west, especially as "the rise of the internet, which has enabled instant worldwide communication, and increased our ability to wage such a metapolitical fight by an almost infinite factor" (*ibidem*: 251).

Ultimately, Langness claims that this generation will simply be the greatest yet, saving the West and re-awakening the western greatness. This goal of glory and victory represent the greatest strength of the radical right that will offer a myth and attract the losers of the current socio-economic race to the bottom represents a powerful tool of recruitment.

The next section will examine the rise of the radical right in the UK.

1.4.2 The Radical Right in the UK

In the UK, as in the rest of Europe, the range of far-right parties and populist right wing groups share common values, which typically include opposition to globalisation, criticism of immigration and multiculturalism, opposition to the European Union and upholding the traditional family. The ideological spectrum of the radical right extends from right-wing populism to white nationalism and neo-fascism.

1.4.2.1 Parties and Movements

In fact, the radical right in the UK comprises a number of parties and movements that include the far-right, fascist National Front, founded in 1967, the British National Party (BNP) founded in 1982, the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), a right wing populist Eurosceptic party founded in 1993 and Britain First, founded in 2011 by former members of the BNP. This mosaic of UK radical and far right movements are in constant shift as various groupings constantly emerge and collapse such as the English Democrats founded in 2002 who aimed to prioritise the interests of the UK's ethnic majority and the English Defence League founded in 2009 with the goal of opposing the Islamization of the UK.

The BNP includes a large number of activists, "men (and a few women)" who, according to Trilling (2012: 3), have "devoted their lives to fascist and racist politics" many of whom genuinely see themselves as representatives of the British people. In the 1990s the legacy of politicians such as Enoch Powell was inspirational for the far right. According to Trilling (*ibidem*: 37) "Powell recast whites as victims, under threat from alien cultures […] features of subsequent far-right propaganda: a vulnerable woman, dirt, the prospect of invasion". The main objective of the extremist rightwing activists was to spread their message as "Britain's small network of fascists was constantly on the lookout for points where their ideas overlapped with mainstream opinion" (*ibidem*: 38).

However it is difficult to capture the classic divide between an "extremist" radical right and a more "normalized" right wing, as highlighted by Harrison who argues that in the UK (2011: 93) "British National Party (BNP) discourse leans toward a xenophobic-repressive ideological identity, and UKIP is more aligned to populist-reactionary discourse". In fact, the BNP attempted to change the public's perception about their political platform by depicting themselves as the driving force of the silent part of the larger population.

> The party also refers to the national community as the 'indigenous peoples of these islands'. In addition, the BNP appoints itself as the spokesperson for the people of the national community, as we see in the following excerpt: 'we, as the sole political representatives of the Silent Majority […] want our country back!' (*ibidem*: 97)

Immigration was used as the main ideological tool to mask fascist elements in the BNP program, soon imitated by other similar movements, because "what distinguished the British National Party from its predecessors, however, was that it made opposition to non-white immigration its central pitch […] the heart of every subsequent far-right movement" (Trilling, 2012: 54). The mainstream political and economic culture, with the emergence of radical progressivist ideas and identity politics, played favorably for the radical right minority as "real divisions in twenty first century Britain centered on race and culture, rather than wealth, was an interpretation of events that conveniently suited the BNP's own aims" (*ibidem*: 146). The idea of national identity in Britain overlapped with different intensity, in the mind of British citizens with a particular set of characteristics, a "truth" that some British celebrities, such as comedian John Cleese in 2011, freely agreed with:

> …for many people 'English' remains an ethnic category […] the comedian John Cleese suggested that English identity was incompatible with cultural diversity, when he claimed in an interview that London was 'no longer an English city', thanks to immigration. (*ibidem*: 185)

The result of this antagonism between two radically different worldviews, the extreme right and progressives, have created the current ideological stance of radical rightwing parties that soon led Britain to become fertile ground for radical right movements to contribute to spontaneous violence. There is evidence to suggest that the BNP and other extremist nationalist organizations have had a considerable influence in promoting racist violence carried out by 'lone wolves', namely individuals who prepare and commit violent acts alone without material assistance from any group. The 'tit-for-tat' processes of radicalization fostered the opportunity for violent acts and hate crimes, a phenomenon defined as 'backlash' – an immediate response to an event such as the 7/7 London

bombings[3] after which an increase in violence is discernable (Lambert, 2013: 43). This violence can be likened to a "dark carnival" as it tends to combine physical violence with features of symbolic humour. In fact, attacks reported in studies "documented 42 cases where pigs' heads, bacon and pork have been used in a variety of ways to signal anti-Muslim hatred at mosques, Islamic institutions and Muslim organizations since 9/11" (*ibidem*: 49). As it is shown in Chapters 3, 4 and 5, what emerges from my collected data of right wing tweeters is this same mix of seriousness and mockery.

As some movements collapsed, other radical right movements emerged in their place in a cyclical process of their waxing and waning intensity. New radical right movements such as the EDL, similarly to older movements, engaged in 'normalization' as "the EDL leadership and many of its activists have repeatedly sought to distance themselves from Britain's 'traditional' far right […] on the changing terrain of far-right and populist politics in the UK" (Busher, 2013: 66). This process signals that despite the fortunes of single radical right movements the silent majority's sympathy for the radical right's cause and consequent possibility for violence persists, for example the idea that "police officers are on 'our side' […] reinforce among activists the belief that they are part of a much larger community that extends beyond the 1,000 - 3,000 EDL activists" (*ibidem*: 73). However, the rightwing's 'militarization' seems to persist in Britain:

> The use of war and military metaphors – the EDL is formed in 'divisions', activists have been referred to in a number of speeches as 'warriors'; and Facebook messages are often signed off 'no surrender'. Activists construct this heroic narrative around their (often verbal) confrontations with the opposition. (*ibidem*)

The division between sincere peaceful radical right activism and violent acts is often visible during marches and protests which are "another aspect of EDL activism, which is the effort made by some activists to stage peaceful protests and to prevent public disorder and violence" (*ibidem*: 80). This tendency is exemplified by UKIP, the most established and normalized of the radical right movements. Compared to the rest of the radical right, UKIP is a tolerated movement that channels the discourse of the "simple British worker" to challenge political authorities and score political points, yet, like other right wing parties

> UKIP demands that 'the first duty of the British government is to defend our country'. In addition, the party asserts that 'the first responsibility of a British government is to its own population, not to those who would like to settle here'. […] it wants to achieve zero immigration. (Harrison, 2011: 98)

[3] "7/7 London bombings: Memorial for bus explosion victims unveiled". 2018. *BBC News*. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-45485154. Last accessed 24 December 2020.

According to Busher (2013: 113) "UKIP saw an opportunity to offer voters a more coherent radical right message, fusing hard Euroscepticism with anti-immigration and populist attacks against the established political class". In fact, UKIP succeeded in taking advantage of an old Labour base, "elderly, working class, insecure and pessimistic voters", by exploiting the failings of a "liberal metropolitan intelligentsia who are uncomfortable among working class voters and find their concerns over issues like immigration distasteful" (Ford and Goodwin, 2014: 127). Consequently, euroscepticism, populism and immigration are universal among all radical right political movements and "UKIP's appeal is strongest for voters who combine Euroscepticism with at least one of the other two core radical right motivations: populism and opposition to immigration" (*ibidem*: 233). The 'reputational shield' UKIP possesses allows for the fact that "the party enjoys much wider and less critical access to the media than their more extreme rivals, coverage that they can use to disseminate their populist and anti-immigrant arguments" (*ibidem*: 236). Sometimes, their illusion faces shaky ground, for example with "MEP Godfrey Bloom's outburst at their 2013 conference – when he appeared to call a room full of women 'sluts'" (*ibidem*: 299). Radical right movements seem to be united by a feeling of moral outrage towards nationally relevant cases of pedophilia on the news that overlapped with racism towards minorities, such as the Rotherham child sexual exploitation scandal involving the abuse of children by predominantly British-Pakistani men.

1.4.2.2 The Public and Rightwing Sentiment

The presence of information that is easily available from online sources has provided these movements with enormous and far stretched exposure of their goals and ideals. UKIP's position on EU migration and its homophobic sentiments, and similarly, EDL's Islamophobic tactics, place the 'other' at the centre of their discourse, and both have found new ways to spread their ideas. The approaches adopted by the radical right in the online world, in forums and across social networks vary on a tactical rather than a strategic level, in other words, compared to the material world, their tools have changed but the message remains the same:

> BNP encouraged members to engage with social networks in order to proclaim their political dogma and declare their party affiliation, whereas in the case of EDL, as previously stated, the group has managed to mobilise large parts of its supporters to participate in direct activities but has also explored the internet to create online networks. (Lazaridis and Tsagkroni, 2016: 254)

Refusal of migrants is the main argument of the majority of these movements. However, it can be argued that the neo-liberal cult of success has become a catalyst for different forms of violence. Resentment mingles with disgust, or can be replaced by it, and can be expressed through anger or

even hatred. The current societal and economic model fosters these feelings in individuals at the bottom of the societal ladder. The solution proposed by neo-liberal centrism is progressive, yet ineffective. This situation is reinforced by the lack of capacity in traditional media and wider academia to address rapidly rising economic inequalities and increasingly irregular societal hierarchies. The 'optimistic' mainstream rhetoric that avoids mentioning the struggles of the working class and the degradation of abandoned areas of British cities re-evokes a disgust-based ping pong between the elites and the working class.

> The neoliberal economic miracle would never deliver on its promise. The dream life of wealth, glamour and freedom they saw on TV – beautiful, sexy people looking beautiful and sexy in beautiful, sexy places – has been shoved in people's faces […] also laid the ground for the anger and resentment that lies at the core of the EDL. (Winlow et al, 2016: 12)

As highlighted by Lazaridis and Tsagkroni, many symbols adopted by right wing movements seem to point at the same sources. From images of Nigel Fargage consistently holding a pint of beer and cigarette of the common English man to those of heroic Crusaders, these signs have the memetic potential to attract support from the blue collar voting pool:

> The UKIP logo is a pound sign (£), with many activists wearing a gold lapel badge in opposition to the Euro and the party's euro-scepticism. Another symbol used is the pint of beer and the fag (cigarette): a number of young activists we interviewed mentioned the pint as something that should be in one's hand. Party leader Nigel Farage's most obvious image is that of being in the pub with a pint of bitter or a cigarette in his hand, or both […] The EDL logo appears online and on pin badges and clothing, and is a Christian cross with the Latin *in hoc signo vinces* ('in this sign you will conquer') written below. Alongside this, their online presence often features images of medieval knights, a direct reference to the Crusades.) (Lazaridis and Tsagkroni, 2016: 252-253)

The efficacy of these symbols is based on the basic sentiments of a group. For example, radical right movements share the low-resolution origin point of the British society based on the shades of organicism.

> UKIP's 'Believe in Britain' or 'Love Britain' (a slogan that was used also by BNP in 2010) are targeting the voter's sentimental attachment to the country and emphasising the element of nationalism […] the nation, for EDL, UKIP and BNP, is perceived as a unit that shares identical cultural and ethnic origins, and individuals that do not share these features should not be considered as part of it. (*ibidem*: 259)

Winlow, Gall and Treadwell's (2016) fieldwork in based on interviews mainly with members of Britain's "old white working class" reveal widespread political attitudes and stances. The authors tried to mainly obtain the views and inclinations of poor white workers seduced by the message of the EDL. For example, the authors report that "some of our contacts, after hearing the EDL's account

of the threats posed by Islam, said that they apparently "made sense", and everything "kind of clicked into place" (*ibidem*: 72). Interestingly, the interviewed members mention that "they had little to do with the new online space […] they used social media to broadcast their own message, not to learn from others" (*ibidem*: 78). According to interviewees, a rigid separation between real and online spaces seems to exist and personal real life contact and protests were what bonded newer and older members. The researchers' testimonies of EDL activists can better illustrate the psychological and social processes of the part of radical right movements that are active on the streets.

> Interviewer: 'So what's all this with the EDL then?' Tony: Well, I went on a protest that one time, but since then I havent't bothered. […] they were saying: immigration has been an absolute nightmare. It has mate, I don't care what you say. (*ibidem*: 91)

As claimed in non uncertain terms by an interviewee called David, a 42 year old underprivileged white worker with radical right sympathies (Winlow et al., 2016: 86), cultural adaptation is seen as a tyrannical imposition as "we're the ones who've got to change, right? Fuck that mate, fuck that" (*ibidem*: 94). Another young respondent, Mike goes further, jokingly saying that adaptation to foreign culture means conquest because "The Sharia law, black flags everywhere. There'll be nothing left" (*ibidem*: 96). The intermingling between radical right movements clearly emerge from the Winlow, Gall and Treadwell's interviews, as, for example, respondent Paul underlines "I'm going to vote UKIP because that's what they stand for. […] Interviewer: 'So why follow the EDL?' Paul: 'UKIP is different. They're going to do things one way and the EDL do it another" (*ibidem*: 99). A dark carnivalesque aspect is the priority for respondent Bren as "the EDL, well, to me it's about having a laugh and just telling the Pakis to fuck off" (*ibidem*: 102) thereby displaying a certain parallel with traditional fascist movements:

> The caricature of the Muslim immigrant created by the EDL is quite similar to the caricature of Jew popularized in Germany by Nazis during 1930s […] sure that the presence of Muslims was corrupting English economic and cultural life. (*ibidem*: 158)

Furthermore, Winlow, Gall and Treadwell noted that during their interviews, "there were off-colour jokes and suchlike, but the general mood was one of utter disgust, these men hated paedophiles, and having white skin did not protect the paedophile" (*ibidem*: 159). EDL frequently mix their actions with disgust and grimness, the necessity of "bouts of drunkenness and raucous carnival, but these things never communicate a sense of positivity and joy" (*ibidem*: 169). Radical right movements enroll serious and dedicated activists and football hooligans alike, for some "the old atmosphere of the football away-day remained. Lager, cocaine, a bit of shouting and singing, the possibility of a

punch-up […] an air of adventure to proceedings" (*ibidem*: 177). Ideological aspects seem to co-exist with this carnivalesque cultural dimension as the rank and file members of the movement are united in their struggle against the mainstream elites of the state they are supposedly fighting for.

The tactics of the radical right seem to be based on "the trade-off […] between 'spectacular' actions, which attract media attention albeit of a negative kind, or peaceful demonstrations" (Pilkington, 2016: 51). Media attention was placed on radical right humour online because an EDL member "was charged and bailed when 'a joke' post to Facebook – in which he said that he would pay £100 to anyone who would knife a leader of the UAF[4] – was reported to the police" (*ibidem*: 52). Scholars often propose that radical right activity should be proposed on "recognising the complexity and 'messiness' of individual narratives, I propose to consider below not 'motivations' for joining the EDL but the contexts in which individuals first became involved in the movement" (*ibidem*: 75). Andrew, a member of the EDL fringe interviewed by Pilkington and his team (*ibidem*: 29), provides a solid picture of what an usual radical right supporter feels like.

> I feel as if I belong in the 1920s … I feel as if, as if my values and my way of looking at life isn't the same as what it is in this in this day and age, I feel like, [exhales] I feel as if I'm in the wrong place […] this is something that has degenerated over time, this isn't how things should be now, today. … [I]t shouldn't be like this, it's not me who's out of place, I have to keep reminding myself – it's not me. (*ibidem*: 83)

Symbolic, and often humourous, violence is a compromise that is adopted to maintain a morally grey position and the behavior of Damon, a former member of the National Front interviewed by Pilkington and his team, (*ibidem*: 138), portrays this approach well:

> A flash demonstration against a planning application to turn a disused church into an Islamic prayer centre and, whilst protesting in front of the building, he repeated the symbolic violence by throwing a piece of pork (from a sandwich purchased en route) over the wall.

Radical right movements possess a value system that seems to justify violence as reasonable defense. The presence of police and counter-demonstrators can justify violence because it proves the deviant nature of the EDL's political activity.

> On 29 September 2012, an EDL demonstration in Walsall descended into prolonged violence […] Over the course of around 45 minutes, missiles (beer cans, placards, wooden planks, pieces of flag stone and even a drain cover) were thrown from the EDL side of the demonstration towards the police and the counter-demonstrators beyond. (*ibidem*: 167-168)

[4] *United Against Fascism*, an anti-fascist pressure group.

The social arena, both online and in real life, on which a sympathizer or active supporter relies, provides the primary influence for his decisions and ulterior radicalization.

> There is not one 'type' of person that is attracted to a movement like the EDL; rather decisions to start, continue and draw back from activism are set within a complex web of local environment, familial socialisation and personal psychodynamics. (*ibidem*: 225)

This notion is relevant in studying so-called lone wolf terrorism that can emerge from the radical right scene. The radicalization of Muslims can be a trigger for those with radical right beliefs to act and commit crimes as well as terrorist attacks. Furthermore, tactics and the approach on how to spread their views online is shared by these movements that have apparently opposite goals. Koehler and Popella (2017: 1) provide the following example of the lone wolf's mentality:

> Varnell was reportedly worried that groups like ISIS could steal credit for the attack from him […] As the Oklahoma plot shows, far-right terrorists might see themselves in some kind of competition for public recognition with Jihadist groups like ISIS, which could lead to a further escalation of tactics.

Another troublesome aspect of rightwing extremist lone wolf activity is their attempt to harness weapons of mass destruction. This planning towards terrorism can assume unthinkable dimensions:

> In 2009 Ian Davidson, who was the leader of the right-wing terrorist Aryan Strike Force (ASF), became the first British citizen convicted of producing a chemical weapon of mass destruction […] estimations by the investigators regarding the lethality of the material varied drastically but some though the amount produced by Davison could have killed up to 1,000 people. (*ibidem*: 2)

Lone wolves can retrieve the necessary materials from their contacts in the criminal world because there exists "an overlap between violent activists from the far-right and organized crime […] neo-Nazi oriented networks such as the Aryan Brotherhood for example, are deeply involved in drug trafficking" (*ibidem*: 5).

This section closes with a discussion of two British celebrities at the forefront of the radical right, Milo Yiannopoulos and Raheem Kassam, who represent specific strategies of success in the current media and online scene.

1.4.2.3 Radical Right Celebrities

Milo Yiannopoulos

Milo Yiannopoulos, is a far right British political commentator. He is a homosexual of Jewish, Greek and Irish descent who was been accused of being a far-right supporter since he self-defined himself as a herald of the alt-right, a loosely organized radical right ideological movement characterized by a rejection of mainstream politics and by the use of online media to disseminate provocative content, during the rise of Trump in the USA. Yiannopoulos highlights that although he refuses the takeover of the alt-right by the extreme rightwing, the movement reflects appropriate values such as the opposition to the left, the struggle against imposed equality and the battle for free speech. Twitter was the source of Yiannopoulos' fame before he was permanently banned four years ago as he believed that "Twitter was about freedom, fun, and the humbling of authority […] before progressive crybabies ruined everything" (2017: 49). In 2019, when black actress Leslie Jones was cast in a leading role for the movie *Ghostbusters,* the actress was attacked online by a mob of users. The choice of this actress was seen as a poor attempt to enforce more equality on the movie making scene and as a part of a cultural ideological battle. The result was a surge of hate speech against her including comparisons between Jones and Harambe, a gorilla. Yiannopoulos joined the fray at a certain point claiming "Lefties in the media saw me as ringleader of the trolls is that it's hard for them to imagine people moving collectively without a leader (*ibidem*: 52). Yiannopoulos insightfully underlines, and ironically frames, given his Catholicism and anti-Marxism, that "the media's 'war on trolls' is just another kind of class warfare […] (Elites) They're horrified by the ribald humour, sharp language and raucous tone of blue-collar interactions" (*ibidem*: 57). An insight that Yiannopoulos reports is that the progressive movements and the radical right are mutually radicalized by each other, for example "in 2015, British student activist Bahar Mustafa was pictured beneath a sign on a door reading "no white-cis-men pls," […] and tweets in which she used #KillAllWhiteMen and #WhiteTrash" (*ibidem*: 70). A fierce Catholic and part of this ambiguous and ironic self-construction, Yiannopoulos portrays "Feminist campaigners like the harpies behind #ShoutYourAbortion […] to turn baby-killing into a token of pride" (*ibidem*: 75). He addresses feminism from a Conservative point of view using a pro-life argument against women who fight for their right for abortion that he defines 'baby killing'. This positioning serves both to build his public persona and to appease the more rightwing religious part of his fanbase.

Another "dangerous" proposition that directly incites his platform is based on the 'health over feelings' stance. Yiannopoulos underlines that "I am not joking when I say fat-shaming should be a social obligation" (*ibidem*: 85). An element of Yiannopoulos' self presentation is in identity politics saturated public discourse is that "I spend time with, make love to, and, for Heaven's sake, fall in love with, black men when nothing is forcing me to, that would persuade you that I'm not a racist" (*ibidem*: 99). He also recognizes that gamers originally inspired the radical right online revolt:

> Gamers were the first group of people to beat them in the millennial culture wars. Their tactics helped inspire a new movement of cultural libertarians, setting off a chain of events that put Trump in the White House. (*ibidem*: 177)

Some members of the gaming community embraced radical right values during an online harassment campaign known as Gamergate in 2013 centered on issues of sexism and anti-progressivism in video game culture. A fracture occurred between journalists and critics of videogames, accused of having become ideologized and unfair in their assessments, and part of the community itself. This process allowed the spread of radical right beliefs in gamers who did not recognize themselves in the changes of the gaming industry. Yiannopoulos' central argument against the progressive establishment is that "under the banner of 'anti-fascism', the Left is bringing the actual tactics of fascists" (*ibidem*: 193). Yiannopoulos proposes complete freedom of action, applicable from a radical right perspective, and the necessity for students "to make jokes about, and discuss, anything they want" (*ibidem*: 208). The overlap between free speech absolutists and the radical right is a notable element of the Yiannopoulos' social and intellectual activity given the cultural particularities of British society.

Raheem Kassam

Raheem Kassam is a former journalist of Breitbart news of Tanzanian immigrant origin who played a relevant role in UKIP and the wider radical right. His reflections on Powell's 'rivers of blood' speech, represents a powerful final reflection of the fate of British radical right.

> A speech that would pave the way for a slow burning revolution in British politics, eventually leading to the nation voting to leave the European Union […] "Everyone who disagrees with me is a racist!" is the text of a hyper-popular meme – usually a humourous video, picture, or phrase with a political or social message that a lot of people send to each other on the Internet, used to poke fun or underscore a point with hyperbole. (Kassam, 2018: 16)

Two effective lines of criticism of mainstream politics and society by the radical right emerge, 'red pilling'[5] and 'truth telling' united to the successful humorous memetics that reshape accusations. Kassam defends in the reoccurring 'normalization' sense Powell:

> Powell's legacy has been twisted into one of "far right nationalism" or "hardline" views – both by a media complicit in the lies of the left, and by actual racists who love the idea that one of the most respected politicians of his time was "one of them". (*ibidem*: 25)

[5] Red pilling is a reference to the film *Matrix* describing a sudden illumination.

Kassam underlines that Powell had a vision for the future radical right because there was the certainty of belief and trust in Britain and its past as an organic society.

> Powell believed in Britain and its history […] apologise for Britain's colonial past was moronic and treacherous, and the harbingers of racially motivated identity politics that, coupled with ghettoization and lack of integration, would create a society in Britain unable to function cohesively. (*ibidem*: 29)

Kassam's vision is that Powell's claims were right because, if not, "why does the United Kingdom have or need so many "diversity officers", "hate crime" -focused police, and/or tax payer cash being funneled into such NGOs?" (*ibidem*: 47). The violent acts that characterize the rise of the radical right are laid at the feet of the elite, Kassam points out that "believe the narrative that "hate crime" is up, and that "nativism" is back on the rise, where else can the finger be pointed at a political class and liberal elite" (*ibidem*: 57). The use by Kassam of cartoons and memes in his book, underline the humorous nature of the initial positioning of the radical right on the political scene.

> Cartoon from the time depicts Powell, clenching one first shut, and holding a newspaper in the other hand reading "Immigration Warnings About Racial Strife". […] The caption reads: "What is utterly indefensible and unforgivable, Mr. Powell, is that you're a politician who's actually been proved RIGHT!" (*ibidem*: 103)

Kassam narrates a continuity of Powellism and Thatcherism to the current radical right because "Thatcher was a Powellite. In many, many ways. She admired him hugely. […] things he said about community, cohesion, about how people feel, Thatcher felt exactly the same way" (*ibidem*: 109).

The interesting thing about Kassam is his immigrant origin because he provocatively writes that "as a brown man I have to think, act, or vote in a certain way because of the colour of my skin" (*ibidem*: 123). The progressive insistence, sometimes through a phenomenon defined as 'cry bullying'[6], can be a consistent source of a 'tit for tat' radicalization for immigrants. Kassam's main diagnosis is that immigration creates impenetrable zones that are willingly occupied by immigrants to supposedly re-create their homeland.

> Criminality is stemming from ghettoization, and it behoves the state to break apart the monopoly that gangs and tribal leaders […] migrants who come in larger numbers may develop larger and more impenetrable ghettos. (*ibidem*: 160)

According to Kassam, progressiveness is the clear source of British decadence because "it criminalized immoral activity (racial prejudice), it drove a further wedge between immigrants and

[6] Someone who uses the perceived righteousness of a social justice cause as a pretext to abuse others, and then plays the victim when confronted about that abuse.

Britons, which is precisely the outcome of which Powell warned" (*ibidem*: 183). First, he affirms that "there are streams of blood in the United Kingdom today" (*ibidem*: 212). Second, he defuses the latter claim into a prophecy tailored by Powell for migrants and their issues in Britain as well as the risks for the English people of having foreign enclaves on their soil.

> The dawnings of thy safety shall be shown, From whence thou least shalt hope, a Grecian town – Sybil, the Aeneid […] Sybil is warning of great hardship for Aeneas, the immigrant, but tells him in that in the end he shall get what he wishes: a town of his own in the land to which he "migrated". Powell will have been aware of this. That rather than integration, what Britain would end up with is foreign areas in Britain. (*ibidem*: 214)

Kassam is aware that Powell's legacy has to be rescued from the overtly extreme far right views to continue a path of 'normalization'. While the evidence provided above disproves this separation could exist, Kassam's preoccupation is legitimate.

> Powell's words can be argued to have emboldened groups like the National Front, who chanted phrases in support of the man, and fashioned pin badges, t-shirts, and posters with the words "Enoch was right" emblazoned upon them. […] assist in winning Powell back from the overtly racist and ethno-centric agitators. (*ibidem*: 220)

Current radical right movements, in Britain as well as abroad tend to employ metaphorical language and humor to convey their feelings that contain an ideological mosaic of views that are broadly shared on the main themes such as immigration, Islam and corrupt elites, strife for 'normalization' to achieve electoral success or break into extremist cells that are part of the same political milieu that can be broadly defined as the radical right scene. The online world and social networks, while used in a different way by radical right groups, represent the greatest asset to spread the radical right message and for the 'self-radicalization' and the consequent emergence of 'lone wolf' terrorism. The greatest danger is in tit-for-tat radicalization' between different ideologies and political movements that, both online and through violent acts, compete for hegemony in online spaces in a spiral of offline violence. The next section will expand upon the approach of the analysts of the radical right movements and lone wolf terrorism.

1.4.3 Analysts' Perspectives of Radical Right Movements

This section covers the thoughts on the radical right by a number of intellectuals, strategy experts and security specialists.

The first point of view on radical right movements is provided through issues that characterized the first democracies. The point of ideological departure for these movements in a modern sense occurred at the beginning of the twentieth century. Democracy is intrinsically vulnerable to counter-cultures and fragmentation and radical right ideology represents one of the logical trajectories of the development of modernity. Pareto claims:

> In every human community two forces are in conflict. One, that can be defined as centralizing, that pushes to the concentration of central power, the other, that can be defined as centrifugal, that pushes towards division. (Pareto, [1920] 2016: 31)

Pareto considers these forces to be universals. In democracies, the side that uses populism and radical tactics may be able subvert and triumph over existing political structures. Moreover, populism represents a set of stances on the socio-political arena that juxtaposes people and elites framed according to the needs of the movement. The evolution of this process extends between past and future:

> The weakness of who governs have in opposite the courageous and violent act of their opponents, made strong by the cowardice of those who can't oppose this development […] these facts have general causes that are not peculiar of a country, or a government; moreover there is continuity of movement, therefore past facts can predict the future ones. (*ibidem*: 87)

Radical nationalism is especially characterized by an ideal inspiration to resurrect a Golden Age from the pre-modern past, a moment with layers of meaning and interpretation crystallized in time. As noted by Gramsci ([1973] 2016: 9, *my translation*), nationalists are conservatives, they are spiritual death, because of "one" organization they create the "definitive" organization as they have an idea as a goal, a fact of the past and not an universal one but a specific one, limited in space and time.[7]

Gramsci notices that political violence by the radical right is clouded by ridicule and humorous fascination, in fact "being funny and ridiculous means inculpability for the violent and absence of security for people"[8] (*ibidem*: 53, *my translation*). He claims that radical right movements solidify around that past ideal because "while developing, fascism becomes rigid around it's primordial core, it cannot hide it's true nature"[9] (*ibidem*: 58, *my translation*). He underlines that "the romantic side of

[7] Source text: "I nazionalisti sono conservatori, sono la morte spirituale, perché di <<una>> organizzazione fanno la <<definitiva>> organizzazione, perché hanno per fine non un'idea, ma un fatto del passato, non un universale, ma un particolare, definito nello spazio e nel tempo".
[8] Source text: "Essere buffi e ridicoli significa impunità per i violenti e nessuna sicurezza per le persone".
[9] Source text: "Sviluppandosi, il fascismo si irrigidisce intorno al suo nucleo primordiale non riesce più a nascondere la sua vera natura".

the fascist movement […] (is) a deranged fantasy, a tremble of heroic fury, a psychological restlessness that doesn't have any ideal content other than the sentiments"[10] (*ibidem*: 157, *my translation*). Radical right movements hijack existing religions, civic authorities and individual values. There is almost a metaphysical dimension to these beliefs, according to Smith:

> The nation, in the eyes of nationalists, can be described as a community of history and destiny, or better, a community in which history requires and produces destiny […] the regeneration of the true spirit of the nation by the yet unborn. (2001: 30)

This spirit persists with different intensity across all nationalist political spectrums. Smith highlights that nationalism is a unique ideology that coopts every other political value. He recognizes the difference in various strains of nationalism. Still, Smith points out that the policies all currents of nationalism propose have a core:

> The analogy of the nation with the individual is not intended to support a liberal theory of individual preferences or a situational analysis of group identities. It is used to confirm the role of the past, of history and memory (and forgetting), as well as of continuing political will. (*ibidem*: 37)

This pervasive nature of nationalism contains the reasons of the re-emergence of radical right movements in the last thirty years. The hybrid nature of nationalist ideology has three important aspects in this regard. The seemingly unstoppable processes of globalization, the changing nature of the nation state and perceived cultural "degradation" that provided fertile ground for these ideologized movements. New changes on patterns of migration are critical:

> First, it has allowed them to expand their organizations, distribute racist literature, and more effectively propagate their extremist views, often at taxpayers' expense. Second, it legitimizes expressions of ethnic hatred and encourages intolerance and violence toward immigrants and those of immigrant decent. Third, and perhaps most important, […] it has changed the political environment and the political agenda by legitimizing policies founded on racism and intolerance. (Schain et al, 2002: 4)

An important part of this change were singular catalysts that propelled a similar transformation. One element, for example, was a perceived inefficacy of the democratic states to address abhorrant crimes. Hossay (2002: 182-183) provides the following example:

> A convicted pedophile who had been released in 1991 after serving only three years of a thirteen-year sentence was arrested after the bodies of several young girls were discovered in his home. Police and judicial incompetence further intensified the public outcry and inspired the "white marches" of October 1996.

[10] "Il lato romantico del movimento fascista […] una fantasia squilibrata, un brivido di eroici furori, un'irrequietezza psicologica che non hanno altro contenuto ideale che i sentimenti".

Another aspect that will become virulent is the downplaying of hate crimes by part of the political elite, for example Merkl ([2003] 2005: 25) reports that "Interior Minister Claas de Vries himself characterized a recent firebomb attack on an asylum-seekers' hostel as perhaps merely a display of youthful exuberance".

A proposal to address the ambiguity of the radical right is provided by van Donselaar ([2003] 2005: 270) who suggests "starting rather from extreme right formations and trying to determine the degree to which each exhibits violent behavior", while Paxton (2004: 42) emphasizes the psychological nature of these issues as "Fascism was an affair of the gut more than of the brain, and a study of the roots of fascism that treats only the thinkers and the writers misses the most powerful impulses of all". Radical right movements are united by the emotional nature of these ideologies. He stresses that the symbols and tactics of radical right movements are adapted to the times and that "new fascisms would probably prefer the mainstream patriotic dress of their own place and time to alien swastikas or fasces" (*ibidem*: 174). Paxton considers the recurrence of the victory of radicals on the right as a possibility:

> It is relatively easy to admit the widespread continuation of Stage One—the founding stage— of radical Right movements with some explicit or implicit link to fascism. Examples have existed since World War II in every industrial, urbanized society with mass politics. Stage Two, however, where such movements become rooted in political systems as significant players and the bearers of important interests, imposes a much more stringent historical test. […] If we understand the revival of an updated fascism as the appearance of some functional equivalent and not as an exact repetition, recurrence is possible. (*ibidem*: 174-175)

The centrism of political forces in the west, left political space for the radical right to re-shape itself and occupy it. The capacity of these counter-culture movements to re-brand themselves provides fuel for this change. According to Williams (2006: 54):

> Radical right-wing parties reinvented themselves in the mid- to late 1980s. The impetus for change came from opportunities emerging in the political party system, as political parties of both the mainstream left and the mainstream right appeared to be converging in the center of many West European political party spectrums.

The rising importance of immigration on the western political scene meant that "radical right-wing parties carefully crafted their central defining issue, immigration, as an omnibus issue through which other socioeconomic concerns of the day could be funneled" (*ibidem*). Moreover, a part of the radical right movements skillfully adopted efficient series of reform and change and:

> …reformulated their platforms, introduced charismatic leaders, played to the media for publicity, adopted politically correct language to distance themselves from fascist rhetoric, and presented themselves in a new style that many authors have called populist. (*ibidem*: 56)

This 'concealed' populism focused on immigration managed to channel every conceivable issue regarding the economic risk seen as deriving from migrants, a vision that targets categories such as refugees:

> If the population was concerned about unemployment, then the radical right could claim that immigrants took jobs away from natives. […] The winning formula has much to do with being perceptive, knowing what the people are concerned about, and then strategically relating those concerns to the presence of foreigners. (*ibidem*: 209)

Supporters and members of radical right movements are widely convinced by the immigration-argument, in fact, Klein and Simon state that "interviewees complained about the decline of their country, which they attributed to unrestricted immigration" (2006: 166). The radical right channels their ideological message through in-group versus out-group mechanics. Analyses of radical right political movements show how "the content of these self-stereotypes again underlines the close interrelation of party identity and national identity as well as the interviewees' feelings of belongingness" (*ibidem*: 238). Nationalism, obedience and an ideal of a mythical past seems to coexist as emerge from interviews carried out by Klandermans and Mayer (2006: 271):

> Our interviewees share these xenophobic attitudes with the rank and file but for them they have a deeper layer, they are part of a more articulated and consistent set of ideas. If one were to find a common ideological core among them it would be less xenophobia than nationalism, in the sense of in-group favoritism, […] an almost biological image of the nation runs through the interviews, as a natural consanguine community.

Moreover, the rise of radical right celebrities who use humour and plainly tell their views, contributed to the consolidation of the radical right on the political scene. Estrich (2006: 40) points to Ann Coulter as one of the first of these public characters:

> Ann plays to the lowest common denominator of derision, labeling the hero a coward, her opponent a traitor, the wife or widow a whore. She says what we wouldn't and shouldn't say, and by saying it in acceptable forums, makes it seem acceptable and appropriate.

Radical right values and messages were gradually transformed into entertainment, on television and online. This process was linked to qualities adapted for mass media of various types. Radical right movements invested in metropolitan celebrities that channeled these views such as members of

LGBT+ community, women or ethnic minorities; a tactic that can be defined as "you wanted a woman; you have one. Our kind, not yours. A bad joke on feminists" (*ibidem*: 41). This dynamic use of humour by right-wing personalities became the key for the success of the radical right wave a decade later.

Another kind of "alternative celebrities" that seems to be increasing in number are right-wing lone wolf terrorists (see 1.4.2.2). As argued by Spaaij (2012: 37), the fragmentation of identities that characterized the post-Cold War period fueled this kind of transformation in people with mental health issues or from a difficult background.

> The relative prevalence of right-wing extremism and White supremacy as ideological sources of lone wolf terrorism reflects the popularity of the lone wolf strategy within far right circles (in some cases, especially in the United States, extreme-right lone wolves also draw on Christian Identity beliefs) […] White supremacist lone wolves currently pose the most significant domestic terrorist threat in the United States.

These cases of radical right violence are a complex challenge to face given the chaotic and casual radicalization process and the carrying out of terrorist acts. Moreover, many ideological elements co-exist in these processes:

> Lone wolf terrorists tend to create their own ideologies that combine broader political, religious or social aims with personal frustrations and aversion. It can be unclear which motive—if any— predominates. Furthermore, the motivational patterns of lone wolf terrorists tend to shift over time as their radicalization progresses (or de-escalates). (*ibidem*: 44)

An example of this chaotic radicalization is the case of David Copeland who in 1999, went on a killing spree with homemade nail bombs strategically placed throughout London targeting ethnic areas and a gay bar. The copy-cat fixation that he exhibits is an unavoidable part of the lone-wolf mentality:

> David Copeland, for instance, closely followed the media coverage of the explosion at Centennial Park during the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games. […] He stated that he gradually became fixated on the idea of carrying out his own bombing. (*ibidem*: 57)

Lone wolves adopt as their own a warped moral matrix, usually a pastiche of ideological belief and fanatical imperatives, that ultimately result in a violent eruption. This kind of radicalized behavior is a part of the radical right's movements agenda:

> Lone wolf terrorists typically feel that they have the moral authority to counter-attack the morally corrupt force (the enemy) that contradicts their ideology, […] an aggravated subjectivism in which the lone wolf terrorist defines himself or herself through a total commitment to the cause for which he or she is the self-proclaimed vanguard. (*ibidem*: 61)

Technological progress is another development that contributes to the increase of lone wolf episodesd with the rise in such attacks as "the most marked increase in lone wolf terrorism took place in the European countries in the research sample, where the total number of attacks quadrupled between the 1970s and 2000s" (*ibidem*: 97). Radical right movements immediately understood the relevance of internet for their strategic planning. Michael (2013: 42) underlines that "the American extreme right's foray into cyberspace came in the mid 1980s […] Stormfront has come to host many extreme right websites and serves as an important entry point". Moreover, lone wolf activity is seriously considered in many radical right movements organizational structures: "Alex Curtis, a young man who operated the Nationalist Observer website […] envisaged a two-tiered resistance organizational structure with an aboveground propaganda arm and a second tier of lone wolves" (*ibidem*: 45). The turn to progressivist neo-liberalism was often considered positive during this technological transformation and the radical right "welcomed measures such as hate crime laws, because he believed that they are selectively used against whites and would engender hostility among them" (*ibidem*). A relevant case of synchrony between internet and lone wolf vigilantism emerged for example through certain websites:

> The Nüremberg Files—a website operated by Neal Horsley, an antiabortion activist in Oregon— listed the names and addresses of doctors who performed abortions, […] the site was removed by its ISP after a red line was drawn through the name of Dr. Barnett Slepian on the day he was killed. (*ibidem*: 57)

All these factors were reinforced by the emergence of jihadist radicalism the existence of which provides an "equal and contrary" bedrock for the radical right platform. Mutual fueling between right-wing and jihadist movements emerged as the rule for post-modern radicalism.

> The American extreme right and radical Islam share a very similar concept of who they consider to be the enemy—Jews and the US government—what would stop an enterprising extreme rightist from […] exhorting Islamists to attack specific targets that would further the revolutionary goals of the extreme right? (*ibidem*: 59)

One of the ambiguities of the radical right that stands out is the coexistence of populism and elitism in their message as, according to Weinberg (2013: 17-18), "they hold 'the people' in contempt as really 'sheeple' in need of guidance and control". Cultural events, music and festivals organized by the radical right, provide a specific and dynamic lifestyle, with "music festivals where naïve teenagers may be transformed into 'freshcuts' (novice neo-Nazis) […] parties where they are inducted into neo-Nazism through a series of ceremonies and rituals" (*ibidem*: 25). It is appropriate to define radical

right ideology as a unique ideological and political construct because as Witte (2013: 123) highlights "elements of these 'old' relationships and manifestations are seen to persist within 'new' far-right platforms, especially behind a more mainstream political façade". The heart of this process of amalgamation was the emergence of the so-called *Nouvelle Droite* (see 1.4) that attempted to unite radical left and right ideas:

> The creation of GRECE (Group for Research and Study of European Civilization) in 1969 that marked the beginning of the intellectual renewal of the radical right […] the aim of the young intellectuals forming the Nouvelle Droite was to fight their battle in the field of ideas. (Gandilhon, 2013: 157)

The radical Wahhabi Islamic currents of thought furthered this sophisticated re-branding of the radical right. In fact, one of the approaches of the *nouvelle droite* to radical right issues was to frame their arguments as libertarian ones:

> The influences of the Counterjihad ideology are now visible […] avoiding the racism of the far-right and instead providing a critical discourse on Islam and Muslims which claims to be a liberal critique, even if the outcome – the demonization of certain minority social groups – is not dissimilar. (Archer, 2013: 171)

Strategy and tactics of these radical currents are remarkably similar, both in real world and online. As argued by Holbrook, (2013: 219) both movements draw inspiration from one another:

> David Lane, founder of the US white supremacist group 'The Order' declared, in one of his '88 precepts' that 'Propaganda is a legitimate and necessary weapon of any struggle. The elements of successful propaganda are: simplicity, emotion, repetition, and brevity' […] militant Islamic leaders have made similar public references to the importance of message generation and dissemination.

Ultimately, the goals of both movements are also comparable as "militant Islamist and far-right cohorts identify lists of enemies, societal ills, challenges and desired ends that are in many ways comparable" (*ibidem*: 227). The increase in lone wolves' activity and ideological competition creates a societal environment that is highly unpredictable. In counterterrorism these processes can be defined as "tit-for-tat radicalization – a spiral of hostility between opposing social movements as groups associated with the "far right" and with "radical Islam" antagonize one another" (Currie, 2013: 244).

Security concerns in western societies rotate around highly damaging and chaotic events that cannot be anticipated.

> The concept of the "black swan" to refer to a highly exceptional event that provokes significant change and/or social upheaval, […] high-impact, low-probability events that are unanticipated because of inherent limitations in our ability to reason from observation and experience. (Huey et al, 2013: 38)

A possible theoretical response to this challenge lies in the proposal of Situational Action Theory or SAT. This theory proposes the concept that a crime is a radical moral action; moreover, "the SAT focuses on how the intersection of individual cognitive schemes and social settings – propensity and exposure – produces a causal process – a perception – choice process – that brings about action" (Ducol, 2013: 92). The initial criminological settings are critical because the first stage of a person, acting against the law and societal moral norms, defines successive radicalization. Radical right movements are exploiting the existing gap because the strategy "appears to be one of encouraging self-recruitment through radicalization" (Davies et al, 2013: 107). Research on radical activity in the cyberspace seems to confirm this hypothesis:

> Individuals must be willing to express themselves in an online space and be willing to violate legal conventions in support of their agenda […] an individual willing to commit an act of violence against a target in cyberspace may also be willing to engage in protest behaviors and physical attacks in the real world. (Holt et al, 2013: 146)

The emergence and evolving complexity of the Internet, especially social media, favours this kind of self-radicalization. A clear divide between a radical and more extreme right is clearly portrayed in cyberspace. The co-existence of a galaxy of movements and tribes in a loose collection definitely shape the political action of the radical right. The online world stimulates:

> The interconnectedness of right-wing extremists online, focusing on the identification of sub-groups in evaluating centrality and connections. A particularly important development is the examination of a single organization or ideology but on multiple social media platforms. (Bouchard and Thomas, 2013: 228)

While the discussion of a "post-ideological" century is becoming prevalent, ideology in its myriads of individual user/citizen interpretations becomes the "glue" of a radical minority. On one hand, the mosaic of cells belonging to the extreme right and the radical right can be what Golder (2016: 6) defined as "the 'groupuscular right', comprised of militant activists who continue to promote various forms of revolutionary nationalism", on the other hand, the presence of radical right parties aim is to "retain its party form but shed its revolutionary goals in the search for votes". The political competition of the purely far right movements is decaying. The disillusioned mass of by the radical right. Technological innovation and internet's continuously increasing complexity are a catalyst for the modern radical right, already according to Nagle (2017: 12) the "leaderless digital revolution narrative, like Occupy Wall Street […] offered a clue that another very different variety of leaderless online movement had potential to brew". The discourse, style and aesthetics of new generations combined with the rising popularity of the radical right develop into:

> The image- and humour- based culture of the irreverent meme factory of 4chan and later 8chan that gave the alt-right its youthful energy, with its transgression and hacker tactics […] V for Vendetta, which the Guy Fawkes mask is taken from, and the 'dark age of comic books' influenced the aesthetic sensibilities of this broad online culture. (*ibidem*: 13)

The forums, where the radical right often have hegemony, emerged through cultural niches. The influence of "nerd" cultures can be noticed in the case of the notorious 4chan platform. These online spaces quickly degenerated, with ambiguous content that can be described as a convergence of hilarious, nerdy and horrific:

> This culture of anonymity fostered an environment where the users went to air their darkest thoughts. Weird pornography, in-jokes, nerdish argot, gory images, suicidal, murderous and incestuous thoughts, racism and misogyny were characteristic of the environment created by this strange virtual experiment, but it was mostly funny memes. (*ibidem*: 14)

The product of this process became an important aspect of the Culture Wars that re-started, or probably never ended in the first place, in the Anglo-Saxon sphere. The banners under which the radical right rallied was the opposition to political correctness, feminism and migration.

> What we now call the alt-right is really this collection of lots of separate tendencies that grew semi-independently but which were joined under the banner of a bursting forth of anti-PC cultural politics through the culture wars of recent years […] spilled over eventually into 'real life' in the ramping up of campus politics. (*ibidem*: 18)

An example of this can be seen in the Gamergate scandal of 2014 where game journalists and developers of videogames, especially female ones, were accused by gamers of unfair reviews, with evidence of sexual relationships and corruption, and radical progressivism. Abuse on an unseen scale was unexpectantly unleashed by some gamers against one of the female developers in which "they express their hatred and disgust towards her, and their glee at the thought of ruining her career. They also expressed fantasies about her being raped and killed" (*ibidem*: 21). This instance of rising online abuse was often dismissed as humourous or inconsequential. The emergence of lone wolves linked to this online scene underlined a darker quality of these events.

> Chris Harper-Mercer had killed nine classmates and injured nine others before shooting himself at Umpqua Community College in Roseburg, Oregon […] the first responder in the thread asked: 'Is the beta uprising finally going down?' while others encouraged the anonymous poster and gave him tips on how to conduct a mass shooting. (*ibidem*: 24)

The particular culture that was forming in online spaces, and day-by-day real-world activity, was synchronic to historical aspects of the radical right as "the style of the rightist chan culture, interpretation and judgement are evaded through tricks and layers of metatextual self-awareness and irony" (*ibidem*: 28). Other aspects were absorbed from the radical left and anarchic scene as "this new online right is the full coming to fruition of the transgressive anti-moral style, its final detachment from any egalitarian philosophy of the left or Christian morality of the right" (*ibidem*: 36). In fact, ideological borrowings from the left are useful for this latest transformation of the radical right because scholars use the term "Gramscian to describe what they have strategically achieved […] creating an Internet-culture and alternative media of their own" (*ibidem*: 37). Several Celebrities on the right emerged with the rise of the Internet-culture. American radical right Celebrities, for example Ann Coulter, paved the way for other opportunists such as Milo Yiannopoulos with "his real media achievement in terms of Gramscian-right tactics and thinking was his Dangerous Faggot Tour" (*ibidem*: 44).

The socio-political environment is shaped by online and offline dynamics as "this vigilante strategy became widespread on both sides of the culture wars and will always entail serious real-world consequences like harassment and stalking" (*ibidem*: 81). The real world seems to be a constant part of this confrontation such as the attempt by Elliot Rodger to massacre a sorority but who ended up being killed by some passers by.

> One of those who took the violent fantasies of these forums into real like was the 'virgin killer' Elliot Rodger […] The term 'supreme gentleman' has remained a joke on the anti-femminist Internet ever since and Rodger has become a comical archetypal figure of the angry beta male. (*ibidem*: 88)

The current danger of culture wars is that for many users "the idea of being edgy/countercultural/transgressive can place fascists in a position of moral superiority to regular people" (*ibidem*: 96). Shaping, bending and pushing moral boundaries both online and offline emerge as a central tenet of these loose collection of radical tribes.

Existing vulnerabilities and openings in the structure of democracies, on the one hand, and social media networks, on the other, are mercilessly exploited by radicals to create a socio-political shift. As Marwick and Lewis (2017: 3) point out, essentially, online spaces provided an outlet to all kind of radical right's groups:

> Taking advantage of the opportunity the Internet presents for collaboration, communication, and peer production, these groups target vulnerabilities in the news media ecosystem to increase the visibility of and audience for their messages, […] use the term "far-right" to characterize these players collectively, through many of these communities resist identification with the term.

Humour appears to be a central tool to reduce accusations of being "far-right". The prevailing ethnic and racist jokes, memes and tropes in these online spaces are cleverly transformed for outsiders, or "normies":

> 4chan participants usually dismiss their cavalier use of "fag" or "n*****" as ironically funny, or as a way to maintain boundaries […] Trolling the mainstream media to exploit its penchants for spectacle, novelty, and poignancy is not only a favored pastime for trolls but is often used as a justification for trolling behavior. (*ibidem*: 5)

The result of this approach is often that "a very successful troll plays with ambiguity in such a way that the audience is never quite sure whether or not they are serious" (*ibidem*: 7). The different tactics developed into criminal activity are difficult to cover in humourous smoke, since Gamergate that involved burgeoning online movements with radical right sympathies:

> Three tactics used during Gamergate can help us understand the subsequent emergence of the alt-right: organized brigades, networked and agile groups, retrograde populism […] the refinement of a variety of techniques of gamified public harassment – including doxing (publishing personal information online), revenge porn (spreading intimate photos beyond their intended recipients), social shaming, and intimidation. (*ibidem*: 8-9)

The use of extremely general political terminology is another aspect of communication as "the term "alt-right" is accommodatingly imprecise […] ambiguity is, itself, a strategy" (*ibidem*: 11). The result is that at the most basic level it is "a deeply ironic, self-referential culture in which anti-Semitism, occult ties, and Nazi imagery can be explained either as entirely sincere or completely tongue-in-cheek" (*ibidem*: 12). Moreover, radical right movements have well established outlets:

> Breitbart is at the center of this new ecosystem, along with sites like The Daily Caller, The Gateway Pundit, The Washington Examiner, Infowars […] some may be categorized as the alt-light, media which parrot some far-right talking points while strategically excluding more extreme beliefs. (*ibidem*: 21)

A soft encounter with this culture and its ideals can eventually develop into radicalization. In a manner ironically similar to the tactics of the civil rights movements, the idea is to gradually gain recruits to the values of the radical right:

> Like the consciousness-raising groups of second-wave feminism, "redpilling the normies" describes spreading parts of alt-right ideology to further its more extreme elements […] A 4chan troll may be more receptive to serious white supremacist claims after using ethnic slurs "ironically" for two or three months. (*ibidem*: 29)

The outcome is often total alienation from society. A counter-culture moral matrix may hijack the perceptions of a vulnerable individual who may be already isolated from society, to gradually becoming an ardent defender of the radical right's ideological stance.

> Many chan users post about feeling unable to relate to mainstream culture […] positioning geeks as an embattled minority under attack from politically correct feminists, gamers saw fighting against divers representation as necessary to protecting their culture. (*ibidem*: 30-31)

Behavior considered distasteful or even criminal is rewarded by the values of this counter-culture, for example users attracted by the movement "post racist or sexist content but claim to do so merely as a way to generate lulz through the offense of others" (*ibidem*: 32). The approach is usually sophisticated and tactical. A common approach is to use "memes that do not involve images. For instance, the (((echo))) meme surrounds the names of Jewish people" (*ibidem*: 37). In this way, a new ideologized language is gradually inserted into common discourse:

> The word "cuck", an insult referring to someone so brainwashed or ignorant that they unwittingly aid their enemies […] originates in racial cuckold porn, in which white men are willingly humiliated by inviting black men to have sex with their wives while they watch. (*ibidem*: 37)

Offensive humourous stunts have a disrupting effect, such as se "YouTube game content producer PewDiePie's release from his contract after organizing a 'prank' that arranged for young children to hold up a sign saying, 'Kill all Jews'" (*ibidem*: 46). Eventually, a transition to coordinated activism from online spaces using humour emerged with "Campaigns such as the Identitarian's 'Defend Europe' mission to block NGOs from rescuing refugees in the Mediterranean and the Charlottesville rally have signaled a strategic expansion from online trolling to real-world activism" (Davey and Ebner, 2017: 7). Online activity by radical right users using humour gradually transformed into concrete action to achieve goals in the real world linked to the ideological dimension of the movements. This activism is characterized, similarly to the radical right's online scene, by ambiguity and potential extremist hi-jacking.

> Identitarians are largely motivated by cultural narratives, are not supportive of violence, and do not usually utilize explicitly racist or racialist language […] Andrew Anglin's Daily Stormer which directly correlated the mission with a race war ("The only thing that'll stop the shit-skins [sic.] from flooding Europe, and remove the ones already here, are more actions like what the identitarians here have done, but on a massive scale, and with more and more radical means.") (*ibidem*: 11)

All the elements described above contribute "by projecting their own ideological motivators and grievances onto the same events, these groups and individuals are able to generate the sense of a global political community" (*ibidem*: 13). Moreover, these global radical right movements and broad alliances allow for a common strategy. A clear instance of this approach are "the channels Reconquista Germania and #Infokrieg [that] were set up to coordinate large-scale social media campaigns and to encourage the use of a range of psychological operations and disinformation tactics" (*ibidem*: 20-21). It is a serious and studied way to achieve larger political goals, as "Reconquista Germania runs sub-chats such as 'meme factory', 'Merkel memes', 'AfD memes', 'old party memes', and 'counter-culture', where offensive, funny and disturbing memes are generated for public distribution on Twitter and Facebook" (*ibidem*: 21). The approach is to flood online spaces with memes that may be useful to reshape public discourse in a manner to gain sympathy towards political movements, similarly to the channel above "#Infokrieg called on all members to create multiple fake Twitter accounts, including at least one account outside of their own filter bubbles" (*ibidem*: 22). A point that clearly emerges from Marwick and Lewis' research on fifty groups of the radical right converge on few ideological bulletin points.

> Ideological Convergence
>
> We identified the following nexus points that were universally shared across all groups:
>
> Grievances:
>
> Migration: 49 out of the 50 analysed organizations expressed grievances associated with migrants and refugees (e.g. "migrants are not capable of integration", "young men flooding Europe are a security threat"). Cultural Displacement: 50 out of 50 organizations expressed grievances associated with the disruption of the cultural paradigm of society, (e.g. "an Islamic invasion of the West", "Muslims destroying European society"). Terrorism: 47 out of the 50 organizations expressed grievances associated with the threat of terrorism (e.g. "Islamic terrorism will kill us all", "we need to stop Muslim terrorists").
>
> World view:
>
> Xenophobic: All of the 50 groups assessed were xenophobic in their world view (e.g. "Pakistani rapists", "African terrorists"). Islamophobia: 50 out of the 50 groups were Islamophobic in their world-view (e.g. "Muslim grooming gangs", "Islam is a cancer"). Nativist: 48 out of the 50 groups were nativist in their world-view (e.g. "we have to protect traditional European vales from immigrants and cultural Marxists"). (*ibidem*: 26-27)

The data supports that "ideological pragmatism increasingly blurs the lines between traditionally separate movements" (*ibidem*: 29). Much of the language of the members of the movements are projecting disgust against target groups.

The next section is an examination of the role of disgust in the language of the radical right movements.

1.4.4 The Role of Disgust for the Radical Right movements

Disgust is a complex emotion that has developed from primitive roots; it is a unique emotion and instinctual feeling that is at the foundation of moral constructs and societal rules. To feel disgust means to feel marked aversion aroused by something repugnant and distasteful. In fact, disgust became the central emotion around which communities and morals coalesced. According to Haidt, McCauley and Rozin (1994: 702):

> Disgust acts as a kind of guardian of the mouth, protecting against the oral incorporation of offensive or contaminated foods, where the principal contaminants to be avoided are the waste products of human or animal bodies. Yet in our American Ss[11], and in the other cultures we have examined, the revulsion associated with disgust extends far beyond this food-related core. Gore and dismemberment of the human body often elicits disgust, as does a range of sexual acts, especially incest.

Therefore, disgust emerges as a universal trait of morality in different cultures even if mapped onto different violations evaluated through a scale of degrees of severity of what is considered a "wrong act", which is why while certain physical acts that are considered dirty or corrupting eventually became abstract and assimilated into moral rules. A certain feature of disgust is in the defensive nature of this emotion, in fact:

> Correlations indicate that disgust can indeed be thought of as a defensive emotion. Highly disgust sensitive people appear to be guarding themselves from external threats: they are more anxious, more afraid of death, and less likely to seek out adventure and new experiences. Disgust appears to make people cautious not only about what they put into their mouths, but about what they do with their bodies. (*ibidem*: 711)

Food, bodies and sexuality are linked to disgust in each community in different ways. It is possible to argue that organized life in a human community evolved through the creation of rules, norms and taboos. The universal nature of disgust means that:

> Humans cannot escape the evidence of their animal nature. In every society people must eat, excrete, and have sex. They bleed when cut, and ultimately they die and decompose. We propose that most cultures have found ways to "humanize" these activities, through rituals, customs, and taboos. (*ibidem*: 712)

An enormous part of the humanization of disgust, at a peak in current Western society, is in the necessity for "hygiene and the handling of body products (excretion) also tend to be highly regulated, with many culture-specific norms, and many people find the practices of other cultures disgusting" (*ibidem*). Disgust markedly differs from other emotions. This uniqueness lies in the fact that "disgust differs from other emotions, […] consistently invokes the sensory experience of what it feels like to

[11] Subjects (participants).

be put in danger by the disgusting" (Miller, 1997: 9). These pervasive effects of every single instance of the emergence of disgust is part of the reason for its central function in morality creation:

> Disgust seems intimately connected to the creation of culture; it is so peculiarly human that, like the capacity for language, it seems to bear a necessary connection to the kinds of social and moral possibility we have. If you were casually to enumerate the norms and values, aesthetic and moral, whose breach prompts disgust, you would see just how crucial the emotion is to keeping us in line. (*ibidem*: 18)

There are several emotions that overlap with disgust because "we use contempt, loathing, hatred, horror, even fear, to express sentiments that we also could and do express by images of revulsion or disgust" (*ibidem*: 25). Imagine what is considered a horrible act happening, probably the feelings that emerge are a complex mix of disgust for the act itself, loathing for the perpetrator or anxiety for the future. The co-existence of disgust with contempt is a subtle phenomenon but crucial to the understanding of this dissertation as humour and irony are often intertwined with disgust. This mutual influence emerges in ways that "there is no doubt that the most intense forms of contempt overlap with disgust […] disgust finds its object repulsive, contempt can find its object amusing" (*ibidem*: 31-32). Therefore, contempt is a "lighter" emotion that is humorous in nature but like humour itself, when addressed, it can expand as "the disgusting forces us to attend to it in a way that the contemptible does not unless it is also disgusting" (*ibidem*: 33). In fact, there are judgements about other people that balance between contempt and disgust, seriousness and humour, as "about persons and actions we say, as noted earlier, things like these: He gives me the creeps. He makes my skin crawl. Yuck. That makes me want to puke. You're revolting (repulsive, disgusting)" (*ibidem*: 180). Disgust is sometimes used in a non-serious manner but being extremely intense as an emotion it can be argued to leave a mark:

> We often speak of being disgusted by little things, styles of self-presentation or minor behaviors that merely "turn us off." […] In such instances, we feel that the idiom of disgust is consciously being used figuratively, that it is meant to exaggerate. A kind of intended comedy, a certain self-mockery, accompanies the assimilation of such peeves, often designated, as "pet peeves", into the idiom of disgust. These are marked as trivial; they are the annoyances and irritations that buttress the usual kinds of contempt that inform so much of social existence. (*ibidem*: 183)

Morality, humour and its derivative forms such as irony, satire, ridicule, and disgust are the main triangle of the societal constant game around norms and appropriate behavior. Moreover, these extracts underline the omnipresence of these mechanisms of human interaction between cultures and lines of class, gender, sex and skin colour. The hierarchical mobility of social interaction is often played through the intelligence of how to effectively use comical rankings and disgust of others.

> These are not informed by disgust except in a consciously ironic vein, the very irony of which places us more squarely in the world of contempt, which so frequently adopts the ironic register to express itself: the roll of the eyes in impatience and annoyance, the "tsk" of disapproval, the one-sided smile all capture the ironic style that so often characterizes certain avatars of contempt. Nevertheless, these comic rankings are part of the moral ordering, and that is just what the disgust idiom claims to accomplish; we are judging what someone is and according him or her a lower place in the moral and social order because of it. (*ibidem*)

A duality often exists in a collection of disgust enforced moral rules that dance around the notion, "if the necessity of moral compromise disgusts, it is another disgust-eliciting vice not to compromise at all" (*ibidem*: 185). Another element of communality of this triangle is that "when we are the objects of disgust, contempt, or derision, it is not just the disapproval that hurts but the small delight we suspect that our discomfiture gives the disapprover" (*ibidem*: 189). This sense of comfort is part of why the same core of social mechanisms survived for tens of thousands of years and still persist now because there is no need to look at "primitive shaming cultures for warrant for a more expansive moral domain in which disgust, contempt, and derision figure prominently […] our own social interactions provide a myriad of instances" (*ibidem*: 198). Miller uses the notion of carnivalesque to underline the role of contempt, and disgust, in the evolution of the democratic forms of hierarchy:

> If the dominant form of upward contempt was and still is largely that of making the superior look ridiculous, either by feasts of misrule or by satirical exposure of the hypocrisy and incompetence of the superior, it became possible with role proliferation, role division, and democratic assumptions simply to be indifferent, to find more than enough space for oneself in which the superior is disattendable and simply doesn't matter much. The low now have available to them the Hobbesian contempt of just not caring to attend to their superiors, and it is this which does so much to engender anxieties in the superior, for the superior cannot fathom that he or she could be so utterly disattendable. (*ibidem*: 234)

Therefore, democratic forms of government are constantly transformed by citizens shaping humour and feelings of disgust into individualized forms of action for all. The ignoring of a high born individual during the medieval age, disgusted by common and dirty populace, was unthinkable for a simple peasant. Miller underlines that essentially "what democracy has done is arm the lower with some of the contempts that only the high had available to them before" (*ibidem*). Disgust is a deindividualized wall that no political regime or philosophy was able to address, as disgusting physical inputs are always present, and "the crucial thing is that smell is "an impassable barrier" […] relativism, like socialism, cannot overcome slurped soup" (*ibidem*: 242). While it is true that a human being can train himself or herself to resist disgusting stimuli, it will still shape much of that person's behaviour. This historical continuity of disgust-based hierarchies persiss, with the less comprehended interaction with technology, throughout all societies:

> What remains is a serious meditation on the connection of emotions, particularly disgust, to the creation and maintenance of class hierarchy. Disgust may not be necessary to all rank orderings, but it appears as an

> insistent feature in some of our most common social orderings. It figures in class, caste, race, religion, and gender. Christians, whites, the upper classes, and men have all complained through the centuries, often obsessively, about the smells of Jews, nonwhites, workers, and women. (*ibidem*: 245)

The perception of what should be disgusting, and funny, is burned into the individual's matrix of values in the first years of life. Consequently, disgust reinforces the abstractness of the moral world and an important variable to steer a person towards action.

> Disgust defines many of our tastes, our sexual proclivities, and our choices of intimates. It installs large chunks of the moral world right at the core of our identity, seamlessly uniting body and soul and thereby giving an irreducible continuity to our characters. (*ibidem*: 251)

The union of neoliberalism, democracies and the progressivism of the last decades has created a cocktail of disgust of elites in every post-modern category: economic success, academia, attractiveness, virtue-signalling activists and far-right radicals. The immense complexity of contemporary society seems to stimulate feelings of disgust for others, especially the losers of society, rather than diminish them:

> Democracy not only worked to ensure the equitable distribution of contempt across class boundaries but also produced the conditions that transformed the once benign complacent contempt or indifference of the upper classes into a more malign and deeply visceral disgust. (*ibidem.*: 252)

Stigmatization, characterized by visceral disgust is an example of the avoidance phenomenon in group adaptation mechanics such as parasite avoidance mechanisms (Kurzban et al, 2001: 197) that emerged to avoid infected members of one's own species. The imperfect side of the adaptive mechanisms is that "the relationship between parasite infestation and visible cues is not perfect […] a signal detection problem" (*ibidem.*: 198). The cost of a miss is extremely high, often one's life, while the false positive affect your communication with other human beings only at a threshold point. One of the most intriguing aspects of the stigmatization process, still at play today, is based on the issue that:

> Physical distancing is critical in the context of parasite avoidance, and we expect people to try physically to stay away from those who deviate from the normal human species-typical morphology […] visibility will play a causal role in the severity of the stigmatization process in cases in which antiparasite adaptations are activated. (*ibidem*)

Scientific evidence shows that disgust influences individual moral judgment as "four studies […] inducing disgust found a causal relationship between feelings of physical disgust and moral condemnation" (Schnall et al, 2008: 1105). One of the aspects to understand about the moral

judgement of the Other is that "disgust influenced judgments of non-disgusting moral violations as much as it influenced judgments of disgusting moral violations" (*ibidem*: 1106). Two ethic systems seem particularly vulnerable to disgust stimuli:

> An "ethic of community" (including moral goods such as obedience, duty, interdependence, and the cohesiveness of groups and institutions) and an "ethic of divinity" (including moral goods such as purity, sanctity, and the suppression of humanity's baser, more carnal instincts). (Graham et al, 2009: 1030)

As the person who provides disgusting cues intrinsically violates the two systems, by aspect and personal purity, it is possible to suggest that "conservatives are more often drawn to deontological moral systems in which one should not break moral rules" (*ibidem*: 1037). Therefore, disgust at a marginal physical characteristic, such as the colour of skin or the shape of someone's eyes, can change the understanding of actions of an individual that would be considered normal if enacted by someone else. According to Haidt and Kesebir (2010: 807), the consensus now reigning in the field of moral psychology is:

> …that reasoning and intuition both matter, but that intuition matters more. This is not a normative claim (for even a little bit of good reasoning can save the world from disaster); it is a descriptive one. It is the claim that automatic, intuitive processes happen more quickly and frequently than moral reasoning, and when moral intuitions occur, they alter and guide the ways in which people subsequently (and only sometimes) deliberate.

Disgust therefore utilizes faster neuro-channels than rational ideas there by explaining the success of news that includes elements of disgust (Heath et al, 2001: 1038). Research provides evidence that "it is plausible to argue that, consistent with emotional selection, more disgusting legends are more successful in the social environment" (*ibidem*: 1039). Therefore, it should be underlined that "legends could be reliably coded for individual story motifs that produce disgust" (e.g. ingestion of a contaminated substance) (*ibidem*). This emotional selection mechanism is connected to:

> A gossipy social world, reputations matter for survival, and natural selection favors those who are good at tracking the reputations of others while simultaneously restraining or concealing their own selfish behaviour […] an expanded suite of emotions related to violations, whether committed by others (e.g., anger, contempt, and disgust) or by the self (e.g., shame, embarrassment, and guilt, although the differentiation of these emotions varies across cultures). (*ibidem*: 810)

The web of travelling information is closely linked to the individual's emotions. The survival of each human being is connected to the reputation and capacity to predict disease patterns based on the information available:

> Principles of gestalt psychology that govern the perception of entities in the physical world […] if people have a hyperactive tendency to see social groups where groups don' t exist, it suggests the presence of specialized social - cognitive structures designed for intergroup relations. (*ibidem*: 818)

There appears to be a strong correlation between Conservative political views and disgust sensitivity, i.e. the predisposition of feeling disgust. Eskine, Kacinik and Prinz (2011: 295) found that an individual's moral judgement can be affected by taste of bitter food, especially if it is disgusting. Furthermore, instances of physical disgust towards foods, beverages and animal carcasses contribute to a sentiment of moral disgust towards behaviours that are considered wrong such as stealing, particularly amongst indiviuals with politically conservative views (*ibidem*: 297). A participant in experiments conducted by Eskine, Kacinik and Prinz would be more prone to Conservative views on political issues after tasting a bitter beverage, this phenomenon shows "how abstract concepts like morality could originate from sensory experiences" (*ibidem*: 298). Visual reminders of disgust often play a similar role such as the placement of a hand sanitizer in front of the entrance of a building before a participant in the experiment participated in a test by Helzer and Pizarro (2011: 4) that stated that "environmental reminders of physical cleanliness shifted participants' attitudes toward the conservative end of the political spectrum". The visualization of the need to be clean:

> …creates a more general hypervigilance toward potential contaminants of the physical and moral variety […] people may be motivated to avoid getting their hands dirty after having just washed them, our manipulation may work by motivating participants to stay clean in the physical sense as well as in the more symbolic moral sense. (*ibidem*: 5)

Participants in experiments based on the perception of disgust seem to react in a similar manner to tastory and visual reminders of physical disgust and the recordings of misbehavior based on morality. What should be appropriate and moral as food and as behaviour is closely connected. Individuals seem to be engaged in a constant effort of both physical and moral detection around them. Eexpriments that focused on a visual reminder of the necessity to stay clean conducted by Helzer and Pizarro show that "disgusting stimuli […] may involve different neural and physiological mechanisms. These mechanisms might, in turn, have different downstream effects on judgments across different domains" (*ibidem*). This means that much of the human behavior can be affected by detection of a something disgusting, be it a food or a behavior considered wrong, in immediate vicinity.

Perception of something considered disgusting can affect not only isolated individuals but even entire communities. There are two scales connected with this process, the scale of Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) that shows the propensity of an individual towards this political stance and

the scale Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) that is used to value how much an individual is prone to see society as a set of dominating hierarchies. If an individual scores high on both of these scales, his propensity to be open to new ideas and experiences will be low (Akrami and Bo, 2006: 4). Disgust evokes the drive to close off and contribute to individuals scoring high on RWA and SDO scales closing in themselves (*ibidem*: 8). Therefore, an individual that is exposed to a visual or tastory reminder of disgust is pushed towards RWA and SDO perception of the world while opposing new ideas or welcoming of people from different countries. Groups, as a collection of individuals, have to react to disgust in some way. BiS is a behavioral system of recognition of contamination and threats that is constantly active for every individual and can be magnified by groupishness (Schaller and Park, 2011: 99). External stimuli of disgust, such as intense media coverage of sick people and hospital patients, can overload the perception of pathogen threats and increase the erratical response to BiS activity.

> The salience of potential infection may be temporarily heightened by specific circumstances (e.g., exposure to exaggerated media coverage of influenza outbreaks). These temporary circumstances can produce inhibitory effects on social interaction. (*ibidem*: 100)

BiS as a behavioral system is extremely sensitive to external stimuli and everyone is prone to commit mistakes to be protected from threats of contagion, in fact it is "sensitive to anything that superficially resembles smoke from a fire, and so are prone to make lots of (irritating but nonfatal) false-positive errors" (*ibidem*). Most individuals are disgusted not only by elements that are a pathogen threat but also by those things that pose no risk at all (*ibidem*: 100). In fact, the experiments by Schaller and Park show how individuals, when a pathogen threat exist, are prone to project the cause onto groups such as immigrants that do not represent a danger of contamination but that come from foreign territory.

> In a control condition, the slide show made salient the threat posed by disease-irrelevant accidents and mishaps (e.g., electrocution). In the other condition, the slide show made salient the threat posed by infectious pathogens. Results revealed that when pathogens were salient, participants were more inclined to spend government money recruiting immigrants from relatively familiar places, to the exclusion of those from places they considered foreign. (*ibidem*: 101)

Feelings of disgust are part of a complex behavioral system and they can be extended on moral codes and cultural value systems (*ibidem*). Each individual builds a hierarchy, that is both physical and moral, of what is digusting in order to avoid danger or, on the contrary, to show openmindness and originality of thought.

The presence of poor sanitation or elements seen as bringing disease and dirt, such as immigrants, reshape the systems of values in urban areas. Collectivist values return to condition the interaction of individuals of perceived different tribes. It is probable that people with evident signs of Otherness will be persecuted in a climate of disease while it could be a less troubling issue in a healthier environment. The sense of dirtiness is transmitted to abstract moral issues. For example, it has been proven by research that "solid independent effects on gay marriage attitudes are registered for both skin conductance changes and self-reported disgust sensitivity" (Smith et al, 2011: 7). There seems to be a relationship of communicating vessels between abstractness of the moral and political issues of the day and the physiology of individuals.

> The central implication of our research is that, whether the relevant raw material of political attitudes is entirely environmental or partially innate, these attitudes sometimes become biologically instantiated in involuntary physiological responses to facets of life far detached from the political issues of the day. (*ibidem*: 8)

Constant awareness of individuals that have visible signs of disease, even in images, provoke a direct response of the immune system:

> Research subjects who observed slides of people with disease symptoms (e.g., pox, skin lesions, sneezing) immediately mounted a classical immune response. Their white blood cells produced elevated amounts of inflammatory cytokine-interleukin-6 when exposed to bacterial antigens. (Fincher and Thornhill, 2012: 64)

If immune systems are constantly overloaded with visual false alarms, the rising biological drive of individuals to protect family and community can change a societal layout. It is observable on gender roles, for example, that:

> Other recent cross-national studies showed that collectivism, autocracy, traditional gender roles (women's subordination relative to men's higher status), and women's traditional sexual restrictiveness and continence are values that positively covary with one another, and occur in nations with high prevalence of infectious disease. The assortative sociality adaptations of xenophobia and ethnocentrism link these values to avoidance and management of parasites. (*ibidem*: 65)

Therefore, this behavioural mechanism is both biologically and socially embedded through a clear correlation that provokes certain behaviours in highly pathogen filled environments. Likewise, the creation of culture is built on this foundation with certain cultural artefacts emerging in these conditions.

An example of a social matrix that emerges from the BiS is political radicalization and religion as Fincher and Thornhill (2012: 75) found that "religious affiliation and religious participation and

value, was positively correlated with all measures of parasite-stress". It emerges, after eliminating other variables, the fact that "poorest nations have maintained similar levels of high religiosity[12] over time is because of the salience placed on tradition, conformity, and other in-group values" (*ibidem*). The attention given by religions to moles on the skin can be partially explained by these data as it is intuitive that "disgust and contamination sensitivity will covary positively with religious commitment and its covariates" (*ibidem*: 77). Ideological commitment functions similarly to displays of radical religious faith provoking notable connections between these different elements. A comparative analysis of different countries by several selected factors on the condition of historical pathogen prevalence proves:

> Country-level analysis showed that even when controlling for GDP per capita, historical pathogen prevalence significantly predicted endorsement of the binding foundations, but not endorsement of the individualizing foundations. These results complement a number of recent finding documenting covariations between pathogen prevalence and psychological/cultural variables, particularly those pertaining to cautious antipathogen tendencies. (Van Leeuwen et al, 2012: 7)

From this kind of multi-level analysis, it emerges that "people up-regulate the binding moral foundations in response to pathogen prevalence as an adaptive response" (*ibidem*: 8). Moral foundations seem to be clearly produced by evolution as "human morals function to cope with adaptive problems" (*ibidem*). According to Bollas and Bollas (2013: 72), psychological variables emerge when "preverbal self-states are transferred into the symbolic order". A concrete example is provided in the account of a psychological case:

> One patient, for example, said that whenever they heard the word 'banana' a kind of sick feeling overtook them. […] It took a long time for this word to break down into its meanings. 'Ba' meant 'Bah!' 'Nana' meant 'Na, Na, Na!' So 'banana' carried a powerful, contemptuous 'Bah! NO!' from the other. It was, literally, a stomach-churning event for this patient and whenever they heard the word their face would screw up with revulsion. (*ibidem*)

Psychological and physical variables are closely interconnected. Disgust stimuli provoke a clear individual biological response that is usually complex and with different emotion categories separated between them. As stated by Barrett, Adolphs, Marsella, Martinez and Seth (2019: 55), being "happily disgusted" seems to be the result of the meeting of humour and disgust, as the face simultaneously displays a smile accompanied by a disgusted frown. On the other hand, there is a clear discrimination between negative visual input and visual input that is devoid of elements of disgust:

[12] This characteristic applies to poorer regions of advanced countries as well as, for example, central states in the US.

> Salivary immune markers between research participants in whom disgust was induced by disease-relevant pictorial cues documented to be disgust elicitors (e.g., a dirty toilet, an eye infection) and other participants who were exposed to either negative, but disease-irrelevant, pictures or neutral pictures. The disgust-primed group showed an oral immune response, but the other groups did not. (Thornhill and Fincher, 2014: 71)

Language follows a similar mechanism. Those who do not speak the official language of the state well, may provoke in native speakers of that language a clear response based on disgust stimuli, as in the case of racist rants about a situation in which immigrants should speak English. Diez (2019: 73) reports a pattern that emerges from her data:

> Americans of high disgust sensitivity rated foreign-accented English as more dissimilar to their own accent than did Americans of low disgust sensitivity […] conservatives perceive greater differences between in-group and out-group spoken language than do liberals.

Furthermore, it emerged from the same study that disgust patterns directly influence political competition:

> …from the US sample that disgust sensitivity predicted voting preferences and actual voting in the 2008 US presidential election: high disgust individuals and US states favored John McCain (conservative), whereas their low disgust counterparts favored Barack Obama (liberal). (*ibidem*: 421)

The correlation of political belief and disgust is almost certain as "the hypothesis that disgust will be greater in conservatives (collectivists) than in liberals (individualists) is strongly supported" (*ibidem*). While alliances reduce disgust impact on society, conflicts themselves correlate with the stress parasite hypothesis. The data suggests that:

> …if perceived levels of infection-related threat increase within a local region (e.g., as a result of climate change), a more conservative cognitive, ideological, and personality style may result—leading in turn to reduced levels of cooperation with out-groups and hence increased conflict and difficulty in effecting global change. Indeed, the frequency of the outbreak of interstate conflicts and civil war has been attributed to the intensity of infectious disease across countries of the world. (Brown et al, 2016: 112)

Therefore, conflicts accompany outbreaks of disease and the consequences for the bearers of false alarm characteristics are usually severe. A relevant link between disgust and social structures is orderliness. It emerges from data provided by Xu (2016: 9) that the two traits are closely related.

> Orderliness and disgust sensitivity may be related constructs, and both share covariance in predicting conservatism. This is because, from a theoretical point of view, basic emotional processes and personality dispositions develop early in childhood, and should therefore precede the development of more specific, concrete ideologies […] surrounding oneself with an orderly physical and social environment can reduce the likelihood of encountering stimuli that should not "fit" or "mix" together.

Disgust is the prime emotion from which the need to create social hierarchies and barriers emerge, to separate oneself from dangers in the surrounding environment. On the other hand, humour is often evoked to go beyond hierarchies and barriers downplaying the need for these tools of social control. Therefore, humour and disgust, as well as the resulting need for orderliness, are deeply connected.

> Orderliness, which emphasizes maintaining structure, organization, and convention, may be the personality characteristic that is most relevant to maintaining meaning. After all, maintaining a coherent meaning framework may contribute to a person's more general subjective sense of order in his/her life. (*ibidem*: 35)

Orderliness and humour are both channeled to create a new understanding of surrounding spaces to evoke new meanings. An orderly person would be geared towards creating limitations to the movement of others and create new forms of organization while a person with a humorous approach to life will be for mixing and the dissolution of any serious planning. Humour represents an unexpected violation of the existing order:

> …more orderly individuals showed both increased preference for coherently meaningful stimuli, and decreased preference for meaning-violating stimuli […] what truly bothers orderly (or conservative) individuals is not randomness per se, but unexpected randomness or meaning violations. (*ibidem*: 40-41)

Orderly individuals often recognize this potential of humour to violate the create order and they attempt to channel it to sustain their worldview. To minimize contamination, disgust and humour are evoked in tandem to establish and nourish a more closed off version of reality.

> Individuals who are especially averse to contaminations and pathogens are also more likely to be orderly, as this may allow them to remain in a structured environment that minimizes the exposure to such contagions. This then has downstream influences on the adoption of more conservative or even authoritarian political values and beliefs, which can further shield them from potential contaminations. (*ibidem*: 55)

Ultimately, the various biological mechanisms and instincts of defence dictated by parasite stress evolved to shape cultures and historical processes. Contempt and humorous elements seem to be an integral part of this mechanism of social shaping. Language, in particular, is a social process that mediates the social spikes of disgust and articulates this emotion. Consequently, in the next section, I will examine the role of the metaphor in conjunction with disgust sensitivity in stigmatization processes.

1.4.4.1 Disgust Metaphors

Metaphors are rhetorical devices that consist of figures of speech that describe objects and actions in a way that is not literally true but that trace a believable comparison. The crucial aspect of a metaphor is that it invites recipents to recognize hidden similarities between two entities, transferring the qualities of one to the other. This technique allows human beings to convey specific emotions by referring to an aspect of reality while discussing another. Metaphorically, the notion of disgust in language usually appears through its connection with diseases, as Sontag (1978: 58) discusses in *Ilness as a Metaphor*:

> The disease itself becomes a metaphor. Then, in the name of the disease (that is, using it as a metaphor), that horror is imposed on other things. The disease becomes adjectival. Something is said to be disease-like, meaning that it is disgusting or ugly.

According to Sontag, in a typical metaphorical process "feelings about evil are projected onto a disease. And the disease (so enriched with meanings) is projected onto the world" (*ibidem*: 58). The connections between disgust sensibility and rightwing beliefs have been discussed in previous sections. Adversarial physical characteristics, religious beliefs and political positions are perceived linguistically as different symptoms of the same disease becoming "the right-wing fantasy of a 'world without cancer (like a world without subversives)" (*ibidem*: 70- 71). Concepts of hierarchy, order and the society as a healthy and natural state of communities emerge in antiquity:

> The classical formulations which analogize a political disorder to an illness—from Plato to, say, Hobbes—presuppose the classical medical (and political) idea of balance. Illness comes from imbalance. Treatment is aimed at restoring the right balance—in political terms, the right hierarchy. The prognosis is always, in principle, optimistic. Society, by definition, never catches a fatal disease. (*ibidem*: 76-77)

Societies cannot, by definition, completely disappear. Therefore, there is a continuous urge amongst people to "heal" the national community through purification. The logic of purity and health rotates around the notion that "the melodrama tics of the disease metaphor in modern political discourse assume a punitive notion: of the disease not as a punishment but as a sign of evil, something to be punished" (*ibidem*: 82). This metaphorized reasoning is particularly evident in radical political ideologies when a portion of society is seen as the enemy of the healthy state and should be exterminated like parasites or rabid animals:

> Modern totalitarian movements, whether of the right or of the left, have been peculiarly—and revealingly—inclined to use disease imagery. The Nazis declared that someone of mixed "racial" origin was like a syphilitic. European Jewry was repeatedly analogized to syphilis, and to a cancer that must be excised. Disease metaphors were a staple of Bolshevik polemics, and Trotsky, the most gifted of all communist polemicists, used them with the greatest profusion—particularly after his banishment from the Soviet Union

> in 1929. Stalinism was called a cholera, a syphilis, and a cancer. To use only fatal diseases for imagery in politics gives the metaphor a much more pointed character. Now, to liken a political event or situation to an illness is to impute guilt, to prescribe punishment. (*ibidem*)

Far right movements tend to utilize these metaphors in language and iconography with zealous intensity, for example, "the imagery of cancer for the Nazis prescribes 'radical' treatment" (*ibidem*: 83-84). Sontag claims that disease-based language indirectly prescribes ethnic cleansing policies:

> The use of cancer in political discourse encourages fatalism and justifies "severe" measures—as well as strongly reinforcing the widespread notion that the disease is necessarily fatal. The concept of disease is never innocent. But it could be argued that the cancer metaphors are in themselves implicitly genocidal. (*ibidem*: 84)

The beliefs of the population are interpreted in a linguistic spiral so drenched in disgust that the only possible solution is the excision of the sick part of society. This use of language is both strategic and instinctual:

> It spreads; it is disgusting—gangrene would seem to be laden with everything a polemicist would want. Indeed, it was used in one important moral polemic— against the French use of torture in Algeria in the 1950s. (*ibidem*: 85-86)

The narrative of Albert Camus' novel *La Peste,* is metaphorically framed to criticize the morality of the French government engaged in despicable acts on Algerian soil. It is evident that it is possible to use disgust-based language both to criticize the powerful or to other the few. Lakoff's view on metaphors is based on the cognitive aspects of language:

> The generalizations governing poetic metaphorical expressions are not in language but in thought: They are general mappings across conceptual domains. Moreover, these general principles which take the form of conceptual mappings, apply not just to novel poetic expressions, but to much of ordinary everyday language. (Lakoff, 1993: 202)

Therefore, metaphorical expressions pervade and give meaning to every aspect of human communication. Lakoff underlines that in modern linguistics "the word metaphor has come to mean a cross-domain mapping in the conceptual system" (*ibidem*). Equally relevant is Lakoff's idea that "emotional concepts […] are understood metaphorically" (*ibidem*: 210). Language, visualization and the portrayals of action have the same origin of comprehension. Lakoff observes that "metaphorical mappings preserve the cognitive topology (that is, the image-schema structure) of the source domain,

in a way consistent with the inherent structure of the target domain" (*ibidem*: 212). Ant example of this process is the use of eating to signify reaching an objective:

> Achieving a purpose is getting something to eat – All the good jobs have been gobbled up.
>
> He's hungry for success.
>
> The opportunity has me drooling. (*ibidem*: 224)

These metaphors are indirectly connected to the emotion of disgust, verifying implicitly in a person's mind a situation, through mental imagery based on food. Image structure of language through metaphor represents a strong point in Lakoff's theory as "abstract reasoning is image-based reasoning under metaphorical projections to abstract domains" (*ibidem*: 227). The cognitive aspects of Lakoff's understanding of language considers subtleties and mutual influence of human action and language. He underlines the role of prototypes in human categories:

> Human categories are typically conceptualized in more than one way, in terms of what are called prototypes. Each prototype is a neural structure that permits us to do some sort of inferential or imaginative task relative to a category. (Lakoff, 1999: 19)

Another aspect that is subtly part of the role of language is the process of embodiment of the communicative sphere, for metaphors of disgust for example. Lakoff defines this mental mechanism writing that "an embodied concept is a neural structure that is actually part of, or makes use of, the sensorimotor system of our brains" (*ibidem*: 20). Therefore, it is logically deduced that every simple thought or action can have an influence on the perception of language be metaphorized in which universality is their defining quality. Lakoff underlines that "models of the motor schemas for physical actions can – under metaphoric projection – perform the appropriate abstract inferences about international economics" (*ibidem*: 42). For example, how it is possible to relate to the Iraq War of 2003? Lakoff points out:

> If the Iraq War was really about oil – if all those people have died or been maimed or orphaned for oil – then disgust is rational. But if you stop at conscious reason and emotion, you miss the main event. Most reason is unconscious! (Lakoff, 2009: 8-9)

These processes around metaphor are largely processed reflexively in an unconscious, automatic manner. The basic functioning of the metaphorical structure around disgust is that "we typically feel disgust when we eat rotten food and good when we eat pure food. This leads to the conceptual metaphor Morality is Purity; Immorality is Rottenness" (*ibidem*: 94). The examples that are provided capture these feelings through concepts such as "pure as the driven snow, Purification rituals, A rotten

thing to do, That was disgusting, Tainted by scandal, Stinks to high heaven" (*ibidem*: 96). Another idea developed throughout evolution and captured by metaphors is that "you are better off if you are healthy than if you are sick, Morality is Health, Immorality is a Disease" (*ibidem*: 97). Discussed in detail by Lakoff, this metaphorical concept is captured by metaphors such as "Terrorism is spreading, The contagion of crime, A sick mind, Exposed to pornography" (*ibidem*). The embodiment of this metaphorical concept appears through the process of "Morality is Cleanliness metaphor affects the behavior of subjects: a threat to one's moral purity induces the need to cleanse oneself literally" (*ibidem*: 99). Lakoff point out that morality and physical bodies of human beings cognitively and linguistically are the same:

> Physical disgust and moral disgust lead to similar facial expressions and physiological activation (lower heart rates and clenching of the throat), and recruit overlapping brain regions in the lateral and medial orbitofrontal cortex. (*ibidem*: 100)

The "least resistance" pathways condition these mechanisms and are the reason why "conservatives insist on strict punishment for nonviolent drug offenders. This is reinforced by the Moral Order metaphor whenever the offender is nonwhite, an immigrant, or a poor person" (*ibidem*: 107). It is also possible to observe that the disgust principle can function in reverse. The automatic and unconscious associations, by the way of a metaphor or a metonymy, have a direct effect on the brain mappings:

> Part of the power of a word is that it can activate vast stretches of the brain because of spreading activation – frames activate other frames, which activate still other frames, and so on. But brain structures provide words with even greater power […] The circuitry constituting the primary metaphors Moral is Up; Immoral is Down, and Moral is Pure; Immoral is Disgusting is sitting there in your brain waiting to be activated. (*ibidem*: 241)

This union between the metaphorical and the cognitive decisively influences culture and communication spheres, as all human history. The metaphor of food as information, a variation of food as goal reported above, is critical to disgust as an emotion that perceive knowledge as contaminated.

> Metaphors for ideas and though tend to give rise to metaphors for communication […] Ideas are Food and Understanding is Digesting, and Communicating is Feeding, as in "I've been feeding him stock market tips for week – so many he can barely digest them all." (*ibidem*: 259)

If an effective account of how metaphors influence the thinking of the radical far-right exists, it is in the collection of notes on the table talk of Hitler. Disgust permeates the entire collection, for example, the suggestion that "Christianity, with its disgusting equalitarianism, would be extirpated" ([1953]

2000: XXVI). For example, rats, that disgusted Hitler, were used in Nazi propaganda to portray Hebrew people: "I learnt to hate rats when I was at the front. A wounded man forsaken between the lines knew he'd be eaten alive by these disgusting beasts" (*ibidem*: 99). A twisted form of honour is upheld through a disgust-based world view by Hitler together with high physical sensitivity. Therefore, moral disgust is an intrinsic part of this perception of the world. During a dinner in December 1941, he underlines:

> Nobody has the right to photograph a man surprised in intimacy. It's too easy to make a man seem ridiculous. […] It was a disgusting way of behaving, and I've forbidden any use to be made of the photos. (*ibidem*: 156)

Hitler's stories of his early revolutionary activity usually mention the disgust of the common population and policemen helping Nazi activists, that "little by little, there was a revulsion in our favour. Now and then a policeman would come and whisper into our ears that he was at heart on our side" (*ibidem*: 293). The feature that is noticeable is that Hitler, on the contrary, cultivates a deep distaste of the masses of people he gathered. He points out, on 1st September of 1942, that "I am an implacable enemy of the Habsburgs, but the sight of this mob sprawling to the very edge of the Imperial box was disgusting and repulsive, and it angered me immensely" (*ibidem*: 679). The national socialist view of the state was to see it as a single body. This understanding of society clearly focuses on dangerous enemies to one's people as a whole, who are likened to parasites:

> In modern extremist and totalitarian ideologies, for instance in Nazi ideology and discourse, the conceptualization of the nation as a body that must be shielded from disease and parasites at any cost has gained new potency. (Musolff, 2004: 84)

Writers adopt dark forms of irony through metaphors that refer to health mappings such as "our country is sick due to homeless parasites" suggesting the cleansing of these individuals. Metaphorical scenarios may even portray some groups as parasites and infer a need for genocide to solve these issues (*ibidem*: 175). Metaphors that use references to bodies to portray entities such as countries or communities can bring violent consequences if rooted deeply in the psyche of readers.

> The 'rootedness' of central mappings and scenarios in primary scenes and experiences is a factor that must be taken into account for any investigation of the reasons of their persistence in folk-theories, idioms, discourse traditions and long-term patterns of sociopolitical conceptualization and argumentation. (*ibidem*: 176)

The target of these body metaphors are often immigrants that are perceived as a contaminating factor of a nation, especially by the right. Immigrants are described as invaders, leeches or tourists, depriving the locals of their birthright.

> Immigrant-as-scrounger who sucks, drains or bleeds the country dry, aims for freebies and lives off or sponges from Britain, thus exploiting it as a treasure island. Its references to immigrants range from relatively moderate depictions as welfare-tourists (since 2013 also, NHS-tourists) to their dehumanizing stigmatization as leeches, bloodsuckers and parasites. (Musolff, 2015: 46-47)

On one hand, the intensity of the language that is characterized by aggressive metaphors can be lightened up through the use of irony and humour. On the other hand, ridicule can be used in conjunction with metaphorical language to target a specific group. In fact, for Musolff, the usage of aggressive metaphors is often paired up with sarcasm, irony and other forms of humour:

> The percentage of texts invoking the scrounge scenario is even smaller in the online-forum sample, where this scenario is present in just 251, i.e. about 10% of all 2473 postings. In 90% of all these occurrences, however, the scenario is used in an assertive-aggressive way to depict immigrants as scroungers, in some cases in elaborate, sarcastic versions. (*ibidem*: 47)

The quality of this discourse with elaborate forms of metaphorical mapping is the accumulation of terminology from disgust, disease and corruption domains. On the internet, where communication flows freely, this phenomenon is even more evident:

> The "Blogosphere" appears to exhibit a relatively consistent xenophobic and polemic bias insofar as the parasite metaphor is used together with further "disgusting and dangerous organisms" terminology to dehumanize immigrants and denounce them as not being part of the 'proper' national society. (*ibidem*: 50)

A common strategy throughout history is to utilize text and images in conjunction, for example, cartoons. Totalitarian regimes widely used this metaphor to justify and propose the radical solution of extermination to cure society:

> Strongly discriminatory denunciations of alleged (socio-)parasites in history, such as those by Nazis and Stalinists, highlighted and instrumentalized their supposedly scientifically proven destructiveness in order to justify their extermination/annihilation as a form of social hygiene/therapy. (*ibidem*: 52-53)

Ungerer and Schmid (2006) identify two forms of metaphorical mappings in human communication: lean mapping that underlines isolated qualities of a target, and rich mapping that embodies abstract ideas. Rich mapping usually emerges when a simple concept is linked with a series of complex human interaction.

> Rich mapping between specific concrete source concepts and abstract target concepts, plus additional mapping from generic concepts, is primarily used to supply a tangible conceptual structure for abstract target concepts (e.g. ARGUMENT, IDEA, emotion concepts). (2006: 127)

New metaphors are created and introduced into a language because they represent an entirely new way to understand reality and how people represent it. This is a gradual and slow process that can increase when a particularly impactful idea mapped through metaphor is introduced. The use of humour is part of the innovation of language as people play with words with humorous intent to create new metaphors that "are different from conventional metaphors in that they are beyond social conventions" (Xiu Yu, 2013: 1470) and often as a result of a joke. The relationship between the world and language is intimate as while the metaphorical sphere restructures cognitive mappings, the physical experience allows an embodiment for the comprehension of human behavior. As highlighted by Zhong and House (2014: 120):

> It is possible that when people start to develop an understanding of moral and social threats they utilize emotional and conceptual tools that they have already grasped through dealing with physical threats, such as contamination and pollution […] concepts related to cleanliness and dirt are frequently referenced in descriptions of moral issues. In English, for example, the phrase "money laundering" implies that the proceeds of crime are "tainted" and need to be "cleaned" in order to pass as legitimate; a tarnished reputation can indicate that previous immoral acts are perceived to foretell future immoral acts; and the phrase "blood on your hands" signifies involvement in nefarious activities.

All spheres of human activity are touched by the disgust metaphor. The physical world often provides evidence for the fact that cleanliness is a sound strategy to adopt, the same reasoning is applied to the abstract world of action. The different layers of metaphors that involve disgust can be explained as follows:

> Three dimensions of dirt and pollution: permanence, contagion, and harm, may carry significant adaptive implications that shape not only how we assess physical pollution threats but also social threats from moral transgressions. Specifically, these properties of dirt may influence how we think about moral reputations, the likelihood of copycat unethical behavior, and how we assess the morality of harmless deviant behaviors, respectively. (*ibidem*: 123)

The influence of literature should be mentioned again as it is through personalized patterns of action that we discover metaphorical mappings to adopt. This concrete way of crystallizing a given metaphor allow to transform an intuition into truth, for example:

> A person who transgresses is thought of as having been "tainted" and it is difficult to "come clean" again. […] Lady MacBeth's futile attempt to wash the blood from her hands is a dramatic example of this metaphorical thinking written into our collective conscience. (*ibidem*: 124-125)

The opposite can be applied as well. If a society experiences a significant technological shift, metaphorical mappings adapted to this new reality will emerge. Events, actions and objects that had been common before the shift will be transformed through a metaphorical mapping into something no longer acceptable. The United States provides different examples of this phenomenon, in racism, drugs and hygiene revolutions:

> Hygiene standards and sanitation in both private and public spheres have far exceeded what is necessary for health and safety reasons. From antibacterial soap, to antiperspirant, to colon cleansing, it is as if Americans have become obsessed with cleanliness […] From within a bubble of cleanliness, people may form misconceived ideas about dirt and pollution. Dirt, mud, dust, grease, sweat, etc., things that are otherwise perfectly normal derivatives of everyday life, now seem tainting, contagious, and harmful. (*ibidem*: 129)

The question that emerges is the one on which this section focuses: "if people are eager to purge the dirt from their physical world, will they be equally passionate about eliminating deviation and diversity from their social order?" (*ibidem*: 130). According to Ervas, Gola and Rossi (2015: 646), it seems clear that "the automatic, unconscious and obliged character of emotional processes are extremely important: they allow for quick action without extensive thinking". Therefore, this attunement for quick action determines the blocking and avoiding on the rational level of elements that oppose this "gut feeling":

> Emotions such as anger, disgust, enthusiasm and aversion seem to be correlated with people's preference for a selective exposure to information. These emotions prepare people for a defensive reaction that seems to block them to bear in mind different point of views. (*ibidem*: 648)

It is not surprising that modern far right movements use the same metaphorical mappings as national socialists. The target can change, from the Jewish people to immigrants, but the language remains the same. As Delouis (2014: 4) points out:

> Official and semi-official BNP publications display particularly colorful language when dealing with immigration, the single most appealing topic to this political party. […] Typical immigration metaphors such as IMMIGRATION IS A DISEASE and IMMIGRATION IS A FLOW or a FLOOD.

It is extremely difficult to imagine far right movements adopting a different metaphorical mapping as it is in the signalling of the weak link in society that the purpose of these political movements, is found. It is difficult to see other metaphors used by far right groups, ethnic cleansing being an effective example, it is "a metaphorical euphemism for killing or expelling a population group,

referring to the underlying conceptual metaphor THE ENEMY IS DIRT" (*ibidem*: 8). Elements are used to invoke a feeling of physical disgust for the targeted enemy and moral disgust for actions against their own weak members that the far right want to protect. In fact, it is used exactly to delegitimize the existing power seen as "corrupted":

> …with the "ethnic cleansing" metaphor, the British population is split in two, divided between a blameworthy intellectual and political elite that "colludes" with immigrants and possibly the EU on the one hand, and the majority population on the other. (*ibidem*: 10-11)

Re-working metaphorical mappings is essential in understanding the far right. A new morality is created through language and the formulation of a different history and a warped, from the democratic point of view, political sense of the existing society is the main goal of far-right movements:

> In the far-right texts under discussion, historical metaphors are certainly hoped to give a rational, perhaps even academic appearance to a number of political arguments. However, contrary to truly heuristic historical analogies, the "conquest", "colonisation", and "ethnic cleansing" metaphors distort reality beyond recognition. The most extreme example is surely the highly paradoxical metaphor of GIVING BIRTH IS KILLING, when births to foreign mothers are likened to genocide of the white British population. (*ibidem*: 12)

The last example I will provide will demonstrate how metaphors of food and alcohol can highlight that far-right politicians present themselves as being against elites. The single politician that drinks beer like a "common man" becomes the visualized embodied metaphor for the general public. This trick is widely used, for example, by the (in)famous star of the Brexit referendum, Nigel Farage:

> The very clear and consistent messaging of Ukip's Nigel Farage in the recent Brexit campaign in the UK (and, for that matter, in the years that preceded it). The politician was rarely to be seen without a pint of beer in hand. (Spence, 2016: 6)

Metaphors are clearly a key component of the language and the creation of meaning by the radical right and far-right movements, both in the United Kingdom and globally. Politicians such as Farage are skillful in walking the fine line between normalization of radical views and extreme outbursts that can attract more attention to their cause. Metaphorical language is a crucial element of radical right communication and of spreading their beliefs.

1.4.5 Summary

As we have seen, current radical right movements, in Britain and elsewhere, are psychologically conditioned by disgust and orderliness. They appear to employ metaphorical language and humour to convey their feelings on views that are broadly shared on themes such as immigration, Islam and corrupt elites and a strife for 'normalization' to achieve electoral success or break into extremist cells that are part of the same political milieu that can be broadly defined as the radical right scene. The online world and social networks, while used in a different way by various radical right groups, represent the greatest asset to spread the radical right message and for the 'self-radicalization' and the consequent emergence of 'lone wolf' terrorism. The greatest danger lies in the 'tit-for-tat radicalization' between different ideologies and political movements that, both online and through violent acts, compete for hegemony in online spaces in a spiral of violence. The role of the emotion of disgust has been explored with the focus on behavioral mechanisms that increase stigmatization and the avoidance of pathogen threats. Groups such as immigrants, people of color and the homeless are seen as vectors of disease and treated with disgust that contribute to the drive of purification of the social body of the nation. Disgust is firmly part of language, especially metaphors that are often evoked to channel this emotion, and is evoked with expressions such as "immigration is disease". Specific attention has been paid to how rightwing groups utilize metaphors of disgust to spread their message.

The following sections will illustrate the role of memetics and social media in the social dynamics that involve users online.

1.5 Memetics and Social Media

1.5.1 Memetics: From Dawkins to Meme Wars

The creation of meaning attached to symbols and beliefs that has emerged throughout human evolution is explored in detail in the work of Richard Dawkins (1976) who first proposed the term 'meme' to refer to a single cultural unit. Dawkins explains the reasons for this choice of terminology in its similarity to the term 'gene' and its link to biological evolution, arguing that just as genes propogate, travel and change, so do cultural items:

> The new soup is the soup of human culture. We need a name for the new replicator, a noun that conveys the idea of a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation. 'Mimeme' comes from a suitable Greek root, but I want a monosyllable that sounds a bit like 'gene'. […] Related to 'memory', or to the French word meme. It should be pronounced to rhyme with 'cream'. Examples of memes are tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches. Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation. (1976] 2006: 192)

Religions, and later in history political ideologies, are a good example of memes or even successful clusters of memes that evolve through time as, according to Dawkins, a meme is a cultural unit that emerges through an accumulation of minor cultural elements. He exemplifies his argument through the notion of God:

> Consider the idea of God. We do not know how it arose in the meme pool. Probably it originated many times by independent 'mutation'. […] The 'everlasting arms' hold out a cushion against our own inadequacies which, like a doctor's placebo, is none the less effective for being imaginary. These are some of the reasons why the idea of God is copied so readily by successive generations of individual brains. (*ibidem*: 192-193)

The accumulation of many memes shapes what can be called culture. Dawkins proposes the conceptualization of a culture that undergoes constant evolutionary pressure in its manifestations. Dawkins examines how a meme evolves. Songs, for example, can shed light on how memes can change through time. Any cultural unit can adapt and be reshaped through these mutations. Dawkins remarks in a later work that "origami folding patterns, useful tricks in carpentry or pottery: all can be reduced to discrete elements […] to pass down an indefinite number of imitation generations without alteration" (2006: 192-193). Cultures or political beliefs, as a memeplex, a collection of memes that are gathered into a larger whole with common characteristics, usually combine resilient memes and weaker ones that parasitically survive together in the body of a culture.

Moreover, memes evolve and survive through a process of adaptation - they compete for supremacy over the minds of a group of people so that a collection of memes will be successful if it strives to create a safe environment to propagate itself indefinitely. Dawkins exemplifies his argument through the notion of religion:

> The ideas of one religion are not 'better' than those of the other in any absolute sense, any more than carnivorous genes are 'better' than herbivorous ones. Religious memes of this kind don't necessarily have any absolute aptitude for survival; nevertheless, they are good in the sense that they flourish in the presence of other memes of their own religion, but not in the presence of memes of the other religion. (*ibidem*: 197)

Dawkins believes that memetic processes extend to all cultural developments. Memes and resulting psychological consequences co-evolve as old cerebral functions adapt to the creation of new cultural units. According to Cosmeides and Tooby (1992: 89), what emerges from these social dynamics suggest that the evolution of human developmental processes rely on a merging of cultures and minds.

> Human developmental mechanisms have been born into one cultural environment or another hundreds of billions of times, so the only truly long-term cumulatively directional effects of selection on human design would have been left by the statistical commonality that existed across cultures and habitats.

Memetic evolution is a challenge because "all humans share a universal, highly organized architecture that is richly endowed with contentful mechanisms, and these mechanisms are designed to respond to thousands of inputs from local situations" (*ibidem*: 116). Human brains create cultural mechanisms to understand the surrounding environment with a gradual adaptation to its growing complexity.

> The psychological mechanisms that govern sexual relations, coalitional partnerships, status, revenge, threat, and parenting—will have to be mapped out and integrated with the psychological mechanisms governing social exchange before social exchange can be fully unraveled. (Cosmides and Tooby, 1992: 210)

For example, cultural processes can change the emotional spectrum of individuals as "in reaction formation, unacceptable feelings are replaced by opposite feelings, for instance, when unconscious sexual wishes are covered by conscious disgust with sexuality" (Nesse and Lloyd, 1992: 610). Humour is an important part of these mechanisms of culture creation.

> Then there are the defenses that are seen as the most mature of all—humour and sublimation. Humour turns problematic confrontations into play, so that neither party is required to compete altogether seriously, with the risks that would entail. It allows graceful yielding without admitting inferior status. (*ibidem*: 625)

Humour seems to be a fluid in which memes expand to assimilate enough minds to survive. Memes could be analyzed by focusing on a specific currency: information. This is the main drive behind memes failure or success.

Brodie links memes to information processes that can have a direct effect on human environment. Information as the main memetic currency allows us to better visualize the mechanics of how memes spread and change. These processes often progress invisibly to then emerge when memes propagate extensively amongst a group.

> Under this definition, memes are to a human's behavior what our genes are to our bodies: internal representations of knowledge that result in outward effects on the world. […] Memes are hidden, internal representations of knowledge that result, again along with environmental influence, in external behavior and the production of cultural artifacts such as skirts and bridges. (Brodie, [1996] 2009: 7)

Brodie's suggestion is that our mind is vulnerable to memes in a similar way to our bodies' weakness to biological viruses. Memetically induced behavior is reproduced through copies of the same action that sperads from one human being to another. Potentially this mental programming can be replicated

endlessly. The rise and success of the first memes were linked to the capacity for survival of human beings. Brodie points out that common memetic themes were crucial in channelling the efforts of early human communities:

> — Crisis. The quick spreading of fear saved many lives by alerting people quickly to danger. We see nonconscious animals exhibit communication of the crisis meme—for example, in stampedes—but communication of the distinction-meme crisis along with specific details had more survival value.
>
> — Mission. Communicating a mission such as fighting an enemy, building shelter, or finding food allowed people to survive in times of adversity or scarcity. Groups of people who evolved to be good at sending and receiving the mission meme had fitter DNA than those who were not, because they were able to work together for a common goal.
>
> — Problem. Identifying a situation—such as lack of food, competition for potential mates, and so on—as a problem to be solved made each individual better equipped to survive and mate.
>
> — Danger. In particular, knowledge about potential dangers, even if not immediate crises, was valuable. Knowing where predators hunted or where water was poisoned enhanced survival.
>
> — Opportunity. Acting quickly to avoid missing out on a reward—historically, food, prey, or a potential mate—that presented itself was of benefit to evolving humans. (*ibidem*: 72-73)

Brodie analyses different emotions as a source of motivation for the survival of memetic themes. For example, revulsion or disgust represent an impactful emotion that is one of the most ancient sources of decision making to decide if the surrounding environment is viable or not. The emotional spectrum was the foundation from which different behavioral mechanisms and cultural practices gradually evolved.

> I would guess that revulsion is an older, simpler mechanism than fear. I say that because the things we tend to be revolted by are very old dangers such as visibly diseased bodies, noxious fumes, and poisonous tastes. Nature has separately evolved many safety-oriented drives: even the most primitive single-celled organisms tend to move away from hostile environments and toward more fruitful ones. (*ibidem*: 112)

Brodie points out that many memes were created from feelings of revulsion with different vectors, such as Racism and Elitism. In-group and out-group processes could be accelerated by these two memes in a way that often erupted into violence throughout history. For example, the drive of racism is based on the need to target and exclude groups of vulnerable people.

> — Racism. Excluding or even fighting people with obviously different genes, the seamy side of birds of a feather, has the effect of preserving the status quo of the gene pool. This is currently frowned upon by mainstream American society, although until the 20th century it was well accepted in most cultures that had exposure to other races. (*ibidem*: 116)

Fear and revulsion represent powerful emotions for memes to tap into. Brodie describes the different possibilities of "mental infection" through repetition, rationalization and the use of one meme to promote memes with similar characteristics for example, i.e. promote the idea of God to argue for a religion (*ibidem*: 126-127). A fusion of technological artifacts and memeplexes can be built around one single memetic idea. Brodie analyzes the news media cycle to explore this concept.

> The news media have evolved into a self-perpetuating cultural virus speaking out in favor of change. This process has continued to the point where the word conservative—which used to mean "opposing change"—has evolved to refer to some of the most revolutionary ideas around! (*ibidem*: 161)

Politics, especially fringe political groups, follow these memetic rules from our tribal past. Brodie points out that the seemingly rational approach to politics nowadays is usually hijacked by hidden and often difficult to recognize group mechanisms that evolved thousands of years ago. He underlines that the members of a political movement can be contaminated by a set of ideas, memes, that they spread in a way similar to primitive tribes and displaying tribal signs of belonging.

> Political campaign organizations. These often use the same basic formula: renting a vacant shell of office space, calling people and asking them to volunteer, and then having those volunteers call still more volunteers. The volunteers self-replicate, and you can plug in literally any political agenda. (*ibidem*: 206)

To use McLuhan's expression, Brodie's point is that the meme is the message. Memetic evolution consumes human thought processes and dreams. Furthermore, the immediacy of memes spreading amongst entire populations poses a complex challenge. The egoism of memes and their drive to change as well as adapt in an increasingly fast way is a central quality of socio-cultural evolution.

Different schemes to tame this complex process has been defined. There are several strategies to constrain how memes behave when unleashed by the course of human events or even chance. For example, Heylighen (2001) proposes the evolution of a meme in four stages:

> To be replicated, a meme must pass successfully through four subsequent stages: 1) assimilation by an individual, who thereby becomes a host of the meme; 2) retention in that individual's memory; 3) expression by the individual in language, behavior or another form that can be perceived by others; 4) transmission of the thus created message or meme vehicle to one or more other individuals. This last stage is followed again by stage 1, thus closing the replication loop.

The absorption of memetic content requires that "the presented meme must be respectively noticed, understood and accepted by the host" (*ibidem*). A physical artifact or a communication system are often the key that provide a vehicle for a meme reaching more individuals. These cultural and technological artifacts assume various forms and shapes.

> To reach another individual, an expression needs a physical carrier or medium which is sufficiently stable to transmit the expression without too much loss or deformation. Speech, for example, uses sound to transmit an expression, while text will be transmitted through ink on paper or electrical impulses in a wire. The expression will take the form of a physical signal, modulating the carrier into a specific shape from which the original meme can be re-derived. This physical shape may be called the meme vehicle. For example, meme vehicles can be books, photographs, artefacts or CD-ROMs. (*ibidem*)

The meme pool, or memetic market, is based on how active memes will be able to exclude their competitors. One of the approaches to understand the spread of memes is based on epidemiology. This perspective defines how memes evolve vertically through time but also horizontally through generations. Blackmore advocates that:

> Memes travel longitudinally down generations, but they travel horizontally too, like viruses in an epidemic. Indeed, it is largely horizontal epidemiology that we are studying when we measure the spread of words like 'memetic', 'docudrama' or 'studmuffin' over the Internet. (1999: ix)

Blackmore underlines the co-existence of different memes in larger cultural organisms or memeplexes. The competition is internal but bound to become external as well, against other memes or memeplexes. This process is characterized by phases of cooperation and competition that shape this struggle for dominance. Memeplexes are constantly refined by technological evolution. Blackmore points out that "the simple self-replicating meme groups we have considered so far have been given a great boost by the advent of computers and the Internet" (*ibidem*: 20). The idea of meme as replicator can include concepts from all dimensions of human life. For example, Blackmore, as an example of a pervasive cultural virus, describes the virality of what happened after the death of Diana Spencer:

> Few memes can claim anything like this power, but the principle is quite general. Certain kinds of news spread more effectively than others. These are the things people get to hear about and want to pass on again. As a result, people talk more. (*ibidem*: 85)

The occurrence of highly intensive emotions greatly contributes to the creation of lasting memeplexes. The unseen elements that memes capitalize upon are an important factor for their success. Events leading to conspiracy theories are transformed into lasting memes that survive for a long time. Blackmore discusses popular legends as a concrete example of the emergence of a collection of successive memes.

> From alien abductions and near-death experiences we can glimpse a general formula for certain kinds of successful memeplex. Take a highly emotional naturally occurring human experience with no satisfactory

> explanation, provide a myth that appears to explain it, and include a powerful being or unseen force that cannot easily be tested. (*ibidem*: 182)

A state of fear or disgust, for example, increases the potential for survival of memes and memeplexes which is why a mystical explanation that answers the emotional response of individuals and groups can have a stronger impact than technical and scientific solutions. Blackmore points out the potential of memes to inhabit and multiply by exploiting these emotive and irrational cultural mechanisms. She emphasizes that the evolution of the online world will be the most important propeller of memes as in itself it is a collection of memetic technological artifacts. The advancement of technology contributes to the emergence of memes that inhabit the system that human beings constantly innovate and improve upon. The occurring mutations will create new and ever-stranger memes able to successfully propagate because "the Net increases in size and complexity, which memetic principles dictate that it must, there will be increasing problems of traffic flow and control" (*ibidem*: 217). Blackmore proposes the idea of humans as organic machines that probably soon will be outpaced by technological means for memetic proliferation. As humans invented and absorbed memes, the memes will change and absorb humans.

Shermer (2002) describes fringe ideological movements, such as creationists and Holocaust deniers, in a way that is useful to understand the workings of parasitic memeplexes. There are certain rules of memetic survivability that fringe movements adopt, sometimes unwittingly, to achieve success. He attempts to track how these movements strive to become mainstream and attract more individuals.

> Tracking an ideological pattern common to fringe groups trying to move into the mainstream:
>
> 1. Early on, the movement includes a wide diversity of thought and members representing the extreme fringes of society, and it has little success in entering the mainstream […] 2. As the movement grows and evolves, some members attempt to disassociate themselves and their movement from the radical fringe and try to establish scientific or scholarly credentials […] 3. During this drive toward acceptability, emphasis moves away from antiestablishment rhetoric and toward a more positive statement of beliefs […] To enter public institutions such as schools, the movement will use the First Amendment and claim that its "freedom of speech" is being violated when its views are not allowed to be heard […] 5. To get the public's attention, the movement tries to shift the burden of proof from itself to the establishment, demanding "just one proof". (2002: 207)

Fringe movements, and to an extent, memeplexes exist beyond facts and numbers but through techniques of memetic survival. Research in memes and fringe groups continues to propose new hypotheses and ideas. Particularly, Aunger's theory of "electromeme" (2002: 12-13) attempted to link memes to some forms of physical environment. In his view, the information packet itself, the meme, shapes and directs those who carry that specific idea. Aunger's theory is focused on this

specific quality of memes because "replicators are entities that can *transfer structural constraints* on what is possible from one location and time to another" (*ibidem*: 151). Replication of memes is seen by Aunger as a constant process of copying of the same informational unit between different individuals.

> Replicators, then, to be defined as similar, cannot just do the same kind of job. They have to do *the same kind of job in the same kind of context*. […] This condition suggests that true replication involves what I will call "structural equivalence" between the source and the copy. (*ibidem*: 154)

A meme that is a valid example is the story of Little Red Riding Hood. Aunger focuses on the fact that such memes are repeated in the same form as "the Little Red Riding Hood story is essentially the same, whether told in pictures or a song or written words, because you can still get the 'moral' from it in any case" (*ibidem*: 153). Each individual can spread his or her memes, especially those that contribute to moral norms and rules. It is an evolutionary process that is linked to an accumulation of adaptations that are building blocks for a moral matrix (*ibidem*: 155). The advantage of Aunger's theory is that he attempts to provide a physical framework for memes. His hypothesis is that memes are contained in special cells alongside neurons in the brain:

> Like other replicators, memes are physical things. They are, in fact *electrical things* – propensities to fire – tied to the special kind of cells called neurons (but are not the neurons themselves). Here, then, is my definition of a neuromeme:
>
> *A configuration in one node of a neuronal network that is able to induce the replication of its state in other nodes*. (*ibidem*: 196-197)

Aunger believes that memes exist in a specific dimension of time, a faster pace by which cultural artifacts evolve that he calls meme time. Memes are reproduced and are shared between individuals and groups while meme time is occurring. Furthermore, a particularly popular idea should attract support amongst enough people for the survival of a meme. When individuals imitate each other it is more likely that others will adopt that idea (*ibidem*: 245-246). Moreover, Aunger sees memes as having the capacity to overwrite the mind of an individual due to constant influence:

> Memes began to replicate between brains […] The memetic spike simply has to stimulate a motor neuron to engage the host organism in a behavior that produces a social signal, such as a stream of speech, that can be consumed by a second organism. (*ibidem*: 327)

Aunger focuses on the role of first primitive physical artifacts such as totems and tools that can become a catalyst of memetic activity of groups. The collections of memes that became more complex, such as tribal identities, coalesced around these material representations. Biological

capacities, as well as physical artifacts, also adapted to the emergence of memetic complexity due to a bigger brain and the development of language. The same processes can be applied to the modern culture. Memetic evolution is linked to the development of physical artifacts such as computers now because "artifact evolution is itself a Darwinian process with great speed and power, and human culture can be thought of as the product of complex interactions between organisms, memes, and artifacts" (*ibidem*: 329). Aunger's perspective is an original take on Dawkins ideas because it gives a possible biological foundation to memes. The coexistence of memes in the same brain represents a promising outlet for future research. Aunger's hypothesis represents an attempt to understand memes beyond theoretical conceptualization that did not achieve wide notoriety. A more popular approach would be to explore the idea of memes as image macros.

1.5.2 Image macros and humour

Research on image macros represents a promising direction to track memes and their evolution. An image macro is a piece of digital media featuring a picture, or artwork, with some form of text superimposed that represents a useful conceptualization of the idea of a meme as a cultural unit. Shifman proposes a concept of meme linked to human choice and in her study of Youtube videos provides a coherent analysis of the memetic processes underscoring the centrality of humour for the processes that occur online.

> I define it as a popular clip that lures extensive creative user engagement in the form of parody, pastiche, mash-ups or other derivative work. Such derivatives employ two main mechanisms in relating to the 'original' memetic video: imitation (parroting elements from a video) and re-mix (technologically-afforded re-editing of the video). 'Memetic' alludes to the act of participation through mimesis, a fundamental aspect of this video type. It captures a wide range of communicative intentions and actions, spanning all the way from naïve copying to scornful imitation. Memetic videos, more so than those tagged here 'viral', highlight the unique traits of the internet as a facilitator of participatory culture. (2011: 190)

Shifman sees the main trait of the memetic activity in active participation. She illustrates that this culture of constant modification of memetic content represents a divide between traditional and new media. Shifman points out that social scientists who explore and study memes need to adopt this dynamic point of view to "measure not only how many people watched a certain video but also how many of them chose to do something with it" (*ibidem*: 198). This mode of participation represents how people engage with materials in online spaces. Shifman also mentions that the cultural dimension of continuous interaction involving memes is central for the creation of new content. Its recognizable structure, format and engagement by the other users create an immediate attachment to a newly created unit of imitation.

> People are emulating not only specific videos, but the cluster of textual traits identified here as catalysts for imitation by others. Transplanting this in the realm of ideas would suggest that more than anything, these memeic videos spread the notion of participatory culture itself: a culture based on the active spread and re-creation of content by users. (*ibidem*: 199)

This unique culture is producing a drive to create a tribal belonging from the idea of online community. Shifman discusses a double tendency, of individuality and belonging, that contribute to the potential of memetic activity online. Users posted content on Youtube, and other social media, to both show their creativity but also to contribute to the creation of a variety of memes that allow the emergence of online communities. The creation of a community inevitably contributes to the emergence of new norms and rules. Memes are increasingly part of this build up process online. Norms and values are continuously created online due to a constant process of posting of users. Shifman sees another aspect of this process in the spreading of memetic activity to elaborate upon other cultural rituals and artifacts because "distinct mimetic practices and norms evolve around specific memetic videos" (*ibidem*) and identifies online memetic culture composed of viral videos, fringe cultural elements and popular songs. All users on different social media see these elements as a connected and constantly changing platform that allows the spread of memetic content. Shifman sees the rise of an increasingly complex intertwining of users, memes and technological artifacts:

> This attribute is highly compatible to the way culture is formed in the so-called era of Web 2.0, which is marked by application platforms for facilitating user-generated content. YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, Wikipedia, and other similar applications are based on propagation of content, to paraphrase Lincoln, of users by users for users. (2013: 364-365)

Human agency is at the center of this unprecedent display of user creativity and memetic spreading. Shifman insists on community norms and practices as central for the survival of different memes because "social norms, perceptions, and preferences are crucial in memetic selection processes" (*ibidem*: 366). Often, meme content is created after an event occurs, it is based on political imagery or pop-culture creativity. Shifman analyzes two levels of memetic activity: one that focuses on political context and a second one that is pop culture oriented:

> Content-wise, two main groups of meme versions were identified. The first group focuses on political contexts: Pike is shown pepper spraying iconic American symbols such as George Washington crossing the Delaware; the former U.S. presidents on Mount Rushmore; and the Constitution itself, as well as freedom fighters across the globe (e.g., in Tiananmen Square). These political versions share a clear idea: that the officer brutally violated the basic values of justice and freedom as represented by the protestors. A second group of user-generated images is pop-culture oriented. In these versions, Pike is pepper-spraying icons such as Snoopy and Marilyn Monroe, as well as a battery of stars identified with other Internet memes, such as little baby panda and Keyboard Cat. The ideas conveyed by this group of pop-culture oriented memes are often polysemic. In one case, in which Pike is portrayed as spraying Rebecca Black—a widely

> scorned teen singer and Internet phenomenon—the original meaning of the photo as criticism of Pike seems to be almost reversed. (*ibidem*: 371-372)

This constant transformation of memes that take on new and older meanings is a basic characteristic of user activity online. Each meme shows the potential to evolve and change as different users modify and post new content continuously. Shifman points out that tradition and innovation are often connected in memes and require specific frameworks of analysis.

> …but if we differentiate between content-, form-, and stance- based memes, we might discover that so-called ‘‘innovations’’ are sometimes old ideas or communicative practices in new textual gowns. This framework may therefore allow us to think about the delicate balance the between diffusion of innovation and the diffusion of tradition. (*ibidem*: 373)

She proposes an increasingly pyramidal structure for memetic evolution and spreading that deeply influences human agency so that users continue to create new memetic content. Emotions and creativity seems to merge in the digital age. Shifman observes that these two processes coexist through a user's memetic activity online.

> In this new era, the two meanings of the term in the predigital age—sharing as distribution and sharing as communication—converge. When I post a funny clip on Facebook, I distribute a cultural item and at the same time express my feelings about it. (2014: 19)

Shifman defends the usefulness of this approach to memetics. She underlines that this approach is needed "to capture a wide range of communicative intentions and actions, spanning all the way from naive copying to scornful imitation" (*ibidem*: 22). Therefore, memes are becoming increasingly mutable and showing a capacity to rapidly change as users interact amongst themselves online.

The perspective adopted by Shifman, traces the influence of memes in online spaces and users' behavior. She sees in the interpretation of the cultural and political meaning of memes the greatest potential for the analysis of human activity online. These processes have to be looked upon by examining the transmission of memetic content as "this would require the evaluation of viral videos not only in terms of success or effectiveness but also in terms of their cultural implications and role in the formation of social and political identities" (*ibidem*: 62). Shifman highlights that six functions of memetic activity are "positivity, provocation of high-arousal emotions, participation, packaging, prestige, and positioning" (*ibidem*: 66). Furthermore, Shifman brings forth the notion that memes are a tool that have to accomplish a defined goal for users. Emotions are fused with memetic content posted online. The deep personal involvement in a certain meme can become a catalyst for actions of

users that create their own content. In this way, there seems to be a connection with memes uploaded in digital spaces and what occurs offline. The dual processes of emotions and memes posted online could become the point of origin of new behavior by users.

> Having seen the video and having been moved by it, users could actually do something with their rage, such as send a premade twitter message to a key policy maker. This additional activity deepened people's sense of involvement, vital for any political campaign. (*ibidem*: 72)

Shifman observes that it is user interaction that marks the divide between a momentary viral piece of content and an authentic memetic unit. She remarks that virality has unregular and unstable properties. Consequently, online spaces are saturated by humour because "like game-playing, humour is enjoyed for its own sake and involves a multilayered perception of social situations" (*ibidem*: 79). Shifman notices that humour facilitates game-playing aspects of memetic culture. An important distinction is between sharing and remaking, or virality and memetic qualities, because "the features that drive people to share content are not necessarily the same as those that draw them to imitate and remake it" (*ibidem*: 94). The widespread memetic activity about politics post-2010 allowed for the emergence of a collective consciousness of users online.

> In 2011, Time magazine crowned "The Protester" as its "Person of the Year," referring to the massive and effective street protests seen around the globe in that period. […] Memes and virals have played an important role within this new landscape of Web-based political participation, both in grassroots and top-down campaigns. (*ibidem*: 122)

The personalization allowed by memes meets the needs of user individuality and community needs for protest. There are often loose associations between online memes and the offline events that show some form of existing connection. Collective instances of meme sharing and the rapid creativity of users both represent an entirely new kind of political activity. Shifman provides an account of this occurring hybridization because "memes allow citizens to participate in public, collective actions, while maintaining their sense of individuality" (*ibidem*: 129). The new, and constantly evolving, technological means allow an unseemly level of penetration of existing cultural and consumer symbols into the lives of users. Memes give way for compression and expansion of current cultural complexity because of "a polyvocal quality of meme-based discourse, through which diverse opinions and identities are expressed and negotiated" (*ibidem*: 132). A clear difference exists with the pre-digital age as the technological means empowered the sudden capabilities of memes for radical acceleration and penetrability. The visual features of memes are at the center of a new aesthetic in

online spaces. Shifman underlines the role of visual dimension that increase emotional and humourous effects of memes.

> Digital memes are much more visual than their predecessors. This has two main implications. First, visual display allows greater integration between politics and pop culture. […] Whereas in verbal jokes the target of mockery and its scorned feature are often clear, visual images' openness and lack of a clear narrative may invoke contrasting interpretations. (*ibidem*: 150)

Online memes are evolving into new communicative modes. Humour is the dough of this creative process for engaged users. Moreover, humourous content is the leeway for communities online to unite and dissolve increasing the fluidity of users' loyalties. Visuality and compression of information represent the two key processes that for Shifman continue to remain in flux.

The increased complexity in technology, culture and creation of meme are often wrongly elaborated by traditional media. Some users simply copy content posted by others as memes spread without much change. Often multiple versions of memes belonging to the same template coexist but this occurrence can create ulterior confusion in users.

> Interestingly, changes are more likely to be introduced by mainstream media sources. Typically these changes are abbreviations or expansions of source quotes, which might add value to readers of these outlets. On the other hand, blogs are more likely to simply copy. […] These findings have important implications for the fidelity of information that is being consumed online, especially since internet users are increasingly accessing new content via social media. (Simmons et al, 2011: 8)

Memes are often created to channel, sometimes unwittingly, ideal psychological types, the idea of a hero, a wise monarch or an innocent lady, that result in a template from which multiple variations emerge. Users interact with one of these templates to continue to create new versions of the original meme. In this way, some memes emerge as a template that is easily recognizable almost by anyone who is an Internet user.

> The Most Interesting Man In The World meme is part of a wider category of memes called Advice Animals, which are image macros featuring animals or humans and superimposed text purporting to represent a character trait or archetype […] The originator of any given advice animal sets the image and colour-wheel and the rest of the series only add new text based on the theme. (Rintel, 2011: 260.)

A hierarchy of successful memes emerge from this continuous interactivity amongst users that use online platforms as hubs for distribution of memes. Sooner or later, memes exhaust their cultural charge to eventually die out or on the contrary, create a lasting cultural legacy. Humour as a catalyst for memes plays a double role. Memes often encapsulate cynical forms of humour to weaken a user's

perception about themselves. Therefore, online spaces are filled by complexity and contradictions amongst users. Furthermore, the social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, function as a hub for distribution of image macros created by others instead of being the source of generation of these digital artifacts (*ibidem*: 265). Users that extensively use humour in their posting often thrive on the chaos occurring online by engaging in posting comic photos, photomontages, slogans and captions to achieve a result that is often humorous, satirical and parodying (Baran, 2012: 176). Memes become a tool of globalization given the universal language of humorous content in digital spaces. Therefore, political memes are often a reaction to a failure of a local politician that could become a global scandal. This is another characteristic of memes that indicates the possibility of the co-existence between offline activity and online posting.

The effect of humour on memes is clear through the phenomenon of so called 'LoLitics', a category of digital texts created by ordinary individuals that, like most political humour, are usually responses to news events and/or gaffes committed by political figures (Tay, 2014: 46). The flattening property of online memetic activity, when every user feels equal to others, empowers individuals but also negatively influences their ability to critically evaluate their own judgements. The long-standing consensus behind humour and jokes could apply to image macros as users usually follow some version of a framework to engage in online spaces. Image macro posting is based on basic rules that change only gradually with the acceptance of the new rules by the greater part of any online community. Each user can post an image signaling to like-minded users different meanings that then are differently interpreted by users from other communities too. Users share an understanding of what is humorous, sharing a common playing field with recognizable rules, in order to create an enjoyable image macro (*ibidem*: 49-50). Hypocrisy, for example by political elites, is swiftly punished by users by posting of more memes. Focus on visual aspects is an effective way to make users content even more persuasive. Therefore, a humourous judging arena made up by users of a community emerges to comment upon or criticize those celebrities and politicians framed as guilty. This process contributed to what can be defined as LOLitics. For example, Mitt Romney was able to attract attention for his campaign and mobilize masses of citizens by pursuing an online strategy based on memes and user interactivity that through engaging with citizen activity online affected offline political discourses (*ibidem*: 58). Memetic activity online remains chaotic and it is difficult for politicians to channel users towards a clear objective. Memes and humour online are simply a game for many users. Nevertheless, a minority of committed activists can post a great quantity of image macros to attempt to steer the public discourse. The posting of memes with a common theme could be a signal of resistance against political opponents and authorities.

The creation of imagery and posting it online could be seen by activists as a first step to rally a movement into existence and then to action. An activist's perspective is often that "online networks do not facilitate the creation of powerful symbols, […] networks facilitate the production of "follow-up discourse" that magnifies the power of a symbol as it resonates throughout a network" (Schrag: 2014: 5). The constant posting of memes represents by itself a unit of imitation that stand for activism online that could eventually result into an offline spillover.

> During the earlier "Arab Spring" uprisings in 2011, local stories of struggle and political change created a "freedom meme" that spread through social networks and sparked conversation about political freedom, recalling Shifman's concept of the Internet meme as a means of creating new discourses. (*ibidem*: 6)

Every online meme has the potential to "reduce the symbol to a simple indicator of visibility, or a rallying-point for public outcry around which radicalization may occur" (*ibidem*). As mentioned, memes have often a traditional element that is used by users for the creation of new ones. Therefore, a meme often continues its existence by re-emerging randomly throughout time.

Image macros have an intrinsic physical quality that is an important aspect of the characteristic to re-surface online. Being widely recognized as quintessential memetic content by users, memes are part of a continuous cycle of submersion and emergence. Therefore, memes seems to exist both online and in human brains as information being a part of the digital culture.

> Virtual physicality is a seemingly contradictory term, yet it reveals that memes as artifacts exist in the human mind as well as in the digital environment. The recursive production, consumption, and reproduction of memes evince their importance and underscore their virtual physicality in participatory digital culture. (Wiggins et al, 2014: 1992)

The complexity of meme creation is linked to the intertwined social online and offline systems of behavior and cultural subsets. The timing of the exhaustion and re-emergence of a meme is unpredictable. Meme creation is a continuous creative activity that coexists on different levels: in human brains, in offline activity and in online spaces. These elements contribute to the chaotic and unpredictable characteristics of posted material. Political content is difficult to isolate as often it is included in a humourous way into the memes. Therefore, the different causes that shape users interaction with memes are difficult to track. Members of online communities, or gatekeepers, are hubs of meme's distribution while star-users are agents that attempt to define and direct these memetic flows. The use of traditional jokes, when creatively incorporated by users in memes, amplify the humourous charge of posted content because "the picture may augment a humourous effect by presenting a widely recognized butt of a joke, which may then be considered a crucial part of the

visual–verbal joke" (Dynel, 2016: 680). Therefore, the online communities have the central stage in memetic narratives.

> The ultimate resolution of incongruity and thus the understanding and appreciation of this meme consist in recognizing the commentary on two social groups inhabiting the virtual space: hipsters (who value independent thinking and counterculture) and haters (who will not tolerate any success in others and continually persecute them). (*ibidem*: 684)

On the one hand, visual and verbal content of image macros often coincide. Image macros are effective when there is a joint use of image and verbal text. Sometimes, image macros can be perceived only through the image or the caption when one of the two become widely known and immediately recognizable by the majority of users.

> Albeit inspired by the relevant image, some catchphrases might exist independently and still retain their humourous potential. The humourous potential of others appears to be boosted by the anchoring images. Yet another class of memes relies heavily on both the overlaid text and the image, which are thus the sine qua non for the production of humour. (*ibidem*: 685)

The image part of image macros evoke creativity in the online communities by itself. Moreover, an image could have an effect on other users, if they focus on it first, without changing the overall message of the image macro. These elements of meme analysis are even more relevant to approach aggressive image macros based on racism, elitism, misogyny etc. Humour is the key component of image macros targeting the line between races, cultures and societies.

> Popular meme topic pairs individuals from racial minority groups (e.g., a Black person) with food that is stereotypically associated with their race/ culture (e.g., a piece of fried chicken). Since memes are intended to be humourous […] they can be justified along a dimension other than race (i.e., it was only a "joke") and therefore they may not be considered by creators and/ or promulgators as depicting racial discrimination. (Williams et al, 2016: 425)

Users bring their full experiences online as well as their values when engaging in online activity. Many users that create image macros with ill intent shield themselves by using humourous intention as a justification. This strong connectivity characterizes memes on different levels of interactivity that could go beyond online, i.e. when an image macro is printed and spread as "these results highlight the interplay between offline and online worlds; when users log on to the online world, they bring with them interpretational frameworks obtained from socialization that occurs offline" (*ibidem*: 428-429). Vigilance and hyper-attention to offensive image macros is usually a reaction of concerned or agitated users. The reaction of users to negative offline and online experiences is vigilance for discrimination that "mediate the relationship between racial microaggressions experienced in face-

to-face interactions and perceptions of racial themed Internet memes" (*ibidem*: 430). In every local community, two classes of image macros, sometimes created with an offensive message in mind, are bound to appear in online spaces.

> The first type comprises image macros which are popular globally and are borrowed by the community, henceforth to be referred to as the global memes. The second type comprises the new image macros generated by the community members based on the images from movies and mainstream media relevant to the demography. (Majumder et al, 2017: 4)

Users post image macros and follow the culture they are part of in the online community. Multimodal templates, a common feature of a collection of image macros, are at the core of the flow of communication online. Moreover, users modify these templates in different ways adapting to the culture of the platform they are interacting with. In this way, online communities are updated daily with original content that shape the conversation occurring in digital spaces.

Imagery and text, the main attributes of multimodality, can be used to track different instances of image macros. The subtlety of each image macro's evolutionary pattern can be captured by examining a tree like structure that can be built from patterns of user activity. The evolution of a meme is often shaped by the characteristics of online communities and users quirks:

> A sample phylogenetic tree constructed from the pairwise distances between different image macros, […] capture subtle evolutionary patterns in the mutation of the meme, with children being semantically linked either through imagery (note the subtree with the hat overlay), or through text (subtree with pokemon text). (Dubey et al, 2018: 9)

Posting of aggressive image macros often imply that a violent message could be made null by evoking humour. The commentaries on these image macros are characterized by emoticons and word play linked to humour. For example, a humourous framing could be used online to lower the status of female users by projecting on them stereotypes and misconceptions on women. More severe forms of aggression, such as rape threats, also occur.

> Most common threats issued to women participating in feminist activism online are rape threats, but these are often qualified with the use of emoticons, the acronym 'LOL' (laugh out loud) or similar signifiers of humour and joking. It is through these signifiers of humour that the threat is rendered 'harmless'. (Drakett et al, 2018: 4)

Technology is a part of an online tribal identity that pushes against those who cannot master its means. Moreover, humour is often linked with posturing of technical superiority. Users who create humorous memes, the creators, can often create a starting point for the flow of posting in an online space.

> Through our thematic analysis of the image macros, we identified two overarching themes. First, Technological Privilege, which sees the construction of an elite, technologically skilled, masculinised identity through three sub-themes: sexy geeks, Internet and technology, and memes about memes. This contrasts with the second theme, Others, where humour is used to construct marginalised groups in specific ways – notably, the most dominant aspect of this theme sees women derogated and cast as 'other'. (*ibidem*: 17)

The perception about technology as source material for memes emerged because "many memes made reference to various aspects of technology use, e.g. social media, gaming, and self-referential memes about memes" (*ibidem*: 26). Discourses and counter-discourses emerge to create a chaos of meaning and a changing mosaic of humorous mappings. The unique qualities of image macros as a way to communicate are usually made more persuasive by users posting stereotypes and prejudices.

> …simply by locating the threat within the visual and textual context of the image macro works in the same way that appending a smiley face or a "LOL" would to a tweet – image macro memes are created for humour, the characters and formats indicate the presence of jokes and humorous content. We argue, in the same way a smiley face renders the threat of rape socially acceptable, that the presentation of violence within a meme renders it socially acceptable, and therein lies a certain level of power. (*ibidem*: 34-35)

Online spaces brim with constant activity around image macros that are caught around different cultural narratives. The impact of online spaces on human physiology and the capacity to aggregate in online communities could be the next stage to explore the dynamics that shape memes as a social process. Three levels of analysis, on the visual culture, online tribalism and political activism online, will address on how the potential of memes can be channeled by users online.

1.5.3 Visual Culture

Online spaces are full of posted visual material that range from image macros to Youtube videos. Users are currently overwhelmed with hundreds different images and videos each day. Many adapt and learn to use these techniques of visual framing to create meaning and express ideas. Users posts images or videos to describe a situation that could be as easily be described through text. This vast visual transformation of modes of communication online shows how users of social media and online forums currently often prefer a visual mode of interaction. According to Becker (2004: 149)

> The contemporary condition is often described as a state of being surrounded, even bombarded by images. The condition is also characterized as an image flow, increasing in its intensity as the means and sources of image production and distribution continue to expand geometrically. Pictures are said to be the most common way of spreading information, of making an impact, of expressing oneself, of influencing others.

Accumulations of images used by online communities create sub-cultures and specific ways to frame reality through "a world which not only reflects the world outside in model-form, but instigates a world which reflexively is conceptualized as a peculiar encultured world" (Michelsen, 2006: 30-31). The connection between online and offline spheres is blurred as visual aspects of reality are crucial to human understanding and both are shaped by the evolution of information presentation by users. This fluidity of content between reality and the online world is part of this change as "the new media may transform phenomena previously associated with the phenomenologically real world to virtual ground" (*ibidem*: 49). The impact of online visual creativity on the offline activities of users is a slowly but steadily established notion.

The current competition to achieve increasingly improved multimedia technological artifacts intensifies the experience of visual aspects in both spheres. As argued by Erdal (2012: 48) each user is encouraged to interact, and they are often constantly connected, with systems dominated by the visual sense.

> All those new venues have conduced producing and sharing of digital visual contents of daily experiences amongst internet users to become so easy with the help of mobile multimedia devices, through which we are able to produce various contents and connect to the internet at all times. (Erdal, 2012: 48)

Users' unceasing search for visual patterns solidify and channel the creation of new images that can result in visual saturation online. Users that follow an instinctual drive to create and post new images, are usually active creators who fill online spaces with content as "it should always be considered that visual perception plays a crucial role in the meaning creation process of visual events, through which visual culture is constituted" (*ibidem*: 49). The recognition of visual representation of specific forms of behavior is linked to tribal nature of human beings. Political parties, online communities and corporations try to unlock this new aesthetic understanding of users to achieve their goals, and the channeling of the visual dimension for political or cultural movements represents a potential direction of the evolution of this online shift.

The rise and success of online platforms such as Instagram show how the crystallization of the visual approach occured online by providing a new image based space. A complex process occurred that gave rise to a digital world shaped by visual stimuli and that can alter physical cultural artifacts.

> Something digital is a happening in culture – something which we have only barely been conscious of – and also that culture is happening to the digital. Together these aspects ontological, technical, and of course material, contribute to what we might call the condition of possibility for emerging aesthetic practices invested in the present, invested as these are in irupting the 'digital' into the 'real'. (Berry et al, 2012: 47)

Images are an inextricable part of the flows of online data on social media because "data streams are new ways to consume various media forms through data stream providers like Twitter" (*ibidem*: 52). Therefore, an understanding of the visual dimension and the one beyond the visual is needed because it is required to "think in terms of a medium as an agency or means of doing something – this means thinking beyond the screenic" (Berry, 2013: 33). Images are needed for everyday user activity in the digital sphere given an underlying framework based on likes. The ambiguity of the visual mode and the mechanics of the "I like" button inevitably start to shape the actions of the users online that start to focus on obtaining popularity and the admiration of other users.

> The page of the Auschwitz Memorial Museum on Facebook is a good example to sketch out how our social discourses are now subject to Facebook's affirmation – if you want to be part of the new digital public, you need to be on Facebook. (Bunz, 2013: 139)

Users post images on social media to publicly portray emotions. The logic of affirmation underlines that "the visibility of emotional conduct in social media magnifies and challenges established emotional propriety and etiquette" (Hardey and Beer, 2013: 173). A simple act of interaction with the online sphere could be a creative act that has a lasting impact on other users. The follower based framework of social media, for example Facebook, gives rise to a renewable source of visual entertainment. The constant surfing online of users for an infinite amount of usually visual content that is linked to followers, creates a barrage of emotional discharges for every online access. A user may access a social media platform with several windows open in the background of the screen of their device, some for different social media accounts accessed at the same time, for increased connectivity. Wittkower, (2013: 186-187) explains:

> The online détournement of 'websurfing' is transformed from a reception of content to a series of potentially shared experiences. The ready sharability of new media, along with Facebook's constant background presence (either figuratively or literally – in a background window), results in a social reading and viewing of material. As we wander around online, we find our friends' interests engaged along with our own, and take note not only of those things which we find engaging, but also those things that others will value, care about, or be angered by.

One aspect of always being connected and watching visual artifacts online is that "the impulse to take a picture of your lunch and post it to Facebook or Twitter only makes sense when we view this as an invitation to participate in a shared asynchronous experience at a distance" (*ibidem*: 187). Ludovico and Cirio (2013: 257) highlight that aspects of everyday identity building of users are influenced also by the "the spontaneously posted data (that) provides an endless (almost automatic) mutual profiling, enriching, and updating of the single virtual identities, in a collective self-positioning" . The visual

element of social media becomes important for profile managing, a mild obsession for every active user as photos and other images are routinely change and updated.

> First, the profiles sublimate the owners' (real) social actions and references through their virtual presences. Second, they synthesize their effectiveness in representing real people through a specific element: the profile picture. This picture, an important Facebook interface, more often than not shows a face, and a smiling one at that. Our face is our most private space and simultaneously the most exposed one. (*ibidem*)

The economic value of social media platforms is provided by users as what seems to come about is "the 'contamination' of social media platforms with data flows and activity that ensured the peopling of social media" (Hatzopoulos and Kambouri, 2013: 294). All facets of digital economy converge and take place on the most popular platform at the time, focused on the visual side of user interaction, such as photos, memes and videos.

> Social media tends to be associated with a convergence of production, distribution, and consumption practices and a blending of user creativity, collaboration, and sharing-enabled and sharing-assisted network technologies. (van der Graaf, 2014: 3)

Social media platforms adopt this economic model as the dynamics amongst users change towards uniformity. At the same time, each user provides a stable flow of content and economic value for the platform. Events that occur in everyday life of each user are also transferred online and posted as a source of content that go on indefinitely.

> People must deploy explicit means to engage and communicate among themselves online such as by creating a user profile on Facebook whereby the fields indicating one's interests, background and so forth, may be understood as an act of self-presentation. Social signalling associated with one's "digital identity" thus occurs via manoeuvring self-presentation and impression management vis-à-vis technology. (*ibidem*: 14)

The perception of physical reality is more intense for users than their identity online built through accounts, photos and memes. For example, looking at offensive imagery online is perceived by users as difficult to address and stop. When online spaces are full, for example due to posting by 'trolls' or radical users, with visual content that can be perceived as violent and disturbing, only social media moderators can intervene to fix the issue.

> On a different level of "offline" and "online" risk perception, people tend to be more aware of risks like crime in the physical world than in the digital realm. Also, people tend to perceive the risk of encountering harmful or criminal activity as being higher for online than offline activity, that is, they feel that they have limited choice and no personal control. (*ibidem*: 16)

Online collective identity and what is considered by users as reliable information feedback could overwrite personal inclinations because "user practice is said to be constituted in networks of practitioners stressing 'information feedback' over individual preferences or price signals" (*ibidem*: 19). This could mean that users accessing information online from someone in their network could change their opinion about an issue. The evolution of this process has resulted in the spontaneous rise of developments in the online ways to interact that emerged as a flow of constant interaction amongst users based on visuality.

Users are immersed in an environment that is developed from the fact that today "meaning and intent are shown by multiple levels of visual and textual content on social media, highlighting the digital and cultural literacies of users and the tropes, affordances, and practices" (*ibidem*: 21). The use of cellphones improves the shareability of these visual artifacts because a user often "relies on a smartphone device to capture photos, edit and enhance them, and then share the produced images on image-based social platforms" (Alshawaf, 2016: 5). A race amongst user to create visual artifacts is encouraged by the structural dynamics of social media.

> New forms of image making can happen in real time […] in the case of Snapchat, a smartphone application from which images disappear after being viewed, and metaphorically when images are posted on social media and hardly viewed again. (*ibidem*: 6)

Selfies, memes and images contributed to "the increase in image-making practices in the last few years has made it possible for images to be a new form of "oral culture" (*ibidem*: 8). These visual artifacts can be improved by users that use emotional tags applied to the content they post, such as emotion labelled hashtags like #happy. Emotional undertones and visual imagery go hand in hand for users that interact intensely with image based social media platforms as highlighted by Manovich (2016: 64):

> Analysis of most frequent tags assigned by people posting the photos can tell us something about what they see as the content of these photos, or emotions they think their photos represent, […] most describe emotions or "people subjects" (we do not consider tags such as #instagood or #followme because they do not tell us anything about the intended subject or emotion).

A new style of living through visual artifacts emerged from user behavior online and dynamics on trendy social media platforms, such as Instagram. Abilities based on the visual dimension of creativity define the success of users who prosper on social media platforms thanks to posted images. Users who collect enough likes and attention achieve not only notoriety but also can potentially achieve economic success through online sponsorships and deals.

> Instagramism is the style of global design class (although it is also used by millions of young people who are not professional photographers, designers, editors, etc.). […] It is also defined by its visual voice—which is about subtle differences, the power of empty space, visual intelligence, and visual pleasure. (*ibidem*: 95)

Visual capitalism is now important for economic systems as "production and presentation of beautiful images, experiences, styles, and user interaction designs is central for its economic and social functioning" (*ibidem*: 117). Every user is a part of the visual digital media that is, inevitably, playing with different visual based online identities because "contemporary Instragrammer is immersed in the experiences, moments and situations" (*ibidem*: 125). The rise of digital tribes is linked to these constant flows of content and experiences:

> They use the Instagram medium to find people like them, to share their images, feelings and thoughts with global audiences who like what they like, to form groups based on common Instagram patterns (like other bloggers do, too), to plan trips with them, to support each other in hard moments, to share discoveries, and to define themselves. (*ibidem*: 134)

The increased connectiveness of digital spaces results in a framework of online platforms fueled by visual content. Furthermore, users create and share multiple unique online identities that coexist at the same time, and sometimes even on the same online platform. Real life tragic events can contribute to the posting of images that focus exclusively on the aesthetic point of view, with users sometimes treating a tragedy to pursue more popularity online. The feeds of user accounts on digital media often show playfully assembled collages of images about a disaster when it occurs. Users in online spaces use humour to offer a funny frame on a disaster as well as to to attract attention. Moreover, images considered salient by the users are freely posted between platforms such as Instagram, Twitter and Facebook. In the case of disasters, users share images with intensity such as during the impact of Sandy hurricane. Many of these visual items become iconic to remember the impact of the disaster:

> In the case of Sandy, it was of the crane from outside the new World Trade Center tower and the façade of a Chelsea apartment that had been ripped off. These became iconic images of the storm seen from the vantage point of Instagram images posted on Twitter. (Murthy et al, 2016: 121)

Posting before the disaster is often playful and humorous to then focus on the impact of the disaster itself for many users. In the case of Sandy hurricane, humorous posting about the disaster was followed by serious posts by the users as "once Sandy made US landfall, the focus of tweets moved from humorous macros to serious reflections of the real damage caused by Sandy" (*ibidem*: 125). Small circles of peers and family share visual material in the first phase of the impact of the disaster

and channel humour to elaborate the occurring events. Furthermore, these images play a crucial role for users to visualize their own feelings and emotions for others as well:

> In our findings is that the marked high frequency of humorous tweets occurs before Sandy's US landfall during this heightened state of anxiety, indicating that significant numbers of sampled users were responding to Sandy's forecasted damage through humour. Interestingly, this was simultaneously semi-private and public. The former mostly involved selfies, mentions of friends, and images of friends, family, and local places. The latter primarily involved image macros. (*ibidem*: 126-127)

Users display their choices to others online as well as focus attention on salient aspects of an event. These actions are often transmitted through humour channeled through visuals, such as "images with both food and drink as well as using animals in humorous images (that) illustrates individuals" (*ibidem*: 128-129). Different types of images are posted by users to build visually complex online spaces that involve photos, selfies, image macros and memes. In this way, every user have its own visual history online that represent his or her tastes and the perception of what is interesting for other netizens to see. The collection of images posted by many users become a visual digital culture with a recognizable style and specific values. There are visual digital cultures that show a negative vision of the world as "images of death in presence and death in absence present a great deal of our visual culture today" (Peraica, 2016: 73). Many users interact with online spaces to spread their values and defend their lifestyle as well as political beliefs to build narratives comprised of images. If users perceive themselves to be outcasts, placed in an abject position by wider society, they will often try to defend their worldview through humour (*ibidem*: 78). The use of images make this operation easier and allow for a more fluid interaction with online communities that have different values.

Online spaces give rise to aggregations of users exchanging pictures. Many fora and accounts devoted to praise for radical ideologies or glorifying mental health issues, and other topics outside of what can be considered as normal discourse, exist through visual artifacts.

> Anorexia nervosa, self-harm, depression, anxiety disorders, and many other mental health disorders are being glamorized, romanticized, and consequently promoted through many social media platforms, especially websites and blogs. Websites that promote anorexia, for example, are called "pro-ana" websites in which publishers post shocking photos, extreme diet plans, and unhealthy techniques. (Jadayel et. al., 2017: 468)

A declaration of vulnerability by a user in an all-affirmative digital culture can be forgotten or instead attract significant attention. The higher appeal of images describing a negative situation often shape the posting of users that are more vulnerable. The multiple identities of users on different platforms

are constantly updated to be popular and 'trending.' Reproducing popular visual framings, regardless of the message, seems to be the aspiration of each user.

> Individuals valued in visual culture subscribe to the dominant trend of identity construction through presenting attractive imagery on a regular basis. […] individuals engage in social learning, identifying which imagery is 'successful' and approved of by peers through positive reception in the form of likes, sharing and positive comments. Constant communication through visual forms combines with social learning, so that users mimic valued identities and style themselves online in compositions which showcase their physical and intellectual traits in a stylised manner. (Stokes and Price, 2017: 160)

The recipe for success online is based on originality and creativity because "as visual culture shifts and online social learning proliferates, trends are cycled through at an increasingly rapid rate" (*ibidem*: 161). Nevertheless, visual styles can also encourage adherence to an aggressive pattern of behavior. Sometimes, tags and relevant images create advertising for dangerous collective behavior, for example "#Thinspo hashtag which was banned from Instagram, […] this online affinity group showcased imagery of dangerously thin individuals as a form of inspiration for eating disorders" (*ibidem*: 162). The spread of visual artifacts online encourages online communities that are often embracing visually based material as an online substitute of a sacred banner. Tribalism online represents the third sub-section that will allow to track the recent rise of groups and entire communities on social media.

1.5.4 Online Tribalism

The rise of social media platforms have created new lines of social division amongst users. Furthermore, technology reshaped the understanding that entire communities had about their everyday activity and message spreading. This change was registered already in the sixties by authors such as Marshall McLuhan that noticed how after a century of technological development humanity effectively abolished space and time for communication (McLuhan, 1964: 5). A single medium, electricity, has become the foundation of the human behavior through content shared by increasingly sophisticated technological means. Technological innovation gives way to social acceleration that encourage new forms of human aggregation.

> Electric media, however, abolish the spatial dimension, rather than enlarge it. By electricity, we everywhere resume person-to-person relations as if on the smallest village scale. […] Acceleration is a formula for dissolution and breakdown in any organization. (*ibidem*: 282)

The rise of electric media gave way to a new culture of cultural tribes and communities that is embedded in visual stimuli accessible through televisions, pcs and smartphones screens. Users of

these new mediums adopted "the forms of association and social gatherings in which young people become involved […] assume a more fluid, neo-tribal character" (Bennett, 1999: 614). The results are a complex race for visibility and success between different mediums.

> Technological innovation is a change that occurs to the system itself, and its impact will be profound and far-reaching. And from a systems perspective, we can understand that media do not cause certain effects in a linear manner, but rather, particular forms of communication, consciousness, and culture emerge out of particular media ecologies. (Strate, 2008: 135)

The beliefs of users are actively shaping the used mediums as "the drive to remake one's environment is the technological imperative, and it is present in bacteria and viruses, just as it is in us" (*ibidem*: 136-137). Moreover, many users feel to belong to different communities at the same time. Every user drowns in information that push him or her to continuosly reimagine their own identity.

The possibilities offered by technology give rise for aggregation of users on the basis of their cultural affiliations and in a creative way. The participation of users in different online subcultures blurry the confines with the realities of everyday life. New identities forged online dictate new ways of living as "the virtual spaces of communication offered by social network sites appear to accentuate existing trends towards reflexively derived, identity projects as identified by post-subcultural theorists in earlier work" (Robards and Bennett, 2011: 304). Furthermore, young users have a growing interest for technological innovation and experimention with identity. The various political and cultural communities online are re-thinked and re-invented constantly as it is the age of connectivity. Visibility on social media platforms is the shared goal that connect users that are active online.

> It is not these sites that are shaping the lives of their users, but rather quite the opposite. Thus, sites like MySpace and Facebook do not reconfigure social relationships or systems of identity and belonging, but they do make these dimensions of everyday life highly visible, exposing existing social practices. (*ibidem*: 310)

Communities online often absorb the beliefs of users who feel that they are a part of a group as "identities being performed on social network sites (and subsequently reflected upon by participants) would align more closely (although not absolutely) with a neo-tribal reading of belonging" (*ibidem*: 311). Each user is pushed to perform his or her cultural preferences in online spaces as "such discourses also draw on elements of perceived 'subcultural' narratives – in the above case, club culture, drug use, and gay identity – selectively adopting particular aspects of these narratives" (*ibidem*: 314). The processes that occur online seems to highlight that a social media platform can

become an anchor in a user's life that can shape their 'story', a public narrative for the user's family, their peers and fellow members of digital tribes.

> The formation of more stable networks (and the articulation of these offline networks in an online space) suggests an emergence of more permanent groupings, albeit ones that are facilitated and managed by a technological medium that transcends conventional understandings of collective social activity. Many participants, for instance, report 'de-briefing' on Facebook after a weekend of partying and socialising, by recounting stories and commenting on images from the weekend's events. (*ibidem*: 316)

Many users of social media are absorbed into building their own brand online as "a key component of brand tribes is that they are organically and willingly formed through individual identification with a brand" (Tuominen, 2011: 6). The digital revolution has enabled and amplified cultural tribes made up of groups of users who admire and support choices that outsiders could consider weird. In online spaces, users are driven towards originality, that often emerges as weirdness, and spontaneously share the same spaces and the same weirdness with other similar thinking users. The constant opposition between a culture for the masses that emerged from previous media, such as books, radio and tv, and the much more interactive culture for users inhabiting online spaces has given way to a new understanding of how culture fused with technology can evolve. The previous mass induced status quo had a different set of norms and rules. Younger users, exploring and interacting with digital spaces in new ways can potentially create an entirely unprecedent set of norms and rules.

Existing technological, cultural and moral standards are changing because "the epic battle of our generation is between the status quo of mass and the never-ceasing tide of weird" (Godin, 2011: 6). Masses of consumers are joining smaller and weirder tribes. The inherent inequality of digital economies is an important aspect of this process of self-branding as weird because "only wealthy organisms are able to culturally diversify, and as human beings get richer and richer, our instinct is to get ever more weird" (*ibidem*: 23). A single user can critically shape a digital tribe, a culture or even create global change by harnessing weirdness.

> We express ourselves, connect with people, and make our home in the world through the culture we participate in. *The biggest cultural shift that the Internet has amplified is the ability to make an impact on your own culture.* (*ibidem*: 32)

The skills of younger generation users who use technological means increase the chance that a posted cultural artifact could go viral. New ideas, created by a small tribe of fans or politically active users, survive in a cultural background to then emerge. Endless small tribes built around weird ideas, while too many for the mass marketers, are spreading and splintering in an endless process of cultural specialization. The acceleration of online processes that involve humour, often in a purely visual

format, and spread of information make these ongoing changes an important aspect of the current cultural scene.

> Jokes and memes and images and inventions and ideas spread faster and farther than ever before, gaining both speed and valuable edits as they travel. And then they come back to use, bringing connection and support with them. […] This reinforcing effect causes tribes to rapidly splinter off from the now fading idea of mess. The weird person seems normal to her small group of fellow choicemakers, but no, that behavior is not big enough to be attractive to the mass marketer. (*ibidem*: 35)

The current recipe for success in online spaces is irrevocably transformed as "the calculus has been fundamentally and permanently altered: you succeed by fueling and feeding the things we used to call niches, not by enforcing normalcy" (*ibidem*: 46). A new political movement or digital tribe has to propose a message that is easy to understand and that could be spontaneously fought for as "the only alternative, then, is to be something important to a few people" (*ibidem*: 55). The nature of the current technology is geared towards an endless stream of information. As Godin points out:

> The Internet encourages weirdness for two key reasons:
>
> 1. […] You can be weird on your own long before the "culture" (what's left of it) tells you to stop.
>
> 2. There are a billion "channels" of information and you can pick the one you want. There's a long tail of channels, and at least one matches every person's precise definition of weirdness. (*ibidem*: 60)

Attempts to trace or even create a lasting set of norms in an online tribal environment will ultimately fail. The pendulum like dynamics of digital tribes between weird individuality and gatherings in small numbers in forums, on social media or whatsapp groups characterize the digital age. Digital cultures are re-defined completely by this last evolution of the human tendency for tribalism.

> Our culture is now a collection of tribes, and each tribe is a community of interests, many of whom get along, some who don't. […] No niches. No mass. Just tribes that care in search of those who would join them or amplify them or yes, sell to them. This is not utopia, but it is our future. (*ibidem*: 96 - 97)

Digital tribes are constantly in search for ways to expand their reach and influence. While tribalism is an ancient social phenomenon, it is easy to observe that moral drive is an important aspect of radical users online activity.

The will to punish hostile users and trespassers while defending often visited digital spaces, such as a page run by like-minded users, is defined by Greene in virtue of the fact that "pro-social punishment is driven by emotions […] call this distinctively moral kind of anger *righteous indignation*" (2013:

59). Older dynamics of human behavior re-emerge integrating in a new way with technological means. The conflicts between digital tribes, even if often remaining in online spaces, are a logical consequence of this process. While the role of religion is often downplayed in secularized societies, fan communities can share a similar commitment to a set of ideas. The features of tribalism started to emerge in online spaces with behavioral patterns of users from our past. Therefore, a list of non-written moral rules, in some shape or form, plays a central role for digital tribes to evaluate each user behavior in his or her interactions with others online.

> Six psychological tendencies that exacerbate intertribal conflict. First, human tribes are tribalistic, favoring Us over Them. Second, tribes have genuine disagreements about how societies should be organized, emphasizing, to different extents, the rights of individuals versus the greater good of the group. Tribal values also differ along other dimensions, such as the role of honor in prescribing responses to threats. Third, tribes have distinctive moral commitments, typically religious ones, whereby moral authority is vested in local individuals, texts, traditions, and deities that other groups don't recognize as authoritative. Fourth, tribes, like the individuals within them, are prone to biased fairness, allowing group-level self-interest to distort their sense of justice. Fifth, tribal beliefs are easily biased. Biased beliefs arise from simple self-interest, but also from more complex social dynamics. Once a belief becomes a cultural identity badge, it can perpetuate itself, even as it undermines the tribe's interests. Finally, the way we process information about social events can cause us to underestimate the harm we cause others, leading to the escalation of conflict. (*ibidem*: 99)

What emerges from these different aspects is that ultimately there are "clashes between tribes that are moral, but *differently* moral" (*ibidem*). Unconscious gut feelings drive individual decisions because "we see punishment as inherently worthy and not just a means to better behavior, much as we experience food as inherently tasty and not just a means to nutrition" (*ibidem*: 274). Different sets of values considered appropriate by the group encompass human behavior as "today, however, there are two global meta-tribes – post-tribal tribes – bound together not by a shared history, and not by proper nouns, but by a set of abstract ideals" (*ibidem*: 334). Possibly the largest meta-tribe on the global scale, the Conservatives, is focused on its own social constructs and cultural artifacts that are posted in great quantities on online spaces as "social conservatives are not best described as people who place special value on authority, sanctity, and loyalty, but rather as tribal loyalists – loyal to their own authorities, their own religion, and themselves" (*ibidem*: 340). The focus of users on what is considered as to be their own is a behavioral attitude that in the digital age is challenged and can evoke confusion. Often, users behave fulfilling their roles of members of a digital tribe but renounce their uniqueness. The emotional reaction of users to this environment of constant global change represent a crucial aspect of the digital age.

According to Pentland (2014: 1), the greatest drawback for users interacting in online spaces is that they "are drowning in information, so much so that we don't know what items to pay attention to and

which to ignore". Therefore, imitating leading members of one's tribe, copying their values, ways to dress and to speak, becomes a instinctive response. The result of this collective response mechanism is that the spreading of a popular idea is usually embodied in a leading member of an online community who is attributed with viral qualities by other users.

> The process of social learning implies that if there is a lot of interaction between someone showing the behavior (the role model) and a new person, and if the new person is susceptible, then it is likely that this new idea will take root and change the new person's behavior. (*ibidem*: 33-34)

The main skill of leading members of an online community is their ability to observe and understand actions carried out by different users as "star performers networks were also more diverse. […] they could adopt the perspectives of customers, competitors, and managers" (*ibidem*: 35). These dynamics in online spaces contribute to the emergence of echo chambers, when a small group of users communicate only amongst themselves, because "when there are feedback loops in the social network, then the same ideas circle around and come back again and again" (*ibidem*: 36-37). Pentland underlines that his data shows that collective endeavors through efforts of groups online could create elements of a gestalt, a collective intelligence online.

> Human communities can develop a sort of collective intelligence that is greater than the members' individual intelligence. Engagement with and learning from others, along with the mutual sharing and vetting of ideas, generate the collective intelligence. (*ibidem*: 44)

The flow of ideas in a group is shaped by users who can be defined as peers because "the behavior of the surrounding peer group – the set of behavior examples that they were immersed in – that was the most powerful force in driving idea flow and shaping opinion" (*ibidem*: 50). The behavioral patterns of a community are absorbed subconsciously by users and account for much of individual behavior in basic day-by-day actions online. Behavior of users online can be regarded as shaped by unconscious and automatic mechanisms instead of a rational actor as "new data are changing this argument, and we are now coming to realize that human behavior is determined as much by social context as by rational thinking or individual desires" (*ibidem*: 59). Peer pressure can deeply shape user's actions online who then adopt new patterns of behavior that can be of new rules and norms previously seen as immoral. Viral cultural artifacts become the cultural pivot that users of social media often use to guide their actions online.

> Other Facebooks users received the "vote" messages and in addition saw the faces of friends who had already voted. Showing these familiar faces to users dramatically improved the effectiveness of the mobilization message. […] Incentives alter idea flow by creating social pressure, increasing the amount of

> interaction around specific, targeted ideas, and thus increasing the likelihood that people will incorporate those ideas into their behavior. (*ibidem*: 65)

Users are conditioned by social media as when their engagement to a group of users increase, the other members of the group have more influence on their behavior online. Data gathered by Pentland show that social media incentives have lasting effects on users as it seems that "people who received social network incentives maintained their higher levels of activity even after the incentives disappeared" (*ibidem*: 68). Digital connections between users are based on one main currency: attention. It is the ability of online communities, or digital tribes, to attract and conserve the attention of users of social media that decide what success looks like in the digital age.

The historical aim of the media was to grab the public's attention, a capacity that increased exponentially throughout the twentieth century. The drive to extract attention from other human beings began at the time of the first cults of tribes of hunter gatherers. The evolution of this urge encouraged technological development because "beginning with radio, each new medium would attain its commercial viability through the resale of what attention it could capture" (Wu, 2016: 6). The technological race, and more sophisticated competition, meant that in order to attract public attention, traders had to look for profitable cultural niches and evoke basic emotions to sell their product.

> Attention will almost invariably gravitate to the more garish, lurid, outrageous alternative, whatever stimulus may more likely engage what cognitive scientists call our "automatic" attention as opposed to our "controlled" attention, the kind we direct with intent. (*ibidem*: 16)

The value of attention as a market, for companies, politicians and digital tribes, is that "if we think of attention as a resource, or even a kind of currency, we must allow that it is always, necessarily, being spent" (*ibidem*: 20). Over time, organized religions refined ways of grabbing the attention of human communities. A simple act of attention, can create consequences as others observe that another person is expending his or her attention on something that is worthwhile. Countercultures also became a part of the commercial effort to harvest the efforts of the consumers. Entertainment can simply be framed as ethical and charged with meaning, that is why "the broadcasters had adjusted the terms: now it was free, relevant entertainment in exchange for attention" (*ibidem*: 165). The first tabloids, such as *People,* understood that success, popularity and scandals are an endless reservoir of potential consumers.

> Young is better than old, Pretty is better than ugly, Rich is better than poor, Tv is better than music, Music is better than movies, Movies are better than sports, And anything is better than politics. No one at *People*

> or *Time-Life* really understood exactly why stories about celebrities captured so many readers: it was enough that they did. (*ibidem*: 222)

A deeply ingrained need for worshipping individuals who are deserving or interesting enough for our attention exists. This shift of attention shaped industry during the digital evolution. The result is a state of an informational polarization because "blogs and other technologies were dividing the country into informational factions who pay attention only to what they care to hear" (*ibidem*: 276). Humour as well as displaying playful and weird identities online, and attracting superfluous attention, could potentially be a short-cut to celebrity if other users start to widely imitate the one acting out. The approach of social media users swiftly changed to post content online they considered funny as a lottery ticket for potential viral celebrity.

> "Ze Frank," a sort of self-styled web-jester. Ze Frank's own road to Damascus had involved a web-based birthday invitation in which he featured, performing funny dance moves; it had earned millions of hits and won him a Webby Award. (*ibidem*: 279)

The response of the mediums built on attention to this new online culture was to develop even faster ways to attract superfluous attention from users. This process of attention gathering follow the rules of memetic spreading as the two are deeply interconnected. The rise of the clickbait, users posting content with the main purpose to attract attention and 'clicks' from other users, became a 'new normal' of online spaces through traffic of sites such as Huffington Post.

> The HuffPo pioneered what would become known as clickbait: sensationally headlined articles, paired with provocative pictures, […] such content seemed to take control of the mind, causing the hand almost involuntarily to click on whatever was there. (*ibidem*: 282)

The widespread joining of social media by users made existing social connections manifest, online and in the material world, because "the networks, so-called, were there already; Facebook simply made them visible, graphically manifest, and easier to keep track of" (*ibidem*: 295). This process of integration between online and material worlds is strengthened by the amount of information every user upload online, even unknowingly, as social media platforms are "using age, gender, stated interests, and – when the "like" button was first activated in 2009 – all manner of preferences" (*ibidem*: 297). The potential celebrity of every user made these new social dynamics more palatable to the general public.

> It was Twitter's system of "followers" – anyone could "follow" anyone else and thereby received their tweets, or posts, automatically. Unlike blogs, one did not need to go looking for new tweets; they just

> arrived. And by indicating interest, even though roughly, the follower system became the new measure of fame. (*ibidem*: 306)

The technological means that increase user's availability to others and the capacity to search for information are already a way to constantly harvest attention during all of the user's waking hours. This ongoing change is a key mechanic for the assimilation between technological devices and behavior because it is "not just an attentional habit but a new social norm, that of never parting from one's device; of standing and staring at it, as if paralyzed, as the world goes by" (*ibidem*: 310). Attention harvesting is now mainly characterized by a visual mode of interaction with other users, with social media platforms committed to this pursuit.

> Instagram allowed for a seamless and more continuous visual narrative. In this way, active Instagrammers "created an Instagram life," telling their own stories, or at least a stylized and idealized version of it, in images. […] A number of them would cultivate multiple narratives with different accounts. (*ibidem*: 312)

The techniques of attention harvesting are continuously being perfected by platforms that take advantage of these tribal dynamics online. The extent by which a platform can arouse emotional intensity has become the heart of the competition for online spaces.

> The urge to share was activated by a spectrum of "high-arousal" emotions, like awe, outrage, and anxiety. A story with a headline like "When All Else Fails, Blaming the Patient Often Comes Next," or "What Red Ink? Wall Street Paid Hefty Bonuses," or "Rare Treatment Is Reported to Cure AIDS Patient" would trigger one of these emotions – or even better, several at once. (*ibidem*: 320)

Ultimately, it is the outcome of the integration between human emotion and portable technological devices that will set the new rules for digital dynamics of user behavior. Emotional impulses and tribal allegiances are being conveyed online by users at an increasingly accelerating pace. The visual dimension of digital communication and tribalism, encouraged by the evolving mechanics of social media has radically transformed cultural and political spaces. These changes shape how political movements, radicals and governments channel these new developments to pursue their goals through online spaces.

1.5.5 Online Activism

Political activism has embraced the new potentials of the digital age. The main battleground for political competition is now culture, on all levels of human interaction. Members of early digitally driven activism played around the first ideas about memetics. A viral meme can attract enough

attention to kickstart a movement to life and have an impact on wider political processes. This initial period was characterized by the goal of breaking through mass media gatekeeping to attract the attention of as many citizens, and users, as possible to a movement.

> **Lasn**: That is where the real revolution lies. Let's say you were able to float this meme that advertising can cause ill mental health. That is a very powerful meme and if you're able to say that on Dan Rather's show, CNN, or Larry King Live, well, this is the kind of power that launches movements. (Pickerel et al, 2002: 13)

The ability to achieve wide-spread virality is the priority for activists in this new age. They focus on the goals of their campaign to create content and put pressure on the neutral public. Digital means offer new possibilities for every pressure group and activist movement as well as those with radical goals. Each user is a unit capable of exerting influence and start meaningful actions through the production of original content. Both online spaces and the material world became a playground for activists. Every characteristic of a user, i.e. class, age or gender, could be a gateway to convincingly push a one-issue agenda into the online spaces and mass media.

> Societal norms can also greatly influence whether and how a person uses digital technology for activism. […] These expectations often differ according to the social group to which an individual belongs and are based on characteristics such as age, gender, religion, education, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. (Joyce, 2010: 5)

Activists now have the chance to evade control while at the same time "the networked nature of the digital world allows for people to communicate and take action" (*ibidem*: 11). These processes apply to all those movements that exist in a physical reality that is connected to online spaces. An unprecedent number of citizens around the world can gather to pursue common political goals through new technological means.

> In 2007, one million people in Xiamen, China, gathered to protest the building of a proposed toxic chemical plant. Many Chinese learned about the protest via a text message warning them of the dangers of the plant, asking people to participate in the protest, and to forward the message. […] Many individuals who previously relied on mass media channels to share information are now able to more actively participate in the public sphere. (Cullum, 2010: 50-51)

The fight for equal rights for all minority based activism was also energized by the new possibilities of the digital age. An act of police brutality can be captured on cellphones and can easily be spread online. Processes occurring amongst the public can be contaminated by the spill over effect of viral

pieces of posted content while the copycat effect, an act that is modelled or inspired by a previous act that has been reported by media or in online spaces, can lead to unpredictable results.

> Multiple mobile phones captured video of an Oakland, California, police officer shooting Oscar Grant, a young, unarmed man, who was being restrained by other officers on a rail platform. The mobile videos were uploaded to sites like YouTube and Witness.org. The footage spread virally across the Internet, and, after viewing, many members of the public organized rallies. (*ibidem*: 60)

The sharing of visual and cultural artifacts has empowered activists because "transcending linguistic barriers and eliciting strong emotional reactions, the role of videos and photos is crucial for mobilization" (Kavada, 2010: 107). Groups of peers connected through activist solidarity now can mobilize large groups of citizens through social media. The tribal dynamics discussed previously improve social cohesion between members of the same cultural or political tribe. The appearance of unusual cultural symbolism on political marches, such as memes and pictures from online spaces, is a common feature amongst activists.

> The explosive viral growth of content and, indeed, the dynamics of more sustained, "merely" social communities online encapsulate in some sense the very mechanisms that activists of all types hope to mobilize. […] That some of the most dramatic mobilizations on the Web have accumulated around humourous pictures of cats or long-lost '80s pop stars should hint at a deeper lesson. (Hwang, 2010: 122)

Political content online is often mixed with humorous memes, conspiracy theories and unusual news, clearly "such data include not just highly publicized instances of political turmoil like the Iran case, but also the ephemera of jokes and odd news stories that are passed around daily" (*ibidem*: 130-131). The focus on the strategic, wider, level of activity of a movement is often needed to understand how their protest develop.

> The digital revolution affects the range of tools available to both campaigns and brings with it a wealth of tactic-level data, […] separating the "signal" from the "noise" in online metrics of success can best be achieved by focusing attention on the strategic level of activity. (Karpf, 2010: 163-164)

Globally, social media are key for activism. For example, Facebook as a platform offers endless possibilities for aggregation and attention harvesting for political movements. Furthermore, initiatives on Facebook could translate into activity in the material world in a constant feedback loop between the actions of users online and their behavior in everyday life.

> Thus, these Facebook features that allowed for interactivity among users helped create a collective identity that served to push the online movement offline to the streets in the form of week after week of protests, demonstrations and petition drives. (Harlow, 2012: 15)

The digital means provide a possibility to be involved for citizens who are unwilling to protest as well because "such first-hand accounts of Facebook users who participated both online and offline […] also contributed to the transition of the online movement to offline action" (*ibidem*). The hybridization of activism can attract previously unthought of masses of people because "it seems online social media like Facebook have the potential to spur moments of collective action" (*ibidem*: 16). Another possibility of the digital age for activists is the creation of multiple fake accounts to jam online spaces.

> Internet also allows for the creation of a fictitious character that you can use to connect with other people. You can define the different aspects of your personality differently. […] Lesbian groups in the Arab world are using "fake" Facebook identities in order to raise awareness. (Cinco and Aquino, 2011: 13)

The interaction between the activist and the technological means has a reciprocal influence. The outcome of this technological race is crucial to understand activism of the digital age because "the psychopathology of speed information is not to be considered as a marginal side-effect of the process, as it is essential in the shaping of social attention" (*ibidem*: 4). New forms of activism that evolved in these new digital conditions emerge to establish another standard of online interaction around politics.

Activist movements of the digital age are characterized by an aesthetic urge. The focus of many users on visual aspects of their posting swiftly became a part of their political protest. The fragmentation of social movements online give way to a flow of visual content that is often ignored by authorities even if it has a radical undertone.

> It does so by utilizing the "cloudization" of social movements and creates a situation in which government and capitalist elements are forced to acquiesce in the name of artistic expression. I define this esthetic approach to social movements as "kawaii (cute) direct action." (Gonoi, 2014: 2)

The connection between online and material world activism can occur with any act of protest as "by combining the occupation of real public spaces, such as parks and squares, and the amplification of their voices, united in cyberspace" (*ibidem*: 6). The rise of a small group of radicals seems to be a recurrent characteristic of activist movements because "the vast majority of the Cause's size and income can be attributed to a very small number of "hyperactivists" (Lewis et al, 2014: 2). Social media platforms, even if creating connections that are less intense then those that users have at home

or at work, can produce many less intense signals and even be able to imitate the closeness of real-life relationships.

> Although the average donation amount on Facebook ($29.06) was comparable to offline donations, the donation rate (0.24 percent) was substantially less and accounted for only a fraction of funds raised by Save Darfur in traditional ways. It seems, therefore, that social media may indeed help activate the interpersonal ties that play such a powerful role in recruitment to offline activism. (*ibidem*: 5)

It is less costly to organize masses of citizens around an issue through digital means, consequently "the mobilizing structure is the social networks and all resources necessary for popular mobilization, which in this case consists of social media as the fastest and cheapest way" (Lopes, 2014: 4). The numbers of citizens connected online can explain the intensity of some mobilizations organized through social media because "although the Facebook model does not show a relationship between Facebook and protests, the Internet penetration model does prove that social media is a statistically significant" (*ibidem*: 19). The digital age's users view of identities is channeled through new means of expression because "social media potentially provide (new) opportunities for citizens […] and the mainstream media to construct alternative collective identities" (Cammaerts, 2015: 5). The impact of these issues on the political activism emerged post-2010 is crucial.

> The protests in Tunisia spreading to other Arab countries such as Egypt, Yemen, Libya and Syria are an example as is the rapid diffusion of the occupation of symbolic public spaces as a direct action in the Arab World spreading to the indignados in Spain, to the United States, the United Kingdom and elsewhere. (*ibidem*: 6)

There is often doubt amongst users that describe activism that occurs online as without consequences and a "lazy" activism, e.g. slacktivism, sometimes called clicktivism, resonates with citizens who fail to make time in their lives for "active" activism" (*ibidem*: 7). A dark aspect of the digital age's activism is the availability of these new means for far-right, criminal and terrorist groups, for example "the progression of online communication, right-wing movements and the white-power music scene benefited greatly as the Internet provided new distribution channels" (Ekman, 2014: 80). The crystallization of content online is eternally present creating an endless source for inspiration for further activism because "archived and published documentation of political activities prolong the presence of the actual events and expand them in space" (*ibidem*: 82). Instances of peaceful rituals such as a gathering in a forest, embedded in traditional far-right symbolic content, when uploaded online can create a cohesiveness that allow for political mobilization for these fringe groups because "the visibility and normalisation are elements of an on-going socio-political (collective) identity process" (*ibidem*: 95). Beyond these fringe political groups, recent years confirm that "the actual

reach of the social media protest communication was many times larger than the number of people posting, tweeting, or commenting on these protests" (Thomas and Van Dijck, 2015: 528). Processes of identity creation online are economically viable for social media giants and can be strategically relevant for activists.

> Major social platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube personalize the user experience on a number of levels. First, they push users to create and extend their personal networks by 'following' or 'friending'. They also stimulate users to create their own communication spaces, for example through hashtags such as #egypt, #sidibouzid, or #OccupyWallStreet, or in the form of Facebook Groups and Pages, like 'We are all Khaled Said'. Finally, social platforms algorithmically select for each user the content that is most likely to meet their interests. (*ibidem*: 533)

A relevant issue is the everyday bombardment of concerned citizens with new causes and political claims as "instant moments of togetherness, inevitably dissolve when social platforms algorithmically connect users to the next wave of trending topics" (*ibidem*: 534). The reimagining of the same meme for different causes adds to this evoked confusion, for example "a picture of Davinci's Vitruvian Man can be a Meme for the excellence of the human body in one day, while being used to tell stories of failing bodily functions" (Thove, 2015: 4). This chaotic interactivity is embraced by a large number of activists as "online networks that delve in anything from critique expression to humourous commenting on everyday situations, support how a simple Meme can spark a defined emotion or context, and thus contribute to a text-based conversation" (*ibidem*: 6). The visual element is important for activists to improve brief texts that are the informational currency of social media. Pictures provide different advantages: fast in diffusion, emotional and easy to modify. The evolution of a new symbolic language for social media became widely spread for the usefulness of "meme-like visual tools in more formal, written communication, as long as all communicators are able to agree on the meaning and see it as something other than a joke template" (*ibidem*: 10). The creation of new, "special", languages for a selected few activists, that could be seen as a digital tribe's chosen, attract attention by those users that are non committed to a political struggle. The diffusion of memes is crucial too for activist movements to gain visibility online.

The fact that the larger part of Internet is unavailable to the public, provided niches for radicals where they could organize, communicate and freely spread their beliefs. Users who can access hidden online spaces are active on different dimensions of their online activity. Humour, sometimes detached from what society deems morality, is often the main reason behind the behavior of these tech-savvy users.

> *At the top of tree of life there isn't love: there is lulz.* […] The anonymous and uncensored world of /b/ generates an enormous amount of inventive, funny, and offensive content, as users vie for popularity, and notoriety. (Bartlett, 2015: 15)

Users routinely engage in activities online that are embedded in humour but can have serious consequences. Some users enjoy searching for and then sharing private details of a user who is considered a potential target such as a girl who may share intimate pictures of herself. Bartlett, describing such a situation, notices that "doxing a camwhore is seen as a rare treat – and before long, users […] revealed her full name, address, and telephone number" (*ibidem*: 16). Those users engaging in a thread dedicated to doxing girls online behaved ambiguously with some writing that those female users that were posting naked were not to be harmed and others pointing out that it was the custom in these online spaces (*ibidem*: 18). Humour and harassment online go hand in hand for some users who see themselves as trolls, who intentionally violently ridicule or upsets people online. Tragedies can attract attention of users who see themselves as trolls, for example after the death of her father "Zelda Williams left Twitter and Instagram after being sent endless insults, horrific photos, and abusive comments" (*ibidem*: 21). Troublemakers adapted to social media platforms acting in accordance to the rules and norms of the platform they interact with. Interviews with these users showed that they often considered trolling as "part art, part science, part joke, part political act" (*ibidem*: 23). Groups of trolls created new ways of harassing other users to both provoke a laugh and often to make a statement:

> Invade other groups by posting ridiculous, Monty Pythonesque posts, preventing anyone else from posting or entering into a discussion. This technique, now known as "crap-flooding," is still very popular among trolls. (*ibidem*: 30)

Disgust provoking techniques are an important part of activism of users who identify themselves as trolls. A race to the bottom between trolls is a characteristic of this social phenomenon that continues to the present day. Adopting increasingly shocking, to the other users, troll techniques seems addictive for this small group of digital jesters. This addiction is often a motivating factor that encourage bold acts of the trolls.

> …/b/ trolling catchphrase: "I did it for the lulz" – a phrase employed to justify anything and everything where the chief motivation is to generate a laugh. […] "Lulz" are a bit like a drug: you need a bigger, and bigger hit to keep the feeling going. (*ibidem*: 37)

An example of troll community in action occurred after the suicide of a student, Mitchell Henderson, who left behind contradictory reasons for his act and due to a grammatical mistake on his memorial

page that provoked hilarity in many users[13]. This tragic act provoked the troll community to create a stream of humorous images and memes, for example "after learning that Mitchell had lost an iPod shortly before killing himself, the /b/tards created photoshopped images of Mitchell and his lost device" (*ibidem*: 38). The interaction of users with online spaces often test their moral limits.

> Our brain has evolved over millions of years to subconsciously spot these cues so we can better read and empathize with each other. Communicating via computers removes these cues, making communication abstract and anchorless. Or, as the web comic Penny Arcade has it: "The Greater Internet Fuck-wad Theory": "normal person + anonymity + audience + total fuckwad." (*ibidem*: 42-43)

These effects apply to other radical minorities online. There is often a clear difference between a real-life activist and their online behavior. These two dimensions can be channeled in synergy by the activist to enhance his visibility and spread his political views or they can be in contrast creating a feeling of dissonance.

> The digital Paul is a dynamic, aggressive, and prominent advocate of the White Pride movement. The real Paul is an unemployed thirty-something. […] Neo-Nazis use Twitter not only for disseminating ideas and sharing propaganda, but also for maintaining a coherent sense of self-identity. (*ibidem*: 49-50)

Another consequence of digitalization for activists is that they are surrounded by information that is in agreement with their beliefs. Moreover, activists are not the only ones who employ these new possibilities because "terrorists, extremists, serious organized criminals, and child pornographers, denied mainstream channels, are often early adopters of new technology" (*ibidem*: 104). A complete immersion in online spaces by users seems to be a source for radicalization against the larger society.

> The "dissociative effect" – the idea that a screen allows you to dissociate your real self from your online behavior, to create fictitious identities and alternative realities, in which social restrictions, responsibilities and norms do not apply. (*ibidem*: 120)

Different communities adopt a point based system to better coalesce their members together such as the pro-anorexia communities where it is mixed with a humorous, light-touch, narrative of popular users.

> Thread is titled "funny/disgusting". **Allbones**: This thread's for all of the yucky/funny things about your eating habits […] I was sitting in bed and burped up this terrible acid/peanut butter liquid and it was all up my throat and in my mouth…and I reswallowed it with pride. (*ibidem*: 197)

[13] An Hero. *Know your meme*. Available at: https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/an-hero. Last accessed 12 December 2020.

Sometimes, the identification between a user and their narrative online is total as one account narrates that "I felt like the Twitter account was a part of me. If I deleted the account or just stopped using it: then I would have just disappeared without trace" (*ibidem*: 199). The union between online spaces and user's actions when offline is clear from the encouragement of members of these communities suggesting drastic actions with serious consequences, in fact "tricks and tips are arguably the most harmful and destructive parts of these subcultures, transforming what might be vague, ill-thought-out plans into a concrete set of instructions" (*ibidem*: 206). The virality of these processes is increased in the online spaces.

> A spate of copycat suicides across Europe by young men who had found themselves in a similar predicament. This strange phenomenon became known as the "Werther Effect." […] The Werther Effect occurs because we are social creatures. We model our behavior on others, learning from and imitating those around us. (*ibidem*: 210)

Self-harming actions harvest attention and can potentially create a social media storm. The reaction of trolls to tragic events is often ridicule and hilarity, for example when a user failed to commit suicide by setting his room on fire and streamed the ordeal online, he was trolled on Facebook (*ibidem*: 213). The tribal nature of the digital age often encourages radical behavior. The potential ambiguity of every user creates an online environment that creates the dark net as a reflection of existing society and its groups. The other aspect of this explosion of multifaceted radicalism is in the real-life aspect of online dynamics.

The described mechanisms of political and social activism online generate new conditions for modern democracy. The radicalization of users active on social media is creating unforeseen challenges for current political life. The production and spreading of content in online spaces is much faster than the reaction time of modern democracies with their centuries old institutions and procedures.

> Representative democracy – slow, unresponsive, full of compromise – suddenly feel absurdly slow in a world of instant gratification. The flood of digital information – data and facts and charts and memes and hashtags and thought-pieces and infographics and retweets – is not making us more informed and thoughtful. It's making us more susceptible to non-sense, more emotional, more irrational, and more mobbish. (Bartlett, 2017: 2)

Events that have occurred in the west in the last decade are re-shaping the understanding of politics for many users. The notion of what was considered normal in the public arena is being stretched in an unrecognizable way. Events and opportunistic politicians exploiting these new social and technological dynamics can shift the political balance irrevocably to create shockwaves in entire societies that can last for decades and sway hundreds of millions of citizens because "the election of

Donald Trump or the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union are just early skirmishes of a more significant realignment, in which assumptions about what is the political normal will change" (*ibidem*: 6). Content posted by radical users, who often use humour to argue for extreme political proposals, is becoming the norm in online spaces. The violence that emerge from this radicalization occurring online appears to be "some mysterious alchemy of timing, networks, personality type and opportunity" (*ibidem*: 136). The posting of content that encourages violent acts is cyclical. The rising popularity of populism lies in the simplification of the political struggle, by definition "populism, which can be either left or right wing, is an approach to politics that replaces one simplistic dichotomy (left and right) with another (the people versus the elites)" (*ibidem*: 149). Simple and funny slogans channeled these new political narratives in online spaces.

> …with its word-count limits and networked sharing, there's no time for the boring business of negotiation and compromise online. Digital technology is dichotomous and interactive, a series of discrete packets; 0/1, Like/Don't Like, My Guy/Not My Guy, Evil/Good. It incentivizes simplicity and rewards pithiness. Slogans and memes are its currency. (*ibidem*: 170-171)

Data gathered on the online activity of populist political movements show that "posts using more intensively anti-establishment vocabulary attracted twice as many comments, and two and a half times more unique commenters" (*ibidem*: 171). These mechanics of communication online were confirmed repeatedly throughout the years as political figures with simple messages that evoke intense emotion succeeded in their campaigning. The US election cycle of 2016 proved that "Trump received around $5 billion in free media coverage over the election cycle as cable news gobbled up his headline-grabbing tweets and outlandish suggestions" (*ibidem*: 173). This fracture between reasonable arguments and emotional appeals is one of the main reasons for the current polarization and tribal fracturing of western societies.

> Your opponents can't simply hold a principled difference of opinion. They must be bad. They must be incoherent babblers, sinister Machiavellians, politically correct elites, or hoodwinked buffoons. […] emotion-fuelled certainties, for angrier, more polarized politics: where attention-grabbing and controversy generation are incentivized over plodding, unshareable deliberation. (*ibidem*: 179)

On the one hand, tribal dynamics of activism seem unavoidable in the digital age, on the other, the potential of these movements is that an activist minority can reshape a stable and democratic political competition into a new scenario.

> Radicals don't always need to win in order to influence mainstream thinking. Due to their energy and passion, they often exert a disproportionate influence, and can move the political centre of gravity in their direction, sometimes very quickly. This is far easier if the centre is weak, lacks support and articulate

> defenders. The UK Independence Party, although it has only one elected Member of Parliament, has shifted UK politics in recent years. (*ibidem*: 302)

Local change carried out by activists can easily overflow geographical borders to become a global factor. Moreover, other activists freely imitate the lessons of movements abroad to better reach their goals. The radical minorities are often closely connected through online spaces as figureheads of the different movements are invited to different countries to spread best practices and attempt to instill emotional attachment to their cause.

> New media has presented the idea of digital circle which is complicating and mixing the boundaries of local, national and international communities. Individuals can transfer, offer, deliver, course, and consider political material from anyplace whenever they want. (Karamat and Farooq, 2016: 386)

The ever-changing nature of the digital age creates a process where cycles of activism can spread globally. The digital world and the material world are both involved in this process as users hijack these new dynamics to spread the messages of new political currents and activist movements. The potential of online spaces offers limitless possibilities for digital activism.

Activism is currently empowered both by radicals and by occasional users. There is a chance for every user to become more involved with a movement of his or her choice. Some users become so enthralled to the cause of a movement that they invest additional time and resources to eventually completely identify with their struggle.

> Our results demonstrate that while notable events may have triggered many individuals to engage in cursory or one-time discourse on the various issues of the Black Lives Matter activist movement, some individuals remained involved in the social media conversations over a long period and across temporally spread-out events. (De Choudhury et al, 2016: 100)

Peaks in user activity on social media platforms are often connected to protests organized by political movements. Users often evoke emotions that seem to be the motivating force through which online spaces and protest activity are joined to then explode later in a state of togetherness. Channeling negative emotions, such as disgust, anger and fear, through online spaces encourages more participation by users.

> Participation in future protests was associated with a spike in the intensity of social media conversations, as well as an increase in negative affect and sadness, heightened cognitive and perceptual processing and manifestation of a collective agency. (*ibidem*)

It is the intensity of contact between activists that could create processes of radicalization because "the openness of the 'free media' identity arguably allows media activists indifferent contexts to adapt it to their local realities while maintaining a sense of connectedness to global struggles" (Stephansen, 2017: 64). The drive to be more and more connected encourages those users who are not interested in politics to join activist movements.

> If someone associates actively with (i.e. engages with) the cause of a community organisation, clearly this might precede connecting with that organisation online, or it might be the consequence of online connection. (Harris and McCabe, 2017: 10)

The availability of social media in a language of the country where a political protest take place seems to encourage activism and the availability of more information. It is also the sum of interactions both online and in the material world that often convince less ideologized users to become active in politics and sometimes to undergo a process of radicalization: "activists start by being exposed to dissident ideas, and people's social networks – which include online and offline interactions – are among the most effective places from which people are recruited into activism" (Tufekci, 2017: 16). It is hard for users to commit to a cause, caused by information gluts online, between many possible endeavors. Users using humour and memes appear to characterize activism everywhere on the globe. For example, the rise of this playful digital culture has seemingly preceded political protests.

> In 2012, political criticism, youth culture, and humour sites had merged and had become part of the networked public sphere, which meant the ability to generate information cascades and go viral through funny and biting political satire. […] It was like slowly bubbling lava, rising higher and higher through the mantle of a volcano, but invisible. (*ibidem*: 45)

Activists are often logistically helped by the rest of the uncommitted population creating a symbiosis between the two. Help can also be psychological in nature as activists, even those involved mainly in the online activity of a movement, often suffer setbacks and abuse because "the online world is not unreal or virtual" (*ibidem*: 58). This is how activist movements reach a compromise with the wider public to achieve notoriety and gather support.

> Social media add new twists to problems of the lack of formal organization and leadership, especially because of novel dynamics of the online "attention economy" – the struggle to get the most likes, views, or other endorsements on social media. (*ibidem*: 79)

Older cultural dynamics emerge anew when others are initiated by users to create cultural collages that become rituals online for social cohesiveness. This process of cultural aggregation "occurs online

and offline as people join viral conversations, adding their voice to the collective" (*ibidem*: 89). These virtual rituals of collectivities of users are then embedded in actions of activists in the material world.

> In Gezi Park, the library was in the middle of the park, staffed by a man in a clown suit. […] Like many things in the park, the library was organized in both online and offline spaces. A publishing house was the first to start a hashtag, #gezikutuphanesi – Gezi Library. (*ibidem*: 90)

Ritual behavior around sacred spaces can be observed from these activist practices and as online spaces are usually monitored for non-compliant users. Different levels of activity have their own dangers from authorities because "tweeting a protest hashtag connects a person to the protest; while offline protest risks tear gas, online protests risks surveillance" (*ibidem*: 111). Online spaces, given their constant change and atemporality, can contribute to the spirit of activists through posted content. Elements of local activist culture are often absorbed in a transnational carnival online that is often spread by activists globally from parks to Facebook pages.

Motivations of activists are often complex as an ideological cause can motivate a politically engaged user to find symbolic ways to represent one's dreams and goals through online spaces. The algorithm based structure of social media platforms can be decisive for the survival or the extinction of a movement because "algorithms can also shape social movement tactics as a movement's content producers adapt or transform their messages to be more algorithm friendly" (*ibidem*: 154). Facebook acquires unrivalled influence on political processes as it can shape the evolution of activist movements that require this platform to conduct their activity. Therefore, social media platforms are a political actor as much as the activists fighting for social change.

> Platforms' algorithms often contain feedback loops: once a story is buried, even a little, by the algorithm, it become increasingly hidden. […] A politician can be greatly helped or greatly hurt if Google chooses to highlight, say, a link to a corruption scandal on the first page. (*ibidem*: 159)

It is the social media platform that create the conditions for a meme or a political message to go viral because "new models of virality pop up quickly, sometimes rewarded and other times discouraged by the central platform according to its own priorities" (*ibidem*: 161). There are niches of user activity on these platforms that can create significant change on online spaces, using humour to stretch boundaries of conventional morality.

> Redditors on the Jailbait forum discussed these girls' bodies, rated their attractiveness, and shared sexual fantasies about these children. Some "joked" about raping them, cheered on by fellow community members. […] Jailbait members created internal norms to justify their behavior. Just like other subcultures, they drew strength from one another. (*ibidem*: 166)

The opposition to activism driven change, led by political elites and security forces of authoritarian states, have also started to use online based communication strategies integrating the repressive power of the state in a multi-faceted response. New tactics were often enough to attract widespread attention from societies and start a conversation about those changes that activists saw as desirable.

> If it had not been for social media, where the occupation flourished as a topic through hastily set-up Facebook pages and Twitter accounts that shared news, pictures, videos from the protests, and even live-streaming of its general assemblies, the movement might have hit a wall because of lack of attention. (*ibidem*: 210-211)

This is a characteristic of spontaneous movements of the digital age that do not have a recruitment process for committed and disciplined activists because "holding large protest events no longer requires a tedious and painstaking organizational effort" (*ibidem*: 217). Amongst Conservatives, it appears that the rise of activism linked to movements such as the Tea party was characterized by a carefully drafted political strategy. The Tea party is a populist political movement whose members defend a free market from a Conservative and libertarian perspective famous for its protest tactics.

> The Tea Party engaged in collective behavior and used tactics similar to those of many other protests. Its focus on electoral capacity, however, shows the importance of political culture in shaping the impact of technological affordances. (*ibidem*: 217)

Tea party political activity managed to shift the Republican party to the right and then to prepare the ground for a president close to their set of values. Ironically, it seems that radical rightwing movements, while not particularly numerous, can be decisively impactful in their activism. This latest aspect of digital activism from the Conservative side and the processes occurring in online spaces culminated into the US 2016 election cycle. The polarization into tribal social groups represents a ticking bomb in the heart of the western democracies.

> Partisan sources of news, which spread misinformation by framing a small kernel of a fact into a misleading story, or flat-out falsehood, were also a stable of the media ecology by the time the 2016 election rolled around. The polarization in the population was also deeply set. "Fake news" virality rising on affordances of digital technology and Silicon Valley business models added. (*ibidem*: 266)

Therefore, the changes provoked by digital means to groups of users divided by their commitment to activism about an issue are unprecedented in human history. The concept of an activist movement is also being reshaped, for example because of "inverted movements trajectories (protest first, organize later unlike the past where a large protest was the culmination of long-term work)" (*ibidem*: 269-270). The main risk is that societies are currently undergoing the unprecedented challenge of

coexisting in the same digital environment, owned by few platforms, and in an increasingly polarized cultural and political scenario. Brexit and the US election cycle of 2016 represent an example of this change, a crucial turning point for western democracies and the result of mass popularization in society due to the rise of digital savvy radical movements.

1.5.6 Brexit and Trump

The events of 2016 such as Brexit referendum and the US elections, were a signal of a worrying ongoing trend. The British General election of 2015 preceded many of the processes that would unfold a year later. It seems that online activity of citizens became more important throughout the years because, as highlighted by Jackson and Thorsen, (2015: 8) "The General Election 2015 was notable for memes such as 'Milifandom' and #JeSuisEd, which were citizen-led campaigns to counter press power through parody and self-effacement". Subsequently, according to Parry (2015: 88), the posting of numerous digital artifacts online is bound to characterize all future political processes occurring in democracies as during 2015 "amongst the infographics, humorous memes and personalized messages, photographs of suffragettes featured heavily". Fan communities were often organized around tribal identities and became relevant political actors because "fan-citizens can perform their identities and their 'affective intelligence' via social media in ways that have left the old(er) guard uncertain whether to interpret all this as ironic, earnest, or semi-ironic" (Hills, 2015: 89). Conservative users on online spaces and those watching traditional media alike contributed towards creating a feeling of revulsion towards immigrants and minorities that later shaped the Brexit political campaign. The impact of immigration and the attested numbers of migrants were usually exaggerated to attract support for the Leave campaign.

> Research undertaken in 2014 by Ipsos Mori that mapped popular perceptions against reality. According to their survey the British public think that one in 5 British people are Muslim when in reality it is one in twenty and that 24% of the population are immigrants when the official figure is 13%. (Fenton, 2016: 57)

British politicians exploited and inflated the Leave campaign with every means and argument, even if plainly false, available. The resulting social and political environment could have encouraged those who wanted to exploit the resulting chaos to commit hate crimes and violence, such as the killer of Labour MP Jo Cox.

> Johnson's wilful irresponsibility (with Gove, Grayling, Duncan Smith, John Mann and Frank Field) was a contributory factor to the 'ugliness' that surrounded the national conversation, […] this corrosive intolerance provided the backdrop for the terrible actions of a disturbed mind in the unprovoked murder of the Labour MP Jo Cox. (Wheeler, 2016: 78)

The victory of the Leave campaign was based mainly on what occurred online. It seems that quantity of posted content, rather than quality, shifted public opinion on the final vote for Brexit. The overflow of online spaces with pro-Brexit content, fake news and emotional stunts by politicians, such as the campaign bus that advertised Brexit with a promise of £350 million to the NHS written on the side or Boris Johnson being suspended in the air while waving two Union Jacks, promoted the Brexit campaign to create sufficient pressure to shift the opinion on the referendum of many users.

> We have captured 30 weeks of data from Instagram, analysing over 18k users and 30k posts. This data indicates that not only were there twice as many Brexit supporters on Instagram, but they were also five times more active than Remain activists. The same pattern could be found on Twitter, where we found that the Leave camp outnumbers the Remain camp 7 to 1. The online momentum of the Leave camp was equally evident in the support they received from the community. On average, Instagram posts from the members of the Leave camp received 26% more likes and 20% more comments, while the most active users in the dataset were also all campaigning for a Leave vote. Furthermore, the top 3 most frequently used hashtags in the data come from the Leave camp and were well integrated into all networked conversations online: #Brexit, #Beleave and #VoteLeave. Using the Internet, the Leave camp was able to create the perception of wide-ranging public support for their cause that acted like a self-fulfilling prophecy. (Polonski, 2016: 94)

Older memes and conspiracy theories also re-emerged for a greater effect during 2016. For example, the idea of vote tampering that was perceived by many to have occurred during the Scottish referendum in 2014 was once again popular during the referendum. Many British citizens were suspicious of the process of voting itself during the referendum, fearing vote tampering as well as fueling conspiracy theories that resulted in confusion and misunderstandings. Many UK citizens were convinced of the need to use pens, instead of the usual pencils, to write their votes and avoid their marks on the schedules being cancelled by hidden conspirators.

> …#usepens hashtag first surfaced in a political context in reference to the Scottish referendum in 2014 reflecting a suspicion of vote tampering. The conspiracy theory involved the Conservative government using MI5 to rub out penciled in ballot papers, […] re-emerging before the EU referendum alongside the now common election day meme #dogsatpollingstations. (Mitchell, 2016: 98)

Social media platforms also shaped the approach to voting during the referendum as it appears that "an analysis of #usepens reveals a polemical mode of discourse, enabled and necessitated by social media's short attention span" (*ibidem*). This was a sintom of a post-Brexit crisis of British society that was a contributing factor to a massive spike of hate crimes that was extensively discussed in the media by British authorities.

> Home Secretary Amber Rudd, launching a hate crime strategy a few days after the referendum, declared that hate crimes were 'utterly unacceptable'. […] police chief Bernard Hogan-Howe, the 2,300 (plus) racist

> incidents reported to the police in the thirty-eight days after the referendum, was a 'horrible spike'. (Burnett, 2016: 3)

These incidents were not uniform, both in terms of the social background of perpetrators and regarding how the crimes were committed, because "whilst the majority of the 134 incidents examined were incidents of racist abuse, they also included physical assaults, arson attacks, death threats and stabbings" (*ibidem*: 6). Both political sides were mostly limited by a narrow and polarized view often fuelled by traditional media:

> Liberals from the 'Remain camp', in particular, have clung to the belief that racist hate crimes are simply a by-product of Brexit, while Conservatives in the 'Leave camp' argue that racism is down to a minority, […] a view reinforced by some tabloids. (*ibidem*: 12)

The referendum was a trigger event that motivated many of those individuals and groups in the UK who were capable, and willing, of committing hate crimes. In many cases, the injuries of the victims of hate crimes were severe and sometimes even permanent. Violence and political campaigning seemed to be connected during the referendum as a spike in hate crimes spike reached impressive vehemdsence after an intensely felt socio-political event.

> 101 of the 134 'cases' (75 per cent) involved interpersonal racial abuse, with fifty-one specifically mentioning the EU referendum or themes central to it. In twenty-five cases, people were physically attacked, and in some cases left with permanent injuries. […] Nine of the total cases involved lengthy harassment, with multiple incidents happening over a given time period. (*ibidem*: 21)

Isolated individuals from a minority background are in great danger when the circumstances of an emotionally charged political campaign occur, especially "those working in the night-time economy – taxi-drivers, takeaway workers and so on – face particular risk" (*ibidem*: 24). This set of circumstances, such as intense political polarization, the rising importance of online spaces, the economic crisis, fueled Conservative as well as radical right media outlets and users that ultimately exploited the outrage of citizens on both sides of the Atlantic.

> An outrage industry has burgeoned, in which radio shock jocks such as Rush Limbaugh, and right-wing populist copycats such as Bill O'Reilly and Sean Hannity, have made large fortunes and global reputations for themselves as purveyors of outrage. Limbaugh is reported to have 13.25 million regular weekly listeners. (Muller, 2016: 17)

Therefore, in 2016, British and American Conservative media and those users who are popular in online spaces managed to exploit the potential of digitally crafted communication to great effect. The

US Presidential cycle of 2016, similarly to the EU referendum in UK, contributed to a cultural shift across the west and the rise of a new, increasingly impudent and aggressive, standard of behavior for Conservative politicians and activists in the public arena. This shift was spearheaded by a Presidential candidate, and then president, named Donald Trump.

> Trump took this to a new level, demonstrating that a candidate can make statements that were verifiably false, be called out on these misstatements, and pay no political price for them. […] And his message was amplified through online social networks, making his followers both consumers and producers of campaign discourse. Combined, these tactics exploited both the multiaxiality and hyperreality of the current information environment. (Delli Carpini, 2016: 20)

There are notable similarities between the political campaign for the Brexit referendum and Trump's staff strategy. A continuous stream of tweets posted by Trump and other figureheads of his campaign, focused on migrants. Trump's campaign had precise goals and a well defined strategy in its communication efforts.

> Clinton tweeted more about the economy and healthcare and Trump tweeted more about immigration. […] the sheer volume of immigration/Trump tweets was the single largest election issue we measured circulating on Twitter from July to September 2015. (Oates, 2016: 22)

The posting of image macros and the spreading of bots online that repeatedly posted simple messages to achieve superiority in the online spaces was equally relevant in the US election cycle as it was for the Brexit referendum. Trump's campaign encouraged like-minded users to flood the digital space with content in line with the message of its candidate. Trump supporters followed the tone of his campaign and focused on the same controversial and emotional themes to spread their message.

> One study found bots were behind 50-55 per cent of Clinton's Twitter activity. That's nothing compared to the 80 per cent for Trump. […] For example, Clinton supporters appropriated the #nastywoman to show their support for a female candidate. Trump supporters took to #repeal19, the amendment that gave women the right to vote. (Hermida, 2016: 76)

The main effect of this overflow of posted content was to normalize this shift toward populism and aggressive communication online. Moreover, this effort by Trump supporters in online spaces gave new life to patterns of behavior that belonged to radical niches in US politics. With enough citizens embracing Trump's campaign worldview throughout the passing of months, the polarization born from the already existing US political divide increased further.

> What matters is the impact these memes have. The most fundamental impact is they normalize hate and denigration to the point hate speech is no longer seen as hate speech. It just becomes speech, whatever Trump happened to tweet that day was later reported by journalists as an expected part of the news cycle.

> The second, more visceral, impact is the power of these memes to undermine the basic sense of safety, worthiness, and political visibility of those populations […] and these memes will continue to work their dark magic, so long as they resonate with enough people willing to embrace--or conveniently ignore-their very real, embodied consequences. (Milner and Whitney, 2016: 84)

Trump's campaign inaugurated new ways to communicate in online spaces and flood social media with content. This effort resulted in radical activity by users who took to the streets to achieve their political goals as well as to signal to supporters of Hillary Clinton of the change of pace occurring in US politics. The success of Trump's new ideological framework was a global shock that could have unprecedent consequences for western democracies.

The shift of US political cycle was profound because "the public was about to transition from believing – with total certainty – "the clown can't win" to "Hello, President Trump" (Adams, 2017: 3). Trump as a candidate possessed several qualities that were new for the US politics. The Trump campaign followed simple principles in its political communication, specifically that "a good general rule is that people are more influenced by visual persuasion, emotion, repetition, and simplicity than they are by details and facts" (*ibidem*: 25). Moreover, the Trump campaign was aware that "visual persuasion is more powerful than auditory persuasion. Our visual sense *changes what we are hearing in real time*, even when we know the illusion" (*ibidem*: 36). Trump masterfully crafted new terms and original tags to mark his political adversaries. The Trump campaign and his supporters were also able to frame minorities considered hostile in a negative light. Another quality embodied by the Republican candidate was that "Trump has a good sense of humour, and that's a powerful tool of persuasion" (*ibidem*: 91). Moreover, this constant process of name calling and aggressive communication motivated Trump's supporters to become the protagonists of an emotional campaign in a heavily polarized political system.

> He created an emotion-triggering visual image (Rosie O'Donnell) that sucked all the attention from the question to the answer, and it wasn't even a real answer. […] He also picked a personality who was sure to trigger the emotions of his base. (*ibidem*: 95)

Pro-Trump radicalism rampant in online spaces encouraged the ongoing tribalization of politically active users. The goal of Trump supporters was often to create chaos and provoke other users to then offer a solution represented by their preferred candidate. The focus on the emotions felt by the Trump's base revealed to be a winning move for Trump as it changed the framing of what occurred during the campaign. He became the protagonist of the information flow occurring on both online spaces and traditional media discourse.

> The best way to think of pre-suasion is that it creates an emotional state that bleeds over from unrelated topics to the topic of your persuasion. If the American flag makes you feel patriotic, and patriotism is more associated in your mind with Republicans (irrationally or not), that's good enough to persuade. (*ibidem*: 118)

The posting of memetic content in these numbers also represents something new for political competition in democracies. For example, Elizabeth Warren was named Pocahontas by Trump because "Pocahontas" is – once again – a fresh insult for politics. […] But best of all, it was silly. And it was easy to meme. The internet loved it" (*ibidem*: 134). Implausible policy proposals were framed by the Trump's campaign in a similar way because it is sign of "**good persuasion**: We will build a big, beautiful wall" (*ibidem*: 139). The visual dimension was key for these attempts at mass persuasion. The co-existence of tribalism online and political polarization on the ground became the new normal for this round of the US election cycle, for example "Adorable deplorables" became one of the many positive spins that Trump supporters put on the Clinton's contemptuous comment when she called them racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, Islamophobic…a basket of deplorables (*ibidem*: 182-183). Trump's campaign managed to remain effectively ambiguous in its communication for many of those voters who did not share its policies were nevertheless absorbed in the cycle of irrational confrontation sweeping over the country.

> If you're a racist, you have a reason to like Trump because of CNN's misreporting, and the fact that Trump didn't do enough disavowing that one time. If you're not a racist, you can like Trump because he disavowed racists several times, in writing and on video. (*ibidem*: 202)

Trump's behaviour on camera, such as kissing Afro-American babies, helped to increase ambiguity about his values and supposed racism. This ambivalent behavior, shown also by other radicals on the political scene, allowed him to create a gap between proposed policies and possible extreme consequences of this ambiguous and aggressive communication style. On one hand, Trump's campaign seemingly normalized radical right and far-right radicalism, on the other, it always refused to recognize a connection between their political activity and hate crimes or even lone wolves' terrorism. These efforts at normalization of radical views were successful at attracting groups of moderate voters initially put off by some elements of Trump's overall discourse.

British society is still under shock from both the Brexit referendum fallout and other global political events, such as Trump's election and the renewed energy of radical right movements globally. The main group of victims of radicalization seemed to be young as they are an easier target to this socio-political shockwave.

> Perpetrators and victims of anti-Muslim incidents could be any age, victims are much more likely than perpetrators to be aged 12 and younger. Only 2% (n=16) of perpetrators were recorded as aged 12 and younger compared to 11% of victims (n=89). (Atta et al, 2017: 44)

Therefore, the largest group of offenders committing hate crimes in the UK is composed by teenagers. The playful elements of the teenage culture reveal a darker side through the tribal dynamics of smaller groups of younger users active online. Humour heavily characterizes the online communication of these teenagers. They could behave in an abusive way framed through humour, with a carnivalesque approach to violence.

> Perpetrators were much more likely than victims to be aged 13-18 years old. […] For example, a Muslim woman described the abuse she faced from teenage boys on a bus, which made explicit reference to her being a 'ninja' because of her niqab, laughing. (*ibidem*: 46)

Communication occurred online amongst users and the behavior of radicals on the ground in several instances coincided. Abusive actions and humorous memes are both a vital part of a socio-political process that occurs on two levels: online spaces and the material world. As discussed above, radical right users and the content they post are followed on a day by day basis by other, non-ideologized, users who are exposed to sources of potential radicalization.

> A network analysis of Twitter accounts in our 2015 report found that perpetrators also followed mainstream accounts and personalities, including ex-EDL leader and founder Tommy Robinson, MailOnline columnist Katie Hopkins and former UKIP leader Nigel Farage. This demonstrates how the rhetoric of some mainstream figures resonates with online perpetrators. (*ibidem*)

Several accounts that post radical content are bots or focus on retweets, for example "we analysed a neo-Nazi account named @uk_disgrace. Over the course of 3 to 4 days, the @uk_disgrace account had made 158 tweets. Of that figure, 96% were retweets" (*ibidem*: 72). Furthermore, there are users who see hate crimes in a humorous light posting content that can be hateful and funny at the same time.

> A far-right Twitter account having made a potentially incriminating tweet hours after the hate crime. The tweet read, 'Fair play to the lads today on take a bacon sandwich to a mosque day, if u haven't done yours yet theres still time!'. (*ibidem*: 75)

A state of constant confrontation amongst users in online spaces is ongoing with the result of challenging the facts behind events and news, for example "a Twitter user with identifiable far-right views wrote "Witch hunt! He did the right thing!" after sharing a BBC News article about an unprovoked racist assault on a Muslim woman" (*ibidem*: 77). Often, uncertain users and citizens are

getting caught in radical right movements because "for more vulnerable or impressionable individuals, the danger is that the ideologies of their peers, real-world or otherwise, are absorbed and regurgitated, often verbatim" (*ibidem*: 78). Once inside a movement or a forum, it is likely that a process of radicalization will begin for a user because they end up in an online echo chamber that circulate same narratives that will have ultimately some sort of effect. There are distinct qualities of online fringe communities that emerge from the analysis of the data collected about the users in online spaces.

> Seemingly "neutral" memes, like Pepe the Frog (or one of its variants), are used in conjunction with other memes to incite hate or influence public opinion on world events, e.g., with images related to terrorist organizations like ISIS or world events such as Brexit. (Zannettou et al, 2018: 11)

What emerges from these complex processes, both online and in the material world, is that even one posted meme can create an impact on online spaces because "events on one process can increase the likelihood of subsequent events, including other processes, e.g., a person might see a meme on one community and re-post it" (*ibidem*: 12). Therefore, memetic content seems to be the new currency of political protest and activism online.

> When measuring the influence each community has with respect to disseminating memes to other Web communities, we found that /pol/ has the largest overall influence for racist and political memes, however, /pol/ was the least efficient, i.e., in terms of influence w.r.t. the total number of memes posted, while The Donald is very successful in pushing memes to both fringe and mainstream Web communities. (*ibidem*: 16)

The large-scale mobilizations of radical right and far-right communities occur in proximity of spikes of activity in online spaces. This overview of the connection between exchanges on online spaces and real-life activism shows how actions in one sphere could contaminate and influence the other, even if it is a challenge to unlock the complexity that is ruling this relationship.

1.5.7 Summary

The first part of this section introduced the concept of memetics and dynamics currently shaping online spaces, specifically trying to bring to the fore issues linked to the visual culture and digital tribalism with a brief exploration of the processes that shaped the EU referendum in UK and the election of Donald Trump in US. The next chapter will present the methods and tools that I adopted in this dissertation to investigate the relationship between online behavior of the British radical right on Twitter and related events in the real world.

Chapter 2

Background, Methods, and Database

2.1 Methodology

This dissertation sets out to examine the discourse of members of the UK radical right on Twitter in order to establish whether there are links between the online behaviour of these users and episodes of physical violence and, if so, to assess how these two spheres are connected. Humour, a feature that is widely considered an effective key to unlocking the meaning of larger social, political and on-going cultural processes, (see Chapter 1) emerges as a significant feature in the online discourse of these users. In this dissertation, I will argue that humour could also be part of a moral phenomenon which is accelerated online and that plays a crucial role in the collision of the online and material spheres of interaction. In order to fill the gap in existing knowledge, the present study will answer the following research questions:

1. What are the specific linguistic techniques and tropes employed by posters who create humorous captions accompanying image macros (Internet memes)?

2. How far is verbal humour present in user responses to controversial internet memes such as Pepe the Frog (i.e. on fora and social media)?

3. Do "hate crimes" occur offline following a period of intense verbal activity that can be identified in humorous content (possibly) connected to the "Alt-right" online?

4. In what ways does popularity on social media (e.g. Twitter) influence the posting trends of those ideologized accounts who have the most followers?

By concentrating my analysis on tweets generated and posted by so-called "radical right" groups originating in the UK, I intend to demonstrate the fine line that exists between online activity and corporeal public life. In this chapter, I explain how I collected and categorized a database within which I explore these issues, in inter-disciplinary terms, by adopting theories from Humour Studies, Memetics and Sociology.

2.1.1 Research hypotheses

Based on the elaboration carried out in the Literature review on the specific nature of humour (see 1.2) and given the focus on this dissertation that cover both collected tweets and the activity of the

extracted accounts, a three level research hypothesis is proposed to the reader. Furthermore, the discussed role of disgust in the formation of the radical right collective psychology is an important part of this dissertation goals as well. The last important element that was identified as a clear hypothesis is the connection between activity online and hate crimes that occurred in the material world:

1) Humour frequently emerges from the online activity of ideologically active accounts and when it does it is deeply linked to specific moral themes linked to a certain ideological outlook on the world of radical right users;
2) Radical right activity is deeply linked to use of metaphors and language related to disgust towards certain targeted groups, i.e. immigrants, Muslims, etc. Consequently, online posting of accounts belonging to the radical right will be characterized by a significant quantity of disgust related outbursts.
3) Online activity of the radical right will be characterized by humour and disgust related language as hate crimes in the material world will have some form of link to the posting by the extracted accounts.

The subchapters of the Literature review (see 1.3.1 and 1.4.2) suggest that to verify the first and second hypotheses required a quantitative analysis of the collected tweets to, tweet by tweet, identify the emergence of humour and disgust by using Haidt's Moral Foundations framework. The third hypothesis instead was explored by an attentive quantitative/qualitative analysis that compared online activity, with a focus on humorous tweets, and hate crimes that occurred in the material world. This was completed by following the research protocol elaborated in the methodology to identify salient cases and offer most notable tweets as examples. A strong attempt was made to observe possible patterns between the collected tweets and identified hate crimes as well as other notable events occurring in the material world.

2.2 Background

In June 2016, following the result of the United Kingdom's referendum on European Union membership, there was a significant spike in hate crimes in the UK.[14] Moreover, according to data furnished by the Home Office, an even higher spike in hate crimes also characterized June 2017, given the terrorist attacks in Manchester, on London Bridge and against the Finsbury Park mosque in

14 Hate crime action plan 2016 to 2020, available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hate-crime-action-plan-2016. Last accessed 24 December 2020.

London.[15] On the basis of these events, I created three inter-linked databases, consisting of tweets, memes, gifs and videos posted by members of the UK radical right on Twitter during the months of June 2017, 2018 and 2019. By tracking tweets posted during the same month for three consecutive years, I was able to construct a corpus made up not only of verbal content, but also of a variety of polysemiotic texts that I could subsequently analyze.

The first dataset consisting of tweets collected in June 2017, shows users adhering to a set of grievances that are generally defined as belonging to the radical right (Golder 16: 6) present in large numbers, as they also appear on several other on-line platforms (Marwick and Lewis 2017: 3). However, this dissertation will focus on the activity of UK radical right users on Twitter alone as this platform provides a convincing image of how the radical right spreads its messages in a monitored space. Significantly, since 2017, radical right users have encountered difficulties in freely publishing their content and have often been banned from the platform (Kuchler, 2017) yet they still manage to remain as a sizeable population on Twitter. It would appear that, despite these bans, the unique dynamics of Twitter exploited by these users in their everyday workings are still appealing as a resource. In fact, especially in the English-speaking sphere, "Twitter has emerged as a key platform on which anyone with a smartphone can engage in political discourse" (Nguyen, 2017). Twitter's user-friendly format and the continued survival of the radical right on this platform are the main reasons for examining their activity specifically on Twitter. Furthermore, according to Williams (2013) Twitter is the most researched social media platform by scholars.

What I set out to do in this thesis is to follow the activity of a number of UK radical right users on Twitter and match their activity to events in the material world. By doing so, I aim to verify if there is a link between the two, i.e. Twitter activity and material events which follow, and to examine exactly how the language in which these users express themselves may incite hate crime. I avoided a discussion on correlation and causation of these processes as it is not in the goal of my dissertation due to the enormous challenges of this analysis. My intent is directed towards a probe to observe if such a link potentially exists at all in the first place and how it can be characterized if it does. In the following section, I will describe how I created my database.

2.3 The database

[15] Home Office Official Reports and Accounts, 2017-2018, available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/home-office-annual-report-and-accounts-2017-to-2018. Last accessed 24 December 2020.

In order to create a database consisting of Twitter posts of UK radical right users, the first step was to identify common denominators that emerged from Conservative/radical right users. However, the creation of this database immediately met with three major challenges. First, Twitter removes tweets and/or accounts that are in violation of Twitter policy. This means that it is difficult to track accounts that publish tweets that contain highly charged content such as racial slurs, incitement to violence, etc.[16] Second, there is a presence of bots created by the radical right and foreign powers such as Russia aiming to shift public perception towards radical right values (TellMama 2017: 94). Third, in order to avoid being censored by Twitter, users adopt codified language such as the use of the term 'kek', a term standing for 'lol,' a Korean approximation in English of laughter when Koreans attempt to type laughter with their Korean keyboards, that signals adherence to the satirical cult of Kek, the Egyptian frog god. Other terms include 'shadilay', a 1986 disco song by an Italian band used as a signal of online tribal allegiance, and the ((echo)) symbol used to identify Jewish users online that 'echo' through history.[17] These flare ups of the online activity amongst radical users are an example of the processes discussed at length in the Literature review (see 1.4.3). According to Nagle (2017: 37), these terms exemplify the evolving code of interaction between like-minded members that emerged through vibrant internet culture, present on platforms such as 4chan, and dynamic alternative media. The answer to these challenges was to design a methodology that was able to deal with the complexity evoked by political exchanges on Twitter. My approach, based on four levels of analysis, aims to provide a better understanding of these processes and discover whether a form of convergence between online activity and hate crimes does actually emerge. The analysed content of a sample of 38 accounts should provide a valid number of extracted tweets, more than 30000 across three months, to characterize a representative sample. The characteristics of the content posted by users and a preemptive extraction of tweets for three days, to observe the type of material produced, address the second challenge. The final challenge is resolved by referring to a carefully assembled literature review that provides a vast ensemble of online processes linked to the radical right. This set of methodological solutions can be a reliable way to address similar challenges in other comparable studies regarding political culture and group interactions online.

2.3.1 The sample

Given the challenges of researching Twitter, I decided to gather tweets not only from content linked to radical right groups, but more generally from those posters adhering to so-called "Conservative

[16] Twitter Hateful Conduct Policy, available at: https://help.twitter.com/en/rules-and-policies/hateful-conduct-policy. Last accessed 24 December 2020.
[17] For more details on 'kek', 'shaliday' and ((echo)) see the Know Your Meme website, available at https://knowyourmeme.com/. Last accessed 24 December 2020.

Twitter" by also including users belonging to conservative political parties and Brexiteers, those posters that campaigned for UK to leave the European Union. This wider net to identify content posted by users belonging to the "Conservative Twitter" was necessary also to show the blurred line between Conservatives and the radical right users as was discussed in the Literature review (see 1.4.3). To identify the sample for this study, I adopted the criteria of "Tweet/follow/like". In other words, I used these three features to identify meaningful radical right accounts that not only produced abundant tweets, but that were also followed and "liked" by other users, in numbers that were high enough to be relevant. I needed an ample number of tweets to create a robust database, so I only selected users who posted more than 2500 tweets for inclusion. Regarding the criteria of 'Follow' and 'Like' some accounts were high on one feature and low on the other, so I decided to set the bar at over 1000 followers and/or likes to achieve account significance.

First, I randomly identified around one hundred accounts belonging to users who were posting about their experiences within the political sphere. Some accounts belonged to political figures, others to users who published news and/or reported tendencies. For example, I included the accounts of a YouTuber because he was mentioned in the report by the "Hope not Hate" advocacy group.[18] Other examples include an English Youtuber and Twitter personality described as alt-right/alt-light in numerous sources[19] and that of a UKIP politician and significant campaigner for leaving the EU. This criterion yielded a large potential sample.

I reviewed a sample of tweets from these accounts over three-days in order to evaluate the kind of content posted. Next, I collected tweets across a compressed sample of these posters. The gathering of data occurred under the supervision of Jacopo Lanzoni, a Software Engineer[20] based in Reading, UK, during my period abroad at the Brunel University, London. I used a Python 2.72 set of packages. Based on the first sample of extracted tweets, I built up a convenient and easy to manage sample. I discarded all tweets that did not mirror the UK radical right talking points, or that seemed irrelevant, reducing the sample to tweets posted during June 2017, June 2018 and June 2019 belonging to both individual users and groups. Furthermore, a sample of 15000 tweets posted for June 2017 characterized by the keyword 'Brexit' was bought from 'TrackMyHashtag', a platform that provide analytics for Twitter, to verify data reliability.

The collected tweets were immediately anonymized and arranged according to a day-by-day structure for each month under scrutiny. Using the 'Tweet/Follower/Like' criterion, I subsequently divided

[18] See Lowles, Nick and Jemma Levene (eds.) *State of Hate People vs The Elite?* 2019: 71.
[19] *ibidem.*
[20] See https://www.mestierideimatematici.it/it/node/103.

these accounts into three groups labelled Top Users, Middle Users and Low Users for exposition purpose. The number of overall posted tweets, followers and 'likes' for each user were used to place accounts into one of these three groups. Specifically, if an account had thousands of followers and/or likes, it was placed in the Low Users' group, accounts that had tens of thousands of followers and/or likes were placed in the Middle Users' group and finally accounts with hundreds of thousands or even a million or more likes and/or followers were placed in the Top Users' group. In this way, I selected ten accounts for each group of users, i.e. Top/Middle/Low Users.

Therefore, based on accounts still existing on Twitter in February 2018, the general characteristics of 30 accounts sub-divided into three main groups were organized through this initial assessment of "Conservative Twitter", namely, accounts linked to conservative political parties, Brexit supporters and radical right groups. This multi-layered approach is used for a general picture of the activity of the British radical right on Twitter. The classification for the year 2017 (see Fig. 3), had one account variation for the year 2018, and a six account variation for 2019. These changes are reported to underscore the challenging task of studying such a constantly changing platform like Twitter.

I next labelled these chosen accounts according to which of the following three categories they belonged:

1. Twitter-News or T-News, accounts that contained pages set up to spread and frame news tweets (10 accounts),

2. Twitter-Politicians, **or T-Po** accounts belonging to politicians or individuals linked to a political party, in this case UKIP. (5 accounts).

3. Twitter-Influencers, **or T-Inf** accounts belonging to influencers, comedians, free speech advocates, or individuals that represent themselves and reproduce a radical right narrative (15 accounts).

I also labelled each account based on how they described themselves in their profiles placing them into one of the following three categories:

1. alt: for accounts of users who address and use typical "alt-right" tropes and language (see 1.4.2);

2. trad: for accounts of users who embrace traditional conservatism and that are cautious in their day by day communication;

3. fspeech: for accounts of users who declare themselves to be free speech absolutists and that are apparently far from traditional or new political right while often embracing the overall ideological theme.

Fig. 3 illustrates this layered division combining accounts according to categories to which they belong; i.e. news, politicians, influencer, with the stance of their profile descriptions; i.e. alt right, traditional, free speech.

Twitter News	**Twitter Politicians**	**Twitter Influencers**
A1 – alt A2 – alt A3 - alt A4 – alt A5 – alt A6 – trad A7 – alt A8 – trad A9 – trad A10 – trad	B1 – trad B2 – trad B3 – trad B4 – trad B5 – alt	C1 - fspeech C2 – alt C3 – trad C4 – alt C5 – alt C6 – trad C7 – trad C8 – alt C9 – alt C10 – fspeech C11 – alt C12 – alt C13 – trad C14 – fspeech C15 – trad

Fig. 2 Posters classified according to news, politicians and influencers.

For ethical reasons pertaining to privacy, and especially because of the sensitivity of my data, I have anonymized the names/handles of each account and replaced them with a letter/number code order to preserve the privacy of posters. The characteristics of these accounts provided, such as number of followers and number of likes, pertain to numbers available on Twitter throughout these three years and could have changed significantly at time of reading. This fluctuation also contributes to preserving the anonymity of posters. In other words, I have provided an indication of the activity pertaining to each poster and not a precise report.

Account Name	Number of Tweets	Number of Followers	Number of Likes
C3	7901	140.000	23.300
C6	10.200	116:000	1.373
C1	22100	177000	7.953
A7	3729	549000	208
A8	20400	206000	1690
B4	14200	1.25 m	94
C14	62400	93400	6377
B5	34000	129000	18100
A10	88000	35000	116000
A9	37800	200000	1965

Fig. 3.i Top Users.

C4	17100	2721	22500
A2	19800	36100	166
B1	47400	13100	47400
A1	29300	83300	48
C7	5095	10300	2837
B3	9348	16500	3340
C11	134000	4747	4747
C12	18800	18300	8497
A6	15100	59800	0
C13	35300	19100	57200

Fig. 3.ii Middle Users.

C5	38000	345	2669
A3	26400	7728	3113
C2	8702	158	1105
B2	7713	8353	5738
C9	6816	3320	9580
C10	2457	36	466
A4	35100	5241	345
A5	36000	6894	4461
C15	5011	3811	2938
C8	18700	274	12.700

Fig. 3.iii Low Users.

Fig. 3 Classification of the selected accounts.

2.3.2 The Time-frame

As mentioned above, I proceeded to extract tweets from Twitter with technical assistance from a third party, using the convenient sample described in Section 2.1, for the months of June 2017, June 2018 and June 2019. I now outline the reasons for this choice of timeframe.

The spike in hate crimes recorded after the EU referendum in June 2016 highlighted the month of June as a critical period. Equally important was the fact that Home Office data pointed out an even greater spike of hate crimes in June 2017. While the Brexit period has been extensively researched (e.g. University of Oxford's EU referendum and Brexit analysis[21]), the fallout from these events

[21] EU referendum and Brexit: Analysis, Available at: http://www.ox.ac.uk/news-and-events/oxford-and-brexit/brexit-analysis. Last acessed 24 December 2020.

remains an on-going discussion. Focusing on the month of June in the three consecutive years following the Brexit referendum allowed me to access tweeting patterns longitudinally, across time. This point of view was key to access how posting changed and progressed throughout the three months. With respect to June 2017, June 2018 was a calmer month, characterized by political struggles between Conservatives and Leftwing movements around Brexit, while hate crimes continued to occur albeit with less intensity. The June 2019 dataset had mixed characteristics showing both signs of a political struggle analyzed throughout June 2018 dataset as well as a spike of hate crimes against the LGBT+ community comparable to the one that had occurred during June 2017 against Muslims. The change in content and popularity of specific themes online at a year's distance and then at two years distance allowed me to observe the evolution of the radical right online through the analyzed tweets.

The UK government triggered Article 50 leading to a year long period of transition. Year by year, following the Brexit referendum, I was able to observe possible changes in the overall flow of ideas. This approach allowed me to trace the behavior of fringe groups. Given the nature of activism online (see 1.5.5), I was able to pin down a number of significant factors through three time cycles and assess whether the sphere of interaction of the radical right online occurs in a non-linear system (Levdesdorff, 1997: 27). With the use of Chaos theory (Kattan, 2012), a discipline that explores dynamic systems that appear to be in disorder and governed by randomness but from which certain hidden patterns can be extracted, it was possible to better observe these processes. This theoretical move is based on a longitudinal dimension, in an attempt to observe emerging trends on a longer time spectrum that allows me to better explore the dynamics of the digital world and political radicalism. Moreover, events occurring in a certain time cycle, in this case over one month, can disproportionally influence the subsequent temporal cycle. In this way, we can observe and attempt to analyze the "butterfly effect", i.e. the idea that small events can disproportionally influence the future while British society, "copes with Brexit" both online and offline in a three-year period.

To sum up, this study follows and reports the online behavior of the British radical right and its repercussions in the material world, during June 2017, June 2018 and June 2019. This approach allowed me to analyze tweets posted by ideologically homogeneous account holders in the required temporal framing.

2.3.3 Timeline of Hate Crimes

One of the goals of this dissertation is to observe the connections between online spaces and the physical world, so what follows is a timeline of hate crimes that will enable us to anchor the collected

tweets within a wider context. The sources used to gather secondary data were the reports of advocacy groups *Tell MAMA UK*, an organization that records Islamophobic crimes, and *Hope not Hate*, a group that campaigns against fascism and racism, as well as documents of the Home Office and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).[22] To obtain a wider picture, the occurrences of hate crime that emerged through the methodical use of numerous search engines (Google, Firefox, and Explorer) were also built into the overall database. The lack of access to police data made this the most viable strategy for extracting hate crimes that occurred to be placed on the timeline.

While verbal acts of hate and insults based on race, sex or religion are odious acts that leave a mental mark, the physical endangering of a citizen is the most accurate indication of a hate crime. Therefore, in this dissertation, the term 'hate crime' refers to the active occurrence of and/or intense propaganda of physical violence. It is hard to locate hate crimes even in a society like Great Britain, where, for example "low levels of awareness of the consequences of hate speech, in particular, can adversely affect the prevention of hate-based incidents occurring in UK society" (Marcelli, 2016: 308). Therefore, high profile incidents were traced along the timeline through secondary sources in as much detail as possible, for example, regarding the Finsbury Park Mosque terrorist attack, the acquisition of the van by the terrorist Norman Osborne, which was his first attempt at violence on 18th of June 2017, were reported on the timeline.[23] On the other hand, specific care was taken not to jump to conclusions in case of an incident that appears to be a hate crime (Burch, 2019).[24] This means that gathered instances of hate crimes were closely examined to avoid cases of false accusation, for example, and to verify from different sources that a hate crime had actually taken place. However, generally speaking, I went by the principle outlined by Strickland and Dent (2017: 3), namely that "the general legal principle is that what is illegal offline is also illegal online". Therefore, 'hate incidents' that, according to the police, involved the possession or brandishing of a weapon and therefore could degenerate into violence, were included in the overall timeline. An example is the arrest on the 17th of June 2017 of a man who had posted 32 offensive tweets from the Manchester Arena bombing on the 22nd May.[25] Some of this person's tweets were explicitly violent with the

[22] Atta et al, 2018, "Beyond the Incident: Outcomes for the victims of Anti-Muslim Prejudice"; ed. Lowles & Atkinson, "State of Hate 2018: Far Right Terrorism on the rise"; ed. Lowles, State of Hate 2019: "People vs The Elite"; Flatley, 2018, "Hate crime: England and Wales, 2017 to 2018"; FBI: UCR, "2017 Hate Crime Statistics", Ucr.fbi.gov/hate-crime. https://ucr.fbi.gov/hate-crime/2017/hate-crime. Last accessed 24 December 2020.

[23] These moments were underlined heavily in the accessed secondary sources.

[24] FBI: UCR, 2017 Hate Crime Statistics, Methodology, https://ucr.fbi.gov/hate-crime/2017/resource-pages/methodology. Last accessed 24 December 2020.

[25] Dearden, Lizzie, 2018, "Man jailed for threatening to 'slit a Muslim's throat' on Twitter after terror attacks", Independent, London. Available at: https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/jailed-for-

mention of "slitting a Muslim's throat" (*ibidem*). This online posturing was considered to be a hate crime given the risk of violence, when, for example, weapons were displayed in a video with threats of violence couched in abusive language against minorities, from what could be regarding as mere posting on Twitter. Therefore, the adopted principles on data gathering on hate crimes were hybrid as I regarded particularly impactful episodes online as a 'hate crime'. My approach to hate crimes is made clear in the chapters that discuss my results where the numerous collected instances of hate crimes are extensively presented. The structure of the timelines were partly inspired by the Human Rights Campaign charts that attempted to classify hate crimes from a temporal standpoint.[26] In the following section I will describe how, with the help of word frequencies, I captured the online activity of selected accounts and connected it to hate crime events.

2.3.4 Word frequency

As I will be adopting a unique approach to analyse the language of the tweets in my database, the next step was to log the frequency of particular words that occurred frequently in my data. I then compressed the extracted tweets into a smaller and a more manageable set of datasets. I carried out this operation through a careful extraction of keywords, namely those words that were used most often in the tweets to subsequently group them together into thematic areas; for example frequently occurring words such as 'Muslim' and 'jihadi'.

I compressed the initial number of tweets into a smaller and significant sub-dataset using the CygWin programme in order to obtain most frequent keywords occurring in the corpus. Taking the Hate Crimes Timeline for each month of June 2017, 2018 and 2019, I selected the days in which hate crimes had been registered as well as the day prior to each registered hate crime. For example, if a hate crime occurred on the 18th of June 2017, both the 18th and 17th were selected for keyword extraction. I did this in order to see if there was any signal of "brewing up" online preceding the selected events. This resulted in a framework of multiple threads, each containing tweets around frequently used keywords. In other words, keywords were organized according to the day in which they had occurred in each of the three datasets.[27] In this way, time of posting, the available information

tweets-hate-speech-muslim-throat-slit-terror-rhodenne-chand-a8419636.html. Last accessed 24 December 2020.

[26] Human Rights Campaign, "Hate Crimes Timeline 1989-2009", Available at: https://www.hrc.org/resources/hate-crimes-timeline. Last accessed: 24 December 2020.

[27] To avoid errors, I ran the data pertaining to the day, hour, likes and shares of each tweet through the Word search function to ensure total absence of recurrences. I also manually ran through each thread to eliminate repetitions of the same tweet.

and the tweet itself are converged to extract a meaningful analytical result. A total of 32 keywords emerged.

Fig. 4 shows the 32 files each labelled by keyword. For example, the first file labelled “britain.doc” contains occurrences of the word Britain; the second file British.doc contains the word British and so on. I next merged the keywords into one single file resulting in a timeline of tweets, with no repetitions, organized in light of the original Hate Crimes Timeline. In order to do this, for each year, I first compressed the tweets into three files that we can see below the files containing keywords in Fig. 4. The final database consists of a day-by-day timeline containing the original tweets, each year, for each of the thirty accounts purified of any repetitions (see Fig. 5 for 2017). In other words, I created a final single file that was subdivided following a day-by-file structure, each containing all the extracted tweets in each of the thirty accounts in which the most frequently occurring words are highlighted. Fig. 4 illustrates a word file for each keyword. The second part of the figure illustrates the result of the compression of the 32 files into three.

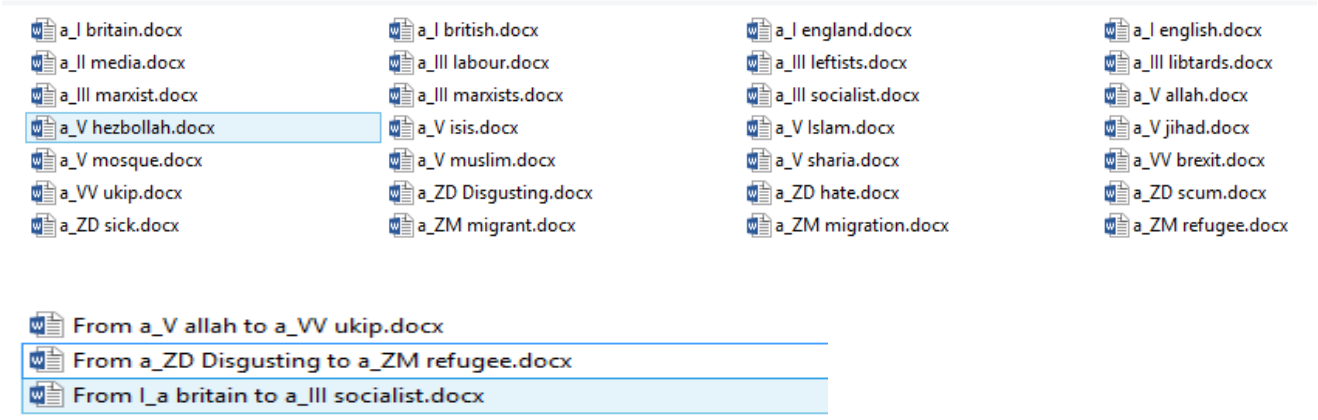
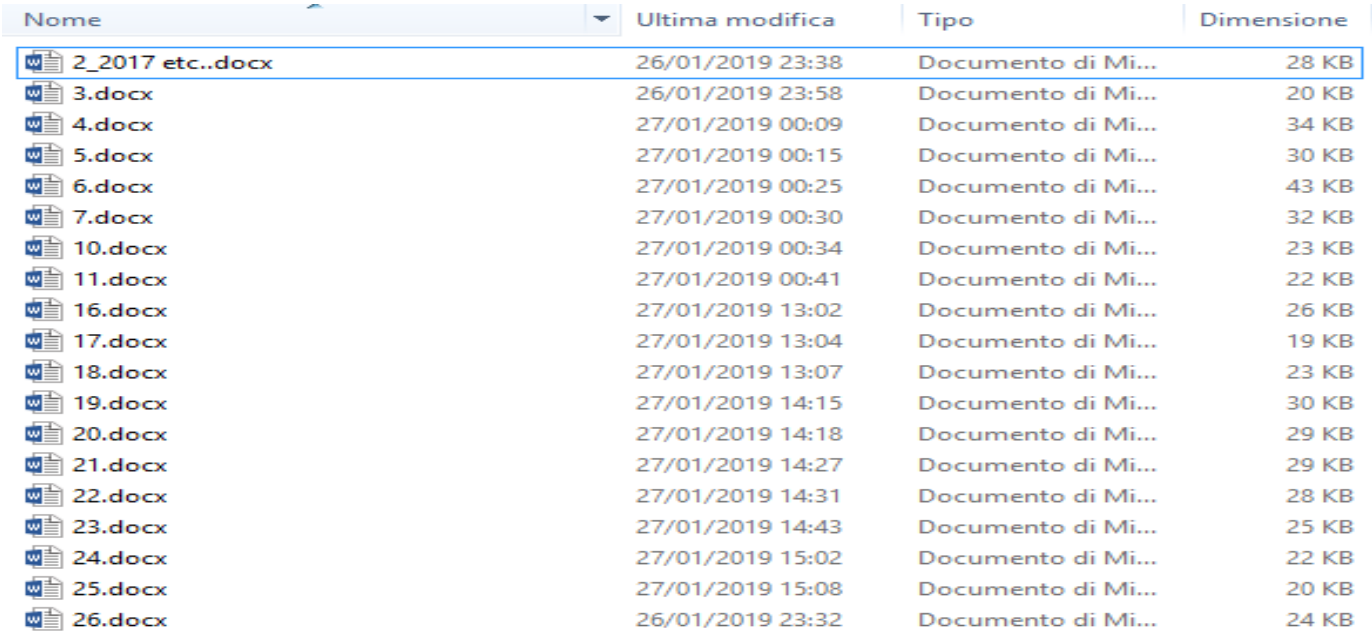


Fig. 4 Keywords in all collected files and by three aggregates.



Nome	Ultima modifica	Tipo	Dimensione
2_2017 etc..docx	26/01/2019 23:38	Documento di Mi...	28 KB
3.docx	26/01/2019 23:58	Documento di Mi...	20 KB
4.docx	27/01/2019 00:09	Documento di Mi...	34 KB
5.docx	27/01/2019 00:15	Documento di Mi...	30 KB
6.docx	27/01/2019 00:25	Documento di Mi...	43 KB
7.docx	27/01/2019 00:30	Documento di Mi...	32 KB
10.docx	27/01/2019 00:34	Documento di Mi...	23 KB
11.docx	27/01/2019 00:41	Documento di Mi...	22 KB
16.docx	27/01/2019 13:02	Documento di Mi...	26 KB
17.docx	27/01/2019 13:04	Documento di Mi...	19 KB
18.docx	27/01/2019 13:07	Documento di Mi...	23 KB
19.docx	27/01/2019 14:15	Documento di Mi...	30 KB
20.docx	27/01/2019 14:18	Documento di Mi...	29 KB
21.docx	27/01/2019 14:27	Documento di Mi...	29 KB
22.docx	27/01/2019 14:31	Documento di Mi...	28 KB
23.docx	27/01/2019 14:43	Documento di Mi...	25 KB
24.docx	27/01/2019 15:02	Documento di Mi...	22 KB
25.docx	27/01/2019 15:08	Documento di Mi...	20 KB
26.docx	26/01/2019 23:32	Documento di Mi...	24 KB

Fig. 5 Words ordered by keywords on a day-by-day basis.

In the following section, I explain how I evaluated the content of each Tweet in the light of Haidt's "Moral Foundation Theory", with the hypothesis of humour being an additional sixth foundation following reflections by Christie Davies (see Chapter 1.2.3). This theory allowed me to observe humorous tweets in a new light and attempt to interpret them in relation to possible effects of online behaviour in the material world.

2.4 Moral Foundation Theory

I applied Moral Foundation Theory in my analysis of the extracted and ordered tweets. This is a social psychological theory that was first proposed by the American psychologist Jonathan Haidt in 2012 to elaborate human moral reasoning on the basis of innate and modular foundations. In this dissertation I shall attempt to propose that humour is an innate moral foundation that, when occurring in digital spaces, accelerates[28] human behaviour. The impact of high dopamine release on human behaviour due to interacting on social media and partaking in tribalism online, both offline and online, is explored in 1.5.4.

[28] The characteristic of online spaces as a source for acceleration of human behavior is being explored extensively, see: Lorenz-Spreen, P et al. 2020. "How behavioural sciences can promote truth, autonomy and democratic discourse online". *Nature Human Behavior*. Available at: https://www.nature.com/articles/s41562-020-0889-7. Last accessed 19 September 2020.

Following Jonathan Haidt's theory, individual tweets were placed in one of Haidt's five categories of moral foundation, namely: care, fairness, loyalty, authority and purity:

- *Care*: cherishing and protecting others; opposite of *harm*
- *Fairness* or *proportionality*: rendering justice according to shared rules; opposite of *cheating*
- *Loyalty* or *ingroup*: standing with your group, family, nation; opposite of *betrayal*
- *Authority* or *respect*: submitting to tradition and legitimate authority; opposite of *subversion*
- *Sanctity* or *purity*: abhorrence for disgusting things, foods, actions; opposite of *degradation*

(Haidt 2012: 146)

After a careful examination of each string of tweets in each sub data set, I classified each tweet according to one of the moral foundations. For example, the tweets in Fig. 6 exemplify how each adheres to one of the five foundations:

- **Care:**

"Cowell turned his phone off for 10 months and says it has made him much happier. At least try to avoid checking your messages every 10 minutes, you will feel much clearer of mind and less irritable".

- **Fairness:**

"It's probably 75% socialists, students, New Scots and Europeans. The 25% have no chance. Sadly".

- **Loyalty**:

"A global plot to destroy Brexit must be fought by Government and all MPs to defend our democracy".

- **Authority:**

"Italy PM takes aim at migrants, austerity in maiden speech".

- **Sanctity:**

"More evidence of Remainer cheating given to Electoral Commission. We should be proud that Brexit won in spite of the filthy campaign by the "In" side".

In this dissertation, I propose humour as a sixth moral foundation. As we shall see from my results, humour frequently manifests itself in conjunction with one of Haidt's five existing foundations. Not only, but each tweet tends to present themes that could be linked to more than one moral foundation. For instance, the tweet "We should fight for our nation" displays loyalty, authority and purity. The methodological challenge was to disentangle the moral foundations present in the tweets. I did this according to:

a) the context of the content of the comments following the tweets, if available. This applies to the time marker that linked it to a specific event;
b) the presence of in-group words, particles or emoticons, for example the use of the term 'lol' (laughing out loud) and other abbreviations;
c) the use of an adapted scheme based on the Moral Foundations Questionnaire (Graham et al. 2008. MoralFoundations.org) to assess which moral foundation is dominant. This is useful to attempt to establish how the tweets are potentially marked by the radical right community online.

Haidt has used these foundations to analyse objects such as car bumper stickers, as well as the behaviour of groups and their rituals. He did not devise his questionnaire to examine tweets or humour so I devised my own model by adapting different questionnaires elaborated by Haidt and his team (Fig. 6).

- *Care*: cherishing and protecting others; opposite of *harm*

  Does the tweet mention compassion? _

  Does the tweet describe hurt defenceless humans and/or animals? __

  Does the tweet argue against killing human beings in any situation? __

- *Fairness* or *proportionality*: rendering justice according to shared rules; opposite of *cheating*

  Does the tweet mention laws with the principle of proportionality as the most relevant? __

  Does the tweet focus on Justice as the most import quality of a society? __

  Does the tweet argue against class/wealth injustices? __

- *Loyalty* or *ingroup*: standing with your group, family, nation; opposite of *betrayal*

  Does the tweet mention UK's history or historical figures? __

  Does the tweet underline that the loyalty to family (party, nation, people) is paramount, even if they are in the wrong? __

  Does the tweet argue for the utility of team-playing instead of individual expression? __

- *Authority* or *respect*: submitting to tradition and legitimate authority; opposite of *subversion*

  Does the tweet mention learning respect of authority as a key principle? __

Does the tweet focus on the traditional roles of men and women as important? __

Does the tweet argue for obedience to hierarchy and orders, even if unjust? __

- *Sanctity* or *purity*: abhorrence for disgusting things, foods, actions; opposite of *degradation*

  Does the tweet mention actions that are regarded widely as frowned upon and disgusting as a taboo even if no one is harmed? __

  Does the tweet talk about good and bad in Manichean terms? __

  Does the tweet describe something as unnatural? __

- *Humour* or *non-seriousness*: a playful attempt at being amusing or comic; opposite to *seriousness*.

  Does the tweet contain multiple possible meanings deliberately left open to interpretation by the author of the tweet?

  Does the tweet conclude with an unexpected reversal of meaning, i.e. a "punchline-like"?

  Does the tweet contain a main moral foundation enhanced, or downplayed, through non-seriousness?

Fig. 6 My adaptation of Haidt's Moral Foundations Questionnaire.

I devised a simple coding scheme basing scores on the 'emotional intensity' of each tweet. I then gave a score from 1 to 5 according to the emotional intensity of the tweet for the answers to each question in Fig. 7. The way I assigned these scores is loosely based on Haidt and Graham's scoring methods (2011: 380). Adding up the scores assigned for each answer, the moral foundation that obtained the highest score was adopted as a label for every tweet. While I am aware that this way of scoring is a methodologically somewhat moot point, i.e. ideally this process would require significant resources in terms of coders, it is nevertheless in line with the goal of this dissertation to open up a venue of research that can be further expanded upon.

To illustrate how I adopted the above scheme, following the London Bridge Terror attack on 3rd June 2017 a spokeswoman for Sadiq Khan commented on a tweet posted by Trump as follows:

"The Mayor is focused on dealing with Saturday's horrific and cowardly attack".

In response, a user tweeted as follows:

"I'm very pleased to see that @SadiqKhan is dealing with the symptoms. But does he intend to deal with the root causes of jihadism?"

The response contains three Moral Foundations: **Loyalty**, due to a situation of being attacked from outside, **Authority**, due to the tweet being directed at Sadiq Khan, and **Purity**, due to use of a "disease metaphor". I arrived at these responses having applied the questionnaire/scheme as follows:

- Loyalty or ingroup: standing with your group, family, nation; opposite of betrayal

Does the tweet mention UK's history or historical figures?	Score 1
Does the tweet underline that the loyalty to family (party, nation, people) is paramount, even if they are in the wrong?	Score 5
Does the tweet argue for the utility of team-playing instead of individual expression?	Score 5

- Authority or respect: submitting to tradition and legitimate authority; opposite of subversion

Does the tweet mention learning respect of authority as a key principle?	Score 3
Does the tweet focus on the traditional roles of men and women as important?	Score 1
Does the tweet argue for obedience to hierarchy and orders, even if unjust?	Score 3

- Sanctity or purity: abhorrence for disgusting things, foods, actions; opposite of degradation

Does the tweet mention actions that are regarded widely as frowned upon and disgusting as a taboo even if no one is harmed?	Score 1
Does the tweet talk about good and bad in Manichean terms?	Score 5
Does the tweet describe something as unnatural?	Score 1

Fig. 7 An example of my coding scheme based on scores of the 'emotional intensity' of Tweets.

As a result, according to the calculation, Loyalty is the primary Moral Foundation present in this tweet.

2.4.1 Humour as a moral foundation

Humour as a moral foundation stands apart as it exists exclusively in association with other foundations crosscutting all five. This means any of the other foundations can be 'contaminated' by humour adding several possible interpretations to the original line of text. Fig. 8 exemplifies how humour can become part of each foundation.

However, it was not always either easy or straightforward to establish whether a tweet was actually humorous in intent. Rarely did I find examples of puns or jokes that are clear examples of humour. Humour was generally much more subtle. In fact, my data showed that radicalized users were often ambiguous in their communication and their humour could be easily misinterpreted and wrongly assessed. Thus, an important step was a necessary shift from a binary conceptualization of humour to introducing the notion that humour can be unclear in its intention and effect. I created a system to evaluate tweets in terms of humorous clarity following a simplified version of Van der Laan and Kuipers' (2012: 3) codebook that focused on cultural variables.[29] Using a set of Excel spreadsheets,

[29] This codebook was originally created for cultural variables that "aim[s] to map, interpret and explain variations and changes in the portrayal of beauty in fashion magazines" (van der Laan & Kuipers, 2012, 3).

I coded and encompassed all three subsets tweets for June 2017, 2018 and 2019 according to the clarity or lack of clarity of tweets in terms of humour. The focus was on a continuous reassessment of all humorous tweets for the data gathered because as explained by DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall and McCulloch (2011, 138): "coding is, in essence, a circular process in that the researcher may then revisit the raw data based upon theoretical findings and the current research literature". When the type of humour displayed in each tweet was ambiguously humorous, in other words it was uncertain whether the tweet was serious or ironic, for example, I labelled it "uncertain". All tweets that were clearly humourous were labelled "clear". This process was concluded after the collected tweets were coded.

1. Care + Humour:

"It is fascinating that 99/100 it is leftists who point to my skin colour and ethnic heritage. I thought they were colourblind? One race!?"

2. Fairness + Humour:

"When you joke about your criminal activity because you know silly little things like the rule of law do not apply to you".

3. Loyalty + Humour:

"Our media, politicians and Left wing are useful idiots for Jihadis. They stop us even resisting, never mind fighting back. We. Are. Fucked".

4. Authority + Humour:

"It's come to this. Where Ministers of the Crown invoke what their children think instead of telling people why they support legislation that might otherwise be covered by existing harassment or privacy laws".

5. Purity + Humour:

"The UK detains, incarcerates and refuses entry to American citizens even slightly " right " while importing millions of pro Sharia , West hating parasites. Screw these 2 bit tyrants and dhimmi-Marxists . Boycott UK , shut off trade and expel all their diplomats . Whiny brats"

I next assigned a different colour to each of Haidt's foundations and applied them to tweets matching each foundation, namely blue for tweets that displayed Care, brown for those that displayed Fairness, light blue for Loyalty, purple for Authority, green for Sanctity. This operation was carried out to better visualize, for each day analysed, the patterns emerging from the "Moral Foundations" of the elaborated tweets. The resultant random collection of strings of coloured tweets for each day allows for easy recall by an analyst. In tweets that included humour, the first part of the text was coloured yellow, and the remainder of the text in the colour corresponding to the moral foundation in question (Fig. 7).

Fig. 7 Colour coded tweets for each moral foundation.

Next, the material was organized according to the dates on which they were posted. The outcome was the construction of three coherently organized datasets, i.e. for June 2017, 2018 and 2019, in which tweets are colour coded according to their moral themes and instances of humour/irony in the tweets of the selected accounts on the same days in which hate crimes which were committed and those that preceded the hate crime. The next phase was to compress three processed datasets of tweets.

The collection of strings of tweets were then merged to obtain five sets of tweets with a different colour according to the moral foundation emerging from each instance on selected days for each dataset. Therefore, the colour of tweets for each day in the dataset, and the overall colour for each of the three datasets were counted in order to see how many tweets for each moral foundation occurred on each day in question. The percentage of tweets for every moral foundation for all time units relevant for the three datasets (day, week, month) were counted to obtain a better understanding of the data. The result is a flexible network with each node connected and one that can be aggregated from any angle for future data analysis. The network structure obtained allowed me to move easily between different levels of enquiry.

2.5 Visual Content

So far, I have described how I created a database for the months of June 2017, 2018 and 2019. This database displays tweets posted in that period by members of the UK radical right; it contains a timeline of hate crimes in the UK, it presents the most frequently used words occurring in the tweets, and finally it shows how these tweets may be categorised in terms of Haidt's five categories of moral foundations plus the additional variable of humour. The final addition to my database comprises a

number of visual elements that often accompany the tweets collected. As we shall see in Chapter 1.5.3, these visuals are mostly humorous in intent.

2.5.1 Visuals

The Word search tool enabled me to trace every tweet containing visuals. By typing the string 'pic.twitter.com' I was able to retrieve the visual support attached to my collection of tweets, i.e. pictures, videos, gifs, memes etc. These visuals were arranged on a timeline as shown in Fig. 8 for June 2017.

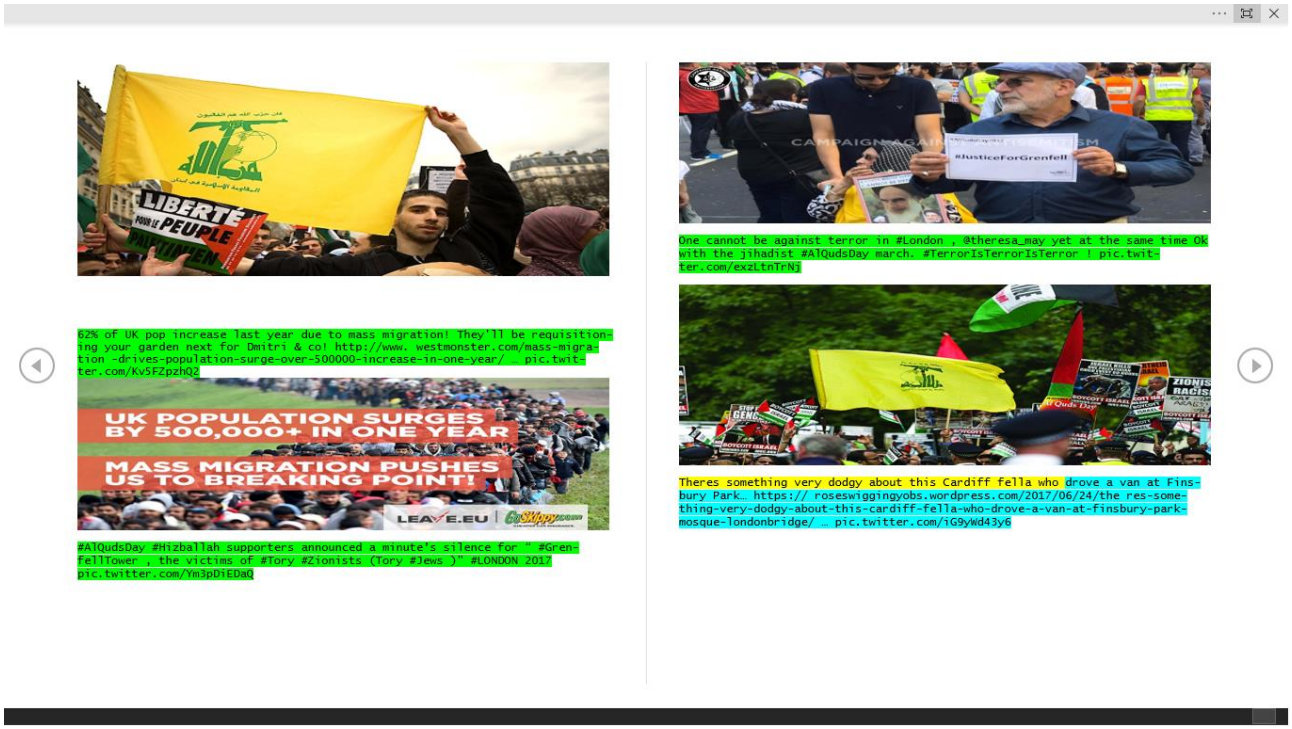


Fig. 8 Examples of visual materials attached to tweets posted in June 2017.

I next picked out exclusively humorous visual content. This process was facilitated by humorous verbal tags that were already present in the texts of the tweets. I then divided the visuals according to whether they were memes, gifs, videos or pictures. This visual material is also presented through a timeline, day by day, to show the intensity of visual humorous support or lack of it in the tweets under scrutiny (see Fig. 9).

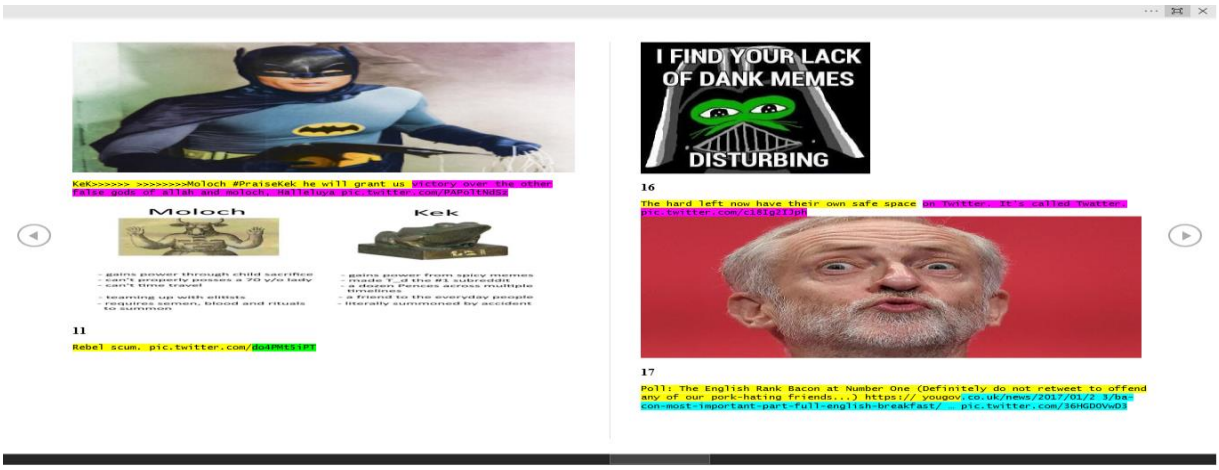


Fig. 9 Examples of humorous visuals attached to tweets posted in June 2017.

A tweet taken from my 2017 database (Fig. 10) shows how the different layers of analysis come together. The context of the tweet is the Al Quds march, an annual international event in support of Palestine, and the counter-protest that took place on June 18, 2017, in London. The verbal content of the tweet is ironic, chastising the "lads" the tweet is addressing for their lack of real-life activism as they are occupied in chatting about nonsense online, a useless activity for the author who uses the word "shit" to describe this activity. On a further level, evidence of the moral foundation of loyalty emerges in that the tweet is a rallying cry for the tribe of the "football lads" to act and fight in opposition to the "Jews", another tribe behaving as it should in the face of an existential threat. The picture attached to the tweet is a photograph where flags of the state of Israel are clearly visible. What we have is serious visual support that frames the humorous text of the tweet.

When jews turn out in their hundreds to oppose jihadi terror supporters on the streets on London and football lads just chat shit online

Fig. 10 "Humorous" tweets and real life

In this tweet, verbal humour, in this example in the form of irony, overlaps with a photograph of a real life event. The tweet was posted the day before the Finsbury Park Mosque terrorist attack

highlighting the poster's pre-existing will to act on the Muslim-related march and aggregations in the online "flow of ideas" (see 1.5.4). Moreover, from secondary sources, and through CCTV camera footage it emerges that Norman Osborne, the terrorist responsible for the Finsbury Mosque attack, had attempted to access the streets where the Al Quds march took place with his van, probably failing in his first attempt at a terrorist attack.

2.6 Correspondence between tweets and hate crimes

The way I have arranged the data into various sub-datasets can be compared, at a glance, to the hate crimes timeline built up from secondary sources, in order to find any possible correspondence between the assembled narrow window into the online world and what was happening in day-by-day life in the UK. Day by day word frequencies are also easily accessible in this arrangement, together with a description of the annotated moral foundations and visual content to form a large interlocked network of data.

Inspired by scholars of symbolic interactionism (Fink, 2015: 5) and the concept of emergence, or the condition of an entity having qualities its single components do not possess, caused by the interactions between the parts, my data will be examined through the lens of Humour Studies, radical right analysis and Online Dynamics. In conjunction with Pentland's "flow of ideas" (see 1.5.4), this gives us an opportunity to establish a connection between the online behaviour and real life actions of certain groups. These links were partially traced by the London Metropolitan Police Service (e.g. for the Finsbury Park Mosque terrorist attack) but are also enhanced by the detailed approach attempted in this dissertation. While the Police simply traces hate speech content, offline and online, the framework adopted in this dissertation allows us to observe the larger picture and attempt to analyse the content of multiple radical right users on Twitter. Moreover, the use of the Moral Foundations framework helps us to better understand the dynamics of sentiment sharing online and its impact offline.

Thus, the obtained tweets for the day before and the same day of any event deemed to be a Hate Crime are analyzed to trace any similarity or theme to the kind of hate crime that took place e.g. tweets displaying islamophobia online and physical violence against Muslims on the ground. First, the use of keywords relevant to the hate crime at hand are identified. Then, all the tweets are analyzed one by one to see if any correspondence exists linking hate crimes and the tweets themselves. Furthermore, information regarding the type of humour displayed in each tweet, be it uncertain (u) or clearly humorous (c), is added to alongside the moral foundation indicated for June 2017.

KEYWORD	TWEET	USER	MORAL FOUNDATION	CLARITY of HUMOUR
MUSLIM	Wrong , sicko . I'm saying any society that sets legal age below actual maturity is sick. Muslim countries set it at child levels,like 6.	alt influencer	sanctity	unclear
	So where were the muslim community protesting after 3 major terrorist attacks in London?	alt influencer	fairness	unclear
	Swedish Islamophobia Expert Who Joined ISIS Now Calling For Attacks in #Sweden	alt influencer	sanctity	unclear
	Poll: The English Rank Bacon at Number One (Definitely do not retweet to offend any of our pork-hating friends...)	alt news	loyalty	clear
	Swedish Expert on Islamophobia Joins ISIS – Calls for Attacks on Sweden.	trad influencer	sanctity	unclear
	Labour casually celebrating the timing of terror attack	alt news	loyalty	unclear
MIGRANT	Illegal immigrants from Iraq and Syria pouring in on the back of lorries. What could possibly go wrong?	free speech influencer	sanctity	clear
	Just need to kill em faster & in Much greater	alt influencer	sanctity	unclear

	quantity . Surely all the EU "migrants" want to go home & fight for Islam , right? Target rich			
	That awkward moment when council employees who housed immigrants in front of local people get attacked by those immigrants #grenfelltower	alt news	authority	clear
SMUGGLER	Man tried to smuggle Iraqi into Britain in suitcase	trad news	fairness	clear

Fig. 11 The humorous tweets corresponding to hate crimes for 17 June 2017.

The tweets are then tagged to obtain a final timeline of tweet analysis, with moral foundation analysis and the hate crime tag. The resulting tags are added to other features, such as the political leaning of the account, the inherent moral foundation, whether there is the presence of humour, obtained for the tweets analysed to create an overview of the connection between the tweet datasets and a hate crimes timeline. The specific linguistic techniques and tropes employed by posters who create humorous captions around image macros (internet memes) are identified. Visual humorous support for the selected tweets were observed through attentive analysis. The methodological basis for this system of visual analysis is inspired by authors such as Limor Shifman (see 2013, 2014) to obtain a coherent way to elaborate and present the results.

2.7 Summary

In this Chapter, I have described in detail how I collected data for the selected 30 accounts and how I constructed timelines upon which to place these tweets for each June from 2017 to 2019. The reasons behind the selected time period were furnished. The methodology to obtain different layers of analysis was also described. Finally, the correspondence between the tweets and the hate crimes concluded the overall process of data elaboration. The outcome of this complex arrangement and distillation of data provides a cohesive way to address the initial research questions in the next chapter where I will

provide the results that emerged from the analysis of the data. The correspondence between tweets and hate crimes is the gateway to the next part of dissertation.

Chapter 3

Results and Discussion – Part One: June 2017

3.0 Overview

The focus of my dissertation is to highlight how fringe ideas run the risk of becoming mainstream and influencing the behaviour of other social media users. Looking at the data I have gathered, cross-contamination online clearly emerges as a crucial dimension of the posting of conservative Twitter users in the UK. Specific language and cultural references belonging to the US, but also to other European radical right currents, appear constantly throughout the tweets I collected. My datasets for the months of June 2017, 2018 and 2019 allowed me to understand how, following the Brexit referendum, the events of June 2016 unfolded at a distance of one year at a time, one dataset at a time. This longitudinal dimension is a key element of my analysis that allows me to unlock how the evolution of cultural items and events occurred during each of the months under observation.

In this chapter, I present my results in three sections, respecting the chronological order of my datasets, namely June 2017, June 2018 and June 2019.

3.1 June 2017

June 2017 was shaped by a series of events that had occurred the previous year and especially during the previous spring. The killing of Jo Cox on the 16th of June 2016 signalled a systemic change in radical right tactics and approaches to political activism, and the Brexit referendum of June 23rd fuelled a spike in hate crimes and online activity of the British radical right. 2017 was characterized by the chaotic fallout of these events. The Parsons Green train bombing on 15th of September 2017 by 18-year-old Iraqi refugee Ahmed Hassan underscored that a new season of terrorism by both the radical right and radicalized Muslims was starting. These events displayed a number of significant facets that emerged clearly during the spring of 2017 that contributed to the events of June of the same year.

The first crucial elements of the build up of events in Spring 2017 were the terrorist attacks by radicals of Muslim faith that resulted in multiple casualties. These events were highly spectacularized by the national media with images that were a constant presence on British TV, computers, phones etc. The first terrorist attack occurred on March 22nd, when Khalid Masood drove a car into pedestrians on Westminster Bridge and stabbed Keith Palmer. On the 22nd of May a suicide bomber, Salman Ramadan Abedi, detonated his vest during a concert held in Manchester by the pop star Ariana Grande

where 23 people were killed (including the bomber himself) and more than 200 people were injured. It was the deadliest terror attack on British soil since the 7/7 bombings in London in 2005. On the 24th May the UK's terror threat level was raised to "critical", the highest possible level. Military and police personnel were deployed en masse with a wave of arrests.

The second element was an unstable political environment defined both by the chaos of the Brexit process and highly polarized political rivalry. On the 18th of April Prime Minister Theresa May called a snap general election for June 8th triggering a virulent propaganda campaign with "all versus all" undertones. On the 4th of May the local government elections were dominated by the Conservative Party at the expense of the Labour Party and UKIP, which faced significant losses, was wiped out. Liberal Democrats and the SNP remained stable. The everyday debates, scandals and recriminations of the political elite and common citizenry alike for months built the structural conditions for a build up of public anger.

The final element was the exponential growth of social media as a "medium-actor" (see 1.5.4) on the socio-political arena. Mainstream media helped to 'direct' the public towards the right wing. Conservatives and radical right social media posts and language maintained the vehemence of the Brexit campaign and showed signs of on-going processes radicalization. Furthermore, content posted online was increasingly radical in tone with explicit references to the deportation of immigrants, use of torture on terrorists and calls to violence. On May 23rd the *Telegraph* columnist Allison Pearson tweeted that "we need internment of thousands of terror suspects now to protect our children" calling for the incarceration of all people of Muslim faith. Tommy Robinson, a leading figure of the British radical right, accused British Muslim residents in Manchester to be "enemy combatants who want to kill you, maim you and destroy you". The spark for the radical right online in the material world that provoked an endless stream of controversy and whose legacy survived for the whole of June, was ignited by a tweet of the radical right radio host Katie Hopkins. With a tweet to *Good Morning Britain* host, Phillip Schofield, she stated "22 – the number is rising. Schofield. Don't you even dare. Do not be part of the problem. We need a final solution. #Manchester". The blatant reference to the Third Reich while resulting in Hopkins being fired, galvanized radicals on all three extremes of the political triangle, left, right and radical Muslims, erupting in physical violence, in at least one recorded occasion that was clearly inspired by this tweet.

These three extremist groups prepared the ground for what happened during June 2017 in an irregular but observable ripple effect with some predictable and other unforeseen consequences. While rising Islamophobia, two terrorist attacks on both ends of the radical spectrum, and political protests were predictable, the digital fallout of such activity was less so.

The next section will introduce a sample of the dataset as well as highlight the main events of June 2017.

3.1.1 The June 2017 Database

The sample of posters collected for this study will be presented one by one, with a brief description for each of their role and agenda. I will use the classification system presented in my research protocol, highlighting three specific roles that the accounts examined fulfil online. As described in 2.3.1, I divided the collected accounts into three categories a) Twitter-News or T-News, consisting of pages set up to spread and frame news tweets (10 accounts), b) Twitter-Politicians, or T-Po belonging to politicians or individuals linked to a political party, in this case UKIP, for example (5 accounts), and c) Twitter-Influencers or T-Inf belonging to influencers, comedians, free speech advocates, or individuals that represent themselves and reproduce a radical right narrative (15 accounts).

Each account is associated with a political identity, through another set of labels that should assist the reader in understanding the communicative style of each account: 1) Alternative or Alt for accounts that often address and use "alt-right" tone and language; 2) Traditional and Trad, accounts that embrace traditional conservatism and that are cautious in their day by day communication; and 3) Free Speech, or fspeech accounts that declare themselves to be free speech absolutists and that are apparently far from the traditional or new political right while often embracing the overall ideological theme. Therefore, I classified each account in my sample according to the roles above.

Twitter News	**Twitter Politicians**	**Twitter Influencers**
A1 – alt	B1 – trad	C1 - fspeech
A2 – alt	B2 – trad	C2 – alt
A3 - alt	B3 – trad	C3 – trad
A4 – alt	B4 – trad	C4 – alt
A5 – alt	B5 – alt	C5 – alt
A6 – trad		C6 – trad
A7 – alt		C7 – trad
A8 – trad		C8 – alt
A9 – trad		C9 – alt
A10 – trad		C10 – fspeech
		C11 – alt
		C12 – alt

		C13 – trad C14 – fspeech C15 – trad

Fig. 12 Accounts examined for June 2017 and role-based categories.

Fig. 12 places the various accounts collected in the database (for June 2017) according first to online roles and then whether the accounts adopt "alt-right" tones and language (alt); embrace traditional conservatism (trad) or consider themselves as free speech absolutists.

3.1.1.1 Twitter News Accounts

- *A1* represents the British regional section of a News Network. It is a radical right syndicated news, opinion and commentary hotspot and it employs stylized and innovative news framing through tweets.
- *A2* is a self-described Euro-centric news and opinion website. Their main goal involves propaganda and crowdfunding to stop immigration in the Mediterranean sea by directly blocking Ngo (Non Government Organization) boats.
- *A3* is an anti-Islam protest group that was classified as a news outlet due to the constant stream of content linked to merch selling and news.
- *A4* represents a High-Tory pressure group that provides a bridge for radicalized right groups further on the spectrum. They publish content on Twitter framed to be appealing to patriots.
- *A5* is a social media experiment of a radicalized minority to push their party further to the right.
- *A6* claims to be a pro Brexist and anti-establishment page that is modelled as a UK version of comparable US online news outlets.
- *A7* shares news and articles with the objective of exposing "the violent Left". While rightwing in its core with a strong bias against even the center-left, it attracts liberal and libertarian sympathies.
- *A8* is stylistically vibrant, posting a daily pressure campaign to leave the EU using radical right talking points and graphic conceptualizations. It has a wide membership, both from the elites of anti-EU political parties and grassroot movements to radical right activists.
- *A9* is the Twitter voice of a political movement and mostly shares news on affiliated politicians' initiatives and campaigns.

- *A10* represents a myriad of accounts and sites that with a smaller audience than A8 that function as a micro pressure group of conservative civil society.

3.1.1.2 Twitter Politician Accounts

These accounts represent figures with a political role.

- *B1* was an important leading figure of the British radical right involved in the Leave EU movement and 2016 Brexit referendum.
- *B2* is a former high ranking member of a party and an active participant in the Twitterverse notable for his colourful, disgust-related metaphors; for instance, he once compared a party to the plague.
- *B3* is the director of a conservative think-tank, a UK reiteration of similar US conservative think-tanks such as the Cato Institute. He has had key roles both in parties as well as the overall Brexit movement.
- *B4* is a politician; his tweets are usually statesman-like with an occasional slip towards radical right talking points.
- *B5* is a former journalist and a former advisor to a party. A hybrid figure with an active Twitter presence, he seems to be a "bridge" figure between traditional conservatives and the radical right groups in UK.

3.1.1.3 Twitter Influencer Accounts

These influencers represent the rightwing and libertarian civil society galvanized by the year-by-year Brexit process. This political earthquake freed the energies of British Conservatives and radical right circles that increased the intensity of their activity around the banner of Brexit. It consists of a galaxy of influencers, businessmen and writers on the right of the political spectrum who exploited the referendum and subsequent crisis to boost their popularity. They also engulfed the societal debate in a widespread and continuous struggle for hegemonic supremacy. The framing of the content posted by accounts belonging to this category often was embedded in the political. Pieces of news, clips from movies, songs and images were inserted in a narrative that was chaotically but effectively presented to the wider public. This resulted in increasing polarization in British society as more and more radical content was posted on Twitter.

- *C1* is a Youtuber who became a figurehead of British free speech absolutism after posting a controversial video. He is a hybrid figure posting content that can be anywhere on the rightwing spectrum, from radicalism to libertarianism as well as traditional liberalism.
- *C2* is a radical right user who often state that people are being subjected to control by financial elites. His tweets mention classical radical right tropes such as jihadism, immigration, EU and corrupt elites.
- *C3* is a conservative Catholic who uses radical right tropes, in particular on immigration and Tommy Robinson[30], but prefers a more mainstream conservative stance on other arguments such as women's role in society.
- *C4* is a British take on the US based alt-right that surfed the meme wave of the Trump election; his tweets are a chaotic collection of libertarian, radical right, Kek[31] and trolling based upon far-right symbology.
- *C5* is a radical right account, attentive to events in the US and was highly active, before being banned. Through examining its posting it is possible to observe a specific communicative style that is couched in uppercase characters and that contains conspiracy theory arguments. Moreover, there are textual elements such as in-group language based on disgust for example the use of the word "libtards" and the phrase "satanic scum" (to indicate the progressive establishment).
- *C6* is a conservative journalist and broadcaster. The tweet production is of classical conservative positions but the account is also a staunch Eurosceptic.
- *C7* represents the view of the UK entrepreneurial Eurosceptic community, framing posted tweets in terms of a democratic fight against a bureaucratic EU.
- *C8* is a radical right user who tweets extensively from a radical right stance, in particular using an anti-immigration, anti-jihadism and anti-left triad of tropes. In fact, the account is opposed to the "The Left/Jihadist/SJW cabal" frequently to anchor posted tweets.
- *C9* is another US alt-right like account active in the UK online sphere that uses trolling and 'memeing' to bring a political, point home, one that is often irrational.
- *C10* is a fringe free speech account that is heavily involved in geek community battles against political correctness in games, comics and other fantasy activities. He extends this stance into

[30] Qaten, Alex. 2018. "Tommy Robinson 'the martyr' – how the far right builds its victim narrative". *The Conversation.* Available at: https://theconversation.com/tommy-robinson-the-martyr-how-the-far-right-builds-its-victim-narrative-98261. Last accessed 30 August 2020.
[31] Neiwert, David. 2017. "What the Kek: Explaining the Alt-Right 'Deity' Behind Their 'Meme Magic'", *Southern Poverty Law Center.* Available at: https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2017/05/08/what-kek-explaining-alt-right-deity-behind-their-meme-magic. Last accessed 12 September 2020.

wider society to criticize “SJWs”, Social Justice Warriors, in all layers of society, most specifically academic and economic elites.

- *C11* is a Scottish Brexiteer who heavily criticizes the British Left and the Scottish National Party. However, his tweeting often goes into radical right talking points advocating deportations and total border shut downs and bemoaning the communist conspiracy that ruined Scotland.
- *C12* is a supposedly free speech absolutist account that plays on satirical imitations using a heavy visual component. It often shifts into radical right positions and ends up eventually being banned.
- *C13* is a comedian who tweets from a free speech absolutist perspective, often using humour to successfully express his political opinions.
- *C14* is an important figure in the radical right wave in the English speaking world. The account often tweets using conspiratorial and radical right tropes.
- *C15* is another comedian who ridicules the progressive stance and ‘SJWs’ in his shows, expressing disgust towards political opponents to score comedic points. His Twitter activity is ‘normalized’ in comparison with occasional humorous rightwing tweets seeping through.

The selected accounts offer a wide spectrum of cultural milieus and political stances. The central use of this data are to show the shifting boundaries between the normalization of radical right tropes on immigration, Islam, left and economic issues, and radical right digital activity. This socio-cultural-political challenge represents the crucial question for digital channels of political and linguistic communication. In this way, humour, visual cues, linguistic techniques and memes online presence can be applied to hate crimes to hopefully shed a new light on the uniqueness of the rapidly changing UK radical right political scene during the Brexit transition.

3.1.2 The Time-frame: Crucial events and temporal nexus points.

June 2017 represented a new ‘turn of the screw’ of a spike in hate crimes that first manifested itself in a lengthy fallout during June 2016, the month of the Brexit referendum. While a more detailed hate crimes timeline will be presented further on in the research protocol application for June 2017, what follows are the main events that took place in that month. This will allow the reader to understand the British political and cultural situation in June 2017 and to comprehend certain events and associated tweets.

- **3 June – The London Bridge terrorist attack.** This resulted in eight deaths and several casualties. Three attackers ploughed into pedestrians on London Bridge with a van and then launched a knife attack in nearby Borough Market. The terrorists were killed by the Police with the whole nation following the entire ordeal through both traditional media (TV) and via digital spaces.
- **4 June – General Election campaigning is suspended** for a day after following the previous evening's events. Prime Minister Theresa May gives a speech that ends with "as a country, our response must be as it has always been when we have been confronted by violence. We must come together, we must pull together, and united we will take on and defeat our enemies".
- **8 June – Results of the 2017 General Election.** The Labour party gains 30 seats and the Conservatives lose 8. These results reinvigorated the UK's leftwing while creating noticeable troubles for rightwing political forces. British Conservatives were put under pressure as the political wind in UK seemed to be changing putting Brexit, their ultimate goal, at risk. Talks of "Reversed Brexit" were crucial to push the radical right towards further radicalization. Radical right circles were more easily pushed towards the far-right movement that advocated an even harsher and more radical Brexit scenario.[32] Fears of the possibility that a liberal and leftwing coalition could lead UK back into the EU were widespread and created a counter rallying point for British Conservatives.
- **10 June** – The Tory party announces that negotiations with the **Northern Irish Democratic Unionist Party** are ongoing, signaling a push by Conservatives further to the right due to the General Election results.
- **11 June – The 'March against Hate'** organized by the British radical right takes place in Manchester self-defined as "a patriots' gathering against militant jihadism" followed by a smaller "anti-racist" counter-protest. The two clashed in some instances with eight arrests for public order offences, the number of arrests was deemed normal for a protest of this size by Greater Manchester Chief of Police.[33] This comment signals that the police were tracking this mobilization, monitoring both online spaces and the material world.

[32] Taylor, Ros. 2017. "Brexit and the mainstreaming of the British far right", *LSE blogs*. Available at: https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/brexit/2017/10/05/brexit-and-the-mainstreaming-of-the-british-far-right/. Last accessed 30 August 2020.
[33] "Protesters slammed for bringing 'hate' to the city and stretching police with 'almost nothing left to give'". 2017. *Manchester Evening News*. Available at: https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/protesters-slammed-bringing-hate-city-13171255. Last accessed 30 August 2020.

- **14 June - A major fire consumes Grenfell Tower in West London** with 72 deaths provoking nation-wide outrage. This tragedy sparked a wide and years long debate on the role of landlords, unsafe cladding of buildings and overall class relations in the UK. Moreover, Tim Farron resigns as leader of the Liberal Democrats leading a transition to a full pro-Remain position.
- **18 June – The Government announces that there will be no Queen's Speech in 2018**, to give MPs more time to deal with Brexit laws signaling that one year after the Brexit referendum this process would continue to be long and chaotic. **Al Quds Day march**: This march is a celebration of the last Friday of Ramadan and takes place every year to express support for the Palestinians and oppose Israeli policies. The Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979 started this occurrence that spread all over the world. More than 15000 people marched through London in 2017. Hamas flags, not in the list of proscribed organizations, were seen at the march.
- **19 June - The Finsbury Mosque Park Attack takes place.** (This will be fully explored in the following sections). Brexit Secretary David Davis heads to Brussels for Brexit negotiations with the European Commission.
- **21 June** – As the heatwave continues, the UK experiences its hottest June day since 1976, with a temperature of 34.4 C (94 F) recorded at Heathrow Airport. Climate functioned as a background issue that entered public discourse for the duration of the summer.
- **24 June** – Police open an investigation on a cyberattack on the Houses of Parliament after a hacker attempted to gain unauthorized access to politicians' email accounts.
- **26 June** – The Conservatives agree a **£1 billion deal with Northern Ireland's Democratic Unionist Party** to support Theresa May's Conservative minority government.
- **27 June – Nicola Sturgeon** opts for a delay for a proposed second Scottish independence referendum.
- **30 June –Nick Paget-Brown, the leader of Kensington and Chelsea council,** resigns public uproar that resulted following the Grenfell Tower fire enquiry.

The events of June 2017 were a catalyst for further polarization within the UK in the following months. The widely televised attack on London Bridge contributed to an already rampant climate of Islamophobia. The minor defeat of the Conservatives that explored the alliance with the DUP pushed the discourse of mainstream Tory politicians towards the radical right. Public protest grew, in all currents of society, with marches both from British Muslims and the radical right. The fire at the Grenfell tower contributed to anti-elite discourse in the country. The Finsbury Park Mosque attack

was a 'coronation' of this process in a string of global repercussions. In the days following this attack and until the end of month, several hate crimes took place as separate cliques of the radical right were galvanized while politicians and the police tried to restore control as Scotland's Prime Minister Nicole Sturgeon decided to tactically "take time". The ongoing wave of both Muslim and radical right radicalization, and the instability of Scotland were the perfect opportunity for the Conservative government to deploy more police and introduce new initiatives in the UK. The PM, Theresa May at the time, in her post-Finsbury Park mosque speech declared the creation of a new Commission for Countering Extremism,[34] an entirely new official body to oppose any new dangerous developments due to the fallout of events in June 2017.

In the next section, I will provide an overview of the data to present trends, patterns and an overall picture of the extracted accounts and tweets.

3.2 The June 2017 Collection of Tweets

By using CygWin, I extracted all the tweets pertaining to the selected accounts for June 2017. The 30 accounts under scrutiny produced a total of 16154 tweets that included 1975 visuals such as videos, memes, gifs etc. In this first dataset, for each tweet with an image or a gif attached there were roughly eight purely verbal tweets without an attachment.

These accounts were highly active during this month producing the highest number of tweets in the entire database. The number of tweets spiked after the two terrorist attacks with an inverse resonance from what occurred offline to the digital spaces. In other words, on 2 June, the day preceding the London Bridge attack, the accounts examined produced 473 Tweets, while on the day of the attack itself, 3 June – they produced 390 Tweets, and on 4 June, 858 Tweets. This shows a significant dynamic where average tweet production drops slightly on the day of the critical event and soars to a double than average level on the day following the event.

In this specific case, this phenomenon can be explained by the surge of vitriolic discourse and debate around Islam and several other terrorist attacks that had taken place during the previous (e.g. Manchester Arena bombing) Spring and June. The events that had occurred during the Spring prepared the ground, politically and emotionally, to what then came about in June in 2017. The

[34] May, Theresa. 2017. "PM statement following terror attack in Finsbury Park: 19 June 2017". *Gov.uk.* Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-statement-following-terror-attack-in-Finsbury Park-park-19-june-2017. Last accessed 24 December 2020.

seemingly endless sequence of critical events from a minority at the centre of the public eye, Muslims, and the still recent Brexit fallout could have caused these episodes of violence.

As shown in Fig. 13, the ten accounts that were classified as Twitter News produced a total of 4766 tweets with an average of 476.6 tweets per account. The behaviour of these users seemed consistent with a day by day approach, publishing news framed from a conservative or even radical right point of view. The most active was A4, an Alt account, with 1012 tweets while, A9, a trad account, posted 124 tweets which was the lowest number of tweets per account.

Five accounts within the Twitter Politicians category produced a total of 1993 tweets with an average of 398.6 tweets. Their tweets were usually serious in tone and informed the public about the initiatives of a particular politician. The most active was B5, an Alt account, with 1143 tweets and the lowest number of tweets per account was by B2, a trad account, with 124 tweets.

Fifteen accounts within the Twitter Influencers produced a total of 9405 tweets with an average of 627. With this category, it is possible to observe a different pattern with more erratic posting at first glance as they closely followed the events-based spikes of June 2017 and contributed the most to the spike structure of the dataset itself. The most active was C5, an Alt account, with 1801 tweets while C15, a trad account, produced only 39 tweets, the lowest number among the Twitter Influencer accounts.

Twitter News	**Twitter Politicians**	**Twitter Influencers**
A1 (alt) - 537	B1 (trad) - 546	C1 (fspeech) - 661
A2 (alt) - 555	B2 (trad) - 79	C2 (alt) - 1008
A3 (alt) - 514	B3 (trad) - 108	C3 (trad) - 57
A4 (alt) - 1012	B4 (trad) - 117	C4 (alt) - 890
A5 (alt) - 276	B5 (alt) – 1143	C5 (alt) - 1801
A6 (trad) - 430		C6 (trad) - 212
A7 (alt) - 336	**Total – 1993 tweets**	C7 (trad) - 88
A8 (trad) - 211	**Average number of tweets**	C8 (alt) - 1347
A9 (trad) - 124	**398.6**	C9 (alt) - 200
A10 (trad) – 761		C10 (fspeech) - 103
		C11 (alt) - 1552
Total – 4766 tweets		C12 (alt) - 133
Average number of tweets		C13 (trad) - 177
476.6		C14 (fspeech) - 1137

		C15 (trad) – 39 **Total – 9405 tweets** **Average number of tweets - 627**

Fig. 13 Number of tweets for each account for June 2017.

Let us now examine these tweets across categories. Thirteen trad accounts produced a total of 2949 of tweets with C15 posting the fewest (39) and B1 posting the most (546). In fact, conservative accounts published fewer tweets on average than those in the other two categories. Even during moments of crisis, they seem to avoid strong language and their content remains measured. These accounts belong to Conservatives that sometimes entertain radical right beliefs but are careful not to lose face online. Their goal seems to be, as a general rule, to preserve what users will perceive as acceptable communication. Any experimentation with Tweet style and visual support, such as posting pictures joined with more radical slogans and statements, were avoided. Their content as well tended to stick to norms accepted by the wider society, such as avoiding characterizations that are too negative and racial slur.

Fourteen alt accounts produced a total of 11,304 tweets with C12 posting the fewest (133) and C5 the most (1801) These Alternative accounts were the most productive digitally. It seems that they tried to achieve a critical mass of content online thinking that like-minded people would appreciate them. The content analysed for this month suggests that these accounts posted tweets to shape the ideological beliefs of other users. Those posting seem to belong to different subcultures that share a set of radical right beliefs, e.g. aversion towards migrants and Muslims, greatness of the UK, opposition to the EU etc.

Three Fspeech accounts produced a total of 1901 of tweets with an average tweet production of 633.66. FSpeech accounts followed a similar trend to the Alternative category pattern, pushing for a critical mass without being concerned about digital etiquette, albeit with a slightly lower tweet average. By digital etiquette, I mean the norms of using technology that on Twitter can be defined as widely accepted dos and don'ts such as posting about controversial themes, swearing language and tweet composition. Fspeech accounts, while few in number, leave a lasting impact with the larger user base as they use a 'freedom trumps all' argument, neutral in its form, to bring the point of the day home.

From this organisational scheme it is immediately noticeable that Twitter Influencers/Alternative right accounts were the most prolific in trying to shift digital public opinion through mass posting. At the same time, Traditional right/Twitter politicians were the least active on Twitter; a first explanation of this could be that traditional Conservatives, and especially politicians, are far more careful to appear serious and to respect perceived etiquette. Already in the tweet posting patterns it is possible to find a clear humorous versus seriousness dynamic between traditional Conservatism as opposed to a radical, alternative right wave that does not care about "posting too much" or exposing themselves but reverses traditional online etiquette to achieve their political goals and, arguably, "have fun" on Twitter.

3.3 Word-frequency

The next step in my research protocol was to calculate word frequency. To do this I compressed the extracted tweets in order to obtain a workable collection of data for analysis. By using, as already stated in the methodology chapter, a dedicated string of commands, I calculated the most frequently occurring words in the overall dataset. The first twenty most frequent words consisted of function words such as articles, pronouns and connective particles, (Fig. 14) as well as the first five hits that were com, twitter, https and status.

1 22460 com
2 20519 twitter
3 20258 https
4 17126 status
5 8384 the
6 5891 to
7 4638 a
8 4159 of
9 3604 (redacted)
10 3308 is
11 3172 in
12 3132 (redacted)
13 3109 you
14 3050 http
15 2838 s

16 2818 and
17 2694 (redacted)
18 2584 i
19 2345 www
20 2310 (redacted)

Fig. 14 The twenty most frequent words/particles extracted for June 2017.

By scrolling further down the list, I began to come across content words such as nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs. I next grouped together words belonging to the same semantic fields. Applying this concept, under 10 headings that I labelled 'nation', 'left', 'news', 'Muslim', 'London', 'EU', 'Brexit', 'Disgust', 'Ukip' and 'Migrants', I aggregated words belonging to each semantic field. For example, under the category of Nation, I placed the most frequent words in my database, which for June 2017 were: UK, with 2088 hits, Britain, with 342 hits, British, with 378 hits, England, with 60 hits, and English, with 62 hits. My goal in this phase was to establish what exactly was being discussed so that I could next compress the gathered tweets into a smaller and more manageable corpus that displayed themes that were relevant to what happened throughout the month.
The aggregate result for the category Nation was a total of 2868 hits. The same process was repeated for all 10 categories (Fig. 15).

Theme	**No. of occurrences**
Nation	2868
News	2563
Left	2373
Islam	2268
London	1494
EU	1037
Brexit	923
Disgust	877
Ukip	658
Migrants	650

Fig. 15 Ten word categories for June 2017.

Clear "priorities" of the selected accounts can be noticed. "UK", "news" and "left" were the top three themes in the tweets. The fourth highest theme contained terms pertaining to Muslims, unsurprisingly, given the terror attacks in May and June. Moreover, while uniting keywords such as England, UK and British under the hypernym 'Nation' was a simple operation, when it came to creating the 8th theme, namely "disgust", I included terms such as "race", "hate", "bullshit" and "sick" (see my discussion of the psychological meaning of disgust in 1.4.4). Particularly relevant are the 223 hits for the term "scum" that was a widely used term to disgust-tag lefties, Muslims and refugees. Consequently, 166 hits for "sick" are in the same "disgust wave" dynamic. Humour was not especially present at this stage; although, the 62 hits for the term "libtard" that unites disgust and irony in one neologism indicates how a carnivalesque surge was building up throughout the month. The main difference between left and Islam for the radical right seems to be, judging by this theme, a "ridiculous" nature of the first and an intrinsically "disgusting" quality of the second. It seems that while the left is humorously punched down, the discourse around Islam contains references to Allah, making it much more specific and hateful: there are no significant hits around the Manifesto but 42 hits for the Holy Quran, for example. This is relevant because sacred literary works are more referenced by the British radical right when the topic is Islam. This means that while the left is perceived as a vague entity, Muslims are mentioned in a much more precise way.

Overall, these themes represent the expected results for June 2017, relatable to the news cycle of that same month. Themes such as immigration, Islam, the Left and Brexit capture the events that occurred offline during this month. There is a noticeable divide between the first four themes and the others. The drive of some accounts on discussing themes that are related to what is happening outside of Twitter show the existence of echo chambers on social media, ordered by beliefs of users, that focus on the salient issues of the month.

These categories provide solid assurance of avoiding any accusation of "cherry picking" that is difficult to avoid in such a research challenge. I will focus my analysis on tweets that include one or more of these themes. Therefore, these tweets represent topics that were discussed at length throughout the month. The next step is the elaboration of a hate crime timeline to parallel the posting of tweets by these accounts.

3.4 Hate Crimes in the UK: June 2017.

June 2017 represented a "hot" month in the United Kingdom for hate crimes. The terrorist attacks during the spring and the London Bridge attack on June the 3rd ignited a corrosive debate and resulted

in a sequence of offences, abuse and hate crimes. The reports received for the year 2017 by *Tell MAMA*, for example, underline that online incidents reflected reality. There was a clear upward trend in reports on offline or street-based level hate crimes with up to a 23% increase between 2015 and 2016 (*Tell MAMA*, 2018: 27). In particular, 'trigger events' (*ibidem*: 45) represented a conscious worry for *Tell MAMA* as often "unforeseen consequences" were widely observed throughout the year. Events that were perceived as an "outside" threat had enormous hate crime fallouts, largely bigger even than historical and highly polarizing political events such as the EU referendum. One of the crucial trigger events was the brutal murder of the Labour politician Jo Cox, (see 1.5.6) that created a sense of fear in the Remain camp and galvanized the radical right and far-right camps.

The spike in Islamophobic hate crime reports sent to *Tell MAMA* following the Manchester suicide bombing on 22 May 2017 was larger than the spike in reports following the EU referendum result. It constituted a 700% rise in hate crimes, from 9 reports in the reporting period prior to the bombing to 72 reports one week later (*ibidem*: 46). The spike in incidents reported to *Tell MAMA* that followed the EU referendum constituted a 475% rise, from 12 reports in the week prior to the referendum to 69 (*ibidem*) in the week which followed the referendum result.

A chain of events can be traced from the Manchester bombing, to the London Bridge terrorist attack, to the Finsbury Park Mosque radical right motivated manslaughter. This element of unpredictable predictability based on Chaos Theory will be key to understanding the overall hate crimes layout built up for this first dataset. Chaos theory allows us to find meaning in complex natural occurrences and in the cryptic behavior of individuals and groups in large and unpredictable systems. For my goal in this thesis, the sheer complexity of the task ahead can be more easily deciphered through a Chaos theory approach to isolating and analyzing multiple emerging components of the system. My approach is shaped by the methods and outlook of the authors reported in the Literature review (see 1.5.1) that discussed the analysis of online and memetic complexity: Susan Blackmore, Robert Aunger, Limor Shifman, Alex Pentland and so on.

The significance of June 2017 in relevance to hate crimes in comparison to other months of the year is confirmed by the data supplied by the Metropolitan Police Service available to the public. These data allow us to observe a wave like quality of hate crime occurrences with periods of lows and highs.

Numbers	England and Wales, recorded crime					
	2013	**2014**	**2015**	**2016**	**2017**	**2018**
January		2.409	2.899	3.052	3.364	4.040
February		2.139	2.909	3.086	3.587	3.782
March		2.816	3.508	3.483	4.697	4.730
April	2.391	2.563	3.435	3.354	4.321	
May	2.903	3.030	3.473	3.780	5.029	
June	2.926	3.300	3.599	4.190	6.042	
July	3.376	3.537	3.882	5.605	5.485	
August	2.916	3.259	3.579	4.493	4.857	
September	2.455	3.361	3.315	4.283	4.448	
October	2.524	3.359	3.570	4.023	4.568	
November	2.373	3.121	3.611	3.772	4.165	
December	2.331	2.789	3.497	3.876	4.090	

Source: Police recorded crime, Home Office

1. Includes: racially or religiously aggravated assault with injury, racially or religiously aggravated assault without injury, racially or religiously aggravated criminal damage, racially or religiously aggravated public fear, alarm or distress and racially or religiously aggravated harassment.

Fig. 16 Number of racially or religiously aggravated offences recorded by the police by month, April 2013 to March 2018. (Flatley, 2018, 14)

June 2017 represents the month with the highest number of hate crime incidents, even in comparison to the June-July 2016 "Brexit" period that registered a previously unrecorded "high" in hate crimes in the United Kingdom. It is possible to notice a "sequence" of hate crimes from March 2017 to July with a build up to June, a slight drop for July, and then a marked, and understandable drop in August. This drop occurred in 2016 as well. Islamophobia seems to be the issue that connects 2016 and 2017. The Met data confirm this predominant quality of hate crimes occurrences for 2017.

Numbers and percentages	**England and Wales, recorded crime**	
Perceived religion of the victim	Number of offences	%
Buddhist	**19**	**0**

Christian	**264**	**5**
Hindu	**58**	**1**
Jewish	**672**	**12**
Muslim	**2.965**	**52**
Sikh	**117**	**2**
Other	**311**	**5**
No religion	**237**	**4**
Unknown	**1.174**	**21**
Total number of targeted religions	5.817	
Total number of offences	**5.680**	

Source: Police recorded crime, Home Office

1. Excludes data from the Metropolitan and Lancashire police forces.

2. In some offences more than one religion has been recorded as being targeted.

Fig. 17 Number and proportion of religious hate crimes recorded by the police, by perceived religion. (Flatley, 2018, 36)

This timeline of hate crimes for June 2017 was built taking into consideration Metropolitan Police data. It will be presented day by day with an introduction and explanation of what occurred. More than 50% of hate crimes occur in this period for Islamophobic reasons. Antisemitic hate crimes are relevant and somewhat surprisingly, it is the anti-Christian hate crimes that follow these as being the next highest numerically. These data are widely perceived to be directed solely towards religious minorities.

The timeline for June 2017 begins with the notorious tweet by Katie Hopkins, a radical right journalist, that called for a “final solution” after the Manchester bombing of 22 May of 2017 (Devlin, 2019) when a terrorist detonated a homemade bomb filled with nails and other shrapnel-like objects during the concert featuring American singer Ariana Grande. The attack and this specific tweet provoked an incendiary debate within the British public and radicalized the right leaning section even more.

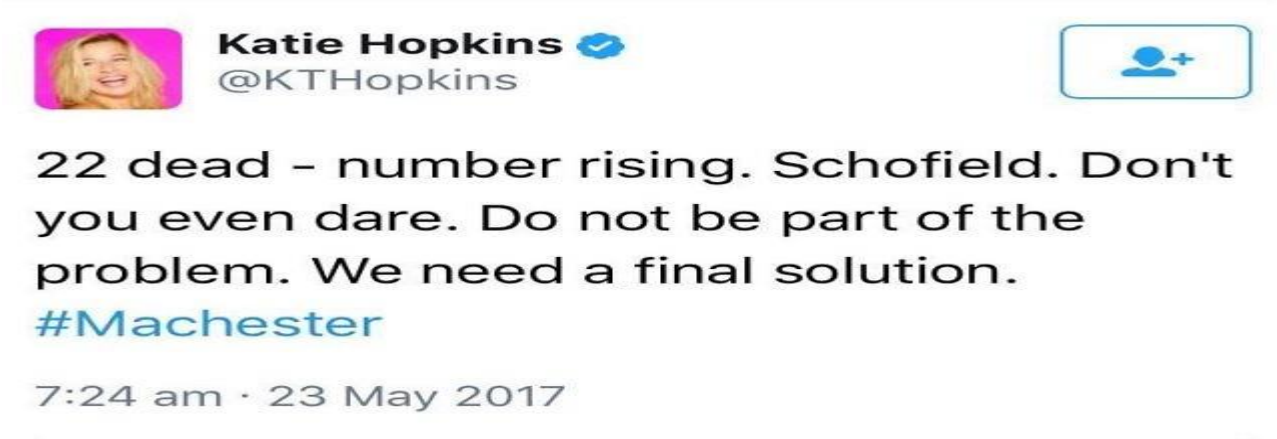


Fig. 18 Katie Hopkins' "Final Solution" tweet.

The tweet was reported to the police[35] and had huge international resonance, for example, in the *Washington Post* (Hawkins, 2017). Moreover, it was the highest point of a crescendo of inflammatory comments and resulted in the firing of Katie Hopkins from her job.[36] This tweet was of historical importance in setting the tone for successive online vitriolic exchanges and interaction in the material world. The other meaningful event was the release of *The Betrayed Girls*, a BBC docufilm[37], and *Three Girls*, a BBC TV Series (Wollaston, 2017), denouncing a scandal that shocked the UK public concerning the rape, grooming and sex trafficking of white, teenage girls by a group of Asian men in Rochdale, in 2012. This crime ignited nationwide outrage also because the police ignored reports about the gang by social workers and victims for years. Moreover, the police for many months refused to acknowledge that these crimes were occurring despite many reports from the local citizenry. The statements of the victims were particularly tragic and harrowing. *Three Girls* was broadcast on three consecutive nights between 16 and 18 May 2017 on BBC One setting the tone for and giving credence to the idea of migrants and Muslims as rapists.

3.4.1 June 2017 Day-by-day hate crime Timeline

- **<u>June 3</u>**

The third day of June was the powder keg for the hate crimes that were committed throughout the month. The terrorist attack that occurred on the 3rd of June on London Bridge was a traumatic

[35] "Katie Hopkins reported to police after 'final solution' Manchester attack tweet". 2017. *The Guardian*. Available at https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/may/23/manchester-attack-police-investigate-katie-hopkins-final-solution-tweet. Last accessed 24 December 2020.
[36] "Katie Hopkins to leave LBC over 'final solution' tweet". 2017. *The Week*. Available at https://www.theweek.co.uk/85034/katie-hopkins-to-leave-lbc-over-final-solution-tweet. Last accessed 24 December 2020.
[37] *The Betrayed Girls, BBC*. Available at https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08xdh9r. Last accessed 24 December 2020.

occurrence for the country as three attackers drove a van into pedestrians after which they tried to kill more civilians in Borough Market. Eight people died and 48 were injured. This had an explosive effect, following the Manchester Arena attack of the 22 May, that had already ignited the radical right and the populace alike in an anti-Muslim wave of hate and attacks. There was an immediate reaction against minorities, as had occurred in Manchester:

> Hate crimes against British Muslims in the week after the terrorist attack in Manchester went up by five times, figures reveal. In total, 139 cases of "anti-Muslim hate" were reported in seven days — compared to 25 in the previous week. (Kerbaj, 2017)

A similar spike happened after the London Bridge terrorist attack. A surgeon, Naveed Yasin, was racially abused and called a terrorist immediately after the Manchester bombing while en route to the hospital where he worked on June 4 (*Tell Mama Report* 2017: 48). After London Bridge, the press published a photograph of a Muslim woman at the scene portrayed as if she was unconcerned by the attack (*ibidem*). Her statement to the *Guardian* was the following:

> …I would like to say not only have I been devastated by witnessing the aftermath of a shocking and numbing terror attack, I've also had to deal with the shock of finding my picture plastered all over social media by those who could not look beyond my attire, who draw conclusions based on hate and xenophobia. (Hunt and Pegg, 2017)

These attempts to contest the radical right narrative by explaining and deepening human narratives did not have any concrete effect on the growing virality of the hate rhetoric and crimes. Liberal media and newspapers tried to craft 'feel-good stories' in the immediate fallout of the London terror attack trying to portray refugees and Muslims in a positive light. For example, they underscored that the Muslim community condemned the attackers and it was 'united in disgust'[38] against the terrorists being British first. Nevertheless, the wave of content posted by Conservative and radical right users was overwhelming and visible in the collected data. Occurences such as those involving Naveed Yasin and the Muslim woman at the scene were usually drowned by the noise.

- **<u>June 4</u>**

The fallout on the 4th of June was enormous. Two cases stand out. James Palmer, a man with a serious alcohol problem, after watching the news coverage of the London Bridge attack, left a blue plastic

[38] Mitchell, Jonathan. 2017. "Mosques and Muslim leaders 'united in disgust' after London Bridge terror attack". *Evening Standard*. Available at: https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/mosques-and-muslim-leaders-united-in-disgust-after-london-bridge-terror-attack-a3556676.html. Last accessed 30 August 2020.

bag outside of a mosque claiming it was a bomb.[39] The fake bomb inside the bag carried a note: "Youse are next, defo" (*Tell Mama Report* 2017, 50). Paul Hepplestall uploaded a video on Facebook in which he made racist comments, threatened to blow up mosques and brandished a machete while laughing and smiling. His goal in the video was to "kill and maim followers of Islam" (Parry, 2017). Interestingly, after the counter outrage and the threat of prosecution by police he later apologized by saying it was a joke.[40] His video went viral. Other incidents reported by *Tell MAMA* include a teacher who made several Islamophobic comments that referenced the terrorist attack directed to the Muslim student in the room, and, a rant at a post office that was focused on the fact that "All Muslims in this country are terrorists" (*Tell Mama Report* 2017, 49-50). This was a common theme in the following days.

- **June 5**

The trend continued on June 5. The most outstanding incident was the writing of the phrase "Muslim Cowards" on Thornaby Mosque, Stockton-on-Tees (Lodge, 2017). These two words were discovered in the early hours of the morning provoking immediate alarm given the heightened tension of those days. The images immediately went viral with hundreds and hundreds of messages of support.[41] This immediate tendency to start "tribally tagging" locations deemed not inside the tribe directly echoed what was happening online. For example, *Breitbart London* released a story on Michael Higginson, a 15-year-old student who was reported for his radical right tweets and viewpoint that culminated in a politically incorrect joke about transgendered celebrity Caitlyn Jenner, which he admitted was "crude" (Deacon, 2017). The article does not report the full joke but the tone was assumed to be typical of the radical right online given the student's vocal support for politicians such as French radical right leader Marine Le Pen (*ibidem*). The convergence between the online and the non-virtual world was immediate and could be easily observed.

- **June 7**

On June 7th, Craig Burgin, armed with a large knife, uploaded a video threatening Muslims. *Tell MAMA* reports that:

[39] "Man jailed for Paisley mosque fake bomb scare". 2017. *BBC News*. Available at https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-glasgow-west-42010425. Last accessed 22 August 2020.
[40] Shakur, Zico, 2017, "Liverpool machete man apologises". *Youtube*. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cgTpifoHZHg. Last accessed 24 December 2020.
[41] "Graffiti-hit Thornaby Mosque attracts hundreds showing support". 2017. *BBC News*. Available at https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-tees-40238853. Last accessed 24 December 2020.

> Burgin, after referring to his knife as his "bad boy", told the camera: "I'm ready for you, scum b******* muzzy c****." Again, "muzzy" is derogatory phraseology that we often find among far-right networks online. (*Tell Mama Report* 2017: 97-98)

He mentions Theresa May and threatens a war in the UK, evidently a "race war". Moreover, *Hope not Hate*, a fairly popular advocacy group that investigates far right movements, underlined how Burgin bragged about abusing drugs while writing "hahahaha" (Archibald, 2017). At this point a carnivalesque threat of violence was looming and could seemingly erupt at any point. There was a mutual radicalization effect, because that same day, three girls attacked and stabbed a nursery worker while shouting about Allah, punching and kicking her (Gillet, 2017). Disgust towards Muslims is evident, accompanied by the carnivalesque sense of lawlessness in both groups: radical right radicals and Muslim radicals. These two movements compete with each other and ride these waves of increasing radicalization.

- **<u>June 11</u>**

The British radical right tried to mobilize its own support by organizing a "Uk against Hate" march in Manchester led by the well-known radical right figure, Tommy Robinson.

> The demonstration was first announced by Tommy Cook (aka Tommy English) under the banner of 'Gays Against Sharia' but was later rebranded as 'UK Against Hate' once former EDL leader Stephen Lennon (aka Tommy Robinson) stepped in and took control of the event. (Mulhall, 2017)

The goal of the march was to promote anti-Muslim sentiment, as recounted by *Hope not Hate* (*ibidem*), but the march was clothed in a sense of righteousness. The declared goal of the march was to protect minorities from Muslims. The protest assumed a carnivalesque character with clashes between police, counter-protestors and some members of the marching crowd. Moreover, the marchers exposed a pig's head and took bites out of it.[42] There were 8 arrests during the day (*ibidem*). This protest was the first sign of a wider mobilization of the radical right.

- **<u>June 17</u>**

Between the Manchester Arena bombing on 22 May and the day he was arrested, on June 17, Rhodenne Chand posted 32 tweets that threatened members of the Muslim community (Dearden, 2018). His tweets were particularly violent expressing the desire to "slit a Muslim's throat" and generally inciting racial hatred (*ibidem*). This was a sign of boiled up radicalization online. It is

[42] "EDL protesters holding pig's head in anti-Muslim slur clash with police at counter-terror march in Manchester". 2017. *Telegraph*. Available at https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/06/11/mayor-andy-burnham-condemns-manchester-protest-against-islamist/. Last accessed 30 August 2020.

significant that this was the day on which Darren Osborne hired the van for his attack on June 19th (Price, 2018).

- **June 18**

Al Quds Day, the last day of Ramadan, was disrupted by a protest in London. The Muslim march occurred amongst tension as Hezbollah flags were seen in the crowd. Throughout the day, Conservative protesters were yelling to marchers that "they hate the West" and "you murderers".[43] It was a particularly vehement protest as "Death to Israel" shouts were clearly heard amongst the Muslim marchers (McKernan, 2017). Osborne himself, who would commit the terrorist attack on the Finsbury Park Mosque the following day, confessed that initially he wanted to target the Al Quds march but could not get to Central London because of road closures (Dearden, 2018). The radicalization process continued to mutually "bounce" between the two parties during June 2017: radical Muslims on one side and radical right groups on the other. While this study focuses on the latter group, the links between the two groups will emerge throughout my investigation through notable examples. The events of the second half of June 2017 will show how extremist groups supposedly on the opposite ends of the ideological spectrum reinforce each others' narratives by riding waves of heightened mobilization and even exploiting terror attacks to craft new narratives.

- **June 19**

This was the crucial day in June 2017 as events at Finsbury Park unfolded. Darren Osborne, the attacker, came to see himself as a radical right solider after being radicalized by preceding terrorist attacks, the online content produced by the radical right, and series such as *Three Girls*. Elements of the copy-cat process are evident in the use of the van such as the one used by the attackers on the London Bridge terrorist attack. Osborne's psyche was deeply consumed by this "ideological mind virus" (Dawkins, 1976, 330) as he was shouting "I want to kill more Muslims" while trying to escape (*ibidem*).

> Abdulrahman, a witness on the scene, claimed the attacker said, "kill me", as he was held on the ground. He added: "I said,"'tell me why did you try driving to kill innocent people?' When he went into the [police] van he made gestures, he was laughing." (Horton and Allen, 2017)

This incident caused a huge resonance online. *Tell MAMA* reports virulent activity by the radical right with hashtags such as #Revenge, invitations to continue the "extermination" with extremely violent

[43] "Hezbollah flags fly in London as hundreds march against Israel". 2017. *I24News*. Available at https://www.i24news.tv/en/news/international/148180-170618-controversial-al-quds-day-march-to-take-place-in-london. Last accessed 24 December 2020.

carnivalesque irony such as, "Is this the month of Ramadan or Ramavan?" (*Tell Mama Report* 2017, 98). This was the crescendo of the process that had started with the London Bridge terrorist attack exhibiting a clear connection between Islamophobia happening in the non-virtual world and what was going on online, with humour as a prime accelerator.

- **June 21**

After a few days of activity surrounding the Finsbury Park Mosque attack, Resham Khan and Jameel Muhktar were targeted in an acid attack through their car window (Dearden, 2018). The attacker did this in plain view of other people during the day and claimed to hear voices in his head (*ibidem*). What at first sight appeared to be a casual vent instead shows the ease with which virality and preceding hate crimes could inspire what at first sight appear to be "random" acts of hate.

- **June 22**

Nigel Pelham, a man who published inflammatory online material between February 24 and November 16, 2015 to stir up religious hatred against Muslims, was sentenced to 20 months in jail (Carlos, 2017). His sentence is relevant because of a claim by the radical right that hate speech is free speech and a right.

- **June 23**

This day saw the initial march of 7000 London football "lads" that started to emerge as the Football Lads Alliance, a significant street movement (StateofHate, 2018: 23). While claiming to be a simple working class movement, they held banners calling for the banning of mosques, halal, sharia and Islam in the UK, sparking clashes in several cities (O'Brien, 2017). Online, the Lone Crusader Meme, depicting Norman Osborne, responsible for the Finsbury Park Mosque attack, driving his van festooned with Crusader iconography, appeared in the morning (Tell Mama Report 2017, 98). Again, we observe mutual online-non-virtual world interaction.

- **June 24**

At Plant Hill Park, Blackley, a gang surrounded the son of a Syrian man, after screaming racial slurs and then launched an extremely violent assault that caused lasting physical damage such as swelling and bruising to his face and skull (Cox, 2017). There is a clear thread from the previous day's hooligan march. This vicious assault raises questions about the vulnerability of UK's youth to radicalization, specifically during such phases of violent hate virality.

- **June 25**

One of the convergent hate crimes happened on the 25th when a Muslim father-of-three was knocked out by thugs before racist graffiti was daubed on the walls of his house quoting a controversial Katie Hopkins tweet (Finnegan, 2017). The victim noticed that "the graffiti on one wall, which included a misspelt hashtag, read: "Pakis out. We need a final solution #Manchester" (*ibidem*). This hate crime clearly shows how certain seductive cultural items can remain "sleeping" for weeks before emerging in the material world in an eruption of violence and memetic activity. The 'final solution' meme, with specific historical and visual meaning, was posted at the end of the May. It notably resurfaced on the 25 of June to concrete effect confirming the fluidity and the potential of cultural items.

- **June 26**

In a similar fashion to the events on the 24th, a boy aged 13 was kicked several times in the head by a gang of older teens asking him, with possible vicious irony, "are you a Paki?" (Keeling, 2017). An answer by the victim to the racist question would not have changed the intentions of the gang that attacked him (*ibidem*). This violent hate crime serves to highlight the union of disgust and irony that characterized radical right violence during June 2017.

A few clear trends emerged throughout the month. The cycle of terrorist attacks during the spring and on the 3rd of June set the tone for both online and non-virtual world human interaction in which the radical right surged, peaking with the Finsbury Park Mosque attack of the 19th. The hate crimes connected to the radical right appear to be based on back and forth interaction. Online spaces were filled with a series of videos that specifically invoked violence against Muslims. This communication was heavily doused in disgust and humour by unleashing a response during the second part of the month, in which offences and physical violence against minorities and vulnerable individuals first spread online, often conveyed through symbols.

After arranging and organizing the tweets, in the next section I will discuss the Moral Foundations of selected tweets and their correspondence with hate crimes.

3.5 Moral Sentiment Theory

In this section, I will examine the tweets from 2017 in my database in the light of Moral Foundation Theory (hereafter MFT). In this section, a general summary of the characteristics of MFT as they appear in the selected tweets is presented accompanied by a discussion about patterns emerging in selected accounts in relation to the hate crimes described above.

The June 2017 sample consists of 1582 tweets that are unevenly distributed along the timeline I constructed. The first finding that emerges is that the tweeting appears to follow certain patterns. The days on which the "main" events of the month occurred, such as the London Bridge terror act on 3rd of June, the radical right march on the 11th and the Finsbury Park Mosque attack on the 19th, produced the lowest number of tweets, respectively 40, 55 and 97. On the other hand, in particular for the London Bridge terror attack, the days after the act of hate saw particularly virulent Twitter activity in the selected accounts: 134 tweets on the 4th, 104 tweets on the 5th, 198 tweets on the 6th and 115 tweets on the 7th. It seems that an act of terror, specifically from the radical Muslim tribe, augmented general Twitter posting significantly. Furthermore, the Finsbury Park Mosque attack, while provoking an equal amount of copycat radical right activity, did not provoke that big a surge on Twitter: 91 tweets on the 20th, 91 tweets on the 21th, 93 tweets on the 22nd, 74 tweets on the 23th and 55 tweets on the 24th. Radical right accounts appear to react differently to terrorism online depending upon whether it is inspired by Muslim radicalism or by far-right beliefs. The actions inspired by the latter are justified, protected and even embraced in the tweets of those with radical right leanings.

What follows is an examination of this first database according to Haidt's Moral Foundations (2012, 147). The tweets appear to be in line with some of Haidt's proposals, with their content falling into the categories of Loyalty, Authority and Sanctity. The category of Care was almost non-existent, and tweets marked as revealing Fairness were rare. In my analysis, I will follow Haidt's order of Moral Foundations (MF), starting with Care and finishing with Sanctity.

I have placed tweets in tables for ease of reading.

3.5.1 The Moral Foundation of Care

Care is the MF that emerges as the least used foundation of all in the database. This is not surprising given that the accounts belonged to users from a conservative political spectrum that would be characterized, according to Haidt, as people with little empathy for others as their defining trait. One of the few themes that signals the foundation of Care is identifying with friends and their struggles. Care involves protecting friends and those we care for and thus the appearance of Care underlines the fact that behind these accounts there are human beings who can express sweetness, even if rarely, to loved ones. Tweet 1, for example, (Fig. 19) shows how the user defends another user who had received hate threats as "one of the sweetest" people they had ever met.

Another Care based theme can be seen when users express condolences for deceased celebrities on social media using the name of the celebrity and a hashtag. This use of a hashtag with the name of a deceased celebrity has become a social media norm (see Tweet 2).

In Tweet 3 the user condemns the terrorist attack on the Finsbury Park Mosque by underlining Care for innocent Muslims, showing selective empathy. Some tweets disavowed this act of terror expressing different motivations. This kind of tweet based on Care was absent, with few exceptions, after June 19th.

Tweets from June 2017 confirm Haidt's assessment of Conservative morality in that those founded on Care were few and far in between. The few that were assessed as such followed social media norms, such as public affection for friends or posting of condolences and RIP wishes to deceased celebrities.

CARE	
Tweet 1	The amount of hate/threats @CassandraRules has to deal with on a daily basis is despicable. She's one of the sweetest people I've ever met.
Tweet 2	Last of the summer wine. Cheers and RIP. #PeterSallis
Tweet 3	I utterly condemn all attacks on innocent muslims

Fig. 19 Tweets displaying the Moral Foundation of Care.

3.5.2 The Moral Foundation of Fairness

In June 2017 the MF of Fairness was more present than that of Care in posts that mostly justified the user's own political tribe against another, "x did y, so why can't we do the same," or to lament the lack of reciprocity by police and the government who are, according to the tweeters, corrupt. Fig. 20 includes a number of tweets where users vent their feelings claiming that they have been unfairly treated as expressed in "we are getting less votes because that group has an unfair advantage". (Tweet 4) and the inequity of the left in seemingly unjust fines imposed by the police on "our own" (Tweet 5). After the Finsbury Park Mosque terror attack on the 19th, there was a surge of resentment against unfairness, followed by a pause for couple of days, and another increase in these tweets on the 22nd and 23rd of June. The extracted accounts often invoked Fairness moral foundation to complain that they are being unfairly dealt with by the wider society.

FAIRNESS

Tweet 4	The only way elections can be 'hacked' are through postal voting but strangely the left don't want to discuss this.....
Tweet 5	German woman has home raided by police, ordered to pay 1300 euro fine for sharing an anti-migrant meme on Facebook.
Tweet 6	Do that all you like but 1400 years of Caliphates, Sunni vs Shia, conquering 2/3 of the Christian world, etc all say you are clueless.
Tweet 7	There have been at least 100 physical attacks on Trump supporters. The mainstream media have ignored them all.
Tweet 8	Is “phobia” only a valid criticism of those who oppose say , gay agenda being forced on public by government but not for anti jihadi ?

Fig. 20 Tweets displaying the Moral Foundation of Fairness.

After the Finsbury Park Mosque terror attack on the 19th, there was a surge of Fairness-related tweets, followed by a pause for couple of days, and another increase in these tweets on the 22nd and 23rd of June. For instance, Tweet 6, posted on the day of the Finsbury Park Mosque attack, explains historically and tries to justify through reasonable exposition that the other person does not know the true nature of Islam. It is indirectly trying to justify a proportionate response to a religion that wishes to conquer and prosper as a result of strife. The tweet does not offend but simply underlines the lack of information and the innocence of the left. Moreover, lack of attention by the media is often lamented as not fair. The struggles of Trump supporters were used in the aftermath of the Finsbury Park Mosque attack to justify indirectly what was happening in the UK (Tweet 7). This tweeting fuels the conspiracy urges of the radical right as there is a clear undertone evoking the global conspiracy of the left opposed by conservatives everywhere.

What is considered to be hypocrisy by those who oppose hate speech is often used to create mental scenarios in which the reader wonders why one type of opposition is acceptable while another is not (Tweet 8). This can assume persuasive attributes as the, usually conservative, reader is encouraged to embrace these beliefs that are naturally suited to him or her.

During June 2017 the MF of Fairness was weaponized by users using at least some reason driven arguments that lamented the lack of a sense of justice and transparency displayed by their opponents. What was not said was the most dangerous aspect of such tweets. This process could easily have turned into a misplaced sense of victimhood, or even the perpetuation of conspiracy theories.

3.5.3 The Moral Foundation of Loyalty

Many tweets are characterized by the Moral Foundation of Loyalty. Emerging in June 2017 were several recognizable threads such as collaboration, and allegiance to common identity, that channeled narratives found in many tweets as digital banners of a shared belonging.

Several Loyalty-related tweets emerge as statements of identity in posts in which a sense of "Britishness" is pervasive (see Fig. 21: Tweets 9, 11 and 15). History is co-opted to establish a common ground for all radical right causes that need to emulate the example of the national heroes who preceded them. This *British* need to fight and defeat the enemy was already widespread prior to the London Bridge attack.

The Moral Foundation of Loyalty is central to conservatives, as it highlights the solidity and the sense of belonging to a tribe. The tweets that were categorized as such were numerous and showed some clear patterns. On the 2nd and 3rd of June, Loyalty related tweets were numerous, evidencing the "bubbling up" of community cohesion in the radical right in the wake of the Spring terrorist attack. This bubbling up of Loyalty was already present and ready to expand at the first opportunity. that turned out to be provided by the London Bridge incident. The same process was set in motion on the 10th and on the 11th for the march in Manchester that galvanized the radical right, both online and in the non-virtual world. Unsurprisingly, the Finsbury Park Mosque terror attack cemented the cohesiveness of the radical right and from the 19th to the 22nd there was a heavy focus on communality in the tweets that united users in pursuit of the protection of their own against unjust accusations or in showing common allegiance. It might be thought be that hate crimes committed by the radical right would disunite the conservatives who were united in online spaces. Tweets tagged with Loyalty during June 2017 in fact served to create cohesion amongst the radical right. They apparently served to simplify issues and to clearly establish boundaries between "us" and "them". Events in the non-virtual world seem to be able to augment Loyalty related tweeting to unify users around their political tribe and maintain a shared communicative direction.

The Loyalty related tweets reflected an "I stand with my own" approach as in Tweet 10. In Tweet 11, the defence of a conservative candidate is related on the fact that he is a conservative. Any criticism is deflected as being within the law that shows loyalty to the candidate, to their nation and to their political tribe.The tweet, in fact, makes use of an article from *The Guardian*, twisting it in order to defend a Conservative politician, Peter Cuthbertson. Cuthbertson had claimed that a promiscuity record was relevant in the case of rape victims. This attracted criticism and calls for his resignation, in particular from the Left. The tweet fabricated a defence based uniquely on the politician's affiliation and tribal allegiance without focusing on the case itself.

Furthermore, in relation to Loyalty there was a widespread use of “hashtag tweets” to mark users’ digital territory. Brexit was portrayed as a completely and utterly British phenomenon and was displayed by hashtags such;"#FullBritishBrexit that were easy to spread and use as flag posts.

Tweets in this category displayed antagonism towards other political tribes (the left) and were expressed in terms linked to sport. Tweet 11 encouraged others to outdo the other side in terms of hate and fanaticism. Tweet 12 uses a “mutual radicalization” technique by applying the same logic that the radical right uses when talking about Islam, to its own tribe. The tweet communicates that others simplify and do not want to comprehend us so we, as a community, must answer in kind.

The last theme that was common in this category of Loyalty was found in the way that news was framed. In framing news, users tried to portray a fracture in the other tribes while creating cohesion in the radical right. The other political tribes are cast as composed by factions, some reasonable and some irredeemable, and as a result these other tribes are portrayed as indecisive and weak.

LOYALTY	
Tweet 9	I am a Christian. Fighting for those that hate us, see Talmud, is not in my M.O. also British who's family fought the fucks in Palestine
Tweet 10	Labour moans that a Conservative Party candidate is... a conservative. His “rape” views are actually legal views.
Tweet 11	They fight us with all the hate & stupidity of true fanaticism . We have to be willing to more dedicated than them
Tweet 12	The media, politicians & UK Left will use #Finsbury ParkPark to say that if you criticize Islamism, Jihad or Islam itself - you're a terrorist
Tweet 13	The New ‘Uncle Toms’: Islamists and Leftists Target Reformists and Ex-Muslims With Racial Epithet

Fig. 21 Tweets displaying the Moral Foundation of Loyalty.

3.5.4 The Moral Foundation of Authority

The Moral Foundation of Authority is central for the radical right as it justifies radical right behavior and values. Tweeting around Authority is often subtle, playing a supporting role to Loyalty and Sanctity. Authority based tweets play, sometimes indirectly, around politicians, popular users and values. It is often a challenge to disentangle the direction in which the poster wants to shift their support. The majority of tweets displaying Authority are evenly spread over this timeline. On the 5th,

in the fallout of the London Bridge attack, the tweets based on Authority are intended to justify, based on a higher value or respectable opinion, the surge of more radical tweets. On the 11th, somewhat surprisingly, after a peak of Loyalty related tweets had been reached, the same process took place using Authority, to cement the reasons for the march that took place on the same day. The day before the Finsbury Park Mosque attack, on the 18th, Authority tweets hit a peak in the radical right twitter sphere, with a sort of prescience. Similar to the tweets about the London Bridge terror attack, on the 22nd another peak of Authority tweets was reached. Again, these tweets appear to justify the Finsbury Park Mosque attack. This process once again was driven by the need to support pro-radical right politicians and users as a reaction to a far right fueled lone wolf terror attack.

A common type of Authority related tweet is to quote politicians and personalities affiliated to the radical right. In this way, both the message and the politician's name are spread online to gather support for a cause, as we can see in Tweets 14 and 16 (Fig. 22) posted by prominent politicians. The Authority Moral Foundation flows both ways as many tweets in the dataset tried to attack an opposing politician or a public figure solely for their political allegiance. At the same time, Conservative and radical right members were defended for their belonging to the 'correct' tribe.

Sometimes, as in Tweet 15, this happens through the use of a curse word, in this case 'bullshit' that demeans the author of the tweet under criticism thus apparently the whole argument of the targeted party can be summed up with this exclamation. Character assassination is the other facet of criticizing the Authority of the other tribe. In this case the personality and the raison d'être of the named politician is summed up in one line to communicate to one's base that this is all he is and all he will ever be (Tweet 16).

A tendency towards self-promotion was present in the tweets, for example, in Tweet 17, the author says "Yes I did that but I'm better than you". Success, for conservatives, seems to be a "take all" meter of personal valour, the validity of the author's argument and their moral standing. Some tweets attempt to shift the online conversation further towards the right by criticizing Conservative politicians, simplifying their world view and then offering an open ended question with an implied radical right answer. "Moderate views mean apocalypse and therefore they lack legitimate authority" was a theme the day before the Finsbury Park Mosque attack (Tweet 18).

News, both from popular moderate outlets such as the BBC and radical right sources was spread when it reinforced the argument proposed by the author of the tweet. The apology reported in Tweet 19 was posted in the aftermath of Finsbury Park Mosque terror attack, and tries to oppose the "witch hunt" of those deemed to be hate preachers, using the reputation of the source. By defending a wrongly accused moderate, the radical right as a whole was portrayed as vindicated. Apologies from the BBC,

seen by these users as a left wing media source, are enough for these users to frame the story as one of a false accusation and a successive redemption.

AUTHORITY	
Tweet 14	@paulnuttallukip To suggest people didn't know what they were voting for on June 23 is farcical
Tweet 15	Don't end savagery because the savages will hate us more is a bullshit argument
Tweet 16	Worst possible start. Gavin Barwell is a staunch Remainer who abuses those who want to control immigration.
Tweet 17	Yeah i had no time coz I was filming all day then gigging in Sheffield, not my fault I'm a much more successful comedian than you
Tweet 18	T-May let in all the “migrants”, violently opposed Brexit, wants police state & censorship for all UK subjects. Do you want this?
Tweet 19	APOLOGY: BBC say sorry to @DouglasKMurray after he was smeared as a 'hate preacher'.

Fig. 22 Tweets displaying the Moral Foundation of Authority.

Authority used as a Moral Foundation is a relevant dimension for Conservatives and the radical right, to show that their arguments have more weight and that they are better constructed than those of the Left. The continued sniping at the Authority of the opposite political tribe was as common as the building up of their side’s prominent personalities and argument. A few days after a tragic event, these peaks in Authority related tweeting seemed to be necessary both to demonstrate that the current direction of the radical right accounts was indeed correct and to justify, retroactively, more virulent and more rash tweets by these tweeters.

3.5.5 The Moral Foundation of Sanctity

This Moral Foundation, Sanctity, is the centerpiece of the analysis here, given its connection to the notion of Disgust. During June 2017 Sanctity was noticeable in the tweeting of the accounts analysed, although it was unevenly spread. There were significant peaks and lows, as Sanctity related tweets beginning with a few became numerous and then dropped down to low numbers again. The biggest surge of Sanctity related tweets was after the London Bridge terrorist attack appearing from the 4th to 7th of June in high numbers. It seems that Sanctity becomes a central concern when there is a feeling of defilement in the radical right base that has both a similar and contrary reaction. When disgust

towards minorities is confirmed by a catastrophic event, such as a terrorist attack committed by radical Muslims, the posting seemed to increase dramatically. Radicalism breeds radicalism, at least in online spaces. The other peak in tweets, while similar, happened after the Finsbury Park Mosque terrorist attack and it was much more fragmented. While the users were united in their disgust towards the radical Muslim attack, in this case many tweets were split between condemning the careless police, the leftwing that created the conditions for the emergence of far right lone wolves and the state that allowed this state of affairs due to uncontrolled immigration. A few offered condemnation of the lone wolf defined as a loser. On the 20th, some of the accounts tweeted focused on Sanctity but then the number of tweets dropped and went up again on the 24th and on the 26th, as significant hate crimes occurred. Sanctity has a "white cells" function online, confirming the behavioral immune system hypotheses presented earlier (Shaller and Park, 2011), apparently in response to the need for purification.

Several tweets with a Sanctity MF just signaled the need to create physical distance between the author of the tweet and their target. In Tweet 20, (Fig. 23) the use of caps lock highlights that all Muslims, because they are Muslims, have to be expelled as they "contaminate" the nation with their presence. The same use of upper case is also present in Tweets 23 and 24.

The experience of Sanctity as a MF is not restricted locally, as it is evident that some tweets were directed towards US liberals. These political and social views were capable of evoking disgust in these tweeters. Certain sacred themes of the radical right, such as gun use, functioned as symbols around which the whole conservative political tribe could unite (Tweets 21 and 22). Calls for harsher punishments also characterized Sanctity related tweets, with some suggesting cruelty and calling this out using swearing. Use of excrement related categorizations, e.g., "shitty", was fairly common to show material and social degradation as different parts of the same process (Tweet 22).

The mention of certain festivities of inclusion in a few tweets, a couple of days after Finsbury Park Mosque attack, highlights the necessity for exclusion of certain groups. Similarly to the way that some Loyalty related tweets functioned, certain circumstances evoked Sanctity related tweets based on the idea of sacred ground and the need for the exclusion from the state on a group basis. Immigrants, Muslims and other minorities were considered in several tweets as an infection in the body of Great Britain that should have been dealt with deportation.

Certain symbols and flags considered sacred symbols of the other tribe had to be defiled online. The disgust for a flag that means the killing of Jews, as claimed in Tweet 24 is magnified by its free display on London streets. Caps lock is used to underline the most horrifying aspects of the offending symbol. Some practices that are considered as "other" but are not directly damaging for their own

tribe's members are still considered to be repellent. Deportations, hatred and refusal of people that are of another culture or religion are justified by their practices that are perceived by tweeters to be horrible. Empathy towards a vulnerable third party, such as animals in this case, is used to motivate the perception of the utter inhumanity of the targeted group (Tweet 25).

Tweet 20	Simple really. Deport ALL Muslims with immediate effect
Tweet 21	Why yes you disgusting. Ignorant deluded victim hater . Dr. John Lott, " More Guns, Less Crime
Tweet 22	They should have tasered him immediately ffs. Our police are being restricted by shit equipment and politically correct protocols!!!
Tweet 23	Our message to 'refugees' is simple; NO WAY! You will NOT make Europe home.
Tweet 24	Apart from a section 13 law being openly broken here! This disgusting flag represents the MURDER OF JEWS! being displayed on #London streets
Tweet 25	Yet we allow Halal which is the most disgusting painful way to kill an animal possible, suffering while it bleeds out.

Fig. 23 Tweets displaying the Moral Foundation of Sanctity.

The Moral Foundation of Sanctity is crucially evoked during periods of intense activity, both online and in the non-virtual world of the more radicalized groups in the Conservative tribe. The majority of Sanctity related tweets were published as a reaction to what was felt as a contamination of their nation and values, namely the London Bridge terror attack and the Finsbury Park Mosque attack.

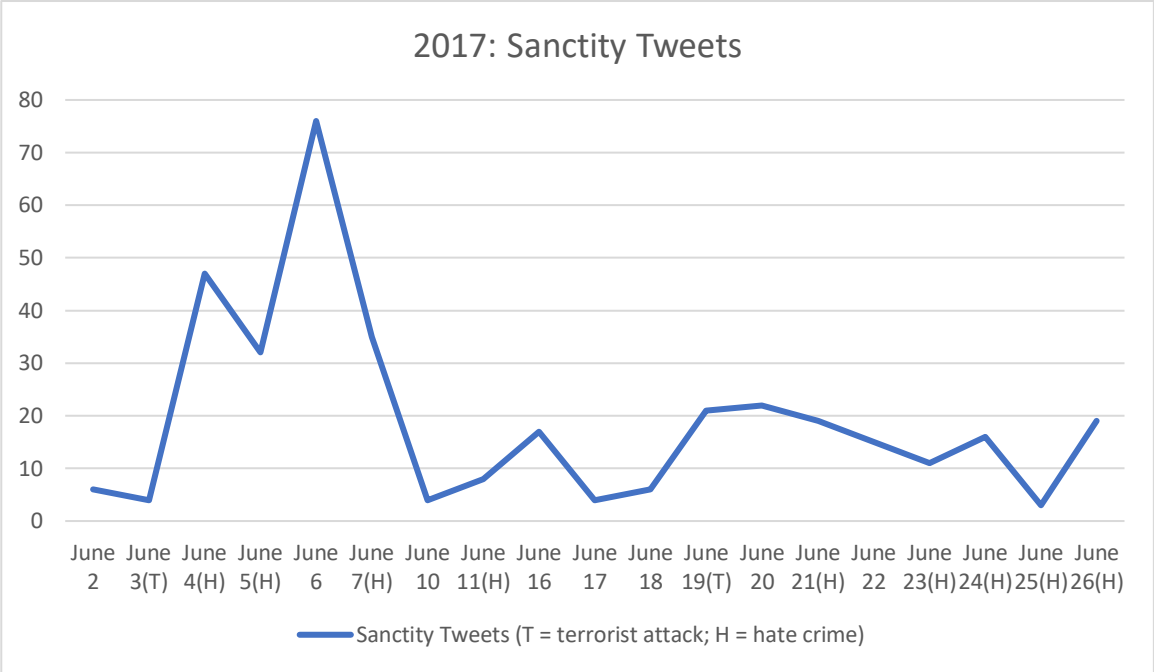


Fig. 24 Patterns of Tweets displaying the Moral Foundation of Sanctity for 2017.

There is a need, expressed online, to separate, expel and deport those that, because of personal qualities or practices, are deemed disgusting and "culturally unholy". During June 2017, terrorist attacks did not exclusively evoke fear and anger in the selected accounts, but also highlighted a Sanctity driven response channeled through the expression of disgust. In the next section, tweets that contain humour will be analysed with the central theme being the elusive nature of humour.

3.6 Humour

Humour was extremely pervasive in the June 2017 dataset. The radical right used it extensively for amusement, propaganda and to score political points. Furthermore, humorous tweets were mostly stable in quantity throughout the month.

3.6.1 Humour as a Moral Foundation

Tweets related as humorous were consistently characterized by a Moral Foundation, "the Conservative Moral Mindset" that Haidt (2012) proposes, based on Loyalty, Authority and Sanctity, that is persistent among Conservatives that have been discussed at length in Section 3.5. In other words, humour always occurred simultaneously to a Moral Foundation in the collected datasets as tweets followed the dynamics of the day and enhanced the discussion on whatever topic was salient on a particular day.

I will describe the patterns of how Moral Foundations characterized humorous tweets collected for June 2017 for each day throughout the month focusing on those containing the Moral Foundation that was predominant on a particular day. As discussed previously, (see 3.5) the London Bridge terrorist attack provoked a surge of Sanctity and Loyalty related humorous tweets on the 4th and 5th of June. The 6th June and the 7th June were consistent for Sanctity related humorous tweets but Authority replaced Loyalty as the secondary Moral Foundation with many humorous tweets arguing about who was in charge and should act during during this crisis (see 3.5). It seems that while the first reaction of accounts was to unite in a tribal 'us versus them' attitude coated in a discourse based on purification and the rejection of the Other, the discussion about who should be leading the crisis became central immediately after (see 3.5). It would appear that the amalgamation between Humour and Sanctity, as well as the link with the feelings of disgust of this Moral Foundation, in a situation of perceived societal peril highlights the connection of the two (see 1.4.4).

June 10th, the day before the "anti-hate" march organized by the members of the British radical right in Manchester produced tweets that were strongly based on Loyalty and Authority. Tweets with a Sanctity theme diminished in a few days — it seems that radical right users avoided it while preparing for their own mobilization. On the 11th of June, Sanctity related tweets became the secondary group of tweets and those related to Authority were in the decisive majority. The skirmishes throughout the day with antifascist activists can explain this slight peak of Sanctity related communication.

The communication phase online evolved further towards an 'us versus them' situation after the Finsbury Park Mosque terrorist attack. The humorous tweets on the 19th, the day of the attack, and the following days were strongly characterized by the MF of Fairness. Therefore, the difference in comparison to the response of these same accounts between the London Bridge and the Finsbury Park Mosque attacks was marked. The first attack was characterised by a wave of purification and violence based tweets, the second was characterized by cries for justice and equity. A smaller group of tweets on the 19th were based on Sanctity as a reaction to the left wing and the state. Nevertheless, on the 20th and for a few days after that, Loyalty related tweets accompanied the majority of Fairness related tweets. Hate crimes became an everyday occurrence from the 24th to 26th and Sanctity related humourous tweets predominated on those days.

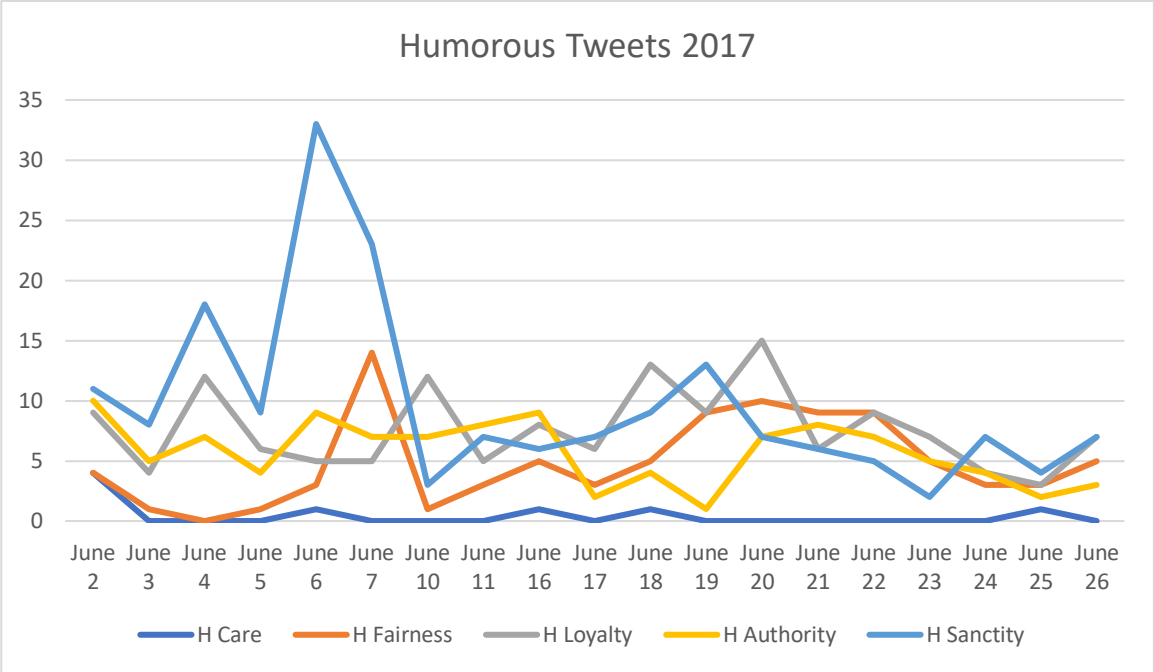


Fig. 25 Patterns of Humorous Tweets for 2017.

Humour, during the tweets collected for June 2017, was used as a tool to amplify tweeting seeped in Conservative Moral Foundations in parallel to the hate crimes that had occurred during the month to push certain issues towards the digital milieu.

3.6.2 Uncertain Humour

Understanding the question of what is humorous content online was one of the biggest challenges I faced when interpreting the data given the unreliability of the politically driven selected accounts. It was not always patently clear whether the tweet was humorous or not. In fact, the ambiguity of whether something was humorous or not in the selected accounts became the central focus of this study because tweets which displayed uncertain humour were posted in significant numbers compared to those that were clearly humorous.

Out of 598 humorous tweets for June 2017, while 369 were clearly humorous, that is they contained wordplay of some sort, and 57 were clearly serious, 172 contained what I would like to label uncertain humour.

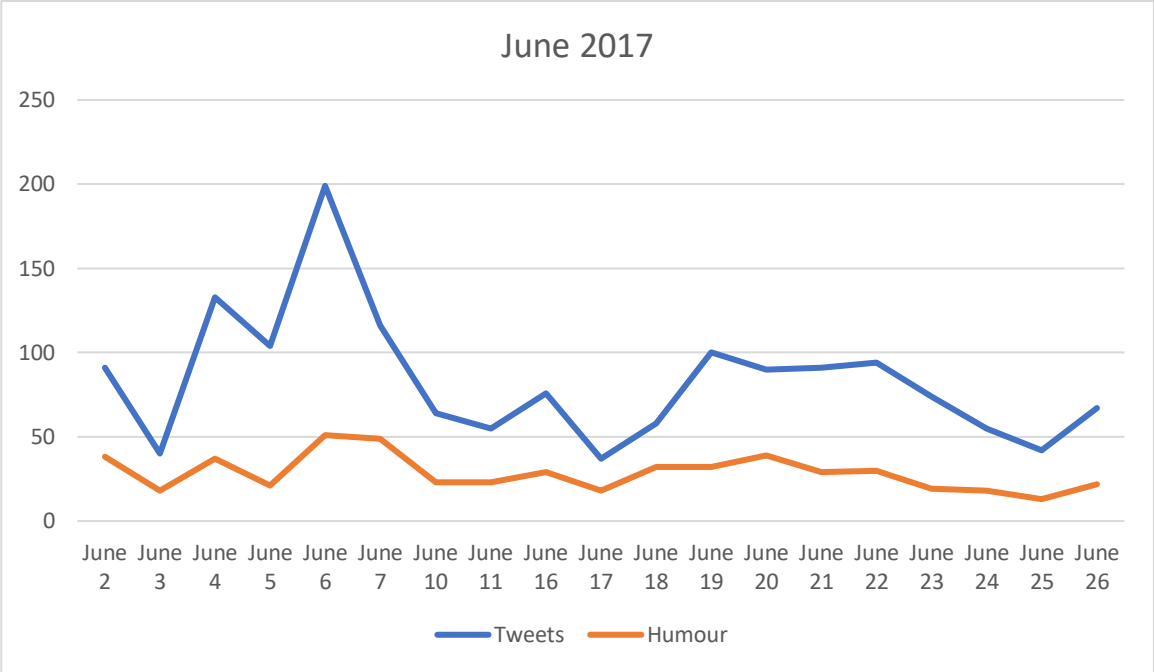


Fig. 26 The comparison between Serious and Humorous Tweets for 2017.

In this section, I focus on aspects of tweets posted by the British radical right that have different possible interpretations, one of which is humorous. The humorous nature of these tweets could not easily be classified and categorized. They were not clear examples of wordplay or irony and were tricky and difficult to decipher, I classified such tweets as being"uncertainly humorous". Tweets that were ambiguous may well be more impactful as a naive user reading the tweet might be more vulnerable to ideological content given the difficulty of interpretation and the resulting sense of doubt emerging from the tweet.

3.6.3 Emotionally charged (humorous) tweets

The most crucial aspect of "uncertain humour" was its emergence in tweets that were highly charged emotionally and that contained evocative language. These tweets contain, clearly, the strongest potential to be misinterpreted and "mis-shared" by other users due to the lack of clarity of intent that may be interpreted in different ways. This "uncertain humour" seems to function both as a vehicle and a tool for ideological contamination in reconstituting meaning for both friendly and targeted users.

I have grouped tweets that display a degree of uncertainty of humour into four major categories: namely those that target members of a different group than that to which the tweeter belongs, those

that target a particular individual, those that adopt a question format and finally, those that predict a nefarious future.

The first group of tweets that displays uncertainty of humour blurred the defining qualities of the community of the person posting in opposition to other groups. The following tweeters (Fig. 27) used humour to target a group, i.e. religious minorities, immigrants and political opposition to enhance negative qualities associated with that community. In the following six tweets the commentary and description of a group usually stands balanced on a precipice between moralising and heavy-handed humour. Moreover, in these examples, humour seems to allow the tweeter to criticize, insult and engage in caustic irony whilst providing an easy way out of criticism because they are (or might be) only joking.

Tweet n.	Text	Account Type	Moral Foundation
Tweet 26	*Most prideful English believe in controlled & tough immigration laws. Most Scottish Nationalists are open borders SJW pro-EU Marxist types.*	alt influencer	authority
Tweet 27	*If Nazis, Stalinists & Maoists added 'phobia' to their propaganda arsenal would Churchill have been ostracised by #CulturallyMarxistMedia*	alt news	authority
Tweet 28	*WSJ, You know nothing. It certainly was not any radical muslim but an oppressed brown skinned man wearing a dress*	alt influencer	sanctity
Tweet 29	*Green targets, windfarms, imprisoning Scots for jokes & "hate*	alt influencer	authority

	speech", Named Person, support for Palestine, collectivist....SNP = LEFT WING		
Tweet 30	*Along with water, a board and a few electrodes, strategically positioned. Although how long do you need to "interview" 3500 known jihadis*	alt influencer	sanctity
Tweet 31	*People you need to think before you post ridiculous shit on social media. This idiot got 20 months. Easy pickings*	alt news	fairness

Fig. 27 Uncertainly humorous tweets that target specific groups.

In Tweet 26 the author builds up an opposition, without offering solid data, between the English, who are positively proud, and the Scottish, who are somewhat negatively labelled as Nationalists. A political group who call themselves Nationalists are supposed to defend borders, stop immigration and fight against the EU as the British Nationalists do. The irony used by the author lies in the fact that they portray the Scottish Nationalists as left wingers fighting for open borders and who are pro-EU. This characterization is clearly excessive because they use the term "Marxist". Someone naive reading this tweet might be unsure whether the Tweet is a serious attack on Scottish Nationalists or a humorous jab that plays on giving this group exaggerated characteristics from a supposedly opposite ideological viewpoint. This tweet is characterized by the MF of Authority as the author tries to establish the values that should have most importance for Nationalists.

Famous characters in British history are often adopted by users. In Tweet 27 the legitimacy of the media is deconstructed by underlining that even ideal figures of Britishness such as Churchill would be under attack by the present establishment, that is evidently too 'politically correct' for the author. Readers cannot be sure whether the author is joking around the fact that every opposing voice is that

of a Nazi, Stalinist or Maoist or whether they are being serious. Regardless, irony allows the author of the tweet to plant this thought in the reader's mind. The MF of Authority emerges in this tweet because it outlines those groups that are hostile and underlines the importance of national heroes such as Churchill. The author, by using the hashtag #CulturallyMarxistMedia at the end of the tweet, invites the reader to spread the idea that the media are Marxist.

The opening of Tweet 28 mimics the famous line from a TV series, *Game of Thrones*, that became a catchphrase, namely the line spoken by the girlfriend of heroic Jon Snow who says "you know nothing Jon Snow…". This catchphrase is widely used as an ironic indication when someone ignores critical information. Furthermore, the fact that the tweet is couched in a catchphrase pushes it towards non seriousness for the users who are in on the *Game of Thrones* reference. The tweet can be interpreted as a serious suggestion that an action, not reported in the tweet itself, was not carried out by a radical Muslim but by a man in a dress. This description meets all the stereotypes often used to ridicule Muslims. Moreover, pointing out that Muslims wear dresses serves to feminize them and, ironically, portray them as lesser men. An uncertain tweet of this kind, given all these possible interpretations, marks Muslims as being all the same, possibly making naive users doubt whether the author of the tweet is serious or only joking. The same process applies to more political tweets. The MF of Sanctity also characterizes this tweet as it portrays a minority by stereotypical and derogatory qualities that evoke disgust.

Tweet 29 uses an emotionally charged description to get its point across. The author of the tweet builds up statements to a crescendo describing how the SNP is planning to achieve what a Marxist party would want for Scotland. By framing the tweet in this way, an apparently Nationalist party is doing the opposite of what other similar parties in Europe are striving for. The goals listed in this tweet are far closer to a stereotypical and one dimensional caricature of communism than to modern moderate left-wing parties, a description that by itself could be interpreted as humorous by a naive user reading the tweet. The use of the word 'collectivist' is in particular almost comedic in the 21st Century because no major political player in Great Britain would openly endorse collectivist policies as they are considered archaic and ineffective. Nevertheless, the accounts under srutiny usually frame the whole leftwing political spectrum as if it was solidly Marxist in its goals and intentions, creating an uncertainly humorous effect. This tweet characterizes the MF of Authority as it tries to frame the foundational values of the SNP. This portrayal of the moderate leftwing as an exaggerated Marxist distortion is an attempt at ridicule will probably be humorous for Conservative and radical right users who believe strongly in an opposite vision of society.

Tweet 30 proposes torture as an acceptable practice if applied to those that are defined as not being human. The innuendo about electrocuting the genitals of jihadis creates ambiguity about the intentions of the author of the tweet, as not all the users who read the tweet will chuckle at the idea of torture. On the other hand, the author's own group, Conservatives and radical right users, might approve of the idea and find the visualization of torture against those who they see as evil as entertaining and even funny, responding to a sadistic expression of humour. The second part of the tweet makes it clear that it is addressing torture, especially given the emphasis on the word interview. Nevertheless, some naive users reading the tweet might not see this meaning or think the author of the tweet is only joking. This tweet is characterized by the MF of Sanctity as it describes torture, a clear violation of ethical barriers, in a positive light against a hostile minority. If the word interview is indeed interpreted as torture, the second part of the tweet serves as a rhetorical question that could be seen as ironic.

This sort of ambiguous humour was also used as a defensive strategy. Tweet 31 semi-seriously warns fellow radical right users to be careful in their selection of content and at the same time creates distance between the stupid author of the tweet and the more intelligent members of the group. The user who was caught is immediately discarded as an "idiot," thus losing their acceptance by the other members of this virtual group. The last two words, "easy pickings" are a warning that there is a hunt on for the radical right. The term "easy pickings" refers to the idea that even the stupid police could catch someone who was still more stupid. Calling the other user's activity "easy pickings" diminishes the importance and humanity of that user, as it constructs them as easy prey to a bigger animal (the police) always on the lookout for the weak to pick on. The MF of Fairness is the most suited for this tweet as the treatment of radical right users by the police is described by the author of the tweet.

Patterns of tweets in which the user targets other groups contained several interesting features. First, they employ hidden uncertainly humorous features and witticisms, that the reader might not pick up on a first reading as they are not obvious. This seems to be an attempt to shift and question what is considered widely acceptable to a readership by employing an altered description of a group (in this case, all Muslims), highlighting its unacceptable behaviours, and constructing a set of negative characteristics which would then justify the necessity of torture. These sorts of tweets carry different implications, some of which are humorous. This tricky composition plants some doubt as to the interpretation of the author's intention and may in some cases slip into radical notions that a naïve user might absorb. The less tuned in reader might be surprised at the underlying content of a tweet that is presented as if nothing strange is going on. The goal of this kind of manipulation using innuendo and ambiguity seems to present a "new normal". This is what makes the radical right's humorous tweets discussing other groups so dangerous. An inattentive or naïve reader might absorb

emotional and ideological stances uncritically, because of the rhetorical strategies used by the tweeters.

The second group of tweets from 2017 tended to focus on discussing a single user, i.e. a journalist, a famous writer or even a far right terrorist, describing his or her qualities, attributes and behavior. This way of characterizing one individual was often achieved by tarring the target with the brush of a group, for example, describing J.K Rowling as a "liberal luvvie". The tweeter tries to frame a group, in this case, "the liberal luvvies", by being both ironic and critical of them. In this and other similar tweets, posters channeled humorous uncertainty to describe targeted individuals as well as the groups to which they belong. The use of specific words t to describe users and organizations might be interpreted either as a serious criticism or as an attempt at ridicule, depending on the reader's interpretation. A salient feature of these tweets was the impossibility to determine with absolute certainty if the descriptions were intended to be read as serious or as humorous exaggerations.

Tweet n.	Text	Account Type	Moral Foundation
Tweet 32	*This is PICAphobia and hate speech. You are making fun of a disability*	free speech influencer	care
Tweet 33	*Is strange how facts upset islamofascism apologists like Mehdi 'Kafir are no better than cattle' Hasan...*	alt influencer	sanctity
Tweet 34	*Tell mama is watching and ready to announce the rise in islamiphobia ! Kerching another few million to combat hate crime ! #LondonBridge*	alt news	loyalty
Tweet 35	*Westmonster asked why no terror investigation. Police: "Can't go into that level of detail"*	trad news	fairness

Tweet 36	*READ | @Nigel_Farage slams liberal luvvie JK Rowling after her disgusting attempts to exploit #FinsburyPark tragedy.*	trad news	sanctity
Tweet 37	*All this loon achieved was killing an old man and giving even more ammo to anti British haters to come down on us*	alt news	fairness

Fig. 28 Uncertainly humorous tweets that target individuals.

Some tweets are about the authors of the tweets themselves such as Tweet 32 in which the tweeter places themselves in a positive light claiming to be a victim of hate speech. Picaphobia, also known as Fotophobia, is a strong feeling of discomfort felt by people who avoid uploading photos of themselves online. The writer refers to this condition as though it was a serious one so they could be mocking victimhood narratives online in which people claim that they suffer from phobias and have been abused, sometimes without any concrete evidence. The framing of the tweet could be either seen as humorous or as a serious protest. The author of the tweet seemingly shows empathy through the MF of Care. The impossibility of a definitive interpretation might lead to a fellow Conservative user to respond humorously while a naive user might be sympathetic to the author's struggles.

The rhetoric in Tweet 33 implies that apologists of Islamofascism do not get their facts straight. The Tweet refers to journalist Mehdi Hasan and includes the Arabic word *Kafir*, meaning 'infidel', framing Hasan as someone who considers westerners to be animals. Highlighting the most negative associations of a targeted group, such as Muslims, in this case by smearing a well known Muslim journalist, was a common trope in my data. This characterization often occurs by giving the target an offensive nickname that, in this case, may not be accurate about the journalist's views, yet now he is labelled an infidel by association. The author's words and attack at a minority considered hostile, and use of disgust fueled metaphors, can be characterized by MF of Sanctity.

In tweets structured like Tweet 34, the reader is positioned so as to be torn between acknowledging the absurdity of spending millions on preventing hate crimes and noting that at the same time terrorist attacks are happening all over the country. The *Tell MAMA* organization is framed in terms of a greedy individual. Moreover, a mocking attitude is visible in the punctuation itself through the use of exclamation marks and onomatopoeia, employing the word 'kerching', a slang term for the sound of a cash register or a fruit machine paying out. By underlining the urgency of the content through exclamation marks, the author exaggerates the importance of to the tweet and creates an ironic effect. The use of the term,'kerching' implies that organizations such as *Tell MAMA* that fight hate crimes are sell outs and they are interested only in making money. This tweet could, charitably, also be interpreted as an indirect argument for a balanced investigation into Islamophobia, without ill intent. The moral perspective of the reader is decisive in interpreting the tweet. The possible responses could be that the tweet was humorous, serious, thoughtful or complex. Knowing the background of the user allows the analyst to make an educated guess as to what this user intended. As well as uncertain humour, the MF of Loyalty emerges as it frames an organization as treasonous to the interests of the British citizens. Tweet 35 contains a built-in dialogue consisting of a question and answer that simplifies the topic and makes the author's stance quite clear, in its implication. The account name, 'Westmonster,' adds humorous charge to the tweet, i.e. Westminster/Westmonster; some users might agree with the author that the Police do not want to protect British citizens while others might perceive see the term as ironic. The Police's response itself is not a matter for humour but the tweeter implies that there is bias and an unwillingness to investigate terror threats. This framing contains both conspiratorial and absurd elements because officially the Police are expected to be interested in fighting terrorists. The wording itself could be potentially interpreted as being ironic, using a cliché that is sometimes used as an excuse for not providing further information. This tweet casts doubt on the efficacy and credibility of the Police. The MF of Fairness characterizes this tweet because it denounces the Police inaction and lack of intervention.

Tweet 36 employs emotionally charged language that projects disgust onto J. K. Rowling, author of the *Harry Potte*r books. She is seen by the author as capitalizing on the Finsbury Park Mosque terror attack, by posting what is considered as liberal propaganda in response. Specifically, the use of the word "luvvie" can change the sense of the whole utterance because if it is used as a condescending insult, making the tone of the tweet serious. On the other hand, several users, in particular belonging to the Conservative and radical right digital tribes, could find the idea of Nigel Farage "slamming" someone funny, in particular a "luvvie," a widespread word to ridicule progressive users. A reader might simply laugh the tweet off, but, the Finsbury Park Mosque attack, and a few other hate crimes throughout the month, seemed to have resulted in a commentary by mainstream Conservatives and

even radical right circles that was focused on brushing off the perpetrator as an isolated case, a situation simply gone awry. The MF of Sanctity characterizes this tweet as the author tries to project disgust on a celebrity due to her actions after a tragedy.

Finally, Tweet 37 highlights the opinion that the Finsbury Park Mosque attacker's action functioned to empower those who opposed British nationalists and portray them as haters of the nation. The choice of the word, "loon", could suggest that the author is seriously calling the terrorist a lunatic or ridiculing him by indexing expressions such as "crazy as a loon". Furthermore, the author uses "all" and "achievement" as if implying on one hand that nothing can be achieved in this way but also that the attack has sabotaged the more intelligent actions of others on the right. The tweet is serious as well as humorous if the text is interpreted by users in the same group as the author. The attacker is characterized as crazy and stupid, because he has messed up the work of others who have the same ideology. The MF of Fairness is evoked in this tweet by the author as they describe the disadvantages of the actions of a terrorist after a terror attack for the rest of the rightwing movement.

These humorously uncertain tweets attempt to characterize a target but also enhance their own in-group goals by framing what are considered hostile and oppositional groups in a certain way. In almost all the tweets, especially the examples provided, there is never an absolute certainty about the intention that the author of the tweet meant to share. In-group knowledge often shapes the interpretation of the tweet itself, e.g. "Mehdi 'Kafirs are no better than cattle' Hassan", "Westmonster" and "luvvie". A casual reader cannot know whether the information in the tweet is presented in a certain way to achieve a goal or simply to confound. Likewise, the use of words, punctuation and innuendo often play an important role in blurring the message of the tweet making any definitive interpretation impossible. This hazy perspective allows users, journalists and politicians alike, to delegitimize the target of the tweet in a smooth, almost light hearted manner.

A third group of tweets are couched in question format. Questions concern issues deemed to be important. Fig. 29 provides a number of tweets in which a question shapes the positioning of the text and offers readers different possibilities on how to interpret the text of the tweet. The use of question marks creates uncertainty that is amplified by the tweet's emotional content, i.e. crimes committed by migrants, terrorism and leftwing radicalism, that the authors often play on. The person who posts the tweet frequently asks questions in a way that suggests an answer but also adds possible doubts about what the tweet was all about. The position of the question mark in the text and therefore its timing could also evoke doubts about the humorous nature of the tweet. The question might either be serious or ironic and it is difficult to discern the two throughout the data. Ultimately the intent, and thus the preferred interpretation of the tweet could be to read it as ambiguous although given the

synchronization between online posting and real life intentions of a politically minded tweeter, it is safe to say that the intent is likely to be that of casting doubt on the actions of the metropolitan police, Muslims, the left, terrorists, etc.

Tweet n.	Text	Account Type	Moral Foundation
Tweet 38	*Gang raped in Covent garden. Where were the MET? Scouring twitter for hate speech*	alt news	sanctity
Tweet 39	*Should we ban women from cycling so as not to offend potential terrorists? Actual attitude of some leftists is not far removed from this.*	free speech influencer	sanctity
Tweet 40	*hey reezy, are u one of these muslim sympathizers. Rather sick wouldn't you agree???*	alt influencer	sanctity
Tweet 41	*Exactly. Good point. They were REAL refugees, these Jihadis are being shipped in by our Gov, for what? So they can rape and pillage?*	alt influencer	sanctity
Tweet 42	*Just need to kill em faster & in Much greater quantity . Surely all the EU "migrants" want to go home & fight for Islam , right? Target rich*	alt influencer	sanctity

Tweet 43	*Please , stop catering to eco-marxists and go produce some real fuel & feedstock for mankind as always. How much does this add per gallon ?*	alt influencer	loyalty

Fig. 29 Uncertainly humorous tweets that include questions.

Tweet 38 poses a question and provides an answer with a strong rhetorical bias. The question is intended to alert the reader to a bad and ridiculous situation by linking a horrible crime to the lack of attention paid by the police. Moreover, the author mentions the place where the gang rape happened implying that if it happened in a public and much frequented place such as Covent Garden it could have happened anywhere. The role of law enforcement is clearly criticized in this tweet. The author could be ridiculing the police, by stating that they waste their time doing something useless, such as stopping hate speech on Twitter, when terrible crimes such as gang rapes occur which should be their remit. The verb used by the author, "scour", underscores the idea that the police meticulously track a relatively unimportant and rare process occurring online, while avoiding doing their supposed duty in real, non-virtual spaces. The tweet is characterized by the MF of Sanctity as it discusses a crime considered disgusting and the different sensibilities of the police on the matter.

The question in Tweet 39 is patently absurd as this juxtaposition proposing a similarity between women cyclists and terrorists could be seen as humorous. Moreover, it would be ridiculous to think that British society would really ban women from cycling due to demands of radical Muslim terrorists. Nevertheless, some Conservative and radical right users could see this tweet as a form of serious protest despite, or perhaps triggered by, the absurdity and thus humorous nature of the tweet. The last part of the tweet focuses on the left wing, framed by the author as being quite close in affiliation to terrorists and willing to cause damage to the rights of women. An unwary reader will be exposed to this strongly ideologically framed message without perhaps realizing that the tweeter is positioning readers by creatingan uncertainty as to the serious or humorous intention of the tweet. The author discusses a ban fueled by religious beliefs and hostile minorities characterizing the tweet with the MF of Sanctity MF.

Informal tweets such as 40 provide a seemingly casual greeting in the first part, the perception of which is reversed by the closing rhetorical question. This twist in tone could be interpreted as shaming and ridiculing users that are sympathetic towards Muslims. The author aggressively channels disgust,

by using the term “sick”, to pose a question to which they clearly suggest an answer. The tag structure of the question expects the answer “yes”. From the stance of the author, being a Muslim sympathizer is a disease. The tweet does not contain a real question, in the sense that it is a request for information, but rather, it an ironic enquiry. The author knows the answer, they are using the structure of the tweet to label another user “reezy”, i.e. ‘diseased’. Ending the question with three question marks underlines its strong emotional force. The final part of the tweet, then, is a rhetorical device that pretends to leave open whether the answer is yes or no. If a reader is sympathetic to the author’s views and they share the same values, this tweet can be read as a serious warning against the Muslim community, and its dangers to non-Muslims. The author defines being Muslim sympathizers equal to being sick evoking the MF of Sanctity.

Tweet 41 opens with two brief sentences followed by a long question that remarks, on the one hand that “real refugees” are arriving and then underlines that others who are defined as refugees, in reality are jihadists. The tweet rhetorically asks the government why terrorists are being imported into the United Kingdom. The second question further remarks that the only things these “Jihadists” do is “rape and pillage”. One interpretation of the post could be that while some refugees should indeed be helped, the real enemy is the Government that tries to bring masses of terrorists into the UK. The final question in the tweet clearly contains the suggestion that the UK government has an evil plan and it is actively encouraging terrorists to “rape and pillage”. This is clearly overstating the case, but the process of delegitimization of legal authority by sharing the message of uncontrolled immigration is a characteristic of radical right online content found in many of the tweets analysed. This tweet uses language to create a medieval image of enemy hordes attacking the populace, evoked by the expression “rape and pillage”. The tweet uses ironic exaggeration to create a sense of immediate danger, and alert the reader to the dangers of “Jihadi” refugees. This tweet too, is characterized by the MF of Sanctity as a minority is portrayed as disgusting and violent.

The question that closes Tweet 42 contributes to the tradition of dehumanizing targeted groups. The author first suggests that killing as many migrants as fast as possible would be a great idea and then feigns concern for “these migrants”, upon whom as a class they have already wished mass extermination, imagining they actually want to go “home” to the EU. They then add, after their apparent concern, that those who are still alive can fight in the EU “for Islam”, thereby entrenching the idea that these “migrants” are killers and fighters because they are Islamic. The tweet ends with the words “target rich” as the author implies that migrants are an easy and deserving target to be shot at, the implication being that they are less than human. Users who are in agreement with the author might appreciate and accept this invitation to join in the shooting of migrants as the tweeter has

already dehumanized them. The overall text of tweet could create uncertainty as to whether the author is serious or only joking. If a reader spends time trying to interpret this tweet, the author will have achieved their goal of having spread their message beyond the appreciation of their usual audience as well as those like-minded users who share their same values and read their tweets regularly. Once more, the MF of Sanctity characterizes this tweet as it dehumanizes migrants and Muslims with a clear invitation for violence and purification.

Tweet 43 conveys the idea that ideologically different political tribes, such as ecologists and leftwing radicals, are living outside the real world. In this case, the author suggests that ecologist and Marxist views are the same. The tweeter's goal is to underline the idea that readers should occupy themselves with the "real" economy, summed up as "fuel & feedstock". The author probably addresses those users that work in the real economy whose livelihoods will be damaged by the reforms of the economy in an ecological direction. The first sentence suggests that the addressee is serving "eco-marxists"; these are framed as if living in an alternative reality. The final question deals with the price of petrol or oil. The author implies that the work of "eco-Marxists" adds more and more to the price of petrol. It is not clear whether the author is seriously proposing a cost-benefit analysis or simply juxtaposing it as a serious concern, rather than using it as a rhetorical trick. Similarly to the other tweets presented in this category, because of their ambiguous presentation, it is not clear how serious the author is being. This caters for more than one kind of audience. The author might be attempting to get non-aligned readers on their side and to consider this point of view. The MF of Loyalty characterizes this tweet as it describes a struggle of ecologists and Marxists against rightwing realists.

The use of questions in this selection of tweets shows how accounts use what can be seen as a powerful rhetorical device. Uncertainty of stance emerges through the use of references that are easier to understand for users who are in on the joke or allusion, being a part of the group of the tweeter, rather than those who are outside the group. Authority and traditional morality, key arguments for Conservatives, are implicated in order to promote and spread specific values through tweets that were deliberately ambiguous regarding the seriousness or levity of the author. The questions themselves did not provide answers, but they certainly suggested them. This uncertainty might cause unaligned readers to think about the questions asked, and the construction of the tweet might lure them into the preferred response. The final group of tweets that employed ambiguity as to whether they were serious or humorous, or indeed both, focused on fear of the future. Posting about something that might take place in the future is a creative way for authors to, for example, imply that there may be bad consequences for activities or situations they consider to be wrong. These posts typically criticize what are framed as mainstream values, for example, if the UK continues to welcome refugees, they predict a terrible outcome in the future. The framing of many tweets followed the format that "if you

or the government do x, there is only one possible outcome, the one I predict". The tweets typically used colourful language in an attempt to create vivid and terrifying images of the what the future might hold. Readers might view such a drastic representation of the future as a serious warning, but others might simply see them as a source of humour, interpreting the tweets as somewhat ironic, or as exaggeration adopted for humorous purposes.

Tweet n.	Text	Account Type	Moral Foundation
Tweet 44	*Your daughter will marry an angry bearded muslim man.*	alt influencer	sanctity
Tweet 45	*Get that Marxist goo out of your ears before you become a zombie socialist or something else unhuman*	alt influencer	sanctity
Tweet 46	*Rubbish is the very least of their problems. They are surrounded by jihadi nutjobs raping all the local girls.*	alt influencer	sanctity
Tweet 47	*I'd worry about a "Christianiphobic" backlash or revenge attacks over #FinsburyPark but we already get blown up & shot by muslims anyway.*	alt influencer	sanctity
Tweet 48	*Well done. Can see this guy a week from now arrested drunk in bondage gear in the back of his gaymobile, ranting the internet is hate.*	alt influencer	loyalty

Tweet 49	*RealJamesWoods how low will msm & libtards go mr Woods its great watching them die could a new movie industry arise when sellout chinawood*	alt influencer	sanctity

Fig. 30 Uncertain humorous tweets that predict the future.

Tweets such as 44 attempt to use ideas of humiliation and disgust to perpetuate and spread negative stereotypes of Muslims. The vivid description of the Muslim man, with his stereotypically Muslim beard, invites readers to fight to stop the 'Islamification' of British society. The idea of marriage between the stereotyped Muslim man and the imaginary daughter of the reader, employs the trope that marriage to a Muslim would be a deep humiliation for the daughter, and thus to her father too. The implication, and threat, of the sexual relationship would serve to further humiliate the daughter, and by patriarchal association, her father. The stereotype is provocative in that it invites the reader to imagine such an image. The poster also assumes that for all his readers, marriage to a Muslim man with a beard would be a terrible fate to befall a daughter, and therefore her parents. The tweet can be interpreted as humorous because the idea of marriage as it is described in the tweet, is ridiculous, given that it is the Muslim beard which is, in fact, the essential part of the image. The depiction of the Muslim man is a well-known and overused caricature that some might find funny, because it exaggerates the beard and taps into the trope that Muslim men are Other, and disgusting, not quite human. At this distance, readers may laugh, but they are also confronted with the idea that such a non-human might be in an intimate relationship with their daughters. The poster clearly poses the threat of the violation of an intimate barrier, evoking a likely response of disgust in readers who might share this world view of Muslim men. This tweet may be seen as tapping the Moral Foundation of Sanctity, in that it deploys images of contamination and disgust. This tweeter uses a fear inducing approach to the future, warning of the humiliation and disgust that could ensue. The tweet could be interpreted as serious, provoking feelings of shame, but also as humorous, because of the one-dimensional caricature of the man with a beard, hairy and not quite human, that might very often be a cause of mirth.

Tweet 45 summarizes the perception of 'alien' ideology such as Marxism, as physical contamination that will transform people into zombies. The description of Marxist notions in terms of a physical substance, a 'goo', indicates the disgust evoked by the poster and the tweet instructs the reader (or a

particular reader) to physically remove the goo from his or her body. For some readers the characterization in the tweet could simply paint a funny picture. In fact, the juxtaposition of Marxists and zombies could be funny, since the tweeter themselves suggests that Marxists are zombies. The choice offered in the tweet is between becoming inhuman, a zombie, by following Marxist ideas or accepting the ideology of the poster. The tweet appears to tap into the MF of Sanctity. It is provocative in that it that could be read as a humorous exaggeration, but it could also be interpreted as a serious ideological statement and a call to action. The purpose of the tweet seems to be to ridicule and dehumanize. The ridicule is produced by the image of goo in the ears and idea of zombies who are created by Marxists. It could be taken as a challenge to those who are being filled with Marxist goo, ideology, and alert them that this is happening.

A rhetorical trick used by some tweeters is to state multiple possible future outcomes by stating that one concern, is far less serious than the outcome of the mass rape by "Jihadi nutjobs". Tweet 46 focuses on a minority depicted in a very negative light. An immediate association is created between the word 'rubbish', at the beginning of the tweet, and Muslims that the tweet negatively portrays. The tweet vividly paints a picture of Muslim terrorists, framed as crazy rapists, attacking local (i.e., "our") girls. The use of the word "nutjobs" could be interpreted as simple ridicule or as a serious characterization of them and their ideas as being insane. Specifically, alluding to their mental health issues targets them as being beyond reason, dangerous and not to be trusted. The poster is using threats as well as ridicule. The last part of the tweet is a highly manipulative and emotive way to evoke a sense of disgust and fear. The words 'local girls' makes this description of an alien threat even more intense as the tweet reminds readers that the "Other" are coming for "our" girls. The tweet aggressively ridicules and stereotypes Muslim men. Due to the connotations of disgust, and the reminder that the "nutjobs" would break sacred barriers, the tweet was tagged as invoking the Sanctity MF. These elements contribute to the overall qualities of uncertainty of the tweet as some readers could see the tweet as tasteless exaggeration, provoking a chuckle due to its absurdist depiction, i.e. it is unlikely that all of the local girls will be raped. Moreover, some users will probably find funny that the poster could seriously believe a narrative of this kind. As a humorous frame was adopted for tweets glorifying violence, inter-religious conflict and ethnic cleansing it could be argued that while some like-minded users in the poster group will take the threat seriously, others will find the ridiculous, overblown descriptions and narrative in the tweet amusing.

Tweet 47 implies an imminent danger, revenge attacks against Christians after the Finsbury Park Mosque terrorist attack, and communicates a sense of resignation, acceptance and uncertainty about the future. The use of the term 'Christianophobic' could be a way for the poster to underline that

'Islamophobia', a term employed to describe the Finsbury Park Mosque attack, is not the real problem. This careful wording could be described as ironic, in that there is an implicit question raised as to which phobic attacks are worse. The implied answer is that it is the attack on Christian ideas and symbols which is the worst. The sense of imminent danger that the tweeter tries to portray is reinforced by the idea of hopelessness that "we" (the targets of Christianiphobia) are unable to stop the stream of terrorist attacks by Muslims. It should be noted that this tweet is in response to an attack on Muslims at the Finsbury Park Mosque, although the tweeter is concerned about attacks that are made by Muslims, and which they feel can never be stopped. This tweet expresses the resignation felt by a group of "Christians", or in fact, non-Muslims in the UK, that Muslims will continue with violence regardless of anything that might or might not happen. Again, the tweeter is posting after the attack on a mosque, for which they take no responsibility at all, and which they, in fact, ignore, other than to note that there will be more violence perpetuated against "us". The images evoked are that "we", (implying Christians and probably all Westerners), are brutally murdered by explosives and guns "anyway". There is a complete avoidance of any responsibility for the recent Islamophobic attack. Rather, the tweet while simply mentioning the Finsbury Park Mosque attack establishes a victimhood narrative that portrays Conservatives and members of the radical right as the victims of Muslim violence. The struggle between religious groupings portrayed in this tweet is a way of evoking the MF of Sanctity. This tweet could be read as sincere and serious, or as sadly ironic, However, it might also be intended to troll and provoke readers who consider all terrorist attacks to be bad, including those committed against Muslims. Given the timing of this tweet, although it could be taken seriously as a rallying cry, it is very likely that in fact the tweeter is trolling the people who might be shocked at the attack on the mosque.

The opening of Tweet 48 is clearly ironic, once a reader has reached the end of the tweet. At the start, it is not absolutely clear whether the poster is sincerely congratulating the person described in the tweet or whether he is ridiculing him. The tweet describes a hyperbolic future situation: "arrested drunk in bondage gear in the back of his gaymobile". A reader might believe that there is a remote possibility that these future circumstances could come to pass because of the construction of the behaviour of the man described in the tweet as "ranting the internet is hate". The colorful language, which is hyperbolic, employing a set of ridiculous stereotypes one after another, 'lightens' up the tweet, although it is all homophobic, charging the man with being a kinky drunkard, driving a 'gaymobile'. The poster implies that the targeted man's actions will attract hateful speech online, about which he will supposedly "rant", because he will claim it is he that is a victim of hate speech. It is clear that the poster views LGBT+ people negatively, whether or not they have a clear personal dislike for the person in question. It could also be argued that the poster sees the gaudy "immoral"

behavior of the man as justifying hate speech, The tweet was tagged with the MF of Loyalty as the person characterized in the tweet was seen to be Other, different, challenging a way of life and a world view, and posing a threat to people like the tweeter. The tweeter seems to be suggesting that if this character is subject to internet hate speech, he probably deserves it, for being unlike the tweeter's tribe, and thus threatening its core beliefs of unity of purpose and world view. Ironically, this tweet itself might easily be considered to be internet hate speech. The tweet could certainly be read as humorous, but the conclusion suggests that the tweeter believes this person is deserving of hate speech because of the way he behaves.

Tweet 49 exemplifies a body of tweets that are poorly punctuated while still conveying a message. This is a casually written tweet that amplifies, even unwittingly, the ambiguity of the poster's words. This poster has inserted radical content into the chaotic phrasing of the tweet. The future predicted in the tweet is linked to the claim that the "msm", mainstream media, and "libtards" (a term usually used to ridicule liberals) exaggerate. The poster is trying to project the idea that Liberals communicate in a dirty and dishonest way. The use of "msm" also shows that the tweet was probably destined to be read by a smaller group of users that are familiar with this abbreviation. The rest of the tweet is dedicated to "mr. Woods", James Howard Woods who is tagged in the tweet itself, an actor and a voice actor who is known for his radical pro-Trump views, and to the new cinematographic industry that will flourish when mainstream media and liberals disappear. The poster stresses that it is great "watching them die" without explaining if they mean actual deaths or just vanishing from the public eye. The poster uses the present continuous tense, as though this fantasy is really happening while writing. Saying "watching them die" could be seen as intentionally amusing. The poster criticizes both the media and liberals for behaving poorly towards Conservatives while they ambiguously write about watching them die, thereby touching a low point. Ultimately, the information the tweet conveys could be taken seriously by an inattentive audience, reading superficially. Some users might refuse to engage with the tweet due to the difficulty in understanding the text and the various references used by the poster. The use of terms such as libtards, that projects disgust onto others, and the deployment of ambiguously serious phrases about watching someone die (therefore breaching an important ethical barrier) qualify this tweet as invoking the MF of Sanctity. The confusing nature of the tweet could provoke a humorous response because some readers might be amused at the idea of watching their "enemies" die, and others may be amused based only on the tweet's rough formulation and execution.

References to the future amplify the ambiguity and uncertainly serious ideas already contained in the tweets themselves. Colorful language, innuendos and aggressive characterization further increase this

effect; excessiveness and exaggeration may be interpreted as humorous in their own right. The future described in the tweets is typically catastrophic and the reader is presented with a binary choice. These tweets have a similarity and a consistency in that they often appeal via vividly emotional and negative portrayals of the future whilst appearing to provide readers with apparent freedom of interpretation. However, a close reading will reveal that these tweets all send a consistently ideological message.

3.7 Tweets with Visual Support

Another category in the data from June 2017 that exploits humour uncertainty can be found in the form of visual support such as gifs, videoclips, pictures, memes etc. There appears to be no clear pattern by which visual content was attached to tweets except that it was presumably used to give more impact to the written message. In a number of these tweets, the use of visual material was chaotic and fragmented with no attempt to use the same image or meme repeatedly to create a wider narrative. In others, tweets that were strongly characterized by a Moral Foundation were arguably reinforced when the posters attached visual support to their written texts.

Visual support was provided by a variety of styles and displays of creativity. The three main layouts consisted of: a) serious tweets with humorous visual support, b) humorous tweets with serious visual support and c) memes. Tweets with visual support conveying a message might create some uncertainty of interpretation of what the tweeter meant: a political message, humour or simply sharing a cool picture. This complexity can be untangled through an analysis of examples that shows how posters merged verbal text with visual support in my data.

3.7.1 Tweets characterized by serious text and a humorous image

Tweets in this category were composed of a serious tweet and a humorous image. These tweets commonly focused on a politician. Specifically, many tweets were framed so as to criticize leftwing movements, such as the Labour party, with the apparent intention of making a serious point but also to ridicule Labour party politicians such as Jeremy Corbyn and Dianne Abbott. The same approach was often used by posters to target minorities when, for example, a serious message framing Muslims as terrorists was paired with a caustically humourous picture.

The tweet in Fig. 31 targets Jeremy Corbyn who at the time was leader of the UK Labour Party. The text is serious and criticizes the Labour Party’s approach to migration personifying it through its leader.

Corbyn refuses to rule out continued mass migration after Brexit. How can we trust him to deliver the will of the people? #ForTheMany

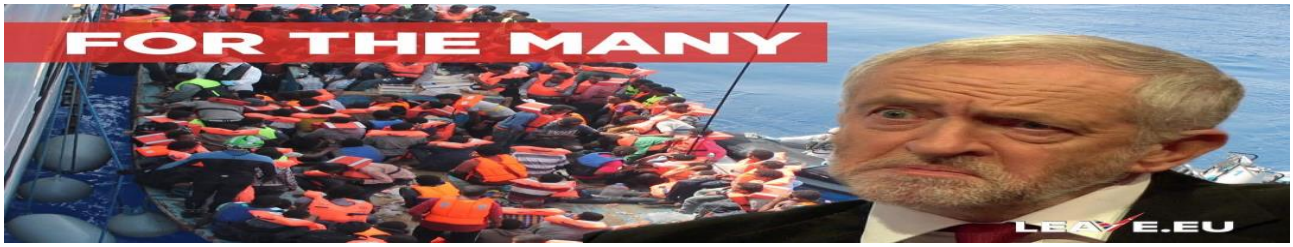


Fig. 31 "For The Many".

The poster's clear intention is to state that Corbyn cannot be trusted to fulfill the will of "the people", thereby accusing the Labour party of being undemocratic. The hashtag, mimicking Labour's slogan "for the many", could be interpreted as ironic, used in a tweet that criticizes the British left, however, the slogan is part of the image. The message is complex. The image shows a boat full of refugees in an attempt to evoke the fear of a threatening mass. The humourous charge of the picture is provided by the silly expression on Jeremy Corbyn's face ridiculing him as confused, ambivalent and apprehensive. The use of the slogan "the many" is clearly ironic, suggesting that it refers to the overwhelming numbers of the refugees about to swamp the UK. This tweet relies on the MF of Loyalty as it seems to evoke the threat that the people of the UK are being overwhelmed by foreign "others", who will take over their way of life, and it calls on people to recognize this threat and at the same time to laugh at the caricature of Corbyn, who is himself a little confused and not in control of the wave of refugees his policies are welcoming. The tweeter seems to imply "the (real) many" need to stick together to fight this threat. Furthermore, the image includes the subliminally hidden slogan in the right hand bottom corner, "Leave EU", with an image of the Union Jack embedded in the "V" of the word "Leave". The implication of this image is that leaving the EU would mean restoring UK to its former glory.

With governments crippled by political correctness across the West, jihadists have loads of soft targets to choose from...

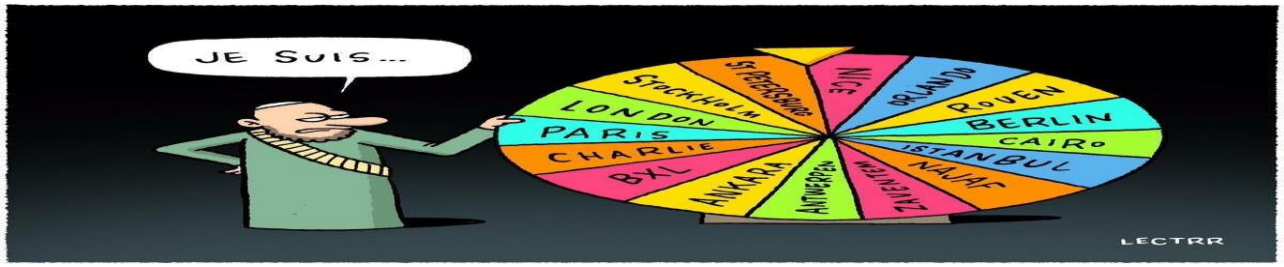


Fig. 32 "Wheel of Fortune".

The verbal text of the tweet in Fig. 32 describes a hopeless situation for Western countries in Europe. Governments are framed as weakened by the ideology of political correctness. Presumably, the target viewership is one that will be emotionally open to this idea. The tweeter invokes the fragility of the West in the what they construct as the ongoing global war against Jihadi terrorism. The poster focuses on "political correctness", an idea and also a slur associated with left and liberal political movements, and constructs this idea as a cultural force that can debilitate governments. The enemy is framed as a Jihadi terrorist threat that is everywhere. The clear implication is that the discourse of the left and liberals contribute to the weakness of their governments. The visual image is of a wheel of fortune, planting the notion that it is simply a matter of bad luck as to which will be the next European capital to be hit by radical Muslim terrorists. The image sets up the idea that the Jihadists can use any of European capital as a soft target, because their governments have been weakened by political correctness, and consequently it is easy for Jihadists to strike because there is no safety for people in these cities. The Jihadi in the image says "Je suis" while playing with a wheel of fortune with the names of different European cities on it. This is a reference to the initiatives of citizens worldwide, in particular on social media, after a terrorist attack, i.e. "Je suis Paris", a slogan first used on Twitter in 2015 stemming from the terrorist attack in Paris on cartoonists working on the *Charlie Hebdo* magazine which popularized the phrase "*Je suis Charlie*". The tweeter employs an ironic use of the words , "*Je suis*…" to attempt to show the hypocrisy of the left and liberals who use these slogans: in this tweet it is they who are seen to be culpable, it is each of them who are "*Je suis*…", and the construction of these juxtaposed words and images puts the responsibility for any Jihadi attacks on them, for crippling their governments and making them "soft targets". Furthermore, the use of the image highlights the sense of randomness about the danger of an attack. Any of the cities mentioned could be a target for Jihadists and no-one should feel safe. Juxtaposing the ideologically charged text of the tweet and a colorful childlike image of a fairground or game show creates a very complex message. The tweeter attempts to be funny and clever while warning about random attacks, a message that will find support among like minded readers, while taunting those who are supporters of "political correctness". Given the focus on these cultural phenomena that are portrayed as foreign and debilitating, and the depiction of all Muslims as Jihadis and terrorists, this tweet invokes the Moral Foundation of Sanctity which is under attack.

Read my conversation with that ranting pro-Jihad muslim. THAT is what our enemy is. They can't handle Infidels who know the Quran & history.

Fig. 33 "The Crusader".

The Tweet in Fig. 33 is characterized by a bellicose frame that invites other users to fight against radicalised Muslims especially from a position of knowledge. The tweeter claims to have read the Quran, and knows that they are an "infidel". They glory in being an infidel labelling themselves as a "pork eating infidel", in the knowledge that pork is *haram*, forbidden to Muslims. The tweeter describes "pro-jihad Muslims" as a hostile group in a serious way in the text attached to the image. Moreover, the poster claims that radicalized Muslims cannot communicate with others who have some knowledge of Islam. He defines their own group as "infidels" and embraces that term in order to frame the ongoing religious battle in the UK between pro-Jihadi Muslims (a term that for them is entirely negative in its connotations) and the group they identify as being "infidels". Embracing the term "infidels" could be somewhat ironic but also a serious characterization worn with pride to underline the conflict between what he draws as British values and Islam. The text also shows the radical nature of the person posting this black and white framing of the struggle. Moreover, the narrative is boosted by an image that picks up on the idea of The Crusades which were essentially a series of wars for Christianity against all others, including and especially Muslims. The image calls for more of such violence against Muslims and spurs on increased radicalization of the tweeter's followers. The verbal text invokes the importance of debate and knowledge while the image calls for violence and flaunts the tweeter's joyful eating of pork, that is forbidden to Muslims. In fact, the author of the tweet pairs a text, that argues for the superiority of reasoned and learned debate about Islam (such as what thet claim to possess), with an image that glorifies the massacre of Muslims in the Crusades and the eating of pork. The use of pork for aggressive provocation to mock Muslims online and defile Mosques by committing hate crimes is widespread among tweeters of this anti-Muslim message. There is some uncertainty as to whether the poster is being serious as we cannot be sure if the tweet is calling for violence against Muslims or just taking the opportunity to spread rude and tasteless humorous content. Online activity such as that found in this tweet contributes to creating cohesiveness amongst like-minded people and might encourage the sharing of additional radical content. Ultimately, this tweeter seems to be inviting his readers to become Crusaders against Islam

by posting an image that is humorous, because of the incongruity of linking the eating of pork with a murderous Crusade, but which is nonetheless highly ideologized. This tweet involes the moral Foundation of Sanctity as it plays on the idea of religious violence to cleanse foreign elements and employs anti-Muslim sentiment by embracing a religious taboo of Islam, such as pork.

3.7.2 Tweets characterized by a humorous text and a serious image

Another group of tweets with visual support consisted of those composed using a humorous verbal text and a serious image. In the data set for June 2017 there were miscellaneous tweets containing serious images that were often not connected to the social and political topics mentioned in the verbal text of the tweet. These tweets appear to be intended to evoke uncertainty in interpretation as compared to those tweets composed of a serious text and a humorous image. In these cases (ambiguously humorous text and apparently serious image) the reader might need to dwell on the entire tweet, given that there is no clue that the image is anything other than serious. This twofold structure of a tweet might allow for more effective propagation of the author's views online as they can share a picture with a serious message that immediately captures the reader's attention to then amuse them through humour embedded in the verbal text.

My dear muslim fellow, the Caliphate is not an empire.....THIS is an empire

Fig. 34 "British Empire".

Fig. 34 illustrates a tweet consisting of a simple two dimensional map attached to an ironic verbal text. The map shows the British Empire at the peak of its expansion, juxtaposing the vivid red of its territories with the rest of the world coloured in white. This picture evokes the historical grandeur of the British Empire and could be intended to rally a sense of loyalty and pride in the reader. The text addresses a Muslim user with highlighted and quite possibly patronising politeness, since it is clear that the targeted reader is not dear to the poster, to demonstrate the spread and dimensions of the British Empire in comparison to the Caliphate, a holy empire built over centuries by Muslims. The verbal text of the tweet draws on the information conveyed by the picture, although there is no

corresponding map of the Caliphate, to create a comparison between the two Empires and the poster uses mockingly excessive good manners towards the targeted other, i.e. the Muslim user. The author of the tweet does not specify whether they are referring to the current Islamic Caliphate created by ISIS or its historic iterations. This lack of precision contributes to the ambiguity of the tweet as a whole. The verbal text, that is the immediate context of the image, might contribute to some ambiguity in tone, establishing a humorous tone so that a user is likely to interpret the red of the territories of the British Empire as not being serious information, but as a way of mocking Muslims and their Caliphate. The structure, "THIS is an Empire!" echoes the famous line from Crocodile Dundee, "THIS is a knife!", used to put down the other element in a comparison. The final exclamation mark and the use of uppercase letters underlines to other users the importance of British identity and encourages others who are invested in the idea of belonging, patriotism and identity. It also draws a clear division between those who are of a like mind to the author and those who are different and therefore do not belong to the poster's tribe. The MF of Authority frames this tweet as the author's goal is to boast about the supremacy of the British Empire and its legacy, and also to construct a difference based on identity and belonging. The author also avoids discussing the fact that the glory days of the British Empire are long past, and remains locked in a mythical portrayal of the past.

The English Rank Bacon at Number One (Definitely do not retweet to offend any of our pork-hating friends...)

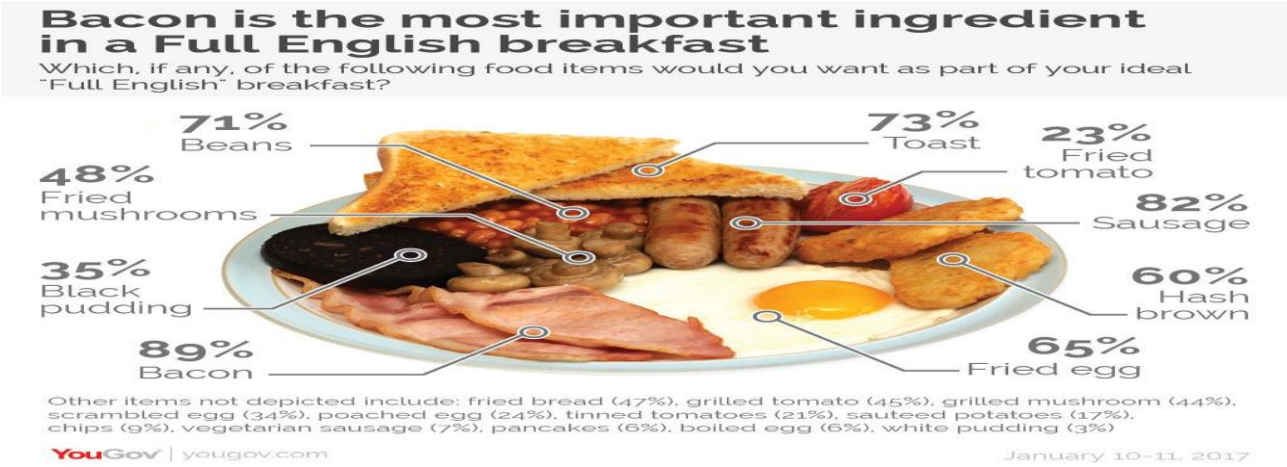


Fig. 35 "English Breakfast".

The verbal text of the tweet presented in Fig. 35 reports a supposedly serious talking point – a poll about English bacon that ranks it in pole position as a full breakfast ingredient, according to the English people. The image attached showsa traditional English Breakfast pointing out that bacon is the most popular food in the dish. The poll shows different kinds of food, such as black pudding, fried tomato, sausages and bacon, with percentages clearly listing the popularity of each item. Any form

of pork is *haram*, forbidden, to Muslims and showing what the most popular food in an English breakfast is to the English is a jab at the community that does not eat that particular food. In this way, Muslims are immediately locked out of being really "English". The implication is clear to bacon eaters (the English) and Muslims alike. The part of the verbal tweet within brackets is intended ironically, as it appears to discourage retweeting but of course, urges followers to retweet. It also caricatures Muslims in terms of one feature, their refusal to eat pork and therefore the rejection of "English" values. The author openly mocks Muslims by using a highly emotionally charged issue, forbidden food, in an indirect and apparently safe manner. The mention of pork is humorous for like-minded users as the author attempts to create a connection between the consumption of bacon and Englishness and at the same time establishes that Muslim values are radically incompatible with English values. This tweet relies on the MF of Loyalty: the author aims to create a schism and a conflict between English people and Muslim people who are a minority in the UK by humorously using a poll about the Full English Breakfast, which is, in itself a caricature.

If you see mass immigration from the 3rd world as an economic necessity or solution to population decline: You are a special sort of stupid.

Fig. 36 "Migrant Crowd".

Tweets such as the one in the Fig. 36 shows a common pattern in the 2017 dataset in which humorous verbal texts combined with pictures of a hostile looking mass of people evoke a sense of peril. The verbal text uses a hypothetical statement, introduced by a conditional, 'if' about immigration, characterized by apparent leftwing tropes, to claim that if the reader is one of those who emphasizes the advantages of migrants coming to the UK, they are intellectually inferior. The author specifies in the verbal text that someone who believes in immigration as an economic neccesity displays a special kind of stupidity, not attacking users themselves, but only hypothetical supporters of immigration. The use of this construction is to accuse hypothetical users who disagree with the poster's anti-migrant message of being a special kind of stupid, the use of "special" implying that such people have

an intellectual disability. The visual part of the tweet is intended seriously, showing an endless flow of people of Middle Eastern ethnic appearance as a mob disrupting traffic and being a public nuisance, as they are restrained by police agents. The scene in the picture could evoke disgust and fear in many users, even those who do not share the author's values. The wording of the tweet is given a context by the picture. The image displays a crowd that seems to be dangerous to onlookers. The police agents are shown as the only barrier between the immigrants and the passing traffic of regular citizens. The juxtaposition of the verbal text and the image is probably intended to evoke the fear of being overwhelmed by alien people. In the way the author frames it, any form of acceptance shown to refugees should be unthinkable for anyone in their right mind. This tweet, by using an image showing masses of refugees invading the UK, challenges the idea that migrants from the third world could be economically necessary or a solution to a declining population. Relying on the MF of Sanctity the author tries to argue against migration from the third world, a different humanity from "our" UK.

3.7.3 Tweets characterized by Memes

Memes, consisting of a humorous image with some superimposed text, make up a particular category of tweets posted for in group users who can recognize the content and the framing easily, together with additional text by the author of the tweet. Classic memetic templates, such as change my mind[44], distracted boyfriend[45], mocking spongebob[46] etc., were avoided by users who used more obscure references and political cartoons and images often based on US affairs. The verbal text of the tweets themselves tended to be written in conjunction with the image, "adding" to the meme itself and reinforcing its message or occasionally reversing the original meaning of the meme completely.

This is #Covfefe !

[44] Steven Crowder's "Change My Mind" Campus Sign - Change my mind. *Know your meme*. Available at: https://knowyourmeme.com/photos/1345112-steven-crowders-change-my-mind-campus-sign. Last accessed 12 September 2020.
[45] Distracted Boyfriend. *Know your meme*. Available at: https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/distracted-boyfriend. Last accessed 12 September 2020.
[46] Mocking SpongeBob. *Know your meme*. Available at: https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/mocking-spongebob. Last accessed 12 September 2020.

Fig. 37 "Marx's Head".

The hybridization of memetic content, the posting of memes and of related text in the tweet, was clearly observed in the data of June 2017. Users also posted cartoons or images that were not related to a recognizable meme template and used these as memes with added text. The tweet in Fig. 37 is a cartoon shared as if the verbal text of the image is an authentic meme because these two elements are used together to propagate an ideological message that is also humourous. Extracted accounts posted many tweets that were framed as memes due to their impact by joining an image and the text of the tweet itself. The entire text unites two viral cultural artifacts. The first is 'This is Sparta', from the movie *300,* yelled by the Spartan King Leonidas when kicking a Persian emissary into an empty well. The pace of the scene, its epic framing and the slow motion effects made it one of the most used viral scenes from cinema in the digital world over the last fifteen years. The other is 'Covfefe', a mistake in one of the tweets posted by President Trump, that went viral. The image of Trump holding the head of Karl Marx with the Paris Climate Accord written on his forehead is visually striking and projects violent aggression.Trump's expression is serious and he is portrayed as one who judges Communists. The apparent slur 'Communist'is extended to include all those of leftwing leanings in the political spectrum for example, the Green parties. This occurs because the author of the cartoon has drawn Karl Marx as a representative of the views of those policymakers who drafted the Paris Climate Accord and who are not Marxists. This visual is a play on the image of comedian Kathy Griffin who was photographed holding a fake decapitated head of Trump on 30th of May 2017. It shows how radical right users have taken imagery hostile to Trump (and by extension, those of rightwing leanings) and by reversing its meaning spread their message. The use of the figure of Trump by British radical right tweeters reflects the visual and cultural influence that the US alt right has on analogous movements in the British Twittersphere. This tweet is characterized by the MF of Sanctity as it portrays an archetypical scene between the God-like figure holding the head of Marx labelled with apparent Marxist dogma, "Paris Climate Accord". Trump is portrayed as a supreme authority passing judgement on sinners as the cartoon is also a reference to an historical image in Western Art

portraying sacred themes, i.e. Judith with the Head of Holofernes, David with the Head of Goliath, Beheading of John the Baptist. Furthermore, Comedian Kathy Griffin played upon the same theme after posting a photograph in which she is holding the mock-head of Donald Trump in May 2017. This tweet could be a part of the reaction of Conservative users to Griffin's photograph. Furthermore, the poster tries to create the feeling of an epic event through the quote from the movie *300*, one that can be interpreted as evoking the notion of sacredness. The word *Covfefe* was used as ridicule against Trump by his antagonists and as a humourous rallying cry for his supporters online.

There's losers and there's leaders

Fig. 38 "Obama vs Trump".

The tweet in Fig. 38 exemplifies the most common pattern in the memes posted in this data set. The verbal text of the tweet simply refers to the meme by reinforcing the comparison made in the meme itself. The poster sets up the comparison, "there are losers and there are leaders". The meme creates an opposition between Obama, portrayed on the left embodying "losership", and Trump on the right portraying "leadership". Obama is characterized as taking away money and jobs and weakening the US, while Trump is cast as a wise leader who can protect both "our" people and the planet, The tweet refers specifically to the Paris Climate Agreement and is framed to support and justify Trump's decision to withdraw from the Paris Climate Agreement by portraying it as an unfair treaty because the US is losing money. Trump's position is summed up in the caption saying "Unsigned! Gonna make a Bigly deal for US!" thereby implying that it is his deal which will be much more fair to America. Moreover, the tweet shows Obama as "in" while Trump is "out". The "in" person takes things away, the "out person" protects "our" people and "our" planet. The use of "our", the first person plural, includes the reader. The verbal contrast is clear, Obama is labelled "signed" whereas Trump is labelled "unsigned". The body language of the two characters is contrastive: Obama is portrayed as shrugging helplessly, conveying both impotence and irresponsibility; Trump is portrayed as much bigger than Obama, his face fixed in his familiar expression, representing solidity and

strength. The colors of the two parties, Republican red and Democrat blue, are inverted by the meme creator, evoking an ironic contrast. Their ties, however, are of the correct color for their political allegiances. Probably, the author wanted to point out how Trump could be a better leader for both parties while Obama would be inefficient either way. A notable visual characteristic of the meme is that both leaders are portrayed as caricatures, evidence that radical right users apply the carnivalesque to their own figureheads too. Also notable is the fact that they quote Trump's use of "bigly", not to be critical of him, but as a creative use of language of which they are proud. The imagery and content posted by "deplorables"[47], supporters of Trump in the US, freely migrated within the online spaces to be adopted by like-minded British users. The MF of Authority is characterized in this tweet by the author presenting a clear comparison between Obama and Trump in this caricature and using numerous techniques to assert that Obama is a loser, and by comparison, Trump is a winner, and that moreover, Trump is a leader fighting for his people and their planet, leading the way by refusing to sign the Paris Accord.

Rebel scum

Fig. 39 "Dank Vader".

Within the dataset of memes, some Kek memes were posted by users. Kek memes had been widespread since the 2016 US elections,[48] and are distinguished by having a traditional memetic template. In Kek memes, the verbal text of the tweet reinforces the pictorial image and attempts to evoke disgust by bringing to mind the idea of repugnant rebels. In the tweet illustrated in Fig. 39, the meme employs the image of The Rebellion in the *Star Wars* franchise, a resistance movement which

[47] Reilly, Katie. 2016. "Read Hillary Clinton's 'Basket of Deplorables' Remarks About Donald Trump Supporters". *Time*. Available at: https://time.com/4486502/hillary-clinton-basket-of-deplorables-transcript/. Last accessed 16 September 2020.
[48] Neiwert, David. 2017. "What the Kek: Explaining the Alt-Right 'Deity' Behind Their 'Meme Magic'". *Southern Poverty Law Center*. Available at: https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2017/05/08/what-kek-explaining-alt-right-deity-behind-their-meme-magic. Last accessed 12 September 2020.

has the goal of overthrowing the evil Galactic Emperor. The meme is framed by the tweet as portraying leftwing users, implying that they are too serious. The author of the tweet and like-minded users are set up in the fiction as part of the Empire, with more than a hint that their Emperor is Trump. The meme shows Kek as Darth Vader, famous in the Star Wars franchise, as a servant of the Emperor. The tweet includes in the meme a phrase from the *Star Wars* franchise. This is an in-group reference to "Dank Memes". The term "dank" is used to describe a meme that is often characterized by a type of humour that is utterly nonsensical, resulting in a specific kind of irony. In the *Star Wars* film*: Episode IV – A New Hope*, in the scene in which Darth Vader says "I find your lack of faith disturbing", he suffocates an Imperial officer with his supernatural powers. The meme is aggressive in tone for those users who get the reference. In this data set, exclusion of out-group users and radical nonsensical humour seem to have become the trademark of the radical right in the English-speaking sphere, i.e. UK, Australia, Canada etc. These exclusionary processes can be traced back to the Gamergate controversy in 2013 (see 1.4.3) and, to this day, they continue to constantly evolve. Because Kek symbolism is representative of a small Twitter community that tends to behave in quasi-religious ways, this tweet may be seen as drawing on the MF of Sanctity.

3.7.4. Summary

In this data set, visual support included in the tweets was manifested in different ways. On the whole, images were used to propagate ideological narratives. The June 2017 dataset clearly shows that material posted online day-by-day does not follow a uniform pattern but instead shows up in chaotically arranged tweets with attachments. Each of the tweets with visual support in the database of tweets posted by the British Conservative and radical right users is a unique cultural unit that represents a complex feature of the digital environment. Humourous tropes were often paired with images of disgust. Many of these portrayed salient aspects of challenging contemporary socio-political processes in order to provoke intense reactions, across a spectrum of users. The polarized political environment of the UK in June 2017 seemed to directly affirm one ideological extreme, massive rightwing affiliation among tweeters in this group. Graphic visual support a technique often shared by users leaning towards different politics too) seemed to be one of the main pillars of the in-group cultural elements, creating a sense of digital tribalism.

3.8 Correspondence between Online Activity and Hate Crimes

This final stage of my analysis focuses on tracing the likelihood of a connection between hate crimes in rela life and online activity extracted from the data. So far in this examination of the June 2017 dataset I have presented an overview of the socio-political situation in the UK at the time, including a timeline of hate crimes that occurred throughout the month; I have introduced non-humorous tweets and discussed the moral tone of the online conversation on Twitter; I have explored instances of unclear humour in detail and have also discussed humour characterized by visual support. In the Introduction I reviewed the Hatelab team's 2020 study "Hate in the Machine: Anti-Black and Anti-Muslim Social Media Posts as Predictors of Offline Racially and Religiously Aggravated Crime" published in *The British Journal of Criminology*, in which the authors analyzed hate crimes and hate speech online to establish a statistically relevant relationship between the two. These findings provide the confidence to treat these two processes, namely online activity by radicals and hate crimes, as synergetic. My goal in this last section is to investigate in the data for June 2017, whether the humorous items in the digital world mirrored, in the use of symbols, communication styles and emotional tone, the hate-filled activity that was going on in the material world at the same time. Similarly, it may be possible to identify processes in which the digital world can be said to have fueled the hate-filled activity in the material world.

3.8.1 Five Keywords for June 2017

Five keywords characterizing June 2017 were extracted from the data by means of pinpointing the salient themes of the hate crimes that occurred throughout the month. This operation was accomplished by gathering collected instances of hate crimes that occurred throughout June 2017 and grouping them together to obtain the major themes that shaped this month. This selection yielded the five keywords/themes that most frequently appeared in the targets of tweets and descriptions of hate crimes throughout the month, issued by police, journalists and advocacy groups.[49] For example, if a hate crime targeted Muslims, this instance contributed to making the 'Muslims' theme salient. Furthermore, the relevance of events such as the BBC documentary *Betrayed Girls* and *Three Girls* Tv Series (see 3.4) that contributed to Islamophobia were also considered.[50] The 'Girls' theme was salient in the attack on radicalized Muslim girls on the 7th of June, and also, it seems, on the motives of the Finsbury Park Mosque attacker on the 19th[51], while the 'Muslim' theme was relevant for day by day instances of hate crimes based on Islamophobia. Each keyword was utilized to represent a larger theme, i.e. keywords such as *jihadi* and *Islam* were

[49] See section **2.3.1 June 2017 Day-by-day hate crime Timeline**.
[50] See section **2.3 Hate Crimes in the UK: June 2017**.
[51] See section **2.3.1 June 2017 Day-by-day hate crime Timeline**.

included in the 'Muslim' theme. Moreover, it appears that these particular themes were often present in temporal proximity to a hate crime or a terrorist attack. Five major themes were identified in the communication flows on Twitter in proximity to events, such as political marches, acts of activists and significant cultural events (see 3.1.2), and hate crimes. The themes were labelled Gay, Girls, Migrant, Muslim, Terrorist.

Keyword 1) Gay – Much of the moral stance during June 2017 taken by the radical right was based on what they considered to be the homophobia of the British Muslim minority; the peak of the mobilization against Muslims and Islam using this as a rallying cry was on 11th of June in the so-called "anti-hate" march.

Gay	10 June	11 June	16 June	21 June	23 June
	1 tweet*[52]	2 tweet*	1 tweet	2 tweets*	1 tweet

Fig. 40 Number of non-serious tweets posted for keyword/theme "Gay" after compression of gathered data during the selected days due to occurred hate crimes for June 2017.

Keyword 2) *Girls* – A TV documentary, *Three Girls*, was broadcast highlighting the abuse of young girls by people of Asian ethnic backgrounds.[53] This broadcast triggered online material that was fundamental to the polarization of socio-political discourse at the time, as well as to the radicalization of some British people, including the attacker on the Finsbury Park Mosque.[54]

Girls	2 June	6 June	7 June	11 June	20 June
	1 tweet	1 tweet*	1 tweet	1 tweet*	4 tweets*

Fig. 41 Number of non-serious tweets posted for keyword/theme "Girls" after compression of gathered data during the selected days due to occurred hate crimes for June 2017.

Keyword 3) *Migrant* – Migrants were targeted heavily in the non-virtual world of the UK within a discourse of public conflict emanating explosively from the Brexit vote the year before.

	2 June	3 June	4 June	5 June	6 June	7 June	11 June	16 June	17 June
Migrant	1 tweet	1 tweet	1 tweet	1 tweet	2 tweets	2 tweets	2 tweets	3 tweets	4 tweets

[52] Tweets marked with * are mixed with other keywords/themes.
[53] See section **2.3 Hate Crimes in the UK: June 2017**.
[54] See section **2.3.1 June 2017 Day-by-day hate crime Timeline**.

	18 June	20 June	21 June	22 June	23 June	24 June	25 June	26 June	
	1 tweet	5 tweets	4 tweets	3 tweets	6 tweets	3 tweets	1 tweet	3 tweets	

Fig. 42 Number of non-serious tweets posted for keyword/theme "Migrant" after compression of gathered data during the selected days due to occurred hate crimes for June 2017.

Keyword 4) ***Muslim*** – Islam was the crucial link for the majority of hate crimes that clearly targeted people on the basis of their religion, relying also on external markers of Islamic appearance, among others hijabs, burkas and certain styles of beard.

Muslim	2 June	3 June	4 June	5 June	6 June	7 June	10 June	11 June	16 June
	2 tweets	3 tweets	11 tweets	8 tweets	18 tweets	13 tweets	7 tweets	7 tweets	4 tweets
	17 June	18 June	19 June	20 June	21 June	22 June	23 June	24 June	25 June
	5 tweet	8 tweets	16 tweets	15 tweets	5 tweets	4 tweets	2 tweets	2 tweets	1 tweet
	26 June								
	2 tweets								

Fig. 43 Number of non-serious tweets posted for keyword/theme "Muslim" after compression of gathered data during the selected days due to occurred hate crimes for June 2017.

Keyword 5) ***Terrorist*** – While the terms Muslim and Terrorist overlapped for most radicalized users, both online and in the material world, there was an occasional divergence in the description of some hate crimes. In these instances, users foregrounded the attack on "terrorists" rather than focusing on the religion of the "terrorists".

Terrorist	3 June	4 June	5 June	6 June	7 June	11 June	17 June	18 June	19 June
	1 tweet	2 tweets	3 tweets	1 tweet	2 tweets	1 tweet	1 tweet	1 tweet	3 tweets
	20 June								
	1 tweet								

Fig. 44 Number of non-serious tweets posted for keyword/theme "Terrorist" after compression of gathered data during the selected days due to occurred hate crimes for June 2017.

These themes were used as search terms for humorous tweets that were then extracted to be analyzed in this section. The tweets were tracked on a day by day basis through June 2017 in order to trace whether any correspondence between online content and hate crimes can be found in June 2017.

3.8.2 Timeline of Keywords

KEYWORD	N.	TWEET	USER	MORAL FOUNDATION	CLARITY OF HUMOUR
MIGRANT	1	Ross Kemp talking sense against the number one argument used to shut you down when you have issues with **immigration**.	free speech influencer	authority	unclear
MUSLIM	2	Attacked for buying beer. Paris enrichment https://www.rt.com/news/390417-paris-attack-**muslim**-dress-beer/	alt news	fairness	clear
	3	Germany suffers wave of honor killings. https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/10441/germany- **muslim**-honor-killings … #NothingToDoWithIslam #RefugeesWelcome	alt news	sanctity	unclear
GIRLS	4	The reporter claims school **girls** have been accused of racism for reporting sexual abuse by their migrant classmates.	alt news	sanctity	unclear

Fig. 45 Examples of keywords in tweets June 2nd 2017.

On the 2nd June, tweets with a clear focus on Migration and Islam evoked a sense of being surrounded and in danger. The online environment was full of radical right tropes that commented on, among other things, the sexual abuse committed by 'migrants', and "the news of honor killings". Over the

following days, these tropes became increasingly radical and escalated numerically. All except one tweet potentially contained "unclear" humour that could take on any shape and evolve in unpredictable ways online. These tweets prepared the way for any event that could further fuel this boiling pot online. Tweet 4 (Fig. 45) is notable as it signals the theme of sexual abuse, with the tweeter mentioning schoolgirls who were accused of racism because they had reported cases of sexual abuse carried out by migrant classmates.[55] The sexual abuse signaled in Tweet 4 that was subsequently relevant for the Finsbury Park Mosque attacker's radicalization, had already been mentioned in the first days of the month. This online radicalization had been on-going before the wave of hate crimes, terrorist attacks and political marches.[56] This process through which users came to hold and express more extreme views online underlines the long lasting trajectory of these digital dynamics.

KEYWORD	N.	TWEET	USER	MORAL FOUNDATION	CLARITY OF HUMOUR
MUSLIM	1	My dear **muslim** fellow, the Caliphate is not an empire.....THIS is an empire	alt influencer	authority	clear
	2	JeremyCorbyn pretends he isn't friendly with #extremists . Who is this man with hate preachers at an #**Islamic** rally?	trad news	sanctity	clear
	3	Is strange how facts upset **islam**ofascism apologists like Mehdi 'Kafir are no better than cattle' Hasan...	alt influencer	sanctity	unclear
MIGRANT	4	Constant terror attacks, **migrants** fighting each other in the streets, women being harassed. Leftist paradise.	free speech influencer	sanctity	clear
Terrorist	5	You must know, any facts which are inconvenient to the open borders, mass immigration, hug a **terrorist**, we hate Britain narrative are racist	alt influencer	authority	unclear

Fig. 46 Examples of keywords in tweets June 3rd 2017.

[55] See **2.3 Hate Crimes in the UK: June 2017**.
[56] See section **2.3.1 June 2017 Day-by-day hate crime Timeline**.

The tweets posted on the 3rd June focus on the link between Islam, terrorism and migrants and those opposing the ideology of the radical right, the British left. An organic development from the 2nd to the 3rd June can be observed in the discourse, now centered around the framing of an 'apocalyptic' situation inside the UK. These tweets mention scenes of urban guerilla warfare on the streets. The London Bridge terrorist attack was a crucial event that intensified the Twittersphere. Tweet 4 (Fig. 46) anticipates the London Bridge terrorist attack and the consequent reaction to it by the radical right that mockingly labels today's Great Britain as a "Leftist paradise". Moreover, the poster argues for the opposite of the so-called 'PC' narrative that it defines as anti-British. The collective reaction of the radical right accounts during the next few days will be characterized by tropes, such as open borders, mass immigration and 'hug a terrorist', as listed in Tweet 5. Furthermore, Tweet 5 is an attempt to scare other users by evoking the suspension of free speech in the UK. This is an example of the build up of radicalization as when the perceived actions of targeted minorities are used as an argument to respond to in kind: the final remark in Tweet 4, 'Leftist paradise', will increasingly become a common way to finish a tweet with an ironic political punchline.

KEYWORD	N.	TWEET	USER	MORAL FOUNDATION	CLARITY OF HUMOUR
MUSLIM	1	British **muslims** know they are a protected species. They dont even wait 24 hours before blaming the UK & defending Islam. MSM got their back.	alt influencer	loyalty	clear
	2	Let's see if British **muslims** can organize a thousand strong march against Jihad. They had no problem during the Danish Cartoon riots....	alt influencer	loyalty	clear
	3	Let the Libtards say what they want. Build the wall, close the borders and deport ALL **Muslims** immediately	alt influencer	sanctity	clear

	4	Your daughter will marry an angry bearded **muslim** man.	alt influencer	sanctity	unclear
	5	The 100 million **muslims** who vocally support a Global Caliphate must be very disappointed that we are not the Crusaders they were told of.	alt influencer	authority	clear
	6	i have an idea, why dont you invite a few more **muslim** nutters for tea	alt influencer	sanctity	unclear
	7	WSJ, You know nothing. It certainly was not any radical **muslim** but an oppressed brown skinned man wearing a dress	alt influencer	sanctity	unclear
	8	beyond crazy. Reza should be met by 100k patriots and hauled off to Syria as an anchor for daily **muslim** songs.	alt influencer	loyalty	clear
	9	I wonder mr Khan, if it might not be time to consider deporting all **muslims**?You can lead the way, you know, leading by example and all.	alt influencer	sanctity	clear
	10	Sturgeon thinks the UK Government havent flooded Scotland with enough 3rd word **muslims**, Sturgeon is not fit to defend Scotland.	alt influencer	sanctity	clear
	11	**Islamists** from Across Europe Moving to UK for 'Freedom' to Practice Radical Islam	alt politician	sanctity	clear

TERRORIST	12	That's a nice sentiment to share immediately after people have been murdered by **terrorists**. Thanks for that.	free speech influencer	loyalty	unclear
	13	If anyone points out Corbyn is a **terrorist** supporting scumbag, his cult members go nuts So let's look at the facts...	alt influencer	sanctity	unclear
MIGRANT	14	hahahah Nice. These complete idiots should all be made to take the next 50 **immigrants** into their own homes.	alt influencer	sanctity	clear

Fig. 47 Examples of keywords in tweets June 4th 2017.

In the data extracted for June 4th, (Fig. 47), both numerically and in terms of increasingly more intense content, there was a clear backlash against the Muslim minority after the London Bridge terrorist attack, shown in this group of tweets mocking Islam and Muslims. The tweets, when considered collectively, are pushing for radicalization. Several tweets mention that Muslim faith is equivalent to psychiatric illness, i.e., its practitioners are 'nutters'. This form of ridicule makes its appearance on the 4th of June and then persists until the end of June 2017, using impaired mental health as a marker of other adversarial groups, such as leftwing users. While no hate crimes towards the British left wing were reported, tweets such as Tweet 1 expand hatred towards the Muslim minority to include hatred against others. This description of the situation in the UK expressed in Tweet 1 surely increased the political tension online in tandem with the one boiling up in the wider society.

The negative portrayal of Muslims is evoked in several tweets. In Tweet 2 there is an accusation that Muslims are unwilling to take to the streets to protest against terrorism, implicitly framing Muslims both as sympathizers and as cowards. In Tweet 3, another user calls for the deportation of all Muslims. There is a clear correspondence here with the Hate Crimes Timeline: the phrase 'Muslim cowards' was written on the walls of a mosque the next day (see 3.4.1), highlighting what seems to be a connection between users online and activists offline. The widespread aggressiveness observable both online and in the material world, is seen through an ironic mention of Crusaders in Tweet 5, a trope that also showed up in videos that described physical violence to be committed against vulnerable

minorities. Tweet 8 portrays the Muslim minority as a 'natural disaster', seemingly a justification for users to engage in calls for purification of British society and a demand to send all Muslims "back to Syria", a theme that emerged for some of the registered hate crimes (see 3.4.1). For example, in Tweet 9 the use of the narrative around the whole Muslim community is adopted to target the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, who shares their Muslim faith,. This narrative preceded instances such as the abuse of a Muslim student by his teacher, reported on the 4th of June. The level and intensity of activity by online accounts and in hate crimes following a terrorist attack often mirrored each other through common language, emotional tone, and shared narratives to be seen in the constant exposition of radicalization online and beyond. The tweets examined capture the blend of humour, morality talk and aggressiveness aroused by these accounts in the first days of June 2017. Humour was channelled online by Conservatives and the radical right alike to propagate their outrage and proliferate views that were acted upon offline by like-minded activists.

KEYWORD	N.	TWEET	USER	MORAL FOUNDATION	CLARITY OF HUMOUR
MUSLIM	1	Immediately deport this dress wearing **jihadi**	alt influencer	sanctity	unclear
	2	Deport Khan **jihadi** immediately	alt influencer	sanctity	unclear
	3	Ah, the **jihadi** tea lady	alt influencer	sanctity	clear
	4	Would you adam and eve it? #londonbridge faking a protest by **muslims**	alt news	loyalty	clear
	5	The UK government has housed one of Britain's most notorious **jihadists** 5 doors down from a primary school.	free speech influencer	sanctity	unclear
	6	**Saudi Arabia's** ignorant view of Christianity and Judaism makes the West less safe and alienates freedom.	alt news	sanctity	clear

	7	Why are the media driving around the same group of **muslims** to different locations and pretending its a real anti Jihad rally? Weirdos.	alt influencer	authority	unclear
	8	The **jihadist** next door #londonbridge #manchesterarena	alt news	sanctity	unclear
TERRORIST	9	Dear Katy; Love does not conquer hate. This isn't a fucking Disney movie. Lame platitudes don't stop **terrorists**.	free speech influencer	loyalty	clear
	10	Should we ban women from cycling so as not to offend potential **terrorists**? Actual attitude of some leftists is not far removed from this.	free speech influencer	sanctity	unclear
	11	This is for **IS**, this is for **al-Qaeda**," hostage taker screamed. Authorities: Not known if terror related.	free speech influencer	authority	clear
MIGRANT	12	WATCH | @NickFerrariLBC blasts LibLabCon politicians who have allowed **migrants** to live within their own monocultures and never integrate.	trad news	loyalty	unclear

Fig. 48 Examples of keywords in tweets June 5th 2017.

Humourous tweets that targeted the Muslim community continued to be posted on Twitter by the particular accounts that were extracted from the dataset. Furthermore, the narrative of several of these

tweets on the 5th of June was focused on framing the Muslim community as terrorists. Tweeters underlined the warning that those whom they called terrorists were everywhere: next door, near schools or even being an old tea lady in your office (see Tweet 3, Fig. 48). These tweeters offered ridicule as a response by British society to this danger as well as through the toughness of authorities against Muslims and by deporting them. The radicalization of these narratives increased day by day as tweets, which were still humorous, became increasingly aggressive. Tweet 1 (Fig. 48) shows the persistence of calls for deportation, using ridicule by labelling Muslim men as "dress wearing jihadi". British society is framed as being fragile and its failure to deport Muslims is used as implicit encouragement for rightwing radicals to take matters into their own hands. Tweet 2 emphatically calls for the deportation of Sadiq Khan, the Mayor of London, on the grounds of his being a radicalized Muslim. Likewise, Tweet 4 is evidence that the London Bridge terrorist attack remained in the digital flow of the radical right posting for days. The serious message of the tweet is encased in Cockney rhyming slang which creates a humorous undertone: "Would you Adam and Eve it" (Would you believe it?) A growing trend in the tweets, as seen in Tweet 5, is the desire of the radical right to act due to what they consider to be the ineffectualness of the British government and police. The behavior of the radical right in the material world reflects this shift as in the case of Michael Higginson, the rightwing student who rapidly radicalized himself and was reported by his teachers on the 5th June.[57] This day's posts also contribute to the "Muslim as the danger next door" narrative. Tweet 8 continues with the "Muslims as terrorists" narrative. Moreover, in the continuation of this narrative, "Muslim Cowards" was written on the Thornaby Mosque walls[58] the same day. Much of the content of humorous tweets posted on Twitter in the selected accounts persisted for days with tweets peaking on particular themes, such as Muslims committing terrorist attacks. The author of Tweet 12 encourages further radicalization of moderate Conservatives through culture, humorously mentioning the popular LBC radio program taunting the listenership of this program. Enforced integration of migrants is implied to be the only rational way to respond to security issues in the UK.

KEYWORD	**N.**	**TWEET**	**USER**	**MORAL FOUNDATION**	**CLARITY OF HUMOUR**
MUSLIM	1	hahahaa Even that ponce and especially if he/she has any connections whatsoever with the **muslim**/islamic faith/ideology	alt influencer	sanctity	clear

[57] See section **2.3.1 June 2017 Day-by-day hate crime Timeline**.
[58] See section **2.3.1 June 2017 Day-by-day hate crime Timeline**.

	2	**muslim** sickos, living around the corner from the local fish and chips	alt influencer	sanctity	unclear
	3	We have **Islamic** extremists blowing us up & Corbynite teachers are reporting UKIP supporters to Prevent.. #Priorities	trad news	sanctity	clear
	4	I would like to offer the first proposal, 1. Deport ALL **muslims** forthwith	alt influencer	sanctity	unclear
	5	'**Muslim** gym' terrorist attended reviewed as "great Halal environment to workout! Great sisters fitness classes.	trad news	sanctity	clear
	6	London terrorist attended gender segregated '**Muslim** gym'.	trad news	sanctity	clear
	7	Unfortunately there was zero intel ground anything. They were all watching to the same **muslim** nutter on TV, weren't they	alt influencer	authority	clear
	8	And just about everyone of these nutters would happily say nothing about the **jihadi** next door.	alt influencer	loyalty	clear
	9	Rubbish is the very least of their problems. They are surrounded by **jihadi** nutjobs raping all the local girls.	alt influencer	sanctity	unclear
	10	Here you go, just in case someone out there actually thinks **Muslims** are NOT nutters.	alt influencer	sanctity	unclear
	11	This **muslim** nutter was actually on TV. Seriously?	alt influencer	sanctity	unclear
	12	Commie trapped in terror attack and moaning about "**islamophobia!** #LondonBridgeAttacks https://www. therebel.media/islamophobia_shut_the_f_k_up …"	alt news	sanctity	clear
	13	There is this Series on MBC, a saudi funded television that is doing a documentary on ISIS,and **muslims** are hating it because it's offensive	alt influencer	sanctity	unclear

	14	Yeah the ones that happened after 400 years of **muslims** conquering their way into Europe while taking over 2/3 of the Christian world. Those.	alt influencer	loyalty	clear
	15	all UK politicians have been taking up the O by these **muslim** nutters	alt influencer	sanctity	clear
	16	oh god, another **muslim** nutter desperately searching for his promised virgins. he is gonna be well pissed when he finds out the truth	alt influencer	sanctity	clear
	17	Must have been pretty big, everytime a **muslim** kills women & children, left wingers start randomly howling "CRUSADES!" at all who'll listen.	alt influencer	loyalty	clear
	18	hey reezy, are u one of these **muslim** sympathizers. Rather sick wouldn't you agree???	alt influencer	sanctity	unclear
MIGRANT	19	'Man who murdered young child in **refugee** home was ex-convict'	alt news	sanctity	clear
	20	Oh, he entered as a **refugee**. Seriously?	alt influencer	sanctity	unclear
TERRORIST	21	Remember- just because one **terrorist** wears an Arsenal shirt, doesn't mean you should hate Arsenal. There are loads of other good reasons.	trad influencer	sanctity	clear

Fig. 49 Examples of keywords in tweets June 6th 2017.

The different themes contained in tweets posted on previous days appeared in notable quantities in tweets posted on the 6th June. A cumulative effect was created by each tweet reinforcing the others in a common narrative online: a battle for the soul of the nation. The ideological struggle, the fight with groups whose identity is perceived as a threat, such as Muslims and Leftwing users, is embraced by these accounts as a priority in their posts. An important argument in these accounts is a criticism of the existence of deviancy in an integrated society, supporting the idea that Muslims are abnormal because they are ridiculous and dangerous: barbarians, sexually violent, insane and murderous. This framing is frequently employed by tweeters through brief comical caricatures of Muslims.

Tweet 2 displays “the dangerous Other lives next door” narrative about Muslims being everywhere and a constant danger to the British population. Tweet 3 incorporates an apocalyptical narrative,

casting Muslims as terrorists and leftwing teachers reporting on Conservatives, by raising the case of Michael Higginson[59]. This tweet could be interpreted as encouraging radicalization amongst younger users. Living with Muslims is portrayed in Tweet 4 as living in the midst of a social disease and the tweeter demands an immediate deportation of all Muslims. Tweets 5 and 6 are attempts to show that Muslim terrorists routinely go to specific places such as particular gyms. Muslims are framed as introducing Halal rules and gender segregation, notions that are alien to British mores of the time. Moreover, Muslims are portrayed as preying upon the weakest in British society. In Tweet 8 'the next door' narrative is continued by the tweeter calling out people who avoid their responsibilities by not reporting on jihadis amongst them.

Those members of British society who attempt to separate accusations of terrorism from characteristics of Muslim communities are constructed as a threat to the whole of society and also by implication, as a threat to the Conservative movement. In Tweet 11, Muslims who are given TV coverage are publicly exposed and ridiculed. The London Bridge attack continues to be mentioned in the digital flow of Twitter. In Tweets such as 7, 15 and 16, Muslims are portrayed as suffering from severe mental health issues through widespread use of a pejorative slang word, "nutters". The use of this term is an important aspect of the dehumanizing narrative about Muslims emerging on Twitter throughout the month. In the Tweet 15, the poster is using a humorous trope based on what is considered, for some, a humiliating sexual practice as the tweet criticizes the political elite because they "have been taking up the O", to project disgust onto politicians and the Muslim community. The "O" mean the rectum in this case. The author implies that only radical right politicians are free from subjection to Muslims. These accounts also continued, day by day, to routinely portray all their political adversaries as one hostile group. For example, the Crusades, in Tweets 14 and 17, were part of a narrative in the digital flow in which tweeters justified these historical and violent activities as a legitimate reaction to Muslim killings and for use in ridiculing left wing users. This narrative tells of the unavoidable violence between Muslims and Christians because they are unable to coexist. Crusade based tropes re-emerge in the tweets days after the Finsbury Park Mosque terrorist attack on the 19th of June. The tweets that mocked and ridiculed terrorists, and Arsenal football club in the case of Tweet 20, are evidence of the popularity of simple and witty tweets that link terrorism with references to pop culture.

KEYWORD	N.	TWEET	USER	MORAL FOUNDATION	CLARITY OF HUMOUR

[59] See section **2.3.1 June 2017 Day-by-day hate crime Timeline**.

MUSLIM	1	**3 attacks in 3 months** and they've arrested more "hate criminals"	free speech influencer	fairness	unclear
	2	Will the Mayor be commenting on the hate crime in London today by **Muslims** stabbing a woman while chanting "this is for Allah"? Or nah?	free speech influencer	sanctity	clear
	3	CLUELESS: Mayor of London doesn't know where hundreds of returning ISIS **jihadis** are. We cannot go on like this!	trad news	loyalty	unclear
	4	STUPID: #MayorofLondon doesn't know where hundreds of returning #ISIS #**jihadis** are. We cannot go on like this!	trad news	fairness	unclear
	5	Just another **muslim** tosser looking for the virgin theory. I am thinking someone should let him know its an islamic joke, like a play on word	alt influencer	sanctity	clear
	6	UK Cops Arrest Dozens for 'Hate Crimes' Since London Attack, But Mayor Says Police Can't Afford to Track **Jihadists**	alt politician	fairness	unclear
	7	**Algerian-born** #ISIS #NotreDame attacker once received #EU award for opposing	trad news	sanctity	clear

		discrimination against #migrants . You couldn't make it up...			
	8	EU Gave Notre Dame Hammer Attack **Jihadi** Award For Writing Pro-Immigration Articles in Sweden	free speech influencer	sanctity	clear
	9	Gorka: **7 Dead In UK**, And CNN Asks Me About Trump's Tweets For 16 Minutes	free speech influencer	fairness	clear
	10	BREAKING: Stabbing of nursery worker by women chanting "**Allah** will get you" not being treated as terror.	trad news	sanctity	unclear
	11	LONDON: Today's attackers were "chanting the **Koran**", "shouting about Allah". Counter-terrorism NOT investigating.	trad news	sanctity	clear
	12	**Muslims**. Chanting about Allah. Chanting Koran verses. Stabbing a woman. Police: Not terror related.	free speech influencer	sanctity	clear
MIGRANT	13	Swedish govt. orders clinic to end treatment for female rape victims in favor of treating 'traumatized' **migrants**	free speech influencer	sanctity	unclear
	14	Risky sex? Or **migrants** and sodomites...	alt news	sanctity	unclear
	15	Some men are claiming to be the legal fathers of up	alt news	loyalty	clear

		to ten **migrant** children.			
GIRLS	16	though's poor **girls** (muslim nutters) were probably faced with gang rape every 30 minutes or this. Can u imagine.	alt influencer	sanctity	clear
TERRORIST	17	There were 14 more "racist incidents" recorded yesterday than average. The left cares more about this than **terror**.	free speech influencer	fairness	unclear
	18	Met Police trumpet 25 "hate crime" arrests since Saturday. Not as many **terror** arrests though we wager. Do you...	alt news	fairness	clear

Fig. 50 Examples of keywords in tweets June 7th 2017.

On the 7th June, we begin to witness the dismantling of users' loyalty to UK authorities. The accounts being considered mostly focused intensely on the mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, but also often criticized the police and the government. To gather support, users framed tweets around the victimhood of the radical right, accentuating the perception of unfair treatment by the state. Tweets 1 and 17 portray the situation in the UK as if right wing users guilty of hate speech (which they deny) are being persecuted by the state and the left wing, while Muslims are given free rein. Tweet 3, echoed by Tweet 4, portrays the Sadiq Khan as lost and lacking in intelligence while radicals of Muslim faith, identified as jihadis and ISIS, are cast as a danger that is ignored. Khan is ridiculed by users as "STUPID" and "CLUELESS, an incompetent with no authority. In Tweet 5 the poster implies that they know more about Muslim theology than the police, and does so by joking about one of the stereotypical tenets of Jihadism. In Tweet 6 and Tweet 18 the police's response to content posted by radical right, which the radical right deny is a hate crime, is used as a way of pointing out that the police are targeting the wrong people. In this way the tweeters are trying to show that radicalization of Conservatives is the right response to the threat by the Muslim community that they perceive. Moreover, a violent video featuring a man, Craig Burgin, threatening Muslims with a knife uploaded

on the 7th June[60] shows that this wave of radicalized digital content online and the perpetuation of hate crimes was not slowing down.

Tweets 10, 11 and 12 show how the radical right calling out Muslims as terrorists and radicalized Muslims carrying out attacks was represented online. The attack by extremist Muslim girls chanting about Allah was used in these tweets to craft a narrative that informs other users that if the state avoids intervention, radical right activists are willing to act. These authors often tried to stoke the feelings of social strife upon other users through the content they posted. Furthermore, the stream of tweets and aggressive actions by radical right activists are framed as justifiable reactions. The author of Tweet 16 attempts to evoke sympathy for the actions of the radical right movement by asking other users if they can picture the suffering of Muslim girls who have been gang raped every 30 minutes by other Muslims. The use of clickbait words such as "muslim nutters" and "raped girls" together in one tweet highlights the vulnerability of the perceived danger by Muslim rapists in UK society.

KEYWORD	**N.**	**TWEET**	**USER**	**MORAL FOUNDATION**	**CLARITY OF HUMOUR**
MUSLIM	1	https://www.bible.ca/**islam**/islam-allahs-daughters.htm (Link share)	alt influencer	loyalty	clear
	2	They dont care about our foreign policy. They think we are godless sinful non-**muslims** who should be killed. Your argument is SO 2007.	alt influencer	sanctity	clear
	3	The DUP oppose gay marriage. Which puts them in a good position to appeal to the 99% of British **muslims** who say they oppose gay marriage.	alt influencer	sanctity	clear
	4	Please retweet to raise awareness of **throwing people off buildings phobia**.....	alt news	loyalty	clear
	5	Dude called Hamza snaps a pic rather than helping. People say **Islam** made the woman help. So no1 else would've?	alt politician	authority	unclear
	6	But no victims and no attacks in Poland were there ?	alt influencer	loyalty	clear

[60] See section **2.3.1 June 2017 Day-by-day hate crime Timeline**.

		Because Poland doesn't take **Muslim** ' refugees " . Heard that somewhere .. Haven't you ?			
	7	KeK>>>>>> >>>>>>>>Moloch #PraiseKek he will grant us victory over the other false gods of **allah** and moloch, Halleluya	alt influencer	authority	clear

Fig. 51 Examples of keywords in tweets June 10th 2017.

On the 10th of June, the Muslim community was still a central topic but most of the tweets did not follow a well defined shared narrative. Nevertheless, in the accounts that have been extracted, the negative portrayal of Muslims is pursued with determination. Some of these tweets clearly suggest that the arrival of refugees automatically translates into violence and crime. The author of Tweet 2, (Fig. 51) using hyperbolic language, points out that no dialogue is possible with Muslims, framing them as likely to exterminate all non-Muslims. Tweet 3 mentions the march for gay rights occurring on the following day and the author humorously states that Muslim community values are equivalent to those of some radical right movements such as the Northern Irish Democratic Unionist Party, who also oppose gay marriage. The mutual aversion/attraction process between radical movements, Muslims and the radical right, emerges playfully in this tweet, and is acknowledged. Tweet 4 is a counter-argument to accusations of Islamophobia on the part of radical right activists in that it highlights the threat of violence that the Muslim community is believed to represent and claims that having a phobia against being thrown out of windows, a mocking over extension of the term phobia, is a legitimate reason to react. These accounts often mention an isolated incident of violence by someone from a minority background to frame the targeted group exclusively in the light of that event, a trope much used in negative stereotyping of an entire group. In Tweet 7, on the eve of a mass mobilization of the British radical right the following day, atypical cultural contaminations from the US with an invocation of KeK, a symbol of the American alt-right, emerge. Use of these contaminations alludes to the mix of religious sentiment and ridicule online that seems to characterize the radicalized users in the US. These tweets preempt the march ‘Against Hate’ organized by British radical right groups on the 11th of June in Manchester.

KEYWORD	**N.**	**TWEET**	**USER**	**MORAL FOUNDATION**	**CLARITY OF HUMOUR**

MUSLIM	1	No , we hate psychotic scumbags like you . Do join your **Muslim**-murderer brothers and pray for your martyrdom . We'll pray for it too	alt influencer	sanctity	clear
	2	The Left think white christians are the ultimate evil while ignoring the overwhelming anti-gay culture within the **muslim** community. No deal.	alt influencer	sanctity	clear
	3	We totally fucked up & allowed known **jihadists** to slaughter innocents, but hey at least the victims were diverse! Fucking kill me now.	free speech influencer	loyalty	clear
	4	They asked Northampton **Jihadi** "what would happen to gays under the sharia"n he said "they'd be thrown off tall buildings" Then theres these	alt news	loyalty	clear
	5	Maybe the cops could stop whining about lack of resources if they stopped harassing decent people & started arresting **Muslim** jihadis	alt influencer	fairness	unclear

	6	**Muslim** "anti-terror protesters" handed posters & flowers by leftists BEFORE CNN staged 'demonstration'. Totally fake news.	free speech influencer	authority	clear
	7	**Muslim** woman helps old lady on bus therefore endless terror attacks & sharia law no longer a problem.	free speech influencer	fairness	clear
MIGRANT	8	The populist, anti-mass migration party is third most popular with **immigrants**.	alt news	authority	unclear
	9	And such a wisely used option would kill stone dead the (false) argument for **immigration** to prop up our ageing...	alt news	loyalty	clear
TERRORIST	10	POLICE: NOT a hate crime, raping white girls! NOT a hate crime, stabbing non-muslims! NOT a hate crime, **blowing up kids! HATE CRIME, BACON!**	trad news	fairness	clear

Fig. 52 Examples of keywords in tweets June 11th 2017.

The tweets from the selected accounts posted on 11th June targeted the Muslim minority with renewed aggressiveness. The Manchester protest on this day[61] was mentioned in few of these tweets. This march occurred as an initiative against "Militant Jihadism" in UK and to defend the rights of the Gay

[61] See section **2.3.1 June 2017 Day-by-day hate crime Timeline**.

community against supposed Muslim hate. These protests provoked clashes and resulted in several arrests. In these tweets, any opposition to this radical right mobilization in Manchester, throughout the day, was considered to be allied with terrorism. Tweets 2 and 5 frame the march as an unavoidable conflict between Christians and Muslims. The tweets often imply that other users have to choose between the two groups. Even progressivism is feigned in these tweets by the tweeters constructing anti-gay culture as an exclusive Muslim trait. Tweet 4, for example, accuses wider UK society of ignoring the risk of terrorism that would first target the Gay community. During the march there were several clashes with the police. This attempt to provoke the erosion of the authority of the state played on the outrage emerging in the first week after London Bridge terror attack due to the perceived lack of willingness by the police to act against the terrorists. Tweet 10 is characterized by a clever use of language, introducing very violent imagery, although preceding it with a negation marker. The tweeter uses upper case in the final part of the tweet, to aggressively accuse the Muslim community of rapes and murders and ridicules them by using and capitalising the term BACON. The tweeter implies as well that hate crimes are an invention and that real crimes, committed by Muslims, are being ignored. During the scuffles of 11th June in the Manchester march, a pig's head was used by the radical right to taunt a smaller group of antifascist protesters.[62] This confrontational signaling based on Islamophobia was channeled through tweeted content and was matched by the actions of radical right activists in marches and protests.

KEYWORD	**N.**	**TWEET**	**USER**	**MORAL FOUNDATION**	**CLARITY OF HUMOUR**
MUSLIM	1	Show some of that anger the next time a **muslim** detonates a suicide vest in a pop concert. Bet you dont. Ambulance Chasing is a Labour cert.	alt influencer	fairness	unclear
	2	Sweden. Where "The Worlds First Feminist Government" preside over **muslim** ghettos & 3rd worlders who just can't seem to stop raping stuff.	alt influencer	sanctity	clear
	3	Germany's first liberal **Mosque**	alt news	sanctity	unclear

[62] See section **2.3.1 June 2017 Day-by-day hate crime Timeline**.

	4	Swedish **convert**	alt news	sanctity	unclear
MIGRANT	5	Swedish **migrant** gang-rape: Court can't establish which suspect did what. So they all walk free, avoiding deportation	alt news	sanctity	unclear
	6	Swedish **migrant** gang-rape: Court can't establish which suspect did what. So they all walk free, avoiding deportation (different time of posting)	alt news	sanctity	unclear
	7	That awkward moment when council employees who housed **immigrants** in front of local people get attacked by those immigrants #grenfelltower	alt news	authority	unclear
GAY	8	All we need is for #**MILO** to join! @AMDWaters @DavidCoburnUKip @prwhittle #MakeUKIPGayAgain	alt news	loyalty	unclear

Fig. 53 Examples of keywords in tweets June 16th 2017.

On the 16th of June, the tweets were not linked with each other and were posted without a common narrative. Many of the tweets described Europe as collapsing due to the violence perpetrated by Muslims. Rapes, supposedly committed every day by Muslims, were an important part of the ideological case made by the posters in the accounts examined. The allegation of rape was one of the main arguments to attack minorities, especially refugees and Muslims, by Conservatives and rightwing radicals alike during June 2017. Much of the content in these accounts focused on events involving attacks by Muslims in past weeks. Tweet 1 is an indication that the anger, evoked by the terrorist attack at the Ariana Grande concert that had taken place on 22 May 2017, was present online at least until 16th of June 2017. It seems that the impact of terror attacks is long lived online and those attacks resurface to be used as justification for the radical right's desire for vengeance. Norman Osborne, the person responsible for the Finsbury Park Mosque attack on the 19th June was motivated

by these feelings of anger and his hate towards Muslims[63]. The prosecutor Jonathan Rees at the Finsbury Mosque Park terror attack trial pointed out that "hatred of all Muslims that had its roots in the material Osborne had watched on television and viewed online" (Dearden, 2018). The note found in Osborne's van after the attack confirmed this view as it "showed Osborne raging against Muslims, grooming gangs, Jeremy Corbyn, Sadiq Khan and Lily Allen" (*ibidem*). While these tweets do not show a clear incitement to commit terror attacks, this content is part of a wider effort online that had an impact in terms of radicalization of more fragile individuals. Moreover, the themes that triggered the radicalization of Norman Osborne, such as Muslims, rapes, key figures of the British left movement such as Sadiq Khan and Jeremy Corbyn, were also the focus of posts in the extracted accounts presented in this dissertation. This thematic connection between the writings of a lone wolf terrorist and what is considered day by day posting on Twitter, a platform accessible to millions of users with a fairly strict policing approach, show how radicalization can become a normal practice in current online spaces. This is another indication that shows how terror attacks from radicalized Muslims can influence acts of violence offline as a cycle of mutual radicalization emerges. The occurrence of these attacks provoked numerous posts about Muslims as terrorists by radical right users. This posting encouraged radicalization of individuals on the right that committed hate crimes that further provoked more extremist Muslims. The result was a cyclical return to violence in both communities. Tweet 2 (Fig. 53) ridicules Muslims, feminists and progressive governments, all at once. By drawing a spurious connection between Muslims, feminists, and people from the third world, the author implies that there is an alliance between feminists, Muslims, and migrants in parts of Europe and suggests that they and are unable to control themselves and that they all work together to commit rapes. The last part of the tweet, "can't seem to stop raping stuff" ridicules the targets of the tweet stating they have no self control and also that they just rape "stuff", not discriminating between people and things. The building of a "liberal" mosque mentioned in Tweet 3 creates a strong implication that such an event is ironic in itself, and that the idea is oxymoronic. The author implies that Muslims do not hold liberal views. Mosques as a symbol of Islam appear to be a target of attacks online by right wing radicals and, as has been seen, offline, mosques were actually attacked. In Tweet 5 rapes are again highlighted as part of the continuing criticism of UK courts which, according to these accounts, do not deal seriously with crimes apparently committed by migrants. Interestingly, Tweet 8 is an example of how these accounts positioned themselves regarding the LGBT+ community. This tweet signals support for Milo Yiannopoulos, a radical rightwing activist who is gay (see 2.5). Some radical right users embrace a "gay friendly" narrative, even creating hashtags such as #MakeUKIPGayAgain, that positively framed gay people who were activists for the

[63] See section **2.3.1 June 2017 Day-by-day hate crime Timeline**.

Conservative and radical right cause. Moreover, the gay friendly narrative apparently clashes with the traditional perception of these radical rightwing movements as being homophobic. During June 2017, these accounts consistently maintained a pro-gay discourse, from the content published for the march on the 11th of June to Tweet 8 published on 16th of June, mainly to weaponize another argument useful to portray the Muslim minority as incompatible with life in UK.

KEYWORD	N.	TWEET	USER	MORAL FOUNDATION	CLARITY OF HUMOUR
MUSLIM	1	Wrong , sicko . I'm saying any society that sets legal age below actual maturity is sick. **Muslim** countries set it at child levels, like 6.	alt influencer	sanctity	unclear
	2	So where were the **muslim** community protesting after 3 major terrorist attacks in London?	alt influencer	fairness	unclear
	3	Swedish **Islamophobia** Expert Who Joined ISIS Now Calling For Attacks in #Sweden	alt influencer	sanctity	unclear
	4	Poll: The English Rank Bacon at Number One (Definitely do not retweet to offend any of **our pork-hating friends**...)	alt news	loyalty	clear
	5	Swedish Expert on **Islamophobia** Joins ISIS – Calls for	trad influencer	sanctity	unclear

		Attacks on Sweden.			
MIGRANT	6	Illegal **immigrants** from Iraq and Syria pouring in on the back of lorries. What could possibly go wrong?	free speech influencer	sanctity	clear
	7	Just need to kill em faster & in Much greater quantity . Surely all the EU "**migrants**" want to go home & fight for Islam , right? Target rich	alt influencer	sanctity	unclear
	8	That awkward moment when council employees who housed **immigrants** in front of local people get attacked by those immigrants #grenfelltower	alt news	authority	clear
	9	**SMUGGLER**-Man tried to smuggle Iraqi into Britain in suitcase	trad news	fairness	clear
TERRORIST	10	Labour casually celebrating the timing of **terror** attack	alt news	loyalty	unclear

Fig. 54 Examples of keywords in tweets June 17th 2017.

The tweets posted on the 17th of June show the continuing spiral of radicalization during June 2017. One of the recurrent tropes in this data set is the framing of Muslims as pedophiles. For example, Tweet 1 (Fig. 54) projects disgust at Muslims and Muslim-run countries, describing them as if they routinely engage in pedophilia. Muslims are portrayed as morally sick because, according to the tweeters, in Muslim regimes the age limit on child marriage is as low as the age of 6. The author

writes "sick" twice in the tweet, with the first use clearly mocking the addressee as, "sicko". Tweet 2 also shows the reaction of an author to the information that there is to be a major Muslim mobilization in the UK, i.e., the Al Quds march on the 18th of June,[64] as the Muslim community did not supposedly protest against the terrorist attacks that occurred in the UK in the last three months. Tweet 2 is also an example of the radical right that consistently continued the narrative on Twitter that all Muslims support terrorism. Tweets 3 and 5 shared a story about an Islamophobia expert in Sweden who joined ISIS contributing to the everyday posting of a few tweets that involved other European countries. It was a feature of the June 2017 dataset to spread the idea of a common European struggle against Islam. Nevertheless, tweets posted on the 17th of June are unclear in terms of the true intensity of the radicalism of the authors. It is difficult to know whether the authors believe the things they write or whether they are joking. The apparent non-seriousness and mocking of these authors seems to only increase the impact of their posting. Furthermore, instead of talking about simply deporting migrants and Muslims, some authors actually began to advocate for violence against them. The author of Tweet 7 proposes national purification and raises as a justification that all migrants, in which he includes Muslims, want to fight for Islam and should be sent to their homes in Islamic countries and increase deaths through violence in these countries. Immigrants were also targeted as in Tweet 8, in which this group is portrayed as ungrateful and violent, attacking those council employees who housed them. The hashtag #grenfelltower is used by the author of the tweet to give an anti-immigrant spin to the narrative around the Grenfell tower tragedy that was damaging to the Conservative government accused to have profited on the renovation of the complex. Tweet 10 portrays the Al Quds march as a celebration by Labour and the left of a terrorist attack, yet again, in this tweet, left wing movements and the Muslim community are presented as one united and hostile entity working to destroy the UK. Tweets extracted two days before the Finsbury Park Mosque attack show that the potential for violence offline was alluded to, rather than being rejected, and indeed, made more palatable, through tweets which were not quite serious, using ridicule and mockery. The extracted tweets often presented an allusion to the right of self-defense of the radical right community against Immigrants, Muslim community and left wing because all of these groups support terrorism and are invading as well as corrupting UK society: Tweets 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 9, 10. Other Tweets such as 4, that hint at Muslims by using the words "pork hating friends", describe hate crimes committed throughout the month against mosques as pork parts were used to desecrate Muslim holy sites (see 3.4.1). Tweet 6 ironically asks about "what could go wrong?" when stories describing immigrants found dead in lorries are routine

[64] See section **1.3 The Time-frame: Crucial events and temporal nexus points**.

in the UK news cycle[65]. Tweet 7, described above, contains clear insinuations about the need for hate crimes and violence against Muslims and immigrants.

KEYWORD	N.	TWEET	USER	MORAL FOUNDATION	CLARITY OF HUMOUR
MUSLIM	1	Apache helicopters & Taranis drones should blare this through loud-speakers when we inevitably invade the **Caliphate**	alt influencer	sanctity	unclear
	2	Annie show those people holding that **hezbollah** flag this picture, they'll Shit bricks trust me	alt influencer	loyalty	clear
	3	When jews turn out in their hundreds to oppose **jihadi** terror supporters on the streets on London and football lads just chat shit online	alt news	loyalty	clear
	4	10,000 **Muslims** expected to attend Cologne anti-terror march. 300 people of mixed faith actually show up.	free speech influencer	authority	clear
	5	That time when Sweden's 'multicultural & **Islamophobia'** expert went on to	free speech influencer	sanctity	clear

[65] In this case the author of the tweet is probably referring to the story of 71 migrants found dead in an abandoned lorry in Austria that made national headlines in UK during June 2017. See: "Trial begins over deaths of 71 migrants in refrigerated lorry". 2017. *The Guardian*. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/21/trial-begins-over-deaths-of-71-migrants-in-refrigerated-lorry. Last accessed 2 October 2020.

		join ISIS. Yes, really.			
	6	Just argued the case to my editor to let me keep the phrase "finger a **jihadist**" in my book. It's gonna be great	alt politician	sanctity	clear
	7	You won't force the pagans to convert to Islam?go say that to the 80 million Hindus slaughtered by the **muslim** horde,and say that to Mohammad	alt influencer	sanctity	clear
	8	Converting the whole world ey ? And what if someone opposes that. What will you do to him ? What will you do to **muslims** who leave Islam	alt influencer	fairness	clear
MIGRANT	9	'Rescued' And why are they 'suspected' illegal **immigrants**? Fairly sure none of them had a Yorkshire accent.	alt news	sanctity	clear
TERRORIST	10	He converted to Islam to become a **terrorist** Don't forget kids, Islam is the Religion of Peace	alt influencer	sanctity	clear

Fig. 55 Examples of keywords in tweets June 18th 2017.

The narrative equating Muslims to terrorists continued through to the 18th of June. Some tweeters commented on the Al Quds march occurring on the same day as being an initiative of terrorist

supporters. Also, some tweets, for example Tweet 6, were framed using humour and disgust, e.g. "finger a jihadist", a sexual practice mentioned by the author without specifying the sex of the target, to humiliate Muslims. The author of the tweet implies as well that the integration of the Muslim community is a danger to the free speech of book authors, due to widespread political correctness in the UK. The author portrays himself in the tweet as having gotten the upper hand against the editor that being edgy against Muslims is fun. Tweet 1 suggests a reaction to the al Quds March, a supposedly ironic call to blare from the speakers of "Apache helicopters & Taranis drones" when a global conflict against Muslims begins and to invade the Caliphate, the so-called Islamic State emerged due to actions of the terrorist group Daesh in Syria and Iraq since 2013. This tweet shows the bellicose intention of the tweeter that is willing for the UK to go to war. From Tweet 3 it can be seen that there is an ongoing exchange in the radical right network on Twitter in discussing how to challenge what is perceived to be a mobilization of Muslims in the country. Furthermore, in Tweet 3 there is also a call online for radical right groups, such as football hooligans, to face the Muslim threat.[66] The narrative of these authors, in Tweets 5, 7, 8 and 10, centers around the potential forced conversion of Westerners into radical Islam seen as part of the danger of the Muslim minority. Tweet 5, for example, repeats the story of an Islamophobia expert that joined a terrorist group, ISIS, already mentioned by two tweets on the 17th of June. This author implicitly discourages the use of the term Islamophobia while they also add "yes, really" to underline the supposed ridiculousness of the story. This process of conversion is perceived to be part of an invasion by what is framed as "a muslim horde" in Tweet 7. The tweet is written in a way to make other users visualize the idea of a mass threat intertwined with feelings of disgust. The visualization of an ethnic and religious minority gathered in mass evokes this sense of disgust; it is a common framing employed by these users, for example through pictures attached to tweets.[67] The author adds in the verbal text of the tweet, in a tone of ridicule, "say that to Mohammad". Moreover, the tweet reports millions of Hindi killed by Muslims, not academically verified, supposedly during Muslim attempts throughout history to conquer India and transform it into a Muslim country. This unproven historical data contributes to the narrative that portrays Islam as an intrinsically violent faith and Muslims as historically genocidal in their conquest of new territories.

In Tweets 2 and 10, tweeters use ridicule and mockery make their narrative seem somewhat carefree. This use of a carefree tone is in direct contrast to what they are proposing, very serious categorizations and threats against Muslims. For example, Tweet 10 is almost a singsong, ironically reminding

[66] See section **4.1 Visuals**.
[67] See section **4.2 Humorous text + serious image**.

children, who probably will not read this tweet, that while many Muslims become terrorists, Islam is supposed to be the religion of peace. The author attempts , through irony, to open the eyes of other users on this paradox but also to frame all Muslims as terrorists. These tweets, usually expressed in a mocking tone, are a small portion of the overall content in these tweets that indicate the widespread feelings of fear and threat, as well as disgust towards Muslims expressed by Conservative and radical right users on Twitter before the Finsbury Mosque terror attack of 19th June.

KEYWORD	**N.**	**TWEET**	**USER**	**MORAL FOUNDATION**	**CLARITY OF HUMOUR**
MUSLIM	1	We're going round in circles. You said all countries attacked by **muslims** deserve it. We can't go beyond that. So BYE. See you at Dabiq ;-)	alt influencer	fairness	clear
	2	They are the wrong type of **muslims**. He even said Indonesia & Peshawar deserved to be attacked. He is a proud muslim. Leave him to it.	alt influencer	sanctity	unclear
	3	Read my conversation with that ranting pro-Jihad **muslim**. THAT is what our enemy is. They can't handle Infidels who know the Quran & history.	alt influencer	sanctity	clear
	4	Are we pretending that there wasnt thousands of **muslims** marching through London expressing support for Islamists yesterday? #FinsburyPark"	alt influencer	sanctity	unclear
	5	Oh look! Left wing Jihad supporter who wants **muslims** to blow up Catholic & Protestant churches. How progressive &	alt influencer	sanctity	clear

	tolerant. Dirty wee cunt.			
6	This **mosque** was where Abu Hamza preached hatred towards us. Young men radicalised. Were you upset by that? #utterlypredictable	trad news	sanctity	clear
7	BBC Targets Kids With Fake "**Islam** Means Peace" Claim Following Finsbury Park Attack Includes: What is Islamophobia?	alt news	loyalty	unclear
8	Good to see that Sadiq Khan will be providing extra policing to protect the **muslim** communities. The rest of you can take your chances.	alt news	loyalty	unclear
9	Look how few likes & retweets Diane's left wing audience give to the attacks on non-**muslims**. Revealing.	alt influencer	fairness	clear
10	Leftists: Don't blame all **Muslims** for terror. Also leftists: Blame everyone I don't like for #FinsburyPark	free speech influencer	fairness	clear
11	Because of scum traitors who have helped **Muslims** take over Britain and murder British people. Traitorous losers like you. Go Multiculti off	alt influencer	sanctity	unclear
12	**Muslim** women now "gets" how European non-muslims feel after dozens of attacks & hundreds of our men, women	alt influencer	sanctity	unclear

		& children slaughtered.			
	13	I'd worry about a "Christianiphobic" backlash or revenge attacks over #FinsburyPark , but we already get blown up & shot by **muslims** anyway.	alt influencer	sanctity	unclear
	14	The mosque rose to notoriety after Abu Hamza al-Masri became **Imam** of the Mosque" - what is WRONG with you!? It is common knowledge ffs!!!	alt influencer	sanctity	unclear
	15	1400 years your backwards medieval desert religion has been locked in civil wars & invading non-**muslim** lands. I KNOW your history, Saracen.	alt influencer	sanctity	clear
	16	Gotta love **muslims**, so peaceful.	alt influencer	loyalty	clear
TERRORIST	17	There will soon be more Brits in prison for criticising Islam, than there will be muslim **terrorist** suspects. Thanks Theresa & the UK Left.	alt influencer	care	clear
	18	Literally no mainstream media outlet is calling this anything other than a **terrorist** attack, you utter moron.	free speech influencer	care	unclear
	19	More leftists are calling for Tommy Robinson to be arrested than have ever called for actual **terrorists** to be deported. Let that sink in.	free speech influencer	fairness	clear

Fig. 56 Examples of keywords in tweets June 19th 2017.

The Finsbury Park Mosque terrorist attack that occurred on the 19th of June provoked an emotional response that was embedded in the use of non-serious language, while at the same time conveying an intense message. The tweets extracted for the duration of this day were characterized by Muslim and Terrorist themes. The collective narrative included in several of these tweets, such as Tweets 4, 6, 7, 10, 13, and 14, (Fig. 56) shifted the blame for the actions of the far right terrorist onto Muslims. The terrorist attack was framed in these tweets as an unavoidable consequence of the rise of radical Islam in the UK. For example, Tweets 6 and 14 addressed the event by justifying what they considered to be the reasons behind the attack on Imam Abu Hamza al-Masri who preached at the Finsbury Mosque. The Imam is framed as a Muslim radical whose preaching attracted radical attention, both left and right wing, towards his mosque. Both tweets display ridicule towards uninformed users, the silent majority of UK citizens, who had chosen to ignore the threat of radicalization represented by this Imam or who were unaware of a supposedly widely known fact that the mosque was supposed to be safe harbor for Muslim radicals mentioned in Tweet 14. In fact, the authors of the tweets paint the Finsbury Park Mosque as a place of radicalization, implicitly justifying the attack by right wing activists. This is shown by the fact that they use hashtags such as #utterlypredictable. The many reasons that inspired the attack were reduced to a cipher, rendering the outcome as an attack on one person, the Imam - a symbol of the entire community whose preaching that radicalized others was the culprit behind the attack for some of these tweeters. The accounts also describe left wingers as losers and traitors and Muslims as Saracens reinforcing the idea that these two groups are in an alliance to damage the UK, a drum beaten by these tweeters throughout the month. Tweet 4 traces a causal link between the Al Quds march that had taken place the previous day supporting Islamists and the Finsbury Park Mosque attack that is implied to be a reaction to the threat of radical Muslims by the right wing. The tweeter shifts the blame on Muslims marching on the previous day as if that action were worse than a planned terrorist attack on the mosque. Tweets 5, 17 and 19 contribute to the narrative that left wing movements and Muslims are allied in a common struggle to overtake the UK also implicitly justifying the Finsbury Park Mosque attack, and augmenting their rhetoric with that expressions of disgust, the use of swear words and insults, e.g., in Tweet 5 a left wing user seen as supporting Muslims is called a “dirty wee cunt” and mocked for being progressive. Tweet 17 embraces another variant of a victimhood narrative that portrays British men as unjustly imprisoned for criticizing Islam and suggesting that there are more British people in prison in the UK, than there are Muslims, for which they ironically thank Theresa May and the left, thereby actually blaming them. It is interesting that this tweeter feels that May, a Conservative prime minister is more allied

with the left (and Muslims) than with the majority of British people. The author of Tweet 7 questions the legitimacy of the BBC by pointing out what they see as propaganda efforts by the establishment after the Finsbury Park Mosque attack. They blame the political correctness narrative that falsely claims that Islamophobia is being instilled in children in the UK. The tweeter juxtaposes the terrorist attack on the Finsbury Park Mosque and the idea of "Islam means peace" claiming that it is ironic to talk about Islamophobia implying the perceived killings and attacks from the Muslim community that brought this attack on themselves. Moreover, this framing of events after the Finsbury Park Mosque attack is rather ambiguous about the terrorist attack itself because the author's opinion on far right terrorism is unclear, although they clearly condemn the "Islam is peace" narrative as being false. The author of Tweet 12 claims that the Finsbury Park Mosque attack was an act of revenge against Muslim mothers. Additionally, this tweeter wants to see Muslim mothers suffer like they feel the mothers of European non-Muslims have suffered, in this way publicly showing support for the far right terrorist. Muslim mothers will now "get" what the non-Muslims suffer through, the count of "dozens of attacks & hundreds of our men, women & children slaughtered" implying that more violence to match those numbers could follow. On the flip side, authors of Tweets 13 and 18 show self-awareness in the wake of the attack. They claim that British society is responding to the attack on the mosque with widespread condemnation, shared by all political movements. The author of Tweet 18 even calls another user a "moron" rebuking them as it is clear that all media outlets call the Finsbury Park Mosque attack an act of terror. Tweet 15, characterized by dredging up selective history, recalls the Crusades, claiming that Islam has not changed since the Middle Ages and ridiculing it as a "medieval desert" religion. The author's point of view can be recognized by the fact that they taunt a Muslim user by calling him "Saracen", a term used during the Middle Ages that is currently weaponized in radical right and far right circles. It is impossible to determine if this author is serious or just trolling their audience with this hyperbolic language; nevertheless, as this tweet is posted after a major terrorist attack, the intentions of the author are clearly sympathetic towards radicalism on the right. In fact, this tweet implies that the historical struggle between Christianity and Islam will never stop. The author of Tweet 19 tries to channel the counterwave of indignation amongst the radicals on the right against UK society's reaction to the Finsbury Park Mosque attack, i.e. with condemnations of the attack on all levels of society and government such as from Theresa May and Cardinal Nichols, the Archbishop of Canterbury, to show support for Tommy Robinson, one of the leading figures of the British radical right who organized the march on the 11th of June. The tweeter states that leftists are more frightened of Tommy Robinson than they are of (Muslim) "terrorists". This tweet is an example of how tweeters in this selection try to reframe the narrative around the Finsbury Park Mosque attack, without mentioning the attack itself, to react against accusations from the wider

society that the attacker was a killer and rightwing terrorist and instead to foreground the radical right message for make it acceptable to public opinion in the UK.

KEYWORD	N.	TWEET	USER	MORAL FOUNDATION	CLARITY OF HUMOUR
MUSLIM	1	**Muslim** Peace March Against Terrorism Attracts More Journalists than Participants	free speech influencer	authority	clear
	2	Leftists suddenly lose interest in tragic murder of **Muslim** girl when it turns out perp is an illegal immigrant.	free speech influencer	authority	clear
	3	Good for you (although I dont believe you). I have only ever been threatened by **muslims**. On twitter. And I have RT'd it multiple times.	alt influencer	fairness	clear
	4	piersmorgan Free-speech matters. Thousands of **muslims** marched through London for the Al Quds march. Yet non-muslims must respect Islam!?	alt influencer	sanctity	unclear
	5	I have a dream. That one day I will be judged on the content of my character, and not on how much I virtue signal to **muslims** & left wingers.	alt influencer	fairness	clear
	6	Look at this nonsense...	alt politician	loyalty	unclear
	7	Breaking: **Person wearing suicide**	alt news	authority	clear

		belt is 'neutralised' in Belgium. But will the media put their recent bone down...			
	8	Iraqi refugee ISIS supporter says non-believers in **Islam** should "have their throats cut". #ReligionofPeace	free speech influencer	sanctity	clear
	9	She blocked me for asking why she blamed Trump/white people for the murder of a **Muslim** girl by an illegal immigrant.	free speech influencer	loyalty	unclear
	10	Hi Emma. The murdered **Muslim** girl you tied into your "Islamophobia" narrative was killed by an illegal immigrant. Follow up article?	free speech influencer	fairness	clear
	11	If you see mass **immigration** from the 3rd world as an economic necessity or solution to population decline: You are a special sort of stupid.	alt influencer	sanctity	clear
	12	Just 2.65% of **migrants** arriving in Italy are actually refugees. #WorldRefugeeDay	free speech influencer	sanctity	clear

MIGRANT	13	It wasn't possible to buy coffee in the UK before mass EU **immigration**.	free speech influencer	loyalty	clear
	14	Hi @ClarkMindock You bashed Trump for not addressing the murdered Muslim girl She was killed by an illegal **immigrant**. Follow up article?	free speech influencer	authority	clear
	15	Hi Amy. The murderer was an illegal **immigrant** from El Salvador. Are you still blaming Trump/white people or nah?	free speech influencer	loyalty	clear
TERRORIST	16	Hey **terrorists**, could you ease off a bit for the moment? It's just the police are too busy arresting twats on social media to deal with you.	trad influencer	care	clear

Fig. 57 Examples of keywords in tweets June 20th 2017.

The fallout following the Finsbury Park Mosque attack became less intensely referred to by the accounts analysed. On the 20th of June, tweeters focused on making accusations against migrants, the Muslim community and attacking political opposition. In Fig. 57, Tweets 2, 9, 10, 14 and 15 mentioned the murder of a Muslim girl by an illegal migrant in the US. The authors of these tweets provide a precise framing for this news story, often to ridicule the narrative about the event proposed by left wing users. Furthermore, the news story was used to ridicule the point of view of users who see the benefit of migration. Similarly to the tweets posted around the radical Imam of the Finsbury Park Mosque on the 19th of June, these tweeters tried to focus on a news story favorable to the radical right view of society to spread their beliefs online. In Tweet 2 and 10 left wing users are ridiculed for

losing their attention on the killing of a Muslim girl once the killer was found to be an illegal immigrant. In this way, the tweeter suggests that the left wing are content to let immigrants kill with impunity. The leftwing are accused of only paying attention to crimes committed by local white people. The spread of this news story on Twitter shows the influence of US news on British political discourse online, as well as showing how these tweeters deflected attention from the Finsbury Park Mosque attack. Tweet 14 defends Trump by reinforcing the narrative of illegal immigrants who kill. The tweets around this new story make it clear that further immigration (to the UK) is a clear threat and should be stopped. These tweeters invoke belief in free speech, sometimes indirectly, to deflect the increased attention by police and society towards radicals on the right after the Finsbury Park Mosque terror attack. For instance, the author of Tweet 3 points at the Muslim community as the only group that had threatened them on Twitter, endangering their freedom online while nothing was done by authorities and moderators to stop this threat despite the tweeter's numerous complaints. Tweet 4 rehearses the narrative of the unavoidable struggle between Christians and Muslims by using free speech as the main argument. The tweeter quotes Piers Morgan, an English broadcaster, journalist and television personality, as saying that Muslims are allowed to march and non-Muslims are not allowed to express their views on this. The tweeter portrays this as an attack on the free speech of non-Muslims. UK authorities were framed as acceding to the left wing and being hypocritical in protecting Muslims and migrants. For example, Tweet 5 starts with the words of the well known speech by Martin Luther King Jr , "I have a dream" and then parodying the speech by saying that they want to be judged by their character, and not by how much they virtue signal to Muslims and left wingers. This tweeter mocks those who judge, using the criteria of pleasing the left wing and those who hypocritically virtue signal. The implication of this tweet is that UK society overall is unfair towards Conservatives and the radical right and instead favourably regards those who take a particular position, either leftists or virtue signalers. A radicalized Muslim, an ISIS member and refugee, is used as an example in Tweet 8 to portray the whole Muslim community as dangerous and violent. The threat is graphic in evoking an immediate visualization of physical violence, i.e. to "cut throat". The ironic hashtag included in the tweet #religionofpeace, is used by to ridicule Islam. Tweet 16 ridicules the police reaction to the increase of hate crimes and hate content online by saying that the police are wasting their time arresting "twats on social media", instead of policing Muslim terrorists, the main threat to the UK. The tweeters themselves think that their participation on social media is not a danger to British society because they often shift blame on their fellow tweeters who hold different views while it is Muslim users who should be the focus of policing.

KEYWORD	N.	TWEET	USER	MORAL FOUNDATION	CLARITY OF HUMOUR
MUSLIM	1	Police car burning in Netherlands. For some reason this seems to only happen in **muslim**-enriched neighbourhoods...	alt news	sanctity	clear
	2	Theresa May and ISIS have one thing in common - They both think people should be imprisoned for criticising Islam, **muslims** or the Quran.	alt influencer	fairness	clear
	3	Gays think a religion that executes them in 10 of it's societies is "hateful" - so surely he supports imprisoning **muslims**?	alt influencer	fairness	clear
	4	That is not the point. This is about free-speech. You either have free-speech or you dont. Gays think ISLAM is hateful. Jail **muslims** then?	alt influencer	fairness	clear
	5	Because we are white heterosexual men who must be attacked, punished, hated & ultimately replaced with 3rd world **muslim** men. Ask the UN.	alt news	authority	clear
MIGRANT	6	Bloody racist homeless veterans not offering their shop doorways to illegal **immigrants**.	alt news	fairness	clear
	7	This pro-**migrant** "guilt trip you into Open Borders" propaganda is not going down exactly as intended....	alt influencer	authority	clear

	8	If this is what we should expect from **immigrants**, send them back to their stinking jungles" sayeth the Viscount....	free speech influencer	sanctity	clear
	9	The dislikes restored my faith in humanity. https://www. infowars.com/internet-disav ows-youtube-over-**morethanarefugee**-video/	free speech influencer	loyalty	clear

Fig. 58 Examples of keywords in tweets June 21st 2017.

On the 21st of June fewer tweets targeting Muslims and migrants characterized by non-seriousness were posted. The perception of an encroaching threat from Muslim minorities in other European countries continued to be mentioned by these accounts, for example Tweet 1 (Fig. 58) spreads this narrative on Twitter. The tweeter describes Muslims as a community whose presence immediately results in crimes and vandalism, using an example from the Netherlands that is implied to apply to the UK too. In Tweet 2, we see an investment in content that delegitimizes the British government online. This investment by certain tweeters continues day by day. The narrative in Tweet 2 is that the radical right is surrounded on all sides by enemies of the UK namely and incongruously by ISIS, Theresa May, and the police. Suggesting that the Conservative Prime Minister of the UK and its police force are in league with ISIS is a wild accusation, probably inspired by a conspiracy theory. These tweeters continued to use ideals of free speech, such as in Tweet 4, to channel opposition on the part of Conservative and radical right users against groups considered hostile, i.e., Muslims, migrants and left wing users. In this case the tweeter uses the logic of the prohibition of hate speech to argue for the jailing of Muslims on behalf of the gay minority. Tweets arguing in defense of free speech, for these accounts, is a way of showing their discontent online, in what they regard as a morally acceptable way in mainstream UK society, while avoiding using more radical arguments. Furthermore, posting in favour of free speech allows these tweeters to avoid being charged with more controversial accusations, specifically those that might appear after a far right terrorist attack. The author of Tweet 5 claims that there is a conspiracy to replace white heterosexual men planned by international organizations such as the UN. Conspiracy theories encourage radicalization in like-minded users, in this case fragmenting society based on race, sex and sexual preferences. The

conspiracy theory referred to in Tweet 5 serves as an ironic contrast with the many hyperbolic criticisms and attacks against LGBT+ and feminist users made by Conservatives and radical right users. It is most likely that that the poster was being ironic around a sensitive topic as the tweet is concluded by invoking UN intervention. Tweet 6 defends homeless veterans, ironically referred to as "bloody racist", who deny their doorways to migrants. The portrayal of homelessness as a struggle between locals and migrants, instead of being seen as a failure of government policies, is an effective narrative to create racial conflict. Tweet 8 uses the expression "stinking jungles" to dehumanize migrants through ridiculing them as coming from stinking jungles, suggesting they are smelly, disgusting animals.[68] Descriptive techniques such as these, casting migrants as disgusting are long lived and can be found in later narratives adopted by the radical right, and political leaders. The video #MoreThanARefugee, posted on Youtube on 20th of June, was referred to in Tweet 9 by the tweeter gleefully rejoicing that the dislikes of the video restored "his faith in humanity" while attaching the link to the video for all to see. The video is a positive story about some refugees who had become integrated into Western societies. This video that was heavily disliked by Youtube users, with more dislikes than likes, an unusual response to Youtube postings. It is likely that Conservative and radical right users disliked the video due to its positive humanizing pro-refugee narrative. The tweeter shares a link to Infowars, a conspiracy theory spreading site that is borderline far right. Again, this shows the strong and constant influence of the ideological milieu of the US far right on British Conservative tweeters. The posting on Twitter on the same day of an acid attack against a Pakistan born girl[69] is witness to the fluidity of narratives in online spaces, stirring up hate and disgust against Muslims on mainstream social media platforms, and the offline radicalization processes on the right that resulted in the attacks of so-called lone wolves.

KEYWORD	**N.**	**TWEET**	**USER**	**MORAL FOUNDATION**	**CLARITY OF HUMOUR**
MUSLIM	1	Think about how The Left treat Christians compared to **muslims**, you cant	alt influencer	authority	clear

[68] A similar expression will be adopted in 2018 by President Trump's exclamation "shithole" that was used to describe the countries of migrants. See: Ali, Vitali, Hunt Kasie and Thorp V Frank. 2018. "Trump referred to Haiti and African nations as 'shithole' countries". NBC News. Available at https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/white-house/trump-referred-haiti-african-countries-shithole-nations-n836946. Last accessed 24 December 2020.

[69] See section **2.3.1 June 2017 Day-by-day hate crime Timeline**.

		assert anything other than "The Left like 3rd world authoritarians".			
	2	Rule Britannia & England is now **muslim**. Have a great day, Saxon.	alt influencer	loyalty	clear
	3	England has more **muslims**, rape gangs & far-left open borders goons than Scotland does, yet this traitor thinks WE are the problem.....	alt influencer	loyalty	unclear
	4	Your daughter will be owned by a bearded **muslim** man. And it isnt the Jocks fault, it is Left Wing Londoners & weak Englishmen's fault.	alt influencer	authority	clear
MIGRANT	5	Hi @SadiqKhan , I was an illegal **immigrant** living in Grenfell. Can I have a £1.5m penthouse in Kensington? P.S Fully furnished & Sky HD.	trad news	fairness	clear
	6	When did **immigrants** (illegal aliens) get souls ? Was that part of the Obama/Hillary illegal alien welfare program ? Cancelled ! LOL	alt influencer	sanctity	clear
	7	Fit every male " **migrant** " with 1 that automatically triggers if wi 10 feet of any woman or child. Bet they'd get back on the boat.	alt influencer	sanctity	clear

Fig. 59 Examples of keywords in tweets June 22nd 2017.

On the 22nd of June, tweeters continued to share tweets that framed Muslims and migrants as corrupting British values, culture and as a waste of money for the UK. In the days after the Finsbury Park Mosque attack, consolidation of group identity seemed to be the dominant response of the radical right on Twitter. The reaction of these tweeters consistently reproduces an idealized perception of Britishness threatened from inside, by the leftwing movement, and from the outside, by the Muslim community and migrants. Tweet 1 (Fig. 59) draws a parallel between third World authoritarian countries and the British left because both supposedly suppress and attack Christians while supporting Muslims. Tweet 2 tries to evoke nationalism and bemoan the legacy of the British Empire, now gone, a few days after the Finsbury Park Mosque attack, attempting to rally radical right users. They adopt the famous British Imperial rallying cry "Rule Britannia" and wishes a good day to a fellow Saxon, applying a particular ethnic category to highlight the divide between true Englishmen and others. On the 23rd of June, football hooligan groups protested and mobilised to call for a ban on Muslim religious and community rituals perceived to be alien to British values.[70] Tweet 3 on June 18th, Figure 52, was an attempt to inspire action amongst "football lads" offline instead of chatting "shit online". This was part of a mobilization effort online that was ultimately successful offline. Tweet 3 on the 22nd of June, on the other hand, focused on those British citizens who refused to accept the radical right worldview propounded by these tweeters. The state of UK society, that the author describes as critical because of "muslims, rape gangs & far-left open borders goons", is used as an encouragement to like-minded users, addressed by using "WE" in upper scale, a we who are opposed to a not well defined traitor, to offline action as they are "not the problem" but a solution. Tweet 6 ridicules migrants in a way that is difficult to understand for naïve users, calling them "illegal aliens" and dehumanizing them by accusing them of lacking souls. In Tweets 3, 4[71] and 7, accusations of rapes supposedly committed by migrants and Muslims contribute to the perception that the United Kingdom as a whole is being raped. In Tweet 7, the tweeter proposes that since Muslims and migrants are pedophiles and rapists, some measures of social engineering, such as electric bracelets, would result in mass deportations

KEYWORD	N.	TWEET	USER	MORAL FOUNDATION	CLARITY OF HUMOUR
	1	Amazing. Modern **immigrant** crimes	alt news	authority	clear

[70] See section **2.3.1 June 2017 Day-by-day hate crime Timeline**.
[71] A detailed analysis is provided in section **3.6.1.1. Emotionally charged tweets**.

MIGRANT		requires German police to don medieval chain-mail protection. "family members...			
	2	France rules out new Calais welcome centre as Emmanuel Macron blows hot and cold over **migrants**	alt news	loyalty	unclear
	3	Its a result for the media that they can show white thugs attacking innocent people for a change. **Eastern Europeans**	alt news	fairness	clear
	4	Homeless smackhead jailed for **racist abuse**. If she'd not used racist language she'd never have got caught. Fact	alt news	fairness	clear
	5	Welfare Recipients, Illegal **Immigrants**, And Liberals Are Like Wild Hyenas	alt influencer	sanctity	unclear
	6	Great. When will you be moving 1000's of MS13 & Islamist " **migrants** " into your house & force your idiot liberal buddies to do the same ?	alt influencer	fairness	clear
MUSLIM	7	SCANDAL: London Bridge Lion, Roy Larner, who fought off **jihadis** is STILL homeless. Pull your finger out @SadiqKhan !	trad news	loyalty	unclear
	8	How Politicians and the Media Are Killing **Muslims** https:// youtu.be/gN0qxp7E7ZI This guy is Spot on on media and Islam	alt influencer	authority	clear
GAY	9	Well done. Can see this guy a week from now arrested drunk in bondage gear in the back of his **gaymobile**, ranting the internet is hate.	alt influencer	loyalty	clear

Fig. 60 Examples of keywords in tweets June 23rd 2017.

On the 23rd of June, several tweets, such as Tweets 1, 2 and 3, (Fig. 60) referred to news stories describing the situation in other countries which reinforced the narrative of radicalized Muslims taking control of Europe. Posting throughout June 2017 often followed a cyclical structure, i.e., an occurrence such as a terrorist attack or a political march, became a catalyst for a subsequent online fallout followed by a more limited numbers of tweets being posted. All the themes analyzed so far throughout the dataset continued through to the closing days of the month as well. Tweet 1 warns of the collapse of Europe due to endemic migrant and Muslim violence, with the tweeter proposing the use of medieval armour to protect the police. The implication of the tweet is that a "medieval" approach, a reference to the Crusades, is now required to protect Europe and the UK. Tweet 2 describes the situation in France where a welcoming centre for refugees and migrants is not to be opened, positioning Macron as the ultimate and ambivalent judge of the fate of migrants. The author of Tweet 3 unites an anti-media imperative with the stereotype that Eastern Europeans are inherently aggressive. The author remarks that "white thugs attack innocent people for a change". The tweet portrays Eastern Europeans as violent criminals who attack UK citizens framed as innocent people, showing that negative views about minorities extended over other ethnic and religious groups beyond Muslims and Middle Eastern migrants. Interestingly, as well, the hooligan mobilization on the 23rd of June was completely ignored in these tweets. Tweet 4 accuses the establishment of being too politically correct and claims that law enforcement intervenes only for accusations of racism, ignoring other crimes, such as illegal drug use. Moreover, the author insinuates that racism is an excellent way of routinely accusing people who while not being guilty of other crimes, are then unjustly imprisoned. Tweet 5 perpetuates a narrative that frames people surviving thanks to welfare, such as immigrants and liberals, as wild animals. The use of the word "wild" to indicate lack of restraint, and the reference to hyenas, "laughing" eaters of carcasses, is geared to evoke responses of both disgust and ridicule. The author of Tweet 6 places the word "migrants" in inverted commas to imply that this group of people are in some way fake. The dehumanizing portrayal of migrants is connected with the "Ramavan" meme, an image of a white van with "Lonely Crusader" written on the side and the face of the attacker of the Finsbury Park Mosque, Darren Osborne, on the front of the truck. This meme was posted on the 23rd of June[72] and promoted an idealized perception of the radical right as honorable Crusaders fighting to stop the invasion of the UK. Tweet 7 incorporates a positive "hero" narrative in the actions of one brave person, at the same time minimizing anti-Muslim discourse, Sadiq Khan is targeted as not providing a home for this homeless hero who fought terrorists bare handed during the London Bridge terror attack,. After that attack, the story of Roy Larner, known as the "Lion of Millwall", was weaponized by the radical right in their propaganda efforts. Tweet 8 shifts the blame

[72] See section **2.3.1 June 2017 Day-by-day hate crime Timeline**.

for rightwing terrorist attacks, for instance the Finsbury Park Mosque attack, and accuses media and politicians by sharing a supposedly enlightening video on Youtube. The tweeter underlines that the youtuber is "spot on" about media and Islam. However, it should be noted that, the account that posted the video, "Acts17Apologetics", is a radical Evangelical whose self-described mission declares that: "the Acts17Apologetics channel features Christian testimonies, and responses to popular atheists (e.g. Richard Dawkins) and Muslim apologists (e.g. Zakir Naik, Shabir Ally, Yusuf Estes, Mohammed Hijab, and Ali Dawah)".[73] Islam is portrayed as something which needs to be apologized for and the video continues this narrative by portraying the Finsbury Park Mosque attack as a natural reaction to Islamic terrorism. Tweet 8 shows how radical right users on Twitter and radicals on Youtube are connected in creating content, but located on different platforms online. This tweet is cleverly framed as a reference to, although not a repetition of, the Youtube video. The poster might skirt the accusation that there is a more complex narrative embracing overarching events such as the Finsbury Park Mosque attack.

KEYWORD	N.	TWEET	USER	MORAL FOUNDATION	CLARITY OF HUMOUR
MUSLIM	1	Kinda funny how you assume I've never been to a mosque or spoken to a **muslim** about their beliefs, but go on and tell me how you know more. 24/06/2017	alt news	fairness	clear
	2	SHOCKER! **Muslim** hates Jews... 24/06/2017	alt influencer	sanctity	clear
	3	Great Idea, **Muslims** ! Burn down All the mosques . Why , yes , yes I DO have a light . Need a match ? 25/06/2017	alt influencer	sanctity	clear
	4	Churchill was also not living in and amoung a group of psychopath **muslims** who's only goal is to check if the promise of 70 virgins is true. 26/06/2017	alt influencer	sanctity	clear

[73] Acts17Apologetics, Description, Youtube, Available at: https://www.youtube.com/c/Acts17Apologetics/about. Last accessed: 7 October 2020.

	5	Its a hate crime because shes the only **muslim** in the street? Thats some compelling proof that. My god 26/06/2017	alt news	fairness	clear
MIGRANT	6	The irony is this woman who insists she'd move to avoid the **immigrants** is clearly one herself. 24/06/2017	alt news	loyalty	clear
	7	Norwegian proposal: "**Immigrants** will swear faithfulness to Norway 24/06/2017	alt news	sanctity	clear
	8	Spain rescues more than 200 **migrants** from Med 24/06/2017	alt news	fairness	clear
	9	People who get to experience " diversity " like rape gangs,terror,honor killing,riots,Anti "infidel" & pro Sharia demos just Love **migrants** ? 25/06/2017	alt influencer	sanctity	clear
	10	**Irregular**? How about Making London Safe Again instead? #MLSA 26/06/2017	alt news	loyalty	clear
	11	Apparently now you can be a **refugee** 'fleeing climate change'.	alt news	fairness	clear
	12	Dreadful considering all the wonderful benefits "**refugees**" have brought to Europe. 26/06/2017	free speech influencer	loyalty	clear

Fig. 61 Examples of keywords in tweets June 24th, 25th & 26th 2017.

From the 24th to the 26th of June, there were fewer tweets after the upheaval of the previous days marked by the fallout of the Finsbury Park Mosque attack. However, the authors of these tweets continued to target migrants and Muslims. Tweeters shared radical viewpoints while continuing to attempt to deflect accusations against the radical right movement. An important element in these tweets is the non-serious nature of the language used. In one case, Tweet 1 (Fig. 61) the tweeter shows that they know Muslims and that they attend mosques, ironically deflecting anticipated criticisms of his being ignorant about Islam. In another case, Tweet 3 is representative of how tweeters continue to incite violence against Muslims. The author proposes burning down mosques offering "a match", after creating a scenario in which they illustrate that Muslims only need a match to carry out the great idea of burning down a mosque. Tweet 3, then, is an imaginary conversation with a Muslim, in which the tweeter proposes what they think is a great idea, suggesting that Muslims are not very intelligent and that the poster can help them to carry out a brilliant idea. This is a truly non-serious tweet, which carries with it an ambiguously serious threat. On the 24th of June a Muslim father of three was assaulted and wounded while his attackers wrote the phrase "Final solution", on the walls of his house repeating the words of Katie Hopkins's tweet posted a month earlier [74]. The phrase "Final Solution" is the name of the notorious plan by Nazi authorities to exterminate the Jewish people during the Second World War. The trajectory leading to this hate crime could be traced through tweets evolving, being forgotten, resurfacing and then being incorporated in acts of aggression offline.

Interestingly, there was a clear difference between the narratives that emerged on Twitter after the London Bridge terrorist attack and those that were posted after the Finsbury Park Mosque attack. The attack committed by a far right terrorist provoked, in these accounts, an intense focus on shared group values, i.e. a reference in Tweet 4 to Churchill, whom the tweeter considers was less surrounded by enemies than his group is now and, in Tweet 9, an increased emphasis on fighting for safety from gangs of rapists, terror, honor killing, riots, Anti "infidel" & pro Sharia demos. In these tweets the posters are expressing the dangers that they feel surrounded by, thereby creating a justification for a violent response to ensure their own safety. Tweeters continued to post ideologically extreme tweets to deflect criticisms of the Conservative and radical right movements. This sort of response, from all of the tweets posted during these three days, was hardly the public display of regret that might have been expected, given the content of earlier tweets and that the terrorist responsible for the Finsbury Park Mosque attack was a far-right terrorist. This collective response to a far-right terrorist attack might signal the ongoing radicalization of these Twitter accounts. For example, Tweet 4 contains a narrative that devalues migrants, portraying them as psychopaths, propounding a 'mental illness'

[74] See section **2.3 Hate Crimes in the UK: June 2017**.

narrative that was extremely common throughout this dataset. This narrative is reproduced often throughout the month of June.

Content posted on Twitter can be accessed by any user and the beating of a 13 year old boy of Middle Eastern background on the following day[75] by his classmates on, the 26th of June, points to how the surge of hate online and offline, led to the radicalization of younger segments of the British population. The day by day posting by these accounts since the Finsbury Park Mosque attack was also characterized by tweets that addressed the surge in hate crimes through a victimhood narrative as illustrated in Tweet 5. The author of the tweet portrays themselves as a victim targeted by a police state that would define an incident as a hate crime even if there is only one Muslim at the crime scene, similarly to protests in the other tweets against unjust hate crimes. This narrative against the charge of hate crimes is channeled by radical rightwingers towards Conservatives to delegitimize the fact that a surge of hate crimes was occurring in the UK. In this way, the importance of major terrorist attacks, such as the one on the Finsbury Park Mosque, that the tweeter was undoubtedly aware of, was diminished through this narrative for the eyes of other users.

Around this time, rightwing tweets more generally, try to debunk hate crimes or ignore them. Tweeters in this data set seem to refuse to publicly recognize that June 2017 saw the highest surge of hate crimes that had been registered in the last decade. So, the author of Tweet 5 appears to claim that acts of violence are often declared to be hate crimes without tangible proof. The author of Tweet 9 draws a clear connection between diversity and "rape gangs, terror, honor killing, riots". The tweeter also sarcastically remarks that people who live in the area where these acts are common "just love" migrants. The authors of Tweets 10, 11 and 12 are less straightforward compared to the author of Tweet 5 but produce ironic narratives during June 2017 that are deeply critical of refugees and the fact that they are accepted into mainstream UK society. Furthermore, the 'making London safe again' slogan mentioned in Tweet 10 clearly echoes "Make America Great Again" used by President Trump during his political campaign in US in 2016. US culture and politics, heavily polarized and aggressive, certainly influenced these accounts throughout the month of June. At the same time, content posted online often mirrored the slogans and emotional material used by perpetrators of hate crimes in the UK. While the link between online and offline hate is often blurry, the connection between them is hard to ignore.

3.8.3 Summary

[75] See section **2.3.1 June 2017 Day-by-day hate crime Timeline**.

In June 2017, tweets using language non-seriously were characterized by different patterns that were identifiable throughout most of the month. The authors of these tweets used different linguistic techniques and narratives such as the simplification of complex arguments, the delegitimization of media, police and state authorities, an almost apocalyptic view of Europe and the UK, imagery inspired by Crusades, and dehumanization of migrants and Muslims. This view of migrants and Muslims (often one and the same) was an insistent narrative using stereotypical tropes and manipulating news stories. Those whom the tweeters considered to be their political opposition, mainly left wing politicians, were portrayed as allies of radicalized Muslims and framed as weak and ideologically contaminated traitors. The latter emerges in the way the London Bridge terrorist attack, carried out by proponents of radical Islam, and the Finsbury Park Mosque attack, carried out by a far right terrorist were characterized. The London Bridge attack provoked a spike in tweeting and the radicalization of the right wing online that led to a week long flow of tweets while the second attack, on the Finsbury Park Mosque, was mostly ignored and when alluded to, in a sense, silently justified. In fact, the reaction of right wing tweeters in the case of the second attack was to shift the blame onto migrants and the Muslim minority. Irony and ridicule characterized the majority of these tweets, designed to spread an ideological narrative and score political points. Several tweets were encoded in in-group non-seriousness meant to be indecipherable to a naive user. The framing of these tweets seems to have been intended to provoke a range of emotional reactions in readers. Words evoking disgust and ridicule, such as “sicko” and “nutter”, were widely used by these tweeters to, for example, enhance the texts of tweets for greater impact. The resulting ambiguity of the nature of these tweets, whether they are humorous or not, is a major feature of several of the tweets collected. This ambiguity is a good indication of how radical right users posted controversial content throughout June 2017 while being shielded by non-seriousness. This “I was only joking” strategy provides an easy answer to attacks and accusations from other users.. Furthermore, some tweeters insistently tweeted about violence, which they attributed to Muslims as a natural trait. This narrative was part of a process of on-going radicalization by right wingers, also influenced by events throughout the month, that was becoming more aggressive and hate filled after the terrorist attacks by radical Muslims.

Ultimately, June 2017 saw a heightened level of activity by the radical right, both online and offline. Tweets contained non-serious use of language as a response to communities considered as a threat, and in order to spread ideological narratives. Some of the hate crimes during this period were mirrored in the tweets posted throughout the month, as the disgust and ridicule shown towards migrants and Muslims on Twitter was embodied by attackers on the ground. There were parallels between the timing and content of some tweets and the leitmotiv of hate crimes committed on the same day or the

day after. We may quite safely say that there was, at least, a connection between online activity and some of the hate crimes committed.

Chapter 4

Results and Discussion – Part Two: June 2018

4.1 June 2018

In terms of radical right activity, the dataset for June 2018 appears to be rather different, compared to the dataset for the previous year. First, it was a month shaped by the events that resulted from the Cambridge Analytica scandal, the documentary that was aired by Channel 4 on March 19th. Second, vast mobilizations that originated at both ends of the political spectrum, by Tommy Robinson for the radical right and for the Remain campaign by the left, continued the Brexit political struggle. Hate crimes were still committed but with less potency compared to the on-going political strife. The goal of the radical right was to attempt to push the national conversation and, for more extremist elements, to ignite a new phase of radicalization against the liberal-left camp. Political ideological beliefs became the main coin of social interaction, online and in the material world, compared to ethnic and religious issues against minorities in the UK in June 2017, specifically regarding Muslims.

The Cambridge Analytica investigation represented one of the greatest scandals in the political history of the UK. The news of mass harvesting of personal data that was used to influence US and British political processes, such as the Brexit referendum, swiftly went viral. This process encouraged radicals at both ends of the political spectrum to do more because as a result of unlawful manipulations major political decisions could be further affected. Specifically, the radical right not only now had to 'positively conclude' the Brexit process but it also had to more proactively contest the rule of law. This had to be done to defend radical right leaders, such as Tommy Robinson who was found guilty of an unlawful broadcast that accused authorities of being soft towards the actions of a grooming gang in Leeds. Tommy Robinson, a prominent voice of English Defence League, a fringe radical right group, is used to carrying out similar stunts to attract attention to his cause. This incident gave the British radical right cause to rally with the cry "Free Tommy". The protests were characterized by widespread violence, Islamophobic slurs, Nazi salutes, among others. An ongoing process of identity searching accompanied this mobilization. The conversation coalesced around the most effective ways to oppose the Remain camp, to continue the implementation of "normalization" strategies to make the values of the radical right acceptable to wider British society and cultivate the mobilization potential at the fringes of that society.

The British radical right tried new tools once the Remain camp was sufficiently galvanized to protest en mass to ask for a new vote on Brexit. On March 24th a Stop Brexit march took place in Leeds, the last of a few similar mass protests.

On June 23rd, on the second anniversary of the EU referendum, People's Vote, a campaign for a new vote on the issue, organized a march in London that numbered more than 100 000 people while a smaller pro-Brexit march was held nearby. The radical right had to find ways to secure Brexit popularity in this new socio-political environment and to continue their struggle for domestic hegemony.

These events influenced tweets posted during June 2018 and also had a bearing on the effect that radical right groups made in the material world. The fragility of political decisions, aggravated by the Cambridge Analytica scandal, and renewed mobilizations in the Remain camp, gave way to a new phase of communication strategies for radical right supporters who were looking for ways to transform the victory of the Brexit vote, into a triumph.

4.1.1 The June 2018 database

Most of the accounts from June 2017 were confirmed in the 2018 dataset. The increasingly tough Twitter policy of banning accounts that incite violence as well as users who abandon Twitter due to various concerns, change their names and so forth, led to a slight change in the number of accounts in the present dataset. Two accounts were exchanged for comparable accounts, following the methodology used in the research protocol, to create a dataset of accounts that can be compared to the first dataset. Accounts labelled "A10" and "C2" were different as the former had changed name and the second had left Twitter. The accounts that were used to substitute for them were respectively labelled "A10-2" that was reclassified as 'alt news' due to a more radicalized output, and "C2-2" an 'alt influencer' account.

Twitter News	Twitter Politicians	Twitter Influencers
A1 – alt	B1 – trad	C1 - fspeech
A2 – alt	B2 – trad	C2-2 – alt
A3 - alt	B3 – trad	C3 – trad
A4 – alt	B4 – trad	C4 – alt
A5 – alt	B5 – alt	C5 – alt
A6 – trad		C6 – trad
A7 – alt		C7 – trad
A8 – trad		C8 – alt
A9 – trad		C9 – alt
A10-2 – alt		C10 – fspeech
		C11 – alt
		C12 – alt
		C13 – trad
		C14 – fspeech
		C15 – trad

Fig. 62 Accounts examined for June 2018 and role-based categories.

- *A10-2* is a page set up to support UKIP that subsequently switched to a more general support of Brexit. A Tory, Unionist and Brexiteer page that approves of Zionism as well, presenting an ideologically diverse set of radical right beliefs.
- *C2-2* is a radical political activist that became an ardent backer of the Boris Johnson candidacy for leader of the Conservative movement. The account merged radical right politics with a fierce advocacy for animals rights.

A10-2 produced more radical content than its predecessor, but it shows both the radicalization process that some accounts underwent without changing their name and how these users coped with a period that was not characterised by major terrorist attacks nor by very many episodes of violence targeting minorities compared to June 2017. C2-2 account provides a mix of radical right politics and animal rights advocacy. This ideological contamination is a direct example of how issues are often mixed together in the pot of radical activism on the right. New trends, compared to the preceding dataset of June 2017, in news, humour, memes and language, have been noted in relation to hate crimes. This

set of data shows how the radical right behaves, invigorating political debate and constructing ideological identity, in conditions such as those of June 2018.

4.1.2 Time-frame: Crucial events and temporal nexus points.

June 2018 was characterized by mass mobilizations on both ends of radical spectrum. The radical right focused on ideological identity as a way to achieve Brexit and win the political struggle against the Remain camp. This account of the events of June 2018 will be examined in relation to the events of June 2017 focusing on the socio-political situation of the UK in that period.

- **7 June – An appeal lost to the Supreme Court against the abortion law in Northern Ireland.** Human rights activists lose an appeal to the Supreme Court against the abortion law in Northern Ireland.[76] Nonetheless, judges underscore that the existing law violated human rights in the case of sexual crime, lethal foetal abnormality and other life threatening events. This decision, while not bringing relief to Northern Irish women, was also a sign that the political pressure on the Northern Irish radical right, for example the Democratic Unionist Party, was intensifying. This pressure became relevant to domestic issues in the whole of the UK as the DUP was to be a central plank for Theresa May's Tory Government.
- **12 June – A pro-Tommy Robinson protest occurs in London.** A 15 000 strong protest is held to support jailed Tommy Robinson, a figurehead of the British radical right. The massive clashes between protesters and the police[77] showed the explosive results of radical right mass mobilization (Dearden, 2018). Several participants are stopped for possession of weapons.[78] *The Guardian* reports that protesters formed a "variegated picture with members of Football Lads Alliance, protesters inspired by the US "alt-right" movement, elements of smaller far-right groups, as well as what remained of UKIP and the radical For Britain Movement" (Gayle and Ntim, 2018). The increasingly international nature of the European radical right movement is confirmed once more through the presence of guests from Europe and the US.
- **13 June – The House of Commons rejects an amendment of the EU Withdrawal Bill.** The House of Commons rejects a Lords' amendment to the EU Withdrawal Bill that pointed

[76] "Supreme Court rejects NI abortion law case". 2018. *BBC News*. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-44395150. Last accessed 16 October 2020.
[77] "Free Tommy Robinson' march violence images released". 2019. *BBC News*. Available at https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-50408328. Last accessed 16 October 2020.
[78] "Big numbers and violence at free Tommy Robinson Demonstration". *Hope not Hate*, London. Available at https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2018/06/09/big-numbers-violence-free-tommy-robinson-demonstration/. Last accessed 16 October 2020.

towards keeping the UK in the European Economic Area (Caird, 2018). All other changes are overturned, specifically the obligation to negotiate a customs' union with the EU. This is to be one of the many episodes of political struggle inside the House of Commons to try for a softer Brexit that nevertheless keeps the struggle between Remainers and Brexiteers alive. Attempts by Remainers to overthrow or at least weaken the Brexit campaign were seen by British Conservatives and radical right movement as a betrayal of the national will expressed during the referendum. Each episode of this political struggle around the Brexit struggle provided a spark to the ongoing ideological confrontation in the UK.

- **14 June – The Lewisham East by-election.** The Lewisham East by-election results in Labour winning the vote but with a much reduced majority.[79] The appointment of Labour MP Heidi Alexander as London Deputy Mayor for Transport, a role that required her to stand down from the House of Commons, started the process for a by-election. This historically Labour seat was won by Labour MP Janet Daby by 50.2 % but showed the weakening of the Labour party in its historically safe constituencies.
- **15 June – House of Commons blocks a bill on upskirting.** A bill that defined upskirting as a criminal offence is blocked in the House of Commons by a Tory MP, Sir Christopher Chope, who faced widespread condemnation from all political forces, as well as Tories themselves. He was even called a 'dinosaur' (Maidment and Mikhailova, 2018) by fellow Conservatives. Nevertheless, this episode highlights the radical right beliefs at the core of some older Tory politicians.
- **17 June – NHS "Brexit dividend" debate**. After an announcement of a budget increase for the NHS, that is poor percentage wise, there are criticisms of former Treasury officials around the idea of a "Brexit dividend". This episode provokes another round of the debate on the benefits of Brexit. Most of the debate occurs on Twitter, as reported by *the Guardian,* with tweets from many important political figures, e.g., Boris Johnson (Walker, 2018).
- **20 June – House of Commons votes against a "meaningful vote".** The Tory MPs rebellion is overturned as the House of Commons votes against a "meaningful vote"[80] that could have allowed MPs to stop a no deal Brexit scenario.
- **23 June – An Anti-Brexit march occurs in London.** An Anti-Brexit march that numbers 100000 people goes through London and calls for a final vote on any UK exit deal. People's

[79] "Labour's Janet Daby wins Lewisham East in by-election". 2018. *BBC News*. Available at https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-44486075. Last accessed 24 December 2020.
[80] "Theresa May heads off a rebellion". 2018. *The Economist*. Available at https://www.economist.com/britain/2018/06/21/theresa-may-heads-off-a-rebellion. Last accessed 24 December 2020.

Vote, the planners of the march, claim that Brexit can still be overturned and British people should continue to fight to be heard. The BBC report that many home-made signs and banners adopted humour and political irony "with slogans like 'the wrexiteers', 'Brexit stole my future' and 'Even Baldrick had a plan.'"[81] The march sparks a new phase of carnivalesque political content used for political goals on both sides of the political spectrum in the UK.

- **24 June – A wave of wildfires engulf the UK.** An unprecedented wave of wildfires engulfs the UK.[82] This disaster increases the pressure on the climate debate UK, both online and in the non-virtual world.
- **27 June – The British Medical Association claims to be against Brexit.** The British Medical Association declares that it opposes Brexit and calls for a say on any final deal by the British public (Russell, 2018). The role of the NHS would take centre stage of the political contest about Brexit and the source of much discord between the Left and the Conservatives.
- **28 June – Russian connection with British politicians debate.** A *Washington Post* article accuses Nigel Farage of being under investigation by the US Special Counsel Robert Mueller's team for his connection with Donald Trump and alleged Russian colluders (Swaine and Kirchgaessner, 2018). The story of Russian collusion with UK politicians, a minor role compared to that in the US, played an important role in the UK media sphere.
- **30 June – Pro-NHS march occurs in London.** Several thousand people march in London both to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the NHS and to protest against the Tory cuts in healthcare (Busby, 2018). This march reveals that the NHS not only provoked a vibrant debate but also inspired vast mobilizations of the British Left wing and consequent reactions from the radical right.

June 2018 presents a different picture compared to the year before. After a first week that was empty of major episodes, radical right activity can be linked to mass mobilization around a leading figure, Tommy Robinson, and the law on abortion in Northern Ireland. Much of the rest of the month was characterized by a political struggle in the House of Commons around Brexit. This debate fuelled a counter-mobilization in the Remain Camp that took to the streets to protest for an overturn of Brexit and to protect the NHS. The actions of Sir Christopher Chope throughout the month, and his refusal to pass the upskirting bill, showed the potential for a gradual radicalization of the Conservative side intensified by a smaller core of older Tory members. The British radical right was interested in finding

[81] "People's Vote march: Hundreds of thousands attend London protest". 2018. *BBC News*. Available at https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-45925542. Last accessed 24 December 2020.
[82] "In pictures: Battling the UK wildfires". 2018. *BBC News*. London. Available at https://www.bbc.com/news/in-pictures-44696612. Last Accessed 24 December 2020.

new ground to occupy within the available political space, showing support for their leaders who were looking for ways to oppose Remainers in order to limit their chances of stopping Brexit.

The section that follows investigates whether or not the Twitter data gathered for June 2018 converges with the 2017 dataset.

4.2 The June 2018 Collection of Tweets

The tweets for June 2018 were extracted following the same research protocol applied to the previous dataset. The total number of tweets was 11027. Tweets appeared rather uniformly in terms of quantity with some observable spikes due to significant events. This pattern conforms with a similar posting structure observable in the June 2017 dataset in which tweet posting changed due to events on the ground. For example, tweet posting during the first week was around 100 tweets per day while nearer the end of the month, with many events and marches, the daily number of tweets rose to 200. 1382 tweets contained visual support with roughly 8 tweets responding to each tweet that contained a video, a meme or a visual image. The proportion of tweets with visual support to those without such support, remained stable.

Twitter News	**Twitter Politicians**	**Twitter Influencers**
A1 (alt) - 605	B1 (trad) - 389	C1 (fspeech) - 992
A2 (alt) - 486	B2 (trad) - 48	C2-2 (alt) - 682
A3 (alt) - 211	B3 (trad) - 362	C3 (trad) - 25
A4 (alt) - 51	B4 (trad) - 79	C4 (alt) - 200
A5 (alt) - 379	B5 (alt) – 811	C5 (alt) - 1209
A6 (trad) - 286		C6 (trad) - 28
A7 (alt) - 53	**Total – 1689**	C7 (trad) - 125
A8 (trad) - 222	**Tweets for average account**	C8 (alt) - 588
A9 (trad) - 69	**337.8**	C9 (alt) - 46
A10-2 (alt) – 486		C10 (fspeech) - 97
		C11 (alt) - 1076
Total – 2848		C12 (alt) - 353
Tweets for average account		C13 (trad) - 30
284.8		C14 (fspeech) - 752
		C15 (trad) – 78

		Total – 6281 **Tweets for average account 418.7**

Fig. 63 Number of tweets for each account for June 2018.

As shown in Fig. 63, accounts defined as Twitter news produced 2848 tweets with an average score of 284.8 for each account. This trend is similar to that of June 2017 with news published in a conservative but societally acceptable way and others that were more radical in content and language. The most active account was A1, in the 'Alt' category, posting 605 tweets and another alt account, A4 posted 51 times which was the lowest mumber of tweets.

The five politicians' accounts posted 1689 tweets with an average of 337.8. The tweets were mostly advertising the activities of the particular politician. B5 was the most active account, posting 811 tweets, and B2 (trad) was the one with the lowest number of 48 tweets.

Twitter Influencers posted 6281 tweets with an average of 418.7. These accounts conformed with the June 2017 trend although with slightly lower numbers. The most active account was C5 with 1209 tweets and C3 posted lowest number with 25.

In the Identity categories, the 12 traditional accounts posted 1741 tweets with the lowest of 25 posted by C3 and the highest by B1 with 389 tweets. The average number of tweets for each account was 137.8. The trend seen in June 2017 for the traditional accounts was matched in June 2018. These Identity accounts were careful in their postings and clearly aware of online etiquette. The average number of tweets from this category for June 2018 was lower than June 2017, with 137.8 tweets against the previous 226.8 tweets.

The 15 alternative accounts produced a total of 7236 tweets with the lowest 46 tweets by C9 and the highest, 1209 tweets by C5. The average was 482.4 tweets. As in the June 2017 dataset, the alternative accounts for June 2018 were more prolific than traditional ones reported above. The tweets from the alternative accounts were more radical than the tweets posted by traditional accounts, showing in-group radical right elements and challenging existing norms and laws. The average number of tweets for June 2018 in the alternative accounts was lower than in June 2017, with 482.4 tweets for 2018 as against 633.6 tweets for 2017.

In June 2017, the fspeech accounts posted a total of 1841 tweets with an average of 613.6 for the month. In 2018, the fspeech accounts behaved similarly to the previous dataset. They maintained "free speech" content that flirted with themes common to traditional and radical accounts, displaying a liquid and flexible political identity to other users. Specifically, the numbers for this category of tweets for June 2018 were almost the same as those of June 2017, with an average of 613.6 tweets for 2018 compared to 633.6 tweets for 2017. While only 3 accounts were defined as fspeech, the content posted signals a constant interest in this kind of adaptive online identity paralleling Conservative political views.

Thus, the ideological themes seen during June 2017 are to be found in June 2018 with traditional, alternative and fspeech accounts maintaining their values. While one account in the news category changed its name and radicalized, the overall news accounts continued to post information framed conveniently for the Conservative worldview. The clear difference between content posted by Politicians and Influencers, shows that the former is more measured and the latter more radical in tone which is in line with the 2017 dataset. The main difference between the two datasets was the lower numbers of tweets during June 2018. This might be taken as a demonstration that events with huge resonance and increased mutual radicalism risks, such as terror attacks, have a concrete effect on groups on the political fringes and their activity on social media platforms.

4.3 Word-frequency

The June 2018 dataset closely mirrors the 2017 dataset. The first 1000 results were calculated considering all the tweets extracted and then compressed and, as in the previous dataset the first twenty results were function words:

1 15035 com

2 13236 https

3 13139 twitter

4 10757 status

5 8362 the

6 5794 to

7 4064 and

8 4011 a

9 3989 of

10 3131 in

11 3106 you

12 2860 is

13 2750 i1

14 2707 s

15 2454 it

16 2235 www

17 2231 (redacted)

18 2080 for

19 2051 that

20 2001 (redacted)

Fig. 64 The twenty most frequent words/particles extracted for June 2017.

The most frequent content words for June 2018 posted in the Conservative category were brexit with 1247 hits, conservatives with 651 hits, tory with 484 hits, may with 646 hits, theresa with 465 hits, conservative party with 358 hits, ukip with 341 hits, farage with 290 hits, tommy with 214 hits, theresamay with 114 hits, tories with 109 hits, mogg with 102 hits, robinson with 136 hits, conservative with 83 hits, nazi with 158 hits, freetommy with 61 hits, borisjohnson with 59 hits, nodeal with 42 hits, eurosceptic with 36 hits and brexiteer with 35 hits.

The main three themes, calculated on the basis of word frequency, for June 2018 are noticeably different from those for June 2017. In June 2018, the focus was mostly on Conservatives, England and Other States. This shift in focus, from Nation, News and Left of the previous dataset, shows a change in priorities with the main narrative looking both inward and outward, commenting on posters' own political movements in the UK but also trying to connect to parties in other countries. The category of 'news' that was placed second in the June 2017 dataset and an important theme for the radical right and more traditional Conservatives, now appears in fourth position. These accounts seem more concerned with being able to control the Conservative news flow. The absence of a 'Muslims' theme, compared to the previous year, and the discussion around Law, Political Attributes and the

deepening influence of President Trump on the UK radical right confirm a new direction in the online world. Conservatives seem to be more worried about discussing how their identity would evolve—from a Migration driven narrative predominant during June 2017—to a shift in emphasis on the British left. Radical right tweeters started posting politicized content targeting users with different values, such as the British left and Remainers. In June 2018 a visible change of pace and in priorities emerges on the Conservative spectrum. Fig. 65 illustrates the 10 themes identified on the basis of word frequency for June 2018 .

Word/Particle	**No. of occurrences**
Conservatives	5030
England	4543
Other states	4497
News	3176
Pol. Attributes	3140
Left	2009
Law Categories	1549
Migration	1362
Usa	1168
Sky	835

Fig. 65 Ten most frequent content word categories for June 2018.

The examined accounts behaved similarly to June 2017 focusing on an 'identity search' for Conservative and radical right values. Furthermore, they were less focused on the Muslim community due to the absence of terror attacks that characterised the June 2017 dataset. These accounts seemed to look for ways to upgrade their movement in the face of what appeared to be a credible potential Remain mobilization; additionally, they searched for a way to prevent the incarceration of leading radical right figures such as Tommy Robinson. Many tweets focus on Italy and the situation of the Northern League, a radical right party noticeably on the rise in Italian politics, that attracted the attention and interest of its British counterparts. The figure of Matteo Salvini, the leader of the Northern League, was used for propaganda purposes in the UK as an exemplar of the radical right leader who managed to gain widespread support for his ideological platform. Radicalization online on the right appears to occur irrespective of geographical borders and between the most unpredictable of allies.

The categories presented in Figure 49, from Conservatives to Sky, were used to gather data showing how the online conversation was shaped. What follows is a hate crimes timeline for 2018, later to be analyzed in relation to the tweets that were extracted.

4.4 Hate Crimes in the UK: June 2018.

In June 2018 several incidents and hate crimes occurred. Generally speaking, the spring and summer period seemed to be a catalyst for such crimes:

> Police data has shown that crime rates rise along with the temperature, regarding hate crime, the rise can be explained by higher volumes of people spending time outdoors in public spaces, changes in opportunities for hate crime, and hot weather affecting people's physical and mental wellbeing. (Atta et al, 2019: 45)

Tell MAMA registered a marked evolution of radical right activity because "the year of 2018 has brought more complex headlines, the issues are more nuanced, and debates and discussions on Islam and Muslims have consistently accelerated" (Atta et al, 2019: 55). Data show that spikes in hate crimes connected to the major events in socio-political life in the UK emerge clearly during 2018 with somewhat lower numbers compared to June 2017. It is necessary to underline that notable spikes did occur early during spring:

> The annual timeline for anti-Muslim incidents reported to our police partners in 2018 shows minor spikes in March and August and a significant spike around April and May. In March, the total number of incidents rose by 32% (from N=130 in February to N=171), and between April and May the incidents soared by 81% (N=134 to N=243). These springtime spikes match those recorded by Tell MAMA, and can be attributed to Punish a Muslim Day, along with Ramadan taking place (roughly) between 16th of May and 14th of June, and the first heat wave of the year that hit the UK in the month of May. "There was a slight increase in August, rising by 10% since July, which we tend to see during the summer period". (Atta et al, 2019: 100)

This second spike is connected to Boris Johnson's column in *The Telegraph* in which he described Muslim women as 'letterboxes' and 'bank robbers' on August 5th (Johnson, 2018). This piece provoked several Islamophobic incidents (Dearden, 2019). The graph by *Tell MAMA* (Fig. 66) shows the wave structure of this spike.

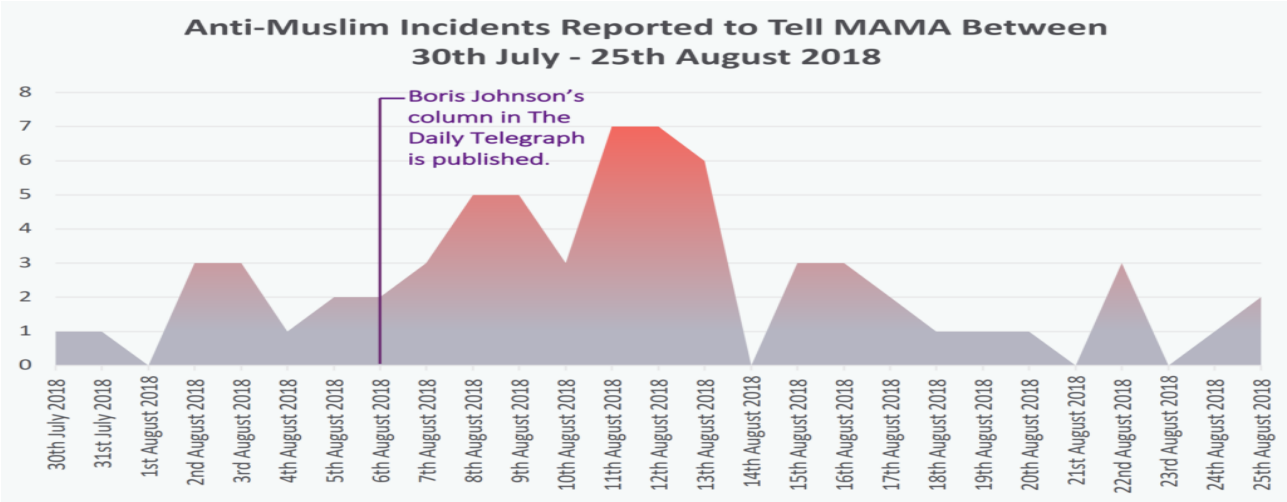


Fig. 66 Anti-Muslim Incidents Reported to Tell Mama Between 30th July – 25th August 2018, Tell Mama (Atta et al, 2018, 48).

Met police observed that "around twelve per cent of hate crime offences in 2018/19 were estimated to have involved more than one motivating factor, the majority of these were hate crimes related to both race and religion" (Home Office, 2019: 5). Specifically for 2018 it was the "race hate crime was the most commonly recorded strand of hate crime in all 44 police forces" (Home Office, 2019: 7). The increase in hate crimes based on Antisemitism during 2018 began to be integrated with the Islamophobia that was dominant in 2017.

In 2018/19, where the perceived religious affiliation of the victim was recorded, in just under half (47%) religious hate crime offences were targeted against Muslims (3,530 offences). The next most commonly targeted group were Jewish people, who were targeted in 18 per cent of religious hate crimes (1,326 offences). (Home Office, 2019: 17). Radical right activity both online and in the material world became more refined but it also extended its range of topics.

The timeline for hate crimes during June 2018 started with an incident that occurred on May 29th when the Bassaleg School and Masonic Hall were damaged by fire and Swastikas were drawn on walls near to the University of South Wales, Newport. There was also an image supporting English Defence League founder Tommy Robinson amongst other offensive graffiti.

Fig. 67 Swastika and graffiti from the incident at the Bassaleg School. (BBC, 2018)

This specific incident shows the link between the radical right, and its attempt at normalization, and the far-right, whose groups and movements continued to be active in the UK throughout the Brexit period. There is a slight but notable ideological difference between the two as, generally, the radical right attempt to normalize themselves with the mainstream right wing, with a more opportunistic outlook on politics, while the far-right often refuse to compromise their principles. Nevertheless, these two streams are not rigidly separated but instead are fluid and constantly intermingling. The Bassaleg incident distinctly reveals the process of their intermingling and their mutual support in this ideological milieu. The other event that is speculated to have had a bearing in June 2018 was the "Punish a Muslim 2" letter[83] that suggested a number of violent actions to be conducted against Muslims should be given a monetary value attached i.e. spitting in the face: 50 cents, forcing two Muslims to fight each other to the death: £ 32 etc. It was sent towards the end of May to different households, following a similar action in March. The 24th of July was set up to be a "Punish a Muslim day," an action that directly incited violence and hateful language. While the portfolio of the radical right diversified during June, Islamophobia remained a significant focus of their activity on the ground.

4.4.1 Day-by-day hate crime Timeline: June 2018

- **<u>June 2</u>**

Matthew Hayden, 17, is racially abused and assaulted by Asian men with lasting damage to his skull (Robson and Murphy, 2018). This group of men used crowbars and golf clubs in their assault. This

[83] "Press Release: Letters calling for 'Punish a Muslim Day Part 2' received by households in Rotherham". 2018. *Mend*. Available at: https://www.mend.org.uk/press-release-letters-calling-punish-muslim-day-part-2-received-households-rotherham/. Last accessed 24 December 2020.

incident is an example of how mutual radicalization and incitement is a continuous process with hate crimes occurring on the part of more than one ethnic group.

- **June 4**

Dale Hart, a man from the Greater Manchester area, attacks a woman with her son and two daughters on their way to a bus stop.[84] This hate crime results in grievous bodily harm and racially aggravated assault to the victim. The Guardian reports:

> Hart admitted he told the boy to "speak English" and then, during what his barrister called "an unsightly scuffle", shouted: "Get off me, you black cunt." (Pidd, 2018)

Notably in this and other hate crimes, the attacker acts against already vulnerable victims, in this case, a woman with her children. While the assault was a 'mistake' for the attacker who meant to hit the boy (*ibidem*), this incident shows how both acts of hate online and in the material world can capitalize on the vulnerability of their targets.

- **June 5**

A teenager is subjected to verbal homophobic abuse and assault by a boy aged about 10 who attacked the victim hitting him on his face and head (Norris, 2018). This crime shows how juvenile radicalization goes even deeper than the attacks of June 2017, absorbing teens and kids in a larger wave of radical right activity. Whereas in 2017 there was a clear common direction and often a link between events occurring within the time frame of terrorist attacks, during the first week of June 2018 the events are much more random and fragmented, reduced to isolated hate crimes that occur without a larger common narrative.

- **June 9**

The march to free Tommy Robinson provided the radical right with a rallying point to descend on London. They occupied Trafalgar Square and the consequence was a stand-off with the police. Five officers were injured by different objects launched by the protesters.[85] A police medic suffered severe facial injury.[86] These episodes appear to be connected to the sequences of tweets during June 2017

[84] "Man charged with Bolton hate crime attack that left mum critically ill". 2018. *BBC News*. Available at https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-manchester-44380395. Last accessed 24 December 2020.
[85] "Crowds chant 'free Tommy Robinson' in protest supporting jailed ex-EDL leader". 2018. *ITV News*. Available at https://www.itv.com/news/2018-06-09/crowds-chant-free-tommy-robinson-in-protest-supporting-jailed-ex-edl-leader/. Last accessed 24 December 2020.
[86] "Police medic injured as rally for jailed activist Tommy Robinson turns violent". 2018. *The Times*. Available at https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/violence-at-rally-calling-for-release-of-tommy-robinson-t0rcbtnvs. Last accessed 24 December 2020.

that criticized authorities and the police[87] that seemed to have contributed to the UK's state of social upheaval in June 2018. The fluid mixing of radical right and far-right figures was on display with the Holocaust deniers Nicholas Kollerstrom and Luke Nash-Jones from Make Britain Great again speaking to a crowd composed of activists from EDL, UKIP, For Britain, the Fla, Generation Identity and many others.[88] The notorious Geert Wilders from Holland was the international speaker at the event (*ibidem*) showing that the British radical right was part of a larger international network during this month. This event resonated online throughout the month and it was part of a search for identity that radical right accounts constantly embraced.

- **June 14**

A few days after the protests to free Robinson, a hate crime occurs in a supermarket when a man decides to test a stain remover by using it on a Muslim woman. He films himself and after the act says "no, no it don't fucking work" before closing the video. The video goes viral with many users on different social media platforms expressing disgust at the episode (Embury-Dennis, 2018). This type of content uploaded online evoked strong feelings of aversion and disgust that the radical right tried to channel. In this incident, a man used a stain remover to attempt to purify a Muslim woman in a supermarket. Sympathizers of radical right views seemed to engage in these acts of social subversion to harass and 'clean' minorities seen as disgusting and dirty. Interestingly, the reaction of many other users not affiliated with the radical right showed signs of moral disgust at the actions of "purification" demonstrating again that mutual radicalization can be based on disgust with the other. Moreover, Islamophobic abuse seems to primarily be directed towards vulnerable targets. On the same day as reported by *Hope not Hate*, David Lewis, a Britain first supporter, posted a photo with knives, an axe and a leaflet with a caption: "Are you ready?" (Archibald, 2018). Similar posts including graphic examples were put up throughout the month as recorded by Archibald. These examples are evidence that the radical Conservative network was active on multiple social media platforms.

- **June 16**

Two women in Cheltenham are racially abused by two men; one of whom was pushing a pram with a baby inside (Norries, 2018). The trend of abuse towards women continues with similar incidents a

[87] See section **4.9.1 A day-by-day timeline**.
[88] "Big numbers and violence at free Tommy Robinson Demonstration". 2018. *Hope not Hate*. Available at https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2018/06/09/big-numbers-violence-free-tommy-robinson-demonstration/. Last accessed 16 October 2020.

few days apart. From these examples it appears that the presence of children on the scene does not positively influence the extent of the abuse itself: it might accelerate the abuse.

- **June 18**

An attack on 70 headstones at the Urmston Jewish Cemetery causes damages of up to £50 000 (Keeling and Day, 2018). Radical right activity, a week after the protests for Tommy Robinson, took on distinctively physical traits in the destruction of grave markings, targeted at Jews. The desecration of graves has also a ritual meaning that targets both real objects with a sacred meaning and the communal perception of a community. A woman with a 10-inch knife screamed 'I want to kill all Jews' as she chased children outside a synagogue (Baynes, 2018). Acts of antisemitism, probably due to the link between radical right and far right, often erupted this month.

- **June 19**

A man is stabbed several times in what Scotland Yard defined as a racially motivated attack.[89] The assault was the result of a brawl that apparently erupted spontaneously. This episode occurred precisely one year after the Finsbury Park Mosque attack showing how, by chance or design, the "copycat" effect could persist for years.

- **June 26**

A text by Milo Yiannopoulos saying "I can't wait for the vigilante squads to start gunning journalists own on sight" was sent to journalists at *The Observer* achieves online virality (Richardson, 2018). Yiannopoulos often answered journalists in this provocative and controversial fashion, probably to attract even more attention. This use of calling for violence, possibly ironically, is the modus operandi of many of the leading figures of the radical right. This comment occurs simultaneously with the entrance of radical right and free speech cultural icons Prison Planet, Sargon of Akkad, Count Dankula, and Yiannopoulos himself, into UKIP. Furthermore, they are welcomed as "true *crusaders* for freedom of expression" (Lawrence, 2018) by a senior member of UKIP - ironic, as it is well accepted that crusaders were religious fanatics who would not be interested in freedom of speech. Prominent figures linked to the radical right movement often use controversial language when describing their fight for freedom speech using terms referring to historical periods popular amongst their base, such as the Crusades or the age of the British Empire, that were not famous for freedom of expression.

[89] "'Racially motivated' stabbing left man fighting for life in east London – police". 2018. *Russia Today.* Available at https://www.rt.com/uk/431236-racially-motivated-attack-stabbed/. Last accessed 24 December 2020.

- **June 28**

The Mayor's speech at the State of London debates is interrupted by a group of hecklers that vocally support Tommy Robinson and harass the Mayor Sadiq Khan. One member of the group is dressed in a pro-Trump shirt and calls the Mayor of London a "jihadist".[90] Not only does this event qualify as a hate related incident but it shows, in addition, how actions of radical right members are linked to the international radical right, brandishing, in this case, Trump memorabilia. On the same day, a gunman opens fire in a newsroom in Annapolis, US, killing five and injuring several others. Amongst other prominent figures of the radical right who invited for violence against journalists in this period, Yiannopoulos claims that he was just joking with the journalists when he was wishing violence on the members of the press, a non-serious act of 'trolling' in his words (Estepa, 2019). This is another element of the connection between the US and the UK radical right groups.

- **June 29**

Blair Wilson, a young Scottish male, is targeted in a violent homophobic attack: first, he is repeatedly called "faggot" and "poof", and then, when he starts a conversation with his abusers, he is attacked physically. After the fact, his selfie with a smile and a bleeding face goes viral and galvanizes many progressives in the UK.[91] This story shows the supportiveness of the queer community and the overall progressive camp in the UK.

The June 2018 hate crimes timeline diverges from June 2017 with a few notable new variants. The attacks of the first week were of an everyday variety with seemingly random incidents that occurred after a rugby game and at a bus stop. The homophobic attack by a young child signals the radicalization of the UK youth and growing homophobic feeling of the UK radical right in 2018. The catalyst that showed the mobilization potential of the radical right was the mass protest for Tommy Robinson. The hate crimes that followed were similar to those of June 2017 with Islamophobia and Antisemitism occurring as notable themes. The link between the online sphere and the material world became more intense, with hate crimes going viral and an increase in online invitations for more violence. The end of the month records the melding of everyday hate crimes and online virality. The invitation of Yiannopoulos to attack journalists occurs two days before an actual attack in the US.

[90] "'Trump is Welcome, You're Not': Tommy Robinson Supporters Lambast London Mayor". 2018. *Sputnik: Europe*. Available at https://sputniknews.com/europe/201806301065915150-robinson-fans-london-mayor/. Last accessed 24 December 2020.
[91] "Defiant selfie of hate crime victim". 2018. *BBC News*. Available at https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-glasgow-west-44820921. Last accessed 24 December 2020.

Sadiq Khan is heckled by radical right supporters and a homophobic attack goes viral due to the online response of the victim.

In the next section, the moral foundation of collected tweets for June 2018 will be expanded upon to examine the relationship between activity in the selected accounts and hate crimes throughout the month.

4.5 Moral Sentiment Theory

The compressed sample was analyzed, as for the June 2017 dataset, taking into account Moral Foundations Theory. Applying Moral Foundations Theory to the data set of compressed tweets for June 2018, provides a snapshot of the emotional stance and moral values about which the radical right are concerned. Tweets concerned with Care appeared in extremely low numbers but Fairness tweets increased notably, showing a shift in the approach of the radical right during June 2018. In the absence of terrorist attacks, tweets concerned with the MF of Sanctity tweets diminished. The data set for June 2018 was characterized by a consistent presence of the MFs of Authority and Loyalty.

Categories	June 2017	June 2018
Total tweets	1586	3358
Care	14 (0.88 %)	33 (0.98 %)
Fairness	122 (7.69 %)	335 (9.97 %)
Loyalty	300 (18.91 %)	785 (23.37 %)
Authority	244 (15.38 %)	675 (20.1 %)
Sanctity	365 (23.01 %)	260 (7.74 %)
Non-serious tweets	541 (34.11 %)	1270 (37.82 %)

Fig. 68 A comparison between tweets posted for each MF in 2017 and 2018.

4.5.1 The Moral Foundation of Care

As for June 2017, tweets identifiable with the MF of Care were few and far between. Tweet 50 (Fig. 69) is a significant attempt by a free speech account who posted intensely throughout the month that invites people to “unplug” themselves from social media. The counterintuitive Care shown by some of these accounts demonstrates that overtly expressed beliefs and the performance of actual deeds can sometimes be at odds.

The MF of Care was channeled to evoke pity for Tommy Robinson, the guiding figure of the radical right (Tweet 51). A virulent radical right account posted a few tweets that appear to express Care,

such as Tweet 52, to describe the tragedy of shipwrecked refugees. The MF Care is used to underscore the human tragedy and cloak the tweet in apparent empathy. Compared to the general attitudes expressed by this tweeter, there may be reasons to question the purpose of the tweet as it is targeted not only to spread news that shows apparent condolences for the loss of human life but also to underline that attempts at migration end in tragedy. This ambivalent news sharing provoke misinformation typical of the radical right efforts on Twitter.

The MF of Care, when employed in an increasingly sophisticated way by the users in this set is usually a means towards a particular end to push an ideological narrative masked through Care, i.e. when a friendly user, such as in Tweet 50, is publicly defended while other similar cases caused from the radical right side, see Tweet 75, are often ignored.

CARE	
Tweet 50	The amount of hate/threats @CassandraRules has to deal with on a daily basis is despicable. She’s one of the sweetest people I've ever met.
Tweet 51	Last of the summer wine. Cheers and RIP. #PeterSallis
Tweet 52	European Union: 'Some 100 Migrants Missing, 3 Babies Dead in Shipwreck Off Libyan Coast - Reports' https:// sputniknews.com/world/20180629 1065894566-mediterranean-sea-shipwreck-boat/

Fig. 69 Tweets displaying the Moral Foundation of Care.

4.5.2 The Moral Foundation of Fairness

The MF of Fairness was surprisingly widespread in the June 2018 dataset, as it was not only more popular then the MF of Care that mirrored the June 2017 trend, but interestingly, more popular than Sanctity compared to findings in the 2017 dataset. The content of these Fairness tweets was mostly similar to those of the previous, consistently asking for major assistance from authorities or for increased fairness of treatment, compared to that provided to the left. The goal of the radical right appeared to be to finding new communicative strategies and political arguments. For example, there were attempts to prove that the radical right *deserved* more acceptance in the wider society.

FAIRNESS	
Tweet 53	We do. There’s no where in that statement where I said this man is a migrant. I said we still allow dangerous criminals into this nation despite the fact that we obviously can’t cope.

Tweet 54	Right decision. No one should be forced to provide a service. Just as a gay-owned print shop shouldn't be forced to make signs for the Westboro Baptist Church.
Tweet 55	UNSAFE: Just 1 in 8 robberies end in somebody being charged. This is the true impact of police cuts, the public aren't safe. https://www. westmonster.com/just-1-in-8-robberies-end-in-someone-being-charged-latest-stats-show/
Tweet 56	So then let me ask you, being branded as a nazi or fascist these days, either truly or falsely, is enough to have antifa try to hunt you down and physically assault you, these words can lead to violence, so do you believe there should be laws against that?
Tweet 57	You are confusing the EDL with Tommy and knowingly so, in the attempt to create reputational damage. I'll pass the info on, thanks.

Fig. 70 Tweets displaying the Moral Foundation of Fairness.

The MF of Fairness is channeled by these accounts into immigration discourse in much the same way as the MF of Sanctity is in an apparent attempt to normalize the discourse. Fig. 70 contains examples of how radical right accounts adapted to different conditions to those of the previous year using moral arguments that were better suited to these different circumstances.

Tweet 54 uses the MF of Fairness to underscore that there is no difference between homophobic attacks and attacks against rightwing Evangelists. In recent years, it is likely that several cases of this kind of contrast between defenders of civil liberties opposed to advocates of religious beliefs, may have contributed to the argument that there is a defensible position for the radical right wing in not being forced to participate in behaviour that is against their beliefs.

Tweet 55 attacks the level of security in British society without mentioning hot button terms such as "migrants" or "Muslims". A link to an article on *Wesmonster*,[92] a radical right news site that is characterized by a strong anti-immigration platform, reinforces the ambivalent characterization of the tweet. It achieves this goal by using official statistics and offers a neutral solution by claiming that

[92] Currently inactive, a user searching for "westmonster.com" is redirected to the Youtube channel of the co-owner of the domain, British Conservative Youtuber & former MEP for the Brexit Party Michael Heaver: Available at: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCnVjidHzypKf5oTKWSA1G3g. Last accessed 24 December 2020.

the police should get more funding. The implication seems to be that justice can be restored by treating the police fairly.

Many Conservative and Free speech accounts embraced a victimhood narrative comparable to the one they claim as being used by the left. In Tweet 56, the author asks rhetorically whether it is fair that being labelled as a Nazi or fascist could lead to attacks by "Antifa" which they suggest is a violent leftwing group. The tweeter asks whether there should be a law against a certain kind of hate speech. The tweet is a description of how the members of the radical right suffer a witch hunt conducted against them. Harshly applying the law then appears to be the only appropriate solution to prevent more violence in the UK.

Some accounts adopted their own witch hunt solutions to attack the left with its own weapons, such as making obstinate attacks on an individual, considering the target guilty before due process and so on. In Tweet 57, the tweeter corrects the inaccurate conflation of the EDL and Tommy Robinson, to provoke an argument about the rule of law and possible consequent threats of prosecution or even violence by like-minded users. The tweeter underlines that that the other user is knowingly trying to damage the reputation of the group and Tommy Robinson. Moreover, the author of the tweet says that he will share this information with others possibly implying some sort of retribution. The tweet is ambivalent and can be interpreted in multiple ways.

During June 2018 the tweets from the radical right applied more sophisticated arguments and tactics by absorbing and learning from the progressive camp. It appears then that in comparison to the June 2017 data, radical right tweeting embraced a new more evolved phase of communication.

4.5.3 The Moral Foundation of Loyalty.

As in June 2017, the MF of Loyalty proved to be a bedrock of Conservative morality. The June 2018 dataset shows how this feeling of belonging to one's own tribe was consistently the most popular MF throughout the month as tweeters signaled their belonging to a community during a period of an adaptation. Furthermore, the hate crimes occurred throughout the month did not change this feeling of being a member of a community for the users in the days preceding, or after, the crimes.

LOYALTY	
Tweet 58	Next weekend in London. Tommy Robinson demo Saturday 9th, and Oppose Al Quds on Sunday 10th details to be announced but get to central London early both days meeting spots will be announced #5w #millwall #arsenal

	#westham #chelsea #qpr #tottenham #charlton #fulham #wimbledon
Tweet 59	Today's @thetimes leader must exasperate all people with perfectly fair concerns about migration. People who will increasingly wonder what the hell is going on when whole establishment simply refuses to listen to them, indeed opposes them at every turn.
Tweet 60	READ | Absolutely right! We need to apply maximum pressure.
Tweet 61	When I finished a tough dawn shift and walked in to a tweet from @irnbrudreaming , only to flick on BBC2 and see that indeed the SNP had walked out of parliament...insulting hard working taxpayers like me, who pay their fucking wages & expenses - yeah, it was not a good feeling.
Tweet 62	You mean like illegal invaders who sneak across our borders with their children and then demand special treatment , " rights " of citizens and " amnesty " ?
Tweet 63	moderately right wing. They were moderates, but the way the media treated their beliefs, in an attempt to destroy their character, is what shifted them even further, so the biggest recruiter of people into far-right ideology, is people like you.

Fig. 71 Tweets displaying the Moral Foundation of Loyalty.

The role of the MF Loyalty as a catalyst around which radical right mobilization was organized remained as strong as it was in the previous dataset. The rallying cry around Tommy Robinson on June 9th was digital as well as material. Radical right accounts activated themselves against targeted groups such as the marches of Muslims as seen in Tweet 58. The MF of Loyalty became a widely shared feeling that helped to organize both those marching for Robinson and those marching against Al Quds, and was used as an important way to spread the news online.

Another trend was to create a widening fracture between the people, portrayed as overwhelmingly radical right in their beliefs, and the Establishment (such as *The Times* newspaper), who, in this narrative, are seen as hypocritical left wingers. For instance, in Tweet 59, immigration is used as a way to separate 'The Establishment' from 'the people', and in this narrative, the people are those who adopt a rightwing position and oppose immigration.

News is framed through the MF of Loyalty to portray an us versus them struggle. Tweet 60 is couched in the first person plural, with the use of the pronoun 'We', thus including the reader as being on the

same side as the tweeter. Other linguistic tropes are also employed: the use of upper case, and absolutist turns of phrase such as 'totally right,' 'maximum pressure', etc. This fight is framed by the radical right, portrayed as the majority, against an aloof and distant minority of pro-EU politicians in the House of Commons.

In Tweet 61, the author describes him/herself as a "hard working taxpayer" who feels to be like other workers whose everyday life makes them a foe of the political elite. Casual users reading this tweet might also consider themselves in the same category, hard working taxpayers, and might be urged to join the fight. This portrayal of an ordinary man, that goes to work every day while the progressive political elite prosper, is an important part of rightwing propaganda.

Tweet 62 portrays immigration as a violation of the community of British citizens that the radical right believes itself to represent in its entirety. Compassion towards refugees, portrayed as "illegal invaders," is seen as the downfall of social order, causing confusion between those who are citizens and those who are not. Migrants are constructed as wanting special treatment, more rights than citizens even. They are portrayed, additionally, as demanding amnesty (although it is not clear for what they require amnesty for) smearing them as having done something wrong if amnesty is what they demand. Interestingly, children are portrayed, in this tweet in opposition to the Care based tweets, as foreign agents who aggravate the situation and not as innocent victims.

The final trend in the tweets marked as the MF of Loyalty, such as in Tweet 63, explain the need for radicalization by Conservatives. The notion is that moderate Conservatives are inevitably pushed by the media, and implicitly by the left wing, to increasingly radicalize and then embrace radical right beliefs. People with different political beliefs are seen by radicals on the right as inherently hostile to mainstream Conservatives inevitably provoking further conflict. The tweet is a call for the likeminded to stick together, as a beleaguered minority. The tweeter blames wider society for driving Conservatives into this ever hardening right wing view, in order to survive. The tweet attempts to explain the rightwing stance and to recruit the likeminded into an increasingly radicalized position.

The MF of Loyalty appeared in the majority of the tweets collected in this set.. The narrative of Loyalty in June 2018 was similar to that of June 2017, with a few noticeable differences. The attempt to coordinate followers using Loyalty based tweets was more obvious and there were sophisticated efforts to develop new more believable narratives, such as by using personalization, emotive language, radicalization tropes and so on. There was a notable effort to absorb left wing tropes into right wing discourse and transform them credibly. Tweets posted in June 2018 were shaped according to the needs of the new conditions of June 2018.

4.5.4 Authority

In June 2018, the MF of Authority was found to be the other central footing of the online behavior in the selected accounts. The imperative to trace the source of the correct authority and obey it accordingly was accentuated even more than it had been in June 2017. Tweets marked with the MF of Authority occurred evenly throughout the month, almost in parallel to those characterized by Loyalty. The only day for which Authority-based tweets were more numerous then Loyalty-based tweets was on the 29th June. It seems that when relevant events occurred on the same day, the need arose among the radical right accounts to agree upon a narrative. The Conservative spectrum of Morality, based on the MFs of Loyalty and Authority is found to be strongly present.

AUTHORITY	
Tweet 64	GEERT WILDERS -- Opinion: I am Coming to London to Protest for Tommy Robinson
Tweet 65	"We can't go on with TM for much longer. Her inability to show leadership or make a decision is creating a vacuum the Remainers use to run riot in. "Once the votes are over next week, she has to go!"
Tweet 66	I'd probably hate the cunt & he would hate me but GOD DAMN I will defend his right to display a poster, have his opinion and use whatever language he likes as long as he isnt making threats - which he wasnt. He 100% should not - ever - be arrested for this. Authoritarian lunacy!
Tweet 67	My ancestors, The Celts, in their earliest history mined and traded in salt. It gives me great pride to know that I have kept the heritage of my ancestors alive to this day.
Tweet 68	ITALY LATEST: Salvini heralds 'Mission Libya' as he rages at aid boats 'causing trouble'
Tweet 69	The more immigration walls you destroy, the more internal walls you have to erect. Trump is right to put America's security first. European leaders take note.

Fig. 72 Tweets displaying the Moral Foundation of Authority.

Several tweets, such as Tweet 64 communicating news, were framed similarly to analogous tweets in the June 2017 dataset. The use of upper case for the name of a leading foreign radical right figure, such as Geert Wilders, and a brief phrase asking other users to follow him are typical.

The trend of smear campaigns continued in this dataset. Moreover, smear campaigns targeted Conservative personalities and politicians who were not considered to be radical enough, such as Theresa May. She was portrayed as in Tweet 65, as weak and ineffectual as well as vulnerable to the opposing political forces, e.g., Labour. The plan proposed in the tweet was to wait until the official political process was over, and then undermine and get rid of her at all costs.

In the data set marked with the MF of Authority, freedom of speech developed into an important talking point for these users. Some accounts defended those opposed to freedom of speech, in the name of the right to express one's opinion regardless of the tweet's content, as can be seen in in Tweet 66. Any attempt to oppose this notion of freedom of speech is dismissed in these accounts, and those who try to do so are framed as authoritarians. The radical right and a few more moderate accounts embraced this free speech narrative during June 2018 considering it to be the one that could allow digital spaces to remain free from government intervention, or one that could at least provide a strong counter-argument for the public at large against political interference in the individual's right to self expression.

Tweet 67 presents the tweeter's link with his or her ancestors as a fundamental connection that should be kept alive. The tweeter states that they are carrying on the heritage of their ancestors and following their lead and authority. They believe that they are doing what their predecessors would want them to do. The proud mention of the tweeter's heritage illustrates how the 'myth of the past' is often a source of identity for users, and not only those on the radical right.

In June 2018, Conservatives and radical right figures beyond the UK were often portrayed as an inspiring example to their British contemporaries. In the case of Tweet 68, Italy and the Northern League leader Salvini are used to broaden the political struggle of the British radical right to a European dimension. Specifically, the vision and the politicking of Salvini produced many tweets as a crucial source of inspiration while encouraging the British radical right due to his external authority during the summer of 2018. In Tweet 68 Salvini is portrayed as a heroic figure 'raging' against aid boats for Libyan refugees, that are 'causing trouble'. Salvini is seen as raging to protect Italy against the threat of boats of Libyan refugees.

In Tweet 69, security is used as an argument to reinforce the position of a radical right leading politician, in this case President Trump, by affirming that Trump had had the required answer all along. The tweeter acknowledges Trump's authoritative handling of security and advises that other political figures and important personalities in Europe should adapt and learn from Trump's example to protect their countries properly.

4.5.5 Sanctity

In June 2018 the tweets characterized by the MF of Sanctity were rather different compared to those in the previous dataset. The absence of intensely felt critical events, such as terrorist attacks, might be a reason for the lower overall numbers of tweets based on the Sanctity MF. There were stable numbers of these tweets daily throughout the month except for the 2nd and 4th of June. During these two days, Sanctity based tweets were second in number, accompanying Loyalty based tweets. This is probably due to the everyday hate crimes that occurred at the beginning of June 2018, such as physical violence towards ethnic and sexual minorities, that could have provoked a reaction in the selected accounts. The hypothesis that the MF of Sanctity is activated as the result of the stimulation of the behavioral immune system (see Schaller and Park, 2011) in users is not confirmed in this data set, despite its confirmation in June 2017. Sanctity marked tweets seem to be connected more to terrorist attacks and other highly emotional acts as can be seen in the posting presented for the previous dataset i.e. tweets posted during the London Bridge terrorist attack.

Tweet 70	Please #RETWEET & #SHARE #Petition : Proscribe #Hizballah in its entirety under the #UK #TerrorismAct 2000! We need to get this #Terrorist SCUM out of #BRITAIN https:// petition.parliament.uk/petitions/2190 20 … #BBC #SKY #LBC @LBC @ConHome @CCHQPress #ConservativeParty #UK #Brexit #Labour @Theresa_May #USA
Tweet 71	“Disgusted by most of our politician's especially TM. I feel our vote to leave is being ignored and she is bowing to the EU with no real effort to carry out our wishes.”
Tweet 72	Here are the the eight "Asian" men who were charged with repeatedly raping and abusing multiple young girls in the UK: Assad Hussain Moinul Islam Kameer Iqbal Raheem Ahmed Khalid Hussain Alladitta Yousaf, Haji Khan Kamran Khan
Tweet 73	The liberal left, biased @BBCNews and @CBeebiesHQ trying to indoctrinate young people with a show called "refugee stories" as part of so called #RefugeeWeek2018 . Really is disgusting that our money funds this propaganda.
Tweet 74	Actually I hate Soros because he literally hunted down his own people and confiscated their belongings in order to survive the holocaust and in an interview he said he doesn't even feel bad about it. He's a piece of shit.

Tweet 75	NAZIS DR MENGLES ISLAM AL BAGDADI RAINBOW MICKEY MOUSE BADGE HUMAN RIGHTS PEDOPHILE RAPING 2 YEAR OLDS ISLAM PAKISTAN RAPE GANGS OF WHITE CHILDREN IF THE GOOD DOES NOT CLEAN THE EVIL & BAD FROM ITS HOUSE THE WHOLE HOUSE ENDORSES & IS THE EVIL CLEAN UP OR PREPARE TO BE CLEANED

Fig. 73 Tweets displaying the Moral Foundation of Sanctity.

Tweet 73 not only screams out the need to distance "us" against a group considered disgusting on moral grounds, but also invites other users to share and spread these demands. The behavior online against targeted groups imitates the spread of a pathogen that is shared with as many users belonging to the group as possible. The pathogen here is seen as an ideological one. In June 2018, the need to expel an ideologically dangerous group of foreign ethnicity and religion persists, much as it did in June 2017.

Tweet 71 embraces the trend of smear campaigns by explicitly mentioning disgust and similar physical and emotional responses. Theresa May was specifically targeted not only as an illegitimate authority who did not represent the will of the people, vis a vis the EU by the the radical right, but also as a possible catalyst for behaviour considered revolting and almost "unholy" as she is seen as the most disgusting politician in the UK who works against the will of the nation. It is clear that the tweeter believes that the ideal leader of the radical right should behave completely differently from Theresa May.

Tweet 72 uses a new technique, spreading the names of those who committed acts considered by the wider population to be unlawful as well as sickening, and particularly so by the radical right. A photograph of each man named is attached to the tweet in an attempt to dehumanize them. Moreover, the term 'Asian men,' as the police refer to the group, is used in quasi-ironic fashion as the photos show mostly ethnically Middle Eastern faces.

In June 2018, the left attracts a continuous barrage of stigmatizing tweets, such Tweet 73, that further weaponize disgust online. The left-wing narrative around refugees contains an attempt to create a certain empathy in younger parts of British society. This narrative is attacked and undermined by the radical right accounts on Twitter through three ideas: disgust, money and propaganda. The right construct the use of taxpayers money to spread propaganda in favour of humanizing refugees as disgusting, This rhetoric seems quite mainstream as it exploits ideas like taxpayer's money and

propaganda. The use of 'disgust' is the term that renders this otherwise more sophisticated critique of the liberal left as a visceral slur.

In this dataset, tweets that targeted personalities through weaponized disgust were more sophisticated than in the 2017 dataset. In Tweet 74, a lengthy, antagonistic description of the behavior of the target, George Soros, a wealthy Jewish philanthropist and holocaust survivor, leads the author to arrive at a brief characterization by comparing him to fecal matter. This tweet is a sign of a growing trend online for the radical right to weaponize physical manifestations of disgust.

Tweet 75 appears with words that are exclusively in upper case and the use of intensely aggressive and chaotic language. The text itself is full of Sanctity based reminders of the evils of pedophilia and rape and proposals for the cleansing away of evil. The tweeter produces a torrent of ugliness, using concepts and terms that contribute to a virulent radical right narrative.

The MF of Sanctity, while less present in the dataset for June 2018 is nonetheless notably present on Twitter. The use of the MF of Sanctity to signal the need to expel and purify still characterizes these tweets. New techniques and narrative elements emerged in June 2018. This narrative change in the Sanctity based tweets showed up in the public profiling of groups the tweeters considered non-human.

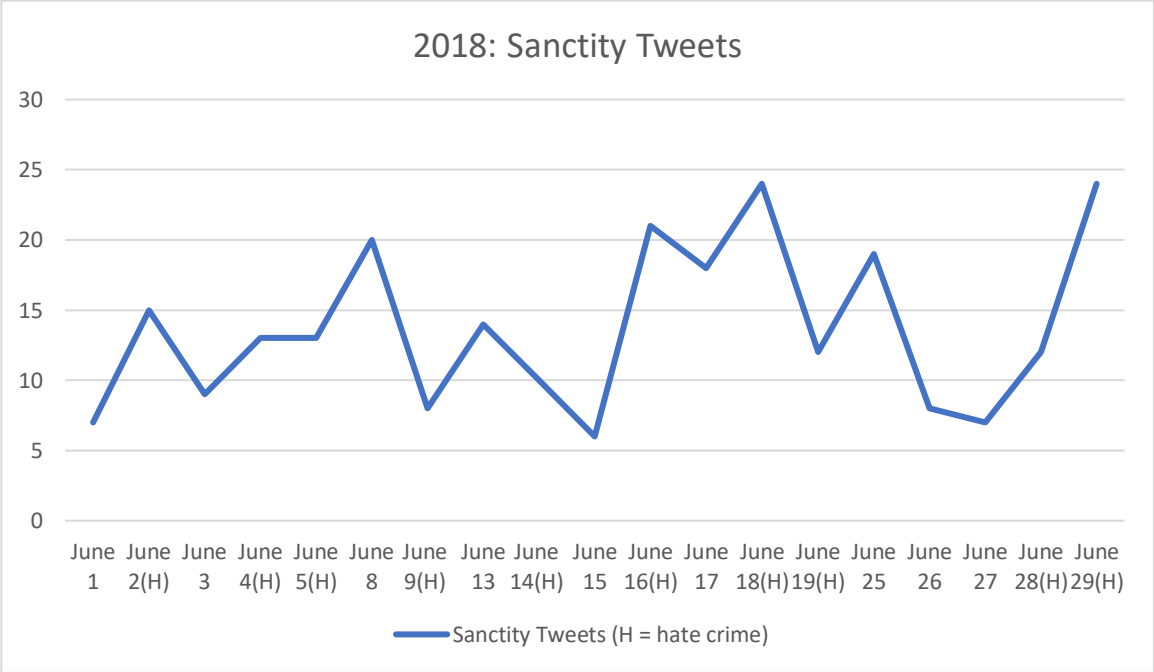


Fig. 74 Patterns of Tweets displaying the Moral Foundation of Sanctity for 2018.

In this narrative, the radical right attempts to substitute policing and due process with a public online tribunal. The point of these narratives is to bring the reader closer to a worldview based on the Sanctity moral foundation and on the basis of that, accuse any opposition of being irrational i.e. looking at

migration as an exclusively negative process. The next section, as for the previous dataset, will cover humorous tweets focusing on the recurring phenomenon of humorous uncertainty.

4.6 Humour

4.6.1 Humour as a Moral Foundation

Humorous tweets were the most numerous category of data for the second dataset as well. Once again, the Conservative moral mindset was faithfully reflected in these tweets as humour seemingly enhanced pre-existing values of the posting of the given extracted account. Loyalty, Authority, and in the case of this dataset, lower Sanctity compared to June 2017, were the crucial moral foundations that were expressed through humour. Loyalty and Authority based humorous tweets were the most numerous throughout the analysed days. June 9th, the day of the protest for Tommy Robinson's arrest, was the only exception to this pattern as it provoked an avalanche of humorous Fairness based tweets that substituted Loyalty. The reaction of the selected accounts to the numerous altercations with police of radical right activists in London on that day provoked a humorous reaction that coalesced around Fairness and Authority. This shift shows how morality shifts, in case of significant events, to better adapt - moral action and the need for rightful authorities for that day became central for the selected accounts.

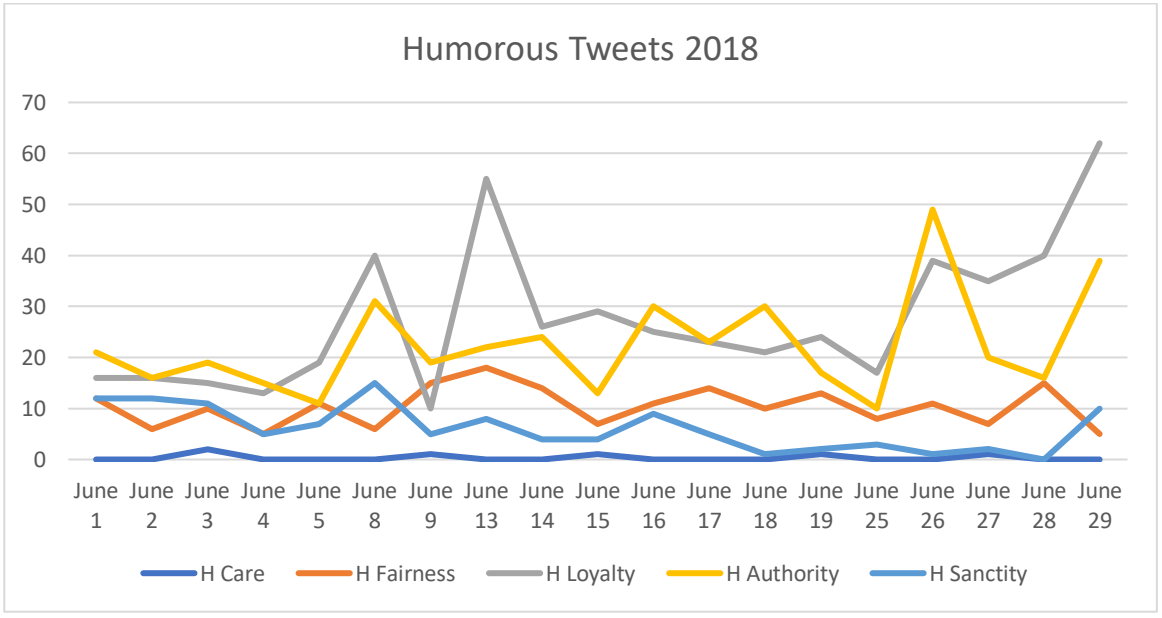


Fig. 75 Patterns of Humorous Tweets for 2018.

Humorous tweeting during June 2018 often had serious intent and changed according to the existing socio-political situation during the whole month. The datasets for June 2017 and June 2018 show how humour parallels serious tweets to evoke stories and enhance new ideological narratives online.

4.6.2 Uncertain Humour

In June 2018, many tweets in the dataset revealed the use of humour much of which was of the uncertain kind. In comparison with the 2017 dataset there were 1291 tweets classified as humorous/non-serious out of a total of 3358, double the number found in the former set. This dataset provided 21 tweets that were ultimately non-humorous, 290 that were potentially humorous and 980 that were clearly humorous. The focus my discussion for June 2018 will focus on tweets that were unclear and hard to interpret, because they were characterized by the use of uncertain humour.

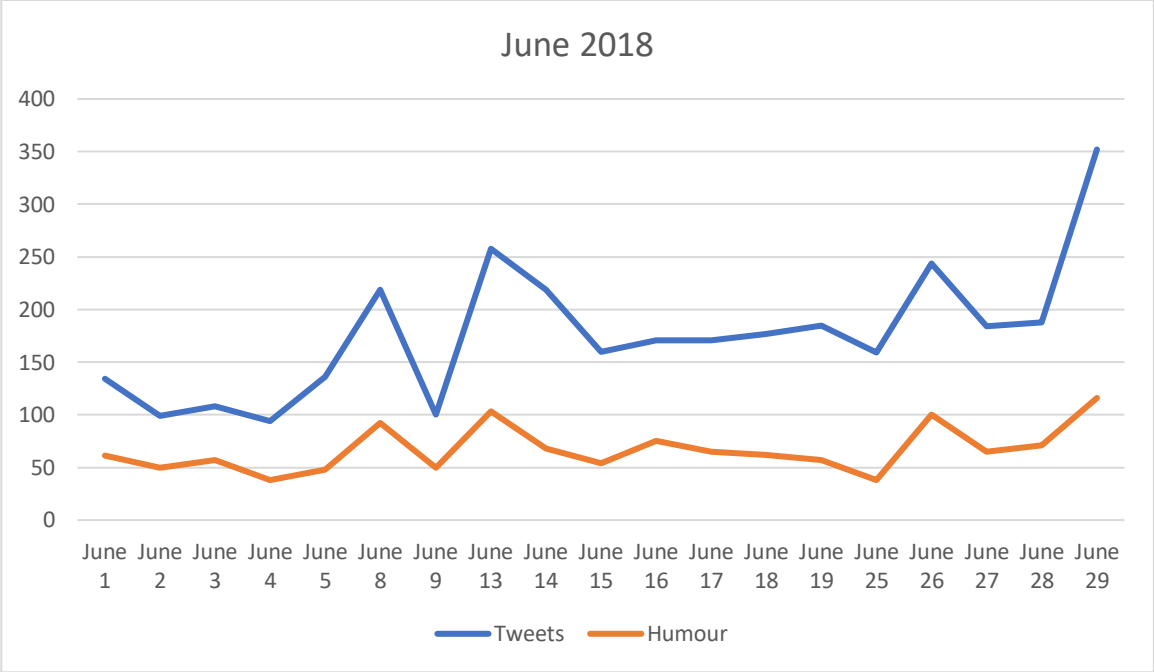


Fig. 76 The comparison between Serious and Humorous Tweets for 2018.

As for the previous dataset, the use of uncertain of humour was an important aspect in the June 2018 data. Humour often occurred as a means to ease messages about ideological contamination. This use of humour enabled these accounts to post content that was ideologically charged but also open to different sorts of interpretation by the casual reader. Significantly, the patterns that emerge in the category of uncertainly humorous tweets mirrored the 2017 dataset with only minor differences.

4.6.3 Emotionally charged (humorous) tweets

As in the previous dataset, a notable pattern in the tweets extracted specifically to examine the use of humour was the occurrence of group values and representation. Once more, the use of uncertain humour provides a way for the posters to suggest additional interpretations in the way tweets about their own or other groups are represented. Tweets in this category that are intended to ridicule a targeted group are phrased in such a way that they have plausible deniability, and therefore might avoid a backlash. Many tweets provided moral guidance for appropriate group based behaviour and proscribed any behaviour on the part of the perceived opposition.

Tweet n.	Text	Account Type	Moral Foundation
Tweet 76	*If you are a Catholic who wants people jailed for criticising a mad bomby sand religion.....you have clearly forgotten 1400 years of history....*	alt influencer	authority
Tweet 77	*The last thing the world needs is yet another Islamic Republic. Just LOOK at the ones we have already.....dear God.*	alt influencer	sanctity
Tweet 78	*The Left used to detest the transfer of power from the people to Brussels. Now, Labour MPs and left-wing groups are pressuring Jeremy Corbyn into backing another referendum to keep power in the hands of foreign bureaucrats. Sad! Support us at*	trad news	loyalty

	http://www. leave.eu/get-involved		
Tweet 79	*Wow... there are a lot of (((misinformed))) people out there*	alt influencer	sanctity
Tweet 80	*I've been blocked, suspended, traffic managed & ticketed multiple times. Centre right, socially libertarian & fiscally conservative political beliefs & appreciation of Christian civilization & values has got me in trouble multiple times. While Marxists & Jihadis get free reign.*	alt influencer	fairness
Tweet 81	*But he is a racist and a sexist!" - Well all the thousands of Americans (and a record number of Black Americans) can now feed their families and afford to treat their wives & daughters better.....so I guess the Racist Sexist is a good president then.*	alt influencer	sanctity

Fig. 77 Uncertainly humorous tweets that discuss groups.

Tweet 76 attempts to radicalize the interpretation of Catholicism amongst other users, proposing a way for a large group such as Catholics to think about Islam. The poster accuses those Catholics that defend Muslims. This position is portrayed simply as a criticism of Islamic behaviour over the

centuries. The final part of the tweet suggests that users that oppose the struggle against Muslims should remember the history of Catholicism, and implicitly of the West as a whole. It is unclear whether the poster wants to emphasize 1400 years, in a serious or ironic vein. The message of the tweet, the expression of a need to rethink Catholicism and also to fight against Islam is underscored by the uncertainty of its expression so that the tweet could be read as caustic irony or as a serious call to fight against Islam.

Tweet 77 opens with an expression of horror that there could be more Islamic radicalism brought about by the establishment of yet another Islamic state. On the surface it appears to be a serious tweet, but it contains elements of casual writing, such as upper case wording and repetitive punctuation, accentuating the intensity of the tweeter's horror, and finally an exclamation calling on God, a common idiomatic use in everyday English, but here adding an extra bit of contrast with the Islamic God, Allah. This way of framing the tweet could be seen as ironic as it underlines in a resigned way, that there are people who cannot see reality. The poster conflates any Islamic state with the ISIS Caliphate, without argument. The framing of this tweet allows it to be interpreted as serious criticism or caustic ridicule. The potentially ironic wording helps to temper the intensity of the message which is being spread by this tweet.

Tweet 78 criticizes the Left by proposing an opposition between the past, when it behaved in a way framed as positive by fighting against the Brussels bureaucrats in the EU, and the present, when it changed its goals to serve foreign powers. This characterization is underscored by "sad", a word widely used by US users to project ridicule on any target. A naïve user not familiar with this catchword might interpret the tweet as serious. However, the potential ambiguity provides an impactful way to frame an opposing political force without the necessity of debating policies or providing data. The final call by the poster is for readers to support the Leave cause by getting directly involved. This tweet also shows the importance of US culture online.

Tweet 79 provides another example of US based online tropes, in this case a more extreme one. The initial italicized 'wow' can be considered as somewhat ironic in that it feigns surprise, but the rest of the tweet seems to be a serious observation. Triple brackets ((())) were intensely used for months as an antisemitic trope to point out people of Jewish descent.[93] The enclosing of the word "misinformed" in these brackets could also be read as a rebuke to the many users who ignore the rise of these fringe communities. This tweet could be non serious and in poor taste, referencing the

[93] Yglesias, Matthew. 2016. "The (((echo))), explained". *Vox*. Available at: https://www.vox.com/2016/6/6/11860796/echo-explained-parentheses-twitter. Last accessed 19 October 2020.

meaning of triple brackets without serious antisemitic signaling as a goal or actually embracing it. The tweet uses uncertainty of expression that divides those who are not in on the joke from those who share the goals and values of the poster.

In Tweet 80, the poster describes how they were punished by wider society and the police without detailing why. The second part of the tweet lists the identity and beliefs of the poster, which are all presented as reasonably acceptable positions. The end of the tweet is ideologically charged as it brings in Jihadis and other groups who the poster claims can do whatever they want. Moreover, the poster tries to compare their self-description to groups and Jihadists, which does a disservice to all the descriptions. This tweet is notable as an example of how some users embracethe narrative of victimhood. The text of the tweet could be interpreted as a sad and serious emotional story about unjust persecution, while others are not persecuted. The implication is that the authorities and their institutions support some groups and Muslims but oppress others. The final part of the tweet could be read as sadly ironic, if the reader credits the poster with enough self-awareness.

Tweets such Tweet 81 that defend public personalities, show how negative narratives created by other groups about leading figures are often fought by some users through framing that essentially shows a public personality's actions, although labelled 'sexist' and 'racist' are anything but that. The tweet is framed around pitying poor Americans while pointing out that if sexism and racism are so bad, it is ironic that there is so much specific care for Afro-American communities. Examples like this allow tweeters to humanize a targeted public personality suggesting that the allegations against him are false. Support for the weak and disadvantaged by Trump, as claimed by the poster, deny these negative characterizations. The poster adds, "I guess", that could be read as further irony, questioning the labelling of a public figure on the basis of the claims of their benevolence. This tweet twists the meaning of certain negative expressions so that paradoxically they now apply to good deeds.

Tweets that appeared in June 2018 that used uncertain humour in framing different groups were generally less direct and aggressive than those of June 2017. Many were more textually complex and included more careful wording, posters communicated radical intent but in general one that could have been understood only by the in-group community. This way of tweeting used the technique of uncertain humour successfully as naïve users could interpret the in-group content as serious while knowing users would find it funny. Much of the tweeting was around issues of posters' own identities, redefining their groups, instead of attacking the opposition as seen in the June 2017 data . Examining these sorts of tweets is a concrete way of showing how the wider

structural changes in the Twitter community and a deeper influence of US culture online, emerged during June 2018 and contributed to a new flow of radical content on Twitter.

As in the previous dataset, many tweets targeted well known individuals. The following pattern of tweets (Fig. 78) focused on a target to create a narrative or ostentatiously fabricate a brief story about a community, based on one of its members. The dynamics of this kind of posting were similar to those described for June 2017 although wording of the tweets was more indirect compared to the the previous dataset. Tweets that incorporated detailed descriptions and exaggerations were used to communicate an ideological message. The relevant feature of these tweets was the use of a negative characterization of targeted individuals as well as elements of humour by the posters.

Tweet n.	Text	Account Type	Moral Foundation
Tweet 82	*PLONKER: Jean-Claude Juncker tells Italy not to blame EU for country's problems...despite Brussels turning parts of the country into a giant refugee camp. This is why Eurosceptics are now winning across the continent.*	trad news	authority
Tweet 83	*Fantastic news! @realDonaldTrump is #MEGA Making Employment Great Again !";;@realDonaldTrump;#MEGA*	alt news	authority
Tweet 84	*You are such a diva, nobody is harassing you, nobody is a nazi. You lost a job because of you ineptitude and decided to try smear Ethan. And when called out on it you play the victim. You are unhinged. Bye*	free speech influencer	sanctity

Tweet 85	*Pedo Alert He must be gutted getting banged up for emulating his pedo prophet...*	alt influencer	sanctity
Tweet 86	*Too easy. Mostly coz you can imagine him actually sidling up to some munter, "Hello, I am a member of the Labour Party and Owen Jones once signed my left nipple."*	alt influencer	authority
Tweet 87	*This has TWO punchlines. You need to cut your dose it's making you immune to other people's jokes*	trad influencer	care

Fig. 78 Uncertainly humorous tweets that focus on individual targets.

Tweet 82 criticizes a public personality and frames him as a hypocrite. The term, "Plonker", is humorous, meaning a "fool" and also aggressive in online spaces. The poster writes that this public figure engages in empty talk with Italy because the EU is allowing the country to be transformed due to uncontrolled migration. The second part of the first sentence is ironic as this public figure appears to ignore a process that everybody knows about. The idea of a country being transformed into a giant refugee camp in reality is humorous exaggeration. The remainder of of the text is serious. This tweet has a rapidly changing tone allowing for irony, and also for serious criticism of the public figure. For the tweeter, it is because of the machinations of manipulative public figures such as this one that their cause is on the rise.

Tweet 83 is a short message praising a public figure, propaganda delivered in a carefree way. The tweet starts with the enthusiastic claim that there is some "fantastic news". The tweet's message is reinforced by the tweeter writing "MAGA", in upper case, echoing a famous catchphrase: "MAGA - Make America Great Again". The use of this term is cleverly changed so that it means: Make the Economy Great Again. The tweeter claims that a public figure creates jobs for all, an appealing thought during times of economic crisis. The tweeter uses humorous tactics to spread what is probably serious propaganda. Because of the exaggeration, it is difficult for a reader to pin down how the tweeter has positioned themselves. It is however, clearly not an attack on the public figure, although it is overblown and excited.

In Tweet 84 the tweeter tries to present the victimhood narrative that the target of the tweet has embraced. The tweeter draws a fine line between aggressive serious berating towards a user, and humorous rebuke that is forcefully exaggerated. The tweeter accuses his target of being unhinged and a part of the radical part of the progressive movement. The final "bye", and the statement that the target is insane all contribute to the humorous tone of what is clearly not a humorous attack, but a very serious one. The tweet clearly contains an attack on a user accusing him of framing an alleged victimhood narrative. The use of exaggeration and accusation is powerful: the tweet uses humour to ease the message, which is very aggressive.

Tweet 85 is a straightforward and provocative attack on a Muslim user with the tweeter using vicious language. The tweet starts with "Pedo Alert" implying that Muslims are pedophiles, a characterization reinforced by calling a Muslim personality a pedophile. Muslims are often marked in online spaces by agressive tweeters as child abusers. This is a form of vicious ridicule and could no doubt evoke a humorous response in like-minded users that mock and hate Muslims. The poster creates an offensive parallel between the target of the verbal attack and a Muslim personality, something that would be seriously offensive, insulting and humiliating to Muslim users. Further, the tweeter then describes a Muslim personality as a pedophile, a seriously blasphemous slur. Although many users might read it as an offensive slur, this tweet's aggressiveness could be interpreted as cause for humour, especially by those users who hate Muslims, and would be encouraged by the slang use of "pedo", repetition of the term, the use of slang based phrasing such as "banged up", the joking warning, "alert" and the allegations that a Muslim personality was a pedophile.

Tweet 86 starts with the expression "too easy", implying that is simple to ridicule a user belonging to a group, as just belonging to that group is in itself ridiculous. The tweet insults women that are part a group by implying that all the women in that group are unattractive, applying the term "munter", meaning a hideous looking woman, that is probably offensive to all women. Moreover, the poster claims that the user they are attacking is proud of the fact that a high profile personality signed their nipple. This frame is an attempt to ridicule a particular target. The tone of the tweet is carefree but is nevertheless a serious denigration of the targeted user. The idea that a personality had signed the target's left nipple is surely exaggeration for effect. The tweet then could be seen as humorous, but it nevertheless seems serious in its intention to insult and abuse the target and its group. A user could probably find this kind of characterization funny while a non-ingroup member might be more resistant to the humour of the tweet not finding the ridicule of a movement to be amusing. Several tweets accused other users of not understanding the humorous tweets of this particular poster.

In Tweet 87 the poster underlines the fact that a previous tweet has two punchlines and suggests that the author should stop using cocaine as it contributes to the loss of their sense of humour. The poster uses upper case to point out the number of punchlines in the previous tweet. The wording of the tweet seems serious, but users would be justified in reading it as an attempt at ridicule. The tweet underlines the in-group/out-group division among users as those who recognize the poster and the previous tweet will recognize the tweet as intended to be humorous. It is common for users from one group to accuse users from another of not understanding humour thereby deflecting accusations of aggressiveness, lack of empathy or hateful content.

Similar characteristics of the tweets from June 2017 were found again in those of June 2018. Tweets had different content but similar tropes: a conscious use of punctuation, clear narrative choices and vivid descriptions. These attributes can create a certain ambiguity of interpretation by other users that might improve the standing of a politician or berate a user, as the tweets are probably non-serious, and the humour potential is uncertain. A significant number of "carefree" tweets, that were ambiguous in their message and language, were posted to describe public figures. Interestingly, the tweets in the dataset for June 2018 were longer than those in June 2017. This change shows a tendency of tweeters, at this point, to produce increasingly complex writing and longer, more drawn out tweets.

Again, as in the previous dataset, numerous tweets were constructed around questions asked by the poster. The question mark itself was used for making the tweet text more persuasive and to underline the poster's narrative points. As for the June 2017 dataset, the timing of the question and its position in the text of the tweet were key to the creation of uncertain humour. Users needed to make an extra effort to decipher the questions asked by the poster. Because of this, while the ideological message of the tweet is easily shared with other users, the tone of the poster's questions was blurred and somewhat vague.

Tweet n.	Text	Account Type	Moral Foundation
Tweet 88	*Import immigrants that will literally fuck anything with a pulse, so fat ginger birds can get a shag?*	alt news	sanctity

Tweet 89	*I dunno about you mate, but my chat up lines don't tend to include which political party I belong to or name dropping friends. Maybe revise your technique?*	alt politician	loyalty
Tweet 90	*Why are there no #BlackLivesMatter marches in the UK to protest against the young black people being shot & stabbed on our streets every day? @ukblm*	free speech influencer	authority
Tweet 91	*CNN @jaketapper this is C133why people see you as partisan hacks, read this tweet, NOW read what Jim Sciutto tweeted about Obama calling another dictator. See the difference? Journalism is dead.*	free speech influencer	authority
Tweet 92	*Is this as well as being an illiterate, murdering,*	alt influencer	sanctity

	misogynistic, pedophile, tranny warlord, or instead of?		
Tweet 93	*Indifference? I think the trial by media has been abhorrent. As are bandwagons which, I know more than anyone, people very much enjoy jumping on.*	alt influencer	sanctity

Fig. 79 Uncertainly humorous tweets that include questions (or questions that create uncertainty as to their seriousness).

Tweet 88 appears to have two targets. The first part of the tweet viciously marks immigrants as rapists, dehumanizing them by portraying them as animals obsessed with sex, and the second part applies the same logic to women whom they label "fat ginger birds". The poster states that immigrants would be willing to have sex with animals, increasing the sense of disgust that is conveyed to the reader. The description given by the poster, of "fat ginger birds", implies that they are addressing women with left wing beliefs through derogatory terms. The tweet projects disgust both towards immigrants and towards women as it implies that those women that support immigration are doing so to have sex as they are unattractive. The question mark at the end of the tweet is used in a way that creates uncertainty as to whether the poster is being aggressive or ironic, The poster uses the verb 'shag', a slang term that increases both the disgust and the possible humorous charge of the tweet. The targeting of both immigrants and women by a poster in a single tweet indicates that tweets posted during June 2018 were becoming increasingly complex.

Tweet 89 proposes a narrative in which the poster portrays themselves in a positive light, as a discreet and unostentatious individual, in order then to criticize and taunt another user. The poster underlines that they do not "name drop" friends and are not boastful. The final question is rhetorical, because what the poster means is that the target *should* change their "chat up" technique. It is not a question, it is a suggestion. The question is thus actually ironic, as it is not a question at all. When the poster uses "dunno" at the start of the tweet they are feigning ignorance, but using

"dunno" is a fairly formulaic way of ironically saying that the speaker does know, and has some advice to give. The language of the tweet is colloquial, reinforcing the idea that this is a cordial exchange. If a reader sees the first part of the tweet as carefree, the tweet's irony is reinforced by the closing rhetorical question.

The goal of Tweet 90 is to expose the hypocrisy of movements fighting for the rights of people of color. The tweet is composed of a question asking why there is no activism in favor of people of color in the UK as young people from that group are killed there every day. The description of how these young people die, being "shot & stabbed", adds graphic details to the tweet to increase the impact of its message. The poster seems serious but the text of the tweet could also be read as ironic, suggesting that here may be a secret reason for the inaction of movements of that kind in the UK. While the mentioning of a movement could be interpreted as a serious attempt to share the tweet with that organization, some users could also see it as a way to mock that movement in the UK. The suggestion that that movement does not care might possibly intensify the ideological impact of the tweet in provoking activists to start an altercation on Twitter.

Tweet 91 is an attempt to delegitimize the media, portraying journalists as "partisan hacks", to point out that the mainstream sources of information are biased against Conservatives. To understand the tweet a user needs to know what a journalist tweeted about a public personality. The journalist, working for a public personality at the time, posted that the call between two leaders ended fifty years of division. The tweeter uses this as a way to frame all CNN journalism as morally reprehensible, and like the criticized public personality, friendly to dictators. The change in tone at the end of the tweet, with a rhetorical question to which the poster provides a direct answer, might leave the reader uncertain as to the intention of the poster. The final retort, "journalism is dead", can be interpreted as a serious indictment by the poster or as an ironic invitation to ignore journalists that refuse to do their job properly, in the poster's eyes. The overall confusion and complexity of the text adds to the ideological charge of the tweet. On one hand, any reader interested in understanding the tweet would need to go more deeply into the intention of the tweeter, which is not at all clear except in that they toss out a number of insults and attempts to build a case for why the media should not be trusted. On the other hand, other users will be repelled by this lack of clarity and will not waste time on a confusing tweet. Because the tone of the tweet is jocular, the poster has left the full interpretation of the tweet open.

Tweet 92 is composed of a tirade of negative characterizations targeting the Prophet Muhammad, the poster rhetorically asking another user, supposedly a Muslim, if this description fits or there any other ways to represent the Prophet. This is a rhetorical trick, because either way the closed answer

required means accepting one or other set of negative characterizations. The description of the Prophet is extremely offensive to Muslims and constitutes a serious violation of propriety even by Twitter's standards, on the other hand, a user who hates Muslims could find this list of unmotivated vicious insults as a form of hilarious ridicule. The final question adds to the humorous charge of the tweet as the poster provocatively asks "instead of", compounding the insult. The poster's words, however, could be read as playful in its ridicule of the article, but also as a serious and aggressive statement publicly attacking the Prophet.

Tweet 93 begins with a rhetorical question. At the outset, the poster merely asks if someone or something is indifferent. The tweet describes some extensive media coverage which functions as a public trial. The second part of the tweet accuses other people and the media of jumping on bandwagons, suggesting that the media craft false accusations that are then embraced by hypocrites or people who follow rowds. The use of the term "bandwagoning" makes it clear that the poster objects to the falsity of others. Some users might see see poster's words as a moralising comment, exhorting people to behave in a different way. However, the initial question creates an uncertainty in interpretation which might lead to further examination of the tweet. The poster is clearly ironic in their use of the term " indifference".

Similarly to the 2017 dataset, in June 2018, posters used questions as a way to present a point of view with the placing of question marks in the text of the tweet to underline an issue. Uncertainty is evoked by using this strategy. The tweets in this category contribute to the online 'buzz' of the posters and the collectivity, even if, narratives they share are often fragmented.

As previously, in June 2018 too, posters used the future as another strategy to contribute to the uncertainty of the humour in their tweets. It is easy to misinterpret a description of an apocalyptical future as either serious or as an ironic exaggeration, or both. Artistic, economic and even fantastic images of the future were used to portray posters' perception of reality and how they saw the future unfolding.

Tweet n.	Text	Account Type	Moral Foundation
Tweet 94	*Because the SNP basically admit that a right wing economic approach (other*	alt influencer	loyalty

	than mass immigration - which is MENTAL.) is the only way an Independent Scotland COULD survive.....shame they then go with left wing social policy, taxation and soundbites, lol. I expected no less...		
Tweet 95	*Italy's new interior minister is out to tear up the previous pro-EU government's wishy-washy deal with Libya's ruthless smugglers. The number of illegal migrants crossing the Med is soaring, Salvini is hellbent on sending them back.*	trad news	authority
Tweet 96	*And Cthulhu will rise up from the*	alt influencer	loyalty

	sea and reign a thousand years of darkness.		
Tweet 97	*This survey says that the strongest contributors to sense of English identity are 1) the physical landscape and 2) our history. No mystery here. It's a sense of shared place and a shared story. It's why Somewhere will always triumph over Anywhere.*	trad politician	loyalty
Tweet 98	*Miss America no longer to be judged on personal appearance. In other news, women's 100 metre runners to no longer be judged on who runs 100 metres quickest, but on who can recite feminist slam*	free speech influencer	fairness

	poetry the quickest.		
Tweet 99	*That "scorched earth" policy is becoming more and more attractive to millions of working class people, up and down the UK. We want actual Brexit and a centre-right CONSERVATIVE government to manage the economy (jobs), protect personal liberty & counter Socialist propaganda, ffs.*	alt influencer	loyalty

Fig. 80 Uncertainly humorous tweets that predict the future.

Tweet 94 uses wording as a strategy to evoke uncertainty making it difficult for the reader to discern whether the text is meant to be serious or ironic. The poster proposes a way forward for Scotland, an economic approach based on a movement, a course of action framed as the only possible one. Policies of other movements that the poster considers to be ineffectual undermine this plan. They describe mass immigration as “mental”, or insane, thus ridiculing the idea, and the attacked movement for even considering it. He uses the acronym “lol”, laughing out loud, and says “I expected no less” to underscore how ridiculous they consider the approach associated with certain groups to be. The rest of the text, could be seen as serious in its content while non-serious in its form. The identity of the reader will probably affect their interpretation of this text. A reader that support groups that the author criticizes could view the tweet, and the ridicule of policies proposed

by his group as serious criticism, while a reader with different beliefs might see the characterization of the opposite political tribe as funny. Either way, the tweet is charged irrespective of the interpretation of the tone.

The policies of leaders of other European countries were popular and often referenced during June 2018. The future of Europe in Tweet 95 is framed by the poster as a struggle between an Italian public figure against the previous Italian government, EU bureaucrats, human smugglers and migrants. The listing of all these in one category is a rhetorical strategy to create humour. The text seems to be serious, as is common for such heroic narratives, but the poster also indulges in an attempt at ridicule by using adjectives such as "wishy-washy". The language of the poster is carefully selected for maximum emotional effect, as the smugglers are "ruthless", the migrants are "illegal" and the Italian public figure, Salvini, is "hellbent" on fighting back. A reader's political affiliation and personal sense of humour is crucial in determining a reaction to this tweet, which can be judged as excessively pompous and propagandistic, therefore ridiculous, or taken at its face value as an appropriate portrayal of Salvini for users that share their beliefs. The use of a public figure from Italy to spread views also indicates that users are in the process of creating a common European narrative for like-minded individuals.

Tweet 96 uses Lovercraft's dark deity, "Cthulhu", to paint an apocalyptic picture of the future. Lovercraft was a writer of horror stories at the start of the 20th Century and the creator of so-called "weird fiction" genre. He is very popular amongst the radical right due to his open racism and the dark undertones of his writing. The poster describes a future that will be "a thousand years of darkness" echoing the idea of a Reich lasting one thousand years that emerged during World War II. The overall language of the tweet mimics the epic tones of a Lovecraftian novel. This tweet could be considered by a reader as ironic, a ridiculous exaggeration or a serious metaphor. Fans of Lovercraft with radical right sensibilities may project the characteristics of the monsters he envisioned on the minorities they target.

Some tweets used the past, usually a strong source of motivation for Conservatives, to frame a vision of the future. In Tweet 97, survey results are used to craft an identity for the English people linked to the nation's geography and history. The poster points out that there is "no mystery here" but his tone is ambiguous and it is not clear to the reader if this is a serious or an ironic remark. This allows readers with a particular identity that is linked to the history and geography of England to feel triumphant over those who do not have such an identity. The tweet closes with a rallying cry for those who feel a serious identification with the construction of English identity as it functions to

back up their position. Furthermore, there is a certain irony in the implication that other political tribes ignore this fundamental truth about England.

To address the shift from the traditional perception of women, some tweets targeted feminism, considered unacceptable by some users. Tweet 98 starts with the news that there is an American beauty pageant in which victory is not decided by the aesthetic appearance of a model, apparently unironically presented by the poster. The rest of the tweet paints a future with the absurd condition that running a women's 100 metre race would no longer be judged by the criterion of who runs the fastest 100 metres but by who could recite feminist slam poetry the fastest. This is pure ridicule, showing the absurdity of judging a beauty contest without taking beauty into account. It may nevertheless be regarded as a serious criticism of feminist ideology. The idea that runners should recite "feminist slam poetry" is a joke, further enhanced by the use of "quickest" referring back to the race. This framing of this tweet criticises feminism in a way that is shielded from possible accusations of misogyny because the poster could always answer that they were joking, because the tweet does actually contain a successful joke, making this is a handy way out.

In Tweet 99 the poster begins by using a radical policy, "scorched earth," to suggest that the situation in the UK is serious and all that is bad has to be destroyed. The tweet is an appeal to "millions of working class people" framing their own movement as being close to the people. The poster goes on to suggest that the future must be shaped by his movement, as only they can achieve a proper Brexit for the UK and a strong economy. The final abbreviation, "ffs" (meaning for fuck sake), expresses exasperation towards those who do not understand these simple truths. The expression "ffs" is used to express strong emotional support for the most important policy that his movement should pursue to counter what the poster regards as propaganda from other movements. Using down to earth, playful language is a creative way to write a tweet such as this and sharing their views online.

Talking about the future was a strategy used by these accounts to create a narrative about the uncertainty of what could, or should, happen. The language, punctuation and framing used by the posters did not lead to a straightforward interpretation, much like the case of these sorts of tweets in the June 2017 database but instead provided ambiguous and suggestive messages. The future catastrophe often described in these tweets was usually linked to a persuasive message. The overall lack of a straightforward narrative contributed to the uncertainty in interpretation on which these tweeters thrived.

4.7 Tweets with Visual Support

Visual support (gifs, video, pictures, memes etc.) represented the other side of the uncertainty of the posted content in the June 2018 dataset. Considered in its entirety, the visual support did not have clear patterns. The common feature was to accelerate an idea by images or memes. The data provided in this second dataset confirm the fragmentation that emerged for June 2017 and contribute to a need for a re-evaluation of the 'meme' hypothesis, being that the content posted online by the radical right is mostly made up by memes. While memes were amongst the collected data, most of the material was not made up of memes but it was composed by visual support items used in different ways. Although, a lot of the material was clearly 'meme-like' with the text of the tweet adding to the image or the video itself. This flexible and wider posting usually enhanced any given moral foundation in the tweet. This process emerged in the tweet to increase its potential spreading factor and user reception. The three main techniques that will be presented are, tweets conisisting of serious verbal texts with humorous visual support, humorous verbal texts with serious visuals and finally, memes.

4.7.1 Tweets characterized by serious text and a humorous image

Many tweets were posted with a serious, or even carefree verbal text, combined with a humourous picture that evoked uncertainty or shed new light on the initial verbal text itself. For June 2017 many tweets were used for political gain, often to ridicule a politician or to spread a political message. In the case of 2018 some accounts produced dozens of tweets paired with high resolution, professional, images and signed with the name of the poster. Some signs of this trend appeared during 2017 but these techniques were further improved in 2018. Another new element is the repeated use of images to denigrate Theresa May and invite her to leave the Conservative leadership. These episodes show how the radical right, many members of which did not belong to the Tory party, campaigned actively against moderate Tories.

The tweet in Fig. 81 is composed of a serious verbal text and a follow up image of a quote by a European politician. The author criticizes the European Union's approach to immigration. The reported quote seemingly agrees with the radical right position but to the lower right of the picture, in red, the answer is a cheeky "too little too late". This last saying can be interpreted as ironic or as a serious final point, evoking uncertainty in the user exposed to the tweet.

If only you'd thought of this five years ago, you know, before you let hundreds of thousands of people into Europe with practically zero checks. Typical of the European Union - too bureaucratic, operating at a snail's pace.

Fig. 81 "Too little too late".

The signaling of the tweet is that Europe is shifting towards Conservatism and readers should hurry to adapt themselves. Moreover, users that embraced 'true' Conservatism have a privileged position in this ideological struggle.

Meeting my ex Pat cousin who is over from Australia this weekend. He left Scotland back in the 70's & is a staunch Yoon & ScotCon. When I was over there in 07 I was just at the end of my left wing Socialist & Irish Republican phase. He is gonna be so happy when he sees me now ;-)

Fig. 82 "Four Pepes in UK".

The text of the tweet in the Fig. 82 introduces the arrival the author's cousin. The overall tone of the tweet is serious but colloquial, with a final emoji. The narrative gist is that the author has shifted politically from the left wing to hardline Conservative views that will make their cousin who share these views, truly happy. The image provides humourous breakthrough, especially for ingroup users. It portrays the smiling family of Pepe, a symbol of the US alt-right, each representing a home countryof the United Kingdom. This tweet portrays a radical right community, beyond national borders inside the United Kingdom, and it sharpens the divide between left wing and radical right users as the first group will interpret this tweet seriously while the second will probably embrace its message.

Ever since the #Brexit vote the majority of the #government, #Parliament , the #civilservice & #Treasury have been trying to overturn our #democratic vote. They are on the #EU 's side not the #UK 's! #MayMustGo #BBC #SKY #LBC #UK @ConHome @CCHQPress #TheresaMay @Conservatives #Tory

Fig. 83 "Sack Dumb & Dumber".

The tweet in the Fig. 83 is written with a precise structure that repeated itself for this account throughout the dataset. It shows the online attack on Theresa May that sums up in one person, for the radical right, the real and perceived efforts of Remainers in UK. The text is serious with several hashtags and tags inserted to improve potential spreading of the tweet. The image injects a humourous tone to the tweet by ridiculing Phillip Hammond and Theresa May as "Dumb & Dumber" to then invite the widespread sacking of Remainers, beyond political allegiance, in government and civil service. The overall aggressiveness of the tweet is somewhat mitigated by the ridiculing line in the visual meme. The tweet evokes uncertainty as the overall serious argument against Remainers is the core of the message of the tweet. The text, that is both ridiculing and serious, merges with an imagethat exemplifies the meme-like dynamics of online content.

4.7.2 Tweets characterized by humorous text and a serious image

The tweets posted with a humorous text and a serious picture were the other main category of tweets. Visuals were used to anchor and accelerate a verbal text to increase the possibility of retweets and sharing of the message. Images were mostly random, from photos to a text imposed on a background that could be a flag. Often, during June 2018, pictures extracted from totally unrelated to politics areas of life were used with political intent through the clever wording of the text. These elements can create uncertainty as a user could read the text and see he picture without connecting the dots that the

author wanted to address. The patterns of posting this type of tweet did largely confirm those observable in the previous dataset, with the changes conditioned by the events of this month.

Looks like lola is mooching about in London no doubt hoping someone will slap her and get arrested, keep your eyes peeled for the chunky communist #5w #millwall #chelsea #tommyrobinson

Fig. 84 "Lola in London".

The photograph accompanying the tweet in the Fig. 84 can be understood exclusively through the verbal. The tweet itself, written in a mocking tone, ridicules the woman in the photograph and directly invokes violence against her. The words used and characterization emphasize direct action of like-minded and aggressive individuals, creating a community feeling. Moreover, it disparages the woman's identity by exaggerating her weight and political belief as markers that justify this threat. This type of public denunciation of enemies of the group can evoke a humourous response from ingroup users but also justify a report to the police from other users with a serious tone. Uncertainty is evoked by this duality.

Oh I see the SNP Rats have walked out DESPITE having questions on the list. Oh well, at least we have some Scottish Tories in there to show that some Scots are NOT angry wee petulant EU shills/bitter socialist goons. More Scots voted Leave than SNP btw. Rule. Britannia. #PMQs

Fig. 85 “Rule Brittania”.

Tweets similar to the one in Fig. 85 were widespread during June 2018 as Conservatives and radical right users were searching for and establishing their identity vocally online. The image with a background of a Union Jack underscores the role played by both Scots and the Northern Irish who supported Remain, to win the Brexit Referendum for Leave. The phrase at the bottom of the picture claims the undisputable ideological identity of the author. The verbal text elaborates on this identarian display by ridiculing the SNP through disgust, and the British Left wing compared to Tories. The ending of the tweet simulates clenched teeth repeating, due to the use of punctuation, a British Nationalist slogan based on the notorious British patriotic chant, Rule Britannia. This tweet is overall uncertain because while full of claims it uses ridicule to oppose what are considered adversarial groups.

Hadn't someone better take Iceland aside and tell them that they're not allowed to have a national team that looks like that - don't they know it's 2018?

Fig. 86 “Iceland football team”.

The photo attached to the tweet in Fig. 86 portrays the Icelandic football team without any previous photoshopping. The issue that the author underlines is that the team is only composed of white men and in this way they indirectly criticize left wing and feminist values. The text of the tweet provides a reversal of the ‘normalcy’ of the picture though by ironically stating that Iceland should not have a team like that in 2018. However, a random user who is not interested in this debate potentially would not probably arrive at this interpretation and even a navigated user is likely to spend some time figuring it out. This subtlety evokes a certain confusion that, in both solved and unsolved scenarios, propagates the ideology behind the tweet itself.

4.7.3 Tweets characterized by Memes

The June 2018 dataset was composed of more traditional memes, composed of an evocative image and a caption, than those that were posted during June 2017. The meme was usually treated as one unit by the author of the tweet that added a text as a commentary. Moreover, the text of the tweet was provided to expand on the humourous charge of the meme to underline the personal touch of the posting account. Still, most of these memes belonged to the ingroup domain with memes that were recognizably shared also by other radical right, or at least Conservative, users.

Utterly brilliant from @afbranco ! @Twitter @facebook @Google

Fig. 87 "Big Tech".

The meme in the Fig. 87 portrays the 'victimhood' narrative embraced by the radical right and Conservatives during June 2018. The meme itself features the CEOs of Google, Twitter and Facebook with the latter pointing a finger at the reader to ask if whether they are a Conservative. While simple, this meme underlines how online users with Conservative views are being hunted down by the tech giants in a carefree way. This humorous representation can justify any act of resistance by radical right users as ultimately being victims in this situation. Furthermore, the theme of the meme, the opposition to tech giants, is a talking point shared by both the mainstream Conservatives and radical right users that can be used to propose a shared ideological platform.

If America treats illegal immigrants like the Nazis treated the Jews, as some hysterical morons claim, why are illegal immigrants trying to get into America?

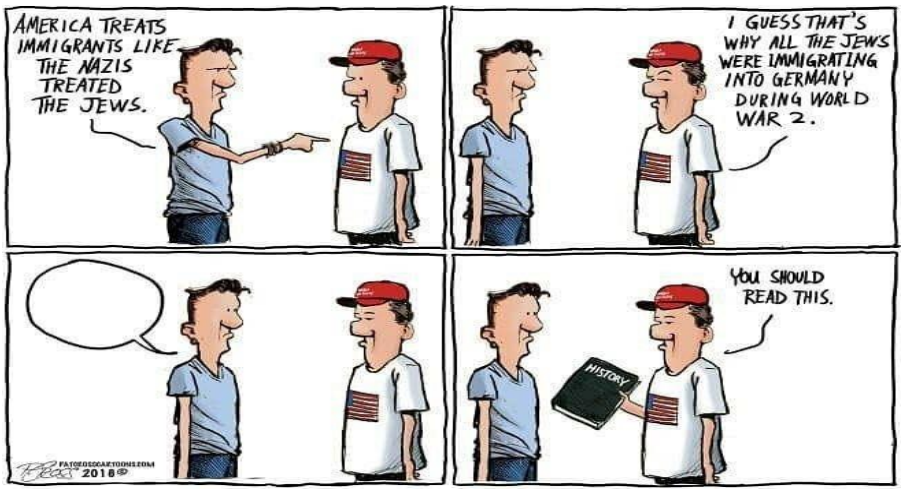


Fig. 88 "Read this book".

In the tweet in the Fig. 88, it is possible to observe the use of the question fomat in the verbal text attached to a meme. The text of the tweet repeats and sums up the main point of the meme to then rhetorically, and ironically, ask the reader to understand how truth can be very different. The meme has a traditional structure divided into four captions with the main character wearing a t shirt with an American flag and a MAGA cap being the reasonable one who ultimately invites the other character to read a book, i.e. 'history.' Radical right users often see the use of progressive talking points and colloquial elements of online writing, such as emojis, abbreviations and slang, as a show of posturing and immaturity by left leaning users. Furthermore, the ideology, language and symbols used by British radical right were decisively influenced by American Conservatives.

Is the "Alt-Right" growing or is the left consistently redefining that term to include more and more people? #ThursdayThoughts

Fig. 89 "Is this alt-right?"

This meme Fig. 89, has an easily recognizable image that is widespread online. The verbal text of the meme was written by a Conservative and it identifies the target in journalists and members of the

world of entertainment. Moreover, it accuses them of faulty judgement. The meme is willingly exaggerated when it states that the target group sees anyone who is not a socialist, the reference being the Democratic Socialist Bernie Sanders, as a member of the alternative right. On one hand, it is a clear attempt to adopt a victimhood narrative, on the other, the text of the tweet ironically proposes and seriously supposes that the radicals on the right are increasing and the left is afraid and losing. The hashtag 'Thursday thoughts' is used to simulate a casual, every day, attitude of the author of the tweet who casually communicates that they is right regardless if he is believed or not.

4.7.4 Summary

Visual support represented a series of items that were employed by the accounts to reproduce ideological tropes or reinforce a given political point. The posting of this visual material did, as for June 2017, not have any coherent uniformity beyond a larger chaotic pattern. The majority of the tweets that employed visual support represented distinctive artifacts that show how most of the material posted online by Conservative tweeters is unique and it is not repeated amongst them. Neutral serious images were used by the selected accounts to create politically charged tweets. In this online buzz, the British radical right it is still possible, once again, to observe a certain sense of communality and shared struggle that seesnline spaces as a potential platform for offline action.

4.8 Correspondence between Online Activity and Hate Crimes

The final phase of my elaboration of the June 2018 dataset is to observe if a connection between hate crimes in real life and online activity is discernible from the collected data. The examination of the 2017 June dataset provided a detailed day by day analysis that illustrated how these patterns can emerge (see 3.8), but for the present dataset, I have opted for a more general discussion. Still, the findings presented here allow us to observe whether the use of symbols, communication styles and emotional tone that emerged online was connected to the hate-filled activity that was going on in the material world at the same time.

4.8.1 Five Key words for June 2018

The keywords in tweets for June 2018 mirrored those in the previous dataset. Here too, my goal was to extract symbols, narrative elements and hateful communication that emerged online and apply these factors to committed hate crimes I extracted five keywords that reflect how mass posting of

tweets occurred in proximity to hate crimes. The keywords found for June 2018 were Robinson, Muslim, Jew, Journalist and Gay.

Keyword 1) Robinson – The activity of the radical right for June 2018 for days focused on the figure of Tommy Robinson and the protest in favour of his freedom. On the 9th of June, the day of the protest, and sporadically on other days, Robinson was used as a potential motivational factor for direct action.

Keyword 2) Muslim – The hate crimes against Muslims were of different quality and intensity compared to June 2017 but still were a reccurring feature throughout the month. Attacks against, and in one case by, individuals of Middle Eastern ethnic origins, happened almost everyday in the UK.

Keyword 3) Jew – Antisemitism, compared to June 2017, was a motivating factor for several hate crimes. The starting point in June 2018 is based on hate crimes that originated in antisemitism. Most of the attacks occurred at night and were based on the destruction of property and occurred in symbolic places such as cemeteries. These acts were probably planned out and may have been indirectly influenced by online activity.

Keyword 4) Journalist – The episode involving Milo Yiannopoulos (see 1.4.2.3) shows how the perception of journalism amongst the radical right can be confrontational. The days around hate crimes were examined for any reference to journalism to see if similar sentiments emerged.

Keyword 5) Gay – Homophobic abuse and hate crimes were a meaningful aspect of the events that occurred during June 2018. It also seems likely that it was younger people thar committed hate crimes bullying members of the LGBT+ community.

4.8.2 Summary

The selected accounts embraced a "pro-Gay" narrative for June 2018 similarly to the first dataset (see Fig. 53) and at the same time as an ulterior justification of anti-Muslim views. Although a few tweets evoked an opposing point of view, for example by justifying the homophobia of Conservative Christians. The tweets of the first day often ironically denied the existence of any injustice towards the gay minority in the UK that coincided with a homophobic hate crime on the 5th of June. The radical right narrative for the rest of the month played between the two sides. Many of the tweets at the end of the month regularly remarked that Conservatives support, and are, gays. On the 29th of June a tweet accused the LGBT+ movement of eating its own. The hate crime on the same day, as for the one at the beginning of the month, oppose this normalization effort attempted in the selected accounts. The tweets about the Jewish people were few but concentrated towards the end of the month. All of them projected antisemitism on others or denied it outright. The sequence of tweets

with “Jew” as a keyword started after an antisemitic hate crime on the 18th. It seems that antisemitism was bubbling under and around the surface with radical right activity itself playing a secondary role. The radical right discussed journalists during the first and the last week of the month. The tweets were critical towards journalists and often projected disgust onto this profession. It seems that journalists are seen as exclusively Remainers. Specifically, the last week is characterized by a brief crescendo on how journalists wrongly accuse people, to engage in disgusting behavior and sniff glue. The reaction to the gunning incident in the US coldly underlines that those fake journalists were utterly condemned by their actions for some of these accounts. The distribution of tweets about Muslims was even throughout the month with a few specific peaks on the 3rd and the 15th. The racist attack by Asian men on the 2nd and an attack on the 4th collocate the first spike as a possible reaction and preparatory online ground at the same time with Muslims and associated ethnic minorities in the crosshairs. The second tweeting spike on the 15th occurred after a hate gesture that went viral online and before another incident on the next day. Furthermore, the protest for Tommy Robinson on the 9th probably influenced this output. The narrative and various tropes mirrored closely those employed by the radical right during June 2017 with the depictions of Muslims as intrinsically opposed to UK’s culture, rapists and criminals. For example, the author of the humorous tweet posted on the 9th mentioned bacon as a taunt towards Muslims. This process signals how the radical right’s focus on Muslims did not disappear overnight but was simply diversified. The tweets on Tommy Robinson closely followed the activities of his supporters: on the day of the protest and the fallout week after the event. Many of the tweets in support of Tommy were full of comparisons between the behavior of Muslims and Robinson’s supporters. Furthermore, these tweets pointed out the perceived discriminatory approach of the police in favor of Muslims. The main narrative of many selected accounts was to normalize, through online activity, the pro-Robinson movement and be its acceptable face online.

The humorous tweets in the selected accounts showed some coherent, even if disordered, patterns. Some were returning tropes from 2017 that were manifested specifically in tweets about Muslims that portrayed them in a ‘disgusting’ light. For example, the number of tweets about Bacon against the Muslim community even increased despite the overall more balanced online flow. Nevertheless, most tweets and narratives changed significantly with attempts at normalization of radical right leading figures and beliefs. Many accounts tweeted several times that they themselves were Jewish or Gay, for example, and represented the whole of those communities but as radical right individuals. The figure of Tommy Robinson became even more central in the flow of tweets. Robinson was usually painted as a martyr for the radical right movement cause. This process reflected on the movement itself, represented, often ironically, as a group of ordinary people who want to re-establish normalcy

in the state. Much of this narrative focused on the created sense online of the disparity of treatments between British people and the attacked minorities. Journalists were also focused upon, following the 'Fake News' narrative coming from the US. Much of the tweets addressing journalists was using US references and certain tropes that echoed President Trump. The overall activity on Twitter mostly reflected a symbolic convergence with peaks of tweeting often in proximity of a hate crime on the built timeline. Humour usually took on ironic forms to constantly erode the capacity of other users or ingroup members to take an informed 'right or wrong' decision on the posted tweets. The "in-group" posting of humorous tweets continued to create a feeling of community united not only by beliefs but also by a sharing comic sense. Words used by more radical users in the radical right community were continued to be spread to ridicule the Muslim community, such as fauxphobia, the fear of fake stories referring in this case to the supposed violence coming from the radical right and far-right groups. Unclearness of the tweets proved to be a strong factor in these narratives online. The 2019 dataset is the last piece of the puzzle that will provide a complete picture on the extracted data and will conclude my analysis.

Chapter 5

Results and Discussion – Part Three: June 2019

5.1 June 2019

My final dataset for June 2019 shows patterns of tweets that are significantly different from both those in my June 2017 and June 2018 datasets. Extracted radical right tweeters changed the direction of their postings and started to converge with the Tories due to the resignation of Theresa May as Leader of the Conservative Party on the 7th of June. The resulting contest between moderate and radical candidates channeled many activists of the radical right in support of Boris Johnson who was ultimately nominated by the Tory party. The Sri Lanka bombing where nine Britons were killed in April and the visit of Donald Trump to London at the beginning of the month contributed to keeping the radical right involved in the socio-political life of the UK. This is the final phase of a political shift for British Conservatives who had moved away from a more liberal platform to one closer to radical right values. An important incident showing that this process of ideological change was occurring was the aggression of a Tory MP, Mark Field, against a Greenpeace activist at a gala on the 21st of June. There was also a less notable dimension that was represented by a surge of hate crimes against the LGBT+ community due to a notable collective reaction of radical right activists in response to Gay Pride Month celebrations beginning from the end of May. The incident that could have started this sequence of homophobic attacks was the attack on a young gay woman on a bus towards the end of May that quickly gained national resonance.

The resignation of Theresa May resulted in a vacuum of power for British Conservatives. The need for stronger leadership, amongst other factors, created the conditions for a move towards radicalism on the right that gathered around the figure of Boris Johnson. The defeat of moderate Conservatives that started in June 2019 prepared the ground for the alliance between Tories and the radical right movement in the UK. This socio-political competition to defeat moderates and successfully conclude the Brexit process galvanized the British radical right. The visit of Donald Trump and the protest that occurred in London at the start of the month, with episodes of a political struggle that went viral such as when a huge balloon in the shape of a baby Trump used by protesters, inflamed the radical right base.

The end of the month was marked by the actions of several activist groups on the Left as a reaction to the radicalization of Conservatives in UK. The aggressive actions of MP Mark Field, who grabbed

a Greenpeace protester by the neck at a Mansion House event (Greenfield, Davies and Sabbagh, 2019), went viral nationwide and further worsened ongoing polarization. This high profile episode also signaled the willingness of radical Conservatives in the Tory party to publicly use force against left wing activism. This moment created a precedent and inspired the momentum for the radical right willing to support Tories and inspire change in the British Conservatives.

The content posted on Twitter by the radical right, as for the other two datasets, mirrored events that occurred during June 2019. Many radicals on the right were emboldened by the fact that mainstream Conservatives started to share some of their ideas; nevertheless, some were opposed to a compromise with the Tories. Support for 'hybrid' politicians, who were officially part of the Conservative Party but expressed a position closer to radical right values, and the opposition to moderates as well as increased attention towards the LGBT+ community marked many of the posted tweets. The goals of achieving Brexit and of building a radically Conservative Britain was within the reach of the UK radical right movement.

5.1.1 The June 2019 database

The change from June 2018 to June 2019 confirmed the increased toughening of the Twitter policy against openly racist accounts, those inviting violence and posting hateful content. Five accounts extracted for June 2018 were banned by Twitter and were substituted by five comparable accounts that were active during June 2019. Two "alt" and radical Twitter news accounts that were banned were substituted by two equivalent Twitter news accounts. Three radical Twitter influencers who were also banned were replaced with an account created to support Boris Johnson for the position of Prime Minister, another belonging to Conservative comedian, and another still belonging to a Brexit Party influencer elected at the end of May for the European parliament .

These new users were added to those from the previous years to assemble the table of analysed accounts for June 2019.

Twitter News	Twitter Politicians	Twitter Influencers
A1 - alt	B1 - trad	C1 - fspeech
A2 - alt	B2 - trad	C2-2 - alt
A3 - alt	B3 - trad	C3 - trad
A4 - alt	B4 - trad	C4 - alt
A5 - trad	B5 - alt	C5 - trad
A6 - alt		C6 - trad
A7 - trad		C7 - alt
A8 - trad		C8 - alt
A9-2 - alt		C9 - alt
A10-2 - alt		C10 - trad
		C11 - fspeech
		C12 - trad
		C13-2 - alt
		C14-2 - fspeech
		C15-2 - alt

Fig. 90 Accounts examined for June 2018 and role-based categories.

12.2 New accounts

- *A9-2* is the official account of the newly born party led by Nigel Farage after his break up from UKIP. Its declared goal described on the Twitter account bio was that "We Are Ready to Change Politics for Good". Its actions from its creation were driven by the principle of Brexit at any costs and to shift the Tories towards radicalism on the right.
- *A10-3* is an account that was created with the goal of mobilizing British people to achieve Brexit and to coordinate like-minded tweeters. The account's bio still declares that the objective is that a "Grassroots campaign to ensure #Brexit, as promised in the Conservative manifestos of 2017 & 2019, is delivered". Therefore, it is a merging ideological narrative between mainstream Conservatives and the radical right.
- *C13-2* is an account created to campaign online for the nomination of Boris Johnson for the position of Prime Minister. Defined in the bio as the "Conservative grassroots campaign built

up during Boris' bid to become leader of the party and now supporting him in the General Election," its style of communication was much closer to the category of Influencers with a focus on Boris Johnson.

- *C14-2* is an influential comedian with outspoken right-wing views. A Brexiteer, his comedy is usually political and provocative. His approach to posting on Twitter is based on embracing an absolutist free speech position while shifting from liberal Conservatism to the hybrid ideological stance to be embodied by more radical Conservatives supporting Boris Johnson.
- *C15-2* is currently a MEP for the Brexit party, elected towards the end of May 2019. After a lifetime as the head of the Office of National Statistics he left the Conservative party to join the Brexit party in the shift that was taking place throughout the Tory Party. The limited amount of time he was in active politics and the content of his posting made him an atypical case of alternative Influencer. Therefore, the line between his being an Influencer and a politician can seem rather blurry.

These changes in place of the banned accounts produced a coherent albeit limited picture of what happened during June 2019 on Twitter amongst Conservative and radical right tweeters. Accounts A9-2 and A10-3 captured the narratives and content posted by the those loyal to the newborn Brexit Party movement that can be defined as alternative. The choice to substitute banned Influencer accounts with those that will channel the direction of this new radical right formation revealed new patterns in postings that emerged throughout the month.

Although C13-2 is an account representing a grassroots campaign, it portrays Influencer-like content to support Boris Johnson on Twitter and his leadership of the Conservative party.

C14-2 was a latecomer to politics who changed his allegiance from the Tory to the Brexit party and had just obtained his MEP position which did not hold him back from being outspoken and informal in his posting.

C15-2, an openly conservative comedian, who posted without holding back his radical views in which he claims to be the only authentic right-wing performer on the circuit.

These new accounts posted tweets that were shaped by the new socio-political environment in the UK.

5.1.2 Time-frame: Crucial events and temporal nexus points.

The events of June 2019 contributed to a socio-political scenario that was remarkably different from what emerged from the two previous datasets. The shift of mainstream Conservatives into a hybrid ideological position, also due to concise efforts from the radical right movement in the UK, provided a source of more ideologized tweets amongst extracted tweeters. The focus of hate crimes committed during June 2019 was against the LGBT+ community, as Gay Pride festivities were held in June. The actions of radicalized Conservative MPs and the visit of President Trump further inflamed this process. It could be said that the sequence of events that led the UK to being governed by an ideologically hybrid Tory government led by Boris Johnson started in June 2019.

- **3 June – President Trump begins his visit to the United Kingdom.** President Trump begins his state visit to the United Kingdom with several programmed activities both with the Queen and Theresa May (Metamoros, 2019). While his visit was officially motivated by celebrations for the 75th anniversary of D-Day, Trump tweeted extensively to ridicule mayor Sadiq Khan, to publicly support Boris Johnson as the possible new Prime Minister and even called for Nigel Farage to conduct Brexit negotiations with the EU on on 31st of October of 2019 regardless of consequences. His arrival inflamed the radical right and those mainstream Conservatives that leaned towards radicalism.
- **4 June – Protests erupt in London against the visit of President Trump.** Tens of thousands of people march to protest against sexism, the spread of fake news and climate change denial (Roache, 2019). Protesters flew a huge balloon of President Trump that attracted worldwide attention and a vehement reaction by the British radical right. An activist with radical right views eventually deflated the balloon using a screwdriver.
- **6 June – The Peterborough by-election ends with a Labour win.** The Peterborough by-election ends with Labour retaining the seat with the Brexit Party finishing second and Conservatives third.[94] This result was another milestone for the Brexit Party that inflamed its supporters and created doubt in Tory elites who were encouraged to continue their shift towards radicalism. The 75th anniversary of D-Day events take place both in Staffordshire, UK and at the British Normandy Memorial in France (Stokols, 2019). These celebrations, with the participation of President Trump, contributed to the building up of the British national spirit that was channeled in debates in the following days by Conservatives and the radical right alike.

[94] "Peterborough by-election: Labour beats Brexit Party to hold seat". 2019. *BBC News*. Available at https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-48532869. Last accessed 24 December 2020.

- **7 June – Theresa May resigns as Prime Minister.** The tenure of Theresa May as Prime Minister ends as she resigns and gives way for the leadership contest in the Conservative party.[95] Nominations started on 10 June with 10 candidates with two main opposing camps - Liberal Conservatives and a hybrid ideological platform led by Boris Johnson.[96] Eventually, after a first ballot of MPs on 13th of June, with ballots taking place on 18, 19 and 20th June, the two candidates that remained were Jeremy Hunt and Boris Johnson.[97] The victory by Boris Johnson in July would seal a change in the Tory party.
- **8 June – The celebrations for Gay Pride Month occur in Blackpool, Canterbury, Coventry, York and Cambridge.**
- **12 June – MPs defeat Labour's plan to overturn Parliament's timetable.** In a close vote, MPs refuse Labour's plan to highjack Parliament's timetable.[98] Their goal was to prevent a no-deal Brexit on 31 October by taking control of the tabling of legislation. This political defeat was one of several to follow, as Conservatives opposed any kind of a similar scenario vehemently.
- **13 June – The Independent MP, Chuka Umunna, joins the Liberal Democrats.** Former Change UK MP leaves the movement to become independent and then joins the Liberal Democrats (Stewart and Weaver, 2019). The seemingly shifting loyalties of Chuka Umunna became a target for ridicule of the radical right that used his example to describe other Left wing politicians as well.
- **15 June – The celebrations for Gay Pride Month take place in Essex, Harrogate and Stoke On Trent.**
- **20 June – The Court of Appeal rules for a case of Campaign Against Arms Trade.** The Court of Appeal rules favorably in a case brought about by Campaign against Arms Trade that arms sales to Saudi Arabia, given its intervention in Yemen, are unlawful (Sabbagh and McKernan, 2019). This result also had a wider domestic impact as radical right forces within the UK were opposed to campaigns against the sale of weapons.
- **21 June – Conservative MP Mark Field is suspended.** Conservative MP Mark Field is suspended after a video that shows him publicly busing a Greenpeace activist goes viral. He

[95] "Theresa May officially steps down as Tory leader". 2019. *BBC News*. Available at https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-48550452. Last accessed 24 December 2020.
[96] "Tory leadership contest: 10 rivals face first ballot of MPs". 2019, *BBC News*. Available at https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-48616776. Last accessed 24 December 2020.
[97] "Boris Johnson and Jeremy Hunt divided over Brexit plans". 2019, *BBC News*. Available at https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-48767191. Last accessed 24 December 2020.
[98] "Brexit: MPs reject Labour plan for no-deal vote". 2019. *BBC News*. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-48613921. Last accessed 24 December 2020.

is seen grabbing ae woman by the neck and then accompanying her outside the venue. While many amongst the Conservatives condemned Filed's behaviour, some defended his actions as justified by the supposed threat posed by the activist. This episode was a milestone in the transformation of the Conservative party into a more radical ideological entity.

- **22 June – The celebrations for Gay Pride Month take place in Edinburgh, Calderdale, Portsmouth, Lancaster, Exmouth, Salisbury, Salford and Suffolk.**
- **29 June – The celebrations for Gay Pride Month take place in Colchester, Crewe Pride, Great Yarmouth and Silloth.**

June 2019 played out in a politically unusual way due to an ideological shift of the main Conservative party towards a hybrid ideological platform that included radical right values, while also displaying the development of events shown in the previous datasets. This process started in June 2019 by an influential foreign political actor, President Trump, who was a key figure in a process of ideological hybridization on the right in the US. He personally encouraged this shift through his support on Twitter for Boris Johnson and Nigel Farage. The protests against President Trump also contributed to the vibrancy of social struggle that encouraged the British radical right. The following leadership contest, and the resulting binary choice for Conservatives between Liberal Conservatives and a radical hybrid position, allowed radical right political parties and movements to support the second option and interfere in Tory party politics. The sequence of events linked to Gay Pride Month underlined that the LGBT+ community was an easy target for those radicals on the right who had the potential to commit hate crimes. Furthermore, the behaviour of Conservative MP Mark Field was a clear signal to many Conservatives that radical right values were represented in the party. This development was enthusiastically received by many radical right activists and politicians. The next section will illustrate the characteristics of the June 2019 dataset and possible differences compared to the previous two datasets.

5.2 The June 2019 Collection of Tweets

My research protocol was replicated for for all tweets extracted for June 2019. The 8658 tweets collected for June 2019 were posted according to the pattern already encountered in the two previous datasets, displaying uniformity across the selected days and spikes when notable events, especially those that were nationally relevant politically, occurred. These repeating trends, from June 2017 to June 2019, are a confirmation of the fact that posting of tweets and important events offline are connected. 1157 tweets contained visual support. This number was slightly lower compared to the other datasets. Throughout the three datasets, the total number of tweets diminished each year both

for tweets with and without visual support. This trend shows how posting patterns on Twitter changed across the three years for this community of Conservative and radical right tweeters.

Twitter News	Twitter Politicians	Twitter Influencers
A1 (alt) - 517	B1 (trad) - 415	C1 (fspeech) - 589
A2 (alt) - 225	B2 (trad) - 52	C2-2 (alt) - 803
A3 (alt) - 207	B3 (trad) - 6	C3 (trad) - 64
A4 (alt) - 412	B4 (trad) - 62	C4 (alt) - 28
A5 (trad) - 88	B5 (alt) - 1521	C5 (trad) - 67
A6 (alt) - 15		C6 (trad) - 24
A7 (trad) - 333	**Total – 2056**	C7 (alt) - 308
A8 (trad) - 135	**Tweets for average account – 411.2**	C8 (alt) - 19
A9-2 (alt) - 84		C9 (alt) - 939
A10-3 (alt) - 199		C10 (trad) - 47
		C11 (fspeech) - 394
Total – 2215		C12 (trad) - 77
Tweets for average account – 221.5		C13-2 (alt) - 175
		C14-2 (fspeech) - 103
		C15-2 (alt) - 750
		Total – 4387
		Tweets for average account – 292.4

Fig. 91 Number of tweets for each account for June 2019.

In June 2019, accounts defined as Twitter news posted 2215 tweets with an average of 221.5 tweets posted for each account. The most active account was once more A1, an Alt account who posted 517 tweets while A6, also an alt posted least of all with only 15 tweets.

The 5 Politicians' accounts posted a total of 2056 tweets with an average of 411.2 tweets. The tweets as seen in other datasets were mostly about the politician's program and events. B5, an Alt account, was the most active, posting 1521 tweets and majorly contributing to the total of posted pol-based tweets. The account that posted the lowest number of tweets was B3 with 6 tweets.

Twitter Influencers posted 4387 tweets with an average of 292.4 tweets. The pattern that emerged for this year did not confirm the dynamics seen in the other datasets as the pol-based tweets were more numerous for each user compared to tweets posted by those categorized as Influencers. The most active Influencer account was C9 (alt) posting 939 tweets and the lowest number of tweets, 19, were posted by C8.

The 12 Traditional accounts posted 1370 tweets with B1, the most active posting 415 tweets and B3 the least active posting only 6 tweets. The average for each account was 114.1. These accounts confirmed the trend seen so far, with trad- based posters being more attentive in their tweeting with fewer posted tweets then other categories. The average fell once again, from a average of 226.8 average in June 2017 and 137.8 in June 2018 to a 114.1 average 2019.

The 15 Alternative accounts posted a total of 6202 tweets with the lowest number of tweets, 15 posted by A6 and the highest number, 1521 by B5. The average was of 413.4 tweets. The difference between traditional accounts and alternative accounts was confirmed for June 2019 as well. The latter posted notably more tweets, again, with much more radical content. The average was once again lower, but not significantly, with an average of 413.4 tweets compared to 482.4 tweets for June 2018 and 633.6 tweets for 2017.

The 3 Fspeech accounts posted a total of 1086 tweets with an average of 362 tweets posted by each user. The fspeech accounts reproduced the patterns seen in other datasets usually containing content that, while sometimes ideological, touched more diversified themes then other categories of accounts. The notable difference is in numbers with a drop in tweets to an average of 362 for each user compared to 613.6 tweets for each user in 2018 and 633.6 tweets in 2017. This could signal the beginning of a transition from free speech based narratives in the galaxy of radical right accounts towards a consolidation around a hybrid ideological platform that was common for different Conservative factions as shown above in the discussion on the ideological shift of Conservatives in UK.

The patterns observed for the previous datasets transitioned to June 2019 with minor changes to the posting of traditional, alternative and fspeech users. There was a transformation in the News category towards posting about the importance of political actors on the national scene such as Boris Johnson and the Brexit Party, with a notable persistence in campaigning on Twitter by mainstream Conservatives. B5, an alternative and political account, posted the highest number of tweets highlighting the importance of these cathegories for this dataset. Even one account can post enough tweets to shape the overall numbers in an analysed time segment. Furthermore, all accounts posted less compared to the previous two datasets. This could be both a reaction by posters to the measures adopted by Twitter to limit hateful speech on its platform, that made the radical right more careful

and to focus on posting fewer but more elaborate tweets. The June 2019 dataset represents the final cluster of data that can shed light on the changing patterns of the behaviour of radical right posters on Twitter.

5.3 Word-frequency

The June 2019 dataset was processed in a similar way to the previous two datasets to compress the number of total tweets to a more manageable amount.

The most frequent words for June 2019 for Conservatives were brexit with 1909 hits, farage with 465 hits, nigel with 370 hits, leave with 461 hits, boris with 458 hits, johnson with 195 hits, ukip with 384 hits, borisjohnson with 263 hits, tory with 260 hits, changepoliticsforgood with 200 hits, conservatives with 197 hits, conservative with 161 hits, arron with 138 hits, hunt with 131 hits, tories with 91 hits, theresa with 85 hits, leaving with 73 hits, rees with 41 hits, mogg with 40 hits, jacob with 35 hits, brexiteer with 38 hits, toryleadership with 34 hits, brexiteers with 34 hits and brexitbetrayal with 32 hits. As for the previous datasets, this process was repeated for other major categories.

Word/Particle	No. of occurrences
Conservatives	5455
Political Terms	5050
Population	4272
Nation	3405
Media	2431
European	1825
Sexual identity	1643
Left/Other parties	1616
Violence/punishment	1588
Curse words/funny	648

Fig. 92 Ten word categories for June 2019.

The themes in the June 2019 dataset once again shifted compared to previous datasets: Conservatives, as for June 2018 dataset, Political attributes and Population were the first three. These priorities show that while the dynamics across users belonging to the Conservative spectrum remained stable, the focus of these tweeters changed during June 2019. The process moved in and out from vaguer propaganda to a more intense ‘us vs them’ struggle across the three years. The fourth category, nation,

confirms this tendency by describing nationality and 'ukness' of the socio-political events of June 2019. The media theme remained important, mentioned by tweeters with comparable intensity to the first four themes. There is even lesser impact of Muslims and Migrants, with a specific focus on sexual identity, both due to the resignation of Theresa May, with a focus of users on women's role in UK society as well as gender identity. The Left theme is less important compared to the June 2018 dataset. Punishment and Curse words come next showing how these two themes often emerged throughout June 2019. The shift of Conservatives towards a more radical platform in June 2019 is a relevant process that emerged in the tweets posted during this month.

In the June 2019 dataset there was a lack of themes that focused on ethnic and religious identities, such as Muslims and Migrants that were relevant in June 2017, and there was also a change from June 2018, with the Left and the Media mentioned less. The only exception to the rule is the Sexual category that shows how from dataset to dataset the identity target changes according to the characteristics of each dataset. It shows how Conservatives and the radical right movement in the UK were actively moving to a new ideological terrain. An increased attention to the political processes appeared to substitute posting around Muslims displayed during June 2017. The goal during June 2019 was to focus on ways to face political opposition for Conservatives and Twitter users belonging to the radical right.

5.4 Hate Crimes in the UK: June 2019.

The June 2019 dataset that shows characteristics that are present in both the June 2017 and the June 2018 datasets as a specific minority, the LGBT+ community, was now intensely under attack and a political struggle was occurring in the UK similarly to the first dataset where the minority was the Muslim community. The difference between June 2019 and June 2017 datasets lies in the fact that the LGBT+ community suffered an increased number of hate crimes in parallel to the Muslim community. A rising trend in hate crimes continues in 2019. This year was characterized by a rise of hate crimes based on sexual orientation, +25 % since 2017/2018, and transgender identity, +37 % since 2017/2018:

Table 2: Hate crimes recorded by the police, by monitored strand[1,2], 2011/12 to 2018/19

Numbers and percentages — **England and Wales, recorded crime**

Hate crime strand	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18[3]	2018/19	% change 2017/18 to 2018/19
Race	**35.944**	**35.845**	**37.575**	**42.862**	**49.419**	**62.685**	**71.264**	**78.991**	**11**

Religion	**1.618**	**1.572**	**2.264**	**3.293**	**4.400**	**5.949**	**8.339**	**8.566**	**3**
Sexual orientation	**4.345**	**4.241**	**4.588**	**5.591**	**7.194**	**9.157**	**11.592**	**14.491**	**25**
Disability	**1.748**	**1.911**	**2.020**	**2.515**	**3.629**	**5.558**	**7.221**	**8.256**	**14**
Transgender	**313**	**364**	**559**	**607**	**858**	**1.248**	**1.703**	**2.333**	**37**
Total number of motivating factors	43.968	43.933	47.006	54.868	65.500	84.597	100.119	112.637	**13**
Total number of offences	**N/A**	**42.255**	**44.577**	**52.465**	**62.518**	**80.393**	**94.121**	**103.379**	**10**

Source: Police recorded crime, Home Office

1. Hate crimes are taken to mean any crime where the perpetrator's hostility or prejudice against an identifiable group of people is a factor in determining who is victimised. For the agreed definition of hate crime see: http://www.report-it.org.uk
2. Data were collected from 44 police forces in England and Wales and cover notifiable offences only (see the User Guide for more information).

3. Merseyside police have revised figures for 2017/18.

Fig. 93 Police recorded hate crimes by monitored strand. (Flatley, 2019, 6)

More hate crimes are registered by police due to more people coming forward to report them but it is also true that many are part of a growing trend of hate crimes in the UK. There is a notable increase from 2017/2018. This rise in hate crimes signals both a major opening of these communities to collaborate with state authorities but also a growing pressure from hostile groups such as the radical right.

Table 3: Number and proportion of religious hate crimes recorded by the police[1], by the perceived targeted religion, 2018/19

Numbers and percentages	**England and Wales, recorded crime**	
	2018/19	
Perceived religion of the victim	Number of offences	%
Buddhist	**19**	**0**
Christian	**535**	**7**
Hindu	**114**	**2**
Jewish	**1,326**	**18**
Muslim	**3,530**	**47**
Sikh	**188**	**3**
Other	**535**	**7**
No religion	**215**	**3**
Unknown	**1,255**	**17**
Total number of targeted religions	**7,717**	
Total number of offences	**7,446**	

Source: Police recorded crime, Home Office
See Bulletin Table 3 for detailed footnotes.

Fig. 94 Number and proportion of religious hate crimes recorded by the police, by the perceived targeted religion, 2018/2019. (Flatley, 2019, 17)

Hate crimes motivated by religious bias grew steadily too. Islamophobia and Antisemitism remain a constant characteristic of several hate crimes committed in all three datasets. Furthermore, antisemitism started to emerge more evidently in June 2019 as was noticed by many Jewish communities:

> In 2019 CST recorded over 100 antisemitic incidents in every one of the six months from January to June for the third consecutive year, perpetuating a pattern of historically high monthly totals above 100 incidents in all but two months since April 2016. This is unprecedented: for comparison, CST only recorded monthly totals above 100 incidents on six occasions in the decade prior, from 2006 to 2015. (Antisemitic Incidents Report, January–June 2019, 2019: 4)

These numbers were registered probably, once again, due to the perception of a more open society that recognize hate crimes and an increased pressure on the Jewish community. Therefore, the dominant strand of extracted hate crimes so far, linked to Islamophobia and reported in 2017 and 2018, is changing in 2019 and becoming more diversified. Important socio-political events, from terrorism to Gay Pride month, can crucially influence both posting and hate crimes with a ping pong effect between online spaces and what occurs offline.

The hate crime that could have provoked a domino effect of hate crimes against LGBT+ community for the rest of June 2019 was an assault on a gay couple on the 30th of May. This aggression occurred on a bus in the early hours of the morning when a group of teenagers first made inappropriate comments and ridiculed the couple by throwing coins at them, and then physically attacking them with punches.[99] This attack went viral on social media provoking more attention to the struggle of the LGBT+ community but also could have encouraged like-minded radical right and far right individuals to do the same. The fast transition from ridicule and the carnivalesque to violence showed how social mechanisms that emerged in social media for the last years started to appear in the real world. Another relevant element was that this hate crime took place in London, one of the most progressive cities in the whole of the UK, showing the pervasiveness of radical right sentiments amongst the population. Ultimately, homophobia became a crucial issue throughout the June 2019 dataset.

5.4.1 Day-by-day hate crime Timeline: June 2019.

- **<u>June 1</u>**

[99] "Arrests made after woman and girlfriend attacked by gang of teenagers on bus for refusing to kiss each other". 2019. *ITV News*. Available at https://www.itv.com/news/london/2019-06-07/woman-and-girlfriend-attacked-by-gang-of-men-on-bus-for-refusing-to-kiss/?fbclid=IwAR2bQP973LXDo0eyyhvLBzPmZTuua0vHynXWpY7zjGUJtRDL_zGcfAhLa9E. Last accessed 24 December 2020.

An aid worker was attacked in his home by masked thugs after returning from Ramadan prayers in the early morning.[100] He was stabbed in the head everyday but managed to chase the attackers away. The victim was known in the community for his adherence to religious activities and charity work for the Muslim community. This incident could not be a hate crime per se even as it shows how vulnerable Muslims are to this kind of aggression and profiling by criminals as well as radical right activists.

- **June 5**

Racist and homophobic graffiti appear in the Calton Hill area of Edinburgh.[101] These acts of vandalism show how throughout the years the radical right marked offline as well as in online spaces. Police treated these incidents as a hate crimes[102] but the acceptance of such signalling by wider society could bring others to embrace this kind of ideological messaging. Analogous incidents occurred on the 16th and 17th of June, proving that these symbolic actions by small radical and far right groups were constant and cyclical.

- **June 6**

Notable hate crimes occurred on the 6th of June. A Northern Irish woman, converted to Islam in 2013, was abused by Loyalist paramilitaries (Edwards, 2019). They threatened her to leave the area of Belfast where she lived saying that she was a terrorist, displaying the typical purifying attitude common to radicals on the right. The victim stated that this was widespread behavior in Northern Ireland according to her knowledge and that she did not wear the hijab but was simply seen outside a local Mosque. A German national of Lebanese descent living in the UK was attacked by a gang and left for dead in Canterbury (MacSwan, 2019). The attack had both local and national resonance with widespread support given to the victim. The police believed that the beating was racially motivated and that the public responded in kind organizing a march on the 12 of June embracing an anti-racist and antifascist platform.

- **June 8**

[100] "Man stabbed in head by masked thugs after Ramadan prayers". 2019. *BirminghamLive*. Available at https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/man-stabbed-head-masked-thugs-16376117?utm_source=twitter.com&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=sharebar&fbclid=IwAR2QmuLjFHuPpnHk7XIb-2bKPv3Cj2T7J8MQx5aLmQwVT_3iHE3Nlg_r4vE. Last accessed 24 December 2020.
[101] "Appeal after abusive graffiti on Calton Hill in Edinburgh". 2019. *Police Scotland*. Available at https://www.scotland.police.uk/whats-happening/news/2019/june/appeal-after-abusive-graffiti-on-calton-hill-in-edinburgh. Last accessed 24 December 2020.
[102] "Probe into racist and homophobic graffiti in Edinburgh", 2019, *BBC News*. Available at https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-edinburgh-east-fife-48682642. Last accessed 24 December 2020.

On 8th of June a theatre in Southampton cancelled a play about a LGBT+ love story because members of the cast had been openly attacked while walking in the street (Perraudin, 2019). These cast members were targeted with stones thrown at them from a passing car and an actor was hit in the face. The resulting minor injuries provoked the stop of theatre activity. This homophobic intimidation is another way of signaling to the wider society that the LGBT+ community can be attacked anywhere. Furthermore, the two girls who were victims of the attack were kissing when they were targeted. This could be a mirroring of the attack in London at the end of May reported previously (see 5.4).

- **June 15**

A group of teenagers returning from a Gay Pride event in Stoke-on-Trent were attacked and hit several times and ridiculed (Parker and Kitching, 2019). The attackers insulted the victims and told them to commit suicide. The video of the homophobic assault immediately went viral. Both groups were very young, showing how the radicalization of teenagers continued throughout the years as observed for other datasets. There is also an element of reverse carnivalesque where an event such as a Gay Pride march provokes a darker mirroring in a group with opposite values such as those of the radical right. The attackers also knew that the victims were coming from a Gay Pride event showing the trigger value of the march of a group that is hostile to LGBT+ community.

- **June 18**

Several events occurred on the 18th. A man died from gang provoked stabbing in London. Knife related violence was rampant during June 2019, and this man was the fifth victim in six days (Gayle, 2019). While not hate crimes per se, this growing level of violence contributed to widespread acceptance of the culture of physical aggressiveness in the UK. Furthermore, a teenager who had posted a picture of Prince Harry as a 'race traitor' with a swastika and a gun online was sentenced to four years and three month in an institution.[103] He had also written several posts inspired by far-right ideology. While arrested in December, his links to the the Atomwaffen Division, a US national socialist revolutionary organization, show how the connection to far right radical material that originated in the US was also present in the UK. Another hate crime occurred in Wales when a man was arrested after threatening someone with a knife while using abusive and racist language (Bethan, 2019). These seemingly random incidents are also strictly connected to the climate of gang violence rampant during June 2019 in the UK. Moreover, in East Lothian a far right radical was arrested after

[103] "Teenager who called Prince Harry a 'race traitor' sentenced". 2019. *The Guardian*. Available at https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/jun/18/michal-szewczuk-sentenced-prince-harry-online-post-far-right. Last accessed 24 December 2020.

attempting to download a manual on bomb making (Hindley, 2019). The news of prevented terror threats of far right nature show the ongoing radicalization of the radical right and far right circles by which "lone wolves" were pushed towards terrorism and to acquire means to carry out terrorist attacks.

- **June 21**

Conservative MP Mark Field is suspended after his physical aggression on an activist, one of a group who interrupted a gala in London, by grabbing her by the neck and violently walking her off the premises.[104] The high-profile status of the protagonist of this episode is a crucial piece of the puzzle to understand the ongoing radicalization of the mainstream Conservatives due to the leadership contest in the Tory party. While Theresa May suspended him in his role of Minister, several Conservative MPs defended Mark Field downplaying the outburst in which he grabbed the activist by the neck and escorted her off the premises as lack of training, or as an overreaction for which he apologized in the following days. City of London police reviewed the events and announced that no further action would be taken. The fracture between Theresa May and her supporters against other Conservative MPs highlights the fragmentation of the Conservative movement.

- **June 22**

Two men were walking in Liverpool when they were surrounded, harassed and attacked by a group of three youths. These teenagers launched homophobic insults and then one who was armed with a knife assaulted the men (Kindred, 2019). The resulting injuries were serious and provoked an immediate response by the police. Youth radicalization and the ongoing sequence of homophobic attacks contributed to the wave of hate crimes. Another hate crime occurred on the London tube where a woman with dark skin, a Lib Dem councilor, was abused by two men hurling racial epithets at her for several minutes (Grafton-Green, 2019). Specifically, they tried to establish if she was truly from London as she claimed to be. Other passengers came to her help and police were called. This is another everyday aggression that shows how these incidents continued to occur in different situations, to individuals from all walks of life and within a pattern that ihad already appeared in other hate crimes.

- **June 27**

[104] "Mark Field suspended as minister after grabbing activist". 2019. *BBC News*. Available at https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics. Last accessed 24 December 2020.

A 12 year old girl of Muslim faith and her family were assaulted after an incessant campaign of abuse in the Greater Manchester Area.[105] She was first violently ridiculed by her classmates, then one grabbed her hijab and started to tap her aggressively on the head, and after that followed her to the Mosque and targeted her and her family. This growing mob started to pull the women's hijabs until police arrived and interrupted the assault. The young age of the abusers and their mob mentality reproduce comparable online phenomena, with ridicule and then an increase in aggression that can culminate in threats of physical violence.

- **July 1**

A Jewish man was threatened in London by a man wielding a knife who said that he was going to behead him (Tobin, 2019). The aggressor hurled several Antisemitic curses at the victim, an Orthodox Jew. Antisemitism was an important submerged theme throughout the three datasets. Lone wolves actions, such as this one, are entirely unpredictable but show radicalization amongst the British population.

This third and final dataset confirms the fluctuation of committed hate crimes over the three years. This month was characterized by actions by lone wolves as well as usually spontaneous assaults on vulnerable targets by radical right and far right groups. Specifically, the latter phenomenon seems to have increased from dataset to dataset in parallel to actual gang violence that became widespread in the UK. The young age of attackers, or vandals in the case of offensive graffiti, signals how a culture of physical aggression against minorities and women, created both online and offline, has emerged in the UK. When this process occurs in conjunction with racial, antisemitic or homophobic sentiment, hate crimes seem to rise while characterized by a targeted demographic. Homophobia during June 2019 became a notable thread that characterized a sequence of hate crimes starting from the end of May to the end of June. A feature of this process was a constant mirroring of hate crimes that had been committed earlier in those that occurred in 2019. These real life dynamics emerged online as well with hate targeting individuals and organizations. This could be interpreted as a sign of convergence between what occurs online and offline. Radicalization is occurring in younger and politicized segments of society on the right. For the third time, the collected tweets of June 2019 dataset will be explored to analyse their moral foundations and examine the activity of extracted accounts.

[105] "Muslim girl and her family assaulted in sustained campaign of abuse". 2019. *TellMAMA*. Available at https://tellmamauk.org/muslim-girl-and-her-family-assaulted-in-sustained-campaign-of-abuse/?fbclid=IwAR2C9EvtIyvTR0K-qbslYgOLlgT1I-h31s9BU9rEd-97v8gu-2h489cZgXU. Last accessed 24 December 2020.

5.5 Moral Sentiment Theory

The final dataset undergoes the same compression process as the previous two, to assess the application of the Moral Foundation Theory on the collected data. The patterns that emerged throughout the month were a crystallization of those that had appeared during June 2018. The moral foundation of Care was still absent in the dataset while the MF of Fairness characterized several tweets as a secondary foundation. Surprisingly, while a homophobic wave became rampant, differently from June 2017, the Sanctity foundation marked tweets remained in low numbers. As in June 2018, the tweets characterized by Loyalty and Authority were the two main foundations on all days examined. Notable examples from all tweets and all foundations will be examined before presenting the humourous tweets.

Categories	June 2017	June 2018	June 2019 (from 29 May)
Total tweets	1586	3358	3885
Care	14 (0.88 %)	33 (0.98 %)	37 (0.95 %)
Fairness	122 (7.69 %)	335 (9.97 %)	321 (8.26 %)
Loyalty	300 (18.91 %)	785 (23.37 %)	971 (24.99 %)
Authority	244 (15.38 %)	675 (20.1 %)	920 (23.68 %)
Sanctity	365 (23.01 %)	260 (7.74 %)	121 (3.11 %)
Non-serious tweets	541 (34.11 %)	1270 (37.82 %)	1515 (38.99 %)

Fig. 95 A comparison between tweets posted for each MF in 2017, 2018 and 2019.

5.5.1 The Moral Foundation of Care

Tweets based on Care were once again rare. All three datasets show how Care is not evoked in the Conservative mindset. Some accounts posted tweets characterised by the Care foundation to show tender emotions to other and explore their feelings. Tweet 100 (Fig. 96) discuss how relationships work. User's conclusion is if one love what one does, a relationship does not require effort. The tweet is a suggestion to avoid negative feelings and emotions, caring for other users. Tweet 101 shows concern for others behavior that can be considered unhealthy. The tweet itself invite other users to help one another in the real world. Other posts, such as Tweet 102, are about issues linked to work, their activity or overall service of their company by applying the Care foundation. It is the most appropriate way, especially in anglo-saxon culture, to politely tell others that specific problem was solved. Furthermore, it is a way to apologize and invite them to attempt to re-enter the malfunctioning

service. The Care foundation appears to emerge in work framed interactions by rightwing radicals as well. These tweets show how Conservativelly minded users apply the Care foundation and what interactions are considered appropriate for a more caring approach i.e. relationships, helping each other and work. Few are linked with helping for people coming from different backgrounds or minorities considered as hostile. On the other hand, The MF of Care was embraced in the selected accounts for simple reasons such as condolences. These were framed clearly, as in Tweet 103, with apologies and sometimes calls for a holy ritual such as prayers. Political radicalism evaporates in this kind of framing as it is focused exclusively on offering understanding to other users.

This dataset confirms that Care is evoked by the radical right for specific reasons and with a goal in mind. Specific interactions with others, such as condolences or work-related apologies, were characterized by the moral foundation of Care. Selected accounts posted tweets with this foundation to successfully complete a social ritual.

CARE	
Tweet 100	Depends on what you mean by "relationship." There are all kinds from casual to business to personal, family, love, etc. If you mean " voluntary love relationships", those still require effort to maintain, it’s just not “work“ if you enjoy doing it .
Tweet 101	Literally. Stress, anxiety and depression can lead to habits that predispose to it and are terrible in and of themselves.
Tweet 102	Hi there, sorry about the website problem - it was fixed yesterday. Try again?
Tweet 103	Sorry to hear that Matt, prayers to you and your family

Fig. 96 Tweets displaying the Moral Foundation of Care.

5.5.2 The Moral Foundation of Fairness

The moral foundation of Fairness for June 2019, similarly to June 2018, was the third most frequent following those of Care and Sanctity and their content confirmed patterns seen in the other two datasets with Fairness characterizing tweets that protested against unfair treatment. Moreover, posters asked for more funds for projects and argued that the EU is deeply unjust in its foundations. These arguments were employed once again to show neutral users, through am MF shared with the left that the radical right was fighting for a more just, cohesive and pure, UK. In all the three datasets, tweets characterized by Fairness targeted the wider community by using a more universal and shared sense

of justice. Once again, the posting of tweets characterized by Fairness in this last dataset was evenly spread.

In 2019, Fairness was often used to underscore how cultural norms are shared between people from different backgrounds and if their perspective can be judged as correct. The discussion in tweet 104 (Fig. 97) is about a simple everyday practice, i.e. whether a cat should stay indoors or outside. Still, the condemnation is towards a third option, owners who can't take care of their pets. The judgement is harsh as they are called egoists.

Tweet 105 shows how Fairness can be used to defend controversial rightwing political decisions such as a trade deal that involved the NHS. The public debate in the UK was against this move. Here the author manages to explain the government's decision in a way to make it sound reasonable although he himself is against it, by evoking Fairness as the motivation. The message is that it is simply done to restore a fair playing field for US companies as well. The final phrase punctuates that truth is the focal point if the decision.

Tweet 106 displays a political use of Fairness but this time in a tweet that criticizes the EU. In light of the on-going political fight over Brexit, the European Union is presented as an unfair entity that punishes small economic actors and rewards large ones. Furthermore, taxes that the UK can collect from countries beyond the EU provide an ulterior reason for the Brexit process. The tweet has an attached image showing a ton of Euros creating the idea of widespread wealth outside he EU and thus highlighting unfairness.

News was framed through Fairness as well, in this case regarding counter-identity politics that are often used as a frame by the radical right. Tweet 107, with an article attached, is neutrally written without, at first sight, any clue of the author's opinion. The use of the verb 'thrown out' and the article itself clearly underscore how this punishment of the student is unfair as he was right to say that there are only two genders. In this frame, identity politics are portrayed not only as wrong on many accounts but also deeply unfair.

Another aspect of tweeting around Fairness was the portrayal of laws of member states around official symbols of the EU such as the flag and the anthem. Tweet 108 ridicules the idea that damaging the two would even be a crime when a law in Germany is about to set a harsh sentence for its violation. At the same time, a similar treatment of the UK flag or anthem would be one of the gravest offences that a citizen could commit, especially for Conservatives and there are examples of the importance of how national symbols are treated in the data collected for the three datasets (see 3.5.5). This tribal double think, often permeates the moral foundation of Fairness in radical right accounts.

FAIRNESS	
Tweet 104	The whole not letting cats outside thing seems to have come across the Atlantic from the states. Basically, the bottom line is, if you live in a place that isn't safe for a cat, don't get a cat! Seems simple to me. Anything else is selfish unless it's for genuine medical reasons.
Tweet 105	Misleading comment about NHS and a US trade deal. There's no talk of "sale" nor "privatisation". It would mean allowing US corps to bid on NHS contracts same as other firms are already able to do. I still don't support it. But let's be honest about it.
Tweet 106	EU contributions hit the poorest in society, despite the EU being most beneficial to big business! c.£6.2bn is collected via import taxes (custom duties/tariffs) from the import of goods from non-EU countries & VAT. #BrexitParty #Brexitparty_uk 1/3
Tweet 107	Pupil Thrown Out of Class for Saying There Are Only Two Genders
Tweet 108	A new law in Germany would impose a three year jail sentence for the 'crime' of burning an EU flag or insulting the 'anthem' of the European Union.

Fig. 97 Tweets displaying the Moral Foundation of Fairness.

In this dataset, Fairness occurred in tweets that appealed to a bigger audience through a more widely shared moral foundation. Fairness characterized the posting of tweets that not only presented arguments already used by the radical right to neutral users in a more palatable way but also treated aspects of everyday news connected to the idea of justice.

5.5.3 The Moral Foundation of Loyalty

This moral foundation was evoked throughout all three datasets as the basic characteristic of the Conservative mindset. During June 2019, the MF of Loyalty was reinforced during the intense political phase that occurred inside the Conservative camp that encouraged the extracted accounts to discuss which choice was the most appropriate in the leadership contest. The continuing online conservations around Brexit, the EU and Trump's visit often played around the notion of loyalty and cohesiveness of a new, hybrid, British right. Therefore, the MF of Loyalty further increased its number of tweets across time and the collected datasets.

The change of opinion of a former adversary, that joins your side, is proposed as a strong argument in Tweet 109 for the validity of a political talking point, in this case regarding the EU. This tweet is

framed around the appreciated change of heart of a named politician who now supports a hard Brexit. Before changing her mind, Esther McVey was in the Theresa May camp with a much softer stance. A small shard of sanctity, the need for a 'clean' break from the EU, reinforces the message: "opponents in party, we are winning so join us".

Tweet 110, while simple, conveys a crucial basic Loyalty narrative. When the opponent, the left, is left without a challenge from the radical right, the consequence is total destruction of everything. The propaganda from the other side should be faced with Conservative propaganda or effects occur immediately.

Some tweets based on Loyalty were of hybrid nature, such as Tweet 111 that is clearly mixed with Fairness. The narrative in the tweet is that not every member state is equally loyal to the NATO alliance as they do not invest enough money. The nature of the discourse proposed by this account is that Loyalty equals honorable behavior. Implicitly, the tweet advocates for great military capacity to defend the cluster of states that compose NATO.

Tweet 112 clearly shows the divide within the Conservative Party against Remainers. The initial word in caps lock immediately signals the on-going struggle and creates an immediate feeling of confrontation. Conservatives are described as fighting for the people while Remainers are rigid and therefore impossible to be negotiated with. The final phrase underscores that this is the only reasonable direction for the author's political tribe, the Conservatives.

The framing of Tweet 113 is clearcut and it is a claim of power. This is a hooligan related author who contributes to a narrative where belonging to a certain group, in this case of football team supporters, allows a user to go beyond the norms and rules of society. The tweet is characterised by two hastags: the name of the group, 5W, and Chelsea, the football team theysupport. . The image attached to the tweet is a coat of arms that functions as a symbol with which the group identifies.

In Tweet 114 the focus is on a narrative that juxtaposes mainstream Conservative elites and a much less nuanced anti-Brexit base. The user presents the Conservative party as a more radical group that can be the face of the rural part of the UK and those in society that are less well-off. This tweet is part of a internal struggle in the Conservative movement. The online narrative of radical users such as the author of the tweet is trying to sway Conservatives as it is depicting moderate rightwing politicians as elitists and ignoring the needs of the people while empowering a more radical agenda in the Tory party.

The MF of Loyalty in the June 2019 dataset, as for June 2018, was widely used by the selected accounts to attempt to push more moderate rightwing users towards a more radical vision of the

Conservative party. The use of the MF of Loyalty for group cohesion, narration and goal seeking, seen in both previous datasets, also persisted. Loyalty remains at the core of Conservative morality that through social media contribute to the existing political polarization.

LOYALTY	
Tweet 109	A “clean break” from the EU is “the only viable and acceptable” option. A commendable change of tune from Esther McVey who voted for May's deal at the third time of asking. Support us at
Tweet 110	Look what unchallenged left wing propaganda has done up here.
Tweet 111	Defence sec @PennyMordaunt wrong to say the UK and US are the only member states to meet NATO's defence spending rules. Five member states spend at least 2pc - still nowhere near enough.
Tweet 112	PRESSURE: Dominic Grieve asked to apply for re-adoption as candidate. Grassroots Conservatives fed up with hardline Remainers. Who can blame them?
Tweet 113	We go where we want #5w #chelsea
Tweet 114	Why aren’t the Tory leadership contenders courting rural voters? Because they voted for Brexit!!!!

Fig. 98 Tweets displaying the Moral Foundation of Loyalty.

5.5.4 The Moral Foundation of Authority

This foundation was the most frequent one for June 2019 due to the ongoing leadership struggle in the Conservative party and the Brexit process. It is unsurprising that it was Authority that emerged as a leading frame for most of the tweets. Those politicians and public figures who were attractive to the radical right were uplifted through a massive flow of posting on Twitter and others who were considered inadequate were actively diminished in status. This process is evident for the struggle around Boris Johnson that some accounts saw as a leader of a coalition between Conservatives and the radical right but others viewed him as a traitor. Across the three datasets this narrative around the MF of Authority became more and more intense in time. It would seem that as political competition and fragmentation increase, Authority based discourse becomes more rampant in online spaces. This process pushes the overall conversation for requests for stronger leadership, a benchmark of the radical rightwing beliefs. This phenomenon could also partially shed light on the spike in homophobic

attacks during Gay Pride month as this demonstration stands for values that are opposite to those of traditional masculine power that inspires the radical wing of the Conservative movement.

In Fig. 99, Tweet 115 refers to the news of an emotionally impactful crime in order to justify and improve the position of Enoch Powell, a radical right politician of the past. The rhetorical structure of the tweet directs less radical users towards embracing the authority of someone who had supposedly predicted the degradation of British society.

The author of tweet 116 argues against a more divisive radical right ideology by opposing another user who advocates that stoning should be adopted against the queer community. Lessons from history show the author that it is not wise, even from a rightwing platform, to discriminate people based solely on identity. The shift of Conservatives towards more radical viewpoints is clearly part of a more complex socio-political process that created a new hybrid ideological platform.

In Tweet 117, the MF of Authority is evoked to enhance the standing of some friends who have won a competition. This moral foundation can be used for the pacific intent of building up online communities and share congratulations for an achievement as this account did. The neutral tone of the first sentence in the tweet is juxtaposed with the amicable and playful tone of the second one to create the feeling in the reader that the author not only know the winners but he is also their good friend. Radical communities work through postings that celebrate everyday occurrences. Nevertheless, the bonds built between users onthese occasions are often crucial to post and exchange information about political issues as well.

This foundation was widely applied to popular figures such as Boris Johnson in the radical right ranks. Tweet 118 describes why Johnson is supposedly the best pick for the Conservative movement. The focus of the narrative is to portray Boris Johnson as a dynamic and authoritative figure. Furthermore, the opening sentence clearly states that he well represents the very wide coalition that emerged in the party itself. The attached video augments the narrative proposed by the tweet. However, in Tweet 119 we see the reverse process in which we observe the views of foreign politicians on how the British Premier minister should be. Any comparison, used in the tweet, to Theresa May is deemed implicitly as pejorative for the radical right community. In fact, she is portrayed as if she is exactly who the EU leaders want her to be. This description lowers her status and automatically improves the status of her opponents.

In Tweet 120 the author tries to maintain their authority by justifying their glee at the news that the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, has health issues. This argument is built up by saying that everyone else shared the video so it is not lack of compassion or gloating but a faithful report. The

political allegiance of the author and the dislike of the British radical right for European leaders leaves some doubt over this explanation.

The MF of Authority was dominant in June 2019 and shaped much of the conversation on Twitter between the selected accounts. The leadership contest in the Conservative movement overall expanded the posting of tweets in that direction. This phenomenon clearly enhanced the candidature of Boris Johnson as a leader who could unite the galaxy of radical right to complete Brexit and win the General Election. Moreover, the crafting of a new ideological platform with enough authority could provide a hybrid framing that could motivate and push even those at the fringes to support a 'new normal' Conservative movement. This is the conclusion of a longer trajectory that involved all three datasets.

AUTHORITY	
Tweet 115	Was enoch powell wrong mate? How a 15-year-old boy was stabbed to death at a chaotic birthday party
Tweet 116	Stoning? Where are you from? People have been persecuted throughout history for all kinds of reasons. Being female, being 'witches', being black, being Irish - the list really is endless. Why create further division? Gays have the same rights as everyone else.
Tweet 117	The Art Competition winners have been announced and the merch is out. God you guys are gonna be drowning in exposure.
Tweet 118	"Boris has built a very broad coalition across the party. People recognise this is a political crisis caused by the fact that Brexit hasn't been delivered, when we said it was going to be, and people want a bold, dynamic figure who can get this done" @DamianCollins #BackBoris
Tweet 119	Macron Wants New UK Prime Minister to Be as 'Loyal and Respectful' to EU as Theresa May
Tweet 120	Yes I'm sure you do. This is an international news story and clearly in the public interest. I am not gloating over her (Angela Merkel) health issues. The video is posted everywhere, so to try to portray me as callous for posting it is fundamentally disingenuous.

Fig. 99 Tweets displaying the Moral Foundation of Authority.

5.5.5 The Moral Foundation of Sanctity

The moral foundation of Sanctity was surprisingly less impactful for the third dataset given the rise of hate crimes linked to a specific identity. The tweets that were linked to Sanctity were evenly distributed during the month without significant peaks or drops. Furthermore, tweets that emerged denoted several strands of pronounced radicalism in the expressed content. June 2019 is a specific case where Sanctity was channeled as a secondary moral foundation with Authority to direct the online flow of posting in extracted accounts.

Some accounts channeled Sanctity linked to other sociopolitical themes such as vegetarianism. The person who posted Tweet 121 linked Conservative views to the campaigm for animal in a togetherness of belief. The reasoning behind this tweet is that consuming meat is a characteristic of people who are just declaredly cruel. Any argument that challenges this position based on sacredness is described by the author as intrinsically pathetic.

Tweet 122 is part of a narrative that can be observed from June 2017 where refugees and immigrants are described as invaders who simply bring diseases. Those who do not fight against these people are seen by the radical right as not only useless but also complicit in this state of affair. In this case, the description is indirect as the tweet starts with ‘meanwhile’ to underline that this is an ongoing danger that should be acted upon as swiftly as possible.

It is common for user to use Sanctity in their writing to describe people with different political beliefs with disgust. In Tweet 123 the implied aggression of a mob of leftwing users against one boy, presumably with rightwing beliefs, is compared to an attack by a swarm of parasites. The author uses the word ‘leftard’ to imply that all leftwing beliefs are for the demented. The language of the tweet plays with disgust while the final word, ‘lovely’, is clearly ironic and incongruous. Furthermore, such a conclusion can be a final jab to what is implied to be the recurrent behavior of leftwing users, to assemble in a mob to attack someone with different values.

In Tweet 124 the MF of Sanctity projected onto political opponents and media is redirected towards their narrative, for example that the NHS is good. The beginning of the tweet describes how a patient is treated to become an addict thanks to the NHS. The reaction of the author is a highly accentuated mention that he is ‘sick’ of all of this.

A physical location can also be presented as irremediably corrupt beyond any hope of redemption. In Tweet 125, this information is channeled towards the reader as a fact, something that everyone should already know. The tweet ends with author underlining that the Conservatives indirectly ask other users to acknowledge it and share this information about Hollywood.

The MF of Sanctity, while often used for the political sphere, is also evoked by users to address other issues concering, for example, food, music, art etc. Tweet 126 shows the author's enjoyment of an actress' gag reflex while reciting a line in a movie or a tv show, due to a bad script. It is clearly an exaggeration but the author of the tweet supposes that it is funny to point this detail out. The use of a gagged reflex for comedy is also a physical reminder on how disgust can influence the enjoyment of culture, especially for Conservatives, who appear to be more susceptible to this emotion.

SANCTITY	
Tweet 121	And why people like you try to make everything about eating meat or not eating meat I do not know. Just another justification for arseholish cruelty I suppose. 'But people eat meat so what's the difference between that and abusing dogs or cats?' Pathetic strawman argument.
Tweet 122	Yeah , real important. Meanwhile, we are being invaded by natives of every country on Earth and their diseases.. While you do Nothing..
Tweet 123	Mob of leftard vermin vs one old boy. Lovely.
Tweet 124	Thanks to the NHS she has gone from needing a routine operation to improve her quality of life for the last few years....to writhing agony, uncertainty and a potential JUNKIE ffs. I am sick to the fucking BACK TEETH of lefties, journos & politicians pretending the NHS is good.
Tweet 125	Hollywood is degenerate. Yeah, we know.
Tweet 126	Love the way the woman nearest camera almost vomits at how bad the line is.

Fig. 100 Tweets displaying the Moral Foundation of Sanctity.

In this last dataset Sanctity based tweets mirrored the processes that emerged in June 2018. There are new dynamics due to the time that passed but the larger patterns can still be found. The MF of Sanctity was channeled to evoke wider ideological struggles, such as animal rights, recreating boundaries for corrupting outsiders and project disgust upon opponents and journalists. In fact, some tweets framed through Sanctity were similar throughout all the three datasets such as comparing migrants to parasites.

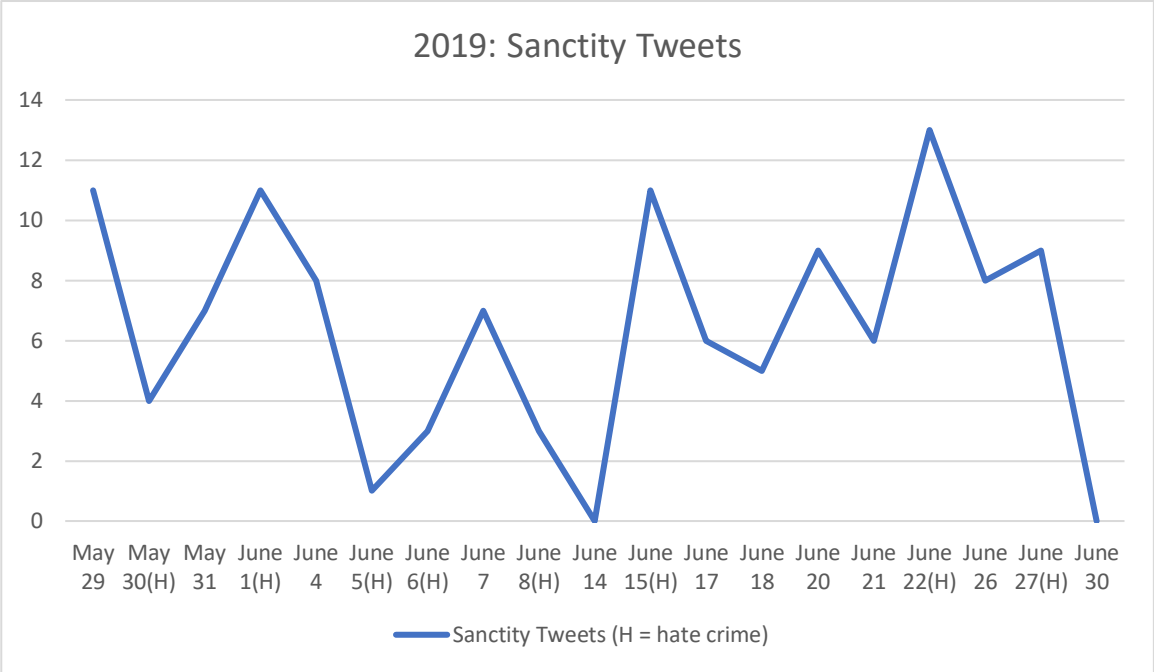


Fig. 101 Patterns of Tweets displaying the Moral Foundation of Sanctity for 2019.

Disgust was a crucial emotion for this moral foundation across time as well, emerging to evoke those unpassable barriers by which to evaluate the corruption of everything the given user deemed as just and sacred. The next section will explore the humorous tweets that emerged during June 2019 to conclude the analysis of the three datasets.

5.6 Humour

5.6.1 Humour as a Moral Foundation

Tweets that contained humour were posted frequently, a tendency that stands confirmed for all three datasets. The June 2019 dataset also confirmed that the Conservative moral mindset remained stable between the serious and humorous content throughout the three years in question. The moral foundations associated to humorous tweets mirrored closely those that are serious with Loyalty and Authority as the two pillars of radical right posting in this last dataset. Fairness and Sanctity were the two secondary moral foundation with a slight preeminence of the latter. The collection of humorous tweets for this final dataset appears as an ulterior stabilization of the patterns seen during June 2018. No significant spikes occurred in the tweets that could significantly upset this linear structure based on the frequent association by these accounts with Loyalty and Authority. The use of morality in humour by politically driven accounts, notable in the posted content, occurred even without any significant event offline to further motivate the larger body of users.

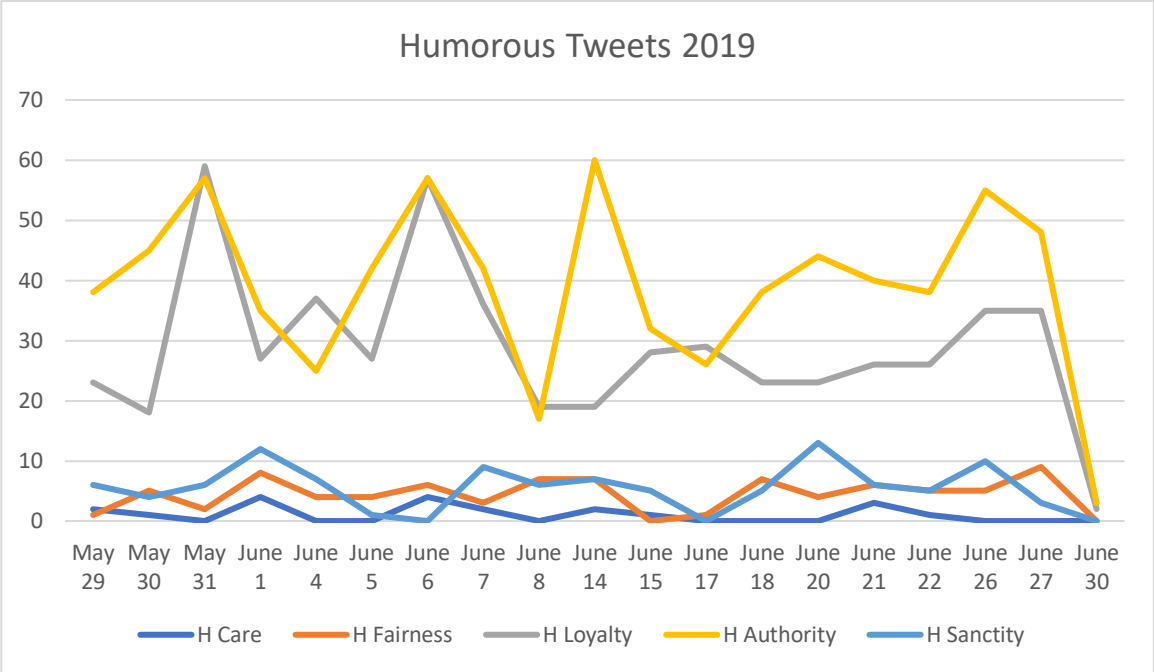


Fig. 102 Patterns of Humorous Tweets for 2019.

This dataset shows how the activity of the radical right online can occur simply by constant posting day by day to sway others towards their goals and create humorous content with moral undertones. All three datasets underline the relevance of humour online for radically minded users to push a sociopolitical agenda through social media.

5.6.2 Uncertain Humour

This last dataset was characterized by several tweets that had humorous uncertainty at their core. These tweets were many even if in fewer in number to clearly humorous tweets as in the previous datasets. 1245 tweets were posted for the June 2018 dataset. In this final analysis I included tweets posted from May 29 to May 31 in order to observe the content posted in this timeframe as an impactful hate crime was committed on the 30th of May. Namely, the attack on a couple of two girls on a bus after a night out (see 5.4). The June 2019 dataset was made up of 15 clearly non humorous tweets, 281 with tweets that were characterized by uncertainty and 1219 that were humorous.

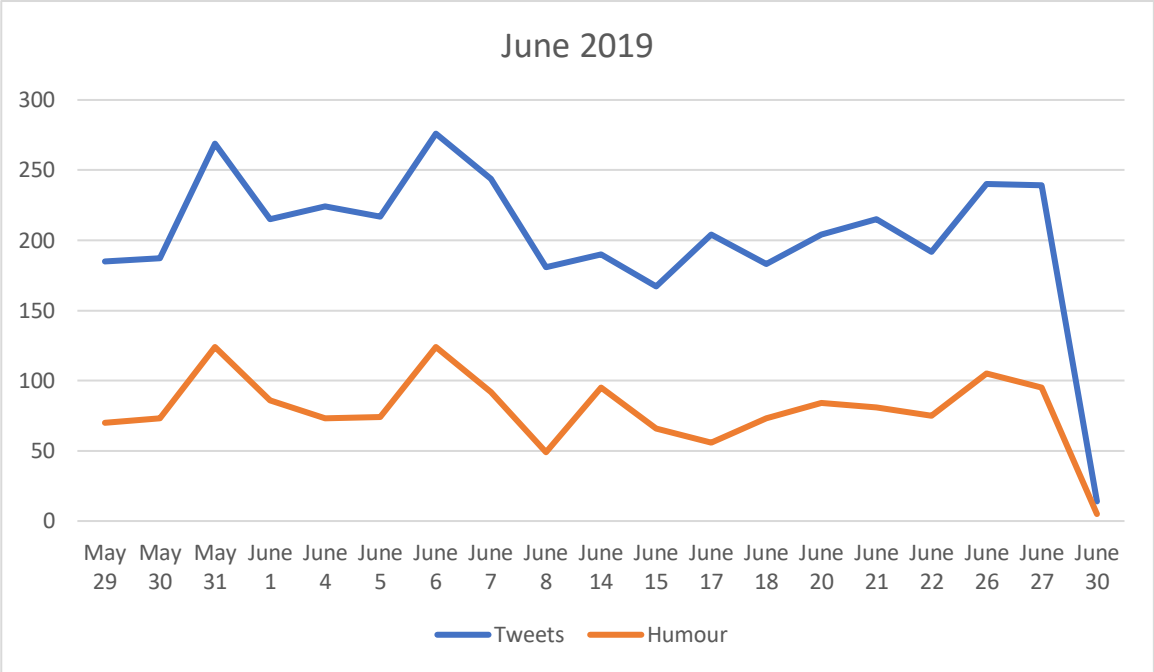


Fig. 103 The comparison between Serious and Humorous Tweets for 2019.

In this section, I focus on uncertainty in the tweets in order to identify if similar patterns and dynamics that emerged in the previous datasets can be identified. The multiplicity of possible interpretations is the analytical challenge but also strength of this analysis across all datasets.

Uncertainty was used to an effect similar to the posted tweets in other datasets as a tool of ideological contamination, presumably provoking confusion and puzzlement in readers. The ideological message of the posters was often distorted between seriousness and humour that could have had an impact on other users due to evident difficulties of interpretation of the tweet. Considering the events of each year, tweets posted during June 2019 seem to have uncertainty as in the other datasets, thereby showing the cohesiveness of the collected data across the three years.

5.6.3 Emotionally charged (humorous) tweets.

The patterns observed in the other two datasets could be found in the tweets of the present dataset with changes that were the results of the events that happened during June 2019. The ideological charge of these tweets can be placed in-between the more aggressive tweets, posted during June 2017 and were also sometimes more measured in their language like those of the 2018 dataset. Therefore, the tweets in June 2019 dataset seemed to be posted in a hybrid fashion. Tweeting occurred around the framing of the group by the various posters and to frame hostile groups such as leftwingers, refugees and migrants in a negative light. Conservatives who were not loyal to the cause of Brexit

were also notably targeted. Brexit issues were strongly influential in the online discourse with tweets including tropes on Brexit posted in 2017 and 2018. The humorous uncertainty was evoked by the posters to great effect in this last dataset showing the progression of the extracted accounts across all the three datasets.

Represented groups were framed in the tweets in an unclear way that was often distorted. This way of framing of tweets, seen in the previous datasets, was for the poster a self-justifying tactic, to shield themselves from accusations, but also made the tweets more persuasive given different possible perspectives. The posters continued to target certain groups, i.e. mostly Muslims, immigrants and members of the left, to continue to propagate a new narrative online to achieve Conservative and radical right goals.

Tweet n.	Text	Account Type	Moral Foundation
Tweet 127	*WE do. We oppose, we protest, we campaign, we point it out.....but our MSM & politicians are in cahoots with the mass propagandizing of Western populations. So the body majority of gentle trusting comfortable Westerners just go along with the agenda and dont want to believe it.*	alt influencer	loyalty
Tweet 128	*Yes. Take a second to think about it, rather than attempting to make "content". These guys perennially chase and hound those they disagree with, and attempt to ruin their*	alt pol	loyalty

	lives. Because of who they are. That is scarcely different from what ethnonationalists do and why.		
Tweet 129	*Here's a tip: Cut off the food, free house and all welfare. Put them in jail on a work gang if they try to steal. Wait a week & offer a job at hard labor or a one way trip home. Bon Voyage.*	alt influencer	loyalty
Tweet 130	*There is simple way to deliver 'no deal' Brexit. It involves doing nothing, bringing in no new bills and running down the clock until we leave. Parliament wouldn't be able to stop it. The Tories face a simple choice: leave by hook or by crook, or die.*	alt news	loyalty
Tweet 131	*But people still voted leave, you cannot get around that! MPs gave the decision to us and promised to implement the result. No amount of moaning now will change that.*	alt influencer	loyalty
Tweet 132	*Don't males and females speak a different*	alt news	loyalty

	language wherever they are in the world?		

Fig. 104 Tweets addressing groups.

The tweets addressing groups were often more direct for June 2019 than they had been previously, advocating for more direct action from Conservatives and the radical right. Tweet 127 is an example of how posters pursued this framing in the fight against the perceived elites. The beginning of the tweet describes all the actions that like minded users do while those who should represent them, the media, written in upper case and abbreviated to 'msm', and the political elite, who allied to betray the people living in the West according to the radical right. The people that the poster declares to protect, westerners, are described as vulnerable, soft and open to manipulation without even wanting to believe the mainstream culture. The description of the poster could be seen as ironic as it is a list of positive qualities that they evidently believe to be a liability. The use of patronizing adjectives, punctuation and terms such as to be in 'cahoots' could characterize this tweet as ironic but some might see only see the political aspect embedded in seriousness. A phenomenon that occurred, throughout the three datasets, was the projection by posters onto groups that are considered hostile to the right such as leftwing activists.

Tweet 128 starts with the word "yes" to then suggest others think instead of just posting content. The poster seemingly describes making content, the latter term written in inverted commas, in an ironic light. Without being specific, the poster also characterizes the behavior of implied leftwing users. The conclusion of the tweet underlines that leftwing activism and far right activism use the same strong ideological message. This juxtaposition could be interpreted as playful nonseriousness or as a serious statement and it depends on the beliefs of the recipent. Moreover, the poster focuses the attention of recipients on the fact that the "whys" of the two political movements are the same.

Another process in the collected uncertainly humorous tweets was the focus to describe the punishment the group they consider hostile should be given. In Tweet 129 the poster's recipe to handle migrants and refugees is serious and probably will be seen as cruel by many people. The poster implies that refugees have an easy life as the government provides for all their needs. The distinction between an 'us' and 'them' is clear from the tweet as the author openly describes how to enslave migrants with the threat of deportation. The final two words, 'Au revoir' could be seen as a cold and serious goodbye or an ironic statement to the migrants if they do not accept being slaves. The text of the tweet itself can be seen through the interpretation of these last two words. The poster can deflect

any accusation of cruelty by invoking the humourous charge of the tweet while freely spreading their ideological message.

The behavior of the community to which the posters belonged to was also brought forth. The focus of Tweet 130 is on the fact that hard Brexiteers are right in their fight in the Brexit political struggle. Moreover, these political groups have already won and the poster says that they can wait until this political process is concluded. The way the poster describes the actions hard Brexiteers should undertake is declaredly loosened up with an effect that could be seen as ironic. The comparison with the Tories is introduced at the end of the tweet to underline to liberal Conservatives that they face a choice of adapting or disappearing completely from the political scene. The portrayed relaxed solution to the Brexit issue and the colorful language at the end of the tweet could be seen as irony but could also be interpreted as serious by other users given that the tweet ends with the word “die”.

Tweet 131 discusses Brexit from another angle as it is couched as a message to Remainers and undecided users. The political elite is framed as being loyal to the people and that they will inevitably pursue the result of the Brexit referendum, portrayed as the moral thing to do. The poster underlines that the vote of the people is an ultimate argument in this debate that cannot be further discussed. The group targeted in the tweet, the Remainers, is described as a group of moaners who will lose anyway and who cannot change the outcome of this political struggle. This last element in particular can be seen as an attempt at ridicule but also as a simple statement of fact. Moreover, many collected tweets referred to Remainers as “Remoaners” to easily and wittily define what is considered as the opposition to Conservative goals such as Brexit.

Gender differences were a theme discussed in the tweets to debate irreconciled contrasts between males and females framed by posters as if they are people who are from different countries. Tweet 132 is framed as a (rhetorical) question that while discussing group differences, shows the blurred categories of these groups of tweets. Some users might find this frame as funny imagining men talking a language that women cannot understand and vice versa Those users who believe otherwise, such as arguably left wing activists fighting for equality between men and women, are seen as if they are not from this world and the tweet could be seen as ironic considering the possibility of this innuendo by the poster.

The patterns seen throughout previously analyzed datasets about tweets that targeted a single user were confirmed for June 2019, with reference to the events that occurred during the timeframe appliedto this last dataset. Posters evoked humorous uncertainty to craft brief stories clearly targeting a politician, a celebrity or a famous public figure. The wording of this type of tweeting is also confirmed from previous years, for example to exaggerate a single feature to confound the user who

can interpret the poster's words either as being serious or through a humorous frame. The complexity of a tweet, and the resulting time a user needs to interpret it, can extend the exposure to the ideologically charged content that the tweeters embed in the posted content.

Tweet n.	Text	Account Type	Moral Foundation
Tweet 133	*Still not going to save you Collins @DamianCollins you and your fakenews committee have done everything to undermine Brexit and we will remind your constituents what a dishonest duplicitous fake MP you are. @LeaveEUOfficial @brexitparty_uk @Arron_banks*	trad pol	authority
Tweet 134	*Desperate stuff from Phillip Lee, penning a letter to his local members before Saturday's deselection vote accusing us of inciting people to threaten him. Absolute bollocks! People are acting against him because he's done all he can to frustrate a democratic vote. Good riddance!*	trad news	authority

Tweet 135	*Right. But if you knew, you'd know David Brent is a comedy character. That character is know for his poor language and inappropriate lyrics. That's the joke.*	alt pol	authority
Tweet 136	"*There's nothing Islamic about the niqab" says Sheik Salim Hitimana, spiritual leader of Muslims in Rwanda. Under his guidance, it's banned, as is anti-Semitism, punishment for leaving Islam and all forms of Wahhabist extremism. A great example to the rest of the Muslim world.*	free speech influencer	authority
Tweet 137	*Slightly disturbingly @RoryStewartUK is channelling the funeral director look*	trad influencer	authority
Tweet 138	*Maybe you can join forces with Alan Craig. He's big on Christian 'family values' too and he doesn't believe in divorce. The two of you will get on like a house on fire.*	alt influencer	authority

Fig. 105 Uncertainly humorous tweets that focus on individual targets.

Tweet 133 is a widespread example encountered in the collected data that targets one politician to damage his or her reputation, in this case Damian Collins. The poster crafts a narrative where the politician mentioned in the tweet betrays Brexit and shares fake news against the will of the people. The lies told by the politician are portrayed to be his inevitable downfall. Moreover, the listing of his qualities framed by the poster, "dishonest duplicitous fake", should increase the impact of the tweet to discredit the targeted politician. The beginning of the tweet suggests a possible interpretation of the tweet as ironic, for users that share the values of the poster, while the rest of the tweet is simply ridiculing the politician instead of seriously attacking him. Furthermore, Damian Collins is a Conservative politician who is perceived to be amongst some radical right posters and users as a traitor. This tweet is a valuable instance of the on-going struggle during June 2019 between the moderate and the radical wings of the Conservative movement. Both interpretations are possible and are shaped by the ideological standing of the recipient and his or her knowledge about the targeted politician.

Some tweets, such as Tweet 134 and Tweet 135, were a reaction by radical right posters to criticism from politicians and members of the media. These posters defend their community even without clearly stating that their tweets are politically motivated. The accusation against the politician in Tweet 134 is based on the fact that he is lying and his goal is to bend the democratic will of the people. Furthermore, the politician mentioned in the tweet, Phillip Lee, a Liberal-Democrat, is portrayed as falsely accusing the political community of the poster of making physical threats. The poster follows up by saying "absolute bollocks" that changes the tone of the narrative from serious to uncertain, and even humorous for some reading users. This tweet shows the pervasiveness of a narrative about a "lying politician" that was embraced by radical users online. The final two words of the tweet, "good riddance", and the use of colloquial language throughout the tweet by the poster can seemingly encourage an ironic interpretation of the tweet while some people would arguably interpret the tweet as serious and heavily politicized.

Tweet 136 targets the fictional character, David Brent, the alter ego of Ricky Gervais on *The Office*, is described as a joke due to his performed poor behavior. *The Office* is a British television mockumentary sitcom broadcast in the UK in the early 2000 of life of colourful characters in an office in UK. It was followed up by its more famous American version a few years later. The poster tries to explain that David Brent is an act with humorous intent. The explanation itself could be seen as ironic, scolding other users, or as a serious reprimand to those that do not get the joke of the series. The opening of the tweet says "right", supposedly answering to a tweet of another user. The frame could be serious or ironic from the start depending on the interpretation of the reading user. The poster

berates the user he implies that they lack proper information that everybody knows. This kind of content show how these politically active posters still engaged with popular culture to sustain the everyday buzz in their online communities. The tweet as a whole can be read as completely serious as a serious criticism or as ridiculing, specifically to someone sharing poster's views. An effective way to target groups considered hostile is to point at their community leaders. Tweet 137 targets a foreign Rwandan spiritual leader by stating that he promotes moral Muslim leadership. The mentioned leader supposedly affirmed that the widespread use of the niqab, a veil that covers the head of Muslim women, is not Islamic. The poster concludes that Sheik Salim Hitimana is a leading voice of the Islamic world as not everyone will know with absolute certainty if the poster is being ironic or serious. The rest of the tweet can be seen as serious by the poster stating that even some African Muslim leaders do not insist that the niqab should be adopted by women and that the Muslim community should follow his example. Another interpretation could be that Islam is a corrupting religion and that all Muslims, for the poster, will inevitably follow Islamic radicalism.

Other tweets focus on a politician's appearance, as in the case of Tweet 137 that results in humorous uncertainty. This tweet is brief but impactful claiming that the politician wants to look like a funeral director and implying that this appearance can disturb those who see him. This description can be interpreted as a serious characterization but also as an attempt to ridicule. The use of the verb "channeling" by the poster could indicate a humorous tone. Regardless, the sharing of the politician's values and support of his standing is key to the interpretation of this tweet. Rory Stewart, the politician mentioned by the poster, is a liberal Conservative who is a target for more radical members of the rightwing.

There were tweets that attacked those Conservatives that held what were considered to be mistaken beliefs in the opinion of the poster. Tweet 138 invites users to support a Christian hard right radical that does not believe in divorce. It could be a reaction of the poster to the accusation of not being radical enough by the more ideologically extreme users that routinely read the posted content. The tweet ends by saying that the alliance of the addressed user and the described radical would be a "house on fire". The characterization of the poster can be seen as serious, to underscore the disaster of hard Christian beliefs for the poster, or as a playful metaphor that ridicules targeted users. Both interpretations, the humorous one and the serious one, could be applied as the tweet is seemingly mocking in tone or even suggesting that their alliance will end in disaster.

Tweets centered around one social media actor mirrored the elements seen in the previous datasets both in content and in form. The wording was smoother for this last dataset with tweets sometimes written in an elegant way that created uncertainty without specific linguistic techniques. The collected

tweets showed that without taking the targeted individual into account, the situation described and the length of the tweet itself, the posters moved in synergy. Their tweets were written in a way that ould be humorous to like minded users for example, and serious to others, with some interpretations falling in between. Another notable trend was a focus on the Conservative movement, lacking in other datasets, that was targeted in a way that was harsher than the attacks to those considered as outsiders of the poster's group. This struggle was resolved throughout the dataset in a fusion of both mainstream Conservatives and radical right posters into one hybrid ideological platform that is to a certain extent reflected in the analyzed tweets. Those users that are considered weak Conservatives and those that are seen as radicals were both attacked in the collected tweets, a process that revealed the transformation of the Conservative mainstream.

Tweets built around a question also maintained the characteristics that emerged in the previous datasets. This trend is a linear one which in 2019, included a question at the end, or somewhere in the text, often evoked humorous uncertainty too. The placing of the question mark by the poster could be used to evoke doubt in the reader about what tone the tweet ultimately has. This confusion, as described in previous datasets, reinforces the narrative that the poster tried to spread through his tweet.

Tweet n.	Text	Account Type	Moral Foundation
Tweet 139	*So you think the opposite of supporting the LGBT agenda is "hating gay people"? You're a fucking idiot.*	alt pol	loyalty
Tweet 140	*What are you basing that on? Most legislators become corrupt coz they can't hang in the coolest spots and live like their celebrity cohorts without external help. $250-400k goes a long way*	alt pol	authority
Tweet 141	*Remainer Conservative MP Jeremy Lefroy has informed his local*	trad news	authority

	members he doesn't intend to fight the next election. He'd been under pressure from his local members and we'd almost hit the threshold to initiate deselection proceedings! Jumped before he was pushed?		
Tweet 142	*"@jeremycorbyn your party is full of hypocrisy! How can you welcome the Chinese president and yet protest about a visit by our closest ally? #ChangePoliticsForGood #labourleave #Labour #Brexit #brexitparty #Democracy*	alt influencer	loyalty
Tweet 143	*Have you listened to speeches by Guy Verhofstadt and co.? There is a reason why people now think the EU wants to be a superstate - its because that's what EU officials say..*	alt influencer	loyalty
Tweet 144	*You support #Labour for an independent Wales? Another Nationalist that wants to leave, but not to leave @ Does Labour support this? Another nut*	alt influencer	loyalty

	job, you couldn't make it up!		

Fig. 106 Uncertainly humorous tweets that discuss questions.

In Tweet 139, the poster caustically asks a user in a confrontational manner why they think that the opposite of fighting for LGBT+ rights is "hating gay people". This position is stated in the text as a fact, asking the targeted user their views on the poster's argument in the form of a question. This framing could already be seen as ironic by some, especially because of the inverted commas surrounding the poster's main argument in the question asked. The closing line of the tweet, that is aggressive and offensive, could be interpreted as a serious statement to finish the tweet and signal the user's thoughts to possible readers or as an attempt to confrontationally ridicule the other user. Moreover, this final outburst evokes uncertainty at the tone of the tweet as it is unclear whether the issue for the tweeter is the supposed stupidity of the targeted user or the support of the LGBT+ agenda, while still condemning both.

The initial question in Tweet 140 creates an immediate doubt in the mind of the user with whom the poster interacts. It is implied that the user lacks vital information without which they cannot argue their case. The following explanation is written in colloquial language, using terms such as "coz" and "coolest", to address the elitism of politicians with a final line of the tweet that points out the sums of money they earn. The poster accuses politicians of living the lives of celebrities without having the monetary means to do so, and this process causes corruption. This text can be interpreted in both ways as it could be seen as a reprimanding tirade to explain how the real world works for the poster or, on the other hand, as a colorful way to ironize the current socio-economic political structure. The final line works by using high numbers to point out a confirmation for the reasoning behind the tweet or as an ironic statement as the poster writes that such a huge sum of money "goes a long way".

As argued previously, questions were frequent in the June 2019 dataset, as in the case of the Tweet 141, where the question format amplifies the uncertainty that appears in the tweet. The text is serious using technical terms and describing a tense confrontation inside the Conservative camp caused by Brexit. The information that MP Jeremy Lefroy is a known Conservative Remainer seems to justify the witch-hunt of sorts against him. Moreover, the poster implies that they participated, by using "we", in the political attack on this MP. The final question could also indicate how the pressure of Conservatives around him was so intense that it was almost certain that this politician would not stand in the next election evoking a sense of uncertainty about the tone of the tweet, as the politican could still try to run, that is left hanging. Furthermore, the ending of the tweet can be interpreted as an

attempt at ridicule or as a serious description of the precipitous actions of a politician with an ambiguous standing on the Brexit issue for Conservatives.

Another tweet format that was encountered in the collected data, for example Tweet 118, consisted of an accentuated accusation, a rhetorical question and a string of hashtags that support a political movement, such as the Brexit party in this case. The tweet opens with an attack against a leader of a political party, Jeremy Corbyn the figurehead of Labour party at the time, followed by a question that could be interpreted as serious but also as ironic given China's ideology, i.e. Communism. This tweet was posted in the wake of protests against President Trump's visit to the UK. The poster of the tweet implies, maybe ironically for some users, that the Labour party prefers to support a Communist Authoritarian state such as China instead of the USA represented by President Trump, framed to be the closest ally to the UK. Moreover, the string of hashtags attached to the tweet can be freely shared by other users to spread support to the Brexit party. The hashtag "ChangePoliticsForGood" could particularly be both read as a moralising statement to improve e British politics or ins an ironic way, if posted by a supporter of a Brexit party, to mock left wing politics that are implied to be bad.

Tweet 143 opens with a question and then offers an answer towards the end of the tweet. The initial question calls users to emphasize the things that European politicians say, implying that what they say is something against the will of British people. The poster focuses the user's attention on Guy Verhofstadt, a strongly pro-European Liberal Democrat. The tweet's wording is "Guy Verhofstadt and co", a characterization that could be seen as humorous. The answer undermines the EU on a fundamental level because the poster frames the tweet to portray the European elite in a bad light. The poster does not openly address what EU politicians are saying, evoking uncertainty in the user, reinforcing the tweet's narrative. The poster claims that the majority of the people knows that "EU wants to be a superstate" implying also that the EU is an evil empire that wants to dominate other states, a statement that by itself can be seen as humorous. Humorous uncertainty is a part of the tweet as the final words can be read as being ironic as well, the possible guesses on what the poster is referring to reinforce their narrative.

Tweet 144 includes a question to chastise another user that stands both for Labour and Independent Wales, that are seen as contradictory goals. The first question is asked almost in disbelief or ironically, to immediately evoke uncertainty. A second question follows up to point out the difference between leftwing ideology and a nationalist agenda. The poster asks if the Labour party, tagged in the tweet, is aware and supportive of the position of the addressed user. The final line, again, could be interpreted as an offense or as a ridiculing effort as the poster calls the addressed user a "nut job". The targeted user is portrayed to be undecided, fake in his beliefs and even implied to be insane. Mental health

issues are a popular frame amongst the posters, projecting disgust, and ridicule to win the online argument. Uncertainty deeply characterizes this tweet with a double question structure, rarely encountered in the collected data so far.

The tweets that include questions have, as throughout other datasets, notable features in common. These posters use questioning to evoke uncertainty and sometimes attack or ridicule targeted politicians and celebrities in online spaces. The rest of the text of the tweet was often written in widely divergent ways as some tweets provided an answer, others finished with a punchline and others were constructed with a long sentence at the beginning of the tweet to then end with a question. This way of posing ideological questions or criticizing other users allowed the poster to deflect criticism and to spread ideologized content. These tweets could easily confuse users with their tone but also ease the absorption of information given the added time needed to interpret the tweet. Humorous uncertainty evoked through questions, for June 2019, provided a frame to create a confusing ideological narrative online to more effectively address those users and circles that are considered antagonistic by authors, both outside and inside the group of like-minded users.

The future was a slightly less relevant trend for June 2019, compared to previous years, but still numerically relevant in the collected data. The future evokes uncertainty and when framed through a tweet could notably affect other users. The poster can invite a user to imagine a future and then project this vision onto a specific group, framing this description negatively or positively as seen in previous datasets. In this dataset, refernces to the future in tweets was often associated not only to the leadership contest inside the Conservative party but also to everyday Twitter interactions or to condemn antagonistic users.

Tweet n.	Text	Account Type	Moral Foundation
Tweet 145	*I guarantee 99% would take the free ride home before lifting a finger to support themselves or their families*	alt influencer	loyalty
Tweet 146	*Since Boris is being taken to court by a Remoaner who can't get over the referendum result, perhaps it's time*	trad news	loyalty

	to dredge up the lies we've been fed by Europhile politicians... Tell us what you think we should highlight as the biggest political whoppers to come out of Westminster!		
Tweet 147	*How long must the British population be forced to pay for those who have no right to be here?*	alt news	loyalty
Tweet 148	*Take care gio, and be careful never fall for their bullshit*	alt influencer	loyalty
Tweet 149	*I wondered where you went; I assumed you were furiously trawling Google to find evidence to support your lies. I was right - have you nothing better to do with your time?*	alt influencer	authority
Tweet 150	*Like many others I've cancelled my license because of the bias. #StarveTheBeast*	alt news	loyalty

Fig. 107 Uncertainly humorous tweets that discuss the future.

In the case of the Tweet 145, the poster proposes a narrative that, given the choice between a return to their countries of origin for free and work, all the migrants would choose the first option. The tweet consists of one sentence that is seemingly serious in tone because the tweet frames migrants as selfish

and lazy. Moreover, the message of the tweet finishes by talking about migrant's families evoking emotional rejection against the targeted group as migrants do not support their loved ones. The poster also uses colorful wording, writing for example about "99 %" that is an exaggeration that could seem as humorous. Moreover, the tweet includes a colloquial expression, "before lifting a finger", that makes the text more palatable and it is a playful way to visualize the behavior of migrants. This tweet can be seen as serious but also humorous to some who might interpret the text as an exaggeration to ridicule migrants and refugees.

Tweet 146 defends Boris Johnson to attack the Remainers inside Westminster asking the digital crowd of users to publicly target hostile politicians, guilty of being sympathetic with the EU, to the poster's ideological imprint. These pro-Eu politicians, who are not mentioned by name, are described as cunning for trying to take Boris Johnson, amicably called Boris in the tweet, to court only because they cannot accept the will of the people conveyed through the Brexit referendum. This mob-like quality of the tweet's message is based on the Brexit divide and the framing by the poster is that these politicians lie, unlike Boris Johnson. The wording of the tweet could be described as ridiculing pro-European elites with words such as 'remoaner' and 'whoppers' (liars) but it can be seen also as serious as the tweet is pushing for an ideological struggle between Brexiteers and Remainers. The struggle of the people against pro-Eu politicians is implied to be the way to create a prosperous future for UK.

Tweet 147 includes a future dimension with the locals vs migrants conflict with a final question mark, evoking uncertainty united to a clearly ideologized narrative. The attack on migrants and refugees is implicit, as they are never directly mentioned in the text of the tweet, but it is easy to understand who the target is, with the British population used as martyrs who are coerced into this unjust situation. The tweet's text is a rhetorical question that is posed on a timeline that implies that this tolerated bad behavior of migrants has been happening for a long time already and will soon be stopped by the British people. The message of the tweet is that migrants are legally in the wrong. Humorous uncertainty is evoked by indirectness, a possible interpretation based on a bleak form of irony or even a serious threat. An article is added to the original tweet to strengthen the poster's claim.

Tweet 148 is simple, consisting of just one line that is sent to a fellow user with a stay well wish and a vulgar warning not to be tricked by those who are ideologically different. Both these wishes are placed and projected in the future. The poster shows concern for "gio", and this statement implies that there should be a notable difference of treatment between like-minded users and those who are ideologically different. The use of a vulgar exclamation, "bullshit", can be interpreted as a sign of serious intent by the poster, who underlines that "them" (they) only lie, or as an ironic exaggeration, a textual element that contributes to uncertainty.

Tweet 149 describes and addresses an online conflict between the poster and another user who is never openly mentioned. The poster criticizes the user at whom the tweet is aimed with the public exposure of a personal squabble. The poster feigns confusion at first, then affirms that the other user is an emotional liar who does not know anything without using Google. To conclude, the poster seriously affirms that they were right about the targeted user. Moreover, the tweet's text asks if in the future the user will continue to behave like the poster described in the tweet. This is a common way in the collected data for the posters to diminish the standing of opponents online to then leave them and other users in uncertainty. The tweet can be seen as ridiculing a targeted user but also, on the contrary, as a serious attempt at berating them. The future can be evoked through elements added to the tweets, such as pictures or in this case, a hashtag.

The poster of the Tweet 150 states that they are part of a community that will not pay an unnamed social media platform and be discriminated against. Rightwing users pursue a narrative in their tweets that often mentions the struggle between them and the big tech corporations that are perceived to be pursuing a leftist ideological agenda. The hashtag immediately evokes a sense of the future, calling other users to the struggle against a corporation that is seen as a wild and violent creature. The wording of the poster is straight-forward but the hashtag can be interpreted both as serious but also as a humorous exaggeration that motivates other like-minded users to fight against a common enemy. Furthermore, the hashtag is useful as it can be widely shared to reinforce a sense of community online.

Posters that included a future dimension in their tweets often tried to push an ideologized narrative as occurred in the previous datasets. There are several techniques used by the posters, to push other users in a specific direction to realize the need to accomplish a political goal and craft an ideological narrative. Moreover, the use of visualization, focused on the behavior of others and evocative images, was widespread, to evoke confusion in what the future will look like. A distinctive feature in June 2019 compared to other datasets was the hybridization of different overlapping themes together, question, future, groups and targeted users, used together to provoke an even greater sense of uncertainty in readers. More complex tweets could in the future increase an evolving pattern of online communication of radicalized users that is shared by others. The collected uncertain content of the posters are balanced between seriousness and the humorous charge of the tweets, contributing to the spread of an ideological message or to score a personal point.

5.7 Tweets with Visual Support

The use of visual elements emerged during June 2019 similarly to other three datasets as gifs, videos, pictures and memes attached to tweets. The emergence of this complex mosaic reappeared with a

kaleidoscopic variety of tweets characterized by an endless variety of different cultural items. Memes were even fewer than in the other two datasets and posted by fewer accounts. This is a sign of a transition within radical right users on seeing visual support as a step further away from memes to a much more flexible and chaotic structure by using variegated visual support. My data collection clearly shows how this process happened across the analyzed three months for three years. The lack of an unified narrative for this type of tweets amongst likely minded users can be logically explained by the need in selected accounts to use as many different visual support items as needed to bring forth their different narratives given the changing socio-political conditions. The examples proposed for this dataset will be based on the categories anticipated in the other datasets, i.e. serious texts with humorous visual support, humorous text with humorous visuals and memes.

5.7.1 Tweets characterized by serious text and a humorous image

The tweets that included serious and more "carefree" texts combined with a humorous image, were widely posted and this combination by itself could change the meaning of the text or create uncertainty, as for previous datasets. The trend observed during June 2018, of professional tweets with high resolution images to create a political narrative online, was further expanded and adopted by two main radical right parties, UKIP and the newly born Brexit Party. These tweets, like those in the previous dataset, that targeted Theresa May now re-emerged in a similar form to target all the participants of the leadership contest of the Conservative party, depending on the authors of the tweet and their allegiance. The main target was those that were 'name called' Liberal Conservatives but the preferred candidate of the radical right, Boris Johnson, was also targeted by some.

Normal people use cakes to celebrate birth not death.

Fig. 108 "Normal people".

The text in the tweet in Fig. 108 can be interpreted as serious but also as an attempt to ridicule. The picture portrays Miley Cyrus, a pop star, licking a cake with the writing 'abortion is healthcare', written on the icing. The tweet is an attempt by the poster, who is against abortion, to criticize the

pro-abortion stance of many progressive celebrities. The picture can be seen as funny but it has a strong ideological underpinning. Users that are sympathetic to the attempt of the poster to popularize views against the abortion might be entertained and amused while maintaining the seriousness of their views. This tweet portray Miley Cyrus' glorification of abortion as a position that is both to be ridiculed and seriously criticized by the wider society as 'normal people' mentioned by the poster default position should be against abortion.

Thanks to Rhiannon and Slinky for sending us this very cute pic! We love to hear about your kipper pets so keep the pics coming!

Fig. 109 "Very cute pic".

The tweets, such as the one in the Fig. 109, were posted to light heartedly spread the word of a radical right party such as UKIP. The verbal text underlines how other users participate in this online campaign, mentioning that it is a nice image. Moreover, the author invites other users to send more of these pictures in an attempt to expand the momentum of the on-going political struggle. The picture itself shows a cat wearing a UKIP party rosette and posing in front of the party manifesto that states in upper case letters 'What we stand for'. Tweets such as this one coated online campaigning and overall political communication of radical right parties in cuteness, to attract even those users that are undecided in their political views. The animal used, a cat, has a high viral potential and it is included in many memes, pictures and videos all over the Internet. This tweet was posted by cleverly using cuteness to propagate political views. Radical right users constantly tried to push towards 'normalization' of their beliefs online in this way.

Nice blouse, mate.

Fig. 110 “Nice blouse”.

Tweet 138 is an effective example of the indirect way some authors addressed masculinity and attacked models of behavior that, in their opinion, were wrong. The image attached to the tweet is of a man wearing a transparent blouse standing with his back to the camera. The verbal text is simple, complimenting the young man in the picture. The author does so focusing on the fact that this young man is wearing a blouse, a traditionally female garment. The complimentary side of the tweet can, however, be easily interpreted as ridicule. This way of tweeting allows a radical right user to indirectly attack forms of masculinity deemed as being untraditional. Moreover, such posting easily deflects any accusation of homophobia while still maintaining such a narrative. It is a simple tweet but an intrinsically elaborate one that shows the skills of many selected users who are able to to create and channel an ideological narrative.

5.7.2 Tweets characterized by a humorous text and a serious image

Accounts, as for previous datasets, widely posted tweets that incorporated serious pictures that completely changed their meaning through the accompanying humorous verbal text. Once again, the meaning of each serious picture was reversed through the text by the author, creating uncertainty in the user as well as spreading an ideological message. Images that were attached to the tweets came from all kind of sources, from posters to books and screenshots. Much of this material was used by changing the original meaning of the posted picture, through the attached text, to propagate political views. Other datasets showed these posting techniques but during June 2019 it seems that accounts had learnt to post in an even more effective way by exploiting uncertainty more skillfully. A seemingly wider moral spectrum is another element that emerged in tweets with this characteristic.

Welcome to third world London. Where diversity is our strength #WindrushDay

Fig. 111 "Third world London".

The verbal text of the tweet in Fig. 111 subverts the original meaning of the image and attacks the idea of a diverse society by saying that London is part of the third world to conclude ironically that diversity is a source of resilience. The text is ironic and uses a hashtag for Windrush day to fix the narrative in readers' minds. The image is a photograph of a poster that tells citizens what to do in the event of an acid attack. Through the use of irony, the tweet indirectly suggests that minorities are to be blamed for such crimes and that ethnic unity is the only way for progress. This technique of posting is effective at multiple levels, as it may be seen as humourous but also advocates an extremely radical, and probably violent, message.

They should all migrate to this guy's village. The locals are hungry ...

Fig. 112 "The locals are hungry".

The verbal text in tweet in Fig. 112 is an effective example of radical right humour. It presumably invites left-wingers to go to the village of the tribesman in the picture because the people there are hungry, implying that they are cannibals. The image portrays a man of color, an aborigine, who is sleeping using a skull as a pillow. Here, the narrative attacks migrants suggesting that they practice cannibalism and suggests leftwingers should live together with them. Moreover, the verbal text and the picture are linked as black humour in the verbal text is evoked through the somber image if the

user understands the ideological undertone. In this way, the ideological dimension used by the author who posted the tweet is effectively channeled to readres.

Hey @BurgerKingUK you still wanna endorse milkshaking people?

Fig. 113 "Milkshaking people?"

'Milkshaking,' the practice among left wingers in Britain (and in the US) to throw milkshakes at Conservatives and radical right public figures, became widespread in June 2019 with many incidents of this kind. The radical right undertook an online campaign against this practice. In the tweet in Fig. 113, the author sardonically asks if Burger King is willing to continue to support people who milkshake as many of these improvised 'ridicule weapons' were bought at this fast food chain. This request could be interpreted as being both ironic, due to colloquial language and the topic, and serious as it was ultimately a serious violation for the in-group of the author. The image is a screenshot of a tweet of the Portland Police saying that several milkshakes thrown that day were full of quick drying cement asking other users to report these incidents. Once again, the posted screenshot is not only portraying the left wing as a dangerous mob and ironically transforming milkshaking into a serious practice, but also lobbying against those corporations and organizations that supposedly supported this practice online.

5.7.3 Tweets characterized by Memes

The posting of memes diminished during June 2019 following a similar trend that had emerged from the other two datasets. The memes uploaded by the selected accounts in this last dataset continued to change in their structure and content compared to the classic meme layout of an image with a string of verbal text above and below an image that conveyed clearly humorous intent. Adding verbal text

by the poster to a meme added further uncertainty to the posted tweet. This use of verbal text on Twitter can reinforce or reverse the meaning of the meme but also add another layer of interpretation. Much of the memetic material uploaded for June 2019 dataset for these politically driven accounts was already ideologically contaminated shaping the already existing set of narratives for Conservatives and the radical right.

Generation nation.

Fig. 114 "Generaton nation".

This meme-like cartoon strip in the Fig. 114 immediately strikes the user with its sequential structure. The text is direct and focuses on two concepts, generation and nation. The meme ironically shows three generations of men: the eldest, a grandfather-like figure is saying that he with his generation fought in a war, the second, father figure is saying that he and his generation rebuilt everything while the young man in the third caption, altered due to red eyes provoked by abuse of drugs or too much exposure to screens, and outrage is accusing both of them of being racists and xenophobes, screaming to ban them from voting. The young man is depicted wearing a T-shirt with the slogan 'I'm in,' implying that he is a Remainer. This is a clear instance of ridicule against younger voters, who overwhelmingly voted for Remain, and Remainers as a whole, are portrayed as being corruptors of the nation's past. This tweet shows how potentially viral meme-like cartoons can easily be spread and channeled by the radical right. These elaborate images then fill online spaces with impactful but compact cultural artifacts that are undoubtedly useful to reinforce a narrative that targets Remainers as ungrateful and treacherous young people who do not work. This is a way to simplify the issue and paint an opposing tribe in a negative, and ridiculous, light.

The Tories are not anywhere even remotely far right. In fact, they arnt even right wing. They are centrists and even left wing on some issues. Just how far left must one be to think these Tories are far-right, lol.

Fig. 115 "The Left, The Right".

Fig. 115 shows a meme that includes a tweet that is a counter-narrative against left-wing and left radicals. The verbal text extensively describes how mainstream Conservatives are distanced from the far-right and that their ideological platform is a spectrum of positions, some even based on leftwing values. The final sentence reverses this narrative to project it onto the left wing implicitly affirming that it is the left wing that is radical. A 'lol' is added to underline that this notion is so ridiculous that it is funny in itself. The meme adds to this narrative with an image that visualizes it. The heading invites the reader to, once again, reconsider their notions of far right with an image that humorously portrays the left, a tiny red blob on the graph with the rest colored blue saying that it is all far right. This exemplifies how while Tories pursue a new hybrid ideological position, the online posting widely attempts to discredit left wing users by showing how Tories are the socio-political 'new normal.' Humorous encasing further amplifies the overall narrative from the right pushing users to reconsider their views.

It is like watching a nation busily engaged in heaping up its own funeral pyre" Enoch Powell #5w

Fig. 116 "Britons as a minority".

The tweet in Fig. 116 shows how memes can be created by the radical right themselves with unusual forms and content. The verbal text of the tweet consists of a quote by Enoch Powell that is charged with seriousness yet can also be regarded as a form of caustic irony. The meme contains an image of migrants and refugees running with a single police officer trying to stop them. The Enoch Powell quote is placed above the image in the same way as the verbal text occurs in more common memes, while the image of a police officer is superimposed at the center of the screenshot. The quote reads that white Britons are now a minority in London, while below the image we find headlines describing a clash with migrants in Calais as they tried to get to the UK. The overall impact of the tweet and attached meme is ultra-serious and heavy in far-right ideological narrative that attempts to shift the discourse on migrants on an ethnical, us versus them, basis. The Enoch Powell quote as well as the fact that white people in the UK are a minority in London, are presented in a way that appears to be a form of black humour, in particular by the in-group. Tweets such as these show a darker face of the radical right, a point of arrival for many radicalized users in the continuous 'normalization' of this narrative.

5.7.4 Summary

The use of visual support by the selected accounts maintained the tactics and trends exhibited in the previous datasets. The variety of posted pictures and memes was once again striking, with almost all of them being unique iterations, often modified for the posting. The behavior of the radical right online and posting of the selected material was original and fragmented while the ideological narratives and content of the tweets often remained a common theme. Once again, images that were

unrelated to politics were employed and modified through the verbal text of the tweets to pursue one of the tropes common to the radical right. During June 2019, specifically, the normalization of radical right views and the convergence with Conservatives to create a new hybrid platform, were crucial for many users. Tweets used different and creative techniques, including images, to attempt to sway other users, of different political loyalties. The characteristics of radical right posting, using visual support items, with some unique features for every dataset, were stable throughout the three years being examined given the communality of fragmentation but also a union of ideological intent.

5.8 Correspondence between Online Activity and Hate Crimes

The conclusive phase of my exploration of the June 2019 dataset is to discern whether a connection between hate crimes in real life and online activity is discernible from the collected data. The examination of the 2017 June dataset was a detailed day by day analysis on how these patterns can emerge (see 3.8), I opted for a more general discussion for the subsequent two datasets. Still, the findings presented here allow us to observe whether the use of symbols, communication styles and emotional tone that emerged online was connected to the hate-filled activity that was going on in the material world at the same time.

5.8.1 Five keywords for June 2019

As for previous datasets, data from June 2019 provided another opportunity to uncover elements of symbolic convergence. Attempting to find a connection between content online and hate crimes on the ground provided evolving challenges due to new conditions for each dataset. Once again, five keywords were extracted from the built timeline of hate crimes, namely Gay, Jew, Muslim, Pride and Activist.

Keyword 1) Gay – the June 2019 dataset was characterized by several hate crimes that targeted the LGBT+ community both spontaneously and through organized effort. Hate crimes occurred both against members of LGBT+ community taking a ride on a bus to systematically pestering a theatrical performance. This wave of hate continued throughout the month and it was central to the radical right effort.

Keyword 2) Jew – Antisemitic hate crimes were not widespread in this dataset, but the hate crime that took place on the 1st July stands out. Nevertheless, acts such as graffiti and legal trials against neo-Nazi activists usually provoked a ripple online that if captured provide a picture of how this trend evolved from the 2018 dataset.

Keyword 3) Muslim – Hate crimes against the Muslim minority were not as rampant as during the events of in 2017 but still occurred with notable regularity in 2019. Once again, they were both spontaneous and seemingly more organized, and even without high profile events, could be traced through the gathered data.

Keyword 4) Pride – The events linked to the Gay Pride festivities attracted constant attention from the radical right that committed hate crimes in the immediate vicinity of these events. This second keyword focused on the LGBT+ community assures a complete capture of collected tweets for hate crimes linked to homophobia.

Keyword 5) Activist – Actions of MP Mark Field against an activist on the 21st were of crucial importance to the change within the Conservative movement. This keyword allowed me to observe in a more reliable way the relationship between acts of physical aggressiveness and the perceived political allegiance of the victim.

These keywords were employed to capture humorous tweets in which they appeared. In the same way as in the previous two datasets this operation occurred for each day the hate crimes were committed as well as in all collected tweets that containted a keyword, to capture any element of possible "symbolic convergence" that emerged in this last dataset.

5.8.2 Summary

Humorous tweets by the radical right for June 2019 followed a sort of hybrid pattern with characteristics that I had already found previously. These tweets embraced conflictual narratives: simplification, delegitimization of the media, police and state and attacks on minorities. On the other hand, the extracted accounts attempted to normalize the radical right discourse on Twitter, by identifying themselves with the attacked minorities or portraying a situation of worrying violence as normal. A pattern that was particularly significant was a proposition of binary choices such as Marxists and radical Muslims, and the 'normalcy' of Western Democracy of which the radical right is the only defensor. The characterizing feature of the third dataset is a surge of hate crimes around the LGBT+ community and resulting posting of tweets. The Gay Pride month had an important role to play in this process. Much of the posting was framed by 'deflection,' to deny any violence occurring against minorities to state that the situation in the UK for 'gays' was ordinary. The 'binary choice' framing was employed to project any LGBT+ community hating on the Muslim community by saying that the radical right stands for law and order. Another feature of the dataset was the ulterior online radicalization of the Remain vs Leave discourse as the end game was well in sight.

Activists are portrayed as a minority depicted through dehumanizing qualities such as brainwashed, violent etc. The symbolic convergence hypothesis stands confirmed in this case as well especially if the more violent tweets are considered. Humour once again was mostly couched in ironic forms that manged to accelerate the frames such as the ‘deflection’ frame imposed on tweets. The Muslim community continued to be a target for the extracted accounts throughout the three datasets. During June 2019, posting around the Muslim community was once again often framed through Disgust. Specifically, the expression ‘Deus Vult’ was used in a stable manner to mark tweets and signal aggressiveness towards Muslims. On the other hand, unclearness was the feature of many tweets in the third dataset, as for other datasets, that was part of most of the tweets. The 2019 dataset closes the analysis of the three datasets.

Closing Remarks

In 2016, a team of researchers at Hatelab, a global research hub, supported by a UK Economic and Social Research Council grant[106] and the US Department of Justice National Institute for Justice, gathered big data regarding hate speech online to investigate whether the latter could be in any way linked to hate crimes proper. The project, 'Understanding Online Hate Speech as a Motivator for Hate Crime'set out to test the hypothesis of a correlation between offline and online hate and was made up of a research team who gathered Twitter data while police recorded hate crime data adopting a longitudinal perspective, over an eight month period. Hatelab adopted a quantitative approach that used Artificial Intelligence to measure hate speech on line and hate crimes in the real world. The Online Hate Speech Dashboard, was set up to establish whether aggregate trends were observable over time and space. In 2020, the team, published their findings in *The British Journal of Criminology* (Williams et al, 2020: 93—117). Through a series of statistical models that show significant correlations between hate speech and hate crimes, the latter is reconceptualized as a continuously on-going process instead of a set of isolated events. The published results of this project back up the hypothesis of my thesis, namely that small groups of like-minded individuals propagate hateful views online that are connected to hate crimes in the real world. For example, the author of the terrorist attack on the Finsbury Park Mosque in London in 2017 was radicalized online with his personal mobile device and computers showing access to radical right accounts on Twitter only two days prior to the violence.

Williams, Burnap, Javed, Liu and Ozalp portray free speech legislation as a central framework that enables these processes but also underlines that the impact of 'normalized' radical right politicians and activists on this phenomenon is yet to be explored. The theoretical framework of their paper argues that the issue of morality contributes to political polarization in a similar way as I do in this thesis. Moreover, 5 out of 10 far-right UK activists were active on social media, according to both the Hatelab team as well as Hope Not Hate (2019), globally positioning the UK as a hub for radical and far right views. These two elements further confirmed my intuitions for the initial project for my thesis in 2017. As highlighted by Williams and his collegues there is a lack of experimental research on the impact of online activity on the behaviour of those on the ground. Humour was not considered at all as a significant factor, a void this thesis has attempted to address as a notable portion of hateful content posted online is humorous in the database of tweets that I have gathered.

[106] Title of ESRC grant: 'Centre for Cyberhate Research and Policy: Real-Time Scalable Methods & Infrastructure for Modelling the Spread of Cyberhate on Social Media.

The Hatelab team has compressed hate crime reported to the police and tweets into one period using a negative binomial regression model and their results clearly show that a strong correlation exists between posted Twitter content and offline crimes. The authors underline that they were initially unaware that online hate preceded offline hate crime but that their research showed that it is a continuous sequence with spikes and ebbs at both levels. The modelling presented in their research undoubtedly shows how population markers and hateful tweets can be used to predict the increase of hate crimes in any given area. While hate is the result of geographical, social, historical and political context, the technology variable is deemed central for further research in this direction. Computational criminology, adopted by Williams and his collegues, is portrayed as an advanced method that can be complemented by other ways of doing research. Furthermore, the authors had collected their data well before hate speech policies had been introduced by Twitter. The present dissertation has attempted a different study in a similar direction by tracking a different audience of users in post-Brexit Britain. The invitation in these conclusions to elaborate upon these results on the quantitative, and especially qualitative level, will hopefully be answered.

A central element of the theoretical approach of my dissertation has been the focus on the behavioral immune system (see Schaller and Park, 2011) and the role of disgust as a motivational force for radical right movements. This line of research, and the specific focus of this thesis on social media and hate crimes, proved to be crucial when the Covid-19 pandemic spread globally in 2020. The first wave of news and then contagion due to the virus provoked a spike both in hate crimes and humourous activity, particularly once the lockdown measures were in place all over Europe. A similar rise in the level of hate crimes due to an overstimulation of the behavioral immune system could be observed during the Black Death, with a substantial rise of anti-Semitism, and during Spanish Flu, due to ideological reasons, in the former Russian Empire (Lobanov, 2020). The same phenomenon could be observed in the United Kingdom during Covid-19 when Asian British citizens were harassed online and attacked in the material world with an impressive spike in this sense. British police tracked far-right nests of activity resulting in multiple arrests. Even a few lone wolves were discovered as far-right extremists intensifying preparations for terrorist attacks and organized violence against minorities. If the experience of the Spanish flu is any indication, the fallout of the Covid-19 pandemic on the radical and far right movements and parties will last for years. The framework chosen to interpret the motivation of the radical right in this dissertation seems to be optimal in these conditions as disgust is indeed crucial to understanding their motivations and flow of communication.

The research carried out by Hatelab on the statistical relevance of online hate content and offline hate crimes not only solves the research challenge of my dissertation, proving that this process does occur with certainty, but also allows me to attempt to answer how this happens, through a qualitative analysis that the paper produced by the Hatelab researchers lacks. In particular, the role of humour as a moral phenomenon capable of accelerating human behavior, especially online, could be a promising research field in the future. Equally relevant, the similarly strict connection between humour and disgust, the latter stimulated in a pandemic through the behavioral immune system (see Schaller and Park, 2011), is a relevant feature of radical right movements and their activity in both worlds. The side effects of the Covid-19 virus could last for years, and only through further investigation can this link be fully explored.

The present dissertation has offered a mixed quantitative and qualitative approach to analyse British Conservative and radical right activity on Twitter during the month of June across three years, namely 2017, 2018 and 2019, with a focus on humourous instances, exploring the link to hate crimes that occurred offline. The four staged protocol presented in this study allows for data compression and it preserves the crucial points of ongoing patterns during the analyzed time frame. Furthermore, the presented research protocol was used to circumscribe the data for the selected datasets and can represent a model for analogous studies in the future. The use of keywords to observe patterns, the synchronization of each timeline and extracted content from Twitter as well as the use of a moral framework to analyse tweets are notable elements of this approach. The extraction of tweets with visual support also contributes to the interpretation of extracted content. This process of step by step analysis is replicable and can be applied to bigger datasets as well as those grounded on Twitter users based in other countries. Humour is a key dimension of dynamics occurred in online spaces that emerged from the analysed data. Thousands of humourous tweets were categorized in three ways: namely whether each tweet was ultimately humorous, non humourous, or uncertainly humorous. The introduction of uncertainty as category was crucial to better understand the ambiguity of humour online. This type of humour was a relevant part of the gathered data showing how much the extracted accounts walked the line between nonseriousness and ideological content with their posting. These qualities of humourous tweets overlapped with five moral categories elaborated by Jonathan Haidt and matched numerous hate crimes that were committed in the analysed months. Furthermore, the focus on the work of Haidt on disgust as a source for morality, with a hypothesis presented in this dissertation on the role that this emotion plays on the development of humour, became even more crucial as the Covid-19 pandemic swept across the planet. Hate crimes were on the rise before and during the pandemic, targeting in particular the Asian community in the UK. A pandemic primarily evokes disgust in the population

and the explored link between hate crimes and online spaces, as well as humour, manifested in the events surrounding Covid-19 presents an opportunity for future studies.

June 2017 was a month that was characterized by terrorist attacks by both by Muslim and far right extremists with an irregular posting of tweets by the extracted accounts (see 3.8). Notable spikes of tweets occurred due to high profile events, usually characterized by a moral foundation based on Sanctity, with words that transmitted a strong sense of disgust towards the minorities considered hostile. The wave of hate crimes specifically hit the Muslim minority with matches with online activity of extracted tweeters in the days before and after occurrence of a crime, meeting the initial hypothesis of this study. The second dataset, June 2018, showed a more linear posting of tweets with few spikes linked to the activity of the radical right offline such as a march to free Tommy Robinson on the 9th of June. The socio-political scene in the UK had notably changed from the previous year with gowing and intense polarization between 'Remainers' and 'Leavers'. The radical right focused on the struggle online against the British leftwing while hate crimes against minorities occurred irregularly and with minor intensity. Posted tweets show this change with a clear focus in the extracted accounts on Moral Foundations of Authority and Loyalty. The final dataset composed of data gathered in June 2019 shows hybrid qualities with a fusion of similar dynamics to those that emerged in my other two datasets. On one hand, online activity is linear and based on the moral foundations of Authority and Loyalty. The main events of the month consisted of the election of a new leader of the Conservative party, Boris Johnson, and the visit of President Trump to the UK, with many tweets posted online that once again targeted the British leftwing. On the other hand, hate crimes during the month hit a specific minority, the LGBT+ community. A brutal attack on a couple of girls on a bus on the 30th May seemed to trigger a sequence of hate crimes against this community throughout the month in which the Gay Pride parade played an important role. There is a connection in the collected tweets projected on the days around hate crimes, specifically for the keywords 'gay' and 'pride.' This third dataset clearly shows the process of a gradual absorption of British Conservatives into the radical right, with a radicalizing ideological position and 'normalizing' of viewpoints considered radical just a few years ago. This process would conclude with the victory of Boris Johnson as the leader of Conservatives, the candidate that embodied this position, and a following landslide victory of Conservatives in the snap election of December 2019.

On a practical level, the outcomes of this study will be of value to Ngo's fighting racism, experts who study the radicalization of modern youth as well as criminological experts who are starting to address the nascent field of studies that are focused on the link between the online spaces and hate crimes occurring on the ground. If correlations between internet-based radical right activity and

violent events in real life are pursued in the future by other scholars, this vector of research can open up a number of paths for further exploration on humour and radicals online. Multiple possible layers of analysis remain unexplored, destined for future research. Different disciplines, from linguistics to media studies, could be interested in accessing data analysed in this dissertation. Furthermore, an aspect that could be further explored is the mutual radicalization between radical users online, both on the left and right of the political spectrum. Data could have been extracted from dedicated far right social media such as Gab[107] to cross check with collected tweets to access a fuller picture of what occurs in online spaces and its consequences for radical right actors offline. Nevertheless, the goal of this dissertation was to better understand not only the humourous aspects linked to the radical right posting on Twitter but also the process of 'normalization' and radicalization of radical right views. These elements were tested throughout my research protocol while weets were necessarily compressed to also allow for a qualitative dimension of the analysis. Moreover the inclusion of a perspective based on the field of strategic studies could provide a more sophisticated way to track far right users online and apply specific techniques to understand the emergence of lone wolves. Experts in this field of study could apply their knowledge to the presented dissertation to add further value to this analysis. However, strategic studies, used in counter terrorism studies, are probably less suited for this type of data that are nuanced and uncertain.

This field of research is extremely challenging. Exploring humour as a process steeped in morality that can impact human behavior was a crucial issue due to a lack of studies in this direction. This dissertation provides an isolated attempt in this direction. Another challenge involves how the analyst should evaluate tweets that could be seen as innocuous compared to those that appear as acts of propaganda. Additional factors that might complicate the task of the researcher include the difficulty in understanding whether the efforts of a given sample of tweets were coordinated and, if so, by whom. As it is to possible to observe in this study, intuition is a poor ally because Twitter patterns are chaotic and variegated. In general, strategic studies could potentially answer the question of how data provides a strategic picture based on a variety of radical sentiment that is manifested through tweets.

A considerable, but intrinsic, limitation of the present study lies in the fact that inevitably an enormous quantity of tweets had to be evaluated, both for moral based tagging and for the humourous aspect of collected data. In other words, while measures such as a code book were

[107] Gilbert, David, 2019, "Here's How Big Far Right Social Network Gab Has Actually Gotten", *Vice News*. Available at https://www.vice.com/en/article/pa7dwg/heres-how-big-far-right-social-network-gab-has-actually-gotten. Last accessed 11 January 2021.

adopted, it is difficult to be certain if another coder after years of data analysis would have arrived at the same conclusions. Therefore, a careful approach to analyse tweets in regards to hate crimes and other meaningful events is necessary. Furthermore, a more detailed analysis of the visual support items could be taken into consideration to expand upon the analysed data patterns. Visual support items can be seen as influencing factors, even when posted without a verbal text, and that could strongly characterize the flow of the tweets throughout the dataset. Finally, the humourous dimension of posted content on Twitter and the proposed 'moral' nature of humour seems to be a promising avenue of future research. It might be promising for future studies to further explore the relationship between human behavior and humour, particularly when the latter is 'accelerated' in online spaces by engaged users. While other studies proved that hateful content on Twitter is statistically relevant for the occurrence of hate crimes, the goal of this dissertation has been to attempt an initial investigation into why this occurs. The link between humour and disgust is a new hypothesis that is proposed in this dissertation and that remains largely unexplored but promising for humour studies. This study represents an initial endeavor that hints at multiple possible research trajectories that can explain group behavior online that involves humour and violence offline.

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the link between hate crimes that occurred in the United Kingdom in June 2017, June 2018 and June 2019 through the posts of a robust sample of Conservative and radical right users on Twitter. In order to avoid the traditional challenges of this kind of research, I adopted a four staged research protocol that enabled me to merge content produced by a group of randomly selected users to observe the phenomenon from different angles.

I collected tweets from thirty Conservative/right wing accounts for each month of June over the three years with the help of programming languages such as Python and CygWin tools. I then examined the language of my data focussing on humorous content in order to reveal whether, and if so how, radical users online often use humour as a tool to spread their views in conditions of heightened disgust and wide-spread political instability. I examined the age-old question of whether humour has a significant effect on societal changes through examples of online content posted during real life events to "push the boundaries" regarding what human beings do when this link is exploited.

A reflection on humour as a moral occurrence, expanding on the works of Christie Davies as well as applying recent findings on the behavioural immune system on online data, offers new insights on the overlooked humorous nature of radical political discourse. An unorthodox take on the moral foundations pioneered by Jonathan Haidt enriched my understanding of the analysed material through the addition of a moral-based layer of enquiry to my more traditional content-based one.

This convergence of theoretical, data driven and real life events constitutes a viable "collection of strategies" for academia, data scientists; NGO's fighting hate crimes and the wider public alike. Bringing together the ideas of Davies, Haidt and others to my data, helps us to perceive humorous online content in terms of complex radical narratives that are all too often compressed into a single tweet.

Academic activities carried out during doctoral path

PHD in Translation, Interpreting and Intercultural Studies

Curriculum: Intercultural Studies

PHD Candidate: Nikita Lobanov

Supervisor: Prof. Delia Chiaro

Co-supervisor Dr. Simon Weaver

November 2017 to December 2020

Current Year: III

Research goals

Humour is an effective tool to better understand social, political and cultural phenomena. Furthermore, in contemporary society its importance is undisputed due to mediation with digital spaces that have recently transformed traditional humour into "e-humour." This recent process is well known due to the diffusion of memes, or image macros, that are frequently posted on line together with verbal texts that represent a volatile form of communication that is in constant evolution. The socio-political situation in Great Britain is crucially relevant to this dissertation as the result of the Brexit referendum and the successful enabling of Clause 50 brought about a rise of hate crimes in the UK and also, in memetic activity online. It soon became clear that users linked to the radical right used humour to spread their political beliefs and ideas with memes, trolling, gifs and a wide variety of other humorous techniques. My dissertation sets out to explore the interconnections between humorous online activity and how it might be linked to events in the real world.

In the first six months of my work on this project, my goal was to analyze the current research on the three themes of my dissertation, humour, the radical right and online spaces, as well as to trace the best methodology to gather data to be used to deny or confirm the hypotheses at the heart of the project. I also focused on activities of what is defined as "*terza missione*", such as attending conferences and making public appearances, in line with the dissertation as well as to find a co-supervisor that would help me expand my research trajectory.

In order to answer my research questions, I constructed my methodology in order to obtain a sociological triangulation as follows:

- Quantitative methods: gathering of data on the content spread by users affiliated to the UK radical right and understanding its impact offline.
- Qualitative methods: analysis of posted content focusing on disgust and humour used by radical right users.
- Social network analysis: find and analyze ties between popular members of UK radical right.

Activities

The first step of my analysis of the literature was focused on expanding the bibliography in three areas that I focused upon, humour, the radical right and digital spaces. Moreover, recent studies on moral psychology focusing on disgust allowed me to go in a promising direction. Given feedback from professors in my department, my operational definition of humour would be important as I focused on the exploration of such a multi-faceted phenomenon. Towards the end of the first year of my PhD, the literature review was completed.

I ultimately chose Twitter as the central platform for this dissertation. A period of study at the Brunel University London, under the tutelage of Dr Simon Weaver was crucial to focus on a research protocol based on a " sample'n'collect" approach. This protocol was refined to gather data on Twitter and to learn the use of programming language Python, in its 2.72 version, under the guidance of Jacopo Lanzoni, a software engineer based in the UK. By applying the research protocol created ad hoc for my dissertation, I collected data and assembled my first two datasets. The visual support that characterized many tweets was also processed as part of a sub-protocol of analysis during data elaboration.

From October 2019 to December 2019, thanks to a Marco Polo scholarship, I spent 3 months at the *Katholieke Universiteit Leuven* under the direction of Professor Giselinde Kuipers who helped me further refine my work to achieve the wider goals set for the dissertation. Thanks to the input of Professor Kuipers, my dissertation underwent a reconceptualization from a binary vision of humour towards the implementation of the notion of uncertainty of humour. This decision allowed me to analyse ambiguously humorous tweets according to whether they were clearly humorous in intent, clearly not-humorous in intent or they were ambiguous. Methodologically, this led to the creation of three datasets based on humorous tweets, one for each analyzed month i.e. June 2017, 2018 and 2019. Through this format I was able to clearly observe the radicalization of posted content, both

for each dataset and throughout the identified timeline. The three datasets were analyzed comparatively, observing differences and similarities of processes that occurred in each month of June over the three years.

The adoption of a research protocol structured in several phases allowed me to analyze those patterns that were chaotic and better order those that were linear. My intuition to focus on humour turned out to be accurate, as around 40% of tweets for each dataset were humorous in one way or another, with a strong presence of irony. These tweets were paired with three hate crime timelines assembled for each month as well as an approach based on Jonathan Haidt's work on Moral Foundations: Care, Fairness, Loyalty, Authority and Sanctity. Furthermore, my initial hypothesis, driven by studies of the electoral cyle in 2016 in the United States, that the radical right posted specific memes in mass was not correct for the UK as the collected data showed a very fragmented and diverse amount of content, albeit memetic in its structure.

I paid particular attention on how to gather data and analyse memetic expansion online and in agreement with my supervisor, I focused on content posted by "sociometric stars" on Twitter - namely radical right personalities in the public eye as well as less known activists. The temporal window that was decided was focused on June 2017, June 2018 and June 2019 that were intensely hot politically in the UK. Moreover, significant surges of hate crimes occurred in these three months.

June 2017, was a month characterized both by terror attacks by Muslim radicals as well as those by radical right lone wolves, with irregular posting patterns. More tweets were posted close to high profile events, usually characterized by a moral foundation linked to Purity, with words that channeled a strong feeling of disgust towards minorities considered hostile. The hate crimes that targeted the Muslim minority during June 2017 were often mirrored in online activity before and after the crime, confirming the main hypothesis of my dissertation.

The second dataset, for June 2018, was much more linear with fewer peaks of tweet posting due to organized activity of the radical right, such as political marches. The political scenario had changed notably with the opposition between Remainers and Leavers at the forefront. The British radical right focused on their ideological struggle against the Left, with minorities in a secondary role. The tweets were characterized by Loyalty and Authority Moral Foundations. Hate crimes occurred with less intensity compared to June 2017 and characterized by more chaos.

The most recent dataset, for June 2019, can be defined as a hybrid with characteristics shared with posts for June 2017 and June 2018. The events of the month focused on the election of a new leader

of the British Conservative movement and the visit of President Trump to the UK, with many tweets focusing on attacking the British Left. Furthermore, several tweets during the month targeted a specific minority, the LGBT+ community. A brutal attack on two girls on the 30th of May seemingly triggered a sequence of attacks during the month of Gay Pride. There is a quantitively robust match for the tweets posted during the month for the keywords 'gay' and 'Pride'. This third dataset saw a merging between British mainstream Conservatives and users of the radical right into one entity with a normalization of views that would have been considered radical only a few years previously. This process was to conclude with the victory of Boris Johnson, the candidate who mostly embodied this hybrid position, and the landslide victory of Conservatives in the December 2019 elections.

Basic reading for my thesis and my research protocol

1 – In **Chapter One**, I provide an overview of existing theories of Humour in chronological order (Superiority, Relief, Incongruity and Benign violation). The operalization of humour as "moral deferment" was useful, as I arrived at the conclusion that Humour occurs when there is a partial, temporary and playful suspension of pre-existing moral structures to create a range of responses from amusement to shock. It became more and more clear to me that humour is intertwined with morality as part of human behaviour, for example in a choice of what is perceived to be 'good' and 'evil'. (Hobbes Thomas [1651] 1968, Freud, [1905] 1976, Morreall, 1987, Veatch, 1998, Critchley, 2002, Veale, 2004, McGraw & Warren, 2010, Attardo, 2017, Chiaro, 2018.)

2 – To explore the operative notion of a moral dimension of humour, a two fold approach was adopted. Humour as part of the cultural evolution and as a way to transcend norms and values of society at large. (Nietzsche, [1882/1895] 2008, Darwin, 1877, Frankl [1946] 1992, Parsons, [1951] 1991, Jung, [1959] 2014, Bakhtin, [1965] 1984, Kristeva, 1982, Wendy, [1998] 2011, Hyde, [1998] 2010, Haidt, 2012.)

3 – Studies on disgust as a crucial part of how human beings adopt moral judgement were explored to find a link between humour and the radical right. The impact of this sensibility to disgust ind linguistic as well as cognitive processes, as described by Lakoff for example, allowed me to present a detailed overview. (Kurzban et al, 2001, Schnall et al, 2008, Eskine et al, 2011, Helzer & Pizarro, 2011, Schaller & Park, 2011, Fincher & Thornhill, 2012, Brown et al, 2016, Taylor, 1992, Trevor-Roper 2000, Lakoff, [2008] 2009, Ervas et al, 2015)

4 – Literature on methodology was equally relevant. Particular attention was paid to different approaches to data mining. Moreover, the literature on books and papers exploring the nature of

radicalization online were also explored. (Jackson, 2002, Bratza et al, 2012, Sheperd, 2012, North, 2012, Waskiewicz, 2012, Adedoyin-Oloweet et al, 2013.)

5 – In chronological order, from the beginning of the 20th century to the digital age, papers and books that explored the radical right ideology were analyzed. Specific attention was paid to analysts of processes linked to radical right such as "lone wolves" terrorists. (Spengler, Oswald, [1916] 1926, Weaver, M. Richard, [1948] 1984, Robertson, Wilmot, 1981, Taylor Jared, 1993, Williams Michelle Hale, 2006, Martin Schain et al, 2002, Ramón Spaaij, 2012, Nagle Angela, 2017.)

6 – To show the impact of radical right movements in the UK, both British thinkers of the radical right and analysts were analyzed in conjunction. This approach allowed me to expand on the specific challenges and causes of the political polarization of the British online sphere. (Harrison Sarah and Bruter Michael, 2011, Trilling Daniel, 2012, Ford Robert and Goodwin Matthew, 2014, Winlow Simon et al, 2016, Hilary Pilkington, 2016, Yiannopoulos Milo, 2017.)

7 – The analysis of studies on memetics were carried out following both the definition of memes as cultural units and their characteristics as image macros. Specific attention was given on the impact of humour in digital spaces. The analysis of a complex socio-online system online was done by focusing on cognitive, psychological and linguistic processes, such as the role of dopamine-linked processes inn the evolution of social networks in the ever new forms of visuality and tribalism. (Dawkins Richard, [1976] 2006, Kent C. Berridge & Terry E. Robinson, 1998, Blackmore Susan, 1999, Aunger Robert, 2002, Godin Seth, 2011, Shifman, Limor. 2014, Levitin, J. Daniel, 2014, Tay, Geniesa, 2014, Pentland, Alex, 2014, Wu Tim, 2016, Rola Jadayel et al, 2017, Han, Byung-Chul, 2017.)

8 – The literature on the impact of social networks on events offline was analyzed with particular care. Attention was given to literature that discussed data that showed the activity of activists movements. The 'Anglo-Saxon' populist rebellion and the rise of Donald Trump were deemed crucial to understand what happened in the UK. This allowed to also understand at large in what direction the online activism is going. (Komov Sergey 1997, Rastorguev Sergey, 1999, Chekinov Sergey & Bogdanov Sergey, 2013, Summer Harlow, 2013, Kevin Lewis et al, 2014, Bartlett, Jamie, 2015, 2017, Adams Scott, 2017, Tufekci, Zeynep, 2017.)

9 – **Chapter 2** The refinement of my research protocol continued during and after my period in of study in the UK by focusing on learning the basics of Python. The four phases of the research protocol were defined after an extended process of "trial & error" with ulterior deepening of the literature that discussed gathering data on Twitter. Moreover, the capacity of organization of data by using CygWin was also fundamental for my work.

(Downey, Allen, 2012, Dave Kuhlman, 2011, Nguyen, Timothy, 2011, Tim O'Reilly & Sarah Milstein 2012, Waskiewicz, Todd, 2012, North, Matthew, 2012, Williams, Shirley Ann et al, 2013, VanderPlas, Jake, 2017.)

a) – Selection of accounts and the temporal frame, extraction of tweets as well as calculation of quantity and word frequency in the obtained corpus, creation of a temporal line of the hate crimes for each selected month.
b) – Extraction of all tweets according to keywords and synchronization of obtained files, one for each keyword, elimination of double tweets to obtain one file that follow the temporal line that contain tweets relevant to hate crimes. Evaluation of each tweet on the basis of Jonathan Haidt's Moral Foundations, where humour is considered the sixth Moral Foundation that accelerates others; classification of results to obtain three sub-datasets subsequently united into one database.
c) – Extraction of tweets and separation of those with humorous intent as well as memes: Harmonization of created timelines.
d) – Analysis of visual support of tweets with a sub-protocol of multimodal analysis. Cross control of extracted hate crimes with different levels of analysis to obtain a final temporal line that characterized the entire database.

Research activity & '*Terza Missione*'

Activities that were conducted in agreement with my supervisor:

- 19-22 October, 2017. 'Voci nell'ombra', National festival of dubbing, XVIII Edizione, Savona. I acted as interpreter for the Russian delegation from Russian to Italian and from Russian to English.
- 25-29 June, 2018. Tallinn, Estonia 30th conferences of ISHS (International society for Humour Studies). I presented a paper entitled: "Holey Moley, Nice to mole you: Humour, Moles and Disgust".
- 21 November, 2018. Brunel University, London (UK); Centre for Comedy Studies Research (CCSR). I held a seminar on humour and disgust.
- 20-22 September, 2018. "Taboo and the Media", Bertinoro, Italy. I presented a paper entitled: "When History Repeats itself: "Slavs" as "Humorous Abjects" in the Newspaper Cartoons of Estonia, Italy and the UK in the Interwar period and post-9/11".
- 23-25 October, 2019. "International Conference on Verbal Humor", Universidad de Alicante, Alicante, Spain. I presented a paper entitled: "When History Repeats itself on

Twitter: “Slavs” as “Humorous Abjects” in the Tweets from Estonia, Italy and the UK during the 2018 World Cup”.

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