ПОЛИТОЛОГИЯ

ЭКСТРЕМИСТСКИЙ ДИСКУРС: СРАВНЕНИЕ ОНЛАЙН-МАТЕРИАЛА ДЖИХАДИСТОВ И БЕЛЫХ СУПРЕМАСИСТОВ

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Аннотация. Цель статьи – сравнение интернет-ресурсов белого супремасистского и джихадисткого происхождения для понимания их сходства. Методология включает контент-анализ материалов из онлайн-журналов, созданных группами белых супремасистов и джихадистов, а также видео из социальных сетей. Университет Осло предоставил доступ к своему хранилищу документов джихадистов для этого анализа. Риторика и повествование, выявленные в проанализированных материалах, демонстрируют сходство в дискурсе, целях и методах между джихадизмом и белым супремасизмом. Автор предлагает ввести более строгий запрет или контроль над интернет-ресурсами белых супремасистов, подобный введенному над джихадистскими. Статья адресована политологам, проводящим исследования политического и религиозного экстремизма.

Ключевые слова: белый супремасизм, джихадизм, американский неонацизм, экстремизм, этнонационализм.

EXTREMIST DISCOURSE: A COMPARISON BETWEEN JIHADI AND WHITE SUPREMACIST ONLINE MATERIALS

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Abstract. The aim of this work is to compare white supremacist and Jihadi online materials to understand their similarities. The methodology used was content analysis of online journal materials created by white supremacist and jihadi groups, as well as videos retrieved from various social networks. Jihadi materials were provided by the University of Oslo through access to their Jihadi repository. The rhetoric and narrative identified in the analysed materials demonstrate similarities between Jihadism and white supremacism in terms of their discourse, aims and

methods. A stricter ban or control over white supremacist online materials, similar to that over Jihadi materials, is proposed. This work is addressed to political scientists conducting research on political and religious extremism.

Keywords: White supremacism, Jihadism, American neo-Nazism, extremism, ethno-nationalism.

Donald Trump's victory as president of the United States in 2016 represented the beginning of a winning spree for far-right politics that revived identitarian and white supremacist discourse in the West. His victory persuaded European politicians that without the legal and societal limitations on freedom of speech that characterise American society, Trump was free to express himself in ways they had only ever dreamt of.

White supremacism as a strong political movement is a recent phenomenon, and so many aspects have not been deeply studied especially from a critical perspective to the permissiveness of white supremacist material online and its similarity to Islamist extremist resources. This work proposes the hypothesis that Jihadi and white supremacist materials use a similar distortion and exaggeration of reality as rhetoric to sow distrust among multi-ethnic and multi-religious societies, which influences only those who lack the knowledge on the topic addressed. This work tries to answer the question: what are the similarities between Jihadi and white supremacist materials online?

The Southern Poverty Law Center describes white supremacism as "the ideology espoused by white supremacist groups that consider non-whites (non-Europeans) to be inferior" [17]. This supremacy is based on eugenics, a pseudo-scientific movement of the 19th century, that promoted the idea of improving the human race through the controlled breeding and inheritance of intelligence that supposedly prevails among the upper classes, that

were intrinsically linked to Europeans [5]. Eugenics is not new to American society, as it was brought by Nazi pseudo-scientists that migrated to the US in the 1930's. It has prevailed because of the stress Americans place on racial identity, strong religiosity and the lack of education in some sectors to confront this pseudo-science [11, p. 742].

Previous work on the study of white supremacism online has been done by M. Wong, R. Frank and R. Allsup who with the use of a crawler conducted an analysis of white supremacist activities in forums where members spread propaganda, share ideas and recruit new members [18, pp. 42–43]. However, this work differs from previous studies as it focuses only on information from websites that do not allow interaction between visitors and serve only as sources of propaganda. In a similar way, De Smedt, De Pauw and Van Ostaeyen conducted a very comprehensive content analysis of social media accounts that focused on a defined Jihadi hate speech with the use of two AI systems. These systems were able to help identify users on Twitter that spread Jihadi hate speech and identify some characteristics like genre and age through data collection [15, p. 5].

Regarding identity and group formation, R Griffin wrote about the "groupuscular right" as a definition that applies to "centerless, non-hierarchical politico-cultural entities" espousing fascist ideologies [7, p. 7]. His work centers on describing how right wing groups behave as individual cells with no clear leader or or-

ganisation, but rather as "rhizomic structures" expanding through uncivil society [7, p. 10]. However, this approach is not entirely accurate as, unlike in 2003 when this work was published, today American neo-Nazism has some identifiable faces that enjoy being public and gaining platforms, which is not the case with Jihadi groups that can fit well into the definition of groupuscules.

In Russia, E. Lymar, S. Fedorchenko and A. Belyustin conducted research on the politicalization of internet and social media platforms as well as the construction of online identities that may affect offline activity. These researchers conducted a massive study of online activity to identify pro-government, anti-government and radical groups in different countries divided into cultural and geographical clusters. The results show that in some cases, depending on the country and time, internet and social media can be used both to support the authorities as well as to demonstrate dissent or radical ideas [2, p. 107].

S. Volodenkov and S. Fedorchenko also analysed and elaborated on the formation of an online identity through the development of the internet and how this has allowed dominant actors to use digital stigmatisation to gain or maintain power [1, p. 119]. According to their work, the era of post-truth is linked to digital stigmatisation as it is a "postmodernist deviation that is not a lie, a myth or an ordinary fake, but a special quasi-real environment that is comfortable for various pseudo-notions and stereotypes that have long been torn off from authentic images" [1, p. 120]. This is one of the strategies used by both white supremacist and Jihadist propaganda, that although do not present falsified information on their material, do present it as an "alternative reality" aimed at attracting like-minded followers.

Within Islamism, Wahhabism can be described as a movement in Islam that promotes a conservative approach to religion and is sometimes used to gain political power. Wahhabism emerged in the Arabian Peninsula in the 18th century and though it is a political and religious movement, it does not look for the ethnic or national superiority of a group. Instead, Wahhabism promotes an ideology of religious supremacy that among others, distorts one of the peculiarities of Islam which considers Christians and Jews as *"People of the scriptures"* and worthy of protection and respect [3, p. 50–51]. Within Wahhabism, Jihadis embrace the historical idea of Jihad as a wave of violent, bloody holy war against non-Muslims like in the times of the Prophet, taking this concept completely literally and out of context, which does not correspond to the generally perceived reality.

White supremacists and Jihadists represent two different types of extremism that promote similar ideologies to achieve their goals of domination. These ideologies look to dominate people's minds so that they can join and go forth to change the systems they live in, which they perceive as wrong or posing an obstacle to achieving the ideal society. White supremacists see the ideal society as one where the native population of European countries or countries with a majority population of European descent (US, Canada, Australia) remain the dominant ethnicity with the right to make decisions about the fate of minorities living in *their* territory. For Jihadis the ideal society includes the revival, establishment and fortification of a caliphate in the Middle East, like what occurred in 2015 with the announcement

of the establishment of the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levante (ISIL) (which is a banned organization in the Russian Federation) [9, p. 7].

To achieve the abovementioned ideals, both groups make use of social media and the internet to spread their ideology and attract followers. Journals like *Inspire* serve as a means to spread Jihadi ideology and as a guide for preparing terrorist attacks. In its early days, militants of ISIL would use Twitter or Facebook to spread videos of decapitations, punishments and combat as well as propaganda about daily life in the Caliphate. After these platforms started banning their content more actively, they moved to other platforms like Telegram.

White supremacism was rebranded as "*alt-right*", which legitimized it by pairing it with other political movements [13]. Political commentators, analysts and activists such as Jason Kessler, Richard Spencer or David Duke openly identify as white supremacists or in support of white supremacy and secure platforms in universities and the news media in the US. White supremacists also use social media to spread their message, like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Though Twitter has been shutting down accounts of white supremacists, a simple search of *alt-right, identitarianism* and *white supremacy* on Facebook shows a considerable list of groups. YouTube is still a safe place for white supremacists who use the label "identitarianism" to continue to upload content calling for the domination of *whites* (Europeans) and the expulsion of *non-whites* from *their lands*.

Twitter has also been shutting down and banning some white supremacists and as a response they have moved to Gab, an app similar to Twitter that self describes as "a social network that champions free speech, individual liberty and the free flow of information online" [6]. Gab is a well-known platform where white supremacists and followers of the far-right share information, racist memes and conspiracy theories.

White supremacists use YouTube freely to spread their ideology. A simple search of the words "alt-right propaganda" on YouTube gives results of personal accounts of individuals praising Nazism, ethnonationalism and white supremacism.

In a video analysed for this work, the author uses part of a speech given by President Putin in 2017 at the 19th World Festival of Youth and Students in Sochi to make it appear as if the president was defending a Christian "white" European identity. The creator used one minute of an hour speech in which president Putin analysed the change in the ethnic and religious composition of the US, and then he cuts the speech right before President Putin said, "We should not divide everything based on ethnicity…but rather look to the future for ways to build a common future and follow this common path" [12].

White supremacists tend to see Russia as the antithesis to Western multiculturalism and some type of defender of Christianity, ignoring facts like the multiethnic and multi-religious composition of the country recognised by the constitution and promoted by the governing party.

The journals analysed for this work are *Inspire* by al-Qaida in Yemen (AQAP) issue 17 of 2017, Radix and Europemaxima. *Inspire* was first published by AQAP in 2010 and is similar to printed commercial journals, it is composed of pseudo analytical articles on Jihad and instructions on how to carry out operations against civilians. This journal "provides theological

justifications for al-Qaida's struggle and promotes a so-called individual jihad in the West, it includes reports of proclaimed victories on the battlefield, interviews with AQAP members and biographies of dead fighters, it also contains texts written by leaders like Anwar al-Awlaki and Osama bin Laden, as well as instructions on how to carry out terror attacks" [8].

Most articles have a simple, repetitive and unprofessional style as well as narrative. The rhetoric in *Inspire* follows a literal interpretation of Quranic texts by selecting those that coincide with their political agenda.

One of the central articles of the analyzed issue is "*Targeting means of transportation*". The article starts with a historical analysis, from the industrial revolution to the Cold War explaining how means of communication and globalization developed. The author's narrative is a critique of globalisation which he accuses of erasing the identity of the people influenced by it [8, p. 9–10]. The author's style is very socialist, post-colonialist and anti-US. His writing is addressed to men willing to serve as lone mujahideen. The author makes a false accusation against Russia by calling Jihadis to make Russia a target as the government has "interfered in matters concerning Islam" when in fact, Russian Muslims are free to practice their religion without restrictions in the country and it is those Muslims themselves who accuse the actions of Jihadis [8, p. 15–16].

In the article "*Rulings on Lone Jihad*" many historic and Quranic references are taken out of context, misleading or false to coincide with the interest of the author, an example of this is when he refers to *ahl al-dimmah* as disbelievers, but who are actually Jews and Christians by historical references [8, p. 24].

In white supremacist material, the author of the article "*The leaders of the European Union are nothing but dictators*" published on Europemaxima, makes several misleading statements. The author considers Europeans are victims and who were not asked their opinion about receiving immigrants from Africa and the Middle East, who he calls invaders [14]. His perspective illustrates his ignorance of the fact that many of the economic and social problems in immigrants' countries of origin are the result of centuries of European colonialism.

This article uses the map of Europe which includes the Russian Federation, as well as territories where Slavs are not the dominant or native ethnic group. This could give the idea that Western white supremacists would support the domination or extermination of non-Slavs if their ideology is ever successful in Russia.

In the article "*Identity before sovereignty*" the author addresses the preference of losing sovereignty before identity, as he argues once identity is lost, it is forever gone, and it is the job of the "*new right*" to defend it [10]. This author sees three threats to the French and European identity: immigration, Islam and Americanism. The author considers immigration as sponsored by a system that promotes ethnic mixing of the population, Islam contradicts European values and American culture destroys the French. The author worries about the results of this change for the year 2100 when, according to his projections only 10% of world population will be European while the Chinese and Indian military power will have strengthened. This shows the problem is not about losing their Europeanness but losing the power and dominance over other nations which Europeans traditionally controlled.

One of the most outspoken representative faces of modern American white supremacism is Richard Spencer, publisher and founder of RadixJournal, founder and director of the website alternativeright.com and president and director of the National Policy Institute (NPI). In a video on altright.com, Spencer explains what the NPI is, using abstract descriptions of identity and making a connection between it and non-abstract objects like land, people and community while using the term "white" to refer to Europeans or people of European descent.

In the article "*Stop watching football*" Spencer tries to deconstruct the sense of belonging of African Americans and humiliate them by saying the US is a foreign land to them, while sidestepping the fact that European Americans or "whites" are as foreign as Africans to the American continent [16]. In the attempt to reach out to the masses of uneducated men and women, Spencer uses an infantile and simple rhetoric which is similar to the one used by Jihadis that addresses men and rewards them for their fighting and sacrifice for a greater "good". Spencer's writing presents another core value of white supremacism besides race, similar to those of the Jihadi narrative, which is an ultra-masculinity that objectifies and inferiorises women and values the show of physical strength and stamina, supporting the proposition that extremism is more of a gender issue.

Conclusions

Since the extremist is defined by local traditions and perceptions, the extremist is defined based on the interest of the one who defines them. The cultural and societal accepted reality, as well as the socially constructed freedom of speech also have an effect on this definition. The lack of a legal framework that delimits what is or should be socially accepted as freedom of speech benefits the growth and emergence of extremist ideologies and groups, like in the US system where offensive speech could be protected speech.

Jihadis and white supremacists manipulate information as they please, and those who have no knowledge of their own religion (Islam) or history (European colonization of the American continent or historiography of Europe) fall easy prey to this extremism. Surprisingly, though white supremacists are convinced they are fighting the Islamization of their societies by uniting under a perceived so-called white identity, they are doing exactly what they accuse Jihadis of by using the same tools and following the same techniques of indoctrination. Though most of the time, white supremacist discourse does not explicitly call for the elimination of "non-whites" as Jihadis do with non-believers, it suggests non-Europeans, immigrants, Muslims and Jews are their enemy. Since 2017 with the onset of Trump's administration, the US has seen an increase in murders that could be well identified as terrorist acts committed by white supremacists [4].

Recognising that white supremacism and Jihadism are similar ideologies might not solve the problem the former represents, as it is rooted in ignorance and the lax protections to freedom of speech in some societies. All the same, raising this topic for discussion will bring attention to the fact that white supremacism is as dangerous and lethal for those it targets as Jihadism has been for Western societies.

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