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**The Development of a Moral and Motivational Approach to
Understanding the Role of Narratives in Right-Wing
Extremist Radicalisation**

Dryden Rutter

University Of Cumbria

Institute of Business, Industry, and Leadership

Lead Supervisor: Professor Roger Griffin (Emeritus)

Oxford Brookes University

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This Thesis has been submitted in partial fulfilment for the requirements of the University of Cumbria for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Abstract

There is a wide discrepancy amongst literature and research on radicalisation, regarding how narratives are conceptualised, their relation to ideology, and their wider role in the radicalisation process. Resolving this discrepancy might allow researchers, and particularly those involved in de-radicalisation/counter-radicalisation, to better understand how narratives function in this context, and what can be done to address them. Accordingly, the aim of this study is to utilise, and synthesise, research into theories/models of radicalisation, particularly Griffin's (2012, 2017) heroic doubling paradigm and Atran's (2016) Devoted Actor Model, with interpretative and narrative theories, alongside relevant concepts from moral and motivational psychology, in order to develop a practical heuristic for understanding the role of narratives in Right Wing Extremist (RWE) radicalisation. The heuristic developed here seeks, therefore, to be able to provide a clear framework for describing *how* specific RWE narratives can involve the psychological processes integral to the radicalisation towards violence. To do this, it draws on Heideggerian concepts, such as "throw-projections," Jerome Bruner's narrative psychology, Peter Berger's "sacred canopies," and Rene Girard's work on the scapegoat mechanism. After synthesising relevant theories and research, the preliminary heuristic was then developed further, through an analysis of contemporary RWE narratives, in the form of three terrorist manifestos. Accordingly, this study argues that RWE narratives, such as those analysed, are adopted, and evolve, through a dialectical process of interpretation, whereby adherents integrate, or "emplot," themselves, and the various aspects of the world around them, into a Manichean master narrative, whose temporal dimension brings about a sense of both existential dread, and a subsequent moral duty, to act in defence of their sacred canopy and sacralised in-group. RWE terrorists, such as these, thus feel they must destroy the present, in order to save the future.

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Author's Declaration

I, Dryden Rutter declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere.

Chapter 1

Literature Review

Introduction: The Aim and Structure of this Dissertation

The aim of this study is to draw on empirically based models of radicalisation, in combination with concepts from moral and motivational psychology as well as interpretative and narrative theories, to develop a practical heuristic for understanding the role of narratives in Right Wing Extremist (RWE) radicalisation which can be applied to the construction of counter-narratives. It will be argued that synthesising theories from these different fields will enable the creation of a theoretical framework that can both supplement existent radicalisation theories by applying their concepts to other research, and also assist in addressing the lack of existing research that seeks to clarify the role of narratives in radicalisation. The impetus for this moral, motivational and interpretive approach, arises from the need to develop counter-narratives around the specific functions of narratives, within the radicalisation process in order to refine techniques and programmes of de-radicalisation. What sustains this impetus, as shall be explored, is the relative lack of explicit consideration given to what these functions are, and how they operate, within contemporary counter-narrative research and practice.

Indeed, one way of defining what makes an understanding “effective,” is the capacity to be useful when applied to solving challenges. While it is important to understand all the factors of radicalisation, for those interested in de-radicalisation and prevention, the role of narratives warrants particular focus, because it is directly applicable to the construction of counter-narratives. Moreover, it is relevant to wider questions as to whether counter-narratives should seek to address violent extremist (VE) narratives at all (as opposed to focusing on the external circumstances or internal drivers

of their adherents, in particular the role played by pathological motivation), and what aspects of VE narratives ought to be addressed, and how. This study will subsequently suggest that a counter-narrative which focuses on the interpretative aspects of RWE narratives, and the moral and motivational psychology at work within these, may be better placed to address the functions that those narratives serve in radicalising people and predisposing them towards VE.

Following the literature review within this chapter, the second chapter will analyse relevant theories and research relating to the psychology of narratives and interpretation as the basis for developing a conceptual framework for understanding VE narratives. The project will thus attempt to develop the concept of a generic VE narrative, that will supplement the insights of existing frameworks, such as the Devoted Actor Model (DAM) and Significance Quest Theory (SQT), by drawing on research into the psychology of narratives and their motivating or mobilizing function. Incorporating these different fields, it will be argued, may help elucidate the interpretative acts behind the causal mechanisms described within the DAM and SQT, amongst others. That is, narrative/interpretive psychology can account for the inherently qualitative, aspects of the radicalisation process, which pertain to the creation of meaning, purpose and the action-oriented interpretation of reality. The heuristic that shall be developed should, therefore, be able to provide clear framework for describing *how* VE narratives mediate the moral and motivational functions integral to radicalisation. Accordingly, the project will draw on research into narrative psychology by Jerome Bruner, and the hermeneutic approach of Hans-George Gadamer, on understanding and interpretation. The literature review will also clarify the need to incorporate research and theories from moral and motivational psychology which pertain to the moral and motivational functions of VE narratives indicated by literature on radicalisation. It will be argued that both the DAM and SQT,

alongside a range of other perspectives, suggest moral and motivational psychology are at the core of violent extremism, and that narratives are fundamental to understanding that psychology. Accordingly, the third chapter will seek to analyse, and incorporate research into moral and motivational psychology, in line with the aims of this study.

Following a discussion of the relevant theories and concepts carried out in chapters 2 and 3, these will then be synthesised in chapter three in a composite, though integrated, heuristic model of the moral and motivational functions of VE narratives, which will take into account the interpretive aspect of these functions, i.e. how they interact with, and complement, the psychology of narratives. Accordingly, the heuristic will propose a description of how this interaction takes place, as part of a theoretical-framework aimed at understanding the role of narratives in the radicalisation process. Following the example set by Griffin's (2017) work on Fascism, it will thus seek to create a social-psychological "ideal-type" of the dynamics of radicalisation based on Max Weber's concept of "one-sided accentuation" Weber (1949, p. 90). The heuristic shall subsequently accentuate the relevant dynamics according to a synthesis of the theories and research analysed as part of its development. The ideal type developed by Griffin (2017) viewed fascism as a "palingenetic form of populist ultranationalism" (p. 46). Accordingly, the ideal-type that this study will attempt to develop, will be based on the moral/motivational, and narrative/interpretive psychology, specific to VE narratives. As with Griffin's approach to Fascism, this heuristic device will not seek to give a concept of VE narratives that comprehensively covers all its various facets, in all its permutations, rather it will attempt to explain and throw into relief, through Weber's one-sided accentuation, the psychological role these narratives play as part of the radicalisation process. The value of this heuristic will therefore be measured by its explanatory usefulness for understanding narratives within this process, i.e. what makes them *violent*

extremist narratives. Consequently, having created the preliminary heuristic, its utility will be evaluated, and developed further by using it as a basis for analysing contemporary case studies of RWE terrorist narratives. Chapter five will then attempt to incorporate this analysis into a wider discussion that will produce practical insights, regarding how best to conceptualise narratives in the context of RWE radicalisation, and how they function within the radicalisation process at an individual level, before outlining suggestions for counter-radicalisation efforts, particularly counter-narratives, as well as areas for future research.

Narratives and Radicalisation

What defines a narrative, in the general sense of the term, is not complicated, even when defined by scholars whose research extensively examines its various forms. Cobley (2014) for instance, defines a narrative as, "...A movement from a start point to an end point, with digressions, which involves the showing or telling of story events" (p. 251). This definition may suggest why narratives and stories are synonymous. That is, both refer to descriptions of events, or *temporally* related occurrences. What distinguishes a narrative from a story, according to Cobley, is that a narrative refers to the act, and means, by which those events that form a story are presented (p. 4). Moreover, what gives stories, and consequently narratives, their distinctive meanings, is not only their temporal sequencing of events, but their *causal* sequencing of *related* events, which according to Cobley, gives them their *plot*. In this regard, narratives are at least, partly, as much explanations as they are descriptions, to the extent that they link events together in a way that demonstrates their mutual relevance. They describe why events matter, in relation to others.

Although this is a straightforward, albeit general, formulation, in the context of VE research, the term narrative is not used consistently to refer to the explanations, or self-described reasons, given by VE groups or individuals for why events matter in relation to others, and why these events justify their violence. Nevertheless, these reasons, and the understandings of reality on which they are based, are clearly important. What is thus needed is a more comprehensive understanding of narratives in the context of radicalisation, in terms of what they are and how they function. Certainly, there is a wide range of different perspectives, theories and research on narratives, broadly speaking however, not all of these relate to the psychological role narratives play within the radicalising process. Consequently, it is important to first examine research into the radicalisation process, in order to evaluate what narratives do, and how, before identifying what more is needed to understand their role in this context. The subsequent literature review will therefore aim to establish the implications of contemporary radicalisation research for the role of narratives and related concepts, as a prerequisite to developing a context-specific heuristic for conceptualising RWE narratives.

Literature Review

This chapter will outline eight psychological theories/models of violent extremism (VE), and evaluate their relevance to understanding the role of narratives in radicalisation. Although all the theories differ in the explanations they offer, they can broadly be divided into two categories; those which explicate causal mechanisms using experimental research designs, and those which provide overarching frameworks for understanding VE. Clearly, it is true that the theories which use experimental evidence also provide wider frameworks of a sort, and those using non-experimental research still

cite qualitative empirical data, as well as quantitative studies, which they argue indirectly support their framework. Nevertheless, the distinction is an important one, because it influences the implications that can be drawn from the individual theories, particularly regarding the role of narratives.

In the case of experimental research, the theories indicate specific psychological mechanisms, or affordances (i.e. identifiable needs, motivations and the means of their fulfilment) which a narrative should provide, e.g. the need for cognitive closure (Kruglanski, *et al.*, 2018) alongside the possible ways they might do this, e.g. presenting Manichean struggles which demand active participation. That is, through their quantitative measures, they identify distinct psychological features for which a heuristic of VE narratives should account. By contrast, in the case of non-experimental theories which seek to explain VE, their value may lie more in the specific characteristics of radicalisation that they make salient, e.g. de-pluralisation (Koehler 2015). These wider frameworks, which do not rely on quantitatively measured psychological states, can describe fundamental aspects of radicalisation, particularly those which are more difficult to measure, but are nonetheless important in understanding the processes involved. They also situate radicalisation in the contexts from which it ultimately cannot be divorced, to the extent that radicalisation is itself co-dependent on such contexts. For instance, the “contrast societies” outlined by Koehler (2015), necessarily exist in opposition to their “target societies.” Similarly, the “heroic doubling” through which Griffin (2012) argues a person becomes a committed terrorist, necessarily requires a *nomos*, or “sacred canopy” (Berger 1967), in order to give their life the potential to create/restore sacredness, and meaning, whether religious or secular. Moreover, the greater emphasis on qualitative descriptions can offer a more detailed depiction of how radicalisation progresses towards, and away from, support for/participation in, acts of violence. These descriptions can

augment an understanding based on the psychological states, attitudes, or circumstances, demonstrated by theories which uses quantitative measures, which on their own, may only offer a relatively limited (albeit well-substantiated) list of ingredients that can lead to such acts.

The theories/models outlined below have been selected as part of the rationale of this study, and its attendant objectives. Those objectives being to develop a psychological heuristic of VE narratives specific to the context of radicalisation, based on, and in response to, different perspectives offered by the relevant literature. Much of this relevant literature, will thus be analysed here. Consequently, the theories/models have been selected based on their relevance and utility to an overall investigation of the role of narratives in radicalisation. Some of the theories have been selected because they are directly relevant to the discussion of narratives, as they refer to them explicitly (Kruglanski, *et al*, 2018), or because they refer to similar concepts that pertain to the relationship between ideas and action (Atran, 2016). On the other hand, certain theories have been selected because they do not discuss narratives, ideology, or similar concepts, and in some cases heavily critique the notion of giving ideas a causal role in radicalisation (McCauley and Molashenko 2017). It is important to include these theories in order to explore the ways in which they contrast with others regarding the role of narratives, and why, for example, do they emphasise other aspects of radicalisation, or define concepts like narratives and ideology differently. The review will be divided into two sections, those theories which explicate specific, individual-level, causal mechanisms using experimental designs, or quantitative data, and those which propose explanatory frameworks for the wider phenomena of VE. A brief analysis of the implications for the role of narratives will be provided after outlining each theory. These will then be combined as part of a wider analysis at the end of each section, before being discussed

within the review's final analysis and conclusion. The smaller number of studies that have focused specifically on the role and characteristics of VE narratives will also be discussed in the final analysis.

Experimental Theories

Uncertainty – Identity Theory

Hogg and Adelman (2013) propose Uncertainty – Identity Theory (UIT) as a psychological mechanism for inducing support for, and membership of VE groups. Notably, this differs from other theories, SQT and DAM, which seek to specifically explain violent actions, rather than just group support/membership. Though this distinction may appear somewhat superficial where the groups themselves are violent, it is worth remembering that, as McCauley and Molashenko (2017) highlight, group membership does not by itself always lead to participation in terrorism. Nevertheless, as Hogg and Adelman demonstrate in a series of studies using quantitative measures, feelings of uncertainty and perceptions of identity can work symbiotically to increase support for certain kinds of group-based extremism, namely extremist methods used to defend one's group, as well as greater support for autocratic leadership of that group.

According to Hogg and Adelman (2013), the underlying premise of UIT is that "...feelings of uncertainty are aversive, because uncertainty makes it difficult to anticipate events and plan action—uncertainty motivates behaviour aimed at reducing uncertainty." (p. 438). Moreover, not all uncertainty is equally aversive, as not all aspects of life are equally important to an individual. Those aspects which are most important, and for which uncertainty is most aversive, are those which concern one's sense of self. As Hogg and Adelman argue, "People need to know who they are, how to behave and

what to think, and who others are and how they might behave, think, and treat us.” (p. 439). The pursuit of self-certainty, and avoidance of self-uncertainty is therefore highly motivating. One particularly effective way of reducing this uncertainty, the authors argue, is through social identification, or self-categorisation as part of a group. Group identification is effective because it specifically addresses the kind of certainty most relevant to *oneself*. Additionally, group identification is sought because it outsources decisions of how to think, act and behave towards others, through the use of group “prototypes,” that are the preconceived ideal-typical conceptions of in-group members (and therefore oneself), and those of relevant out-groups. Identification thus enables the world to conform to prototypical expectations, and thus restores certainty by rendering, “...one’s own and others’ behavior predictable, and allows one to avoid harm, plan effective action, and know how one should feel and behave.” (p. 439).

UIT also holds that the kinds of group identification sought in response to uncertainty are those which, deliberately or otherwise, provide their members with the most certainty and unity of purpose. Hogg and Adelman argue such groups are defined by their high “entitativity,” which refers to, “...that property of a group, resting on clear boundaries, internal homogeneity, social interaction, clear internal structure, common goals, and common fate, which makes a group “groupy,”” (p. 439), creating the feeling of belonging to an organic entity. This single-tracking gives group members a clear prototype with which to identify. Similarly, individuals may disassociate themselves from groups with low entitativity, as these are less effective at providing certainty. Alternatively, a person may accentuate the perceived entitativity of a group with which they already identify, in response to feelings of self-uncertainty (Sherman, Hogg, and Maitner, 2009).

Moreover, this striving for prescriptive uniformity leads to another key aspect of UIT, according to Hogg and Adelman (2013) in relation to extremism, that is, the desire for a rigid group structure, alongside autocratic leadership, which can maintain an identity group's entitativity. Indeed, the property of having high entitativity often encompasses having singular, or few, sources of authority from which to derive a group's prototypes. Likewise, rigid conformity to these prototypes, and the normative/prescriptive standards and goals they embody, will itself produce entitativity. This property is also sought by groups attempting to effect change, as coherence and loyalty become viewed as essential where there is a perceived threat from a more powerful majority group, or opponent. For such groups, "...in the absence of material power, the pursuit of a diachronically and synchronically consistent and assertive behavioral style will effectively render them highly entitative" (p. 441). In the case of VE groups, which prescribe fierce loyalty and violent actions in pursuit of group goals, individuals seeking to affirm their identities will enact these prescriptions as a means of resolving their uncertainty. That is, group identification, and thus certainty of one's identity, is rendered through group subservience.

Using four sets of studies, Hogg and Adelman (2013) test and develop various aspects of UIT, with a view to exploring its relevance to VE groups. These studies, they argue, indicate that a person's feelings of uncertainty about themselves can induce stronger identification with higher entitativity, or extremist groups, as well as a greater motivation to participate in, or support, more extreme action in the service of such groups, particularly in their defence. Their studies also indicated that self-uncertainty creates a greater desire for leadership in general, though particularly strong autocratic leadership that maintains a rigid hierarchy (p. 449). Notably, one set of studies specifically addressed the question of support for violent actions (as opposed to just group membership or

support for strong leadership), in the context of Israeli/Palestinian conflict. The first study found that, "...Palestinian Muslims support for the use of suicide bombs was, as predicted, notably stronger among those who identified strongly as Palestinian and reported higher levels of uncertainty, particularly self-uncertainty related to the Middle East conflict." Similarly, in the second study it was found that, "among Israeli Jews—as predicted, they supported the use of military tactics most strongly when they identified strongly as Israelis and were primed to feel uncertain" (p. 444).

Implications for Narratives

Having outlined Hogg and Adelman's argument for the UIT., it is now possible to consider what this might suggest for the role of narratives in radicalisation. Notably, Hogg and Adelman do not discuss narratives in relation to their framework, and where ideology (a term sometimes used synonymously) is mentioned, it is not given a causal role, rather it is viewed as orientating a person towards the group with which they come to identify, in *response* to self-uncertainty. In earlier work, however, Hogg (2005) discusses in more depth the role of ideology, in relation to UIT. According to Hogg a group's prototype forms "...part of a representational system that can be considered ideological." (p. 221). Although Hogg does note the controversial status of ideology in the social sciences, he defines the term as, "...an integrated, coherent, and internally consistent system of beliefs, attitudes, and values (e.g., stereotypes) that serve to explain one's world and one's place and experiences within it." (p. 222). The integrated and coherent nature of ideologies, Hogg argues, is what gives them power to reduce uncertainty. Indeed, group prototypes "...are better at resolving uncertainty to the extent that they are ideological" Consequently, those seeking to reduce self-uncertainty

“...accentuate the entitativity, prototypical clarity, and ideological quality of their group” (p. 223). Here, Hogg is explicitly identifying ideology, as having a specific quality, which can be used to describe a group’s beliefs, i.e. the quality of coherence, clarity and certainty.

Following UIT, ideology can be viewed as forming the normative basis for a group’s prototype, which group members seek to emulate in order to achieve self-certainty. Accordingly, ideologies, and/or narratives, to the extent they inform a person’s view of their group identity, function to provide/restore certainty, particularly self-certainty. As to whether this is a representative view of ideologies, or whether it risks uncritically equating ideology with self-enclosed and therefore inflexible dogmas, will be discussed in the next chapter, regarding narratives and ideology. Nevertheless, Hogg’s approach is useful to this enquiry because it suggests how ideologies relate to beliefs around group-identity, and VE. That is, they are the beliefs, or “stereotypes,” surrounding a group’s prototype. What this leaves out however, is how exactly these beliefs come to be, as part of the radicalisation process, other than being driven by the desire to relieve uncertainty. The question still remains as to where and how the beliefs which make up a group’s ideology are adopted, and what is the role of the individual in their adoption. Moreover, though Hogg and Adelman do not refer to narratives themselves, the role of perceptions feature heavily in their framework. These perceptions change from an initial state of self-uncertainty to the state of greater certainty, through rigid group identification. Indeed, perceptions of oneself in relation to others, effectively form the beliefs underpinning the group’s ideology, and how it conceptualises group identity. To what extent these perceptions are influenced by narratives is unclear, based on UIT by itself. Similarly, it is unclear if high-entitativity groups use certain kinds of narratives to create the unity and clarity of purpose which UIT holds as necessary to restoring self-certainty.

The Significance Quest Theory

Kruglanski and Webber (2014) outline the basic aspects of the Significant Quest Theory (SQT) of radicalisation. These are, a perceived loss of significance, an extremist narrative and a network of like-minded individuals who share that narrative. According to Kruglanski, Belanger and Gunaratna (2019), the need for significance in SQT can be activated through one of three ways. Firstly, through a loss of personal significance often resulting from a kind of humiliation; a *deprivation*. Secondly, by a perceived threat to that significance that engenders the need for *avoidance*, i.e. a possible, or looming humiliation. Thirdly, the need for significance may be activated by the possibility of *significance gain*, wherein the perceived elevated significance alone acts as an incentive (p. 44). Notably, SQT outlines an individual level mechanism, and so refers to a personal sense of significance, however that sense can be experienced empathically through the victimisation of a wider group with whom a person identifies. Whichever way the need for significance is created, it leads to a *motivational imbalance*, wherein one particular goal is afforded much greater commitment than others. These other goals which can be displaced by a disproportionately high need for significance may include material well-being and maintained family relations.

Once a need has arisen, a narrative is adopted that provides an individual with a way of redressing their motivational imbalance. Importantly, Kruglanski, *et al*, (2018) argue that the need for significance generates a *need for cognitive closure* (NFC), whereby those with a motivational imbalance experience "...a heightened desire for clear-cut and unambiguous answers" (p. 112). These answers simplify the world in terms of right and wrong, and what needs to be done accordingly. This in turn redresses the loss

of significance, by alleviating the feelings of uncertainty and anxiety with which it is bound up. To restore the desired closure, a narrative provides what Kruglanski, *et al*, (2018, p.109) term, “meaning frameworks,” which explain how the world works, a person’s place in it, what goals they should pursue, and the way they should pursue it. In essence they give reasons for the actions a person may choose to restore their significance. While multiple narratives might serve this purpose, VE narratives may also be adopted, which specifically provide their adherents with violent goals, or goals that necessitate violence.

Importantly, the authors highlight the attractiveness of the Manichean certainty that VE narratives provide, through their unambiguous black-and-white depictions of reality (p. 112). Kruglanski, Belanger and Gunaratna (2019) discuss further, how in relation to SQT, the need for closure can result in increased support for VE. As evidence they cite four studies by Webber, *et al*, (2018) that demonstrated that a perceived loss of significance indirectly increased support for VE, through an increased need for closure. The first two studies were conducted on Islamist detainees in the Philippines, and former Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka, respectively, and both demonstrated that a loss of significance and support for extremism were mediated by a need for closure. The fact that these studies used participants holding both religious and more secular ideologies would suggest a wider applicability across contexts. Importantly, Kruglanski *et al* (2018), also noted the role of ideological disillusionment could be a key driver in disengagement from extremist movements, particularly disillusionment with violent means and the moral justifications given for violence (p. 115).

Networks are the third component of SQT, comprising of individuals who share the same extremist narrative and can range from loose affiliations of friends, family members or organisations with formal structures. According to Kruglanski, Belanger and

Gunaratna (2019) such networks serve as, “conduits through which the individual gets acquainted with, and embrace, the ideological narrative that the network espouses and that guides their attempts to earn or restore their sense of significance” (p. 51).

Implications for Narratives

Unlike other theories, SQT proposes a key role for narratives in radicalising individuals towards acts of violence, as they serve specific psychological functions that are fundamental to the causality it proposes. Firstly, narratives serve to fulfil the need for significance, by imbuing reality with the necessary meaning to provide closure. Secondly, they serve to bind individuals to wider networks that reinforce belief in that reality, whilst simultaneously affording them the opportunity for collective action within it (or at least collectively valued in cases of lone-actor terrorism, even if the network is largely virtual or imaginary). Importantly, SQT does indicate a particular aspect of the meaning which narratives serve to provide, i.e. a higher degree of certainty. Similarly to UIT, the desire for certainty, or cognitive closure, is a fundamental part of what makes VE groups and ideology appealing. However, unlike UIT, SQT explicitly identifies narratives as *functioning* to provide this certainty, as part of the wider psychological mechanism of restoring significance.

Following this view, narratives are centrally concerned with motivational redress; they function to serve the *fulfilment* of basic, however unbalanced, human *needs*. However, in order to provide this fulfilment, they are also necessarily “meaning frameworks,” and must thus frame reality in accordance with the motivational needs of the network in which they are shared. Moreover, the frameworks themselves must necessarily be applied by the network. That is, the adherents of violent extremist

narratives must *use* the narrative to understand the world they encounter. This points to the relevance of research on, and psychological theories of, narratives and interpretation, specifically where these pertain to the creation of meaning, as these will enable a greater understanding of *how* meaning frameworks influence a person's beliefs. Consequently, any heuristic of violent extremist narratives would need, not only to explain the motivational psychology indicated by SQT, but also to describe how this psychology relates to narratives, and the formation of those beliefs by which a person interprets the world.

The Devoted Actor Model

The Devoted Actor Model (DAM) of radicalisation outlined by Atran, (2016) holds ideology to play a key role in radicalisation, or, more specifically, the “sacred values” as represented in the ideologies of their adherents. Accordingly, violent extremists are motivated to act in defence of sacred values, which come to embody their wider, and to a large extent, imagined, community. Sacred values, Atran argues, play on the evolutionary mechanisms of “parochial altruism”, which drive people towards violent, seemingly irrational, behaviour, in defence of these communities, (p. 193). These communities are predicated on sacred values that serve to give people both a collective and an individual identity. When the former subsumes the latter, through “identity fusion”, so that group membership becomes foundational to an individual's identity, they can become predisposed towards, “... extreme progroup behavior when the group is threatened.” (p. 197).

Identity fusion is therefore a fundamental component of radicalisation according to the DAM. Sacred values alone, devoid of context, Atran argues, are seldom enough to

engender the requisite parochial altruism behind much violent extremism. Instead, it is the capacity for these sacred values to bind individuals to their imagined kin, which makes them potent motivators of such violence. Their ability to aggregate a wider community renders them the transcendental and supreme values from which their adherents derive their goals, and the impetus achieving them. Sacred values are themselves the products of groups of people within a certain context, and are thus subject to the interpretations of those contexts and groups by the people therein. By sharing sacred values, individuals can share the goals they engender, strengthening their social bonds and feelings of belonging in the process. This sense of shared mission or destiny serves to facilitate identity fusion. Importantly, as research by Sheikh, *et al*, (2012) suggests, when devoted actors perceive an existential threat from out-groups to their in-group and concomitant sacred values, they are more likely to demonstrate commitment through extreme parochial altruism. Thus, the joint struggle of individuals who contextualise their sacred values and in-groups in opposition to existential threats, serves to intensify their identity fusion and reinforce their commitment to their values and groups.

As with other models of radicalisation, social networks play a pivotal role in DAM. It is through social networks of close kin (i.e. friends and family), that an individual comes to share their sacred values, fusing their identities further, and increasing the felt sacredness of their values. These close-knit networks contextualise their sacred values based on their shared culture and history and what these mean in the present. A system of mutual reinforcement occurs, whereby sacred values are contextualised by a perceived threat that intensifies identity fusion between those values, and an in-group which in turn engenders greater commitment to the group/values, and an attendant altruistic obligation towards violent extremism. Hence, violent extremists are *devoted actors*, devoutly following their convictions. According to Atran, they are

deontic actors, in that they follow a deontic logic (the logic stemming from a deep ethical sense of duty and service to a higher morality of cause) similar to that advocated in the deontological morality of the philosopher Immanuel Kant. Deontic actors are guided by the preservation and propagation of immutable moral absolutes in their decisions and actions (p. 193). From the perspective of DAM, however, serving these moral absolutes is akin to serving the preservation and consolidation of identity-infused communities, both imagined and real, as devotion to one's close kin is transmuted into devotion to one's infused identity/sacred values. Both SQT and DAM indicate that narratives serve specific functions within the radicalisation process, providing and articulating *moral motivations* for violent extremism. It may be that the pursuit of significance creates devotion to sacred values, or that a perceived threat to sacred values arouses the need for significance, or perhaps that both reinforce each other simultaneously. Nevertheless, narratives, by providing meaning-frameworks, formulate and explicate specific values thereby allowing the actions that best serve them to be identified. In doing so they provide the motivation behind both violent extremist ends and means.

Implications for Narratives

For Atran (2016), it is not just the perceived sacredness of values that motivates VE, but the perceived threat to those values, and to the community which is seen as embodying them and with which a person identifies to the exclusion of other ultimate causes. Indeed, Atran argues, a person becomes more "fused" to such communities through the sense of shared threat, and through the *collective* struggle with close kin (real or imagined, socio-cultural or ideological) to defend those "sacred values" that they are perceived to embody. *Belief*, therefore, not only in sacred values, but particularly

threatened sacred values (and their attendant communities), appears central to radicalisation, according to the DAM. Here again, as with UIT, there arises the question of the extent to which such beliefs are the subject of an explicit ideology and narration? Once again, the need for having conceptual clarity also arises, in order to understand the role of narratives, regarding ideology and radicalisation.

The DAM is highly relevant to the role of narratives, certainly to the extent that it highlights the ideological and value-generating function of narrative in the context of upholding ‘higher’ values’ and ‘sacred’ causes, and more specifically to how the narrative encoding ideological convictions relate to beliefs which cement group-identity, and how the actions they inspire are rooted in notions of existential threat to their survival. According to Atran (2016), sacred values that are defined through a threat dynamic can create a deontic obligation for their adherents, motivating their participation in (taboo-breaking and even self-sacrificial) acts of violence. Clearly therefore, the role of beliefs, and belief formation, is relevant to the sacred/communal duty, which the DAM holds to be the causal mechanism for inspiring VE.

It is noteworthy that in his book *Talking to the Enemy*, after detailing the empirical research that informed the DAM, Atran (2010) stresses the importance of not overplaying the role of (explicitly articulated) ideology. Atran argues that, “...However simple and appealing may be the notion of an ideology as a self-replicating high-fidelity “meme,” psychologically that’s pretty baseless and unrelated to how the mind actually works – almost as distant from reality as the claim that religion itself is the greater cause of human group violence.” (p. 426). What is particularly important, is the concept of ideology being discussed here. The reference to self-replicating “memes” stems from the wider critique of the “New Atheists” being made throughout the chapter. Atran argues that seminal New Atheists authors give too much weight to ideology, and religion in particular, when

describing what they see as the causes of human violence. According to this argument, the concept of a meme (self-replicating human beliefs, transmitted between humans), oversimplifies how humans within, and across, groups come to share the same ideas. Highlighting Dawkins' (2007, p. 204) explicit comparison of human minds to computers, Atran (2010) criticises such theories for portraying humans as "robotic learners," (p. 419) as this leaves out the interaction of networks, communities, and contexts that are integral to the formation of people's beliefs.

The concept of ideology being criticised here is perhaps somewhat limited, or at least limited to the kind of concepts advanced by prominent New Atheists, which reduces VE ideology to being simply contagious bad ideas. Consequently, it seems necessary to go beyond the computer virus metaphor for ideologies in the context of radicalisation, which as Atran argues, lacks psychological understanding and explanatory power. Nevertheless, to the extent that ideologies pertain to beliefs about sacred values, (i.e. their being threatened) then these are highly relevant to radicalisation, as the DAM paradigm emphasizes. Given that ideological beliefs regarding sacred values do not transmit like computer viruses, then how such beliefs come to be held, is inexorably bound up with the question of why it is they are held. Accordingly, the need to consider the psychology of radicalisation alongside the psychology of narratives and interpretation, becomes more pertinent. This would enable, a more context-specific conception of how narratives, and ideology are embodied within, and applied by the networks and communities which Atran argues are central to creating devoted actors.

Both SQT and DAM indicate that narratives serve specific functions within the radicalisation process, providing and articulating *moral motivations* and moral license for violent extremism. It may be that the pursuit of significance creates devotion to sacred values, or that a perceived threat to sacred values arouses the need for significance, or

perhaps that both reinforce each other simultaneously. Nevertheless, narratives, by providing meaning-frameworks, symbolically encode in a cohesive story/version of reality and hence explicate specific values while simultaneously identifying the actions that best serve them. In doing so they provide the motivation behind both violent extremist ends and means.

Summary of Experimental Theories

Taken together, these theories, despite their different terminology, converge on the recognition that narratives are involved in several of the key psychological mechanisms involved in radicalization as is evidenced by experimental studies. Moreover, it would seem that these mechanisms overlap, or are interlinked to such a degree that they can be viewed as the different (though still interlinked), functions of the same beliefs, which together comprise VE narratives, as they exist as part of the radicalisation process. Firstly, there is clear evidence that the way a person relates to those others, whom can be described as their in-group, both in terms of their close kin within a network, and the wider communities (however real or imagined) with whom they identify, is causally important to radicalisation. All three theories have a measurably important communal factor to their psychological mechanisms, e.g. group identification in UIT, identity fusion in the DAM, and narrative sharing networks in SQT. They also suggest that this communal aspect is largely mediated through ideology, sacred values, or narratives, respectively. Indeed, all three use different conceptual frameworks to highlight the role played in the path to premeditated violence by communally shared beliefs which orientate individuals towards their respective groups, including the VE groups who claim to act on their behalf.

This communal aspect is perhaps inseparable from another function of VE narratives, indicated by the above studies, that is, their capacity to provide a means of normative orientation for their adherents. The devoted actors, outlined in the DAM, are inspired to deontic actions, out of loyalty to real or imagined communities with whom they identify. Sacred values, according to the DAM, derive their sacrality by being seen as embodied and infused in these communities, hence the concept of *identity fusion*. Similarly, with UIT, a group's "prototypes" serve to enable certainty of identity, by demarcating "us" from "them", providing clear normative standards to uphold, and actions to take as expressions of devotion to the cause. There is a clear moral, ethical component of group identification through adherence to group prototypes, which advocate, indeed sanctify, actions taken for the greater good of the group. Furthermore, Hogg (2005) argues ideology is essential to a person's understanding of these prototypes and the actions they render morally necessary, to the extent that it creates the required group "entitativity" for resolving uncertain, incoherent, fragmented identities into certain, cohesive, total ones. SQT also points to the morally prescriptive aspect of narratives, which act as "meaning-frameworks" that serve to provide clear norms and propose courses of action for achieving a group's collectively shared goals. For SQT, narratives are essential to VE, because they direct their adherents to violence as a justifiable, and potentially effective means of pursuing such goals, and thus restoring/achieving a sense of significance.

Moral clarity, and particularly the provision of ethically clear courses of action, coincides with another, perhaps more general function of VE narratives, evidenced by the above research; that of abolishing ambiguity and delivering certainty. UIT explicitly holds the reduction of doubt, particularly self-doubt, to be the key psychological driver for motivating membership of VE groups. Likewise, the need for

closure (NFC) is essential to providing/restoring significance, according to SQT. Indeed, SQT identifies narratives as fulfilling this need through the depiction of Manichean struggles that dramatize the conflict between the ‘sacred’ values of the community and external enemies who threaten them in narratives which unambiguously situate their adherents on the side of good. By doing this, they also simultaneously provide a clear path towards restoring significance, by framing a political, social, cultural, ethnic or religious grievance in unambiguous terms, which thus enables it to be resolved through similarly unambiguous actions, conceived as a ‘struggle’ to overcome ‘evil’.

Accordingly, the interconnectedness of the psychological functions identified becomes clear, as the certainty which narratives provide is evidently a directed certainty, i.e. towards a sense of identity inseparable from the community of values it is devoted to, and the moral actions required to serve specific, and specifically defined, identity groups. Even with the DAM, which does not explicitly identify certainty and a total sense of being ‘right’ as part of its causal mechanism, the moral imperative of defending one’s sacred values/identity-fused groups, creates a *clear* understanding which obliges devoted actors to become violent actors in times of perceived existential threat to the community.

Qualitative Frameworks

The Two-Pyramids Model

McCauley and Moskalenko (2017) outline the Two-Pyramids Model (TPM) of radicalisation, in which they emphasise the degree to which most of those who could be considered as having extremist beliefs, including *violent* extremist beliefs, do not go on to commit extreme action or violence. They go on to criticise what they consider to be

the elision of radical ideas and radical actions, which can lead to mechanical notions of a “conveyer belt”, whereby radical ideologies gradually drive their adherents to violence (p. 211). Accordingly, McCauley and Moskaleiko distinguish between an opinion pyramid and an actions pyramid as a framework for accounting for VE. The opinion pyramid is a scale of radical belief, whereby those who have little to no thoughts on a political cause, or ‘neutrals,’ form the base, and as their sympathy for, or inner commitment to, the cause increases, the higher they ascend the pyramid, and the greater their support for violence to further that cause. Support for violence increases from “sympathisers” to “justifiers,” with the peak of the opinion pyramid consisting of those who feel violence is a “personal moral obligation” in pursuit of their cause. Similarly, the action pyramid is a scale measuring the radicalism of behaviour. As one ascends the action pyramid, the more extreme their actions become in pursuit of a given political cause. This pyramid ranges from those who do nothing for a cause, or “inerts,” to those engaged in legal political action, known as “activists,” those engaged in illegal action, labelled “radicals,” and finally, those at the peak of the pyramid who become “terrorists.” Although, the authors stress that both scales do not necessarily represent linear “stairway” models, as a person can skip whole levels (e.g. activist to terrorist) for various other reasons than just ideological development (e.g. status, revenge or love). (McCauley and Moskaleiko, 2017, p. 211-212).

One notable aspect of the TPM is that it holds commitment to, and engagement in, violence, as being the apex of radicalised individuals, in both the opinion and action pyramids respectively. At the same time, McCauley and Moskaleiko emphasise that endorsement of, or engagement in, violence, is not the defining feature of those who hold radical opinions, and that such opinions alone are seldom the prerequisite for violence. The implication being that de-radicalising initiatives would need to address commitment

to violence as something other than the logical conclusion of an ideological “conveyer belt.” The authors argue, instead, that extremist violence predominantly results from personal drives, particularly emotions such as revenge, love and status (p. 209). Indeed, the authors criticise the usage of the term “radicalisation” itself, because, they argue, it is too often used to connote a linear process, typically driven by ideology. By contrast, the TPM approach does not itself offer a single causal mechanism or process, like other models e.g. DAM and SQT. Instead, it proposes typologies of those who become violent actors, at the peaks of the opinion, or action pyramids.

In the case of “lone-wolf terrorists,” McCauley and Moskalenko (2014) distinguish between “disconnected-disordered,” and “caring-compelled” perpetrators. Disconnected-disordered attackers are typically socially isolated individuals, with psychological disorders, whose actions are based on a personal or political grievance. Sometimes these grievances can overlap, as in the case of the Fort Hood shooter, Major Nidal Malik Hasan, who, “...saw himself discriminated against as a Muslim (personal grievance) and saw the war on terrorism as a war on Islam (political grievance).” (p. 82). The authors, refer to “unfreezing,” as being situational factors that destabilise a person’s sense of self-worth, e.g. a personal failure, loss of relationship, illness, or a perceived negative change in circumstances. In the case of Hasan, the authors argue his “unfreezing” likely arose from the death of his parents, and his impending deployment to Afghanistan. Accordingly, the disconnected-disordered terrorist can be motivated to violence through both a political grievance and personal factors such as the need to (re)gain status.

Caring-compelled lone-wolf terrorists, by contrast, are typically more socially connected, and do not necessarily suffer from significant personal hardship. They feel morally obliged to commit acts of terrorism by their sympathy for those they perceive to be victims of injustice. As an example of this type they suggest Vera Zasulich, a 19th

century Russian dissident, who assassinated General-Governor Fyodor Trepov for his flogging of a student activist. Notably, Zasulich did not suffer personal humiliation, and did not exhibit any signs of psychological disorder, her actions were, according to McCauley and Moskalenko (2014, p.74), motivated by an abnormally strong emotional response to the unjust suffering of others, with whom she empathised. McCauley and Moskalenko, (2017) point out that caring-compelled terrorists possibly challenge the TPM, to the extent that they demonstrate that “sympathy-induced outrage may be only one of the emotions that can push radical opinions to radical action” (p. 213). Although, here they still emphasise the emotional component as it relates to “radical opinions”.

In addition to their “lone-wolf” typologies, McCauley and Moskalenko (2017), identify mechanisms at two levels, “individual-level mechanisms”, and, “group-level mechanisms.” At the individual level, “...love, risk and status, slippery slope, and un-freezing” can drive people towards radical action, whilst at the group-level, “...polarization, competition, and isolation and threat,” can inspire, “...radical action in the absence of radical ideas.” (p. 212). Indeed, from their perspective, “Radicalization of opinion is a phenomenon of mass psychology,” distinct from radicalisation of action that occurs at the group, and individual level. (p. 213). Accordingly, they suggest that CVE strategies place greater focus on these levels, particularly their emotional components, rather than seeking to combat radical ideas, under the false-assumption that these are the necessary antecedents to radical actions. The evidential basis for TPM’s typologies, and emotional mechanisms, comes from case studies of individual terrorists in earlier work by McCauley and Moskalenko (2011), as well as research based on Social Movement Theory by della Porta (2013).

Implications for Narratives

The implications of the TPM perspective on VE, are perhaps, more ambivalent than those of other theories. Firstly, it is important to note that rather than providing an overarching framework for explaining the radicalisation process, the TPM's framework describes the various levels of support for, and involvement in, VE movements. The causal mechanisms it does offer to explain why a person commits VE, centre on the particular emotional intensities, and life circumstances, of specific individuals, and the small groups of which they are members. Given that the TPM is premised on the gulf between the number of people who hold extreme views, and the number which engage in extreme actions, then TPM would certainly seem to suggest that, to the extent that narratives inform these views, they are relatively unimportant for motivating VE. Indeed, the authors vehemently oppose what they see as ideological "convey-belt" explanations of VE, where terrorism follows from VE beliefs. They oppose this approach to such a degree that the notion of someone engaging in terrorism purely out of them reaching the peak of the opinion pyramid, as in the case of "caring-compelled" terrorists, was viewed as a potential challenge to the model. Exactly why this might be is however unclear, as the large numerical disparity between those holding radical opinions and those who engage in radical actions (on which the two pyramids distinction is based), is unaffected by the small number of people who do engage in radical actions *because* of their radical beliefs.

Moreover, that terrorists might be motivated by their views would not seem to contradict the role of emotions, which McCauley and Moskalenko argue are key to explaining acts of terrorism, the peak of the action pyramid. The same is true in reverse, unless that is, one entirely separates beliefs from emotions. This, perhaps, points to the key aspect of the TPM framework, which explains why it holds beliefs, or "opinion" to

be significantly less important than other models/theories of radicalisation, and may also provide insights regarding how to conceptualise narratives and beliefs in terms of radicalisation. For instance, McCauley and Moskalenko, criticise the US government for defining violent extremists as being “ideologically motivated,” claiming that this completely negates emotional reactions as a motivation for terrorism, arguing that, “...A motive as simple as revenge for perceived Western humiliation of Muslims (Khouri, 2015) is not conceivable under this definition.” (p. 213). Presumably, therefore, such a perception is not derived from, or at least influenced by, an ideology or narrative. Also, the perception of a humiliation, those blamed for it, and their alleged aims, presumably does not form part of a VE ideology, VE narrative, or just part of the opinion pyramid? Quite how such perceptions and “simple” motives come to be, is not exactly clear, other than being fuelled by the emotional states proposed by the authors. However, this would appear somewhat circular, and is, in any case, a problem that only arises when one entirely separates opinions from emotions, requiring one to happen before or after the other.

Nevertheless, McCauley and Moskalenko do not explicitly separate emotion from belief, suggesting that what they mean by “opinion” does not exactly correspond with the term belief, or perception. It may be that that the authors are distinguishing a rhetorical/ideological premise (i.e. the humiliation of Muslims by the West), from a person’s sentiment (i.e. how they feel emotionally as part of that perceived humiliation). Seen in this light, what McCauley and Moskalenko (2017) might be seeking to challenge when they criticise ideological “convey belt” notions of radicalisation is a view that resembles a kind of accumulation of ideological premises, whereby one idea leads to another, in a more-or-less pre-determined way, as a person follows an argument to its logical conclusion, with little to no role for their sentiment. Criticising such a reductionist view would be understandable, but it does not address the connection between an

ideological premise and a person's sentiment. Rather, it would appear that in attempting to redress concepts which "elide ideas and action" (p. 211) the authors risk eliding the role of beliefs in motivating terrorism all together.

Why, for instance, is placing great personal value on one group, and holding intense enmity towards another, not both an individual and group level mechanism centred on *both* beliefs and emotions to the extent that both inform how a person understands the world? With this question in mind a useful heuristic for understanding the role of narratives in VE must explain what role narratives play in eliciting or directing the emotions, which as McCauley and Moskalenko argue, separates radical actors from a wider group of those holding radical opinions. Crucially, the most relevant insight of TPM, is that it indicates that the narrative heuristic must explain what turns an extremist narrative into a *violent* extremist narrative. That is, how do those at the top of the action pyramid understand their world differently to those below them? Is it that their beliefs about others are more extreme, or is it that their beliefs about themselves i.e. what actions they should take, and why, differ... or is it a combination of both factors? A narrative heuristic that could explain these differences may be able to apply the insights of the TPM in a way which affords a more comprehensive analysis of how VE understand the violence they carry out. It might also resolve the challenge to the TPM, which the authors themselves argue, arises from "caring-compelled" terrorists at the peak of the opinion pyramid.

Moghaddam's Staircase

Moghaddam (2005), outlines a broad and sequential 5 stage process, or "staircase," leading to terrorism. This staircase model is designed partly to iterate the need

for a preventative approach to countering VE, which seeks to address the earlier stages, before they can develop into the latter, more severe, stages. Although, there is linear procession of stages, each with the potential to lead to the next, it should be noted that Moghaddam's staircase is not a causal model, rather it seeks to outline a "...general framework within which to organize current psychological knowledge and to help direct future research and policy," (p.162).

According to Moghaddam, the staircase to terrorism begins with a ground level, comprising a person's basic perception of injustice regarding an issue, or group, particularly those with which a person already identifies. The majority of people could be categorised as being on this level, according to Moghaddam, to the extent they are aware of contemporary political issues on which they have some moral position. By having such a position, they are led to consider what ought to happen in order to redress their perceived grievances. A person enters the second level when their beliefs around such issues give rise to "displacement of aggression," whereby a hostile attitude develops towards a general out-group, or antagonist, whom they see as causing an injustice, or obstructing its solution (p. 164). At the third level the enmity towards this antagonist intensifies, as the person reaches a level of "moral engagement" with terrorist groups or individuals whom they view as providing increasingly convincing answers for redressing the original (though by now at least somewhat ideologically articulated) grievance. This "moral engagement" with VE ideologies coincides with a moral disengagement from wider society, whose norms gradually come to be felt as incompatible with the ideology, and the remedial actions it proscribes. Consequently, those at the third level begin to lead "parallel lives," in which they keep their recently acquired morality (and subsequent rejection of their wider society's morality) secret (p. 165).

The fourth level involves active participation in a terrorist organisation, or network. This requires complete conviction regarding the group's or personal ideology, particularly the Manichean distinctions it draws between friend and foe, and most importantly the violent actions they subsequently prescribe. According to Moghaddam, it is extremely difficult for a person to reverse course at level four, as their life is completely subsumed within VE networks, and the ideology they share. Their options are, by this point, limited to those prescribed by their network/ideology. At the fifth level the staircase reaches its ultimate conclusion in acts of terrorism. The binary distinctions between good and evil, both justify, and even compel, the deliberate targeting of civilians, whose deaths are perceived as the only option for resolving the grievance (initially identified at level one). In this respect, stage 5 essentially categorises those individuals who actively apply, through violence, the morality with which they are inculcated (or inculcate themselves) at stage four. Importantly, for Moghaddam, the terrorism of stage five cannot occur, and thus be understood, without the nascent sense of grievance at stage one, and the subsequent ascension of the psychological staircase he outlines.

Implications for Narratives

Moghaddam's staircase framework both coheres with, and differs from, other radicalisation theories, such as the TPM and SQT, in ways that are fundamental to understanding the role of narratives. Firstly, although the staircase explicitly does not offer a causal mechanism, it does posit radicalisation as being something akin to experiencing a gradual reduction of options and elimination of peaceful resolutions or courses of action for addressing morally loaded issues. The staircase begins when those confronted by a situation, "...climb to the first floor in search of solutions," (p. 162)

particularly one which they perceive to be an affront to their wider (real or imagined) community. As they ascend the staircase further, their search narrows as the number of viable solutions decreases, particularly those which are in the range of normatively (and eventually legally) acceptable actions of wider society. VE ideologies are adopted, in part, as an explicit rejection of formerly viable non-violent options, when the individual becomes “morally engaged” with terrorist organisations, and simultaneously morally disengaged from societal norms. What this suggests is that the progressive adoption of VE ideology serves to clarify, and reduce, the range of available courses of moral action intended to address a political grievance. Here, VE ideology would therefore seem to serve the same function as that of narratives within SQT, which similarly afford adherents with a means for achieving ideologically shaped moral goals. What is left out, however, is what occurs, and how, psychologically at the individual stages that leads one to reject certain views, or actions and adopt others. This perhaps points to the relevance of interpretive/narrative theories, which focus on the creation, or reduction, of meaning, as part of how one perceives the truth.

Notably, the processual nature of Moghaddam’s staircase differs substantially from the TPM, which is based on the critique of linear processes, particularly those involving ideological commitment, perhaps akin the Moghaddam’s “moral engagement.” However, it is unclear to what extent moral engagement differs from emotional engagement, or specifically the emotional responses which McCauley and Moskalenko (2017) argue are key drivers of VE. To be sure, moral engagement refers to commitment to a group, its ideology and aims, rather than *just* the intensity of one’s emotions towards a political grievance. However, is this engagement not, at least in part, driven by emotion? Perhaps emotion is part of the frustration with less extreme means of action, as suggested by Moghaddam’s scheme? Instead of attempting to parse emotions from

ideological beliefs, it may be more useful to examine how the relationship between the two, as part of a wider interpretation of the world, inspires terrorism. Doing this would, perhaps, offer a more holistic explanation of how beliefs and ideology work with emotions, and thus serve to direct VE towards terrorism. What is therefore needed is a heuristic for understanding how VE interpret, or narrate, reality in such a way to negate or eliminate non-extreme courses of action in concert with the intensity of emotion VE feel as part of those interpretations/narratives.

Contrast Societies and De-pluralisation

Moghaddam's notion of radicalisation as being a process of increased commitment towards goals, alongside a decreased range of action for their realisation, also coheres with Koehler's (2015) concept of ideological de-pluralisation. Koehler's research into the role of the internet in radicalisation offers a useful conceptualisation of how VE orthodoxies can develop, through the interplay of narratives and networks. Citing the controversy surrounding attempts to define terms such as radicalisation and extremism, Koehler's proposed concept is worth quoting in full, as it emphasises the relevance of meaning, particularly the *reduction* of meaning, with which narratives are concerned. Accordingly, "...radicalization can be understood as a process of individual depluralization of political concepts and values (e.g. justice, freedom, honour, violence, democracy) according with those concepts employed by a specific ideology." (p. 126). De-pluralisation, in this sense, renders alternative concepts less and less valid, the greater degree of radicalisation, thereby legitimising acts of symbolically targeted violence.

Koehler proposes de-pluralisation as part of a wider framework for understanding VE movements, which centres on what he terms "contrast societies". Contrast societies

are similar to what are sometimes referred to as, “counter-cultures”, in that they oppose the prevailing norms and values of mainstream society. However, unlike the typically more benign counter cultures, contrast societies seek to alter or destroy these norms and values in order to realise a purified society which accords with their ideology. Thus, contrast societies are in ideological competition with their host societies, whom they target with various means designed to transpose their de-pluralised conceptions and narratives onto potential recruits. This can take the form of various actions that form part of what Koehler terms, a movement’s “infrastructure,” including song lyrics, polemics, slogans and terrorist attacks. Importantly, Koehler considers these actions to be “framing acts” as they seek to transform the interpretative frames by which a target society will receive the contrast society’s narratives/ideology (p. 29). Here, Koehler is drawing on work on semiotic framing by Borah (2011) according to whom the political strand of Framing Theory, “usually refers to ‘characterisations’ of a course of action where a central idea provides meaning to the event” (p. 284).

The role of ideology and the production of these interpretive frames is under-researched, according to Koehler (p. 26). However, the imputation of meaning is clearly central to motivating contrast societies, who are themselves attempting to claim hegemony for the meaning they hold for political concepts. However, Koehler also notes that the role of ideology and narratives in motivating VE groups is somewhat disputed in the literature on social movements from which he draws to formulate his “contrast society” framework. This stems from a definition of ideology, echoing that used by Hogg (2005), which emphasises the coherence and group unanimity it provides and is thus, reminiscent of McCauley and Moskalenko’s critique, assumes a, “...greater correspondence between ideology and behaviour than might be the case” Koehler (2015,

p. 26). Koehler therefore argues for a conception of ideology that coheres with framing theory.

Thus, Koehler draws on the morphological approach to studying ideologies developed by Freeden (1996), which revolves around the notion of de-pluralisation arising from the need to make (political) decisions. Freeden broadly describes ideologies as, "...systems of political thinking, loose or rigid, deliberate or unintended, through which individuals and groups construct an understanding of the political world they, or those who preoccupy their thoughts, inhabit, and then act on that understanding" (p. 3). According to Freeden, (2015, p. 93-105), de-pluralisation stems from the "finality drive" of ideologies, which is the attempt to arrest the meaning of political concepts permanently in order to provide a stable basis for decision making.

This approach to defining ideology, Koehler argues, coheres with framing theory, and the concept of framing acts. These acts are designed by contrast societies to render, i.e. de-pluralise, the meaning of concepts, or transpose already de-pluralised, disambiguated concepts onto their target society by *framing* such concepts in deliberately contrasting ways. Moreover, Koehler argues that Freeden's approach addresses the critiques of ideology made in previous literature, as it, "...maintains a notion of ideology as a dynamic and flexible system that implies neither a high degree of coherence necessarily," nor "...ideological unanimity among adherents, nor even correspondence with behaviour." (p. 28). That is, it refers to the conceptually bound understandings of a situation (or situationally bound understandings of a concept, to the extent that the meaning of both situations and concepts are co-dependent), by which a person interprets the world, and the subsequent situations they wish to create. What is thus clear, as Koehler states, is that indictment of the target societies, as being in need of radical change,

requires a kind of ideological (meaning) framework that defines (sacred) values, and what threatens them (p. 28-9).

Additionally, the concept of contrast societies endorses Moghaddam's notion of a continuum of moral engagement with VE ideologies, and subsequent disengagement from societal norms. As with the staircase framework, contrast societies carry out terrorist acts *because* they are an explicit rejection of the societal norms they seek to uproot and eradicate. When members of a contrast society adhere to de-pluralised political concepts, the wider society to which they belong becomes morally incompatible with their increasingly narrowly-defined and puritanical value system. This inspires or compels such adherents to find ways of reducing the plurality of their host society's values in line with their own limited conceptions. Importantly, as the values themselves become more opposed to those held by the host society, so too do the means of achieving them, as the continuum of legitimate action becomes similarly inverted. Terrorism and violence become justifiable, and potentially necessary, whilst peaceful means are seen as impotent, or undesirable (particularly if they are seen as legitimising the target/host society's incompatible values).

Following Moghaddam, the de-pluralised concepts of contrast societies emerge, in part, as a response to dissatisfaction with a society's legitimised range of actions to resolving its legitimised range of grievances. As meaning becomes de-pluralised (the ascent of Moghaddam's staircase), this range shrinks until it is rejected all together, and a person comes to sympathise with an opposed range of means and ends, i.e. those proposed by a contrast society, whose actions and goals are subsequently limited to being outside societal norms. Accordingly, both Koehler's contrast societies and Moghaddam's staircase support a view of radicalisation which hinges on the reduction of possible meanings a person ascribes to his or her ultimate values and goals, in tandem with a

reduced range of viable options for realising or achieving them. Though crucially, in both cases these are in direct *opposition* to societal norms.

Implications for Narratives

The contrast society framework places much importance on the role of meaning, particularly as it relates to ideology and ideological frames. Koehler notes that ideology, particularly as it pertains to social movements, overlaps substantially with what are sometimes termed narratives, which he describes as a "...related but somewhat competing concept" (p. 25), citing Polletta (1998), who defines narratives as "chronicles invested with moral meaning through emplotment"¹ (p. 140). Both Freedman's approach to ideology, and Polletta's definition of narratives, would therefore seem relevant to the framing theory on which the contrast societies paradigm is based. Moreover, Koehler cites Snow's (2004) description of social movements as, "...signifying agents engaged in the production and maintenance of meaning for protagonists, antagonists, and bystanders. (...) The resultant products of this framing activity within the social movement arena are referred to as 'collective action frames.'" (p. 384) These frames would therefore seem to be both ideological, and narrated, to the extent that they incorporate *applied* moral beliefs based on pre-existing understandings of reality, as they relate to (or have "emplotment" with) past, present, or future, collective action frames. This suggests that narratives and ideology are mutually involved in how VE contrast societies frame themselves, their actions, and their target societies, and consequently are both mutually involved in de-pluralisation, and thus radicalisation. Accordingly, a heuristic for understanding the role

¹ Ricoeur (1992) describes emplotment as the union of multiple heterogeneous events or incidents into *one* story. By configuring such events and incidents together within a temporal sequence, emplotment transforms them into a coherent whole, what Ricoeur describes as, "...drawing a configuration out of a succession." (p. 22). Thus, narration is for Ricoeur fundamentally an act of synthesis.

of narratives should, in light of the contrast societies framework, explicate the relationship between narratives, ideology and the creation of “collective action frames,” which involve both the application, and de-pluralisation, of meaning by VE to the world around them.

Another implication for the role of narratives, is that, to the extent that they inform meaning (following Koehler’s framework), they may have a causal role in radicalisation. By de-pluralising and thus reducing to a single, absolute, fanatically followed truth, the meaning ascribed to the political concepts or values which VE seek to advance, narratives simultaneously re-pluralise the meaning of what they deem unacceptable, as the ever-increasing range of denigrated societal norms grows in relation to the ever-decreasing range of acceptable norms. All that which does not conform to VE ideals must therefore be overturned, as, following the logic of Manicheanisation, an increasingly narrow conception of what is moral creates an ever wider conception of what is immoral. Here, the similarity between de-pluralisation and the moral engagement that leads to the binaries of “us” and “them,” as proposed by Moghaddam (2005, p. 165-6), suggests a corresponding re-pluralisation of all that is deemed immoral, and subsequent moral disengagement from wider society. In this respect the narratives of VE contrast societies, are themselves fundamentally counter-narratives; that is, they are inseparable from the society, and the societal narratives, it seeks to change.

Koehler’s framework also suggests that narratives have a fundamental role in decision making, and directing VE both towards goals and the means for achieving them. This coheres with Moghaddam’s staircase, which is not just about progressive disenfranchisement, it is also fundamentally about making decisions, or more specifically the narrowing down of options, for resolving moral issues (originating at level one of the staircase). Similarly, Koehler’s notion of de-pluralisation draws on Freedén’s (1996)

approach to ideologies, as they pertain to the need to make (political) decisions and formulate action plans. Ideological de-pluralisation can be seen as providing the progressive reduction of options, which perhaps forms the trajectory of Moghaddam's staircase, leading to simplified binary decisions based on moral absolutes.

Alternatively, it may be that de-pluralisation *is* the progressive reduction of options, whereby those ascending the staircase feel as though they are reaching an epiphanic "moment of truth," wherein they achieve the certainty required to most effectively address the original issue, identified at the first step of the staircase. Here, Freedom's concept of "finality drive" appears most apposite, as is at the last stage of the staircase that any sense of ambiguity surrounding a person's actions is finally resolved. For those who reach this stage, there can be no other way. Indeed, this would cohere with the absolutist deontic morality which Atran (2016) argues *compels* devoted actors to commit terrorism. However, what remains unclear, is how this process of de-pluralisation unfolds. Given that ideological "collective action frames" must necessarily be applied by VE contrast societies, this would imply that ideology, and ideological understandings of situations cannot be divorced, and may therefore, by definition, have to be narrated. This suggests that narratives are either vehicles for meaning, to the extent they involve interdependent frames, and/or are themselves the application of meaning to situations, past, present, and future.

Again, understanding exactly how a person de-pluralises meaning through VE narratives, would require research and theories that specifically examine the relationship between narratives and meaning. Indeed, any heuristic that sought to explain how narratives function in radicalisation would have to explain how they render alternative meanings and courses of action, particularly those offered by wider society as being immoral and ineffective. Certainly, the meaning VE ascribe to the world, particularly the

target societies or spheres of human reality within them that become their theatres of struggle and action, appears integral to both Moghaddam's and Koehler's frameworks. Consequently, to what extent this meaning, and the subsequent response of VE groups is narrated, warrants further investigation.

Meaning, Nomos and Heroic Doubling

Griffin (2012, 2017) develops the concept of "heroic doubling," as part of his framework for understanding VE, according to which individuals generate heroic versions of themselves, whose morality justifies, or necessitates, (to them heroic) acts of terrorism. Through engaging in such acts, the "heroic self" imbues an individual's life with the meaning, or purpose, their normal self might otherwise lack. The concept draws on work by Lifton (1986), whose interviews with former Nazi doctors from concentration camps led him to propose the role of alternative selves, or doubles, in the perpetration of experimentation of extreme barbarity which are still remembered as among some of the more gruesome events of the Holocaust. These doubles were effectively induced by the extreme contexts, and institutions, to which such individuals belonged because of years of indoctrination by the Third Reich. This induced the formation of an ideologically reinforced and hermetically sealed compartment within their personality structure. The result was that they operated while "at work" in a separate moral universe within which they were morally licensed and psychologically empowered to perform extreme in humane acts, inconceivable within their "normal self", which continued to retain the capacity for loving human relations in the private sphere of home and intimate relations.

Griffin (2017) combines Lifton's model with work by Carl Jung, Otto Rank, also a student of Freud, and the "existential anthropologist", Ernest Becker, and in fact

highlights the fact that Lifton cites Otto Rank's own earlier work on doubling which proposed the existence of unconscious, or repressed selves, he called "Doppelgängers," who comprised the negative and destructive traits that were disassociated from the everyday self. Jung, however, developed a similar theory of what he termed a person's "shadow". The shadow likewise comprised a person's unconscious negative traits, though crucially, these were in fact often a product of their heroic attempts to grapple with the moral realities they encountered. Moreover, it was only through acting out this "hero myth" as part of a personal "immortality project" (Becker) that an individual could come to terms with their, otherwise unknown, destructive negative self, as a necessary stage in the process of "individuation", or deepening self-knowing /self-improvement that can lead to the fully integrated human personality..

It is the separation and heroization of Jung's "shadow" or Rank's "Doppelgänger" that allows the theory of doubling to move beyond a situationally induced mechanism for dissociation, to an integral human motivation to have moral clarity in thought and action, albeit within a profoundly compartmentalised personality. Griffin (2012) discusses this heroic dimension further through the lens of Ernest Becker's theory of human "meaning generation" through myth, in particular his seminal, *The Denial of Death*, in which Becker proposes that the pursuit of heroism stems from the existential need to psychologically overcome one's mortality and achieve a sense of self-transcendence. This need, Becker argues, is achieved through "hero systems," the cultural, religious, or secular ideologies, which provide the necessary illusions of heroism, however mediocre, which allow people to transcend their fundamental finitude, their "creatureliness" (Becker, 1973, p. 87).

Moreover, as Griffin (2012) highlights, the sociologist Peter Berger's notion of a "sacred canopy," or nomos, served a similar function of shielding those under them from the terrifying meaninglessness, which would otherwise become apparent in the absence

of such canopies. (p. 25). The hero system of a person's nomos gives them, psychologically, their reason for continued existence. The corollary of this, however, was that by identifying with the side of good, the aspiring heroes often rely on identifying others as being their evil antithesis, or that which *ought* to be overcome. The projection of evil adversaries thus becomes integral to VE hero systems, which subsequently serve as means for symbolic immortality. By projecting evil in this way, the destruction of one's own adversaries is not only justified, but necessitated, as part of the hero's quest for immortality. Here, Jung's concept of the "shadow," i.e. the destructive side of moral striving, comes to the fore. A moral striving, that is, to overcome the perceived destructiveness of an enemy, for the furtherance, or survival of one's own nomos. It is through projecting malignancy onto others, i.e. those seen as threatening a nomos, that VE are able to project their own heroic doubles, who must subsequently act with their own extreme, but meaningful and seemingly heroic, morally sanctioned malignancy (though the "evil" is only perceived within the mindset of the demonized 'other'). Accordingly, a person's capacity to generate a heroic double is inextricably bound to their quest for a totalising nomos, or "meaningful order," on which they rely to imbue the world with moral, and existential meaning, and their lives with agency, purpose and self-transcendence.

Notably, heroic doubles are generated in response to an acute sense of the lack of existential meaning, or rather an intense, "fulfilling" sense of purpose and agency on the part of an individual, or in response to a challenge to the moral order or nomic community on which they rely for such meaning. A person who therefore loses their faith in what Becker (1973) would call the prevailing, "cultural illusion," which serves as a "... necessary ideology of self-justification", suffers a loss of meaning and their symbolic or mythic reason for living beyond their basic animal needs. (p. 188-9). The threat of this

symbolic, metaphysical death can motivate what Griffin (2012) describes as “Zealotic terrorists” (named after the anti-Roman ultra-orthodox Jewish terrorists in ancient Judea) who act in fanatical defence of their *nomos*, which they perceive to be under “siege” by forces which represent a threat to the very survival of their culture, traditions, or wider community. As an example, Griffin (2012, p. 39-43) cites recurring conflicts between Chechens and various Russian regimes. On the other hand, Griffin describes “Modernist terrorists,” as being motivated by the desire to inaugurate a new order of meaning, or *nomos*, through violent revolution. For these terrorists, there can be no going back to past orders, which have been irrecoverably buried by modernity, or the kind of modernity they perceive to be existentially bankrupt, and itself irreconcilable (p. 66). Griffin identifies the RWE Black terrorism of 1970s Italy, which was partly inspired by the Traditionalist author Julius Evola, who railed against what he perceived to be the spiritual failures of modernity, from a radical right perspective (p.145). In either case, from whatever direction a person’s *nomos* is threatened, VE heroic doubles can provide those, “...with a stressed, anomic, or chaotic inner life with a portal to powerful feelings of transcendence, wholeness, meaning, redemption, and symbolic immortality.” (Griffin, 2017, p. 359).

Implications for Narratives

Griffin’s explanatory paradigm is perhaps the most relevant qualitative framework for understanding the role of narratives in VE. This is because it ties a person’s conception of themselves, particularly their life’s purpose and how they should act accordingly, to their *beliefs* about their *time* and *place* in history. Heroic doubles most clearly result from a person’s desire, or need, to give their lives meaning, through imbuing

the wider socio-cultural context they inhabit, indeed often reality itself, with a greater transcendent, or nomic meaning. Crucially, this meaning arises from a person's understanding of how his or her life is embedded in a wider socio-cultural and historical context which threatens their sense of identity and agency, and their realisation that this context can be transformed by targeted acts of violence thereby restoring a complete sense of self and transcendent purpose. Following Griffin's paradigm, the human desire for meaning, and the meaning humans find, are inextricably bound to understandings of how to ensure the creation, or survival, of a nomos, which was once a communal cosmology preserved through ritual and tradition, but in the modern age can be located within an ideological or faith community or even in the mind of a single, isolated individual (though shaped by ambient politico-cultural influences). Based on their understandings of the past, and the present, VE are thus committed to ensuring that their nomos, or "meaningful orders," (Berger 1967), inhabit the future.

Following this paradigm, ideology, or at least ideological beliefs, do not (just) exist as abstract precepts, but are themselves the nomic meaning which individuals project onto themselves and others (friends or enemies), as well as their wider environment, and on which, the formation of *heroic doubles* depends. That is, heroic doubles are the very application of ideological, or at least nomic, beliefs to one's understanding of the world. They necessarily rely on the ability of individuals to situate themselves in a story, with an identifiable sacred canopy to defend, or (re)create, a cause whose reality transcends the limits of their own lives, and endows actions performed for the sake of that cause with an ethos of heroism and self-sacrifice. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine how heroic doubles could function without some kind of narrative, in which they become the protagonists. Griffin's paradigm would, therefore, seem to suggest that narratives are an integral part of radicalisation, to the extent that the self-perceived

heroisation of terrorists requires narration of themselves, in relation to the threats to their perceived nomos and the imperative to devote their life to defending it. To engage in a project of nomic defence, renewal, or creation, requires heroic projections of supraindividual, “cosmic” Manichean struggles (Griffin, 2017, p. 360) a “grand narrative” or “metanarrative” within which radicalising individuals emplot their individual life-line. A heuristic of VE narratives should consequently explain the extent to which these projections are themselves narrations, or how VE narratives inform such projections.

Griffin’s paradigm does indicate what VE narratives are likely to include, or what they must include in order to provide their adherents with heroic doubles. Similar to Atran’s (2016) devoted actors, who fight for their sacred values, heroic doubles engage in terrorism when their nomos is, “...threatened with disintegration or erosion by ‘culture-cidal’ (‘nomocidal’) forces perceived to be at work from within or without.” (Griffin 2012, p. 30). Narratives that not only depict a nomos, but also depict a “nomocidal” dynamic at work which must be reversed, would thus seem integral to the psychology of radicalisation through heroisation.

Summary of Qualitative Theories

There are several commonalities and relevant implications amongst the qualitative theories outlined above. Each theory suggests significant aspects of the role of narratives in radicalisation, based on their individual perspectives. Firstly, all four would seem to suggest that meaning, or rather the attribution of meaning within a specific ideology, and those aspects of the world they purport to describe, is essential to understanding the violence through which VE give their lives meaning, purpose and agency. Koehler’s

(2015) notion of de-pluralisation (of the meaning of political concepts) perhaps most explicitly points to this dynamic. Likewise, Griffin's (2012) application of the Berger's (1967) nomos concept, clearly indicates that the way VE ascribe meaning to reality, and in particular, feel called upon to actively engage in a struggle against the perceived loss of transcendent meaning in order to restore it, is an essential part of the process of heroic doubling. Realising that this nomic meaning stems, in the case of radicalising individuals, from their understanding of themselves as part of a wider temporal, dynamically changing, historical or cosmic order, and hence of a historical or cosmological plot or metanarrative, forms the basis of understanding how, for individual terrorists, a powerful sense of personal existential significance can be generated by their active intervention in the direction taken by that metanarrative. Indeed, the relationship between time and meaning, particularly as it pertains to VE perceiving their own temporal proximity to their nomos (past, present or future), perhaps indicates the importance of how VE narrate themselves as involved in a process of heroic doubling. Even the TPM, which was based on the explicit rejection of ideology (or at least opinion) as causing terrorism, would still seem to place much import on the role of meaning. Certainly, that is, the emotional meaning, experienced by VE, which McCauley and Moskalenko (2017) argue pushes those with radical beliefs into radical action, is the furthest the TPM goes towards providing a causal mechanism.

Another commonality, which suggests an integral role for narratives, is the adversarial way which VE ascribe meaning. For Moghaddam (2005) "moral engagement" with VE groups increases as one ascends the staircase towards terrorism. This moral engagement entails a simultaneous moral disengagement from society, and the socially accepted norms and means for pursuing political change. Likewise, Koehler's (2015) "contrast societies", are by definition, oppositional in nature, due to them being

founded on a rejection of their target society, and its prevailing political norms. Here the utility of qualitative frameworks becomes most evident, as both Moghaddam's staircase and Koehler's contrast societies demonstrate the context-dependence of VE. That is, they are, to a substantial degree, a product of the societies they seek to change, or at least the form they take is derived from the rejection of these societies. Similarly, Griffin's (2012) heroic doubling is also bound up with the state of moral and existential bankruptcy radicalising individuals ascribe to modern society as being the source of their personal anomy (lack of nomos or meaning) (p. 154). In the case of either modernist or zealous terrorists, it is the current or impending nomic disaster or collapse which characterises their opposition to their respective societies, and the motivation for their subsequent violence in a radical bid to catalyse the emergence of a new order. This suggests that the adversarial nature of VE movements necessarily requires an understanding of how they narrate themselves and emplot themselves within contemporary history and culture in relation to the societies they oppose. It also suggests that their beliefs surrounding the political, moral, and existential, inadequacy of the reality they encounter, ought to be addressed by any heuristic of narratives in radicalisation.

Additionally, the above qualitative frameworks indicate the need for such a heuristic to explain how beliefs change as part of the radicalisation *process*. Moghaddam's staircase explicitly outlines a staged process leading towards VE, whilst Koehler's notion of de-pluralisation would similarly seem to imply radicalisation is something that increases or decreases in degrees. The latter is perhaps most relevant to the role of narratives, as it is the de-pluralisation of the meaning of political concepts which defines radicalisation, suggesting it to be an *interpretive* process, requiring one to adopt, however gradually, radical, Manichean understandings of the world around them. How the understandings of radicalising individuals change, or what prompts such change,

should thus be one of the tasks of a heuristic for investigating VE narratives. This would help explain *how* one moves from the different stages of Moghaddam's staircase, perhaps even extending this framework beyond its original capacity to describe each individual stage.

Other Research into VE Narratives

In addition to radicalisation theories, and models, and the implications these have for the role of narratives, other research which specifically attempts to describe the role played by narratives in terrorism, can provide further understanding in this context. According to Corman (2016), extremist narratives serve to facilitate the *vertical integration of personal narratives into local narratives*, as part of wider *master narratives*. Vertical integration describes the process by which an individual locates their role (personal narrative) within their country or region (local narrative) as part of a wider story of an existential struggle (the master narrative). This is evidenced, Corman argues, in Islamist publications with historical references to crusaders (Western militaries) and tyrannical pharaohs (secularist Middle Eastern dictators). In the case of RWE, Corman cites the Oklahoma City bomber, Timothy McVeigh's affinity with Patriot Movement and its American revolutionary framing of perceived governmental overreach which they saw as a grave threat to individual liberties.

Similarly, Furlow and Goodall, (2011) also identify key similarities between Islamist and RWE narratives particularly what they term "root war metaphors". These comprise Manichean portrayals of reality, wherein something of transcendental value faces an existential threat from malign forces which must be defeated by any means necessary, including the use of violence and terrorism. Such tactics may also be used in

order to “awaken” a greater number of people to the urgent need to defend against the forces of “decadence”. Root war metaphors would thus seem to cohere with Corman’s (2016) description of “vertical integration” into “master narratives.” Indeed, both refer to a type of grand narrative that enables violent extremists to contextualise their lives in similarly grand struggle. Notably, Furlow and Goodall make frequent reference to the historical component of these root war metaphors in both Islamist and RWE cases. In the case of the former the Crusades and *jahaliyya* (state of ignorance used to describe the Arabian Peninsula prior to the advent of Islam) are frequently referenced, while in the case of the latter infringements on the US constitution or literalist interpretations of the Bible are raised. This does however, suggest a more US specific view of RWE historical narratives.

That said, the basic premise of a root war metaphor that is derived from reductionist and highly selective historical narratives would appear to be applicable to contemporary RWE attackers. The 2019 Christchurch terrorist Brenden Tarrant for instance appears to have been partially inspired by conflicts between European nations and the Ottoman Empire, visiting several battlefield sights in the Balkans (Gec, 2019) and writing the names of such battles and famous Balkan Nationalist figures on the weapons he used to carry out his attack (Eckel, 2019). This indicates that Tarrant subscribed to a historical narrative which depicts Muslims (previously in the form of the soldiers of the Ottoman Empire) as attempting to supplant Europeans and their culture. Moreover, the fact that he wrote the names of such battles on his weapons during the attack which he livestreamed on the internet, might also suggest he was attempting to increase the currency and mobilizing power of this historical root war narrative. Similarly, Anders Breivik made frequent reference to Balkan conflicts in his manifesto, released before he carried out the 2011 terror attacks in Norway, (Eckel, 2019). He also claimed to be part

of a wider organisation he called the Knights Templars after the Christian monastic order from the Crusades, (Feldman, 2012). The use of historical root war metaphors would thus appear present in the narratives of both Breivik and Tarrant, who see themselves as protagonists in a far reaching racial/cultural struggle for survival that has ebbed and flowed throughout history. That is, they were both vertically integrated.

What both Corman (2016) and Furlow and Goodall (2011) indicate is, that VE narratives serve to give their adherents a *clear moral sense* of the world, and their place in it. Indeed, through vertical integration, they are able to situate their own lives within their own “root war metaphors”. Perhaps, this moral clarity speaks to the need for cognitive closure (NFC), or moral certainty, which Kruglanski, *et al*, (2018) highlight as being central to the attractiveness of VE narratives, and their capacity to restore a sense of significance to their adherents. Additionally, vertical integration and root war metaphors indicate a temporal dimension to the role of narratives in radicalisation, which may be fundamental in motivating VE. This becomes clearer if Corman’s vertical integration is considered in combination with Furlow and Goodall’s (2011) root war metaphors. These metaphors give a cosmic significance to VE struggles, i.e. elevating them into master narratives with a cosmic-ontological significance, to the extent that the meaning of historical and contemporary events are derived from them. That is, through this historical rootedness, VE themselves ground their personal narratives in a radicalised and integrated overarching understanding of reality and of how they subsequently ought to act; a kind of *moral* ontology, in which they simultaneously transcend the temporal confines of their own existence, thus devising what Becker calls their own “immortality myth”. Having one’s personal narrative integrated in a Manichean struggle, spanning generations, renders that narrative existentially significant, perhaps fulfilling the need for significance stressed in SQT (Kruglanski, *et al*, 2018), and affording disoriented, anomic

individuals the opportunity to form a mortality transcending “heroic double” whose “sacred” mission is to resolve the struggle. Furthermore, by amplifying the threat to their individual sacred values, and the nomic community they represent, VE narratives increase the impetus for deontic action for their preservation. The narrative construct, however illusory, that a “root war” is reaching its final conclusion which will decide the fate of the supra-individual nomos being defended is clearly highly motivating to radicalised individuals who feel they have found a higher cause to which to devote their lives, and would appear to be a salient feature of RWE narratives. For instance, Champion’s (2019) analysis of Australian RWE narratives, identified “threat narratives” depicting, “racial peril,” as a recurring theme (p. 216). Consequently, in this sense, the narration of a master narrative, indeed a whole emplotted nomos, introduces the temporal component that generates both the urgency and sacredness of VE actions. By giving a sense of a temporal crisis to be resolved, VE narratives render the lives of their adherents more morally significant, and their actions to reduce anomy more effective.

Seen in this light, vertical integration might also be considered temporal and ontological integration of an individual within, from their perspective, an existentially charged perceived “wider scheme of things”. Indeed, Griffin (2003) applies to understanding the temporal aspect of VE narratives the distinction between two different ideal types, that represent contrasting ways of experiencing time, to 20th century fascist movements, and RWE more broadly. Derived from Greek antiquity, these are “Chronos,” or profane time, and “Kairos,” or sacred time. Chronos refers to time as it is personally experienced in a linear progression, whilst sacred time refers to time as imagined within a supra-personal, and supra-historical, order of events. In the case of RWE, this order is characterised by decay or conflict. The moral value of actions is subsequently judged, by RWE, in relation to this “higher” order, i.e. ending the (cosmic) decay or winning the

(Manichean) conflict. Griffin (2012) argues that it is the bid to escape from this chronic, in-between, anomic or “liminoid” time which drives both VE ideologies and millenarian movements and compels terrorist violence as the catalyst to propelling historical time beyond the cusp of the present anomic order and so inaugurating a *new*, a kairotic order based on a new nomos. Accordingly, by projecting “root war metaphors”, onto the status quo, VE narratives might also help prescribe the actions required to integrate one’s anomic profane time, as experienced personally, within an imagined (though experienced objectively), sacred, nomic order.

What is outwardly seen as radicalisation may thus be experienced from inside as the progressive restoration of existential significance and purpose, in line with SQT. The implication is that VE narratives locate the lives of their adherents in temporal relation to the survival, or renewal, of their sacred values, or nomos. Time therefore is central to the unshakable moral certainty and totalising sense of deontic obligation (“fanaticism”) which inspires terrorism.

Discussion and Next Steps

Clearly, the above studies have manifold and significant implications for the role of narratives in radicalisation. They also highlight differing perspectives on how to understand narratives, or similar/overlapping concepts, such as ideology, frames of meaning, or sacred values. Indeed, this difference perhaps itself indicates the need for more conceptual clarity, which might be provided by a heuristic informed by an interdisciplinary approach. Moreover, these differing perspectives are useful, in that between them, they both suggest what narratives do, and to some extent, how, whilst also indicating what is, as yet, not fully understood, or integrated, within the study of radicalisation. That is, they indicate what questions need to be answered, in order to

provide a better understanding of how to conceptualise RWE narratives, and VE narratives.

Narratives, Ideology, and Meaning

By synthesising both the experimental theories and the qualitative frameworks outlined above, it is possible to suggest that VE create and attribute meaning to the world through narratives that emplot their individual lives within a metanarrative of Manichean or “cosmic” struggle in which they are called upon carry out acts of violence for a supreme (sacralised) cause, and that such emplotment forms an essential part of the radicalisation process. In the case of the DAM, sacred values must be *defined*, and *interpreted*, as being under threat, before they can inspire devoted actors to commit violence in their defence. Indeed, following the DAM, the process involved in valuing something to the point of such sacredness that it inspires devotion, implicates the psychology of meaning creation/attribution, in motivating terrorists. Likewise, SQT explicitly refers to narratives as meaning frameworks that mediate the need for significance by providing cognitive closure in the Manichean struggles they depict, and ideologies they instil in their adherents. This highlights a central question in understanding the role of narratives, that of their relationship with ideology. According to Glazzard, (2017, p. 6), the two terms have become synonymous, particularly amongst politicians and policy-makers, although, to a lesser degree across academia. Similarly, Koehler (2015, p. 25) argues that both are competing concepts; but competing for what? Clearly, both terms relate to beliefs about, and interpretations of, reality and morality. However, this does not necessarily make them the same thing. Rather, it might be, that ideologies do indeed refer to beliefs, though such beliefs are themselves part of a

narrative, which, following Griffin's (2012) paradigm, places adherents in relation, *temporally*, to their given nomos, and its destruction, or (re)creation. To apply an ideology when describing a situation in need of resolution, and the subsequent means of that resolution, particularly where this involves conflict, is at least, in some sense, to narrate that situation. This would be consistent with the conception of narratives outlined by Kruglanski *et al*, (2018), which serve to orientate adherents towards the necessary actions for restoring significance, based on VE *beliefs* concerning a given grievance.

Nevertheless, this also raises the question of how ideologies and narratives actually work, at the psychological level, to create or attribute meaning, i.e. do narratives give rise to ideological beliefs, or vice versa? Can the two, in fact, be separated psychologically? Koehler's (2015) notion of radicalisation as de-pluralisation, combined with his use of framing theory, would perhaps suggest they cannot. Contrast societies, according to Koehler, employ, "collective action frames," which serve to "diagnose a specific problem, give a prognostic account of what to do about it, and motivate to a course of action" (p. 25). Furthermore, Koehler cites Benford & Snow (2000), who argue these frames are actively employed by their *participants*, which "...implies agency and contention at the level of reality construction" (p. 614). Accordingly, ideology and narration both inhere to the *act* of framing and reality construction.

Moral Certainty and Group Identity

According to the literature sampled here, VE beliefs about themselves, and how they should act, can be characterised by ethical certainty and moral absolutism, the denial of the relativism and pluralism that might lead to self-doubt and dilute the process of Manichaeisation. Additionally, many of the theories outlined consider the desire for

this certainty, and the subsequent moral clarity and legitimacy of violence such certainty prescribes, as being fundamental to driving VE. For instance, the importance of uncertainty, as the central psychological mechanism of radicalisation in UIT, clearly overlaps with the integral role of the need for closure (NFC), outlined in the SQT. Similarly, the emphasis placed on group-identification, particularly through the normative and deontic role of a group's "prototype," speaks to the DAM's largely group-based mechanism (identity fusion), for ensuring (morally) devoted actors. What UIT therefore suggests, is that the kind of closure emphasised by SQT, is evidently a key part of radicalisation, though crucially it is certainty in a specific direction, that is, towards a person's self as defined by their relation to a wider community and its defence, with the subsequent moral actions this necessitates. In the case of SQT, closure is sought, in the form of VE narratives, as a means of restoring significance and agency, whereas in the case of UIT, self-certainty itself takes the position of significance; a certainty which is restored through renewed self-identification. Although crucially, in both theories, certainty/significance is provided through moral prescriptions, in the case of UIT identity is affirmed through actions taken on behalf of the group, and in the case of SQT a narrative prescribes actions for the restoration of significance. This suggests that, to the extent that a stable group identity in VE is achieved not just through participating in a real or virtual ideological and ethical community, but through the radical, violent actions taken on behalf of and licensed through that community, that narratives which prescribe such actions may be as fundamental to restoring significance as they are to restoring self-certainty. Furthermore, that in the context of VE, significance, in contrast to the heightened sense of meaning and purpose derived by most sufferers of acute anomy simply by actively participating in a "faith community" (whether secular or religious) is

inextricably bound up with a renewed sense of agency, of being able to transform an intolerable situation through action, namely targeted acts of extremist violence.

Moreover, morally prescriptive narratives would also seem key to providing VE groups with the greater “entitativity” which makes them attractive to those with low self-certainty.. Indeed, the concept of entitativity, as defined partly by subservience to a group’s (clearly defined) cause, appears highly congruent with Atran’s (2016) notion of identity fusion, as part of the DAM. Taken together, the DAM and UIT suggest that identity-fusion serves to provide the self-certainty central to UIT’s explanation of radicalisation. Consequently, in order to understand the role of narratives in radicalisation, particularly as they relate to defining group-identities, it is necessary to understand how narratives prescribe moral actions, or create the normative standards for identity-affirming entitativity, which in the context of VE entail prescriptions of extreme violence legitimated by their presumed effectiveness in catalysing desired change. Notably, Hogg and Adelman’s emphasis on the normative aspect of identity affirmation coheres with the seminal work by the developmental psychologist, Erik Erikson, who proposed moral authority within groups to be essential in developing an individual’s identity as they progress through adolescence. For Erikson (1968), the acceptance of authority was inseparable from identity formation, and authority itself relied on group identities, arguing that “only within a defined group identity can true authority exist” (p. 41).

Hogg and Adelman’s framing of UIT does nonetheless differ somewhat from the mechanisms explicated within SQT and the DAM, as it seems the loss of certainty always initiates the task of its restoration, through identification with high entitativity groups. By contrast, according to Kruglanski, Belanger and Gunaratna (2019), the quest for significance can be engendered not only by a deprivation of perceived significance, but

also by the need to *avoid* such a loss, or by the allure of *gaining* more significance (p. 44). Likewise, in the case of the DAM, participation in VE groups and their actions is motivated by a perceived threat, which activates “parochial altruism” and the deontic subservience to defend one’s in-group (Atran, 2016 p. 193). This does not negate the role of self-uncertainty, however it does suggest that it may often be that radicalisation is driven more by extrinsic factors, as someone could react to the perceived threat to the group with which they already identify. That is, the certainty of the group-identity may already exist, while the certainty of that group’s future may be called into question.

This was in fact indicated by one of Hogg and Adelman’s (2013) studies, which found increased support for suicide bombings from Palestinian Muslims to be correlated with greater “self-uncertainty related to the Middle East conflict”. (p. 444). Therefore it might be that, “group-uncertainty,” as an extension of self-uncertainty, more accurately captures the motivating factor in cases where VE are responding to a perceived threat. However, that uncertainty is likely mediated by narratives surrounding a group, to the extent that these involve ideology, which according to Hogg (2005), comprises the beliefs surrounding group prototypes, and the violent prescriptions they can engender.

The extrinsic dimension does, however, highlight another area of ambiguity regarding UIT, and the role of narratives in general, which a more context-specific view of narratives regarding *how* they relate to group-identity might address. That is, whether uncertain identities, or threats to group identities, are themselves narrated, inducing greater engagement with high-entitativity group as a consequence. Alternatively, are these “post factum” narratives, functioning as rationalisations sought after the fact, and which exist entirely external to the individual who seeks them in order to resolve the uncertainty they perceive towards their group’s future? Likewise, to what extent are individuals involved in their own group-identification ... do they react to threats to their

own identity-group as they occur ... in which case how are they narrated? Or, are such identities, and entitativity-enabling narratives, sought in response to a general feeling of uncertainty? These questions are made more complicated by the fact that many VE groups are high entitativity groups, which claim to act in the interest of wider groups which as a whole have less entitativity, but whom many people none the less identify with, often due to contingencies of birth or cultural belonging. For instance, Islamist VE groups (often using their own narrowed definition) claim to defend a wider community of Muslims, or “Ummah,” and RWE groups (often using their own narrowed definition) claim to be defending a wider community of white Europeans or Americans, sometimes referred to as “Aryans.”

Again, clarifying this aspect of how narratives relate to group identities, including where such identities already exist, would require a more context-specific view of narratives, and narrative psychology, particularly regarding groups, and identity formation. Indeed, the fact that identities are often largely extrinsic, or non-volitional, highlights the need for a heuristic of narratives that can address the distinction between extrinsic (particularly in terms of ideology) and intrinsic (particularly in terms of emotions) factors. A distinction that can be viewed, following psychological mechanisms discussed above, as one between radicalisation resulting from an internal privation of significance, or meaning, and radicalisation resulting from the experience of external forces, i.e. existentially charged events, which call forth a response. Here, the typologies proposed by McCauley and Moskaleiko (2017, p. 212-3) which differentiate between “disconnected-disordered,” and “caring-compelled,” lone actor terrorists, may become relevant. Disconnect-disordered terrorists, they argue, often suffer from depression, and seek to resolve their grievances from a state of social isolation, suggesting that VE who fit this category pursue certainty in response to an intrinsic sense of uncertainty (or

anomy, to borrow from Griffins (2012) paradigm). Whilst “caring-compelled” terrorists are not generally isolated, and are often morally predisposed towards others, they thus become morally obliged to act, on behalf of the victims with whom they sympathise. This suggests a greater extrinsic dimension, whereby those who fit this category are called into action by the morally unjust world they perceive around them. The certainty of that world’s indictment may for them already be there, necessitating morally certain actions, as a direct consequence.

Although McCauley and Moskalenko do not develop the point, it might be added that caring-compelled terrorists sympathise with those whom they perceive as victims of an intolerable system or historical situation, though especially those with whom they *identify*, inspiring the kind of evolutionarily derived “parochial altruism” that, according to Atran (2016, p. 193), radicalises devoted actors. Consequently, to the extent that the victimhood perceived by caring compelled terrorists relates to their identity-fused sacred values, as the DAM postulates, then such terrorists can be seen as responding to threats to what amounts to their nomos, to borrow again from Griffin’s (2012) paradigm. The disconnected-disordered and caring-compelled distinction may even map on to Griffin’s (2012) own distinction between modernist terrorists, who face the anomy of modernity (a lack of nomos), and zealous terrorists, who face the destruction of their (to them already present) nomos. In either case, the uncertainty and anomy would appear to need some kind of narration, in order to motivate the morally certain actions of VE against the perceived sources of nomic threats, and to identify what are the necessary actions that need to be taken, as a consequence. Just as Koehler’s contrast societies need to narrate their target societies in order to indict them, disconnected-disordered and caring-compelled terrorists need to narrate their means of restoring the nomos they lack, or

defending a nomos they claim to have. Understanding how this narration takes place is therefore imperative to understanding radicalisation.

What is also clear, is that UIT, alongside SQT, demonstrates the integral role that extreme certainty (often referred to colloquially as “fanaticism”) plays in radicalisation, indicating that any heuristic that does not explain how narratives provide such certainty would be severely limited. Koehler’s (2015) notion of de-pluralisation indicates what narratives might do to provide certainty, i.e. fix meaning, but crucially does not explicate exactly how they do this. Similarly, Moghaddam’s staircase offers a description of the various stages of increasing *moral* engagement, but not how engagement increases or decreases. Given that this engagement is fundamentally about a person’s beliefs, then the process of their engagement is implicitly an interpretive one, suggesting the need to combine research into moral and motivational psychology with research into the psychology of narratives/interpretation. Furthermore, both UIT, and the DAM, support the case for radicalisation being a highly normative psychological phenomenon, as moral standards and goals appear essential to affirming group-identities, which in turn afford those holding such identities the prospect of greater significance. Consequently, a heuristic of VE narratives should also incorporate research into moral psychology, particularly those theories which pertain to identity, and the formation of moral beliefs.

Conclusion

In order to fully understand the role of narratives in radicalisation, it is necessary to incorporate research into the psychology of narratives and meaning-generation/imbuing reality with significance as part of the heuristic proposed by this study. In particular, it is important to include those theories which pertain to the

creation/attribution of meaning, within a person's sense of reality, particularly those that acknowledge the role played by engagement in extreme action in generating an experience of agency and transcendent, heroic purpose. Having an understanding of how narratives, or the *act* of narration, creates meaning and legitimates violent actions is thus essential to understanding how narratives serve the psychological mechanisms evidenced by experimental theories in the context of terrorist radicalisation. It is also essential to explicating *how*, at the level of individual interpretation, VE move through the radicalisation *processes* outlined by qualitative frameworks. Consequently, the next chapter will seek to incorporate the relevant research and theories regarding the psychology and normative function of narratives as a necessary basis for understanding how they fulfil the moral and motivational functions indicated by the above theories with regard to the enactment of extreme violence. The model that emerges of these moral and motivational functions shall be incorporated in the third chapter, which will analyse relevant research and theories from moral and motivational psychology, and further suggest how these might relate to narrative psychology in the context of VE. This will hopefully enable the creation of a heuristic that conceptualises the dynamics of narratives specific to the context of radicalisation and their context-specific psychological and ethical, legitimising functions. It will therefore explain how "collective action frames" can become *heroic* action frames.

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Chapter 2

The Psychology of Narratives and Interpretation within Radicalisation

Introduction

In the previous chapter it was argued, based on a review of radicalisation theories and relevant research, that in order to have analytical utility a heuristic for understanding VE narratives must incorporate psychological research and theories, regarding the creation of meaning and interpretation. Accordingly, this chapter will evaluate the relevance of research and theories which address the meaning-creation/interpretive processes involved in narratives and narration to the processes involved in radicalisation (as identified in the previous chapter). The chapter will thus draw on three different types of theory which are specifically useful in understanding how narratives fulfil their associated psychological functions, in the context of radicalisation towards violence. Examples of these functions include, de-pluralisation (the reduction of possible meanings) (Koehler, 2015), the provision of moral certainty regarding future actions (Kruglanski, *et al*, 2018), and the wider dynamics of meaning-creation involved in how VE understand their nomos, the nexus of values and goals that constitute their worldview (Berger, 1967) (Griffin, 2012), and relate to it temporally, in terms of sacred time or “kairos” (Griffin, 2003) or “immortality project” (Becker, 1973).

The various research and theories on narratives that will be analysed can be divided into three different (though overlapping) categories. Firstly, there is research which deals with narratives as part of an active process of meaning-creation carried out by social groups. These theories address how interpretation and understanding take place within the historical and social contexts which people inhabit, and how these understandings relate, inform, and are informed by, narratives. Secondly, there are those

theories which pertain to ideology and the meanings by which VE (amongst others), come to understand their actions. This category most directly addresses the role of meaning-creation, and meaning-attribution, in radicalisation and how this relates specifically to terrorism. Thirdly, there is research into how narratives, particularly life narratives, inform a person's sense of self, in terms of his or her life so far, and how they have subsequently come to understand their present normative goals and projected futures. Throughout this chapter it is important to refer back to research outlined in the previous chapter, in order to demonstrate the relevance and applicability of the various theories, concepts, and perspectives, regarding narratives that will be analysed here. Accordingly, the chapter will conclude by summarising, and to some degree synthesising, the implications and relevance of the examined perspectives/theories to the psychological functions identified in the previous chapter's literature review. The conclusion will also suggest what additional research would be required to further enhance the explanatory use of the heuristic developed in this study.

Narrative Psychology

There has been a steadily increasing range of research and theories into the psychology of narratives, particularly their influence on how individuals come to understand themselves, and the world around them. Whilst these understandings are clearly also the subject of other fields of research, which will subsequently overlap with narrative psychology, only a subset of research from these fields examine narratives specifically, e.g. McAdam's (2006) investigation into the role of narratives in personality development (which will be considered in due course). Additionally, there is what might be considered "seminal" works by scholars that have sought to outline broader

frameworks for narrative psychology as a field in its own right, such as Bruner's (1987) *Acts of Meaning*.

Bruner's work is particularly relevant to this project because it deals with the creation of meaning as its central question. Indeed, Bruner's approach is perhaps most apposite in the present context, because it was developed in response to what, he argued, was an overly mechanistic view of how people interpret the world around them, in the (then recent) field of cognitive psychology. Accordingly, Bruner's critiques may provide useful suggestions for those theories/models of radicalisation which explicate causal mechanisms and cognitive processes. These theories/models are based on experimental research, and thus use quantitative measures to indicate causal mechanisms, giving them the clear advantage of providing relatively robust and generalisable explanations of VE psychology. The mechanisms they explicate thus necessarily rely on quantifiable psychological states, or needs, e.g. the need for cognitive closure in SQT, identity fusion in the DAM, and uncertain identities in UIT. These mechanisms are all useful in that they identify key aspects of radicalisation. However, as the previous chapter's literature review concluded, individual radicalisation pathways are more dynamic than *just* the arousal and fulfilment of needs. To the extent that needs, and psychological states arise and are fulfilled within the continuous act of sense-making that each individual undergoes throughout their respective radicalisation pathway, SQT, the DAM, and UIT might benefit from other research into how people interpret the world around them.

Moreover, to the extent that such sense-making is *agentic*, however much it relies on external influences, then mechanistic explanations, *on their own*, may be found wanting. Bruner (1987) made a similar point regarding the then emerging field of cognitive psychology. Bruner was concerned that the advancements the field had made, particularly over behaviourist theories, which he argued eschewed any understanding of

agentic meaning-making, were beginning to commit the same overly-mechanistic error. This was despite the original goal of cognitive psychology being to, "...discover and describe formally the meanings that human beings created out of their encounters with the world, and then to propose hypotheses about what meaning-making processes were implicated." (Bruner, 1987, p. 2). Where it had faltered in this task, he argued, was its overreliance on, "information processing" for its explanatory basis.

For Bruner, the problem was most acute when analogies to computing were used to explain human behaviour, as these implicitly presupposed standardised units of information already to hand for humans to "process," according to their situation (p. 4-6). How the meaning of that information was constructed was of diminished importance. Consequently, explanations of human action that explicated a role for beliefs and intentions were discredited. Indeed, the explanations given by humans for their own behaviours, and that of others, were relegated to the status of epiphenomena with little causal import (p. 9). It is at this point, Bruner argues, that the purported "cognitive revolution" begins to resemble the deterministic mechanisms of behaviourism.

Perhaps the most apparent limitation with the "information processing" approach alone, is that it does not account for how the information to be processed arises, and to what degree this determines the processes used, or vice versa. Moreover, if the information being processed comprises those aspects of reality *believed* to be true by the processing mind (making them worth acting on), then those beliefs must necessarily be integral to the outcome of such processes. Thus, following Bruner, by downplaying, or ignoring, how information came to be, this kind of cognitive psychology actually diverged from the task of understanding the very creative processes of meaning-making on which its mechanisms ultimately depend.

Here, the relevance of Bruner's perspective becomes clear, as similar issues to those he identified with approaches centred on "information-processing" may arise regarding theories/models of radicalisation, particularly SQT, DAM, and UIT. However, both cases are not entirely analogous, as these theories do clarify where the information to be processed originates, i.e. networks, or groups, their narratives and/or pre-existing cultural meaning-frameworks. Nevertheless, whilst these theories do identify where such information (i.e. beliefs, or meanings) originates, they do not describe *how* an individual applies their newfound, or adapted, "meaning frameworks" to ascribe meaning to themselves and the world around them. Such a description is fundamental to understanding the role of narratives in radicalisation. Indeed, to the degree that radicalisation is defined by the process of adopting extremist beliefs, it is fundamentally a process of meaning-making or rather a transformation of the meanings a person makes which leads in the direction of extremist, violent goal-oriented actions.

While all three theories/models provide a robust explanation of what engenders this process in terms of causal prerequisites (e.g. uncertain identities, loss of significance, etc.), they omit a detailed account of how these feed into the interpretive acts that create meaning. To do this they would need to explicate a general theory of how humans interpret reality, and the role which narratives play in this process. They would then have to analyse in depth the explanations given by VE for their actions and the meanings by which they understand the world -- that is, how they rationalise violence in accordance with their interpretations of reality. Doing such a task comprehensively, is evidently outside the scope of the quantitative studies on which these theories are based. However, the relevance of Bruner's critiques suggests a need to incorporate theories of meaning-creation into any heuristic of VE narratives, lest it risk making the same omissions of purely "information-processing" paradigms. Consequently, it is necessary to look in

more depth at meaning-creation, and specifically how this influences a person's understanding of what is true, and hence the contrast between existing reality and an imagined ideal reality that contrasts with it so starkly that it leads to violent action intended to transform it.

The solution, for Bruner (1987, p. 18-9) was for a re-emphasis on peoples' rationalisations, when explaining their own behaviour and that of others, as part of what he calls a "cultural psychology", or "folk psychology." A core tenet of this psychology is that people act in concert with others, based on, "...a shared conceptual structure," which makes their actions *mutually* intelligible (p. 14). Bruner accordingly draws attention to the communal nature of meaning-making, particularly as part of shared narratives, which by virtue of being shared provide the basis for the cultural meanings that underpin peoples' shared understandings of the world. According to Bruner, culture provides people with implicitly agreed-upon expectations of how the world should be, and crucially, narratives which provide coherent explanations of any breaks in these expectations. Importantly, this includes normative expectations of *what should be*, and why something is *not as it should be*, in terms of the motivations of *others*. Narratives allow people to perceive what others are working towards, and if not, then *why*. Hence, Bruner's assertion that the "...function of a story is to find an intentional state that mitigates or at least makes comprehensible a deviation from a canonical cultural pattern." (p.49-50). By implication, this would enable a narrative to identify the good intentions for those who pursue what normatively should be, and the malign, or at least uninformed intentions, of those who pursue normatively undesirable goals. In the case of VE narratives which denigrate or reject the morality of their antagonists (e.g. politicians, minorities, supranational organizations, advocates of opposing ideologies), finding an "intentional state" may amount to projecting evil onto demonised "enemies", and/or

attributing hostile or destructive motivations to “real” but disguised intentions of these antagonists. Indeed, identifying people or groups as adversaries would appear an important part of how VE narratives explain why things are not as they should be.

Moreover, it is worth highlighting Fioretti and Smorti’s (2019) comparison of Bruner’s paradigm, and that of the developmental psychologist Jean Piaget. The latter of whom held assimilation to be a core component of a person’s early development, and to the extent this development is normative or social in nature, their socialisation. Accordingly, “The expectancy system (or, in Piagetian terms, the assimilation processes) is very powerful and influencing, and the human being can attempt to process new and unexpected data in terms of previous schemes and expectancies” (p. 704). These previous schemes and expectancies appear to serve a similar function to what Berger (1967, p.15-16) describes as the “internalised” nomic “structures” of the objectivated world (i.e. what *should* happen), as part of a wider dialectic wherein pre-existent understandings are actively maintained and renewed.

It is perhaps this explanatory function which is most relevant to radicalisation, as it deals directly with the ways people interpret situations morally, i.e. through their own construction of an value system which “extremists”, “fundamentalists” or “fanatics” are convinced is absolute and non-negotiable. Of particular relevance is Bruner’s concept of canon and deviation, which he argues enable narratives to create, or recreate, the meanings ascribed to a person’s actions. When, “...things are as they should be”, Bruner argues, narratives are unnecessary (p. 40). According to this view, narratives are employed by those with (often implicit) *expectations* of how a situation should unfold, which are subsequently not met, and are thus in need of explaining. Narratives serve this function for groups who share basic understandings of the world, and how people should act in it. It is these understandings on which their narrative expectations (canon) are

subsequently based. By explaining the violation of the often subliminally constructed canon, narratives are able to revise, and deepen a person's understandings and expectations of the world. In other words, by resolving a challenge to the prevailing or hegemonic cultural canon, they restore and enhance the meaningfulness and moral legitimacy of external (social, cultural, political) reality.

Where narratives concern shared moral expectations, and the violation thereof, to varying degrees, they also presuppose a group which shares those expectations. Accordingly, shared moral narratives are at least partly intertwined with shared moralities. A shared morality is needed for a community to have a mutual concern for a violation of *their* culturally consolidated canon. Whilst it may appear a very general comparison, it is clear to see how this might apply in the case of the DAM (Atran 2016), whereby a challenge to canonicity, in the form of a threat to *shared* sacred values (perhaps the ultimate arbiter of what *should* be), provokes a response from those who perceive that threat, precisely because such values are believed to be mutually shared, and indeed binding. In such cases, following Atran's (2016) notion of identity fusion, the defence, or reaffirmation of a canon, is given existential impetus by it being communal, or perceivably relating to a wider sacralised in-group.

Hermeneutics, Phenomenology and Interpretation

Having outlined Bruner's approach to understanding the role of narratives in the creation of meaning, various perspectives from scholars of hermeneutics shall also be examined, as, it shall be argued, they complement and enrich Bruner's approach, and provide additional insights to the role of narratives in radicalisation. Hermeneutics and phenomenology are both concerned with the how people interpret, that is draw meaning,

from the world they encounter, including situations where this world is mediated through narratives. The work of phenomenological philosopher Martin Heidegger is foundational to many subsequent perspectives on hermeneutics. Because they apply certain concepts from Heidegger's philosophy, specifically those that pertain to a person's ontological beliefs of themselves, and the world around them, these perspectives are especially relevant to the context of narratives and radicalisation. Using the concept of Dasein (being-there), Heidegger articulated the human condition as being one of continuous meaning making which occurs as a result of one's consciousness of existence itself. However, that consciousness does not choose the time and place in which it exists, nor, therefore, does it choose the history and culture of the context in which it finds itself. Consequently, Heidegger argues that, by having arrived in their context, i.e. being-there, or Dasein, a person is *thrown* into that context, and through this *thrownness* (*Geworfenheit*) they necessarily must make sense of their experiences, finding meaning in the various phenomena in which they become involved. (Withy, 2011).

This notion of thrownness, alongside the attendant notion of thrown projection (*geworfener Entwurf*), is in fact highly relevant for this study. Both concepts go hand in hand, according to Withy (2011), as following Heidegger's phenomenology, human life (or Dasein), is projected or cast into being by virtue of existing in a time and place, whilst also itself projecting interpretations of that context through the sense it makes out of it in the form of designs and drafts of, or projects for, different realities and alternative futures (*Entwürfe*). However, Withy makes the broader point, that thrownness goes beyond being situated in, and having to make sense of, a context involuntarily. Rather, what he calls "pure thrownness" is the human condition of being an entity that makes sense of contexts to begin with. That thrownness and sense-making are inseparable, results from the fact that, in Withy's words, "We might think that 'being Dasein' or 'being a sense-

maker' is not only the 'am' of the fact that I am, but also the most basic 'what' of what I am" (p. 74). Thrownness and thrown projection are two sides of the same coin, rather than one simply following from the other, as to be thrown is to be a sense-maker and vice versa. Moreover, thrown-projection is the act, arguably the condition, of making sense of the past (the direction from which one has been thrown) in terms of the present, and the future (the direction in which one is thrown) (Warnke, 1987, p. 38). It is thus a fundamentally *temporal* sense-making endeavour. The same is perhaps true of narratives whose temporal descriptions seek to unify past, present and future events in a coherent meaning-framework. In the case of VE especially, these temporal descriptions serve normative and prescriptive functions which establish or dictate how to think and act. In this regard, thrown projections can be viewed as morally motivated projections.

Furthermore, in terms of the psychology of radicalisation, Heidegger's "thrownness" and "projection" potentially cohere with, or correspond to, certain functions of VE narratives that were highlighted in the previous chapter's literature review, e.g. the need for closure (Kruglanski, *et al*, 2018), certainty of identity (Hogg and Adelman 2013), and immortality ideologies (Becker, 1973). Specifically, Heidegger's reference to "angst," resulting from an awareness of one's thrownness, and thus a sense of fate as a de-facto sense-maker, highlights how psychologically driven and morally motivated the act of projecting can be. According to Withy, this awareness "suspends our ordinary lives and brings into salience what it takes to be us" (p. 76). Describing "What it takes," at least morally, is largely the function of VE narratives that claim to have the right descriptions of reality, and the right prescriptions of how to act accordingly. Before discussing the relevance of Heidegger's concepts to the moral, and ontological nature of VE narratives in more detail, the relevance of the hermeneutic approaches he inspired should be analysed, as these address the act of narration, and interpretation more directly.

Traditionally, the field of hermeneutics, as outlined by Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey, sought to understand the *meaning of texts* in terms of the meaning they represented to their authors. Dilthey in particular advocated an approach aimed at understanding the authors better than they understood themselves (Odenstedt, 2011, p. 497). In this regard, his approach was epistemic, in that it attempted to gain knowledge of how the author derived *their* knowledge. By contrast, following Heidegger's paradigm of Dasein, Hans George Gadamer outlined an ontological approach to understanding hermeneutics, which, rather than being a systematic methodology, he argued was the process that inevitably constituted the act of interpretation (Gadamer, (2004, p. xxv). Interpretations, according to Gadamer, are themselves necessarily determined by the tradition (in a broad sense, including culture and language) in which an interpreter is embedded (regardless of their attitudes towards it).

Specifically, these traditions determine the prejudices (not necessarily in a pejorative sense) of both the researcher and the author. It may be more helpful to iterate that Gadamer refers to a tradition's prejudices in a broad sense, encompassing all their *pre-judgments*; i.e. their assumed premises and taken-for-granted axioms. These axioms comprise the author's/reader's *pre-existing* beliefs about the nature of reality: hence this is an ontological hermeneutics. Indeed, Gadamer (2004) argues that prejudices are themselves, "conditions of understanding" (p. 278). For Gadamer, it is the juxtaposition of one's prejudices with those of the author's which enables a greater understanding of both, alongside a more informed view of the subject matter (what it is, that is being understood). That is, the process of interpreting a text is dialectic in nature, as one comes to understand the authors' pre-understandings (prejudices) of reality, in the light of their own, and their own pre-understandings (prejudices) in the light of the authors'.

Importantly for Gadamer, one is able to ascertain the author's ontological pre-judgements by considering their relation to the whole text. This stems from a core tenet of hermeneutics, whereby the meaning of a text can only be understood by considering its parts along with the whole. The concept of the "hermeneutic circle" is thus predicated on the idea that the meaning of parts and the whole of a text stem from by their interrelationships. Accordingly, the act of interpretation requires the interpreter to "circle" or gravitate between different parts of the text at different levels, examining the relationship, for instance, between words within sentences, sentences within extracts, and all of these within the whole text. This can generally be described as examining what, in the author's view, a certain concept or phrase means in terms of other concepts or phrases, and what these mean in relation to the whole account given by the author (Eatough and Smith, 2017, p. 9-10). The parallels between this notion of the interdependency between meanings, and the interrelated meaning of "cluster concepts" outlined in Freeden's (1996) morphological approach to ideologies, are notable. Ideologies, Freeden argues, are not the product of a single core concept, but rather "cluster concepts," which relate to other concepts within an ideology to give it a holistic meaning (p. 60-66). It is thus through their specific conceptual configurations, according to Freeden, that ideologies serve to "de-contest" the meaning of concepts, which in turn provides clarity in thought and action (p. 76-7). Although, these similarities are unsurprising, given that Freeden highlights the value of various contributions made by hermeneutists in the study of ideologies, namely Hans Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricœur (p. 111-17).

In accordance with Heidegger's emphasis on the temporal nature of being, understanding lies not in trying to simulate the author's consciousness, but is itself an event, what Gadamer (2004, p. 305) calls a "fusion of horizons." That is, from a phenomenological perspective, truth is experienced as a kind of acquiescence, in the

moment in which his or her own interpretation is taken to be reality. However, this does not mean complete acquiescence to the author's descriptions, nor their unquestioning rejection. Rather, it entails a mediation through the hermeneutic circle by the interpreter between what they assume to be ontologically true, and what the narrative itself posits as ontologically true; not unlike an actual dialogue that would allow a greater exploration of the author's positions (prejudices) and a subsequent refinement of those of the reader. That is, to the extent that the interpreter understands the author's understandings, they do so through their own understandings. Gadamer's approach is consequently double-hermeneutic in nature.

The role of tradition, and prejudices, as the "conditions of understanding" has significant parallels with Bruner's concept of canonicity and violation as the basis for the (re)creations of meaning which is central to his psychology of narratives. In Bruner's theory, a person's expectations regarding the actions of others in a situation are in some way subverted, which then requires an explanation of why the expectations were not met in the form of a narrative of that situation. The original expectations are subsequently revised and given new meaning, so as to incorporate the narrated explanation into a new or updated canon. Importantly, the narrative's capacity to create or reaffirm meaning, and the way it does so, is determined by the canon that was initially challenged, and the expectations that were not met. To the extent that these canonical expectations are culturally consolidated they are likely to reflect the kind of "tradition" which Gadamer posits as being a carrier of pre-judgements. Here the hermeneutic circle becomes relevant to Bruner's paradigm. In this regard, the meaning of the challenge (that which makes it a challenge) is co-dependent on those expectations that are being challenged, and those expectations are themselves subsequently redefined in relation to the outcome of that challenge, as the meaning of the parts and the whole are interdependent.

For Gadamer however, the hermeneutical task goes a step further. When interpreting someone else's narrative, a person is effectively interpreting that person's own interpretation, and thus the prejudices on which it is based (hence double hermeneutic). This means they must explicate those prejudices which were challenged as part of that narrative, and which gave the narrative its wider meaning, i.e. what it exists to explain (why certain expectations were not met). Whereas Bruner emphasises that the canon of culturally consolidated meanings provides the expectations necessary to (re)create its own meaning, for Gadamer the importance lies in the fact that these expectations are not necessarily shared between the author and the interpreter. Following Gadamer's hermeneutics, interpreters reappraise their own prejudgements (i.e. their canon), by discovering those which underpin a given narrative. These alternative prejudices, however, are only fully discovered when considered in relation to the whole narrative. Translated into Bruner's terms, the interpreter understands the canon on which a narrative is based to the extent that he or she understands how the challenge presented within that narrative challenges the canon's expectations.

According to this view, a narrative involves the presentation of fore-understandings, which must then be modified, or reaffirmed, in order to (re)create meaning, i.e. new understandings. Alternatively, for Gadamer, new understandings are discovered by considering these fore-understandings, in the light of one's own fore-understandings. What this highlights, is that the canonicity-violation binomial takes place on two levels; as the canon, or tradition, posited by a narrative is reappraised through a challenge, so too is the canon of the interpreters. This is because the reappraised canon, or tradition depicted within a narrative itself, presents the interpreter with a challenge, by which they reappraise their own canon, or tradition, and its fore-understandings.

Hermeneutics and Nomic Structures

Taken together, what Gadamer's and Bruner's paradigms suggest in terms of how narratives serve to create meaning is an essentially dialectic process which relies on the application of one's own understandings in the understanding of those of others. Accordingly, the adoption of new beliefs is predominantly influenced by those which are already held. Put simply, a person reconsiders what they hold to be true by applying their beliefs as they interpret reality. In terms of the relationship between VE narratives and normative beliefs, Bruner's narrative psychology and Gadamer's hermeneutics should be considered in light of Berger's (1967) descriptions of the Sacred Canopy, or Nomos, which constitutes a person's sacral (absolute, inviolable) and ontological (existence determining) understanding of reality. Berger begins his description of sacred canopies, by referring to society as a "dialectical phenomenon," which, "...continuously acts back upon its producer" (p. 3). Berger, outlines three stages that this dialectical process follows; what he terms, "externalisation," "objectivation," and "internalisation."

According to Berger, externalisation is at the base of human existence, so long as a person is alive, he or she perceives the outer world they inhabit. "Human being is externalising in its essence and from the very beginning." (p. 4). This constant state of needing to make sense of the world leads humans to collectively create shared understandings, by which to orientate their actions, and act *collectively*. In Berger's view, these shared understandings are the beginning of culture. The fact that such understandings are shared, and function to organise human life gives them an objective quality, as something that has to be reckoned with, regardless of one's own commitment to the beliefs themselves. "This transformation of man's products into a world that not only derives from man, but that comes to confront him as a facticity outside of himself, is intended in the concept of objectivation" (p. 8-9). However, that certain aspects of a

person's world (language, mores, values etc.) have undergone objectivation, does not mean they determine how that person interprets their reality; beyond presenting facts of life that must be dealt with, they have not yet been internalised. According to Berger, "...Internalisation is rather the reabsorption into consciousness of the objectivated world in such a way that the structures of this world come to determine the subjective structures of consciousness itself" (p. 14-5). The greater the degree that culturally objectivated meanings become internalised, Berger argues, the greater the degree of socialisation, and the greater the stability of a societies cultural traditions.

Importantly, this dialectic is a perpetual process of interpretation, that involves the active participation of the individual. Indeed, for Berger, "he is formed in the course of a protracted conversation (a dialectic in the literal sense of the word) in which he is a *participant*" (emphasis in original, p. 18). Similarly to Bruner's "cultural psychology," meanings are situated (in their relevant contexts), and distributed (across socialised groups), through their application by individuals in concert with others. In addition, echoing Gadamer, the processes of socialisation and interpretation overlap to the extent that they require the constant application, and potential reconfiguration, of one's normative and ontological assumptions about the world. However, it is important to highlight that Berger's three stages of externalisation, objectivation and internalisation are not entirely analogous to the hermeneutic circle, because the latter does not (necessarily) describe the adoption of shared beliefs. Nevertheless, all three perspectives would suggest that assimilation of socially and culturally predicated norms is central to the creation of meaning, and to the generation of new understandings of what is true morally and ontologically, when those norms are not fully and unquestioningly assimilated and assumed.

By explaining the world and rationalising action, a nomos provides what Berger terms a “plausibility structure,” used to determine the moral validity, and to a large extent, the reality, of a given version of events, as well as the actions and claims of those involved. Importantly, this structure is the basis for judgements existing a priori and having been internalised during socialisation, it is through it that an individual instinctively interprets reality. This structure consists of what Berger describes as “legitimations,” most of which are “pretheoretical in character” (p. 30). In this respect legitimations are functionally similar to Gadamer’s (2004) ontological pre-judgments (prejudices) in that they likewise form the “conditions of understanding”. According to Berger (1967), “They not only tell people what *ought to be*. Often they merely propose what is.” (p. 29-30, emphasis in original). Echoing Gadamer, Berger argues that, “Only on this cognitive basis is it possible for cognitive propositions to be meaningful” (p. 30)

Importantly for this study, Berger describes various levels of legitimation, ranging from “self-legitimizing facticity,” and “...secondary legitimations made necessary by challenges to that facticity” (p. 31). Berger distinguishes further between different levels of secondary legitimation, according to the degree of conscious articulation required to frame and respond to a given challenge. Firstly, there are “... traditional affirmations of which the paradigm is “This is how things are done.”” (p. 31). These are essentially pre-theoretical. Beyond this, legitimations become “incipiently theoretical” in the form of proverbs and moral maxims. These legitimations may then be “...developed and transmitted further in the form of myths legends or folk-tales” (p. 31-2). The final level of legitimation is the most theoretical wherein, “...the nomos of a society is legitimated *in toto* and in which all less-than-total legitimations are theoretically integrated in an all-embracing *Weltanschauung*.” (p. 32 emphasis in original). According to Berger the efficacy of these final legitimations, which traditionally take the form of religions, stems

from their ability to relate the "...precarious reality constructions of empirical societies with ultimate reality." (p. 32). In other words, their legitimating power derives from their *integratory* power. Their capacity to justify norms and actions, in response to challenges, derives from the congruence with which they can unite such norms and actions with a sacred, or at least definitive, truth. That is, they unify what ultimately there *is*, and what ultimately *ought to be*.

It is these higher order levels of legitimation which also suggest a functional similarity between plausibility structures and Bruner's cultural/narrative psychology. Both serve to generate normative expectations, deviation from which demands a context-specific explanation which consciously reappraises those expectations and/or situates them differently in the respective context. That such reappraisals, or reaffirmations, are required by a deviation from, or a challenge to, a (nomic) canon suggests that legitimations, particularly at the levels of myths and folk-tales, provide a similar function to narratives in Bruner's (1987) paradigm, according to which "...it is only when constituent beliefs in a folk psychology are violated that narratives are constructed" (p. 39). Crucially, both legitimations and narratives must respond to the challenge, by attributing intentions, and beliefs to others. "Such legitimations serve to both explain why the resistance cannot be tolerated and to justify the means by which it is to be quelled." (Berger, 1967, p. 31). Likewise for Bruner (1987), narratives are designed to "... find an intentional state that mitigates or at least makes comprehensible a deviation from a canonical cultural pattern." (p. 49-50). In this respect, to explain motivations of others is to legitimise or de-legitimise those motivations, thus enabling narratives to affirm the motivations of those who subscribe to the *nomos* which it seeks to legitimise.

What Berger might add to this perspective to make it more valuable to our project is greater nuance in terms of what drives challenges to the canon, how they are met, and

with what degree of legitimation. Thus, he writes, “The seriousness of the challenge will determine the degree of elaborateness of the answering legitimations.” (p. 31). What this “elaborateness” refers to, however, is not just theoretical complexity, but the degree of *integration* which a legitimation is provided within an “an all-embracing *Weltanschauung*.” That is, the seriousness of the challenge determines how much “ultimate reality” will have to be mentally reconfigured and marshalled in defence of the “plausibility structure”, which undergirds a nomos. The potency of a narrative, in terms of its ability to reconfigure and legitimise a threatened nomos, depends on how well it can relate those contested aspects of the existing nomos to this “ultimate reality”, i.e. By inference, the potency of a narrative, (or counter-narrative?) to de-legitimise the existing nomos depends on how well it can disrupt this relationship between the existing nomos and the ultimate reality that it is believed to instantiate.

Here, the relevance of Corman’s (2016) notion of *vertical integration*, outlined in the previous chapter, becomes evident. VE personal narratives were, according to Corman, vertically integrated into local narratives within wider master narratives which gave their adherents cosmic significance through the overarching struggles in which they believe themselves to be embroiled. Adherents of VE master narratives can thus be vertically integrated into their respective sacred canopies, by involving themselves in the kind of higher order legitimations outlined by Berger. Master narratives may themselves be considered a form of higher order legitimation, to the extent that they encompass the struggle for legitimation, i.e. to impose a morally legitimate order upon reality. Through vertical integration, they may also address an individual’s own struggle for legitimation, to justify his or her existence in ultimate nomic terms.

The ability to confer upon their adherents both the possession and blessing of an ultimate truth is perhaps the most straightforward way VE narratives both create the

meaning by which to interpret the world, and give meaning, to the lives of their adherents, in the form of cosmic justification, by providing a mission to impose the necessary transformation of existing reality so that it conforms to this meaning. Both aspects of nomic legitimations, and the narratives in which they are contained, may thus be interdependent. Indeed, both aspects are a central function of narratives according to Kruglanski *et al* (2018); they provide both an interpretive framework and afford their adherents with the sense of significance, the pursuit of which SQT holds to be a central driver to radicalisation. According to Berger, nomic challenges (of the kind depicted within VE master narratives) are articulated as part of a dialectic by which a group maintains its nomos. Vertical integration into narratives of these challenges (and thus the wider struggle for legitimation) is one way such narratives can, according to SQT, provide and attribute meaning in a way that leads to terrorism, as these show the “reality” of the wide discrepancy between the status quo and the new sacred canopy aspired to and scale of the “correction” it demands.

The nomic challenge posed by a narrative, may be to the pre-theoretical assumptions of a nomos, and thus their relationship with ultimate reality on which the legitimacy of that nomos is based. In this case the ultimate reality itself may be challenged indirectly. Alternatively, the challenge may be to the ultimate reality directly, thus contesting the relationship between it and, what Berger terms a “plausibility structure’s” everyday facticity, i.e. rendering it no longer plausible. Depending on how the ultimate reality/facticity relationship is challenged, a legitimation may require a change in everyday facticity to accommodate the re-defined ultimate reality, or a re-defined ultimate reality to accommodate the recent challenges to everyday facticity. Moreover,, because the two levels (pre-theoretical facticity and the narratives, or the totalising nomos which comprise them) are mutually dependent on each other for their meaning (legitimation), a

challenge to one level can, is perhaps inherently, a challenge to both. Consequently, the seriousness of the challenge might always be potentially high. What this indicates, in the context of VE, is that the kind of nomic threats, which according to Griffin (2012) compel VE into action, need not be explicitly aimed at an ultimate truth, or sacred value (Atran, 2016), for them to be considered nomic threats. However, if a narrative construes them as such, then VE may respond to such challenges as if they were an existential threat to their nomos. The perceived erosion of values thus becomes seen as part of a project for their overall removal, and de-legitimation becomes akin to destruction (of a VE nomos).

Indeed, following Griffin's (2012) paradigm, the nomic threats (and in some cases opportunities) posed by modernity need only arise from a gradual accumulation of challenges to the everyday facticity of a plausibility structure. What the eminent sociologist Max Weber called the "disenchantment of the world" (Weber, 2004) refers to a core feature of the secularising processes of modernity, and features in both Berger's, and subsequently Griffin's, analysis. For Berger (1967), this process comprises the removal of "...the three most ancient and powerful concomitants of the sacred: mystery, miracle and magic." (p. 111). In the context of contemporary VE, Griffin (2012) refers to,

"... The intensifying forces of secularisation and globalisation of the last two centuries have accentuated the earthly foundations of sacred canopies which, before the advent of 'Western' modernity, always lay not in human institutions, temporal power, or expressly secular human utopia, but in one of a myriad versions of an eternal metaphysical Law born contemporaneously with the primordial cosmogonic act which created the universe." (p. 112).

The key point is that de-legitimisation and disenchantment are the result of the disconnection of the sacred-eternal and the quotidian which is a core feature of secularising modernity for those suffering acute anmoy. According to Griffin (2012) it can thus inspire both “Zealotic terrorists,” who act in defence of a nomos perceived to be endangered, and “Modernist terrorists,” who seek to create a new nomos out of the ashes of a morally, and spiritually, bankrupt epoch. In the case of the zealots, the link between the sacred and everyday facticity is to be re-augmented, and the challenges to the integrity of their nomos must be recognised as being exactly that and met with an appropriately nomic response. For the modernists, the *dis-integration* of the nomos must also be recognised. However, in their case, the purpose is to find a new, or an as yet undiscovered, ultimate reality (though not necessarily an otherworldly one based on religious or cosmic truths) with which to reintegrate and re-legitimise the world around them. The disenchanting/de-legitimising nature of modernity may thus be useful for the Modernist Terrorists who seek to hasten the end of the current, in their eyes unsustainable, plausibility structure, in order to inaugurate their new nomos. Indeed, the deliberate de-legitimisation of the status quo is represented in Griffin’s description of the “creative destruction,” which is a core feature of Modernist Terrorists, as exemplified by 19th century anarchists. (p. 61). Modernist and Zealotic are of course, not mutually exclusive categories, as Griffin highlights the two can come together in cases where VE seek to destroy an existing, or advancing, nomic order, which they view as jeopardising the traditional nomos which they seek to recreate or save. Griffin describes, for instance, how Sayyid Qutb, an historical contributor to the ideology of al-Qaida, saw in what he perceived as the moral bankruptcy of modernity, particularly as represented by Western culture, that the world was, “...ripe for rebirth through a sustained campaign of creative destruction which will restore the canopy and save humanity from annihilation.” (p. 183)

What these perspectives, in aggregate, add to an understanding of VE narratives, is that their capacity to generate meaning, particularly the kind which inspires Devoted Actors (Atran, 2016), is co-determined by the nomic plausibility structures and legitimations they seek to defend or destroy. VE narratives are thus themselves legitimations or de-legitimations, or both, in the case of Modernist-Zealotic Terrorists. Importantly, their legitimising/de-legitimising power is determined by their ability to integrate, or disintegrate, life as experienced in the here and now, with an ultimate reality, and its binding moral truths. In this regard ultimate reality can form the basis for a kind of ultimate, or sacred time, what Griffin (2003) refers to as “kairos,” as opposed to “chronos,” or profane time, as part of his “Chrono-Ethnological” analysis of RWE movements.² Accordingly, VE narratives not only (vertically) integrate their adherents within a sacred canopy, but also integrate them (temporally) into its destiny, and ultimate fate. To experience and participate in kairos, or “dream time,” Griffin argues, enables a person who believes he or she is upholding a particular sacred canopy to “win symbolic victories over time and not be crushed by the Juggernaut of chronos” (p. 63). Kairos is meaningful time impregnated with significance and value precisely because it integrates those who experience it into a wider narrative, which enables them to transcend what would otherwise be experienced as superfluous and finite lives.

Unlike the disintegratory, reality-corroding chronos, kairos places VE subjectively in temporal relation to ultimate truth through their participation in a cosmic struggle to transform the status quo which integrates the past, with the present and future. That it is integrated is what gives kairos meaning, binding the fate of those who experience it within a master narrative which subsumes their own personal narratives and fates and provides a sense of belonging to, and acting on behalf of, a self-transcending

² See Chapter 1, p. 54.

cause. Kairos is fundamentally *projective* (into the past and future), because kairotic narratives entail *imagining* the realities that have once been and may yet be. Imagined fates are, when integrated within kairotic time, narrated fates. Importantly in the case of VE, their narration relies upon the depiction of a conflict or a struggle using what is in Furlough and Goodall's (2011) terms a "root war metaphor". The struggle to overcome chronos must therefore be narrated, in order to identify the targets for the creative destruction which, for VE, holds the promise of kairotic significance.

Here, the relevance of Bruner's canonicity-violation becomes clear, particularly when combined with Berger's emphasis on the dialectical nature of socialisation (into a *nomos*), and its notion of nomic challenges in need of answers (legitimations). These challenges, or violations, are the prerequisites for narratives themselves and their capacity to create meaning. Accordingly, it is always in relation to a problem or challenge that ontological and normative meaning, what is ultimately true, must be reinterpreted. Disruption is therefore central to the creation of meaning, as narratives must reintegrate an ultimate truth, in order to explain the disruption, i.e. respond to the challenge to the *nomos* on which they are based.

To reemphasise' the contribution of Gadamer's hermeneutics, it is worth highlighting that the parts of a narrative and its aggregated whole are interrelated, and interdependent for their meaning. Consequently, the challenge posed within a narrative derives its meaning from both the assumptions which, according to the narrative, it challenges, and the posited solution which results. This (still only narrated) solution then ultimately gives new meaning to the original assumptions, which are seen in a new light after their challenge is addressed. Narrative-legitimations are therefore reinterpretations of a plausibility structure, in accordance with a specific challenge. For Gadamer, the act of interpretation was defined by the reappraisal of ontological prejudices. In the case of

VE narratives, these prejudices are radically redefined, or rejected entirely. Importantly, following Berger, both redefinition and rejection follow from challenging the link between the world as encountered, or nomic facticity, and an ultimate truth, or sacred value, the denial of which spells disaster in the form of a reality devoid of meaning and moral justification, and hence intolerably absurd or offensive to sacred values.

In this way, by presenting both a nomic challenge and its solution, narratives may provide a key motivation of radicalisation; that is, the promise of radical renewal and rebirth (palingenesis), i.e. a *transformation* in the (moral) order of reality, and the subsequent meaning by which a person, or group orientates their life. This is crucial to understanding not only how narratives (re)create meaning, but how VE narratives are able to do so in a way that inspires the required devotion to that meaning (and potential meaning in the case of palingenesis) for motivating terrorism. For Griffin (2012), this dynamic can be discerned in the narrative found within Sayyid Qutb's, *Milestones*, of a "nomocidal modernity" which is "...transmuted by the palingenetic mindset into a fanatical sense of the utter worthlessness and impotence of the fallen 'world' and the absolute indestructibility and power of the creed whose redemptive mission it is to re-impose itself on humanity so as to 'save' it." (p. 188). Similarly, in the context of RWE terrorism, Anders Breivik's palingenetic-fundamentalist narrative depicted a "millenarian vision of the world process," which he was convinced could be "...transformed within two generations thanks to the sacrifice of the vanguard of modern Knights whom his attacks would call into being." (p. 210, emphasis added).

Gadamer's Games and VE Realities

Gadamer's approach to hermeneutics may be especially useful for understanding the relationship between narratives and ideology, with the potential of clarifying some of the definitional inconsistencies that can complicate attempts to understand the wider role of narratives in radicalisation, specifically, Gadamer's emphasis on the dialogical nature of understanding, of both the situations one encounters, and the texts, or narratives, which may relate such situations. According to Gadamer (2004), hermeneutics can be properly described as, "...as entering into dialogue with the text." (p. 362). For Gadamer, this means one must ask questions when interpreting a text, particularly regarding what questions the text itself seeks to answer; that is, "...to discover the question which it answers, if we are to understand it as an answer." (p. 334). By doing this, the interpreter can understand the prejudices on which such a question was based, i.e., the ontological beliefs from which the question stems (and the normative beliefs which gives rise to a nomic challenge). Understanding such questions, Gadamer argues, means, "...understanding the particular presuppositions whose demise makes the question no longer relevant." (p. 338). These presuppositions may be dissolved or refuted as a result of their negation, or reformulation, through either the answer given by the text itself, or by the answer given by the interpreter.

Importantly, what this dialectic of questions and answers indicates is that the problems posed by a text, or a narrative, arise from the real or imagined facts and constraints (presuppositions) which govern a situation and determine its possible outcomes. Even though the interpreter may agree or disagree with the presuppositions implicated in a text, they must, however, recognise them in order to understand the answer which a text or narrative provides to the problem (which itself poses). Likewise, Gadamer argues that a similar interpretive process occurs when participating in games,

or playing roles in any kind of artistic performance. Playing a game, or playing a role as an actor, are both representational activities, as in both cases a person must commit to the rules and abide by the normative constraints of their role. They are thus fulfilling a function that is determined by the rule-bound *structure* of whatever they are playing, a structure which they come to represent and embody by virtue of their participation in it.

The representational aspect occurs for both participants and spectators of a game or play, as the players or actors become recognised and their actions “read” as part of the game/play’s structure. Gadamer places great import on this “recognition.” To spectate at a game or play, and to recognise the roles of the players or actors, is to *understand* its structure experientially rather than theoretically as represented by those players or actors. As Gadamer argues, “This kind of representation leaves behind it everything that is accidental and unessential, e.g. the private particular being of the actor disappears entirely in the recognition of what he [sic] is representing” (p. 114). Gadamer claims this dynamic exists for sports, plays, artistic creativity, religious rituals, and crucially, written texts. By engaging with a written text (or narrative), particularly in understanding the questions or challenges it seeks to answer, the interpreter can figuratively play its game, or at least understand how it has been played in terms of the rules and objectives (the question to be answered) implicated in its structure. This structure comprises the normative rules and presuppositions which make the question or challenge relevant. In other words, the structure is derived from the nature of reality (the ontological facts/constraints) adherence to which makes the game or challenge viable, and its understanding possible. Thus, the structure of a narrative, or game, is an ontological one, comprising its prejudices, or assumed axioms, by which those who participate in it are bound.

This notion of a game-like interpretation of reality corresponds with Vervaeke, Mastropietro, and Misevic’s (2017) concept of “agent-arena relations.” These relations,

they argue, form part of what anthropologist Clifford Geertz termed a “worldview,” which fulfils two primary functions by providing “(1) a model of the world and (2) a model for acting in that world. It turns the individual into an agent who acts, and it turns the world into an arena in which those actions make sense” (p. 33). It may be argued that, as with Gadamer’s structures, models are not themselves analogous to narratives: rather they provide the ontological meanings by which narratives make sense. However, if such models comprise VE fore-understandings of reality, then narratives may be thought of as the projections, or “thrown-projections”, to borrow Heidegger’s concept, which entails the application of those models. Indeed, such models/ structures do comprise the ontological meanings necessary for narratives, but it might also be argued that narratives, or just the everyday act of interpretation (Berger’s “facticity”), comprise the ontological meanings which give rise to these models/structures. For Gadamer the game exists through being played by a player; likewise, the arena is defined by its relationship with the agent. The arena is thus both simultaneously projected as a range of possibilities existing a priori, and projected into, as the particular combination of those possibilities from which the agent must decide.

To project in this sense, is to simulate or open mental space for future possibilities according to the relationship in which individuals understand themselves to exist within their arena. Moreover, the authors suggest the agent-arena relationship is a dialectical one, not unlike Gadamer’s games, and Berger’s plausibility structures. To participate in the arena is to interact with it, or in Gadamerian terms, to converse with it: “the agent and arena mutually make sense of one another and ratify each other’s existence and intelligibility”. (Vervaeke, Mastropietro, and Misevic 2017, p 34). Importantly, however, by virtue of this conversation being between two separate entities, it is still experienced by the agent as being external to him or her whilst being mutually involved the arena.

Similarly, Salovaara and Stalter (2019) apply Gadamer's approach to highlight the ontological nature of what they term "gamification." Citing work by Figal (2010), they emphasise how a person's relationship with a game is an objective one, regardless of their subjective feelings towards it. "Despite various interpretations, objectivity refers a point of reference that sustains and withstands." (p. 150). Thus, the reality of a game is experienced as being essentially *external*, something outside oneself which must be reckoned with. The structure of socially constructed games is thus, at the very least, "objectivated," if not "internalised," to use Berger's (1967) terms. Moreover, in keeping with Gadamer's focus on the ontological, Salovaara and Stalter (2019) describe how the objectively experienced structure of a game, resembles a dialogue concerning a real object between interlocutors. That is, they argue, "In conversation, we become involved with our environment and with the other" (p. 150)

Indeed, the dialectical nature of games can be inferred from Gadamer's emphasis on the "back and forth" movement involved in playing them. For Gadamer, this back and forth movement constitutes participation in the games structure. Likewise, this dynamic exists in an actual dialogue aimed at an aspect of reality (with the back and forth analogous to the reciprocating speech of the participants). Accordingly, "Conversation does not refer to dialogue partners or text interpretation (as play does not refer to players or game either), but to the matter at hand." (p. 150). As with Berger's notion of a dialectically constructed social reality through constant (re)interpretations of nomic facticity, for Salovaara and Stalter (2019) "A player of a game is, in these terms, in a conversation with the game". (p. 150). What this suggests is that, where VE narratives can be perceived as games (rules to follow and goals to pursue), or rather offer an ontological structure to adhere to, they are actively (to the extent they are interpreted), (re)creating the meanings which constitute VE ideologies.

Narratives then Ideologies?

Gadamer's dialectical notion of games, and their ontological structure, is particularly relevant to the question of how narratives relate to ideology, i.e. do ideologies spawn narratives, or vice versa? Similarly, do VE narratives derive their normative goals, and prescriptive actions (their solutions to a nomic challenge/violation of canon) from their ontologically descriptive pre-understandings of reality? Do certain truth claims follow from each other? For Gadamer, the division between descriptive, normative, and prescriptive truth claims is likely to prove an artificial one. At least, in Gadamer's view, these truth claims, or the truth the holistic structure of a narrative claims to make, is more likely experienced simultaneously than following each other sequentially. This can be inferred from the nature of understanding described by Gadamer, particularly -- and appositely for this study -- moral understanding.

Gadamer addresses the issue by way of considering the hermeneutic jurist Emilio Betti's writings on the matter of interpreting the normative implications of a text. Betti distinguishes between normative, re-cognitive, and reproductive interpretation. As Noakes, (1985) summarises, normative interpretation aims at engendering a new judgement, or "... the adoption of some sort of practical decision in life," whilst re-cognitive interpretation is, "...interpretation as an end in itself". Reproductive interpretation, on the other hand, has, "...as its end to make that which is interpreted understood by someone else" (p. 3). For Gadamer (1985) however, understanding the meaning of a legal text (its normative interpretation), even without the intention of applying it (simple re-cognitive interpretation), necessarily entails understanding its application in relevant situations (p. 276). Similarly, Gadamer argues that translating a text from one language to another, or even its poetic reproduction, entails, "...the same explanatory achievement as literary interpretation." Consequently, normative, re-

cognitive and reproductive interpretations are for Gadamer invalid distinctions as "... all three constitute the same phenomenon." (p. 277).

To clarify this unity further, Gadamer cites the treatise of Aristotle dealing with knowledge of morality, and its application. In contrast to Socrates and Plato, Aristotle does not equate virtue with the knowledge of what is good in the abstract. While this knowledge is still integral, for Aristotle it is the capacity to apply it, and the *recognition* of the situations to which it applies, that constitute moral understanding. Both aspects are crucial, for if it were just a matter of capacity, or procedural competence, then moral knowledge would resemble the kind of technical skill learned by a craftsman. However, while this is partly true, according to Aristotle, such knowledge is the discernment one (inevitably) exercises when judging how to act across situations. Regarding the question what constitutes virtue, moral knowledge therefore lies in being able to see the universal, in the particular (in terms of the specific situations). The virtuous course of action, according to this view, is not universal in preceding the situation, as in an abstract schema, rather it arises from the situation and is determined by it. The virtuous action is thus universal, in the sense of being the moral actions that ought to be taken in a specific situation, meaning that moral knowledge is having the correct moral *understanding*, or *interpretation* of a situation. Consequently, understanding moral knowledge is, according to Aristotle, simultaneously an act of comprehension and application. Both aspects constitute the same phenomenon. (p. 278-289).

Aside from making an interesting philosophical case, it is the implications that Gadamer draws regarding moral understanding and the act of interpretation, which is particularly significant. As we have seen, for Gadamer it is the recognition of how a game, or ultimately a narrative, is structured, that determines the meaning one is able to derive from it. Therefore, following Gadamer's view, in describing situations, or an

aggregate of situations, narratives employ a structure by which such situations generate their possible meanings. Importantly, if those situations are in fact moral situations, as is the case in the context of VE, then VE will structure their narratives according to the moral (ideological) knowledge, or meaning-framework, by which they interpret the world. VE narratives thus entail the recognition of the “universal” ultimate truth, or sacred value, in the “particular” situations in which they become relevant. To recognise this relevance, is to recognise, indeed, to participate in the ontological game/structure which constitutes VE beliefs.

As with Aristotle’s theory of moral knowledge, the meaning framework does not exist outside of its application but is rather located within the author’s interpretation (his or her own narration). Rather than being abstract and static schemata, VE ideologies, specifically their truth claims, are the normative/ontological understandings by which VE recognise and interpret the meaning of situations. Moral prescriptive knowledge regarding what actions to take in a situation, is according to this view, inherent within one’s descriptive ontological knowledge, or interpretation, of that particular situation. In this sense, the meaning framework *is* the interpretation. Regarding VE narratives, the normative and prescriptive components of a narrative (the why and how), which serve its moral and motivational functions by identifying problems and the means for their resolution, are thus not detached from the narrative’s descriptions of reality (the what), but rather are codetermined by them.

Narratives and Ideology

These interpretive/narrative theories offer a potential means for understanding the dynamics involved in what Koehler (2015) terms, the “de-pluralisation” aspect of

radicalisation within his wider “Contrast Societies” paradigm. Specifically, it is this interpretive dialectic by which narratives are able to contest and de-contest the meaning of a nomic canon’s basic “pre-theoretical” assumptions, and replace, or reformulate them, in response to a narrated challenge, which indicates how exactly de-pluralisation takes place. Furthermore, this nexus between assimilation, dialectic, and interpretation suggests that narratives redefine a person’s ontological prejudgements, their “expectancy system” (projective facticity), by applying and challenging those prejudgements in the situations they depict.

Following the framework set out by Freeden (1996), Koehler (2015) describes de-pluralisation as the process by which the meanings of political concepts are de-contested, and become fixed, giving their adherents the certainty required to make decisions. In the case of VE, this certainty can take the form of the moral compulsion felt by devoted actors (Atran 2016) who act in the defence of their sacred values and the sacralised communities to which their identities become “fused.” However, the “canonicity and violation binomial” highlighted by Fioretti and Smorti (2019) suggests narratives can as much contest meaning as they can de-contest meaning. Indeed, in terms of rendering alternative meanings invalid, the former would appear necessary for the latter. To suggest how this might work in the case of VE ideologies, it is necessary to recapitulate Freeden’s approach in relation to nomic structures, particularly given its emphasis on the interdependence of meanings. Ideologies Freeden argues, are a specific configuration of “cluster concepts,” the meaning of which is derived from their interrelationships.

Importantly, following this approach, the meaning of a concept is “de-contested” by its relationship with other concepts *according to a specific context*. Meaning is thus “fixed,” rendered true or untrue, through *integration* with other concepts and their meaning. Although, Freeden’s approach is orientated around ideologies, rather than the

all-encompassing sacred canopies outlined by Berger, in the case of VE at least, the two significantly overlap, and the importance both scholars place on integration is insightful. Indeed, it would not be difficult to combine both approaches, by describing how the meaning of a given political concept, or contemporary political issue, is rendered through its integration within a particular nomic “ultimate truth,” and vice versa. Likewise, to contest the meaning of a political concept, would be to contest its integration with a higher ultimate truth, or to contest the meaning of the ultimate truth on which it is based. In either case its nomic plausibility, and thus its moral legitimacy, becomes uncertain.

The continuous dialectic of socialisation described by Berger, and the nomic legitimations it calls forth, would appear central to the contestations of meaning that define Freedden’s approach to understanding ideologies. Defining a normative challenge (including an ideological challenge), requires the active application, and thus the interpretation of, moral values. Accordingly, the meaning of a political concept, particularly what Freedden (1996, 75-8) terms a “perimeter concept,” the application, or relevant aspect of a value concretised in the “real world” (e.g. specific policies), becomes contested by questioning its relationship with an ultimate truth (e.g. a sacred value, or ideological core concept from which it derives its supposed meaning), or by contesting the nature of that ultimate truth itself. Similarly, in the case of de-contestation (the affirmation of meaning), it is the relationship that is de-contested. Following Bruner’s paradigm, narratives serve to describe, and explain, these contestations/de-contestations through the challenges they depict, e.g. situations when things are not as they should be.

This points to another aspect of ideological narratives, which Freedden’s approach brings to the fore; a challenge gives meaning to concepts by clarifying their relationship with other more sacred concepts. Where a concept is shown to be at odds with a sacred value, then that concept, or the particular version it takes, is redefined as antithetical to

the nomos. Indeed, to de-contest the meaning of concepts through narrated challenges would suggest that many of what Freeden would term, the “core,” or “perimeter” concepts of ideologies, are necessarily defined by the obstacles to their fulfilment. What this also suggests is that, where challenges, and particularly conflicts, are used within narratives to de-contest the meaning of concepts, they rely on what might be termed false, or even enemy concepts, to de-pluralise the range of acceptable options for the continuation of a nomos.

Through the depiction of challenges, narratives can de-contest the nomic meaning of political concepts in at least two ways. Firstly, they can re-define the meaning of canonical normative expectations in relation to, and as a result of, that which defies those expectations. This is the more obvious extension of the assimilatory nature of Bruner’s “expectancy system,” (Fioretti and Smorti 2019, p. 704) and Gadamer’s ontological hermeneutics: the redefining of what is known to be (ontologically and normatively) true. Secondly, as part of this redefinition, narratives can also create meaning by identifying and framing what constitutes the normative aberrations which challenge a nomic canon. The challenges depicted in narratives thus serve to identify, and concretise, nomic threats and the nomic enemies which represent them. That is, by concretising the normative-ontological structure of their narrative, through its enactment, VE effectively concretise Carl Schmitt’s famous “friend-enemy distinction” to which he argues all politics can effectively be reduced, (Schmitt 2007). The greater the challenge (to the integrity of a “plausibility structure”), the higher the nomic stakes, and the more fundamental the wrongness or the rightness of the challengers or the defenders, particularly in terms of their intentional states. Explaining these intentional states is, according to Bruner, one of the primary means by which narratives fulfil their explanatory functions, i.e. who is counter to the sacred, and crucially why.

The capacity for narratives to generate enmity becomes clear, given that it is precisely the *sacred* which is being challenged, or restored in the context of VE. Those deemed responsible for the restoring or challenging the vertical integrity of a sacred canopy can thus become seen as fundamentally good or evil, through ignorance (of the correct path) or *mal-intent*. Consequently, the destruction of those guilty of such intentions is justified, and/or necessitated, alongside the righteousness, and deontic obligation of those committed to their destruction. Furthermore, Koehler's (2015) "contrast societies" paradigm would suggest that the perceived malignancy, or the conscious hostility of a designated enemy group is not necessarily, or even primarily, the main motivation for VE. The ignorance of the wider target society, which is viewed as in need of purification (or de-pluralisation) and enlightenment (towards the real ultimate truth), may be the most important intentional state, one used to rationalise the struggles depicted in VE narratives. Although, it is probable that a combination of both malignant *and* ignorant, hostile groups give RWE narratives the moral impetus for attempting to change their respective target societies. Much of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, for instance, is dedicated to depicting *the Jews* (described as a monolithic political entity, despite their alleged selfish individualism) as actively trying to subvert "Aryan" peoples and culture, through an insidious infiltration of their societies. For Hitler, overcoming this threat meant overcoming the ignorance of his target society/audience (non-Jewish Germans), and the alleged Jewish deceptions arrayed against them by inciting them to see politics, indeed human existence in general, through his frame of racial struggle. (Hitler, 1943, p. 285-289).

The depiction of intentional states is clearly an important explanatory function of VE narratives. When considered in light of Gadamer's game-structure, and the back and forth of moral dialectic involved in VE narratives, it is also clear that imputing intentional

states onto others is one way such narratives create ideological meaning. VE narratives are, in this view, fundamentally the product of the dialogue VE have with the reality around them which constitutes their agent-arena relation. This dialogue would also suggest that ideologies evolve through their application, one which they are ultimately dependent for their meaning. They are intrinsically context-dependent, and thus narrative dependent. As a narrative evolves through time with the back and forth of interpretation, so too do the future projections based on this continuously evolving “expectancy system,” which constitutes the normative-ontological agent-arena relationship of the narrative’s adherents. Accordingly, meaning becomes de-pluralised in line with this narrative development. The back and forth of interpretation eventually reduces the meaning of political concepts (representing sacred values), and the range of action required for their survival, or realisation. In the case of VE, this may constitute the complete destruction of an enemy group, whose intentional states have been rendered essentially antithetical to the nomos of a particular in-group.

Ideology, according to this view, is not a static amalgam of abstract concepts, but the ongoing concretisation, and attribution of the meaning of such concepts within an ever-evolving narration/ interpretation of reality. That is not to say ideological concepts cannot be articulated in abstract or “first principle” terms, rather that the meaning they come to hold, particularly the kind of sacred meaning which inspires extreme acts of violence, cannot be divorced from the contexts in which they are narrated. For a person to be ideological, according to this view, is for them to be ideologically “attuned,” to use Vervaeke, Mastropietro, and Misevic’s (2017) term for how individuals orientate themselves according to the agent-arena relation within and through which they interpret the world. The term “attunement” is also particularly relevant, because it describes a kind of nomic orientation, the absence of which can result in acute anomy. According to

Vervaeke, Mastropietro, and Misevic, the increasing secularisation and decreasing religious participation (described also by Berger), together with a wider disillusionment with cultural institutions, begets a, "...declension in worldview attunement," (p. 48) which in turn creates nomic disorientation, as the individual loses sight of how to live a meaningful life. "Since this attunement is fundamental to the agent-arena relation discussed above, the loss has a calcifying effect on its ecology, and on all meaningful participation that was inculcated by the coverage of a sacred canopy." (p. 48-9)

VE by contrast with this nomic disorientation, are heavily attuned to their worldviews. Indeed, following Griffin's (2012) paradigm, it is in response to nomic disorientation, or the threat thereof (together with existential dread of death, human finitude, and the potential meaninglessness of existence), that propels VE towards hyper-attuned political fanaticism. This attunement causes certain phenomena to become more salient than others, in line with the (ideologically-rendered/de-pluralised) sacred values. It therefore pre-determines the "salience-landscape,"³ (Ramachandran and Oberman 2006), which comprises the arena to which the agent is related, and thus their expectancy system by which they are orientated. That is, salience, or the discernment of meaningful occurrences, is the means by which VE relate themselves to the world around them. Accordingly, it is through *recognising* what is ideologically salient, that VE are able to narrate/interpret their perceived agent-arena relation. Through this recognition, they are able to discern what something means (e.g. an event such as an election) *in relation* to something else (e.g. their sacred values), and in relation to themselves. VE narratives are

³ Salience Landscape Theory was developed by autism researchers Ramachandran and Oberman (2006), and describes the trained automatic responses of the amygdala which together create, "... a map that details the emotional significance of everything in the individual's environment." Based on this map, "...messages cascade from the amygdala to the rest of the limbic system and eventually reach the autonomic nervous system, which prepares the body for action." (p. 69)

thus projections onto the world (both in terms of past and future events) from the perspective of this attunement.

Ideological attunement forms part of ideological narration of both a recollected past, and a projected future, to the extent that such attunement orientates VE according to their respective expectancy system. This expectancy system is the (narrated) “truth,” i.e. what has happened and what should happen, with which VE attribute meaning to unfolding events. Attunement necessarily exists within a narrative, i.e. *the story so far*. In the above example of Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, this attunement takes the form of anticipating two Manichean possibilities which stem from his narrated Manichean antisemitism; either the “Aryans” will realise their place in the covertly waged race war, and save their, “...original creative racial nucleus” (p. 264), or the Jewish conspiracy will triumph with the destruction of Aryan racial purity, and with it their “culture-founding” creativity. The intentional states of Hitler’s perceived Jewish menace are explained through a biologically deterministic racial essentialism, which underpins his narrative, according to which the Jews are inherently evil, and thus anti-Aryan, because of Aryan inherent goodness. For Hitler, this meant that, following the *trajectory* of his *narrative*, he had to inculcate his target society with his radically racist worldview (indeed his attunement) before it was too late.

Importantly, this indicates that Nazi ideology was consciously articulated with an awareness of its stage of development within a narrative, or the story so far⁴. According to this view, the normative-ontological possibilities and required actions, which comprised much of Nazi ideology and policy, were rooted in an unfolding narration of world events. For certain RWE at least, to be ideologically attuned, is to be *consciously*

⁴ Indeed, it is worth noting that, however inaccurately, Hitler spends much of *Mein Kampf* detailing his own ideological journey, simultaneously narrating both his radicalisation process (albeit selectively), and the various forces which he believed to have shaped the world.

situated within an ideological narrative. Translated into Berger's or Gadamer's normative-ontological dialectic, this means having a particular understanding of where the dialogue of socialisation has so far reached, and an expectation of where it will go in the future. For VE, this dialogue entails the unfolding of events towards a final realisation, which will conclude the narrative and give its constituents their ultimate meaning.

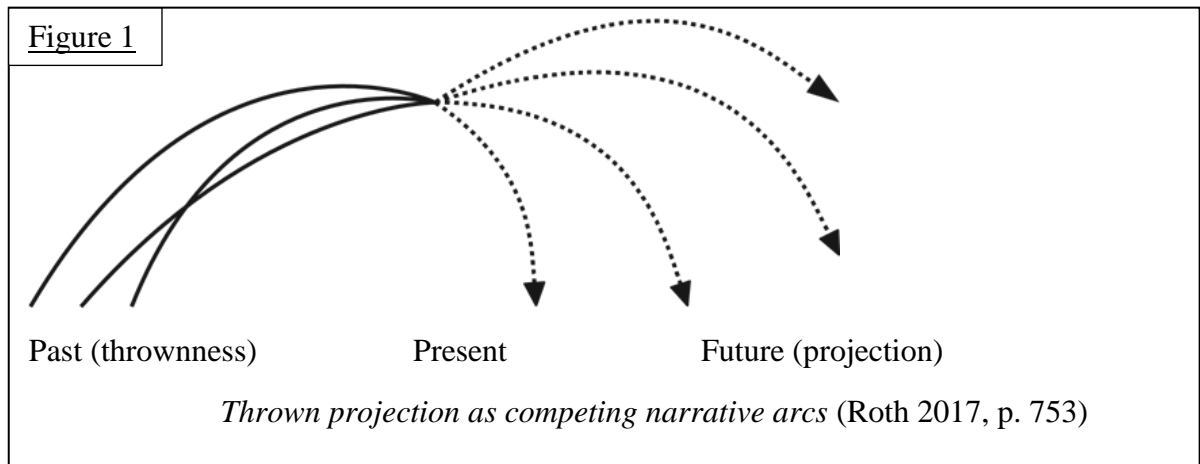
Narratives and the Self

The various theories and perspectives on narratives, interpretation, and meaning, surveyed so far, have been general in nature. Whilst certainly they posit specific processes (e.g. Bruner's notion of challenges to canon) and identify fundamental aspects of narratives and interpretation (e.g. fore-understandings according to Gadamer), on their own they do not necessarily offer an explanation of how *individuals* understand *their* lives through narratives. It is of course useful to have a generalisable psychology of interpretation/narration, however, it is also necessary to understand how this psychology influences the decisions, experiences, and understandings of personhood at the individual level. This is not only necessary for understanding that psychology more comprehensively, but in the context of VE, it is essential to understanding the role of narratives in radicalisation. This is because, however identity-fused they may be to a wider collective, and however dependent on others (real or imaginary) they may be for validation and normative orientation, terrorists are ultimately individuals who must make sense of their own individual lives..

Projecting the Narrative-Self

In line with the view discussed above of the inherently narrative (and therefore temporal) situatedness of ideological frames, Roth (2017) proposes that individual life narratives are themselves read from the middle of an developing story. That is, they are experienced as an act of integrating a known past with an expected future. Roth argues that Heidegger's concepts of projection and thrownness are particularly apposite for demonstrating how a person's understanding of their lives, their past and their future, are entwined within a constantly unfolding narrative, and the act of interpretation itself. In Roth's view, Heidegger's twin concept of thrown projection amounts, "...to the same hermeneutic structure we use when interpreting a narrative when in the middle of it" (p. 747).

Roth draws on the importance given by Heidegger (2010) to the role of possibilities, when understanding one's place in the world. "Projecting has nothing to do with being related to a plan thought out, according to which Dasein arranges its being, but as Dasein, it has always already projected itself and is, as long as it is, projecting. As long as it is, Dasein always has understood itself and will understand itself in terms of possibilities" (p. 141). These possibilities form a person's pre-understandings of how the future might unfold, based on their understanding of their (life) narrative so far, (see figure 1). To Roth (2017), this highlights the essentially liminal nature of how humans comprehend and experience their lives; "We exist always on the cusp between actualities and possibilities" (p. 747). Importantly, projection is not just one's plan for the future, but all those events that are believed to be possible, and which constrain, or direct, the plans one makes. That is, the inevitable awareness of possibilities is fundamental to Dasein, and, thus also to the act of interpretation.



Because of this constant state of anticipating the future through an interpretation of the past, Roth argues that narrative is integral to a person’s self-understanding, and thus their possible identities. That they are only *possible* identities is key: as so long as a person continues to be alive, their narrative is ongoing. Rather than providing certainty of who one is, thrown projection orientates, “...ourselves provisionally (not definitively or finally) against a multiplicity (not one configuration) of possibilities for our existence. This set of possibilities is constantly evolving, constituting a network of narratives, possible arcs of plot we might play out in our existence. The self is to be found where these various plotlines intersect.” (p. 752) Here Roth employs the literary scholar Wolfgang Iser’s notion of the “wandering viewpoint” (Iser, 1978) to describe this intersection, and its implications for the narrative self. Roth goes on to cite Ricoeur (1988), who describes this concept as expressing “...the twofold fact that the whole of the text can never be perceived at once and that, placing ourselves within the literary text, we travel with it as our reading progresses” (p. 168). Similarly, a person’s life narrative follows a certain trajectory, which may or may not conform to their expectations (which are themselves garnered from the story so far).

Moreover, the projections which a person makes arise from their individual narrative structure by which they understand their life. According to Heidegger, this is the holistic structure of one's "being-in-the world" which constitutes the manner of existence of Dasein. However, Dasein only realises the unity of this structure through a particular mode of being, which Heidegger terms "care" (*Sorge*).⁵ Indeed, Roth's (2017) employment of the wandering viewpoint is based on the perspective of "care-structure as Dasein's everyday manner of being." (p. 759). Care in this context describes the purposeful *attunement* of oneself towards an unfolding reality. This attunement is involved whenever a person considers the trajectory of their life narrative. As Horrigan-Kelly, Millar, and Dowling, (2016) summarise, "...In explicating Dasein's care structure, Heidegger was demonstrating the life pathway of Dasein from a temporal stance" (p. 4). By implication, the wandering viewpoint "travels," in Ricouer's words, along the life pathway set out according to a given care-structure. Thus, to interpret through a "care-structure" is to have temporal attunement towards the anticipation of the future possibilities which it projects.

Projecting VE Futures

Roth's perspective coheres closely with those of Bruner and Gadamer, who similarly posit interpretation as being a kind of perpetual recalibration of one's normative-ontological "expectancy system," whereby one's understanding of reality evolves dialectically. What Roth's approach highlights is the inherently anticipatory nature of the

⁵ *Sorge*, a subtle term which in German has connotations not just of being "careful", i.e. paying close attention, and "caring about" something, i.e. a loving concern with something or someone that matters, about but also of sorrow – the etymologically related word in English), anxiety and worry. *Sorge* is the opposite of indifference, mindlessness, or lightness of being which goes with total accommodation of the status quo or present state of one's life.

wandering viewpoint which situates a person in their life narrative. In this respect, integration and projection are one and the same, as one identifies with a given narrative, not only in terms of the story so far, but also in terms of where it is heading. Here, the interpretive expectancy system, or “care-structure,” which Roth is proposing, not only integrates future projections with extant knowledge, it simultaneously orientates those projections according to a specific narrative/life trajectory. It is not only understandings of reality which are reappraised, as per Gadamer, but understandings specifically of the future. To reiterate Heidegger (2010), “Interpretation is not the acknowledgement of what has been understood, but rather the development of possibilities projected in understanding” (p. 144). In the case of life narratives, the development of these possibilities is orientated around the interpreting individual. It is the possibilities *for an individual* which are projected by *their* wandering viewpoint, according to *their* care-structure.

The normative-ontological beliefs, which are evolving through the wandering viewpoint are not just about reality in general, they are primarily about one’s relation to it. Consequently, what the individual is attending to (what they care for within their care-structure), characterised by Heidegger as the “for-the-sake-of-which”, is highly influential on the future possibilities they project. In the context of VE, that which is cared for takes on cosmic importance, and the possibilities which are projected are the possibilities for relating to, and acting within, an existential struggle. For individual VE, the various competing narrative arcs depicted above would take on a severe normative significance, as the projected vicissitudes of the overarching conflict in which they are vertically integrated underlie the various possible selves they project. This suggests, further, that Cormann’s (2016) vertical integration is inextricably bound up with temporal integration, or rather the two constitute the same phenomenon.

Indeed, it would not be difficult to imagine this through the narrative arcs depicted in figure 1. In the case of VE, another narrative arc could be added, representing the conflict or “root war metaphor” (Furlow and Goodall, 2011), which likely emerges before the start of the individual narrative arcs and intersects where they begin their interest, and involvement in, the conflict. The conflict narrative arc then constrains and orientates the possibilities projected into the future, and with it the possible selves, i.e. whether the individual carried out his or her moral duty towards a sacred value, or *nomos*, or passively watched its destruction. Here, Roth’s perspective offers a straightforward, albeit general, explanation of how the wandering viewpoint simultaneously integrates individuals within a VE narrative, and also projects them into its future in a way that evokes the kind of deontic obligation which inspires Atran’s (2016) “devoted actors.”

Providing clear routes for moral action is an inseparable part of another function of VE narratives highlighted in the last chapter’s literature review, i.e. that of providing unambiguous identities, particularly group identities. Uncertainty Identity Theory (UIT) naturally gave this feature more prominence than the other theories/models reviewed. According to UIT, VE pursue self-certainty by self-categorisation within a rigidly defined group. Additionally, when their self-uncertainty is threatened by a perceived threat to the group with which they identify they are more likely to support violent, or authoritarian measures to reduce the threat. Importantly, self-categorisation reduces self-uncertainty by providing what Hogg and Adelman (2013) term group “prototypes,” which comprise a normative ideal-typical conception of who a group member is and how they should act accordingly. These prototypes, and the prototypical identities they bestow would, in light of Roth’s (2017) perspective, be projected as possible selves to be pursued by following a specific, and in the case of VE, ideological narrative arc.

A prototypical identity can thus be viewed as something which is *fulfilled* by adherence to a VE narrative's normative implications (i.e. the possibilities it gives for nomic renewal). This goes somewhat beyond the framework set out by Hogg and Adelman, as it highlights the future-bound nature of securing one's identity. Rather than just being a static way of being, even where this involves active moral vigilance through conformity to general normative guidelines, the actions required to achieve identity-certainty are dependent on the particulars of the context in which *individual find themselves*. This may, however, be more relevant to terrorists, particularly lone-actor terrorists, than members of organised RWE groups in general, e.g. neo-Nazi groups. Whilst a group-identity can on its own provide self-certainty, particularly where this is affirmed by group members, for some, being their most meaningful normative selves requires them to secure their perceived group-identity, and their heroic identity within that group, by securing *the future* of their identity group.

In the case of devoted actors who are preoccupied with the struggle which defines a VE narrative and their subsequent care-structure, the interpretive intersection described by Roth would suggest they are in a constant state of self-narration in relation to this struggle. Consequently, their possibilities for being their morally optimum selves evolves with the progression of the narrative arc in which that struggle is interpreted. As the reality of their situation, or their "agent-arena relation," to use Vervaeke, Mastropietro, and Misevic's (2017) term, becomes progressively revealed, their means of being an effective moral agent within that arena becomes progressively clearer. These are individual heroic prototypes, designed and enacted to ensure the future creation of their desired prototypical identity-group. Here, Griffin's (2012) paradigm of the heroic double comes to the fore. Anders Breivik, for instance, perhaps projected two prototypes, one of his heroic self, designed to inspire other would be "Knights Templers" who would emulate his individual

prototype, and a second prototypical conception of an ethno-culturally purified Europe. This latter prototype thus becomes the goal at the end of a narrative arc depicting a nomocidal/nomos-creating struggle, from which RWE terrorists derive the possibilities within their individual life narratives for heroic transformation.

According to Roth (2017), "...We understand who we are now by casting larger hypothetical arcs of plot in the same way that readers, when in the middle of a story, project where that story is going in order to understand the identity and situation of its characters." (p.747). Heroic doubles can thus be seen as projected narrative arcs, the possibilities for which become progressively clearer the more the wandering viewpoint integrates its life narrative with that of a nomic struggle. Interestingly, Roth raises the inherent incompleteness of a life narrative, for the wandering viewpoint, and the subsequent indeterminateness of one's identity. "Because my life will be whole only when I am dead, I can never grasp it in its full actuality, from birth to death." (p. 759). A person's life narrative, and thus their heroic identity, can only be securely defined after the narrative's *completion*, in death. The relevance of this aspect is perhaps more obvious in the case of suicidal terrorists, whose lives end with their last, to them self-transcending heroic, act. Following Griffin's paradigm, these terrorists attempt to achieve their heroic transformation, and the palingenetic transformation of the world around them, by completing the ultimate nomic duty. The finality of their actions leaves no room for identity-uncertainty because they have also completed their life narrative's arc through their own volition.

According to Kruglanski *et al* (2018, p. 112), (NFC) is the determining factor, which, leads those on a quest for significance towards VE narratives, and ultimately terrorism. In this context, it may therefore be that VE narratives provide the ultimate closure, through the death of their adherents, which in turn affords them the promise of

ultimate significance in the certainty of their heroic selves. In line with Griffin's use of existential psychology, particularly Becker's (1973) *The Denial of Death*, life narratives which depend on the certainty of death to define the identity of their protagonist can turn the quest for significance into a quest for symbolic immortality. By binding an individual's fate to a sacred value, their death in pursuit of that value gives their life narrative meaning by integrating it into a master narrative which they themselves project far into the future wherein they symbolically live on through the revived nomic order they helped to create.

Whilst RWE terrorists tend not to die during their attacks (though some have been subsequently executed), for them these attacks are the culmination of their life narratives, which henceforward are spent in long-term incarceration. Thus, RWE attacks are the last, and *defining*, act of the narrative they themselves authored, and can similarly be viewed as a means of *completing* their nomic quest, and thus also securing their heroic identity. In contrast to the wandering viewpoint which travels along a life pathway, always cognisant of the possibilities that can be realised before its ending in death, the terrorist viewpoint marches towards its own termination in order to render only one possible identity, that of the hero. Roth's perspective is perhaps most useful because it indicates how life narratives encapsulate a process of self-understanding and self-transformation, including the kind of transformation by which VE pursue their nomic duties and heroic selves.

McAdams (2006) research into the role of narratives in personality development may provide support for the existence of a similar dynamic to the one proposed for the heroic-nomic narrative, suggested above. McAdams identifies an ideal-typical life-narrative of, what he terms "the redemptive self." Specifically, through a series of studies using midlife American adults, McAdams found a certain pattern which characterised the

life narratives of participants, who scored highly on measures of *generativity*. Originally conceptualised by developmental psychologist Erik Erikson, generativity refers to the commitment of oneself to securing, or improving, the well-being of future generations. According to McAdams, redemptive selves are, "...typically deeply invested in their own family and work lives and who tend to be very involved in community, civic, and/or religious institutions — tend to construct life stories that feature redemption sequences, which we define as scenes wherein the protagonist is delivered from suffering to an enhanced status or state." (p. 17)

McAdam's redemptive narratives have several points of contact with SQT. Firstly, SQT holds that a loss of significance can be experienced vicariously on behalf of a suffering, and/or persecuted in-group, which then leads individuals to adopt "clear and strong value systems," in the form of VE narratives. A key part of SQT is that such narratives identify normative goals by which VE seek to restore their significance. Similarly, the "caring-compelled" typology of terrorists identified by McCauley and Moskaleiko (2017), are often prosocial individuals, who feel morally obliged to act, out of sympathy for the suffering of others. Likewise, for Atran's (2016) devoted actors, it is the threat to a wider (real or imagined) community (one that embodies sacred values), which evokes an evolutionarily grounded sense of "parochial altruism," and which subsequently compels them towards their perceived moral duty. Griffin's (2012) heroic doubles are also deeply invested in securing the future for their particular nomos, and are themselves inspired to act, in reaction to perceived nomocidal threats, or the perceived moral bankruptcy of their present age. However, unlike McAdam's redemptive selves, VE are pursuing a kind of *heroic generativity*, which is tied to their ideologically framed quest for meaning. Their ability to influence (in their view "save") the future, is their means for heroic transformation, wherein their existential need for meaning is achieved

through the symbolic immortality of their *generative* actions. Moreover, the life pathways of VE and redemptive selves both include a significant reorientation of how they relate to the world. They are in this respect also *revelatory* selves. However, in the case of VE, it is not a newfound gratitude for their individual life circumstances that is revealed, rather it is the nomic threat from perceived demonic forces, along with an intense and highly externalised hostility towards them.

Conclusion

Having examined a range of perspectives on narratives and interpretation, it is now possible to discuss their combined implications for the development of a heuristic for understanding the role of narratives in radicalisation. The various perspectives and theories may be divided into three separate, but overlapping, categories. Firstly, there are general theories of narrative psychology and the processes of interpretation provided by Bruner (1987) and Gadamer (1985) respectively. Secondly, these have been synthesised with Berger's (1967) seminal work on socialisation and sacred canopies, together with other relevant perspectives, namely, Freeden's (1996) approach to ideology and its application by Koehler (2015). Thirdly, Roth's (2017) application of the Heideggerian concept of thrown-projection has been discussed in the context of VE, according to the theories outlined in the previous chapter's literature review.

Clearly, the act of narrating reality, according to one's normative-ontological beliefs, is inextricably bound with the act of interpreting that reality. Indeed, narration and interpretation, may in this context, be synonymous. As both Gadamer, and Bruner indicate, the creation of meaning stems from an ongoing reappraisal of an individual's current understandings. The creation of meaning, according to these perspectives, largely

becomes the narration of meaning, broadly following the formula, “this is what I currently know about a given thing, following the reconfiguration of my beliefs, in light of new information and/or perspectives relevant to that thing.” Although this is a very reductive summarisation, it demonstrates the assimilatory nature of interpreting events, as they unfold. Meaning is created, in both narration and interpretation, through the interrelationship between current understandings and the world in which they are applied. This interrelationship integrates new and expected events, with those which have already occurred. This dynamic applies in the case of both ideological master narratives and the life narratives through which individuals understand themselves.

Accordingly, narratives, and the act of narration, combine two co-dependent processes; integration, and projection. The integratory functions of narratives were highlighted by several scholars, particularly those studying individual life narratives. Naturally, this coheres with the hermeneutic perspective, as the meaning of the various parts of a narrative (e.g. events and people) is derived from their interrelationship with each other and with their aggregated whole. To interrelate the various aspects of an individual’s life is to *narratively* integrate them. However, this also applies to VE master narratives and the nomos on which they are based. Furthermore, because these master narratives are based on a particular kind of nomos, however fully or poorly elaborated and articulated verbally, into which their adherents are vertically and temporally integrated, they can afford individuals who participate in them a supreme sense of significance and the promise of symbolic immortality (on which that significance is likely based).

If meaning stems from integration, then integration within a master narrative, which constitutes *kairos*, or “deep time,” is perhaps the primary means by which VE narratives afford their adherents the meaning needed to fulfil their psychological needs.

The fulfilment of these needs is, however, not the only function which narratives serve within the radicalisation process. According to the last chapter's literature review, they also serve to give their adherents a clear sense of normative-ontological certainty. Clearly, the depiction of Manichean conflicts which leave no room for moral ambiguity are integral to this particular function. However, what certain perspectives outlined above offer, is a potential means of understanding how the depictions of such conflicts come to be adopted as truth. Roth's (2017) use of the "wandering viewpoint," is perhaps one such perspective, and is especially valuable because it suggests how the meaning derived from narrative integration is applied within the individual's view of the future. Accordingly, the possible narrative arcs of a VE master narrative determine an individual's life-narrative arcs, constraining the range of normative-ontological possibilities for their future (at least to the degree with which they are integrated within it).

This points to another insight provided by Roth's paradigm, in that it suggest a narrative *evolution* of how VE understand themselves, with regards to the nomic struggle which structures (in the Gadamerian sense) their reality. It is this evolution which gives a narrative arc its trajectory. Following Moghaddam's staircase, this evolution steers VE towards a severely limited range of goals and actions for the pursuit of their sacred values. As reality continues to move away from the nomos prescribed by their narrative, their "collective action frames" Snow (2004)⁶ become progressively more desperate. VE narratives thus project a life trajectory for their adherents and the fate of the sacred values to which they are fused. If this projected future is believed sincerely and can only be realised by precipitating a radical transformation in the existing state of society, then it becomes a moral obligation to engage in violence, the final step on Moghaddam's staircase. This is because the narrative trajectory which is projected renders the current

⁶ See Chapter 1, p. 41.

state of affairs so incongruent with the narrative's morally prescribed outcome, indeed for VE the only acceptable outcome, that it gradually implicates the status quo as in need of complete destruction.

This points to the revelatory nature of VE master narratives, whereby, the more integrated the life narratives of their adherents become within them, the more their adherents experience a sense of emerging clarity as they subjectively come into greater accord with the world around them, or become progressively more lucid about what is wrong with the world and what needs to be changed. As a result of this processes they come to achieve an ever greater lucidity of vision about what is *their* ultimate truth and, where it clashes with the values of the prevailing system, the moral imperative to undertake strategies and actions to turn it into external reality. VE narrative arcs which employ root war metaphors can provide this kind of clarity by narrating and hence crystallising normative-ontological certainty to the point where direct engagement in the battle between the forces of good and evil (as identified by projecting their intentional states) gives adherents the experience of heroic transformation from a state of passive impotence to one of committed action. Radicalisation, according to this view, is the experience of a progressive realisation of an individual's normative reality, and how they relate to, and ought to act, within it. Accordingly, carrying out acts of terrorism is a specific point in the nomic dialogue described by Berger (1967), a dialogue which has evolved according to a VE narrative structure to a point of no return.

The theories and perspectives, analysed above, offer a significant contribution to the development of a heuristic for understanding the role of narratives in radicalisation. When analysed in aggregate, and synthesised with contemporary radicalisation research, they provide key insights into the dynamics involved in VE narration and interpretation, including how these contribute towards the decision to engage in terrorism. Nevertheless,

in order to have a well-rounded heuristic, one that does not neglect the psychological dynamics involved in how individuals interpret, and narrate, issues of truth and morality, it is necessary to analyse certain theories and perspectives from moral and motivational psychology. These will provide greater depth, in terms of how humans develop their moralities, and come to perceive the world, according to their motivations. As will be argued, both aspects are demonstrably crucial to understanding radicalisation, and as such they shall be the focus of the next chapter.

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Chapter 3

Moral and Motivational Psychology within Violent Extremist Narratives

Introduction

The previous chapter sought to examine and compare various theories and perspectives of narrative psychology and interpretive processes, in terms of their relevance to the radicalisation process. It was argued that violent extremist master narratives are likely fundamental to influencing the life trajectories of individual VE, and their subsequent radicalisation pathways. Accordingly, self-understanding and the projection of possible futures in an individual's life-narrative, evolve through the ongoing of self-narration of his, or her life in relation to an overarching VE master narrative, or "root war metaphor" (Furrow and Goodall, 2011). This chapter will seek to develop these insights further, by examining relevant research from moral and motivational psychology.

These additional perspectives, it will be argued, must be incorporated into a heuristic for understanding VE narratives, as they enable a more detailed explanation of the role of narratives in the *action* of VE. That is, psychological research, which is both relevant to the moral and motivational functions of narratives suggested within the first chapter's literature review, and which also seeks to explain what motivates decisions and actions, must be included in order to bridge the gap between understanding how VE interpret/narrate the world, and why they choose to act on those interpretations. If the heuristic proposed by this study is to have any explanatory use, in terms of understanding how VE narratives contribute towards terrorism, it must reckon with the psychology of making moral judgements, and taking actions. Specifically, those judgements and actions

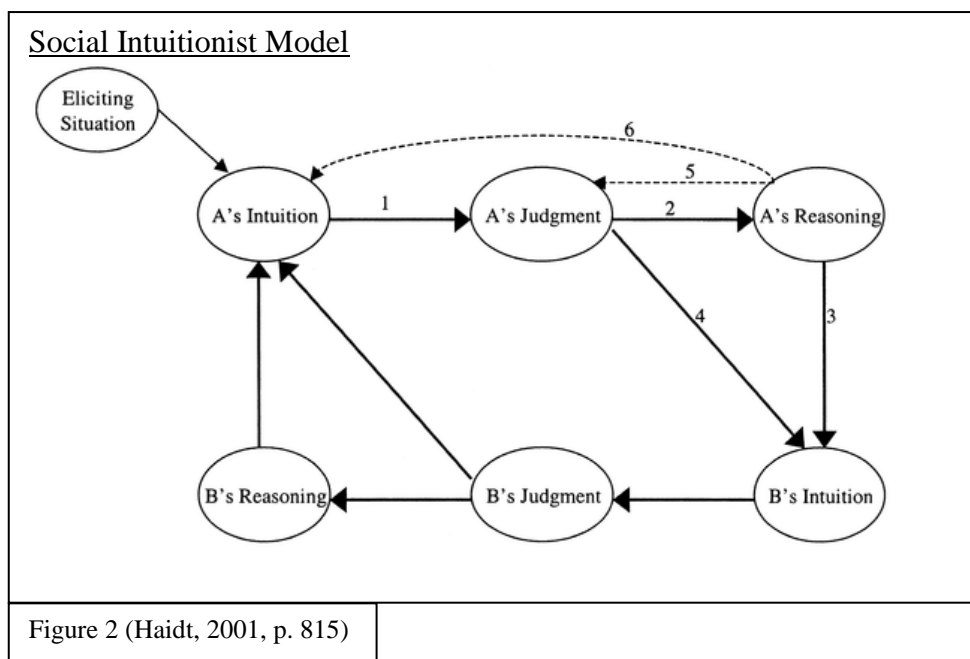
which contravene what would appear to be in a person's material or hedonic interest, as terrorism is itself dangerous for its perpetrators, and generally leads at worst to life incarceration, or death, and at the very least to a life in hiding, or a secretive existence which destroys any prospect of enjoying a fulfilling family life or the material comforts of a conventional career. This chapter will therefore draw on theories and perspectives from moral psychology (i.e. those pertaining to judgement making), and from motivational psychology, (i.e. those pertaining to why people take certain actions, and avoid others, particularly in relation to how they understand what they believe to be truth of their reality). These will then be synthesised within a conclusion which will place these perspectives in the context of radicalisation theories, and the psychology of narratives and interpretation examined thus far.

Moral Psychology and VE Narration

As argued in the literature review carried out in chapter one, VE narratives are likely to serve specific moral functions within the radicalisation process. Atran's (2016) Devoted Actor Model (DAM), and Griffin's (2012) heroic doubling paradigm both point to a sacred element in VE thinking, whilst Hogg and Adelman's (2013) Uncertainty Identity Theory highlights the inherently normative nature of VE group "prototypes." Consequently, it is necessary to consider relevant research from moral psychology, particularly those theories/models which are explicitly related, not only to notions of sacredness and the sense of being charged with a self-transcendent mission promising a form of immortality, but also to the psychological processes involved in narratives and interpretation (as outlined in the previous chapter).

Social Intuitionist Model

Haidt, (2001) outlines the Social Intuitionist Model (SIM) of moral decision making, in which he emphasises the primacy of intuitions over moral deliberative reasoning in the context of confronting ethical questions. Accordingly, moral judgements are made quickly in response to ethical questions and dilemmas, based on a person's intuitions, with their moral reasoning generally being provided afterwards, as a post-hoc rationalisation, and often only if solicited. Haidt defines moral judgements as evaluations made of the behaviours of others, using specific, often culturally defined, values as the standard for goodness. Moral reasoning, according to Haidt, is the (at least partly) conscious effort of rationalising ethical decisions using a step by step process, which applies a certain logic. Moral intuitions, by contrast, are the instantaneous feelings one has when confronted with circumstances that provoke internalised attitudes and valuations towards a given issue (see figure 1).



Additionally, Haidt refers to two categories of “motivated reasoning” which underlie the SIM. These are “relatedness motives” and “coherence motives”. Relatedness motives arise when people are motivated to agree with their friends or in-group, out of a desire for social acceptance and validation. From an evolutionary perspective these motives promote the smooth running of social interactions, essential for group collaboration and survival. Coherence motives on the other hand result from the need to have stable and reassuring conceptions of the world, and one’s place in it, particularly “self-definitional” attitudes, whereby individuals see themselves as having the right beliefs, and thus acting righteously as a result. Challenges to coherence in the form of contradictions found within one’s moral reasoning can lead to defence motivations. These cause people to react defensively, by selectively constructing arguments designed to maintain the coherence of their moral values, and the intuitions to which they give rise (p. 821).

Ostensibly, to apply the SIM to VE narratives might suggest that they serve to depict the world in a way that affords the motivated reasoning required to support moral intuitions. Ideology, or more specifically, the ideological framing of events within narratives would thus appear as post-hoc rationalisations for moral judgments made intuitively. After all, according to Bruner (1987), narratives serve to explain why things are not as they (intuitively?) should be. Berger (1967) also proposed that narratives or “folktales” were used as higher-order “legitimations,” designed to re-establish the integrity of a group’s sacred canopy. However, in light of the interpretive and narrative *processes* examined in the previous chapter, this might not straightforwardly be the case.

For Gadamer (2004), interpretation follows from a person’s ontological prejudices (their pre-judgements), what they believe to be true a-priori, which are then modified, or refined in light of new information (be it confirmatory or dis-confirmatory).

Likewise, Berger (1967) described the construction of sacred canopies, and the societally shared moral understandings of the world comprised within them, as a “dialectical phenomenon,” which, “...continuously acts back upon its producer” (p. 3). This description coheres significantly with the depiction of the SIM provided in figure 1, whereby a person’s moral intuition, judgement, and reasoning, recursively feedback into one another, in response to an eliciting situation, and the interpretation of it given by others.

Moral intuitions would thus appear to be deeply embedded within an individual’s understanding of reality, not unlike Gadamer’s prejudices, or “fore-understandings.” Indeed, both intuitions and prejudices might even be considered analogous to the extent that they encompass normative expectations of what ought to happen, and ought not to happen, in a given situation. Bruner’s (1987) paradigm also posits that culturally canonical expectations are integral to a narrative’s capacity to generate meaning. It is in the violation of these expectations, i.e. when things are not as they intuitively should be, that narratives come to the fore. However, the corollary of this is that intuitions are themselves a function of the kind of narration which entails the ongoing development of someone’s normative expectations. That is, following the social intuition process depicted in figure 1, the relationship between moral intuitions and the narratives in which they are articulated, is somewhat cyclical.

Whilst ideological apologia might in fact accurately describe much of the post-intuition “motivated reasoning” described by Haidt (2001), ideological intuitions would also appear to be an integral part of interpretation and narration, with moral intuitions developing in line with the evolving narratives by which a person understands a situation. Haidt’s “eliciting situation,” may even be likened to Bruner’s notion of a challenge to cultural canon, the narration of which redefines what a person believes to be canonical,

and what as a consequence they *intuitively* expect to be the case in future situations. Moral intuitions are thus part of an ongoing, and context-specific (to the relevant situations) interpretive process of understanding the world, which, whilst not necessarily always comprising a single narrative or worldview, nevertheless involves narrative(s) in the application and development of those intuitions. That intuitions are part of narration, certainly to the extent that they provide moral expectations, is perhaps uncontroversial. It is however, worth emphasising that following the theories discussed in the last chapter, narratives are not just devised after a challenge, but rather, just as according to Heidegger (2010), "...Dasein is already *ahead* of itself in its being." (p. 185 emphasis in original), so too is the individual always already in a narrative, i.e. the kind of life narrative arcs described by Roth (2017), with all the normative expectancies these involve. However, it may also be useful to explore where intuitions, and the narratives of which they are a part, arise. That is, why morally narrate a situation at all? Or articulate what one values in that situation and why? Or why in fact do people care enough about certain things to have the need to narrate them the first place? Evidently, these are broad questions that concern essential aspects of human existence, and thus would require an entire book to answer in any way satisfactorily. However, for the purpose of this study, it will be sufficient to examine those perspectives most relevant to the role of narratives in radicalisation, i.e. what do narratives do in terms of the above questions, and how does this influence a person's decision to engage in terrorism.

Moral Foundations Theory

In order to explain in greater depth the origins of moral intuitions, Haidt & Joseph (2004) and Haidt & Graham (2007) developed what would become the Moral

Foundations Theory (MFT). As a psychological theory of human morality, MFT was formulated as both a nativist theory (positing innate evolutionary pre-dispositions), and a cultural-psychological theory (positing the processes by which groups share and construct the meanings of their values). According to MFT, “human groups construct moral virtues, meanings, and institutions in variable ways by relying, to varying degrees, on five innate psychological systems” Koleva, *et al* (2012, p. 185). These systems generate the automatic intuitions that form the basis of the moral evaluations produced in response to eliciting situations, as per the SIM outlined above. The five moral foundations are; “harm/care, fairness/reciprocity, in-group/loyalty, authority/respect, and purity/sanctity.” (p. 185). According to MFT, each of these five foundational virtues have an evolutionary basis, rendering them universally available (though with varying emphasis) to all peoples and societies.

In further research, Koleva, *et al*, (2012) sought to use MFT to explain the opposing views expressed on culturally sensitive political issues in America. Using two studies, the views of 24,739 people across the US were sought on 20 “culture war” issues (e.g. same-sex marriage and immigration), after they had completed an MFT questionnaire, designed to gauge which moral foundations were given priority. In both studies differences in endorsements of moral foundations predicted positions on “culture war” issues. One key finding was that the “purity/sanctity” foundation was a strong predictor on issues regarding sexuality, illegal immigration, and flag burning. In-group loyalty was also associated with firm positions on issues of national security. Thus, higher purity and in-group/loyalty scores predict positions on political issues which fall towards the political right. By contrast, higher harm/care and fairness/justice scores predicted positions which fell towards the political left. These findings are likely relevant to this study, as they suggest those moral foundations which may be most represented in RWE

narratives, i.e. which values and corresponding moral foundations do such narratives purport to serve. Indeed, the purity/sanctity, in-group/loyalty, and harm/care moral foundations, would seem a likely feature of narratives depicting nomic threats to a wider community. Moreover, these moral foundations appear to relate to the “identity-fusion” of devoted actors with their in-group, and the sacred values they are believed to embody, the preservation of which motivates deontic violence (Atran, 2016).

Moreover, Haidt, Graham and Joseph, (2009) argue that evidence for MFT in moderate ideological narratives is discernible, and can be insightful in understanding the personalities of their adherents. Accordingly, they distinguish between three main levels of personality. Firstly, at the most innate level, de-contextualised personality traits such as those measured in the “Big five taxonomy,”⁷ which are likely to be present irrespective of circumstances. Secondly, at level two, these innate character traits are contextualised and become “characteristic adaptations,” as a person manifests their dispositions according to their surroundings, including the other people in it. Individual moral foundations, the authors argue, mostly come into being at this second level, as this is where a person’s values and preferences start to take form, at the nexus between nativist traits and cultural constructions begins.

Narratives, particularly ideological narratives, come into play at level three, and are partly derived from integrating level 2 values into a coherent worldview. The authors cite research by McAdams, *et al* (2008) into the way “integrative life stories” impact on a person’s notions of morality and political persuasions. These life stories concern not only a person’s beliefs, but crucially *why* they come to hold them. They are co-authored

⁷ The big five personality traits, according to McAdams and Pals (2006), “...organises individual differences in social and emotional life into five factor-analytically-derived categories, most commonly labelled extraversion (vs. introversion), neuroticism (negative affectivity), conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness to experience.” (p. 204)

between a person and the, “cultural context within which the person's life is embedded and given meaning” (p. 101). Here again, there appears to be a reciprocal relationship between narration and the moral intuitions by which a person interprets their surroundings, and produces normative expectations, not unlike the kind of dialectical socialisation described by Berger (1967), which acts back upon its producer. Moral intuitions are thus born out of a specific *narrated* context. What Haidt, Graham, and Joseph’s (2009) three tiered approach adds to this recursive dynamic is a more individualised understanding of ideological narratives, which draws on personal predispositions and life-development.

MFT is useful for understanding the interaction between life narratives and ideological narratives, because it suggests that both are centred on identifiable (and sometimes even opposing) moral foundations. These moral foundations both enable and constrain a person’s interpretation of the world by limiting, or making available to them, different values through which to perceive their individual life experiences, and their wider cultural context. The cultural context itself can both enable and constrain the various perspectives available to an individual, through which they can frame the values/moral foundations towards which they are predisposed⁸.

Motivational Psychology, VE Narratives and Actions

In outlining Significance Quest Theory (SQT) Kruglanski, Belanger and Gunaratna (2019) suggest the various psychological antecedents which can engender, or

⁸ That is not, however, to suggest a completely deterministic view of political leanings, whereby a person predisposed towards certain moral foundations is completely incapable of understanding the view of someone predisposed towards other, often contradicting, moral foundations. Rather, it is to suggest that moral foundations make certain perspectives more accessible and convincing than others, which in turn gives certain issues greater salience and priority than others (because they are perceived to have greater value).

are in some degree analogous, to the need for significance. Psychologists, the authors argue, "...have long realised this quest constitutes a universal, human motivation variously labelled as the need for *esteem, achievement, meaning, competence control, etc.* (p. 43 emphasis in original). Amongst the examples of relevant work, they cite Higgins's, (2014) book *Beyond Pleasure and Pain: How Motivation Works*. In the book, Higgins argues that much of human motivation stems from an innate desire to exert effective control over one's environment, emphasising the human need, "...to be effective in life pursuits," (p. 41) and to be, "...directing choices in order to be effective" (p. 42).

Higgins developed this approach, in part, as a response to what is sometimes termed the "hedonic" approach to motivational psychology, which emphasises the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain. For Higgins, this approach was fundamentally lacking, as it did not address the innate desire for competence in life pursuits, evidenced by other scholars, namely Robert W. White's research into the desire for competence, (White, 1959) and Albert Bandura's work on the need for self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982), alongside his own research (Higgins 1997). Though pleasure and pain were important, Higgins (2014) argued that they were overvalued and in fact often functioned as "...a highly useful feedback signals about whether the goal pursuit has been effective or not" (p. 44). Thus, the motivation for self-efficacy and agency, is generally speaking primary.

Given that VE often engage in terrorism in an attempt to bring about change, or influence a course of events, it is likely, at least in a very broad sense, that Higgins approach to motivation has relevance in this context. However, it is the particular ways of being effective that Higgins outlines which are especially relevant to the function of narratives in radicalisation, particularly as they pertain to the need for closure, and the subsequent ability to act with moral certainty, and perceived efficacy. Higgins, (2014) distinguishes between value effectiveness, truth effectiveness and control effectiveness,

as motivating people in the formation of their beliefs and their decisions to act. Broadly speaking, value effectiveness is the ability to uphold and achieve one's aspirations, truth effectiveness refers to someone's ability to acquire an accurate perception and understanding of reality, whilst control effectiveness refers to their capacity to influence that reality.

In the context of VE and specifically SQT, narratives function as “meaning frameworks” in order to direct individuals towards violent means for political ends (Kruglanski, *et al*, 2018, p. 109). Accordingly, these narratives must include value, truth and control effectiveness in its portrayal of the world; that is, how one should act in it, and why. Furthermore, by providing moral clarity, a narrative can restore closure, by giving an unambiguous truth from which to base judgements and actions, so avoiding, removing or anaesthetizing the psychological pain generated by the cognitive dissonance from how the world is (seen) and how it should be. “Truth” is thus, at least partly, narrated in order to ensure a clear moral framework, depicting unambiguous values that can be used to restore significance. In line with the DAM, SQT, and heroic doubling, VE narratives would thus seem to allow their adherents to competently apprehend the world in a totalising, non-relativistic frame of mind, particularly in terms of what their sacred values/nomos demand of them, in a way that enables their moral elevation, and sense of significance. They give a sense of ontological certainty and moral clarity, experienced as deontic duty (what the situation demands of them), and the subsequent impetus needed for heroic actions and self-transformation. Heroic doubles can only be realised through a coherent moral/nomic understanding of the world, mediated through a narrative which makes the realisation of those doubles necessary.

Indeed, heroic doubles may themselves be considered a supreme incarnation of the human desire for truth, control, and value effectiveness, as their whole being arises

out of a need to restore/establish a nomic *ultimate truth*, and influence the course of human history in accordance with this truth. Ultimate truth is consequently required, and in turn apprehended through narratives, as a means for the ultimate control effectiveness. However, narratives do not just serve as useful signposts, sought after the need to act effectively has arisen. They are also integral to bringing an individual into what might be, to them, a logical cul-de-sac, and the inescapable moral position, and sense of duty, whereby the only way out is to commit a violent destructive act, due to a lack of alternatives. Paradoxically then, the inner act of moral closure can shut out, exclude alternative diagnoses, moral outcomes and ways of acting on reality, trapping the extremist within the fatal logic of his/her analysis. At that point, the search for a way out of an oppressive present, for psychological escape and freedom, has only led to a different sort of oppression enacted on the anomic pre-terrorist self by the heroic double, which comes to define their conscience.

In this way, VE narratives may themselves create the tension between the actual selves of potential terrorists, and their ideal/ought selves or alter ego on a mission to enact a moment of self-transcendence at times *even at the cost of life itself*, i.e. the heroic doubles. The realisation of these doubles is consequently designed to break this tension. It is thus necessary to examine how this tension might precipitate the moment at which individuals who subscribe to VE narratives decide to act on such narratives, through violence. This means going beyond the observation that such narratives depict Manichean futures, and create a moral impetus, and looking in more detail at the psychology of fear, angst, and the need for agency.

Fear, Control and VE Narratives

Miceli and Castelfranchi (2005) argue that anxiety is fundamentally an “epistemic emotion”, and advance a framework for understanding it from the perspective of a person’s perceived level of control, specifically, the perceived control that arises from a person’s capacity to foretell and influence the future, with regards to something that person values. They argue that anxiety is, “...in fact a very general and basic emotion, as it “revolves” around the notion of threat.” (p. 292). Wherever a domain exists whereby a person cares for the achievement, or security, of a given goal or outcome, and the perceived possibility exists for those goals or outcomes to be thwarted, then the potential for anxiety arises. Anxiety is thus fundamentally a product of uncertainty, and, the authors argue, is subsequently distinguishable from fear, which entails specific knowledge (greater certainty) of an expected identified threat. Although an awareness of possible events can elicit fear, it is the degree to which a person is uncertain of the likelihood of such events, and the perceived uncertainty of the dangers involved which creates anxiety. Whereas fear stems from knowledge of specific threats, anxiety stems from a lack of knowledge surrounding the possibility of threats.

This distinction between anxiety and fear has important implications in terms of how a person perceives their ability to control the world around them, according to their values. Miceli and Castelfranchi make another distinction between two kinds of control: “pragmatic control, that is power over events, so as to shape them according to one’s own goals, and epistemic control, that is being able to foresee what will happen, and particularly whether one’s own goals will be realized or not.” (p. 292). It is notable that Miceli and Castelfranchi’s (2005) distinction between epistemic control and pragmatic control both cohere with Higgin’s (2014) notions of truth effectiveness and control effectiveness respectively as outlined above. However, by framing these constructs in

the context of fear and anxiety, Miceli and Castelfranchi highlight their anticipatory nature, and crucially, the emotional force they can thus exert. Indeed, in their formulation, epistemic and pragmatic control are innately tied to the *future* of what one values. In a certain sense, this is logical, because a person cannot control the past. However, it is nevertheless important to highlight, because it suggests how a person's emotions are tied to their expectancies, and longer-term future projections, both of which are the subject of life narratives, influencing the way in which they interpret the world, and their future possibilities.

Accordingly, the experience of having both epistemic and pragmatic control over a narrative is an emotional one, whereby control is sought to relieve anxiety and fear. The kind of control in question is particularly relevant to radicalisation, as it pertains to a person's capacity to understand the world in terms of causes of phenomena, and the subsequent ability to make predictions about the future, alongside the perceived capacity to change the world based on these predictions. Epistemic control in particular, would appear to describe one of the central psychological functions of narratives charged with relating the unfolding shape or story of individual's life to him-/herself. Bruner (1987) argued that such narratives served to identify, and project onto others "intentional states," which could be used to understand a challenge to one's culturally acquired normative expectations; that is, why things are not as they should be (p. 49-50). Knowledge of such intentional states would appear key to both epistemic and pragmatic control.

Moreover, Miceli and Castelfranchi (2005) cite the work of Kelley (1967), to describe the need for epistemic control as one "...to attain cognitive mastery of the causal structure of the environment" (p. 193). Importantly, Miceli and Castelfranchi argue that, in the context of future events, this cognitive mastery means knowing (or projecting in narrative arcs?) "...with the greatest possible degree of certainty what will happen, which

causes – including one’s own and others’ behaviour – will operate to bring about which effects, beneficial or harmful as they may be.” (p. 296)

Terrorism seeks to bring about political change, based not only on the righteousness of the terrorist’s cause, but also based on the conviction with which they believe their narrative to be true, and particularly the *future* narrative projection of the intolerable state of the world yet to come. Moreover, following the arguments set out in the previous chapter, a sense of moral righteousness, and the attendant belief in the moral license to enact extreme acts of violence and murder are inseparable aspects of experiencing the projection of these futures, as the Heideggerian “care-structure,” on which life narratives are based (Roth, 2017, p. 759), is simultaneously both normative and ontological. Certainly, for Gadamer (p. 277-289), both normative and ontological aspects were part of the same phenomena of interpretation. Consequently, a person’s experience of both epistemic and pragmatic control are co-constitutive in the radicalisation process, and are likely regulated through, and determined by, the degree to which they adhere to a “de-pluralised” (Koehler’s 2015) VE narrative.

Although previous research implied a subordinate relationship, whereby epistemic control was generally instrumental to the primary goal of having pragmatic control, Miceli and Castelfranchi, by contrast, argue that whilst this is often true, the epistemic motivation can function autonomously, and sometimes even contradict the pragmatic one. The conflict arises, in large part, out of the need to alleviate the anxiety of uncertainty, and a subsequent reorientation towards fearful (often fatalistic) certainty, as a response. People in these circumstances forfeit their sense of pragmatic control over their future, or the future of what it is they value, for greater epistemic control, in the form of a purportedly more realistic and *certain* view of the future, whereby their actions are

futile, as the negative outcome is inevitable. “In such cases, anticipation of failure is regarded as “preferable” to the anxiety caused by uncertainty.” (p. 299)

That having a sense of epistemic control can run counter to pragmatic control in this way, is important because, as Miceli and Castelfranchi argue, it explicitly entails the negation of potential courses of action for addressing threats. Anxiety and the, often intolerable, uncertainty facing a person, or their values (a constant state of not knowing whether their actions, or those of others will secure them), is overcome by having the looming disaster assured. However, in extreme circumstances, what replaces this anxious uncertainty is unbridled pessimism, depression, and fear. If what initially gave rise to a person’s anxiety was a perceived threat to their sacred values, then that which is feared may become the potential meaninglessness of a world devoid of any *nomos*. In the case of VE, rectifying this state of dread means bringing back into contestation what was formerly believed to be the inevitable outcome of the current situation.

Overcoming anomic nihilism, in this respect, means regaining a significant degree of pragmatic control, or rather the possibility of pragmatic control, afforded by rejecting the current status quo, and its perceived *nomocidal* trajectory. This may reflect Polizzi’s (2021) research into the “digital they-self” of RWE terrorists, which draws on Heideggerian concepts (i.e. the “they-self”⁹), alongside Griffin’s (2012) paradigm, and in particular Berger’s (1967) work on “sacred canopies,” (the latter two discussed in chapter one and two). Echoing Atran’s (2016) Devoted Actor Model, Polizzi describes how

⁹ Heidegger’s notion of the “they-self” refers to the way in which the facticity of being in given group, with shared taken for granted understandings, structures one’s own self-understanding. Dasein recognises its “being-in-the-world,” through its “being-with” others. The normative dimension is integral here as, “...Being-with existentially determines Dasein even when another is not factically present and perceived.” (Heidegger, 2010, p. 117). Indeed, “...As being with, Dasein “is” essentially for the sake of others.” (p. 120). With reference to Berger’s work on sacred canopies Polizzi (2021) describes how “...As a meaning-generating process, the they-self orders human existence from a specific *nomizing* “point of view,” which in turn provides being-in-the-world a structure of meaning by which to pursue its projects. (p. 7)

Dylan Roof felt morally compelled to carry out his terror attack at the Mother Emanuel Church in South Carolina, which killed nine members of the congregation. Roof targeted the African Methodist Episcopal, because he sought to kill only African-Americans, in order to precipitate a race war within the US (p. 204-9).

Interestingly, however, in subsequent interviews carried out by the FBI, Roof was not especially optimistic about the chances of his attack succeeding in this regard. For Roof, it would seem, terrorism was the only available action, after his, largely online, radicalisation process, wherein he became preoccupied with crime, particularly violent crime, perpetuated by black Americans against white Americans (often mediated through RWE websites). Having completely internalised (in Berger's sense of the term), an RWE framing of such crimes as being ontological and endemic, according to Roof, his was the only way of responding to his perception of a stark reality, by which he understood his life narrative. Despite, by his own admission, having little chance of exerting any pragmatic control over his RWE master narrative, Roof nevertheless sought a kind of moral-nomic solace in his actions. As Polizzi argues, "What Roof's phenomenology reveals is a manifestation of being-in-the-world-as-white-supremacist that is shamed by the "truth" he is provided by this digital process of nomic ordering and becomes determined to respond." (p. 211)

Gaining the kind of complete epistemic control, whereby the only right action is to attempt to transform the world (in Roof's case through a race war), would require a negation of all the other potential courses of action for securing one's sacred values. The kind of absolutist and exclusive epistemic control this would represent, resembles, in both appearance and practice, Koehler's (2015) description of radicalisation as "de-pluralisation," (see literature review). When an individual's worldview becomes de-pluralised by having the meaning of his or her values "fixed" within an ideological

narrative's depictions of the world (as opposed to more abstract notions of ideologies), then the corresponding means for achieving those values (and thus narrative trajectories) becomes similarly de-pluralised. What Koehler terms "contrast societies," including VE movements/groups, seek to transform their target societies (the target audience for their narratives) by inculcating in them the de-pluralised meanings realised within their VE narratives, through a range of "framing acts," including terrorism (p. 29).

Similarly, Moghaddam's (2005) staircase model of radicalisation describes a complete transformation of worldview, characterised by a progressive rejection of the societally legitimate means for addressing a political grievance, to the point of a total rejection of the status quo, the continuance of which represents the triumph of evil, typically metaphysical for religious fundamentalists and moral for secularists (or at least secularists do not explicitly use a theological-metaphysical). Moreover, following Griffin (2012), this evil can be defined as the existence of a morally bankrupt or culturally decadent society, and/or the main obstacle to the defending, or rejuvenating of a once glorious nomos. Indeed, based on Griffin's application of existential psychology (e.g. Becker 1973), the status quo itself can represent the terror of a death entirely disconnected from any symbolic immortality, or wider narrative, by which a person's life is given meaning which transcends their mortal finitude, i.e. their basic "creatureliness" (Becker, 1973, p. 87). Having one's sacred values threatened in such a way, not only threatens a wider identity-fused community, but also simultaneously threatens the value of the individual's life: after the world has been stripped of what matters most, their nomic shield, an individual life too ceases to matter.

Narratives that project such apocalyptic conclusions may also maximise the perceived epistemic control of their adherents, and might be, at least partly, rooted in the need to relieve existential anxiety. Perhaps paradoxically, this would suggest that a high

degree of fatalism might also provide a sense of agency through the promise of an imminent reckoning which will decide the fate of one's nomos. The scope for pragmatic control is thus reduced to initiating this revolutionary moment, and "awakening" others to its nomic-existential implications. All future possibilities, the Heideggerian thrown-projections, or projected narrative arcs, as outlined by Roth (2017)¹⁰, come to be defined by this moment, which in turn defines how agency is realised. No other opportunities are perceived to exist for exerting pragmatic control and being at peace with one's conscience, outside of the potentially (however improbable) revolutionary creative destruction of terrorism. Similarly, the perceived transformative potential of terrorism becomes the only avenue for escaping the fear of a meaningless life, one devoid of any nomos.

Maximising epistemic control through the certainty of a destructive future is perhaps the primary way VE narratives can, following SQT, fulfil the need for closure, and provide the promise of a restored sense of significance. Indeed, a large part of an individual's perceived significance revolves around the perception that one has the pragmatic control over the security of one's sacred values. However, following the above argument, maximising epistemic control may also entail minimising pragmatic control to a severely limited range of actions, which, however desperately, are designed to reconstitute reality itself. This minimum degree of terrorist pragmatic control, is likely the product of an increasingly Manichean narrative which, as it unfolds, negates any alternative means for protecting sacred values (and the identity-fused groups they come to symbolise), which themselves come to be defined in opposition to the current status quo. In this regard, the normative-ontological "game" which, in the Gadamerian sense, constitutes reality, and on which a person previously based their life narratives, comes to

¹⁰ See Chapter 2, p. 114.

be viewed as rigged against both their sacred values and their in-group. This morally necessitates an overturning, or at least a rupture, in the normative-ontological ordering of the world, in order to change the games “structure,” again using Gadamer’s language, in an attempt to avert the nomic catastrophe that is putatively assured by its current configuration. Acts of terrorism are designed to achieve this normative-ontological restructuring, by “awakening” others to the narrative trajectory which the current structure is perceived to make inevitable. Accordingly, by inspiring like-minded others¹¹ to raise this consciousness through similar terroristic acts of creative destruction, VE believe they can emerge victorious, by precipitating *their* revolution, rather than that of their perceived enemy, or, as in the case of Roof, at least carry out a symbolically significant act which highlights a fundamental social evil, in his case a multi-ethnic America, and inspires other to take up the struggle further.

An alternative, perhaps simpler, pathway to VE acts might be through the conventional relationship between epistemic and pragmatic control, described in the model proposed by Miceli and Castelfranchi (2005), wherein the former is purely instrumental to the latter, rather than sought for its own sake. Put simply, the need to act effectively creates the need to understand effectively. Consequently, having a totally fatalistic sense of epistemic control, which denies, or minimises the perceived utility of any action, is inimical to this purpose. VE narratives might therefore be adopted because the perceived epistemic control they afford their adherents (in the form of certainty or closure), also affords a perceived degree of pragmatic control. Indeed, the belief that one can transform a society at all, or act as a catalyst to its future transformation, is perhaps

¹¹ For example, part of the rationale behind the attacks of Anders Breivik, was that he wanted to inspire the mobilisation of “Knights Templars,” who shared his ideology, and would carry out similar attacks. As Griffin (2012, p. 210) argues, these were a fundamental part of the creative destruction by which Breivik planned to transform European societies (see p. 54 previous chapter).

one way VE narratives are used instrumentally to give their adherents a high degree of perceived pragmatic control, without necessarily undergoing the fear of meaninglessness and despair, which characterises the epistemic control of *complete* negative certainty.

On the other hand, such an account would leave out the intense emotional and motivational force which such a fear would generate, a possible prerequisite for carrying out a terrorist act. The question which then arises is, do terrorists act out of a desperate sense of impotency, having had all other recourses denied to them? Or do they act out of a sense of maximum, even Promethean potency, that has been promised to them by their narrative, and the heroic self it enables them to become? Or are different terrorist personalities/ /temperaments/ logics at work? Given the emphasis placed on threats and fear by the theories and models discussed in chapter one, e.g. threats to sacred values (Atran 2016), nomocidal threats (Griffin, 2012), and the threat of an uncertain future for an individual's in-group (Hogg and Adelman, 2013)¹², the former might be more the case than the latter, though this may differ across contexts, or depend on individual psychology.

Perhaps, however, both pathways are far from being mutually exclusive. Rather, it is possible that the greater the desperation a narrative can induce, by projecting apocalyptic futures, the more pragmatic control it can promise through the creative destruction ensured by these futures. Indeed, because VE narratives negate societally accepted means for addressing political grievances, they turn destruction of the societal status quo into the only means of pragmatic control. Promethean acts of revolution are consequently necessitated by the narration of nomocidal threats, and at the same time

¹² One might also add Significance Quest Theory to this list, where potential VE are motivated by the need to avoid a loss of significance. Kruglanski, Belanger and Gunaratna (2019) distinguish between three precursors to the significance quest; a present loss of significance, or *deprivation* (e.g. from a perceived humiliation), an anticipated loss of significance necessitating a need for *avoidance* (e.g. from a perceived threat), and the *incentive* of gaining increased significance. (p. 44)

reduced to the only true available means of realising agency, i.e. taking part in the narrative's Manichean struggle. In this view, the binary relationship between complete powerlessness and a perceived maximum transformational level of potency, is itself a product of narration. Having complete epistemic certainty would therefore render the perceived ability to influence the future as either total or zero.

If epistemic and pragmatic control are sought *in response* to anxiety, fear, and desperation, it might reflect a relationship between narratives, and the need for control similar to that of narratives and the need for significance, according to SQT, but in a way that gives them more causal importance than the authors perhaps suggested. Although Kruglanski, Belanger and Gunaratna (2019) argue that the relationships between, and the prominence of, each of the "three N's" (need for significance, a narrative and a network) can vary between cases and contexts, their formula is generally framed as having the (closure restoring) narrative adopted in response to a significance loss (though this may partly be due to reasons of clarity when explaining the process). According to this view, VE narratives would, like epistemic certainty more generally, appear to be more instrumental in addressing *an already existent* need for significance and closure. In their words, "It is this desire for certainty that fosters a preference for simplistic black-and-white, us-versus-them narratives" (p. 47). Whilst this might accurately describe the pathway for many VE, it may overlook the role of narratives in engendering a need for significance and certainty, in light of their relations to epistemic and pragmatic control.

That is, where narratives provide a high degree of epistemic control, through total, or near total, negative certainty (as is likely the case for Manichean/apocalyptic narratives), then epistemic control itself, in the form of the ultimate truth which VE narratives claim to possess, may be the primary factor in motivating terrorism. For instance, high epistemic control, in the form of the certainty of an *anticipated* homicidal

threat, would likely engender a need for an *avoidance* of a significance loss. Because epistemic and pragmatic control are futural emotions, in that they depend on the perceived ability to anticipate and influence future events, then, to the extent that they effect an individual's sense of significance, this sense is also contingent on the projection of possible futures. Clearly, a perceived lack of epistemic control can create anxiety (uncertainty) over a person's sacred values, leading to a loss of significance. However, the perception of high, or complete epistemic control, can create fear (negative certainty) over the future of such values, which may subsequently intensify feelings of lost significance (or the need to avoid such a loss), or even create the original perception of a loss (or the perceived threat thereof).

This would differ somewhat from the notion of narratives as signposts, directing potential VE towards the means for redressing their lost significance, and perhaps gives them a more central role in creating the motivational and emotional force behind acts of terrorism. It would also be more congruent with the processual nature of narratives, as outlined in the previous chapter. Rather than being static formulas, narratives are continuously applied and adapted through the ongoing act of interpretation. Particularly life narratives, which Roth (2017 p. 747) argues unfold over time, with the movement of the wandering viewpoint which characterises the perspective of reading (and projecting) from the middle of continual narrative. Accordingly, the process of narrating one's life, involves greater clarity surrounding possible future situations, and how to act in them, i.e. epistemic and pragmatic control. As this perception of epistemic control increases for potential VE, with the development of their life-narratives, so too does the fear, and subsequent moral impetus to act, as they become increasingly certain that their sacred values are being threatened. Under these circumstances epistemic control not only facilitates pragmatic control, but necessitates it both rhetorically and emotionally, through

prophesising the destruction of one's nomos, and the existential dread of a meaningless existence, one devoid of the symbolic immortality it formerly provided.

Narrative Endings and Emotional States

It is however important to remember that VE, including RWE, is a multifaceted phenomenon, spanning a variety of contexts and individual radicalisation pathways, making generalisations (particularly regarding the causality of emotional states), more speculative than in other areas of research. Indeed, the role of fear, anxiety, and the need for control in VE narratives, and the radicalisation process more broadly, as suggested here, is precisely what a heuristic for understanding RWE narratives should aim to clarify. To do so, it will be important to analyse those RWE narratives which are more autobiographical in relating a first-hand account of radicalisation, as well as those which describe sacred values, and political concepts, through more emotive language.

Nevertheless, the research and perspectives discussed above are useful, because they suggest ways in which narratives interplay with an individual's emotions and existential needs, as part of radicalisation towards violence. This might go some way to addressing the critique made by McCauley and Moskaleiko (2017) of perspectives which, to them, overemphasise the role of ideology in motivating violence, and subsequently underplay the role of emotions (p. 213). For McCauley and Moskaleiko emotions were the primary cause for pushing a person into violence, and separated many of those who held VE belief from those who acted on such beliefs. However, as discussed in chapter one, this position depends on a significantly more limited conception of ideology and narratives. This can perhaps be demonstrated when the author's argue that the individual and group level mechanisms that they identify can inspire "...radical action

in the absence of radical ideas.” (p. 212). Many of these mechanisms reflect the author’s emphasis on emotions e.g. “...love, risk and status,” and “...competition, and isolation and threat,” (p. 212).

The perspective developing here, however, would hold that the kind of emotions McCauley and Moskalenko raise (particularly those concerning threat), are part and parcel of the phenomenology of VE narratives. Anxiety and fear are, according to Miceli and Castelfranchi (2005), epistemic emotions, and are thus dependent on beliefs surrounding a person’s values, including their perceived ability to know the future of such values (embodied for VE in sacralised communities according to the DAM), and their ability to act accordingly. To the extent that values are mediated and defined by ideological narratives, then the emotional experience of having those values threatened is inseparable from the experience of adhering to those narratives. Narratives are not just adopted because a person cares about a pre-given value, rather they are developed in the act of trying to gain epistemic and pragmatic control over such values, i.e. the act of trying to project the possible futures of such values.

Consequently, for VE to care for, or have an emotional interest in something (sacred values and in-groups), is to narrate it. Here, the Heideggerian notion of “care-structure” might be useful (see also previous chapter). For Heidegger (2010, p. 184-9), the structural unity of “being-in-the-world” that constitutes a person’s (or Dasein’s) mode of existence, is realised through “care.” Specifically, “care” attunes one towards a place and time, and structures how one experiences the context in which one are “thrown.” Importantly, care structures the experience of anticipating the future development of that context, i.e. care structures the possible futures one projects.

According to Roth (2017), this care-structure characterises the experience of interpreting, and projecting a life narrative as it unfolds: “we are selves at the center of a fabric composed of numerous narrative threads.” (p. 759). Part of caring, in this respect, is the emotional significance of the issue to which one is attuned as part of their self-narration; indeed, both attunement and emotional significance are, from a Heideggerian perspective, part of the same phenomena of being-in-the-world. Notably, much of Heidegger’s work discusses “moods” in relation to fear and anxiety, as fundamental aspects of human existence, or Dasein. According to Elpidorou and Freeman’s (2015) interpretation of Heidegger, “moods are basic affective states that make circumspective engagement with the world possible: they open up the world to us and reveal it to us as a world that is suffused with values and entities that matter to us.” (p. 668). The authors subsequently argue that emotions (e.g. fear), are derived from such moods (e.g. anxiety), that is, “...moods should be thought of as the background against which occurrent and intentionally specific emotions arise” (p. 668).

Echoing Miceli and Castelfranchi’s (2005) distinction between anxiety and fear, according to Elpidorou and Freeman (2015), fear is characterised by object-specific certainty, whereas anxiety arises out of the very state of being an entity that projects (uncertain) futures of itself. Both fear and anxiety can be seen as representing higher and lower levels of epistemic control, respectively. For Elpidorou and Freeman, “The fact that fear is directed at a specific worldly entity can be taken as evidence in support of the claim that fear, even in Heidegger’s understanding, is an emotion, and not a mood.” (p. 668). Exactly how well the author’s distinction between moods and emotions stands up to scrutiny, and is useful (Miceli and Castelfranchi for instance refer to anxiety as an emotion), is not of central importance for this study. What is important is that emotional experiences (particularly involving fear), and projecting future narrative arcs as per Roth

(2017), are united by, and follow from, care. Care, can perhaps thus be viewed as underlying a person's sense of epistemic control, and care-structures that orientate people towards high negative-certainty in the form of a specific threat might thus be considered "fear-structures". Narratives which follow a fear-structure, give their adherents a sense of epistemic control over that which they care for.

Taking action, that is exerting one's pragmatic control over the future (or in the case of terrorists existentially committing to a cause and course of action that provides the illusion of exerting control over the narrative arc of one's own life by changing the status quo through a self-sacrificial heroic act) can, according to this view, be seen as an emotional response, as the individual attempts to overcome a state of tension and fear. Far from being a separate epiphenomenon, or sought after the fact, narratives would appear as inextricably bound up with the emotional experiences undergone during radicalisation. For those who do act on their beliefs, the kind of negative certainty afforded by VE narratives can take the form of overwhelming fear; overwhelming in the sense that it comes to define all future possibilities, preying on the conscience of the individual. As the threat advances with time, the individual feels forced to act in order to escape the emotionally intolerable condition of fearful anticipation.

Notably, in their discussion of how negative certainty/epistemic control can serve as a strategy for overcoming anxiety, Miceli and Castelfranchi (2005) observe that "...the uncertainty and waiting is the worst part of a threatening episode. At times one feels an irresistible urge to end the wait by rushing toward the threat despite the realization that doing so may increase the risk of compromising the threatened goal." (p. 299). In the case of VE, "rushing toward the threat" may take the form of trying to initiate the apocalyptic reckoning which will decide the fate of their nomos, and subsequently relieve them of living with constant fear of the future. Here, the attempt to exert pragmatic

control, however desperate, appears to serve as a response to the near complete negative certainty provided by VE narratives. Ending the state of fearful anticipation means bringing the narrative to a close, in order to bring about a new palingenetic beginning.

Broncano (2013) argues that narratives, and particularly narrative endings, both autobiographical and fictional, are a fundamental means of realising individual agency. Specifically, in those "...significant cases in which there are threats of self-opacity, or difficulties to form plans of life due to angst or even traumatic experiences, a narrative form achieves high level of quality of agency." (p. 596). Both uncertain-identities (Hogg and Adelman, 2013), and anomic disintegration (Griffin 2012), perhaps reflect the most severe forms of "self-opacity," and create the greatest need for agency-restoring narratives. According to Broncano, narratives can be used to overcome despair, by providing a "therapeutic representation" of a threatening experience, which explicates a person's fears in a way that affords them a sense of agency, through projecting an end to that experience.

Echoing Bruner (1987), Broncano argues that narratives are essential to making sense of behaviour, due to the way they ascribe agency, what Bruner would term "intentional states" (see previous chapter), to agents. This also enables a person to make sense of their own actions, and is a prerequisite for asserting individual agency. According to Broncano, "... behaving agentially requires making sense of the behavior, and this is what a narrative structure achieves." (p. 598). Moreover, to ascribe agency to agents (including oneself), is to give such actions meaning, particularly the kind of meaning which defines the agent's role in relation to a wider unfolding narrative. "The claim of making sense introduces necessarily the subject's perspective in the causal ordering of events." p. 600). This perspective, in turn, represents the temporal unity, by which those agents involved in the narrated chain of events are related. Indeed, to *unify* a *chain* of

events causally is to make sense of those events, and thus to narrate them from a given perspective.

Broncano argues this unity arises from the inherent telos of a narrative which presupposes both a beginning and an *end*. A simple means-end schema is one way of understanding how a perspective gives rise to a telos, i.e. how a task is to be resolved/goal achieved. The telos, i.e. the expected resolution, arises from the perspective of the task to be completed.¹³ For Broncano, however, this understanding is useful, though ultimately insufficient. He cites work by Kermode (1966), in which it is argued that the tick-tock sound of a clock represents a culturally derived “organisation of duration,” with the expectation of tock following tick being, “...evidence that we use fictions to enable the end to confer organization and form on the temporal structure.” (p. 45). The important point for Broncano (2013) is that the “...“means-end” scheme is then just a token of a broader type of temporal organizational scheme of duration,” which “...is previous to the subsequent “means-end” form of a fictional “plot.” (601).

According to this view, to anticipate an ending necessitates a pre-understanding of what situations/experiences require a resolution, and thus endings are presupposed by the culturally-informed perspective of the narrator. Here again, there is congruence with Bruner’s (1987) work, which argues that narratives arise when cultural canon is violated. That is, when something is amiss, and needs the explanatory power of a narrative to re-establish order. What is amiss, and what constitutes order, is according to both perspectives, derived, in part, from how the narrator’s perspective has been socialised. Consequently, a narrative’s structure, i.e. in terms of what needs to be resolved, and what

¹³ This is partly overlaps with what Heidegger (2010) would term, “the-for-the-sake-of-which” (p. 84), which constitutes the care-structure, by which Dasein experiences, and is orientated towards the world, i.e. in terms of their expectations, and what is made salient to them (due to its relevance as part of the care structure).

constitutes a resolution, or ending, and why, is dependent on what might be considered the normative prejudices (in the Gadamerian sense) held by the narrator.

What is of particular relevance to this study, however, is Broncano's discussion of the additional role of emotions in generating narrative structures. He cites Velleman (2009), who argues that emotions form the primordial basis for narratives, and that narrative structures follow the natural cadence of the activation and decay of emotions. According to this view, the initiation of an episode of experience, with a definite or expected ending, mirrors the arousal and extinction of emotions, with narratives serving as accounts of these episodes. Again, for Broncano (2013), this is only a partially complete explanation. He argues that, "Emotions, certainly, have narrative structure, but it is not because they are "biologically programmed"; on the contrary, it is because they are culturally shaped by many learned narratives." (p. 602). That is to say, narrative understandings are both prior to emotions, and determine their development. These narratively based emotions also determine the further development of the narrative, in terms of problems to be solved (means and ends), and the emotional cadences one experiences.

Importantly, this view does, as Broncano highlights, depend on a "narrative conception of emotion" (p. 602), which is largely congruent with work already explored thus far in this study. Emotions, particularly "epistemic emotions," such as fear and anxiety, are the product of the perceived (i.e. narrated) vicissitudes to which a person's values are subject. When someone projects an uncertain future for that which they value (e.g. in the context of VE their identity-fused community), their anxiousness is contemporaneous with their projecting. The anxiety is inseparable from that which they are anxious *about*, i.e. the object of their uncertainty, and their relation to it. However, while many, perhaps even most, emotions are contingent on some kind of narration,

particularly those regarding a projected future, it might be somewhat overly expansive to claim all emotions arise out of their place in a *culturally contingent* series of narratives¹⁴.

Nevertheless, knowing the exact causal relationship between narratives and emotions in *all* cases is not necessary for this study. What *is* important is that certain emotions (e.g. epistemic emotions concerning the future), are part of an everyday normative “facticity,” which is, to a significant degree, contingent on culturally mediated values and narratives, i.e. (Gadamerian) fore-understandings of what ought to be the case. A challenge to cultural canon, following Bruner, thus initiates an emotional state in need of redress, and which in turn warrants a narrative response, and further determines the narrative structure by circumscribing what constitutes a narrative ending. That is, the narrative is largely defined by the emotional challenge it purports to meet, and which therefore pre-determines the narrative’s structure. In the case of life narratives, the arousal and resolution of emotional states may mark the entire narrative, or episodes within the narrative. For example, in the case of SQT, the beginning of the significance quest may be marked by an unsettling encounter, or an accumulation of realisations which challenges an individual’s cultural canon (or their entire *nomos*), on which they depend for knowing what is valuable, and their place in the world. The narrative structure follows the *telos* set by the need to resolve the individual’s emotional quest, and their own culturally mediated understanding of what needs resolving to achieve this. Put simply, the emotional challenges (what the narrative purports to resolve), to a large degree

¹⁴ For instance, there may be near universal (evolutionarily based) fears, such as a fear of certain kinds of animals, or of falling from great heights. Whilst it can be argued that both of these are contingent on a kind of narration, i.e. projected future possibilities, or unknown possibilities, and are thus also epistemic, neither rely necessarily on any input from a cultural milieu. Indeed, it might be argued that cultural narratives are vital for overcoming *innate* fears, rather than giving rise to them, i.e. a cultural, or religious narrative may be used to overcome a fear of the dark, e.g. “whatever happens, God wills it,” or “Inshallah.” Moreover, this is more in keeping with Becker (1973) and Berger (1967), who argue that religious stories form part of a cultural repertoire for overcoming the fear of death (see previous chapters). Crucially however, their view does not negate the view that many emotions can also be contingent on narratives, rather that the ability of narratives to engender emotions is, at least partially, derived from their capacity to represent and overcome threats to symbolic immortality.

prescribes the range of pragmatic actions afforded within the projected future narrative arc.

The therapeutic potential of narratives thus arises, according to Broncano, precisely because they are able to articulate distressing situations, by projecting intentions on to oneself and to others (epistemic control?), in a way that gives an individual a sense of agency (pragmatic control?), even if this is only projected, or experienced vicariously, for those who do not enact such narrated situations. For this reason, Broncano argues that narratives themselves represent a special kind of achievement, in their mere articulation. An achievement that is principally realised *at the end* of a narrative, when one is able to make sense of, and give meaning to, an adverse experience, or, "... when the agent is able to overcome the barriers obstructing her agential capacities and she succeeds in making sense of a past situation without sense." (p. 603). Having a stable sense of identity might thus depend on having a coherent life-narrative, through which a person makes (i.e. narrates) sense of who they are, what they can expect in the future, and why. The conclusion, or the promise of a conclusion, to life challenges, and distressing episodes, is thus integral to securing a sense of moral self-worth and purpose.

When a person is unable to make sense of an experience (lacking epistemic control), they can experience anxiety, as the narrative remains incomplete, or its completion seems elusive. Indeed, the purpose of psychoanalysis, Broncano argues, is to bring the kind of narrative closure, by which a person is able to come to terms with otherwise incomprehensible traumatic experiences, that stifle their personal (life narrative?) development. A "narrative inability" to make sense of trauma, is overcome by re-enacting the past, "in order to substitute the paralyzing reminiscences that submerge the agent in a continuous present for new narratives that enable her to cope with the existential normal anxiety." (p. 605)

Importantly, the same also applies to possible (projected?) futures, or anticipated situations, which arouse anxiety and fear, namely for Broncano, the fear of death, which he argues can be effectively overcome by great works of fiction that simulate and make sense of such fears. To make sense, in this way, is to give the reader the agency required to overcome these fears. Great works, "...show us how it is possible to speak about the unspeakable, how to imagine the unimaginable, and how to heal the most fearsome traumas." (p. 605). These works are often made necessary when the standard cultural canon of "folk-tales" is unable to redress states of existential dread. As discussed in the previous chapter, this can constitute an inability to "legitimate" a person's respective *nomos*; when the standard narrative responses fail, anomy ensues.

The Finality of Violence in Narrative Endings

By projecting an ending, narratives can bring agency-restoring closure to adverse episodes, or states of overwhelming dread. To conclude a narrative, is to give it meaning and resolve the traumatic experiences, or the *anticipated* traumatic experiences, that gave rise to it, or at least (re)defined its narrative *telos*. Endings are thus a fundamental means for taking control over, and making bearable, such experiences. Although, Broncano does not limit the restoration of existential agency to great literature, other sources include "...certain scientists, activists, and other creative beings, share the same destiny of therapists of angst. They are able to find paths when the trails of folk-psychology cannot be found." (p. 606). One might add to this list, those VE narratives that promise an end to the all-consuming threat of homicidal destruction. However, these narratives are able to promise respite in their future endings, only through the terroristic creative destruction

of the present state of affairs, and as such demand real-world enactment in order for their prescribed ending to have its therapeutic-agential potency.

It is precisely because the endings of VE narratives are so comprehensive (in being apocalyptic or revolutionary), that they can promise the requisite meaning to make sense out of the seemingly terrible experience of jeopardy undergone by their adherents. Following Broncano's perspective, therefore, the greater the sense of an ending, the greater the sense made by the narrative, and also the greater the promise of therapeutic closure, with which one can come to terms existentially with one's life. This notion of a therapeutic narrative ending, and the subsequent ordering of experiences, parallels, to a significant degree, recent research by Cottee (2020) into incel ("involuntary celibates") ideology and attacks¹⁵. Based on his analysis of incel subculture, Cottee argues that incel attacks serve not only as a means of revenge and of sending a political message, but also "...to therapeutically de-humiliate the perpetrator" (p. 24). For Cottee, the work of Waldron (2004) is applicable in this context. Specifically, Cottee cites Waldron's (2004) suggestion that "violent action might be viewed as a form of therapy for the perpetrator, particularly where the perpetrator has suffered for a long time in the ignominy and humiliation of some oppressive form of subordination". This, in turn, is based on the theories of the radical anti-colonialist Frantz Fanon, who argued that "At the level of individuals, violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex

¹⁵ Incels, or "involuntary celibates," are a predominantly online group of (typically young) men, who identify themselves as being incapable of finding sexual partners, and who blame this incapacity on contemporary society, particularly women. According to Cottee (2020), "Incels interpret and experience this deficit not just as a private source of sexual frustration, but as a shame-inducing moral wrong inflicted on them by women and genetics. This perceived wrong forms the basis of the incel worldview, which serves to rationalize the sexual deficit of incels and justify hostility against women and sexually active men." (p. 2) It might be argued that incel attacks do not technically qualify as terrorism, as the attackers are often motivated by a sense of personal humiliation, and may sometimes seem to act out of a kind of generalised revenge, which might therefore give them a closer resemblance to school shooters, than politically motivated terrorism. However, the collective sense of injustice, referred to above by Cottee, would point to a political project of a kind, and particularly a desire to transform society, or at least punish it for not conforming to their ideals.

and from his despair and inaction, it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect” (Fanon 1966, p.122).

According to this view, violence affords the perpetrator a sense of (or the promised sense of) release from an intolerable state of indignity, and perhaps existential torment. Whilst Cottee’s notion of therapeutic de-humiliation primarily concerns an individual’s sense of self-worth and social standing, its relevance to other kinds of emotional adversity might also be useful to understanding the power of narratives, and particularly narrative endings, in making sense of, and overcoming, such adversity. To be made fearless, is to redress a state of fearfulness, and to draw to a close, as far as one’s life narrative is concerned, a period of emotional strife from which there was no other perceived means of escape. The finality of terrorism thus serves to make sense of, indeed “make right,” the life narrative of an individual, which has become increasingly defined by such torment, and the dread of a meaningless future.

Indeed, the “cleansing force” which violence represents to VE, necessarily occurs at the end of a narrative (itself within a wider master-narrative), wherein the individual transforms into a heroic self (Griffin 2012), who overcomes the fear of death, and makes a solid break with their former fearful selves. The *sense* of an ending thus provides the promise, or at least the allure, of therapeutically *making* sense of one’s life narrative, and the emotional anguish of a projected *nomocide*. Overcoming this anguish means *ending* the status quo, both externally in terms of the society at large (as seen through the master narrative), and internally in terms of the individual’s sense of self and sacred duty (as seen through their life narrative). Enacting the end of a narrative, or projected narrative arc, is therefore a fundamentally emotional experience, and suggests that emotions and narrative understanding are intrinsically linked. Moreover, the sense of an ending, and the sense provided by that ending, suggests that terrorism allows the individual to

agentially unite their life narratives with VE master narratives (i.e. on *their own terms*), in a way that affords them a therapeutic release from the fear of passive impotency in the face of a terrifying future/nomic threat.

Similarly, this view would cohere with René Girard's overarching theory of a pervasive primordial scapegoating mechanism, which he argued underpins much of human violence, particularly in cases where the victims are individuals, or form part of a minority whom are held responsible for a perceived weakening of the integrity of a wider community (Girard, 1988, 1989). Riordan (2021), argues that Girard's perspective should be considered alongside other theories, which draw on evolutionary psychology to explain the relationship between group psychology, religious thinking, and violence. Accordingly, scapegoating serves to ensure greater group cohesion, and to stabilise dominance-based hierarchies in times of crisis and conflict. Such conflicts are endemic in human groups, Girard argued, because of a phenomenon he termed "mimetic desire," which refers to an innate human propensity to mimic the actions and intentions of others. That is, a thing becomes more desirable by virtue of another person desiring it. Mimetic desire, therefore, is deeply rooted in the projection of intentional states onto others, and likely evolved to enable the greater inter-group coordination and coherence that would have been beneficial for survival, not unlike the "coherence motives," which influence a person's moral intuitions, discussed by Haidt 2001 (see p. 4 this chapter).

However, in dominance-based hierarchies, mimetic desire can become problematic, when everyone desires the same thing (e.g. wealth, power, or prestige) to an extreme degree, and conflict ensues, alongside reciprocal and escalating violence. Such occasions precipitate a "mimetic crises," which can only be resolved by re-establishing group coherence. Consequently, as humans evolved to have a greater propensity for mimetic desire, a countervailing mechanism was required to restore group integrity when

conflictual inter-group mimesis spiralled out of control. Scapegoating, according to Girard, is this mechanism, and as Riordan (2021) highlights, is also itself a product of mimesis, with, "...all members of a group spontaneously aligning their hostility towards a single individual, and either expelling that individual from the community or, more probably, killing them." (p. 244).

Notably, despite the connotations of cynicism the term may invoke, scapegoating necessarily works as an unconscious mechanism for reaffirming notions of the sacred and group loyalty. Those allocating blame do so sincerely. Indeed, it is precisely because communities are able to define themselves in opposition to scapegoats, that the victims can become foundational to shared narratives, i.e., communities come to share an opposition to a collectively agreed-upon evil. In fact, the scapegoating mechanism parallels, in certain respects, the process of identity-fusion as outlined by Atran (2016), according to whom a person comes to fuse themselves with a wider (real or imagined) in-group, through devotion to the sacred values, which they are believed to embody. That is, according to the DAM, sacred values derive their sacredness from the communities they are believed to represent. Identity-fusion, and in-group loyalty, increase when the community is perceived to be under threat. Collective enmity thus serves as collective reintegration.

Drawing on Girard's work, Astell (2017), emphasises that the collective persecution of a scapegoat can serve as an "ersatz" kind of transcendentalism, analogous what Émile Durkheim termed, "effervescence." Specifically, the, "...general effervescence results which is characteristic of revolutionary or creative epochs. (Durkheim, 1915 p. 211). Like Girard's scapegoats, effervescence unites a community in a common purpose, as, according to Durkheim, "...a collective sentiment can become conscious of itself only by being fixed upon some material object" (p. 237). By fixing

upon a shared enemy, collectives are able to fuse themselves anew, around the creative epoch precipitated by the violent destruction of their scapegoats.

However, as Astell (2017) describes, for Girard and his fellow religious scholar Simone Weil, this was an, "...ersatz mysticism of the great beast, in which the individual loses him- or herself within the collective." (p. 399). The effervescence of shared enmity through scapegoating, was for both scholars, only a short-term remedy to mimetic crises, one that would need to be repeated periodically unless the sources of such crises (mimetic desire) were themselves acknowledged by the collective. Nevertheless, scapegoats can resolve mimetic crises by orientating a community around a new zeitgeist, and can crucially both represent a narrative ending, and a new narrative beginning, with the subsequent promise of palingenetic renewal.

According to Riordan (2021), the promise of a new beginning, rooted in the destruction of a scapegoat, was essential to understanding the mimetic desire to identify and mobilise against such scapegoats. That is, "Of equal, if not greater, importance, Girard theorized, would have been a longer-term effect whereby this cathartic violent resolution to a crisis would have engendered a narrative, or myth, that initially blamed the selected victim for the crisis, but subsequently may have credited them with being the source of its resolution, imbuing them with a mystique, and even making them appear godlike." (p. 244).

This propensity for retrospective deification (as well as demonization) can make the long-term status of the scapegoat potentially ambiguous. However, it may be that, in the context of VE narratives, the guilty status of the scapegoats is also projected into the future, whereby their destruction (realised through acts of terrorism, and the subsequent violence such acts are intended to inspire), unifies an in-group around the destruction of

the nomic threat, or at least awareness of the threat. Consequently, the new beginning, and thus the new narrative, founded on the nomos-restoring acts of terrorism, represents a decisive break with the past, or specifically the end of a previous narrative defined by nomic threats, and in-group disorientation. This is one way violence serves to renew a nomos, according to a projected VE narrative arc.

Alternatively, it might be that terrorists are themselves aware of the subsequent deification of scapegoats, which they themselves seek to become, or rather, for a time at least, seek their in-groups to become. This may apply in those cases where terrorists actively seek to provoke what they perceive will be further victimisation of their in-group, either by other groups (e.g. Dylan Roof's desired race war), or state repression by authorities which are perceived to represent the prevailing nomocidal order. By scapegoating themselves, VE may hope to accelerate, what they perceive to be the societal scapegoating of their in-group, which will in turn mobilise that in-group around their perceived enemies, and thus create a similar effervescence of shared enmity. Ben and Weimann (2020), for instance, discuss how online RWE effectively confer martyrdom status to RWE terrorists, such as Anders Breivik and Brenton Tarrant, the latter of whom they highlight as following an accelerationist RWE ideology¹⁶ (p. 141).

Similarly, in the context of Islamist VE, an analogous desire to accelerate group conflict through scapegoating may exist. One example might be the narrative, and strategy put forwarded by Abu – Bakr Naji, a jihadist writer who authored several articles for an al-Qaeda affiliated magazine (Edger, Regen and Springer, 2009 p. 79). In an influential extremist publication, titled "The Management of Savagery" Naji explained what he believed should be the aim of jihadist terrorism. He argued that "This battle

¹⁶ In the context of RWE, Ben and Weimann (2020), describe Accelerationism as "...a sub-ideology which seeks to hasten the end of modern society, insomuch as it is irredeemably corrupt" (p. 138)

alone, through its vehemence and its (ability to) separate (people), is that which will enable us to polarize the largest number of individuals toward our ranks” (Naji, 2006 p. 108). Certainly, violence, and the state’s response to it, seems to be, according to Naji, a key means for inculcating VE sympathy, and group solidarity. For Naji it is through terrorism that “hearts and minds will be moved and (this violence) will furnish the greatest proof to the people. Thus polarization will increase.”(p. 109) Kilcullen (2017) also describes provocation (of an ideally heavy-handed state response), as a fundamental, indeed the initiatory, part of al Qaeda’s strategy of, “mobilizing the Ummah and provoking Western actions that alienate the Muslim world” (p. 29).¹⁷

Although this would not necessarily follow the pattern of scapegoating from a Girardian perspective, rather it would suggest a kind of reciprocal scapegoating, that nevertheless ends one narrative of nomic decline and communal disintegration, and begins another of nomic renewal and communal solidarity. Terrorist violence, reciprocal-accelerationist or otherwise, would still appear to be aimed at concluding one narrative and initiating another. The sense or promise of a narrative ending, may thus be realised through the violent mimetic desire of scapegoating, which in turn serves to ameliorate fear, by promising adherents a future sacred community of integrated (identity-fused) members, one purified of the scapegoats they were unified in destroying.

Additionally, whilst the scapegoat mechanism appears better suited to explaining mob violence (e.g. lynching and pogroms) than individual or small cell terrorism, the communal “mimetic” nature of scapegoat violence coheres to a significant degree with “parochial altruism,” involved in the DAM (Atran, p. 193). A fundamental role of

¹⁷ Kilcullen (2017, p. 29-33) outlines al Qaeda’s strategy as following a general pattern of “provocation,” “intimidation,” “protraction,” and “exhaustion,” i.e. drawing out a Western military response, before gradually sapping the will of Western governments and publics to maintain that response, whilst simultaneously recruiting greater sympathy for their ideology amongst Muslims globally.

scapegoats is to bind together communities whom are perceived to be threatened by their current state of disintegration. Solidifying the nomic unity of a group in this way, is from the perspective of VE, essential to ensuring the future of that group, and the symbolic immortality it represents. The scapegoats depicted in VE narratives are therefore essential to enabling a therapeutic narrative ending, as it is through the *creative* destruction of such scapegoats, that VE believe themselves able to realise their sacred vision.

Scapegoating might also be useful in explaining the relationship between epistemic and pragmatic control, violence, and the fear of nomocide. It may be, that rather than fulfilling the need for *individual* control, the “cathartic violent resolution,” outlined by Riordan (2021, p. 244), enables VE to escape that need all together, alongside the subsequent anxiety of an uncertain future (for their nomos), as they give themselves over to the cause of their sacred *community*. In doing so, they identify with the projected desires of those in-group members, in a projected apocalyptic future, whom they wish to save from destruction. Consequently, as they devote themselves entirely to this sacred group, and securing its future, they forfeit any struggle for individual agency, and submit themselves to what Astell (2017, p. 399) terms the “ersatz mysticism” of their collective “great beast,” with whom they have become identity-fused. VE may thus seek to bring about the end of their projected narrative arcs through terrorist violence, overcoming both the existential anxiety of low epistemic control, and the fear of total negative epistemic control in the act of their sacrificial devotion to the destruction of the scapegoat.

Conclusion

What this chapter has attempted to explore, and partly synthesise is the various moral, motivational, and emotional aspects of radicalisation, with respect to narratives,

and interpretation. It was argued by Miceli and Castelfranchi (2005) that anxiety and fear were epistemic emotions, which were determined by one's perceived level of epistemic control, surrounding those things which one values. By the same token, however, it might be argued that one's perceived level of epistemic control is akin to one's level of anxiety, or fear about those things which one values. That is, to be anxious or fearful *about* one's sacred values, is to have uncertain, or threatened epistemic control over one's *future*. Here, what becomes clear, is the fundamentally interlinked nature of moral psychology (what a person values and why), motivational psychology (why that person acts to control a situation), and emotional psychology (how that person feels about themselves in that situation).

All three aspects, are at least to some degree, likely experienced simultaneously as part of both a life narrative, and the wider master narrative in which that life is embedded, and through which one makes sense of the future. Indeed, it might be that narratives unify all three aspects, to a greater degree the more they project into the future, in a way that requires an individual to narratively integrate their experiences into a coherent trajectory, i.e. the more they attempt to exert epistemic control (in response to existential anxiety). Because, for VE, these narratives concern the fate of sacred values, the process of narrating is inherently emotional, as VE narratives comprise the sense individuals make, in their attempt to predict the future of their sacred values, and to act accordingly. Consequently, the rise and fall of such emotional cadences are inseparable from the narrative structure, which, in projecting future narrative arcs, gives rise to emotionally laden expectancies, and the emotionally laden sacred obligations to act on such expectancies.

What this suggests, is that narratives are essential to having the sense of truth and control effectiveness, which according to Higgins (2014), is the underlying motivation of

much of human thinking, and behaviour. Narratives are not created as disinterested explanations, or predictions, but are themselves motivated by the desire for self-efficacy, and the desired capacity to influence the future in accordance with one's perceived interests. That is, narratives are created from a *perspective*, a "for-the-sake-of-which" (Heidegger, 2010, p. 84) which directs, and makes available future narrative arcs, according to its values and assumptions. Such a perspective seeks to attain, what Kelley (1967) referred to as, "...cognitive mastery of the causal structure of the environment" (p. 193), or to be most effectively attuned to what Vervaeke, Mastropietro, and Miscevic (2017) termed the "agent-arena relations" (p. 33). Having (or rather perceiving to have) knowledge of these relations, constitutes, for VE, having the power to act effectively, in order to control the future.

What the Moral Foundations (MFT), together with the Social Intuitionist Model (SIM), contributes to this understanding of VE narratives, is a basis from which the values, that are the primary concern of such narratives, originally stem. Haidt's (2001) "social intuitions" arise in response to eliciting situations which challenge a person's culturally-informed normative expectations. In this regard, they might thus be called social emotions, to the extent that these responses entail an element of fear, anger or disgust. When normative facticity is upended by such challenges, narrative understandings are required for its restoration, particularly the intentional states, following Bruner (1987) these understandings project onto others, i.e. why certain people are jeopardising a person's desired future, and what can be done to stop them. In the context of VE, answering these questions is essential to saving one's nomos, and fending off the terror of a meaningless existence.

Moreover, the culturally contingent nature of social intuitions coheres significantly with Broncano's argument, that a person's emotional responses and

expectancies are embedded within the fabric of their narrative understandings, which are themselves derived from a cultural milieu. MFT, as outlined by Haidt and Graham (2007), posits that these social intuitions stem from five underlying moral predispositions, that are both evolutionarily based, and culturally influenced. The purity/sanctity, in-group/loyalty and harm/care moral foundations are particularly relevant for this study, as they would seem to be heavily involved in RWE narratives. Certainly, they would seem to feature in those narratives depicting a nomos involving a wider community, whose survival is threatened by the perceived disloyalty and disunity of its members, together with their neglect of their sacred duties. Understanding the kind of issues that relate to certain moral foundations, and how moral foundations can be both served and shaped by ideological narratives, should thus be an important part of any heuristic for understanding RWE narratives.

Finally, the sense of an ending, and the role of scapegoats in creating that sense, should also be considered by such a heuristic. Projecting, and then ultimately enacting, narrative endings, through the anticipated revelatory violence against a necessary scapegoat, may serve as a kind of therapeutic resolution to a state of nomocidal dread (itself a product of VE narration). Violence against VE scapegoats, according to this view, would be the final step that a person takes to effect change in a narrative, and escape the dread of seeing their nomos destroyed in a narratively projected future. Ending the narrative, would thus seem to be akin to completing the significance quest, something which is achieved by breaking the existential and emotional tension which gave rise to it. Narrative endings, and the scapegoated enemy/enemies used to reach those endings, serve as a therapeutic answer to the challenge of fearing for one's sacred values, and sense of self-worth. To VE, these endings are designed to redeem a fallen society, by giving the certainty, indeed the sense, required to *make* the world morally comprehensible.

As discussed in the previous chapter, ending a narrative in an act of self-sacrifice (even if the “self” sacrificed here is not necessarily the life of the physical body but the possible life experience that might have been enjoyed by the pre-terrorist self if he/she had not been radicalised) may be the surest way of finding closure, regarding the significance of oneself, and the future of one’s sacred values. Terrorism might therefore be considered a kind of acquiescence or submission to a projected heroic self, whereby one devotes one’s life entirely to the sacred cause, and in doing so escapes a sense of existential uncertainty and *futility*, and the need to ruminate on the future of one’s nomos. How VE experience their narratives emotionally, may therefore be the primary deciding factor that differentiates them from their non-violent peers, who nonetheless adhere to very similar narratives of nomic destruction. As the narrative simultaneously builds tension, and provides a resolution to that tension, in the form of destroying the status quo through projected revolutionary violence, certain individuals might succumb to the need to escape their anomic dread, the fear of the destruction of their identify-fused communities, and their own sense of inadequacy in terms of a morally worthwhile and meaningful life, or varying combinations of all three. These individuals then give themselves over to a heroic self, one defined by realising a narrative ending through the destruction of a scapegoat, and the subsequent establishment of their purified/re-integrated in-group community, which will also make their life meaningful by providing a sense of symbolic immortality.

What the above perspectives have added, in terms of developing the heuristic proposed by this study, is a more detailed account of how narratives are inextricably bound up with moral, motivational, and emotional psychology. Indeed, the narratives by which a person makes sense of themselves, in relation to the world around them, might be considered the nexus of all three psychologies. This also enables an understanding of

narratives, and the act of narrating, that is informed by fundamental human desires and needs. Narratives, in this respect, always serve a purpose, in that they are always trying to make sense of something, which constitutes the perspective from which that thing is narrated. For VE, narratives serve the ultimate purpose, in seeking to make sense of the ultimate (moral) truth, and in seeking to find the most sacred narrative arc, by which one's life can be morally redeemed, and given meaning. However, these narratives also cause and intensify this need for meaning and this sense of homicidal dread, and are thus recursively involved in the emotional strife which may lead certain individuals to seek respite, or self-fulfilment, in what they narratively project will be world-changing redemptive terrorist violence.

Having considered the above perspectives, this study is in a more holistic position to begin articulating a heuristic for understanding the role of narratives in RWE radicalisation. Any heuristic will, of course, be necessarily incomplete in terms of capturing all the dynamics of every context, and it is entirely possible for materials in addition to those discussed here to be relevant to some situations. However, the core bond between moral, motivational and emotional psychology, as this study has sought to demonstrate, is an integral part of framing such additional material. As such, the next chapter will attempt to outline preliminarily a heuristic which synthesise the moral and motivational perspectives discussed in this chapter, with the narrative and interpretive theories explored in the previous chapter, and the models and theories of radicalisation analysed in the first chapter. If successful, the result will be a heuristic that not only provides a useful way of conceptualising narratives in the context of RWE, but also explains how such narratives contribute to the radicalisation process, and lead certain individuals to become terrorists. This in turn should serve as a basis for identifying the basic requisites and essential features of VE counter-narratives which loosen the main

existential knots in the narrative threads, which make the pathway to acts of violence come to seem so inexorable to the radicalised individual.

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Chapter 4

Preliminary Heuristic and Analysis

Introduction

In the preceding two chapters this study sought to outline, and examine, relevant research and theories from a range of fields and perspectives, in order to inform the development of a heuristic which enables a more comprehensive understanding of violent extremist (VE) narratives, and their role in the radicalisation process. Here, being comprehensive means reflecting both the plurality of dynamic factors involved in that process, and the specific ways such factors may be entwined with narratives and the act of narration. It also means understanding narratives and narration, from a context-specific view, rooted in an analysis of a range of theories/models of radicalisation, which was the aim of chapter one's literature review. Whilst the previous chapters discussed areas of congruence between relevant theories on narratives/narration and moral and motivational psychology, regarding radicalisation, these were only the initial stages in developing an integrated preliminary heuristic. Accordingly, this chapter will seek to synthesise the conclusions and arguments of the preceding chapters, in order to outline a preliminary heuristic, which will then serve as a basis for analysing three examples of contemporary RWE narratives, in the form of three different terrorist manifestos. Analysing these manifestos will allow the heuristic to be developed further, by throwing into relief those aspects of narratives, and narration that are integral to RWE radicalisation.

Narratives and Narration

It is important to understand the relationship between pre-existent narratives and the continuous act of narration (of one's life and the wider world), as this relationship indicates the fundamental role of VE narratives in the ongoing process of developing understandings of the world and identity which inspire or compel terrorism. Clearly, narratives are necessarily themselves the products of narration, having been formed through what Ricoeur (1991, p. 21) terms the "emplotment" of events and people¹⁸. However, as has been discussed, narratives, once created and/or adopted, also structure the way new events are interpreted, based on the expectancies they generate. These expectancies comprise the thrown-projections, generated by what Roth (2017) calls the, "wandering viewpoint.". It is again important to reiterate what Berger (1967) argued was the dialectical nature of nomos construction and maintenance. This, as highlighted in chapter two, coheres significantly with Gadamer's description of the act of interpretation. Narratives are also largely social constructions, parts of which are often co-authored by several (sometimes opposing) groups, using an amalgam of shared understandings, which are similarly created through the act of narration. In this respect an individual can as much adopt a narrative from others, as (re)create it themselves. Indeed, in the context of VE, where narratives overlap significantly between individuals and groups, ideological beliefs are adopted through accepting, either partially or completely, the already existent narratives of others. These pre-existing narratives might thus be seen as conduits for the adoption of beliefs which make certain narrative arcs more believable to the adherent. Accordingly, there are at least two kinds of interpenetrating pre-existing narratives which structure the development of further narration, and subsequently become inseparable for the committed VE. Firstly, there is an individual life narrative, that is constantly being

¹⁸ See Chapter 1, p. 41.

interpreted as a person makes sense of their life through the “wandering viewpoint,” and which informs a person’s sense of personal identity, and biographical trajectory. Secondly, there are ideological master narratives which already exist within an individual’s network, or which they may come across for other reasons, e.g. a lack of personal meaning, the desire to understand and remedy a political grievance, or a combination of both (indeed both may be inseparable in some cases). What is important however, is that the meaning which pre-existing narratives hold for a person, significantly influence how that person interprets new experiences, and consciously projects future narrative arcs (both in terms of their own lives and the fate of the wider world). Adhering to these pre-existent narratives can also make the adoption of other narratives, or rather the adoption of certain ideological elements within their continuing narrative, more likely, depending on how much they fulfil or intensify the existential needs of the adherent.

Highlighting the relationship between pre-existent narratives (however incomplete), and the act of narration, is important because it allows the heuristic proposed by this study to discuss *processes* of change that might take place as part of an individual’s radicalisation pathway. It should also allow a clearer summation of the heuristic, the main aspects of which will subsequently be elaborated, following the approach used by Griffin (2017) as part of his working definition of fascism (p. 46). With this in mind, VE narratives can be conceptualised as ideological *pre-structures*, for directing the developmental and dialogical interpretive process involved in the continuous narration of an individual’s life. This process contributes towards radicalisation through certain key elements, which underpin the act of the narration by changing and solidifying a person’s normative-ontological beliefs, and which can reciprocally exert and intensify emotional and existential pressures to which an individual becomes subject.

Accordingly, in the context of radicalisation, VE narratives are interpreted and adopted through a series of *integrated projections*, which unite events, people, and sacred values, within a causal sequence, spanning the past, present, and future. This is done by projecting *intentional states* onto different groups and individuals, alongside normative and ontological precepts, that *constrain and necessitate* their range of actions, as part of a wider struggle between ideologically rendered notions of good and evil. These narratives serve to increase radicalisation (towards terrorism) by simultaneously increasing certainty of a projected apocalyptic future, which threatens certain sacred values, and the moral-emotional impetus to use extreme violence in order to prevent, or harness, either certain aspects, or all, of that future. In doing this, VE narratives increase adherence to ontological and normative axial beliefs, which both constrain and make salient the range of perceived available actions for defending, reinvigorating, or creating anew an individual's, or a group's, imagined sacred order. As VE narratives appear to make increasing sense to an individual, the limitedness and salience of their proffered range of actions comes into increased focus alongside, for certain individuals, the sense of existential exigency to take such actions. In this way VE narratives can both reciprocally channel and intensify the moral and motivational needs and drives of an individual, where these needs and drives are not checked by other considerations, or do not find a natural limit, depending on the specific personality traits, or circumstances, of an individual.

Integration and Projection

The above description applies to both VE master narratives, and individual life narratives; however, it is suggested that radicalisation is defined by an increasing “vertical

integration” (Corman 2016) between the two, as an individual becomes increasingly immersed in the experience of interpreting the world through the lens of their respective master narrative. What should also be highlighted, is the degree to which this also involves a temporal integration, as the individual’s future (and specifically their chances of having a meaningful future) becomes increasingly intertwined with that of the future projected by their master narrative, particularly where this concerns the fate of an identity-fused in-group and sacred values (Atran, 2016).

In chapter two it was argued that the work of Roth (2017), suggests that the development of, and increasing belief in, both master and life narratives, involves a process of reappraising fundamental beliefs, based on integrating knowledge and experiences, both biographical and of world events, often leading to greater clarity regarding how to comprehend future situations, and act accordingly. Roth’s (2017) use of the Heideggerian concept of thrown-projections perhaps demonstrates this most clearly. As an individual increasingly relies on Manichean master narratives to make sense out of the past and the present, they project with increasing certainty an apocalyptic future, which in turn affords them moral clarity. Here, “making sense” means uniting the past, present, and future in a causal chain of events, by projecting “intentional states” (Bruner 1987) onto groups and individuals to explain their actions, or inactions (whether these be hostile, ignorant, or friendly). Importantly, integration and projection are mutually reinforcing aspects of interpreting a narrative “from the middle” (Roth 2017), in that both aspects become embedded within, what Berger (1967) terms, the “facticity” (i.e. the everyday taken for granted normative-ontological assumptions), by which a person experiences and interprets their unfolding life-narrative. As the narrative unfolds, the projected future becomes increasingly threatening, the more it is integrated with a seemingly nomocidal past and present. The past and present, are similarly given

threatening portent, through their integration with a projected future nomocide (possibly the ultimate goal and defining feature, of the intentional states projected onto seemingly hostile outgroups). Accordingly, narrative integration is a core feature of radicalisation, and likely a fundamental prerequisite for compelling terrorism.

Increasing Futural Clarity and Motivational/Emotional Impetus for Action

Narrative integration is thus a key aspect of narration in general, and largely describes the progressive adoption of the ideological master narratives by which VE come to understand their lives, and identities. In narrating their lives, an individual also narrates the evolution of their beliefs, and thus the realisations and reappraisals which have led them to believe in their current life and master narrative. Importantly, by making the future more certain, narrative integration enables an individual to project, with a greater sense of clarity, their future narrative arcs. This can have the twofold effect of responding to an individual's anxiety (their need for closure), whilst placing them in an increasingly emotionally intolerable situation, one that is defined by the threat of nomocidal forces, and/or the potential for palingenetic renewal. By projecting these futures, narratives create a situation in need of redress, following the cyclical/dialogic process of constantly reappraised understandings, which inheres in the act of narration and interpretation, as per the arguments of Bruner (1987), Berger (1967), and Gadamer (1985), outlined in chapter two.

In other words, narration of a potentially destructive future that threatens a perceived nomos, creates itself the need for further narration, at the level of the individual, regarding what should be done about that future. Here, perhaps, is where extremist narratives become violent extremist narratives. When destructive futures are projected,

wherein the survival of one's sacred values are jeopardised, this creates the moral compulsion to act, and the future narrative arc of a "devoted actor" (Atran 2016). Realising this deontic duty, stems from the perceived realisation of a VE narrative, and a potential future VE narrative arc. Bringing about the desired end to this narrative arc, becomes the only morally acceptable, and emotionally tolerable, way of living within a narrative that projects such a threatening future. Consequently, narratives both exert motivational/emotional forces onto an individual (and can reciprocally respond to those forces in a way that intensifies them, e.g. through moral impetus, or fear), and afford the individual the promises of respite (e.g. through heroic sacrificial narrative endings). A narrative's capacity to lock a person in this interpretive spiral, may depend on how well that narrative serves their existential needs, which may in turn depend on its ability to invalidate alternative narratives, and thus "de-pluralise" alternative ideological meanings (Koehler 2015), in the eyes of the potential adherent.

Griffin's (2017) heroic double could, according to this view, be seen as a possible self, co-authored within the *dialogical* process of self-narration involved in the reappraisal/realisation of ideological beliefs, and the progressive adoption of VE narratives. For Gadamer, interpretation meant having a dialogue with that which is interpreted. When that which is interpreted is an apocalyptic narrative of reality, then it can make certain normative demands of the interpreter (what Gadamer called "claims" to truth). Acquiescing to these demands, means giving oneself over to the heroic double. Indeed, to the extent that interpretation is a kind of dialogue, interpreting VE narratives might be considered, in a certain sense, a dialogue with a heroic double, and, where such narratives are adopted and acted upon, an acquiescence to the demands of that double (who demands self-sacrifice in order to secure self-transcendence and impose meaning on an otherwise meaningless death).

Constraining Possibilities and Enabling (Compelling) Action

This revelatory aspect of narratives speaks to their fundamentally ontological and normative nature. That is, those beliefs about reality which are reappraised, and those ideological meanings which are de-pluralised within an unfolding narrative (as part of a person's narrative integration), pertain to how a person perceives what is possible and what is certain. Indeed, this inheres in the interpretive process of projecting future possibilities, following Roth's Heideggerian approach to understanding the "narrative self." It is important to empathise this facet of narrative projections, because it underpins the sense of futural clarity and moral impetus discussed above. By portraying an array of possible futures, VE narratives simultaneously diminish or affirm the efficacy of different courses of action. In the case of VE narratives, wherein all possible narrative arcs lead to nomocidal/apocalyptic scenarios, the efficacy of potential courses of action is determined by their ability to address such a scenario.

Here, is perhaps the primary mechanism for de-pluralising the meaning of sacred values and ideological concepts (e.g. nation, self-determination, etc.), alongside the attendant means for pursuing such values and concepts. Moghaddam's (2005) staircase model of radicalisation particularly empathises this aspect of VE pathways. For Moghaddam, the ascent of the staircase is defined by a progressive rejection of the status quo, leading, in the case of terrorists, to the fifth and a final step, wherein the individual's "moral engagement" with a VE ideology becomes total, and consequently the only way of addressing their political grievance, which by this stage is framed in Manichean "all or nothing" terms. What Miceli and Castelfranchi (2005) would term high "negative epistemic control" (certainty of a destructive future), would describe this final stage,

wherein the range of possibilities is reduced to such a degree that the creative destruction of the status quo becomes the only feasible (however unlikely) solution. In Gadamer's terms, it is simplifying the "structure" of the ontological "game," to the point where the only viable means of securing one's sacred values is the complete restructuring of the game, i.e. the complete destruction and reordering of the status quo.

Intentional States

Clearly, VE narratives shape, and in the case of radicalisation, restrict, possibilities for action by portraying a world which revolves around "root war metaphors" (Furrow and Goodall 2011), which divide people and actions, unambiguously between for or against de-pluralised) understandings of sacred values, and the overcoming of evil. These possibilities are made explicit by attributing "intentional states" (Bruner 1967) to a range of actors, though most importantly malignant outgroups, who are defined as being fundamentally hostile to the survival of an individual's sacred values. The capacity of VE narratives to exert normative-ontological authority is perhaps primarily derived from their capacity to convincingly attribute such intentional states onto others. Indeed, this capacity may be largely determined by the degree to which such narratives can essentialise outgroup antagonists, as being inherently hostile to an individual's sacred values. An adherent's perceived certainty of future possibilities, and the subsequent range of possible effective actions for securing their sacred values, is largely derived from a narrative's portrayal of the inherent intentional states of different groups. McCauley and Moskalenko (2017) outlined two, sometimes overlapping, pyramids of support for VE movements, which they termed the "action" and "opinion" pyramids. Based on the above arguments it would appear likely that VE narratives also (however incoherently), model

such pyramids by describing/projecting different groups, with differing levels of potential support for the “true” sacred values, whom are in need of mobilising through framing acts, including acts of terrorism. In addition to McCauley and Moskaleiko’s pyramid of potential support, VE narratives might also project opposing hostile pyramids, defined by increasing sympathy towards, and active support for, enemy groups, characterised by enemy objectives, which often explicitly entail the destruction of VE sacred values.

Accordingly, the objective for the adherents of VE narratives is the counter--mobilisation of support for their sacred values, particularly support for defining such values in opposition to the perceived threatening groups. This means mobilising (indeed radicalising) the wider base of their respective pyramids, what Koehler (2015) would term their “target societies” of sympathisers, towards the destruction of the opposing pyramid, or at least mobilising support for the destruction of that pyramid’s upper stratum, who are perceived to be essentially inimical (through their imputed intentional states) to VE’s sacred values. VE narratives thus serve to project possibilities, by orientating the individual around these essentialised groups, whose predictable hostility, or potential support in the case of sympathisers, affords them with the “cognitive mastery” (Kelley 1967), needed to fulfil their need for closure, restore their sense of significance, and ultimately defend their sacred values. Here, it may be that by projecting hostile “entitativity”¹⁹ (Hogg and Adelman 2013) onto outgroups (or at least the peak of the projected enemy pyramid), VE narratives afford their adherents with a sense of greater epistemic, and ultimately pragmatic, control.

¹⁹ See Chapter 1, p. 15.

Consequently, it is the ability of narratives to impute intentional states, to construct strawmen, perhaps akin to René Girard's "scapegoats," that affords their adherents the promise of restored significance. Alternatively, or perhaps concurrently, the attribution of intentional states, i.e. the depiction of enemy pyramids of support, may engender, or intensify, the perceived homicidal threat, alongside the need to remove that threat, and restore an individual's sense of significance (or the threat thereto). Following Girard's paradigm, these enemy groups hold, in their destruction, or rather the unanimity of support for their destruction amongst the wider in-group community, the promise of palingenetic revolution, and thus the survival/rejuvenation of a given nomos. Whilst many VE might not expect to achieve this unanimity through their individual acts of terrorism, they do intend to instigate a chain of reciprocal violence, through inspiring subsequent attacks by other adherents, and the retaliation of their projected enemy outgroups and state (the two can often overlap). According to their narrative projections of the future, this will eventually culminate in a final reckoning, whereby their respective in-group communities will mobilise around the destruction of the enemy (scapegoat), and there newly realised sacred values, thereby securing the survival or rejuvenation of a purified nomos, and with it their symbolic immortality.

Alternatively, in the absence of an evil outgroup collectively orientated around the explicit destruction of a sacred value, it may be that VE narratives depict an ignorant populace, who have lost their way, and neglected their sacred duties, but whom can be awoken, if the ultimate truth is brought to them. Their future intentional states become seemingly predictable and achievable, through the ultimate truth depicted within a master narrative. In either case, what is important, is that narratives afford futural clarity, and a range of possible and impossible actions (future narrative arcs) for saving one's nomos, not only by defining sacred values, but also, as part of this, by giving adherents a sense

of normative-ontological insight, regarding the intentions and actions of others. It is this insight into the “real” nature of groups (i.e. what sacred values they are trying to subvert and/or are ignorant of), particularly hostile out-groups, that is developed with the progressive adoption of VE master narratives, and their (Gadamerian) normative-ontological prejudices, as part of the wider development of an individual’s life narrative and self-understanding. Projecting these intentional states with a high degree of certainty, may be the primary mechanism which leads to the sense of nomic threat, and sacred obligation, experienced by VE.

Differences in Personalities and Circumstances

Even with the emphasis placed here on narratives, it is important to consider the role of differing personality types in the radicalisation process. Indeed, from the perspective outlined above, these are closely bound up with the development of life narratives, and their integration within wider VE master narratives. Certainly, to the extent that personalities are cultivated as part of a person’s self-development and self-understanding, they would appear reflexively involved in the act of narration, in the sense that personality can affect how a person narrates their life, and this narrative also effects their personality. McAdams (2006) for instance, describes the “redemptive self” as an archetypal life narrative for many people who have higher levels of “generativity.”²⁰ The redemptive self, according to McAdams, follows a life narrative characterised by the overcoming of suffering, and of a previously deficient state (p. 17), suggesting that specific kinds of personalities can themselves emerge as part of the process of self-

²⁰ See Chapter 2, p. 121.

understanding, involved in narrating one's life. In this case, the type of personality is a product of an archetypal kind of transformative experience.

Additionally, Haidt, Graham and Joseph (2009) argue that the moral foundations which underpin a person's political persuasion, generally form part of their "characteristic adaptations," which, using the framework developed by McAdams (1995) and McAdams and Pals (2006), comprises their second level of personality, between their "dispositional traits" at level one, and "life stories" at level three.²¹ Moral foundations accordingly begin to take shape at the nexus between innate predispositions and cultural context. Whilst they do not predispose people towards violence or extremism, they might influence the kind of ideologies that person uses to understand their own life narratives, and the world around them. For instance, a person with higher in-group/loyalty may be more sympathetic to ideological narratives that advance the rigid defence of their in-group. Similarly, a person higher in the fairness/justice moral foundation, might be more sensitive to narratives depicting injustice and oppression.

It is also important to emphasise that such ideological narratives are created by those who have these moral foundations, and largely *because* they have those foundations. That is, narratives are not necessarily sought or found after the fact, but are co-created according to certain archetypal values or moral foundations. Thus, the

²¹ Notably, McAdams and Pals (2006) perhaps offer a more comprehensive view of personality using a five tier system. The authors propose that personality should be conceived of according to the following levels: "(a) individual's unique variation on the general evolutionary design for human nature, expressed as a developing pattern of (b) dispositional traits, (c) characteristic adaptations, and (d) self-defining life narratives, complexly and differentially situated (e) in culture and social context." (p. 204).

This could also be integrated with certain perspectives on VE. For instance, Atran (2016) argues that an evolutionarily derived motivation for "parochial altruism" underlies the psychology of devoted actors, suggesting tier (a) has a pivotal role in the development of VE personalities. Whilst Kruglanski *et al* (2018) hold that social networks (and their wider cultural context) are integral to the dissemination and adoption of VE narratives, as part on an individual's significance quest, indicating the importance of tier (e). As elsewhere, it is likely that it is the specific interaction of all five tiers, within an integrated life narrative, which forms a personality that is more or less prone to projecting, and acting upon VE narrative arcs.

“characteristic adaptations” level of personality can direct, to a significant degree, how someone’s personality develops, as part of their life narrative, including what kind of ideological narratives they use to make moral judgements. It may therefore be that, those who go on to follow VE narratives have exceptionally accentuated moral foundations (or rather a combination of several accentuated moral foundations, e.g. in-group loyalty and purity), perhaps as a result of their more innate dispositions (level one and two of personality), and/or because these have been cultivated and accentuated by narratives available to them (e.g. within their social context or that are stumbled upon). Alternatively, it may be that certain individuals are more prone to undergoing a “personal nomic crisis” (Griffin, p. 210), and are thus more existentially sensitive to threats to their significance (Kruglanski *et al* 2018). This higher sensitivity might incline them to develop and appropriate Manichean VE narratives, according to their particular, and to a degree already preformed, moral foundations. Indeed, such individuals might be more likely to adhere to VE narratives in the process of defining (i.e. de-pluralising), values corresponding to their moral foundations, throughout the development of their life narratives, according to which these foundations acquire personal meaning.

Moreover, personality differences would appear to be an important factor in contributing to the emotional pressures involved in radicalisation towards violence. McCauley and Moskalenko (2017) particularly emphasise the role of emotions in motivating violence, by both “disconnected-disordered” and “caring-compelled” lone actor terrorists (p. 212-3). The former of these proposed typologies are susceptible to depression, and feelings of meaninglessness, whilst the latter are sensitive to the suffering of others, often feeling morally obliged to act in their defence. Both types may represent specific kinds of personalities, or the specific responses of different personalities. These might also overlay, or interact with, certain moral foundations. For example, the

fairness/justice and harm/care moral foundations may be more prominent amongst caring-compelled terrorists. Equally, it could be argued that devoted actors (who could also be described as caring-compelled) are likely to have personalities high in the harm/care, in-group/loyalty, and purity/sanctity moral foundations. Furthermore, both the caring-compelled and disconnected-disordered types share key features with the “redemptive self” life narrative, identified by McAdams (2006). Disconnected-disordered terrorists, for example, can experience periods of emotional anguish and feelings of purposeless, motivating them to overcome their seemingly deficient state, through acts of terrorism. Similarly, caring-compelled terrorists are motivated to act on behalf of others, in a way not wholly dissimilar to sense of duty felt by redemptive selves, to improve the lives of future generations, i.e. their “generativity.”

Disordered-disconnected, and caring-compelled individuals, may thus both represent different precursors to a kind of terrorist redemptive self, one who integrates their life narrative within a VE master narrative, as part of the process of their personality development. Following the heuristic developed here, this development is likely subsumed within the dialogical cyclical/dialogic process of constantly reappraised normative-ontological understandings (including self-understanding), involved in the act of narration and interpretation. Accordingly, certain personality types, and the emotional predispositions which comprise them, may be more likely to integrate themselves within VE narratives, which in turn reflexively accentuate such predispositions, to such an extent, in certain individuals, that terrorism seemingly becomes the only available means of redressing their moral and emotional states. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that, whilst they may have an innate basis, these types not only produce, but are themselves produced, by the cultural context, and the individual life narratives, in which a person’s personality develops. They may make certain VE narratives, and particularly

their projected future narrative arcs, more emotionally exacting, and/or they may make those narratives more persuasive from the outset.

Preliminary Implications for Counter-Radicalisation

Depending on its applicability to contemporary RWE terrorism, the preliminary heuristic outlined above has several implications for counter-radicalisation interventions, particularly in terms of counter-narratives. Firstly, it is important to note that narratives serve specific psychological functions, both in terms of engendering challenges (e.g. the fear of death and the need for closure), and in terms of providing the solutions to those challenges, i.e. by limiting the range of possible actions for defending one's sacred values, and projecting (significance restoring) certainty into the future. Consequently, counter-radicalisation efforts should seek to address these psychological functions, and counter-narratives should seek to render VE narratives less effective at serving these functions.

Based on SQT, Kruglanski, *et al* (2018) argue that the incongruence between means and ends leads to a perceived loss of significance, which in turn reduces their commitment to the group. Importantly, the above research suggests that if violence is seen as ineffective or inimical to a particular cause (read: sacred values), this can be leveraged to encourage the rejection of *violent* extremist narratives, amongst those who support that cause. However, this may also depend on re-defining, or more specifically, re-pluralising the cause in question, in order to sufficiently render violence antithetical to it. This would likely mean addressing the Manichean normative-ontological prejudgements, or facticity, from which highly motivating apocalyptic futures are projected. If terrorism is pursued to avert nomocide, then certain key assumptions on which that projected nomocide is based, will likely need to be reappraised (as part of a

re-pluralised narrative process), in order for counter-radicalisation, or de-radicalisation, to be effective.

Whilst the above heuristic places much causal importance on the capacity of narratives to intensify, and perhaps even create, existential needs (e.g. the fear of nomocide and the subsequent need to re-establish symbolic immortality/the survival of sacred values), it should not be assumed that counter-narratives, and counter-radicalisation measures more broadly, must aim to negate such needs. On the contrary, the desire for meaning, and motivations for generativity, should be leveraged against the logic of terrorism contained within VE narratives, and harnessed in pursuit of non-terroristic notions of a meaningful life, which will in turn likely depend on non-terroristic master and life narratives. Indeed, it is unlikely that the need for meaning and purpose, within a nomos that overcomes the fear of death, can be negated at all for many people, particularly those susceptible committing acts of violence in defence of their sacred values, having completely integrated themselves into a VE master narrative. Put simply, it is probably ineffective to try to persuade certain people to “not care,” or to not hold sacred values. Rather, counter-narratives should seek to change VE narratives, so that adherents do not identify their sacred values with the destruction of out-groups, and subsequently do not limit the range of projected possible narrative-arcs, to a choice between terrorism and a meaningless existence.

Griffin (2012) argues that counter-radicalisation should seek to redirect the existential drives of VE towards a more balanced (and consequently realistic) worldview, that forms a particular iteration of what he terms “transcultural humanism” (p. 219). Citing the example of former Islamist Ed Hussain, whose re-understanding of his faith led him away from involvement the Islamist group Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami (Islamic Liberation Party), those who follow this de-radicalisation pathway come to re-understand

their nomos as incompatible with the totalising Manichean pretensions of VE ideologies. The latter are subsequently seen as an obstacle to be overcome in pursuit of a more complete, and prosocial understanding of their nomos, based on tolerance for, and solidarity with, those who likewise wish to maintain their own nomos, and that, "...acknowledges the humanity of 'the Other' which is the psychological antidote to fanaticism." (p. 219). Moderation, humanity and humility are thus adopted *because* they are perceived to be more congruent with the truth of reality, and an individual's attendant understanding of their highest values.

In terms of counter-narratives, this would mean redirecting the interpretive dialogical/cyclical processes involved in narration outlined above, so that potential VE continue to reappraise their normative-ontological understandings, but in a way that re-pluralises nomic meaning, away from the severely limited ideological notions based purely on a friend/enemy distinction, and a projected apocalypse. That is, these severely limited understandings ought to, themselves, be reappraised through narration, as previous understandings were likewise modified at prior stages of the radicalisation process, whence an individual's life narrative became increasingly integrated with a VE master narrative. The aim of this being that potential VE should, therefore, no longer define their sacred values in opposition to the demonised out-groups portrayed by Manichean narratives, and would subsequently no longer see violence as acceptable, or effective.

Counter-narratives should accordingly use the desire for existential effectiveness (i.e. the ability to competently apprehend reality, in order to find meaning in serving one's sacred values) as a means of discrediting de-pluralised ideological narrative arcs, particularly those that project a moral duty to engage in terrorism. If successful, then a

nomos which relies on the scapegoats that define VE master narratives, would appear as a poor substitute for, and indeed antithetical to, the “real” (or at least more real) thing.

However, the above prognosis would be more applicable for those terrorists that could be more aptly described as “devoted actors” (Atran 2016). It is here that the role of personality differences may become especially relevant in terms of how a counter-narrative might affect a change in beliefs. Although it is likely that the disordered-disconnected and the caring-compelled typologies, proposed by McCauley and Moskaleiko (2017), overlap to a significant degree in certain cases, it may be that for many terrorists, the individual is better categorised as one type rather than the other. Consequently, the emotional forces and processes involved in narrating a person’s life-narrative, their VE master narrative, and their subsequent experience of radicalisation, is likely to differ from those of others. Caring compelled VE, or devoted actors, might be more persuaded by counter-narratives that provide an alternative means of generativity, altruism, and serving specific sacred values. Discarded-disconnected VE, on the other hand, may have undergone a more individualised sense of significance loss, and so may be primarily drawn towards terrorism by their own anomic life narratives, rather than an ideological master narrative depicting homicide. Such individuals may be more motivated to replace the status quo through revolutionary violence, because their place (life narrative) within it has, thus far, been deeply demoralising. Consequently, the prospect of avenging their *personal* grievances and elevating *themselves* through the seemingly heroic actions projected by VE narrative arcs, has greater motivating force than any affinity to their purported in-group, or sacred values.

Thus, disconnected-disordered VE may require counter-narratives which afford alternative means of restoring individual significance, and discredit the efficacy of VE narratives for self-elevation/transformation. Indeed, if counter-narratives could

persuasively suggest that de-pluralised ideologies, and the violence they extol, in fact demonstrates an individual's failure to improve their life, then the desire to achieve personal significance might be leveraged against VE narratives. These will subsequently be seen as an ersatz kind of heroic life-narrative, which only serves to give their adherents the perception of higher significance. Overcoming this kind of de-pluralised life-narration could thus be seen, as itself, a kind of genuine (and perhaps significance-restoring) form of self-development, as part of one's life narrative.

However, it is important to remember that the disconnected-disorder and caring-compelled types of VE may often (or to some degree mostly) overlap in any one case, meaning that VE narratives address, and are themselves partly derived from, the psychological needs of both categories. It may also be that an individual evolves from one type to another within their respective radicalisation pathway, according to the degree to which they are integrated within their ideological master-narrative. Counter-narratives should perhaps therefore not overly focus on the psychological needs of the disconnected-disordered type, at the cost of neglecting those of caring-compelled VE. Indeed, doing so might even be counter-productive, if the counter-narrative appears to diminish the importance of certain sacred values, or suggest that the very desire to define and defend such values is merely a means of bolstering one's ego. Denying outright, what are for VE, the all too real importance of their sacred values, and their wider communities, may only serve to persuade them further that alternative narratives are fundamentally lacking, due to the normative-ontological ignorance of their proponents, who simply do not see what VE hold to be reality. Rather, re-defining meaning of sacred values and narrative trajectories, towards a less limited, less dehumanising, and in the long term more personally fulfilling interpretation of reality, ought to be the goal of counter-narratives,

and any counter/de-radicalisation intervention which seeks to address the fundamental role of narratives in terrorist violence.

Conclusion and Next Steps

This chapter has aimed to give a provisional outline of a heuristic for understanding VE narratives. Based on the research discussed in previous chapters, it was intended that this heuristic would make salient those aspects of narratives, and narration, which are most relevant to the psychology of radicalisation. Because radicalisation is a process, it was also intended that this heuristic would potentially offer some, however general, account of the dynamics involved in the psychology of narratives/narration within this process. That is, it has sought to emphasise how understandings *change*, particularly those pertaining to the meaning of sacredness, threats, groups, and an underlying reality. The meaning of the latter is projected into the future in the form of possibilities, which in the case of VE narratives, can at some stage, include, and even become limited to, acts of terrorism. The heuristic outlined here, proposes that much of this change takes place within the act of narrating one's life, and the adoption of VE master narratives, both of which recursively feed into one another. It is this recursive limiting of meaning, to an increasingly Manichean normative-ontological understanding of reality, that in turn increases the emotional load on adherents, to such a point where the trajectory of their life narratives becomes similarly restricted to terroristic acts of creative destruction designed to overturn that reality.

The next stage, after having outlined this preliminary heuristic, is to evaluate its applicability to real-world cases of radicalisation, specifically, in the case of this study, RWE radicalisation. This will mean examining the explanatory usefulness of the specific

ideal-typical view of narratives, offered by the preliminary heuristic outlined above, in understanding the role of narratives, and narration, in the process of radicalising individuals towards RWE terrorism. Specifically, this means bringing into focus and describing those specific elements of narration, which this heuristic purposely accentuates, when applied in analysing and conceptualising RWE narratives, as part of the wider phenomenon of radicalisation. This analysis will take place in the next section, before being incorporated into the final chapter which will seek to develop the heuristic further within an overall discussion of the analysed narratives. Following this discussion, the study will conclude by outlining the implications for understanding narratives and their role in RWE radicalisation, as well as areas of future research.

Analysis of Contemporary Right-Wing Extremist Narratives

The previous chapter outlined a preliminary heuristic for understanding the role of narratives in Right-Wing Extremist (RWE) radicalisation by synthesising key perspectives from an array of relevant fields. Consequently, it is now possible to evaluate the utility of this heuristic, and develop it further by applying it in an analysis of contemporary RWE narratives. These will be identified as those narratives contained within the manifestos created by individual RWE terrorists which they published online prior to their attacks.

Selection Criteria

The criterion for selecting these manifestos has been their relevance in providing basic rationales for, and articulating the fundamental goals of the particular RWE terrorist attacks to which they relate. Specifically, the manifestos of three known RWE terrorists will be analysed, in order to gain an understanding of RWE narratives, as they pertain to developing a commitment to violence, and extremist goals. The selected manifestos are those of recent terrorists, with the earliest attack occurring in 2019, meaning that the analysis will be focussed on gaining a more in-depth view of the most contemporary RWE narratives motivating acts of terrorism.

There are two general reasons for these selection criteria: Firstly, as is often discussed amongst literature on VE, defining what exactly constitutes extremism continues to prove challenging. That it is challenging, largely due to the relative, and inherently political nature of the term, seems to be the most stable consensus to be found thus far. As cited in chapter one (p. 39), Koehler (2015) developed his notion of radicalisation as de-pluralisation, precisely in response to the controversial nature of identifying what radicalisation actually means (with a view to being analytically useful

within his wider paradigm of “contrast societies”). However, terrorism research (including this study), is generally concerned with how, “...members of a small group without the power of a state become capable of political violence that includes violence against non-combatants.” (McCauley, 2007, p. 14). Consequently, it is narratives that pertain directly to this particular kind of violence that are the focus of this study. Furthermore, a common thread across definitions of extremism, and the way researchers approach the study of radicalisation, is its connection with the support for, or participation in, political violence, especially terrorism. Notwithstanding the controversies entailed in defining terrorism, which do in part mirror those of defining extremism, referring to radicalisation as it pertains to the enactment of terrorism, and the creation of *violent* extremists, binds these terms to something more concrete, and more easily identifiable. That many more people will share the basic plot of VE narratives when interpreting the world, who do not commit violence, than those who share it and do, does not detract from the role of narratives in motivating violence in these minority cases.

Secondly, alongside these definitional challenges, are the aims that counter-radicalisation interventions and policies should prioritise in relation to de-radicalisation. The first objective, suggested by Kruglanski and Webber (2014), in reversing the radicalisation process, was reducing the commitment to violence amongst extremists. The second, was reducing commitment to extremist goals, some of which are likely to necessitate violence, certainly at least in the view of actual terrorists. Additionally, the England and Wales’ Extremism Risk Guidance (ERG22+) and Vulnerability Assessment Framework (VAF), uses 22 risk indicators to assess the risk to an individual of radicalisation, and predict subsequent outcomes, in both prison and community settings. The indicators consist of thirteen factors relating to a person’s engagement in extremism, six factors regarding their intent, and three regarding their capability. Amongst those

indicators in the “intent” category, are those which would pertain to the use of violence, i.e. “Attitudes that justify offending, harmful means to an end and harmful end objectives” (Knudson, 2018, p. 41). In accordance with the ERG22+, it would therefore appear that addressing someone’s “intent” indicators would, to a significant degree, address their risk of radicalisation towards terrorism. Reducing their intent indicators (amongst others) might also serve as a measurable target for counter-radicalisation efforts, including counter-narratives, in a prison setting or any other, where the ERG22+ or VAF can be conducted.

The selection of three unusually articulate expressions of narratives that rationalise the type of acts of terrorist violence which often remain unexpressed or subliminal, directly relates to a key premise of this thesis, namely that is identifying and delegitimising the rationales and justifications of violence in the mind of the would-be terrorist should be a central focus of counter-radicalisation efforts, since acts of *violent* extremism are both the worst outcome and defining feature of VE narratives. However, defining where a violent extremist narrative begins and a non-violent narrative ends, is often complicated and highly conjectural. Indeed, segments of the arguments that are used to justify terrorist violence may be taken from non-violent narratives, and the arguments, or underlying prejudices (in the Gadamerian sense) within these narratives, may in turn, be taken from others, ad infinitum. Attempting to trace all these arguments and attempting to attribute their degree of culpability in the eventual justification of violence by RWE, is beyond the scope of this study. The aim here is to analyse the nexus of ideological, moral, motivational, psychological components which interact within the narratives that rationalise and license RWE terrorism, as far as it can be discerned or inferred from the declared rationales (“manifestos”) provided by RWE terrorists for their

acts. Consequently, explicitly *violent* extremist narratives, given from the perspective of those who believe in them, will be the primary focus of this study.

To be a qualitative analysis of any descriptive depth (the kind required for giving a first-hand account of individual radicalisation pathways), necessarily means deliberately limiting the cases studied to provide this depth. Though the narratives (particularly in terms of master narratives) are likely to share general pre-judgements, structures, or ways of “emploting” events with other RWE narratives, past, present, and future (to say nothing of their shared antagonists), the individual-level psychological dynamics inferred in the following analysis are exactly that; specific to the individuals concerned. Consequently, what is being explicated are the specific interactions of individual life narratives with wider RWE master narratives. To be sure, in the cases analysed, both of these merge to the point where distinguishing between the terrorist’s own version of a wider master narrative, and the master narrative as manifested in the particular individuals’ life, becomes difficult. It also depends somewhat on the amount of creative free-play, or synthesis, one affords the particular individuals. Nevertheless, these are still individual level dynamics, and ones which have been selected given a particular selection bias, that of obtaining relatively well-articulated rationalisations for RWE violence. Those RWE terrorists who do not leave as extensive accounts of their radicalisation pathways, and detailed narratives of the world, have necessarily been left out. This selection bias, together with the necessarily limited number of cases, by extension necessarily limits the implications that can be drawn in terms of generalisability.

Consequently, what will be developed further through the following analysis is not a general heuristic that explains, or even necessarily pertains to, the role of narratives in all RWE terrorism across the board. Rather, what has been outlined preliminarily

above is a proposed heuristic for understanding narratives in the context of RWE terrorism, particularly the nexus of life narratives and master narratives, which will next be developed, and to a certain extent evaluated, through the analysis of a specifically selected group of three RWE terrorists. This aspect concerning context specificity, and the limits of wider applicability, will be discussed in the concluding sections of this study, regarding its implications.

Bratislava 2022

On the 12th of October 2022, shortly after 19:00, 19-year-old Juraj Krajčík opened fire on a group of people outside the Tepláreň gay bar in Bratislava, killing two, and injuring a third. He then returned to his home in another part of the city, where police believe he took his own life, after his body was discovered the next morning with a gunshot to the head. Prior to his attack, Krajčík published his online manifesto titled, “A Call to Arms.” In the immediate aftermath, he also made several posts on Twitter, including one in which he said he had no remorse for his attack (Pravda 2022).

Krajčík’s manifesto begins with a straightforwardly neo-Nazi orientation, in the form of the black sun symbol²², and the opening lines, “It’s the jews. *It’s the jews. It’s the jews.* They all have names and addresses. The people responsible for our situation have names and addresses” (p. 1). Indeed, this sentiment largely defines the rest of the narrative

²² The Black Sun symbol (German: Sonnenrad) is a variation of sun wheel, composed of twelve zigzag sig runes, which was originally depicted in the form of a mosaic made to decorate the floor of a room within Heinrich Himmler’s (head of Hitler’s SS) castle of Wewelsburg during the 1930s (Goodrick-Clarke, 2002, p. 125). The inventor of the symbol, Wilhelm Landig, an Austrian occultist who would go on to fight for the SS during the Second World War, would later attempt to develop the meaning of the Black Sun further in a series of esoteric books. (p. 140-48). According to Pfeiffer (2020), “Few, if any, symbols within the right-wing extremist movement are presumed to have a wider reach than the Black Sun,”... “However, the Black Sun is not suited to integrating those subsections of right-wing extremism that engage in xenophobic agitation but have no affinity to National Socialism” (p. 164). This latter point will become relevant later, in the case of Brenton Tarrant’s manifesto, which uses the Black Sun symbol but does not have a neo-Nazi orientation, in the sense that it does not apply a Manichean anti-Semitic framing.

and worldview depicted within his manifesto, and his main reason for writing it. Jews, and specifically the “Zionist Occupation Government” (“ZOG”), by which they are said to orchestrate world events, are held to be responsible for a long list of schemes, whose ultimate purpose is believed to be the demoralisation, subjugation, and eventual extermination of white Europeans. The grievances in which the Jews are implicated are wide ranging, encompassing both specific issues, and general trends, which all comprise the author’s grievances with contemporary western societies. “Who to blame for the unchecked rise in non-White immigration to Europe and the US. Who to blame for the rise of degeneracy, faggotry, transgenderism, deviancy of all forms” (p. 1). In a more specific case, Krajčik claims “the” Jews also seek to exert control through “...measures like the jew-created and dangerous “COVID-19 vaccines” (p. 2).

What is notable, is the seemingly omnipresent reach of the alleged Jewish machinations, from which there can be no escape, and consequently no alternative but to “strike back” at all forms and symbols of ZOG power. According to Krajčik, the Russian Federation under Vladimir Putin is also a bulwark of Jewish power, and is in fact “...just Eastern ZOG - a counterpart to the Western ZOG. They may disagree on the methods and execution on how to subjugate the goyim, but fundamentally if they succeed, the result will be the same thing.” (p. 22). Both Eastern and Western ZOG are thus competing antagonists within his Manichean anti-Semitic master narrative, though Krajčik still maintains that “...the United States is the Great Satan, and it must be destroyed.” (p. 20). In this narrative, Jews would appear to conform to a key archetypal trait of the scapegoat mechanism analysed in Girard’ (1986), namely that, “...the scapegoat no longer appears to be merely a passive receptacle for evil forces but is rather the mirage of an omnipotent manipulator shown by mythology to be sanctioned unanimously by society” (p. 46). The scapegoat here appears similarly omnipotent, as the gradual entropy of white majority

societies, symbolised by the multifarious forms of “degeneracy,” in terms of which Krajčák describes many of his political grievances, and which he believes will culminate in the eventual destruction of such societies, is all viewed as the *intentional*, albeit secretive, works of all-seeing, all-knowing Jews. The rationale, according to Krajčák, behind the destructive and controlling measures advanced by Jews, is presented in largely materialistic terms, wherein ZOG seeks to create “...A world populated by obedient consumers, who will work, consume and not rise up. Who will produce profit for the “chosen ones” at the top.” (p. 2).

However, Krajčák also refers to a narrative of vengeance, and historical enmity, from which the alleged Jewish desire to destroy white Europeans is purported to stem. “When a kike sees an Englishman, he doesn’t think of English people. He thinks of the Edict of Expulsion.” (p. 24). Jews are thus believed not to differentiate between white European ethno-cultural groups, but rather seek revenge against all of gentile European polities for historical grievances, e.g. “...the numerous pogroms in the Pale of Settlement, where their ancestors were kicked out or wiped out by Ukrainian, Russian and Belarussian commoners, peasants and serfs, Cossacks and soldiers.” (p. 24). Krajčák emphasises his belief that Jews do not “...care if you’re Swedish or Italian; English or Irish; German or Polish; Spanish or American; Slovak or Hungarian. They see us collectively as enemies, those who rightfully and dutifully persecuted them across centuries due to their endless scheming and plotting and subverting. They see us as White. And they intend to deal with us collectively.” (p. 24-25). Consequently, all political solutions that do not centre on an anti-Semitic racial purging of western societies, are thus deemed to be ineffective. Moreover, all RWE terrorist strategies that do not aim to defend white people as a united collective, are also deemed to be misguided, and misdirected in the struggle against the collective vengeance, allegedly wrought by Jews in the form of ZOG.

This totalising Manichaean element characterises the whole narrative, necessitating a total transformation of the status quo, via a purifying race war, and the racial purging of non-white ethnic groups within majority white societies. In line with the fifth and final stage of Moghaddam's (2003) staircase, this all or nothing solution is made a moral imperative by the racial jeopardy that is perceived to be the function of the current world order. According to this view, racial salvation (in the form of a secure homeland for white descendants), can only be achieved through a *total* inversion of what the narrative takes as certain to be a genocidal (and to that end culture-cidal and nomocidal) state of affairs, one that is deliberately maintained for that purpose by Jews, for their own self-interested, and vengeful designs. Not only are democratic political solutions rendered ineffective, they are seen as a counter-productive, since "...Voting only serves as a pressure release valve," which diminishes the potentially transformative anger of those with similar grievances. (p. 15). Here, the very notion of aspiring to gain legitimacy within the current system is rejected as a kind of ZOG trap.

Echoing Girard's motifs further, not only does Krajčik intend to unite white people around the collective extermination of Jews, and the expulsion of non-whites, he also wants to remove all trace of Jewish existence, save one important caveat. He specifically, argues for, "...the erasure of all mentions of the jewish plague from the annals of history, except as a cautionary tale for the future." (p. 4). In order for Jews to serve as an effective scapegoat, one that can sustain the palingenetic revolution projected by this narrative, they must forever, and without question, be defined as the personification of evil, hence licensing the radical dehumanisation and "othering" which precludes any sort of human compassion for the proposed victims. Through their perceived ability to unify a future collective around an imagined racially pure nomos, Jews, through their demonisation as a common enemy are a fundamental part of restoring

the sacred in a fallen world. As with Girard's scapegoats, in this narrative it is this apparent redemptive power, which makes the Jews intrinsically bound up with a kind of sacredness, in that the anti-sacredness of the Jews makes their destruction the route, or means of realising the re-sacralised world. This anti-sacredness gives them a kind of superhuman potency, and subsequently for the author, a sense of inescapable fear. It is precisely because the Jews are viewed as totally evil, and in almost total control of reality, that their destruction is subsequently viewed as the gateway or portal to a redeemed and renewed world. Following Girard's (1988) theory, "...the birth of the community is first and foremost an act of separation," in which, "...the new temporal cycle is inaugurated by a break with the sacred, which is invariably "bad" when it has infiltrated the community." (p. 304) The collective agreement on the villainy of Jews, and crucially those signs of degeneration that they are alleged to represent,²³ are seen as a key means of legitimation for the new *nomos* projected into the future by this narrative; one that will end the "sacrificial crisis," by demarcating a clear normative system by which an idealised and purified community can orientate itself.

Furthermore, it is not enough, according to Krajčák, for white Europeans to throw off the control of ZOG, and reach accommodation with other ethnic groups, and political powers. Rather, his narrative requires complete white European world supremacy, and total ethnic segregation. Alongside the "... total eradication of all Jews," victory in this narrative means, "The expulsion or physical removal of all alien races from our lands," and the "... neutering of all rising threats from non-White countries of the world, to ensure European superiority for all of time." (p. 4) White racial mastery, and the destruction of the Jews, are thus seen as the *only* viable form of liberation. The

²³ These signs of degeneration and dysfunction may be analogous to the dissolution of differences, by which Girard (1988) characterises the "sacrificial crisis," which he defined as "a crisis of distinctions, a crisis affecting the cultural order" (p. 54)

narrative thus provides a stark choice between two alternative projected futures, one of either the genocide of whites, or genocide by whites, a rigid “us or them,” “kill or be killed,” played out on a planetary scale. Consequently, Krajčák emphasises that only violence directed at “the system” can bring about the necessary destruction of ZOG, before it destroys or subjugates all white Europeans.

Because the narrative holds that survival necessitates such a complete upending of the status quo, anything, and anyone, implicated in ZOG is held to be a legitimate target for physical attack. This includes a substantially expanded list of targets for attack, “Strike at ZOG; strike at its institutions; strike at its human shields; strike at the hordes of racial enemies invading our lands; strike at key leaders that keep the System going; strike at the rank-and-file activists; strike at the System’s property.” (p. 6). Moreover, Krajčák explicitly endorses terrorising those implicated in ZOG by targeting those close to them, “...Destroy the government! Target traitorous politicians; target their families; target their children; target their property.” (p. 6). As justification, Krajčák argues that weakening the hold of ZOG on the population is more important in the medium term than attempting to win over their approval. Violence must therefore be used by small cells and individuals to, “Accelerate the decline of ZOG, so that we may rise from its ruins.” Indeed, accelerationism²⁴ is seen as a necessary strategy because “time is limited,” and the longer the war is delayed, the stronger and more entrenched ZOG will become. Accelerating the decline of ZOG is believed to accelerate the radicalisation of potential supporters, “The average Joe must no longer feel safe. He must feel the issues plaguing ZOG. He must feel unrepresented in the political process, excluded from it completely.” (p. 9). In this respect, accelerationism means replicating the same radicalisation process undergone by

²⁴ See Chapter 3, p. 173.

the author on white publics in general, to the point where more people, like him, come to reject the status quo in its entirety.

Much of this strategy is designed around individual attackers, or small cells, as these are believed to be more unpredictable, and better able to heighten a societal-wide feelings of insecurity. Krajčik specifically argues that, in order for his supporters to be effective, they must “decentralize,” as this is believed to enable them to achieve their objective of increasing fear and anxiety for both demonised out groups, and in turn, the wider white population. For example, Krajčik praises the RWE terrorist Payton Gendron for his attack on African Americans in Buffalo, New York, because “It spreads fear and doubt and uncertainty about the future in a community when a random outsider comes up and starts killing locals.” (p.18). Moreover, the unpredictability of these kinds of attacks are believed to drive further polarisation, by making ethnic minority groups feel targeted as a collective.¹

Although it may be difficult to determine to what extent, and how much, of what the author has written about himself may be either embellished or biased, the short account he gives of his own radicalisation process may be useful. He presents his upbringing as generally normal, aside from switching schools due to bullying (though he states this was likely to have been his own fault due to not being able to handle jokes). Additionally, he claims to have self-diagnosed himself with mental health problems using the Internet, although he later discredits this remedy by reporting that it exacerbated later feelings of depression and loneliness. He seems to have had an interest in moral and philosophical questions from an early age, spending “... quite some time on the Internet, starting with debating atheism vs religion” “...Well, “debating” as much as a literal 11-year old could” “...In fact, atheism/agnosticism or general irreligion was actually my first political stance that I took.” His subsequent political interests, prior to 2019, seem to

have been relatively varied, having "...dabbled in all sorts of ideologies and movements," most of which appears to have been due to his own online explorations, "I was a kid cruising the Internet, picking up shit along the way and throwing it away just as quickly." (p. 10)

According to Krajčák, his radicalisation towards RWE terrorism began in earnest in 2019, after viewing the footage of the RWE attacks in Christchurch New Zealand that year, recorded by the attacker himself. Though he claims to have already had an interest in "true crime content," the Christchurch footage "...felt "different" to most other content that I had seen before." (p. 11). This appears to have sparked his subsequent interest in the message board website 8chan before its subsequent removal. After exploring the website, he claims he "was never the same." Taking Krajčák at his word, this would appear to be the phase in which terrorism became the only viable means of addressing his political grievances. Grievances which, at least in part, appear to have been framed in such a way as to necessitate violence, i.e. "I learned so much there, it completely changed my view of the world. Yet most importantly of all, from day one, I was never under the illusion that a political solution to the problems I learned about on the website, was possible."

This, of course, raises the twofold questions as to what the specific details were of "the problems" he "learned about," and how he came to believe these were accurate descriptions of reality. To answer the first part, one could look to the Manichean anti-Semitic master narrative that informs his entire manifesto, answering the second is perhaps less straightforward. That is, it remains unclear exactly how his belief in this narrative developed, in terms of the notion of racial jeopardy, and the attribution of blame to Jews. He makes no mention of harbouring, even milder anti-Semitic sentiment (e.g. common tropes) before his time on 8chan, whilst always maintaining an aversion to Islam

throughout his ideological development. This might suggest that the belief in the apparently totalising, and essentially genocidal hegemony, of “the” Jews, which underpins his entire narrative, is likely to have been a more recent development than his perception of the threat posed by ethnic/religious minorities. It may, therefore, be that his narrative’s Manichean anti-Semitism was adopted as a means of affording the greatest possible closure, regarding this particular political grievance. A notable feature of this kind of narrative is that it centres the concerns of the adherent on an ultimate cause surrounding cultural and demographic changes within Western societies, one which is held as being a kind of guiding causal principle, for understanding the status quo, and the intentions of the designated enemy. The narrative is thoroughly “de-pluralised” to use Koehler’s (2015) term, in the sense that it makes a totalising race war the basis for rationalising the intentions, and actions, of others. Economics, culture, and world politics are all constituents of the various fronts, on which this war is waged.

Furthermore, Krajčák claims that his ideological beliefs, and thinking surrounding possible solutions, became increasingly radicalised and entrenched with further exploration of 8chan which he claims will continue to inspire many “...who took the redpill and subsequently the action-pill in the Memetic Warfare and book threads, the shitposts and effortposts, the debates and infographic dumps.” (p. 11). This would suggest a trajectory towards a greater degree of “de-pluralisation,” both in terms of de-pluralising sacred values, and the means for securing them. Indeed, it would appear that, within this narrative, both sacred values²⁵ and the means for achieving them amount to the same thing, i.e. a racially purified white homeland and worldwide white supremacy, which are viewed as essential to the survival of future white generations. That is, a violent, racially purifying, revolution becomes effectively identified itself with the adherent’s sacred

²⁵ See Atran’s (2016) Devoted Actor Model outlined in Chapter 1 (p. 22).

value. However, the sense of certainty, or high “epistemic control” (Miceli and Castelfranchi’s 2005), negative and fearful though it might be, affords the adherent with a clear route to complete their narrative journey, and an end to the intolerable state of dread in which their ideological journey (life narrative) has culminated..

Much of Krajčák’s portrayal of his ideological journey towards commitment to violence is framed in emotional terms, as are his appeals to others to follow his example, suggesting the relevance of Miceli and Castelfranchi’s (2005) discussion of anxiety and fear as “epistemic emotions,” particularly the complete epistemic control, afforded by the negative certainty of fear. Fear, specifically the fear of a genocide of all white people, and the moral urgency to avert this genocide, is the primary message of Krajčák’s narrative. He is at pains to impart his own fearful certainty onto others, attempting to dispel any uncertainty that potential sympathisers may have regarding the necessity of violent resistance. Rather than being the other way around, uncertainty, is according to this view, a kind of coping mechanism, used by those who adhere to the same, or a similar narrative, to justify their own inaction and cowardice. Non-violence thus becomes a moral fault and passivity an accelerator of the fulfilment of the enemy’s plan.

Krajčák specifically appeals to those who are depressed and in despair at the state of the world, by attempting to empathise, using his own experience. He addresses those who “... may feel downtrodden, demoralized over the bleak future ahead of us,” “...Believe me, I know the feeling. Years ago, I felt the same way” (p. 56). Claiming to have at one point considered suicide, he describes how he once “...walked to the railway embankment, waiting for my ticket out of this world. My train to what I perceived as my freedom.” (p. 56). Overcoming this despair, he argues, can be achieved by resisting the temptation to give up on a meaningless life, but instead channelling one’s hatred of the status quo into violence against the system, with the intention of creating a better future,

one safe from the genocidal machinations of ZOG. Here, there are clear parallels with the “redemptive self” life narratives, identified by McAdam (2006), which are characterised by an episode of mental hardship, purposelessness and depression, which is then overcome by new paradigm of self-understanding, whereby a person devotes themselves to the betterment of future generations (i.e. generativity²⁶). In this case, the sense of purpose, indeed ultimate purpose, is rediscovered with fanatical vigour as the surest way of overcoming the former anomic self. As with the apocalyptic future projected within this narrative, the protagonist’s solution is framed in terms of a heroic, regenerative triumph over the despair of a meaningless existence. The latter takes the form of the imminently genocidal status quo, which must be shattered through the sacrificial commitment on the part of devoted actors, who devote themselves entirely to the meaningful future projected by this narrative the portal to which is an act of symbolic violence enacted against a demonised enemy or embodiment of Manicheanised evil.

Indeed, the alternation between despair and redemption, disaster and triumph, coheres with the role of emotional cadences (i.e. the arousal and resolution of emotional states) which Broncano (2013) argued were integral to narratives, and the process of narration. By creating an emotional challenge, Broncano argues, narratives also create the expectation of a resolution. That is, the desire for closure, or the desire to answer a question, drives the narrative towards a resolution, which can take the form of a therapeutically potent ending, one made emotionally necessary by the original challenge depicted within the narrative. Importantly, this suggests the degree to which emotions and narratives are fundamentally intertwined. Rather than one following from the other, both inhere within the process of interpreting the world, and one’s place in it. The cadence of anxiety and fear, what Miceli and Castelfranchi’s (2005) describe as

²⁶ See Chapter 2, p. 121.

“epistemic emotions,” would appear in this case to take the narrative form that coheres in large part with the loss, and subsequent quest to regain, significance, as outlined by Kruglanski *et al* (2018).

However, rather than the terrorist narrative being sought simply in response to a sense of loss, the continuously unfolding life narrative, in which that loss is understood, itself evolves towards integration within a terrorist narrative, according to the intensity of the felt loss, and the individual’s personality, which is reciprocally shaped within the life narrative they inhabit. In this respect, resolution or closure are not just sought after the fact, but are expected, as integral to the “telos” which Broncano (2013) argues defines a narrative by giving it its unity (or what it strives towards as an emplotted ending or dramatic dénouement). In other words, the telos arises with the arousal of an emotional challenge, of which the individual strives to make sense. Here, making sense means bringing closure, through the narrative’s completion.

For RWE such as Krajčák, integration within a wider terrorist master narrative *is* the resolution. In other words, the degree of integration represents the degree of resolution, or conclusive sense made, regarding the adherent’s nomic crisis; a crisis itself which may be at least in part the product of a particular narrative framing which denies purpose and agency. For many who perhaps do not experience depressive episodes so severe that they can finally precipitate a redemptive self entirely devoted to a sacred cause, lesser degrees of integration within a RWE narrative (e.g. lacking the drive to assert agency by taking extreme, life-changing actions) may provide adequate closure to their perceived nomic threat. These lesser degrees of integration might correspond with the lower levels of McCauley and Moskalenko’s (2017) “action pyramid,” (e.g. vocal support, or activism). For others however, the terror and despair of anomy, personified by a previous purposeless, depressive phase in a life narrative, gives rise to a need, i.e. a

new narrative telos, which orientates them towards an ultimate resolution to the emotional cadence aroused by a sense of complete meaninglessness and despair.

The contrast between meaninglessness, and its overcoming in a state of meaningful and sustained transcendence of anomie makes the experience of the resolution of the existential crisis more convincingly sacred. The pursuit of this ultimate meaning is the telos of a narrative which arises from the challenge posed by anomic despair. Accordingly, the ultimate resolution amounts to an ultimate integration within a master narrative that projects a sacred value, in the form of a redeemed future, one contrasted with a morally bankrupt present, and in particular contrasted with an alternative and abjectly hellish nomocidal, even suicidal, future. In the context of Krajčik's RWE terrorism, the ultimate certainty of complete narrative integration requires committing oneself entirely to a normative-ontological structure, that in extreme cases requires violent self-sacrifice or at least the readiness to die for the cause. Integrating oneself completely into this structure necessarily means ending one's life narrative completely (or the narrative of one's former self), in order to give it definitive, seemingly incontestable, meaning, as part of a wider collective struggle within which the self is subsumed, thus providing the subjective prospect of a transcendence after death. Ultimate commitment means the binding of one's fate with that of a nomos (past, present, and future), which subsequently provides the most assured connection between the terrorist, and those sacred values on which all life's meaning depends, at least for those with an existential need to discover and live out in action an absolute value.

This notion of emotional cadences forming the basis of a narrative's telos, and thus to a large extent its trajectory (i.e. questions to be answered or challenges to be overcome), highlights the relevance of the Heideggerian concept of "care-structures," particularly as applied by Roth (2017) in the context of life narratives. For Heidegger,

“care” constituted the mode of being, by which Dasein realised the structural unity of its being-in-the-world. To be concerned for something means to attune oneself toward understanding reality from a particular perspective. Importantly for Heidegger (2010), the anticipatory nature of this attunement is also unified by the experience, or everyday “facticity,” of time as, “...*The primordial unity of the structure of care lies in temporality.*” (p. 312, italics in original). This means that, through taking care, Dasein is attuned to the past, present, and future, as part of a single holistic experience, or “thrown-projection”. To say that temporality underlies care, is to say that careful attunement maintains a consistency, by which Dasein (or a narrative perspective) understands its being-in-the-world.

In terms of RWE radicalisation such as Krajčák’s, the care-structure of an individual life-narrative becomes premised on doing all that one can in pursuit of a sacred value, as it is projected in the form of a racially purified future, which necessarily can only be secured through (at the very least readiness for) self-sacrifice. Through such acts of sacrificial violence RWE terrorists realise the emotional and existential completion of their life narratives, according to their “care-structures.” That is not to say that in taking care, adherents of RWE narratives have only one fixed outcome for their life narratives; rather, for those like Krajčák with a redemptive life narrative, that which they care for gives their life narrative a kind of telos, in the form of emotional and existential questions which demand answers and will only be resolved through acts of symbolic violence against the source of the intolerable status quo or phase of history deemed to be “evil.” These generally equate to some kind of question surrounding “what is the good?,” and “what should I do/not do, to bring it about?” Answering both questions definitively (though the two are ultimately inseparable), means definitively restoring a sense of significance (Kruglanski *et al* 2018), and heroic purpose, to those individuals threatened

by anomy. It is this kind of need to provide meaning/significance-restoring answers that characterises the kind of care, by which RWE terrorists interpret, and participate, in their life narratives. Ending one's life (or life narrative) through sacrificial violence (or being prepared for this outcome), is for these individuals, the most definitive way of giving oneself to a sacred cause, and cathartically ending a previous state of existential uncertainty. Terroristic self-sacrifice is the ultimate and final act of integration, through which the emotional cadences of RWE narratives reach their resolution.

Following an evolutionary logic, Krajčik explicitly advocates that those with nothing to lose should sacrifice themselves for the greater cause of defending the race, the survival of which will ultimately render their individual lives meaningful. "Humans have one biological purpose - to spread our genes." "...It extends to your tribe, your nation, your Race." (p. 56). A person that has lived through the depths of depression is particularly qualified for pursuing such a task, he argues, as they have, "...fought perhaps the greatest adversary a man can face - his own mind - and won the battle." (p. 57). Here is perhaps a clear demonstration of how the emotional turmoil of a meaningless existence, a turmoil that itself is largely induced through a narrative understanding of the world that projects a hopeless and apocalyptic future, can attract a cathartic resolution in form of the symbolic immortality, which is provided by the projection of seemingly heroic self-sacrifice or the sake of a higher, i.e. suprapersonal cause. The overwhelming terror of death, and the attendant need to heroically overcome it so as to achieve a form of symbolic transcendence of mortality, as outlined by Becker (1973), is perhaps most aptly captured when Krajčik implores his potential supporters to see that, "...You can only lose your life. But you can gain a purpose - fighting in defense of your People, your Race, so that they may continue to propagate forward, to prosper, to thrive. Isn't that a beautiful thought?" (p. 57).

In this case, it would thus appear that the individual's "heroic double" (Griffin 2017) provides the answers to the questions of purpose and agency which torment the original anomic self, in the form of self-immolation for a transcendent cause, providing a physically self-destructive but psychologically self-creative and redemptive solution to the existential challenge posed by the original negative life-narrative or lack of narrative which makes the formation of a heroic self necessary. By completely internalising a narrative which projects personal nihilism and private nomocide, the pre-radicalised, anomic self necessarily has to reckon with the fear of a meaningless existence, and necessarily must believe in the need for a heroic double as the only morally acceptable future narrative arc. At the heart of the radicalisation process, in cases such as this, there therefore lies the search for the "radix" or root cause of one's own existence, the point where radix and nomos merge. The more the heroic double (implicitly at first) forms within the radicalising self as an increasingly real possibility of overcoming rootlessness and anomie, the greater the certainty with which the adherent believes in the nomo-generative future projected by his narrative even if the rebirth of a new order, the expected palingenesis, will only benefit those who outlive their sacrifice. Violent revolution, and heroic self-transformation, are bound together, as to partake in one is to partake in both. For RWE like Krajčák, they are also both entirely contingent on the belief in nomic, specifically in this case, racial, jeopardy. Heroic doubles thus go from being an implicit possibility, to an explicit necessity, at the point at which the adherent feels they cannot bear living in an (for them all too real) narrative, in which continuing to live in his or her everyday self, means continuing to live with the certainty and fear of the ultimate nomocide to come once the degenerative, decadent process identified by the redemptive nomos (racial decay, secularisation, expansion of capitalism, ecological degradation etc.)

has reached its ultimate nihilistic conclusion, and thus with the prospect of facing their own subsequent moral failure of not doing what they *knew* was needed to prevent it.

By making the violent sacrifice of both the adherents and their victims a moral necessity, the narrative simultaneously makes the complete transformation of the passive believer in a cause into the terrorist actor charged with completing a proactive realisation of that belief in what is experienced subjectively as a drama of heroic self-transcendence. Indeed, Krajčik devotes one section of his manifesto to “mental preparation,” in which he argues that those he advocates should follow his example must come to terms with the fact that their previous lives will be forever gone. Potential terrorists are reminded that their actions will completely separate them from friends and family; “Once you attack, almost everyone will hate you” (p. 58). Consequently, he recommends that they “...think about the good times; think about the memories already made,” or alternatively “...slowly push them away before the day of the operation, to make it easier on yourself mentally.” In essence, he is suggesting that at the heart of the struggle to triumph over ZOG, lies the inner struggle to move beyond one’s anomic identity and overcome one’s former self, through transformative acts of self-sacrifice, or perhaps a single, devastating act of violence.

It is clear to Krajčik that not only must potential terrorists be prepared to kill others, but they must also accept the possibility of their own death. “You must realize that once you attack, you can not go back, and you may lose your only chance at life on this Earth in the process.” (p. 58). Overcoming the fear of death, in this regard, means embracing the necessity of self-sacrifice as the most virtuous and meaningful action a person can take, within this narrative. It is the finality of killing one’s former self, and perhaps one’s entire self, that is demanded by the heroic double. The heroic double, or rather the projected future heroic self, thus makes severe normative-ontological claims

on adherents with respect to the quest to find meaning in death. To a significant degree, they are in a kind of moral dialogue with this double, which ultimately they come to identify with their conscience, by projecting, with complete certainty, nomo-generative narrative arcs into the future. Ultimately, Krajčák claims, he felt compelled to "...take a stand, even if just once in my life. Even if I must stand alone, even if just for one day, even if I may fail - I must do something." (p. 12).

Notably, the persuasiveness of this perspective, particularly in terms of its emotional force, seems to have been strengthened by the role model provided by other RWE terrorists. Krajčák repeatedly cites Brenton Tarrant's manifesto, as demonstrating the validity of his own narrative. For instance, Tarrant is quoted to reaffirm the unavoidability of violence, i.e. "Do not suffer under the delusion of an effortless, riskless democratic victory." (p. 15). He specifically cites the example of the RWE terrorist Payton Gendron, as being the "... final nail in the coffin." (p. 12) His example, Krajčák claims, was particularly inspirational, because, "...in Gendron, I saw myself - a young man with his whole life ahead, who decided to fight for something bigger than himself who fought for what he believed in." (p. 12).

It would thus appear that the need to realise an idealised terrorist self, achieved through self-sacrifice, became more powerful through continued reinforcement, not only of a particular RWE master narrative, but also of the adherent's life-narrative as being integrated within this wider master narrative. By interpreting the intentional states of other RWE terrorists, including those that he believes will follow his own example, Krajčák projected his own idealised terrorist-self, which demanded an act of violent self-sacrifice and the sacrifice of its victims both as a moral imperative, and as the only viable answer to the existential dread of a meaningless future, one of the fundamental and defining elements of his RWE master narrative. That is to say, the perspective of the (as

yet unrealised) heroic double, becomes increasingly more forceful, due to the increasing moral and emotional weight that the anticipated scenario in the role of martyr to a transcendent cause, places on the adherent to act, which, in turn, is a function of the increased reliance on the RWE narrative to interpret the present and project the future, with increasing certainty. To adopt such a perspective is to internalise a highly personalised individual life narrative, one completely integrated within a (perceived or imagined) collective struggle for meaning, within a wider master narrative of historical conflict, what Furlow and Goodall (2011) termed the “root war metaphor,” a conflict which in turn define the “ultimate truth” required, according to Berger (1967), to erect and legitimise a sacred canopy.

The heroic double answers its own existential question in that it provides a solution, in the form of the finality of sacrifice, to the terror of anomy, a terror which it in turn exacerbates, through the total certainty of a Manichean narrative which demonises the threatening “other” to a point where its human protagonists are dehumanised as embodiments of “evil” so that their murder becomes licensed and necessary in the name of the “good”. This perspective is reinvigorated by the acts of other terrorists, that are carried out with the explicit intention of reinforcing the perspective of the heroic double within others. What sets these apart from overlapping RWE narratives that do not endorse terrorism, is that they are derived from the perspective of sacrificial idealised selves, whose mission is to recreate, in the life narratives of others, the moral and emotional forces that drove themselves to violence. By adopting the perspective of the heroic double, the adherents of RWE terrorist narratives, such as Krajčák, are able to confine the struggle against a meaningless future to their own personal struggle for what they perceive to be the moral courage to act. That is, these narratives reduce the battle against the forces of evil to a straightforward, albeit daunting, struggle to end one’s former self, in an act of

violent self-sacrifice in which the new heroic self is physically destroyed but simultaneously created spiritually in a way that achieves a form of immortality. Making others view this struggle to overcome the fear of self-sacrifice as being the “real” field of battle to be conquered, would appear to be a central goal of this kind of RWE terrorism. Following Krajčák’s narrative, it is a battle waged at the level of the adherent’s conscience, one which necessitates the terrorist breaking out of the self-imposed isolation from the family and friends of his/her anomic self to form part of an invisible community of fellow fanatics who have sacralised their lives through violence. The adherents motivate themselves in order to motivate others, and simultaneously to win for themselves their own individual battle, achieving their own perceived modicum of victory against the homicidal forces of evil that define the wider RWE master narrative. The narrative understanding of the world in which such terrorists operate, and which they seek to communicate and propagate to others, is one that frames the fundamental challenge for securing the sacred value, of what in Krajčák’s case was the utopia of a racially pure future, as the challenge of self-overcoming, by conquering the fear of death and giving oneself over to the terrorist-self.

Buffalo, New York 2022

On the 14th of May 2022, after driving over 200 miles to his destination, 18 year old Payton Gendron carried out a shooting at a supermarket in Buffalo New York, murdering ten people, and injuring three others. Eleven of the thirteen victims were black, including all those who died, and the location of the attack itself was chosen because it was in a predominantly black neighbourhood (BBC 2022). Gendron livestreamed his attack on the online streaming service Twitch for less than two minutes, before the site ended the stream (Lord 2022). After entering the supermarket, and killing six of his

victims, Gendron gave himself up to responding police officers at the front of the store after they persuaded him to drop his weapon (CNN 2022). As with previous RWE terrorists (e.g. Christchurch 2019) and those that would follow, (Bratislava 2022), Gendron left a manifesto online designed to inspire future attackers by imparting his narrative to potential adherents, who he hoped would then follow its normative implications as a solution to their own state of rootlessness, anomie and impotence (lack of agency).

Like other RWE terrorists, the central theme of Gendron's manifesto is a perceived state of racial jeopardy, wherein white Europeans are threatened with replacement and ultimate extinction at the hands of hostile racial groups. These groups are viewed as being all the more threatening because of their higher birth rates, enabling them to out-populate the "indigenous" whites, and thus seize for themselves (at the expense of whites), hegemonic control over white majority countries. Gendron argues that white majority countries are, "...experiencing an invasion on a level never seen before in history" (p. 1). Mass migration is thus the primary threat in this narrative, which must be addressed before the issue of ensuring replacement birth rates, and thus continued white majority-hood (which is effectively equated with long term survival). This is particularly important for Gendron because, "Mass immigration will disenfranchise us, subvert our nations, destroy our communities, destroy our ethnic ties, destroy our cultures, destroy our peoples. Long before low fertility levels ever could." (p. 2). Consequently, migration, be it legal or illegal, of non-whites into majority white countries, is itself perceived as a hostile act, according to this view, which depicts the presence of non-whites as inherently threatening to the continued existence of whites.

Although racism is a core feature of all the RWE narratives analysed, Gendron's text points to a particular animus towards black people, who were subsequently the targets

of his attack. Gendron identifies black people as especially threatening due to their higher birth rates, and what he argues is an innate tendency towards crime and violence. Like other RWE narratives, he uses an evolutionary argument to denigrate black people as being inherently (that is genetically) inferior, which he claims can explain the bulk of disparities between black people and other racial groups which are evidenced in crime and socioeconomic statistics. Within this narrative of contemporary society, black people are not only more predisposed towards negative traits and behaviours, but due to their genetics, "...simply are not built to live in the White world." (p. 18).

Unlike Jews, however, whom he describes as intentionally malignant towards white people, blacks and other groups (e.g. Hispanics) are viewed as enemies by default, what he calls "replacers," simply by virtue of their non-white presence in white majority countries. Here, Gendron appears to essentialise racial groups not just according to their allegedly inherent negative traits, but also according to his race war ontology, which underlies his entire narrative. Overcoming racial peril for Gendron means, therefore, achieving the complete racial purification of majority white societies. According to this view, all peaceful coexistence is ruled out, as different racial groups are perceived to follow their own self-interest, which to Gendron, amounts to the subjugation, and even extermination of other groups.

As well as calling for the expulsion of all those deemed to be "replacers," Gendron's narrative identifies Jewish people as being the ultimate source of the current threat to white populations, in various guises, claiming that "'The elite", "The 1%", "The bankers", "The capitalists", (((them))), "The marxist's" they all refer to the same group: THE JEWS!!" (p. 24). Because of their alleged malignant sectarianism, together with their designs on world supremacy, Jews are perceived to subjugate gentiles through various means, preventing the kind of pan-global ethnic solidarity which is seen to

undergird and motivate their own power, and ultimately survival. “They advocate for leftist ideology, and spread propaganda among the right. They spread their lies through all forms of media. They want us to divide ourselves by race, instead of goy and non-goy, like they already do.” (p. 24). As evidence for the ethnic supremacist hostility of the Jews, Gendron uses Talmudic quotes, though some of these include anti-Semitic fabrications such as, ““Sanhedrin 59a: “Murdering Goyim is like killing a wild animal”” (p. 27).²⁷ Fabrication though it may be, this does, importantly, reflect how Jews are understood within this narrative, namely as eternally committed ethnic supremacists, bent on the genocide and subjugation of all other groups, particularly white Europeans, whose historical opposition to this plot has made them the nemesis of Jews the world over.

Here, there appears to be two aspects of VE narration working in tandem to provide the adherent with a model both for the kind of world they ought to create, and the actions needed to create it. Firstly, there is the clear use of what Furlow and Goodall termed “root war metaphors” that serve as overarching historical master narratives which contextualise world events within one continuous conflict between primordial enemies. Secondly, as part of this narration, “intentional states,” which following Bruner’s (1987) outline are fundamental to a narrative’s ability to create meaning, are projected onto others in order to explain their role in creating a present situation. In root war metaphors these are malign intentional states, which essentialise antagonists as being irrevocably hostile towards the sacred values and objectives of one’s own in-group.

Whilst this evidently demonises groups, and justifies their destruction, it could also inspire adherents to carry out acts of violence in a somewhat deeper sense than a general attribution of blame might suggest. The intentional states depicted within root war metaphors can also serve as a model for how to act, following Girard’s (1986) model-

²⁷ The quote itself does not exist anywhere in the Talmud according to Steinhardt (2022).

obstacle dynamic within his broader concept of mimetic desire. Mimetic desire, to repeat, simply describes the way people adopt the desires of others. Accordingly, something can become desirable to a person because they perceive it to be desirable to other people. Desirability is thus intensified the more it is replicated. Crucially, replication is here fundamentally an act of imitation or mimesis, as one imitates the intentions and dispositions of others surrounding the desired object or state of being. What is also crucial, is that mimetic desire can simultaneously bring people together in mutual, self-reinforcing orientation, and divide them against each other in mutual, self-intensifying antagonism, particularly during a “sacrificial crisis,” that is a time of nomic disintegration wherein societies become polarised in their pursuit of a scapegoat, whose removal is believed to bring about palingenesis. These scapegoats serve as the projected source of the crisis precisely because of the fundamentally malignant intentional states projected onto them.

Notably, however, in projecting onto a scapegoat the desire of destruction, those who would see themselves as a narrative’s protagonist tasked with resolving the sacrificial crisis, themselves come to resemble their perceived antagonists. This is because they come to desire that which they perceive their adversary to desire, i.e. control over the destructive violence threatening the nomic order. In doing so, their adversary becomes what Girard (1988) termed their “model-obstacle” in which the “...mimetic impulse hurls itself blindly against the obstacle of a conflicting desire. It invites its own rebuffs, and these rebuffs will in turn strengthen the mimetic inclination”. (p. 166). Importantly, Girard (1986) argues, not only does desire increase with resistance, but correspondingly “... the model becomes increasingly obstructive and the obstacle becomes increasingly the model, so that ultimately desire is interested in that which opposes it”. (p. 13). Paradoxically, it would seem, by defining themselves in opposition

to a perceived evil other, whose intentional states (their projected desires) are antithetical to the adherent's own, those seeking to secure their sacred values come to model themselves on the very enemy who are perceived to threaten such values.

Following Bruner's approach, narratives fundamentally serve to attribute intentional states onto others, giving their actions meaning as part of a wider effort to make sense of a situation, and can thus be considered essential to mediating the kind of violent mimesis outlined by Girard. In RWE narratives such as Gendron's, apportioning blame means attributing malign intentional states to demonised outgroups, particularly the Jews, in order to make sense of present reality. Moreover, the sense that is made, simultaneously defines the enemy, and that which they desire, i.e. the destruction of the protagonist's sacred community through hegemonic control of society and the supremacy of their own community, though in the narrative these essentially amount the same thing, as the safety of one group means the destruction and subjugation of others. Accordingly, Gendron seeks to invert this state of racial threat by doing to the Jews what he alleges they are attempting to do to white Europeans, and is thus imitating his own conceptions of Jews as genocidal supremacists. By projecting these genocidal intentional states, Gendron's narrative would have its adherents participate in the kind of perceived mutual animus that characterise the model obstacle dynamic, and which engenders mimetic violence.

Here, the model-obstacle dynamic coheres significantly with Griffin's (2017) heroic double paradigm, in which terrorists realise heroic versions of themselves through redemptive violence. Partaking in such violence transforms the adherent, by binding their fate with a rejuvenated nomos, allowing him or her to overcome a former metaphysically impoverished and debilitated self who would otherwise be resigned to a state of anomic nihilism. By depicting the status quo as evil and destructive (of sacred values), VE

narratives also depict violence aimed at destroying the status quo as being part of the greater holy war, and all those who partake in such violence as sacralised heroes. The use of, seemingly righteous, destructive violence is thus morally sanctioned by the evil destructiveness of society in its current form. Following the reciprocal logic of mimetic violence, heroic doubles necessarily rely on such seemingly destructive adversaries to ensure their own violent counter-destruction is unambiguously heroic, as they seek to inspire in both their perceived enemies, and potential followers alike, the same fear of nomic disintegration which the status quo inspires in them. The fear of this total destruction will then in turn, provoke greater, and crucially more overt, hostility on the part of these alleged enemy groups, which will thus serve to realise, that is, to make concrete for all to see, the supposed conflict on which the narrative is based.

Indeed, when describing the model-obstacle dynamic, Girard (1988) refers to the “monstrous double” as a construct of those essentially malignant aspects of two rivals which they both reciprocally project onto each other, but which the rivals themselves cannot recognise in their own identity. According to Girard, “A fundamental principle, often overlooked, is that the double and the monster are one and the same being.” (p. 180). Whilst this may not apply exactly in the case of RWE narratives,²⁸ it does point to a coincidence of those destructive aspects projected onto demonised outgroups, and those which are sanctioned on behalf of the purportedly victimised sacred community. It also coheres with the unconscious elements of the heroic double discussed by Griffin (2017). Specifically, Griffin (2017) applies theory of the Shadow as developed by Carl Jung,

²⁸ Clearly, in RWE narratives the protagonists and antagonists are far from identical in nature, as the former pursues a puritanical racist ultranationalism in order to combat the latter, who are portrayed as being overly pluralistic, i.e., “decadent,” or “degenerate.” However, it is the *perceived* mutual enmity, and apparent resolution in pursuit of each other’s destruction, that makes the reciprocal dimension of Girard’s concept relevant here. Indeed, for RWE it is the desire to make this enmity truly symmetrical that forms the rationale behind acts of terrorism, which are designed to “awaken” the wider sacralised in-group to the malign intentions of demonised others.

which refers to those destructive characteristics of individuals of which they are unconscious or which they repress, that can come to the fore in their projections onto the world and onto other people. Key to the formation of heroic doubles, is thus the, "...role played by the mythic projection of the repressed hatred, violence, and inhumanity subsumed within the individual's Shadow into a demonized Other." (p. 359) In this context therefore, projecting the evil onto others entails projecting the unrecognised destructive desires of oneself.

As with Girard's monstrous double concept, the Shadow is not generated, according to Jung (1968), by isolated individuals, but is rather encountered by them through their interpretation of and projection onto the personalities of others. Importantly, these projections attribute malign intent to the demonised other whilst simultaneously concealing one's own malignancy. They thus serve to "...change the world into the replica of one's own unknown face" (p. 9). Whilst the shadow represents the personal unconscious, according to Jung (1968, p. 10), this forms part of the wider collective unconscious of humanity, or what he termed the "anima." In the case of RWE narratives such as Gendron's which project Shadow qualities onto innately evil adversaries, essentialised as being forever and always motivated by a zero-sum racial self-interest, it may be that what is being reflected back onto itself is a specifically transpersonal propensity for genocidal Manichean thinking. This may be especially true given that the narrative has a "root war metaphor," or rather a race war metaphor as forming its basic ontology from which it projects the intentions of whole groups. According to Jung, "...it is quite within the bounds of possibility for a man to recognize the relative evil of his nature, but it is a rare and shattering experience for him to gaze into the face of absolute evil. (p. 10).

Needless to say, adherents of RWE narratives such as Gendron, do believe themselves to be gazing into an absolutely evil future, one of subjugation or extermination for their sacred community. Certainly, a future sufficiently evil enough to provoke the “parochial altruism” of Atran’s (2016) devoted actors. This total negative certainty of their future narrative arcs, what Miceli and Castelfranchi (2005) termed “negative epistemic control,” is derived itself from the projected intentions of demonised others. Following both Jung and Girard, in the very act of this projecting, they are themselves participating in the capacity for animosity and destruction which they project onto others. In this context, the degree of certainty with which one sees malevolence in others is directly proportional to the degree to which one does not recognise one’s own fundamental capacity for malevolence. That is, to externalise evil is to increase one’s ability to unconsciously perpetrate it. RWE narratives such as Gendron’s serve to externalise this human capacity for destruction by depicting an epiphany accessible only to the adherents, that world events and all their subsequent grievances result from the machinations of an essentially malignant Jewish cabal, bent on waging a race war against white Europeans. For such adherents, it must be *their* racial supremacy and *their* genocide of the enemy, which must be realised, in order to prevent the enemy from doing the same to them. In keeping with the unconscious nature of the Shadow/malignant double, the cause is ultimately viewed as external, an outside reality and threat which they encounter and to which they must respond, without a sense of it reflecting something essentially inside themselves.

Moreover, as with Berger’s (1967) sacred canopy paradigm, the greater the narrative is “internalised,”²⁹ the more it is viewed as an ontological certainty, existing outside of the adherent’s own interpretations. Internalising a narrative (in Berger’s sense

²⁹ See Chapter 2 p. 91.

of the term) which projects (and indeed scapegoats) essentially malignant out-groups, means completely denying the possibility that what adherents believe to be reality is to any extent just that, i.e. *their* projection, a denial that thus ensures complete moral certainty. Whilst in Jungian theory, both the anima, and its individualised derivative the Shadow, are innate archetypes, existing as propensities prior to a given narrative, it may be that in the context of RWE terrorism, the anima can evolve into a position of dominance through the very act of narration in which it is projected onto evil others. This dominance may be represented by the degree of certainty with which the adherent embraces their Manichean narrative and the degree of devotion with which they pursue seemingly heroic revolutionary violence. That is, the more the narrative's adherents seek to realise their heroic double by overcoming their projected adversaries, and thus their Shadow-projections, the more the shadow, and the anima which *animate* such projections, comes to the fore.

Notably, although Gendron stresses the ethnic and religious motivations he sees as binding Jews together in their malignancy towards gentiles, he also claims that one can essentially become a Jew by aligning with the interests of world Jewry. "I should also mention that not all 'Jews' are ethnic or religious Jews. Jeff Bezos for example is not a religious or ethnic Jew but may be considered a Jew. All elitists and globalists may be considered a "Jew" simply because they act like one." (p. 53). This is a very expansive definition of what it means to be Jewish, however, it is perhaps indicative of how this narrative defines both its protagonists and its antagonists (and for that matter good and more broadly evil), with the former being defined through their opposition to the latter, encompassing all those the narrative deems responsible for threatening the survival of white Europeans, i.e. the establishment within the current status quo. Jews are depicted

as being religiously opposed to gentiles, particularly white Europeans,³⁰ and, according to this narrative, have thus worked to organise the status quo in line with their deeply sectarian intentions. Consequently, the status quo, represented by the projects of globalist elites, is Jewish by virtue of its being seen as hostile, and even genocidal, towards white Europeans.

What this suggests is the co-constitutive way in which the meaning of sacred values is concretised and simultaneously “de-pluralised” (Koehler 2015), through their alleged opposites. These opposites conversely become hyper-pluralised to the degree they encompass ever more aspects of contemporary culture deemed to be decadent, or simply not aligned with the aspired revolution. In this narrative the status quo is viewed as being engineered towards the destruction of white people (i.e. the sacred value), the survival of which subsequently comes to be defined as the opposite of the status quo, i.e. a racially purified society orientated around racial survival through total separation and self-glorification. Jews, or rather Jewishness, is essentialised as being anti-white European, within the causal sequencing, or what Ricoeur (1991, p. 21) terms the “emplotment” of the narrated threat, and the subsequent narrated solution. Overturning the status quo through a revolutionary race war is thus an inherently anti-globalist, and thus anti-Jewish, project, whilst maintaining the status quo is inherently inimical to white-Europeans. In a very general sense this pattern accords with the way Bruner (1987) describes the role of challenges to a cultural canon within narratives, in that narratives serve the specific purpose of providing explanations where normative expectations are not met, by depicting the intentional states of others.³¹ The meaning of the cannon can

³⁰ Gendron admits that Jews themselves can be considered white, particularly Ashkenazi Jews, however denies that they can be considered European because they “...are simply not descendents of ethnic Europeans, in the same way that the ethnic Druze, Samaritans, and Lebanese of today cannot be considered European.” (p. 26)

³¹ See chapter two p. 80.

thus be *re*-understood through its relation to those who challenge it. In this case, the canon regarding what normatively ought to be, becomes re-understood as the opposite of what currently is, i.e. the status quo.

Likewise, according to Berger (1967), a sacred canopy had to be maintained through various levels of “legitimations” which are employed to counter threats to a group’s nomic understanding of the world.³² Sacred canopies are thus continuously re-defined through the narration of the challenges they must overcome in the minds of their adherents, particularly where such canopies are threatened with disintegration, and adherents risk becoming severed from their “shield against terror” (p. 22). Legitimations are thus sought as a means of *re*-integration. Those legitimations that take the form of narratives may use a kind of emplotment in which reintegration is sought through concretising the forces of disintegration in the form of essentially evil outgroups. The intentions of these out-groups are thus wholly projected through a sacred value-centred narrative, one that interprets reality according to an increasingly Manichean mode of “care,” following Heidegger’s use of the term.

Here, however, the care in question is an ultimate care for securing the integrity of a disintegrating nomos, and the survival of the threatened sacred values that define it. Again, this suggests a co-constitutive dynamic, in that sacred canopies create nomic challenges as much as nomic challenges create sacred canopies. Accordingly, by defining the status quo as evil, through projecting the genocidal/nomocidal machinations of hostile out-groups, the nomos becomes identified with the projected means of realising its reintegration. In this case, an inversion of the status quo (seen as a kind of wicked Jewish hegemony), which can only be achieved through violent revolution. Responding to the nomic challenge depicted in this narrative means, therefore, waging a racial holy war

³² See chapter two p. 90.

against the basic reality of modern societies, as it is seen through the eyes of its adherents. Overcoming this present reality, is thus believed to be an overcoming of the projected Jewish nemesis, with which it is essentially equated.

To further understand how such a totalising narrative can orientate its adherent so completely against the present reality, it would be useful to draw on work by Polizzi (2021), who also uses Heideggerian concepts, and Berger's theory of "sacred canopies," to approach radicalisation. Specifically, Polizzi applies Heidegger's notion of the "they-self," which is a fundamental part of being-in-the-world (Dasein), constituting the "being-with," by which Dasein understands itself, in relation to, and through relation with, the wider cultural group(s) within which it is located (or "thrown," in Heidegger's terms). The they-self is thus the social context, through which Dasein is able to imbue its identity with meaning. Crucially, as Polizzi highlights, there is a significant normative component to this socially dependent identity formation, as, following Berger's paradigm, the construction and maintenance of a *nomos*, and the range of identities that it normatively circumscribes, is fundamentally a group phenomenon. Across a wide range of terrorism contexts, "...the they-self structures a field of social relationality that values certain types of being-in-the-world while devaluing others." (p. 15). Dasein's "being-with" is therefore constitutive of the normative facticity, by which it affirms its identity as part of a secure *nomos* (secured, that is, by virtue of being shared by the cultural group). According to Polizzi, terrorists seek to reaffirm their they-selves largely in response to the threatened, or insecure, normative facticity, which results from nomic challenges.

RWE digital milieus, Polizzi argues, are one such form of they-self, which is co-created, and mutually affirmed, by those threatened by nomic challenges, but who wouldn't necessarily express their views offline for fear of social ostracism (this rejection by the wider public serves to further validate their perception of nomic danger) (p.192-

3). Much like Koehler's (2015) "contrast societies," Polizzi describes how individual RWE develop into "personalities of resistance," which, "... coalesce around nomic structures no longer validated or with those threatened by "total extinction." (p. 12). The kind of identity-fusion, so central to the DAM (Atran 2016), is located within a narrative defined by the nomic threat of the present reality, creating a they-self defined by a rejection of this reality. Being-with those who share this rejection provides RWE with the most secure means of facing the fear of nomic disintegration. It is thus a they-self that is consciously orientated towards securing the they-self, by identifying the forces (and particularly groups) from which it is perceived to be threatened. Similarly, what Gendron's narrative iterates, is the degree to which the being-with that constitutes RWE they-self, is fundamentally a kind of "being-against." Identity, and the nomic meaning on which it depends, is consequently secured according to the degree that one rejects the status quo, and for terrorists such as Gendron, what actions one takes to bring about its destruction, and the destruction of those groups with which it is identified (i.e. Jews and black people). Integrating oneself fully into the race war narrative, by killing perceived racial enemies, and striking back at the "zog-bot government" (p. 12), therefore becomes the ultimate means of both enacting one's part in the narrative of racial struggle, and of embodying the they-self in the face of severe anomy.

Much of Payton Gendron's manifesto takes the form of a dialogue, not only with potential sympathisers, but also at times with the author himself, which may suggest further the relevance of Bruner's notion of challenge and solution, and the wider reciprocal dynamics of narration emphasised in this study. Indeed, given that Gendron wishes to inspire future attackers, having a dialogue with both himself and *like-minded* others to a significant degree amounts to the same thing, as he attempts to understand their perspectives based on his own experiences. Here we see the importance of projecting

intentional states onto those deemed allies, as well as those deemed to be enemies. These intentional states are also understood as part of Gendron's overall understanding of his own life narrative, and how he perceives the causal structuring of his desired future narrative arcs, particularly his idealised racially purifying revolution. In a section titled "Questions and Answers" (p. 4-13), Gendron outlines his views through a kind of imagined interview with supporters and detractors. Whilst this might only be considered a succinct way of conveying the basic ideological tenets which he wishes to spread, it also suggests the degree to which Gendron perceives himself through the perspective of others, and vice versa. In order to radicalise others, he attempts in some part to replicate the interpretive stages, or at least the requisite conclusions, of his own radicalisation process, for those who he wishes to inspire. In doing so, the narrative of how he came to support, and then participate in, what is explicitly designed to be revolutionary terrorism, becomes a model for how to radicalise other. Here, the proximate goal of the heroic double is to inspire the creation of future doubles amongst sympathisers who would thus go on to partake in the same RWE narrative and carry out similar acts of violence against the "enemy". More realistically, it might be to inspire the realisation of those doubles already forming amongst those who share the same, or similar narratives, and the emotional experiences involved therein.

Again, what this underlines is the degree to which RWE narratives rely on projecting the author's own intentional states as the basis for anticipating (or rather fantasising about) how others will react to their actions. Certainly, the act of terrorism is situated within and motivated by an ongoing narrative, and is inseparable from the expected reactions of both supporters and opponents alike. This kind of knowledge (real or imaginary) surrounding the intentional states of others, and the subsequent expectations of how they will react to terrorist "framing acts" (Koehler 2015) forms the

what terrorists perceives to be their "...cognitive mastery of the causal structure of the environment" to borrow from Kelley's analytic discourse (1967, p. 193), or their "truth effectiveness" and "control effectiveness" to borrow from Higgin's (2013). It is this causal structure, one generated by the projection of one's own intentional states onto ideological "friends" and "enemies," on which Gendron's objective of bringing about of a race war through polarising violence is based.

Moreover, in accordance with Gadamer's (1985) notion of the role of the "transformation into structure" (p. 99-105) in the process of interpreting or reading contemporary history,³³ Gendron participated in the normative-ontological reality, as he saw it, of the race war narrative which he and previous RWE terrorists had internalised. As Gadamer argued, interpretation necessarily entails a kind of participation in the structure of that which is interpreted (including narratives). This structure is recognised and understood at the same time as those ontological pre-judgments (prejudices) on which the structure is based; that is, the structure rests on the everyday facticity of these taken-for-granted truths. Understanding a narrative's structure, in the Gadamerian sense, therefore means understanding and applying, at least partly, the pre-judgments on which that structure rests. Hence for Gadamer, interpretation is essentially a perpetual comparison of the narrative's prejudices with one's own, i.e. a "fusion of horizons." For RWE narratives such as Gendron's, these "truths" pertain to the intentional states of others, and what this means for the future. To participate in this narrative is to understand events as they unfold according to the deeply sectarian intentions that govern the actions of whole groups. The genocidal propensity, and thus genocidal potential, of such demonised out-groups, are the normative-ontological pre-understandings, by which the adherent projects into the future, and on which they base their own actions.

³³ See Chapter 2, p. 99.

Evidently, Gendron had not only understood the structure of the RWE narratives he encountered, but he had adopted them as his own, to the point where the “fusion of horizons” became a complete merger within his vision of social reality. In doing so, his own intentional states, i.e. what he believed he ought to do, became fully synchronised with the structure of a Manichean race war narrative. He therefore “internalised” a view of who he should become, and what he should do within a new, fully radicalised self utterly devoted to the cause of white supremacy, i.e. a heroic double; to the same extent he recognised the “truth” of essentially hostile intentional states of his narrative’s antagonists. Internalisation, according to Berger (1967), is the “...reabsorption into consciousness of the objectivated world in such a way that the structures of this world come to determine the subjective structures of consciousness itself” (p. 14-5). Consequently, the basic facticity on which a narrative depends, does not just mediate reality, but rather takes the place of reality. The choice between a nomocidal apocalypse, and palingenetic renewal, becomes an inevitable fact of life, every bit as much as the certainty of one’s own death. Indeed, the certainty that this *is the only choice*, makes the struggle to become the heroic double one of reconciling oneself to what the situation demands and accepting the possibility of death as intrinsic to the fulfilment of a higher, transcendent, nomo-generative destiny.

Winning the battle against ZOG, would thus appear akin to winning the battle against oneself, as what this narrative calls for is that white Europeans match their intentional states with those of their allegedly genocidal adversaries and answer them in kind and in intensity within the race war which the narrative depicts. Realising the nature of the struggle, and all the obligations it entails, is for RWE the proximate goal to achieving racial salvation within their wider master narrative. Put another way, the war *is* the objective, and participating in the war personally, in order to increase the further

participation of others, is the only means of averting nomocide. Importantly, this not only means that Gendron adapted himself to the demands of the situation he perceived, but also modelled the intentional states of others based on his own radicalisation process. How terrorists such as Gendron understand the narrative of themselves, i.e. their life-narratives, and their ideological transformation therein from an anomic to a fully re-nomised existence, is therefore key to how they believe others will react to their actions, and how they hope to radicalise and inspire future attackers.

Christchurch 2019

On the 15th of March 2019, 28-year-old Brenton Harrison Tarrant carried out two separate shootings, between approximately 13:40 and 13:55, at two different mosques in Christchurch New Zealand, killing 51 people and injuring 40 (BBC 2019). The first attack took place at the al Noor Mosque leaving 44 people dead, before Tarrant travelled to Linwood Islamic Centre, where he killed a further seven victims. Police rammed Tarrant's car and arrested him on his way to the Ashburton Mosque, where he had planned to carry out a third attack. Tarrant livestreamed the attack for which he used an assortment of different firearms on which he had written the names of historic figures and events (e.g. the crusades), as well as previous terrorist attacks, alongside various symbols, including those used by Estonian, Hungarian, Latvian, and Norwegian SS. Shortly before his attack he released his manifesto, outlining his ideology and motivations. (Bayer and Leask, 2020)

Titled, "the great replacement," the central message of Tarrant's manifesto is that white Europeans are being demographically replaced by the mass migration of non-whites into Western (that is white majority) countries, at the behest of corporations seeking cheap labour and NGO activist groups with specifically (though hidden) anti-

white aims. These are supported by a similarly profiteering and ideologically-minded political system, academia, and media. Although Tarrant uses the black sun symbol on the title page, he later claims not to be a neo-Nazi, but rather an “Eco-Fascist,” identifying Sir Oswald Mosely as the politician with whom he most identifies (p. 15), alongside his environmental concerns, and the dangers of over-industrialisation. To emphasise his revolutionary aspirations, the black sun itself is depicted at the hub of a wheel, which is situated vertically between the lines, “Toward a new society,” and, “We march ever forward.” Eight maxims are written on the inside perimeter of the wheel, between its eight spokes. These include, “Anti-Imperialism,” “Environmentalism,” “Responsible Markets,” “Addiction-Free Community,” “Law and Order,” “Ethnic Autonomy,” “Protection of Heritage and Culture,” and “Workers’ Rights.”

According to Tarrant’s narrative, these all necessitate, and themselves represent, an inversion of contemporary western societies, which are characterised by “...the destruction of the traditional family unit,” and, “...the disaster of hedonistic, nihilistic individualism.” This affliction, Tarrant claims, particularly afflicts the white populations of western societies, in contrast to non-white migrant populations, which retain their traditions, cultural mores, and sense of ethnic solidarity. In contrast to their non-white counterparts, this is believed to lead to the relative group dissolution, apathy, and a severely reduced desire for (ethnically-centred) generativity amongst whites, who subsequently have lower birth rates, hastening further their demographic decline. Indeed, for Tarrant, terrorism serves as a means of awakening whites both to their racial jeopardy, and to a kind of organismic racial solidarity and “gnosis”³⁴ which he believes is their only

³⁴ This might be viewed as a kind of contemporary RWE equivalent to the Marxist-Leninist “revolutionary Gnosticism” outlined by Pellicani (2003). Tarrant invokes the notion of a “natural order,” and claims to diagnose how humanity (and particularly white Europeans) have deviated from this natural order as part of his own RWE gnostic soteriology. The “Gnostic pathos,” according to Pellicani, “...is characterized by the radical refusal of the world in all its perverse and intolerable manifestations and the conviction that there is a solution for escaping the present situation and regaining paradise lost. This

salvation. An awakening, that he projects, can be realised through inspiring further attacks, increasing polarisation, and the consequent increasingly resented government response.

The idea of provoking such a response is key to the logic of using violence, which Tarrant's narrative makes explicit. Indeed, Tarrant fully endorses "accelerationism," which he believes will increase the inevitable process of polarisation and awaken greater numbers of white Europeans to their perilous situation. Accordingly, his terrorism is designed to, "... add momentum to the pendulum swings of history, further destabilizing and polarizing Western society in order to eventually destroy the current nihilistic, hedonistic, individualistic insanity that has taken control of Western thought." (p. 6). Here, we see the interplay between Tarrant's racialised communal Gnosticism and the role of "creative destruction," which according to Griffin (2012), typifies modernist terrorists (e.g. in the Evola inspired "Black terrorism" during Italy's "Years of Lead" in the 1970s and early 1980s) (p. 145). The anticipated response of the authorities and wider society is a key aspect of how this narrative projects its desired future, one in which polarisation is used to unmask the current order. Nihilism (essentially a lack of meaning) is to be overcome by giving the ultimate meaning to the sacralised community (of white Europeans) through the kind of unifying regenerative myth, similar to that described by Georges Sorel.³⁵ Whilst, in contrast to Sorel, who explicitly downplayed the importance of the veracity of mythic futures, Tarrant evidently believes in what he sees as the largely

conviction derives from the gnosis which is the total complete knowledge (descriptive and normative) and describes-therapy of human alienation." (p.152).

³⁵ In his *Reflections on Violence*, Sorel (1915) argues that "The myth must be judged as a means of acting on the present; any attempt to discuss how far it can be taken literally as future history is devoid of sense. *It is the myth in its entirety which is alone important*: its parts are only of interest in so far as they bring about the main idea." (p. 135-6). Writing in the context of a "general strike" designed to advance socialism in the early 20th century, the strike functioned, according to Sorel, as, "...the *myth* in which Socialism is wholly comprised, i.e. a body of images capable of evoking instinctively all the sentiments which correspond to the different manifestations of the war undertaken by socialism against modern society." (p. 137)

unrecognised reality of white racial jeopardy. Nevertheless, it is the myth of a revolutionary race war which he believes can be used to overcome the status quo through its capacity to *unite* his sacralised community against a compound Manicheanized enemy of white supremacy. Nihilist individualism is to be overcome through unity of consciousness and purpose within the group; a unity that is supposed to be engendered by an overtly repressive establishment response (to RWE terrorism), which will serve to confirm the establishment's fundamental hostility to the community, and thus validate Tarrant's narrative.

It is a testament to how convinced Tarrant is of the intrinsic destructiveness of the status quo to the global community of Whites that he rationalises his violence by way of using its own destructiveness against it. Because his narrative assures him of the unsustainability of the present order, it provides the certainty of a destructive endgame towards which he can orientate his actions. This unsustainability is defined by, "Empty nurseries, full casinos, empty churches and full mosques, entropy in blitzspeed." (p. 35). What he condemns as a kind of omnipresent decay also serves as the means by which he seeks to secure his sacred values. So sure is he of an apocalyptic future, he has convinced himself that the most effective, that is, *reality congruent*, course of action is to bring about this future on his own terms. Evidently, Tarrant's violence is intended to master fate, rather than succumb to it. He knows with absolute faith that the rupture with the present world is imminent, and central to the role of violence within his narrative is his faith that he can have mastery over it. Indeed, the narrative provides him with the certainty that he knows the nature of the system which he wishes to destroy and can thus use its momentum against it. As with Gendron's narrative, it is clear that having a perceived mastery over the "causal structure" (Kelley 1967) of the environment, not only generates a moral

obligation, but also provides the allure of being effective in the realisation of RWE sacred values.

Like other RWE, Tarrant equates racial survival with complete segregation. For him, there is no safe amount of migration or cohabitation as the presence of any non-whites is seen as just one step on the path to replacement. Moreover, he emphasises the degree to which he also equates complete segregation with the natural world which he claims to be preserving. Accordingly, he aims for "...Ethnic autonomy for all peoples with a focus on the preservation of nature, and the natural order." (p 18). Here, "ethnic autonomy" can only be achieved through total ethnic segregation, wherein any migration out of one's allotted racial territory is, by definition, an act of aggression, which necessarily threatens the ethnic autonomy of others. Segregation itself is seen as an integral part of this "natural order," as ethnicities and cultures are supposedly diminished through any degree of what he deems to be unnatural mixing.

In Tarrant's narrative the threat of racial replacement is underpinned by two main forces; demographic projections based on white birth rates, and an overarching civilizational conflict between the white Christian Europe, and non-white Islam. Whilst the former necessitates a palingenetic regeneration of the sacralised ethnic community the latter demands a puritanical racial purging of Western societies, though both are inseparable for Tarrant, and are part of the same nomic struggle, or rather the struggle to restore a lost nomos of absolute White supremacy. Indeed, taken together, both demography and the current state of this civilizational conflict are seen to represent how contemporary society is fundamentally inimical to the long-term survival of white European civilization (which includes Europeanised cultures outside Europe), thus making clear their need to orientate themselves in a Manichean direction towards a radical narrative of the conflict between "good" and "evil" in which those with similar RWE

instincts to Tarrant are exhorted to participate. Moral certainty and future certainty are in this respect co-dependent corollaries of each other.

The certainty of a future disaster stems from demographic projections which suggest that white population of western nations declines rapidly relative to the increasing birth-rates of non-white immigrants, particularly Muslims. For this reason, Tarrant opens his manifesto with, “It’s the birthrates. It’s the birthrates. It’s the birthrates. If there is one thing I want you to remember from these writings, it’s that the birthrates must change.” (p. 3). This problem is preeminent for Tarrant who argues that even without the mass deportation of non-whites, current birthrates ensure that white Europeans will, “...still be spiralling into decay and eventual death.” (p. 3). This demographic projection gives the impetus to act, by setting an impending deadline within the 21st century for whites to lose their majority share of the population within Western nations. That means for Tarrant that they must be mobilised through what Durkheim (1915 p. 211) described as “effervescence,” whereby in a heightened sense of collective, communal awareness a group becomes conscious of its collective sentiment by becoming fixed on a given objective, or enemy (p. 237).³⁶ Bringing about this effervescence is thus the ultimate rationale of Tarrant’s terrorism, which is explicitly aimed at realising, in both the minds of increasingly like-minded others, and in their own subsequent acts of violence, the racial war for survival which defines the normative-ontological structure of Tarrant’s narrative.

To draw again on the work of Polizzi (2021), Tarrant’s supposed racial gnosis and aspired for effervescence, are perhaps twin aspects of the particular they-self which constitutes the being-in-the-world of RWE terrorists, one in which, having apprehended

³⁶ See Chapter 3 (p. 171), for a discussion of effervescence in relation to René Girard’s research into the scapegoat mechanism. Additionally, effervescence, as described by Durkheim, has notable similarities with the unifying role of myths described by Sorel mentioned above (see p. 257), namely the function of unifying the consciousness and orientation of a wider group (particularly in terms of their emotions) around a situation, and the necessary actions/goals for its resolution.

the “true” sacred value (racial purity/survival), one must proselytise to the sacred community, for the sake of their salvation (and especially for that of the individual terrorist). It is thus a they-self which must expand horizontally across this sacralised group, in order to secure its continued existence; that is, a they-self whose insecurity over its own survival can only seek security by spreading its own insecurity. Tarrant’s narrative, of both his own radicalisation process, and that of the present state of Western societies, culminates in the absolute “truth” of an ontological race war, which threatens the future of white Europeans, and necessitates their embrace of such a war in order to ensure their survival. Salvation and fear thus become intertwined, or rather, it is a salvation through fear, specifically the fearful they-self of RWE, which, to the adherent, is the final revelation of, and resolution to, their narrative; one which promises to save their in-group from destruction, and themselves from a meaningless existence. Consequently, the RWE narrative followed by Tarrant has the further adoption of its own perspective as its primary goal. That is, the ideological conclusion of the radicalised individual life narrative, the RWE gnosis, is the necessary goal for the sacred community projected within the RWE master narrative. The “personalities of resistance” described by Polizzi, in the case of RWE terrorists like Tarrant, would appear to reach a stage where resistance itself becomes identified with the they-self, and the sacred values they seek to embody. Resistance consequently defines the kind of care, by which the terrorist Dasein attends to the world, and narrates his or her life narrative. Increasing the resistance which defines this they-self, is thus equated with increasing or securing the they-self per se, and restoring/defending the nomos in the face of an overwhelming threat, in light of which the being-with, is necessarily a “being-against.”

The ontological race war, in which this being-against is grounded, underpins the adherent’s moral certainty, reinforcing the impetus to take the kind of violent action

which Tarrant's narrative extols, by framing any demographic shifts through the "care-structure" of overcoming/defending against inherently hostile, and opposing, ethno-cultural and religious groups. In this narrative, the underlying racial conflict which defines much of human existence takes the form of a centuries-old civilisation/religious conflict (clearly Tarrant views it as part of one unified conflict) between white Christian Europe and non-white Islam. By targeting Muslims, he sought what he saw as "...revenge against islam for the 1300 years of war and devastation that it has brought upon the people of the West and other peoples of the world." (p. 13). Immigrants, particularly Muslim immigrants, are subsequently viewed as *de facto* enemies through their mere presence in white majority nations. Whether Muslims know it or not, their migration to such nations is a fundamentally hostile act, not only due to their higher birthrates, but also due to what Tarrant sees as their complete antagonism to white European Christian culture. Because they are defined in opposition to this culture, they are defined as being inherently anti-white, and their presence in majority white societies, however large or small, is deemed to be inherently imperious, and ultimately both culture- and genocidal.

Invoking 1300 years of continuous civilizational warfare is, perhaps, a clear example of how the "root war metaphors" described by Furlow and Goodall (2011), serve to integrate events, groups, and group intentions into a unified causal structure. They are in this respect essential to projecting Bruner's (1987) "intentional states" onto others, in order to make sense of a morally/emotionally challenging reality, and why things appear amiss, particularly, in this context, of demonised out-groups. This is also, perhaps, a clear example of how a RWE narrative such as Tarrant's appears to self-perpetuate and reaffirm itself, by making contemporary events salient in accordance with this hyper-racialised, ever more threatening structure. Gadamer's approach to hermeneutics becomes relevant here, as a narrative's part (i.e. an individual event, or person) is interpreted through its

relation to the narrative's whole (i.e. overall narrative structure). When interpreting the world, Tarrant's overall race war narrative, and its particular instantiations, are mutually reaffirming. To recognise the universal (i.e. ontological race war) within the particular (e.g. the presence of Muslims), is thus to affirm the certainty of the overall narrative structure, alongside its moral implications and imperatives.

Indeed, spreading this kind of recognition is key to the racial effervescence which the RWE terrorism described here is intended to inspire. For Tarrant, overcoming demographic replacement necessitates symbolically participating in, and thus raising to the consciousness of white Europeans globally, an overarching, Titanic civilizational struggle (which can be seen as the mass socio-political enactment or activation of a "root war" metaphor) against the long-term consequences of the advent of Islam (once itself the product of an effervescent movement) and the subsequent Ottoman expansion into Europe. In a short section where he explicitly addresses the issue of present-day Turks, Tarrant describes how Turkish territory west of the Bosphorus is a perpetuation of Islamic imperialism, which all white Europeans must unite to redress: "The Hagia Sophia will be free of minarets and Constantinople will be rightfully christian owned once more". (p. 28). Accordingly, both demographic projections, and the wars between Christendom and various Islamic powers, are united into a single narrative, which provides a self-validating and potentially ever-intensifying sense of fear, existential threat to white civilisation, and moral obligation to act.

What might illustrate this dynamic further is the way Tarrant highlights several large-scale cases of child sexual exploitation, in which predominantly British Asian men raped and sexually exploited predominantly white British women and girls. This ethic dimension was perhaps most documented in the case of Rotherham (Jay, 2013 p. 92-4). Tarrant had also written the words, "For Rotherham," on the magazines of the weapons

he used to carry out the attack (alongside the names of other RWE, with whom he felt common cause) (Eliot, 2015). In his manifesto he frames the subject along the following lines, “Many of you may already know about the rape of British women by the invading forces, Rotherham of course being the most well-known case.” (p. 31). In Tarrant’s narrative, these cases validate, and are seen as part of, the wider root war metaphor to which he subscribes. In his view, whether it is recognised or not, the struggle to overcome Islamic subjugation continues apparently unbeknownst to all but the enlightened few racial crusaders, and their supporters, who struggle to unmask contemporary society for what it really is; a genocidal pact between self-interested ethno-religious, and political groups to “replace” white civilisation.

For Tarrant, such cases not only implicate all Muslims (or ethnicities that are traditionally seen as Muslim) in sectarian violence, but also the wider Western establishment in the covering up such violence, and hence the deep-seated, millennial drive towards ethnic supremacy on the part of Muslims which they are perceived to demonstrate, i.e. “...the media and the judicial system work in unison to hide these atrocities, in the fear that knowledge of these events would enrage the native people of the West” (p. 32). NGOs are also singled out as conspiring to replace white Europeans due to their own religious and ideological motivations. Indeed, Tarrant sees the former as directly implicated in promoting the Islamic cause which ruling elites are keen to cover up, with NGOs hiding “...their true intentions behind a facade of religiosity,” and the people “running the show” in fact being, “...atheistic cultural marxists using naive Christian Europeans to both labour and fund their own attempt at class and racial warfare.” (p. 60). In Tarrant’s narrative, this also makes NGOs essentially secret combatants, and thus legitimate targets for RWE attackers.

That the narrative essentialises people into Manicheanly conceived friend/enemy groupings serves to further legitimise RWE violence through its revelatory component. That is, attacking these targets will make explicit the underlying secret war that is being waged against the adherents' in-group, putting paid, it is believed, to the lie of pluralistic contemporary society. Intentional states are thus projected onto both entire ethno-religious groups (using a root war master narrative), and onto a more amorphous network of organisations, institutions and (often masked) political actors. The latter are mutually interested in the subjugation and destruction of white Europeans, and the suppression of their organismic racial solidarity and collective ethnic gnosis, which, for Tarrant, they must realise in order to avoid being replaced, and which in this narrative, effectively amounts to the adoption of Tarrant's worldview.

Moreover, the hidden agenda of hostile groups which forms the premise of the causal structure of Tarrant's narrative, is also an integral part of its gnostic solution. The absolute lie, which for Tarrant defines the nomos of contemporary western society, stands in direct contrast to the absolute truth which Tarrant believes he has apprehended at this final stage in his radicalisation process. Indeed, the absoluteness of the lie and the absoluteness of the truth, are dialectically interdependent aspects of the narrative's indictment of contemporary society, since in order for terrorism to be truly epiphanic to the point of mobilising a white revolution it has to comprehensively invalidate and refute any lingering belief that the status quo is not utterly decadent and unsustainable in ethnic terms, and shatter any, "...delusion of an effortless, riskless democratic victory" (p. 21). There is a clear relevance here to the fifth and final stage of Moghaddam's (2005) staircase in which the adherent comes to reject their present reality in its entirety. Importantly, however, this rejection stems from an absolute conviction in the "ultimate truth," (Berger 1967), that is, an eternal and sacred aspect of being, and source of

meaning. Importantly also, is that this ultimate truth and the ultimate lie which it is defined against, are derived by projecting malign intentional states onto others, and the desired radicalised intentional states onto the wider sacred in-group community. Here, “ultimate reality” takes the form of a natural order of complete racial segregation, and the need for a racial holy war to prevent its subversion by essentially genocidal “invaders” and their accomplices within the establishment.

In terms of narrating his own radicalisation process, Tarrant refers to two overlapping facets of the overall narrative that he came to adopt; complete certainty that the status quo is antithetical to the changes necessary for preventing racial replacement, and – particularly revealing in the context of the thesis of this research concerning the centrality of the need to overcome anomy and depression – an emotional component, consisting of the need to overcome despair and embrace one’s fate in pursuit of these changes. During his travels across Europe in 2017, Tarrant claims to have undergone a “...revelation of the truth, that a violent, revolutionary solution is the only possible solution to our current crisis.” (p. 7). It was during this time that an Islamist terrorist carried out an attack in Stockholm, using a stolen truck to kill five pedestrians, including an 11-year-old girl. According to Tarrant, “...the indignity of her violent demise and my inability to stop it broke through my own jaded cynicism like a sledgehammer.” In the same year, despite Tarrant’s hopes for a “...milquetoast, , civic nationalist,” (presumably Marine Le Pen), an “... internationalist, globalist, anti-white, ex-banker,” (Emmanuel Macron) won the French general election. At this point he claims to have come face to face with an intolerable reality, as the “... truth of the political situation in Europe was suddenly impossible to accept. My despair set in. My belief in a democratic solution vanished.” (p. 8).

The experience was compounded by the presence of non-white “invaders,” whom he encountered whilst driving through several French towns. Finally, having stopped at a WW1 cemetery, he claims to have broken into tears as he vexed over moral questions about himself and the world around him. “Why were we allowing these soldiers deaths to be in vain? Why were we allowing the invaders to conquer us? Overcome us? Without a single shot fired in response? WHY WON’T SOMEBODY DO SOMETHING? In front of those endless crosses, in front of those dead soldiers lost in forgotten wars, my despair turned to shame, my shame to guilt, my guilt to anger and my anger to rage.” (p. 9). It is at this point that he claims to have committed himself to violent action.

Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind the extent to which his online searching also influenced how he narrated himself and reality. In a question-and-answer section he addresses this directly, i.e. “From where did you receive/research/develop your beliefs? The internet, of course. You will not find the truth anywhere else.” (p. 17). Moreover, the internet plays an important role in the more gnostic aspects of his narrative, “Once the corporate and state medias grip on the zeitgeist of modernity was finally broken by the internet, true freedom of thought and discussion flourished and the overton window was not just shifted, but shattered.” (p. 36). Accordingly, it would seem likely that the internet played a formative role in the development of his narrative and was in mutual interaction with the way in which he interpreted the world offline. In other words, his online and offline life interacted with one another, to make certain experiences (e.g. a general election) salient according to particular narrative frames, in a way that reconfirms the validity of the overall narrative. The dialectical nature of socialisation outlined by Berger (1967) would, in this context, seem to be more akin to a monologue, or a at least an ever-restricted dialogue, whereby the adherent answers their own questions, as they

themselves apply the narrative (participate in its structure in Gadamerian terms), i.e. they interpret the world through it.

In any case, Tarrant's account of his time in Europe may be particularly insightful, regarding the emotional forces at work during RWE radicalisation. Following the work of Broncano (2013),³⁷ a person's narration of themselves and the wider world are intertwined with their emotional cadences. In that chapter it was also suggested that these emotional cadences are intrinsic to the perspective of the narrative-self, its Heideggerian "care-structure," the "for-the-sake-of-which," which constitutes Dasein's "being-in-the-world." Accordingly, the "wandering viewpoint" of self-narration outlined by Roth (2017) would make unfolding events *emotionally* salient by integrating those events within a narrated past, and a projected narrative future. This integration forms what Ricoeur (1991, p. 21) termed "emplotment," and it is through this emplotment that events and experiences are given their emotional salience, in this case through their narrated relevance to sacred values, the in-groups in which such values are embodied, and what is narratively perceived to threaten them.

What is clear is that at some point in Tarrant's life, one which forms a seminal part of his own conscious narration of his life and radicalisation pathway, he gained an absolute conviction of an apocalyptic-genocidal future, and inner certainty that this future was essentially an intrinsic feature of the status quo. Indeed, it was a feature that was the logical conclusion of the intentional states which his evolving narrative had come to project onto various groups within his Manichaeic racist worldview. This realisation was experienced with an ultimate sense of despair and dread, or what Miceli and Castelfranchi (2005) term high "negative epistemic control". The emotional cadence of holding out for non-violent (democratic) measures for the realisation of his idealised *nomos* had run its

³⁷ See Chapter 3, p. 161.

course, and anxiety (i.e. uncertainty and ambivalence) evolved into fear (i.e. total certainty and unshakable conviction regarding the identity and nature of a given threat). The corollary of this fear is that the emotional cadence itself evolved into one in which Tarrant had to come to terms with the stark reality of the two alternative narrative arcs which he projected into the future – either nomocide or palingenetic revolution – and became fully conscious of the moral duties it placed on him. Because the replacement of whites was assured by their continued ignorance or denial of the reality which he had only just realised and which had struck him with a dreadful epiphanic force, the only remaining way of resolving his desperate emotional cadence that lay open to him was to devote his life completely to removal of that ignorance, the dissipation of collective white denial, and with it, the current order of things.

The dynamics of “identity-fusion” with, and “parochial altruism” towards a sacralised in-group community, as outlined by Atran (2016), would thus appear to be enmeshed within this experience of despair, helplessness, guilt, and vengeful moral duty. Tarrant’s inability to defend innocent members of his sacralised in-group from those he deems “invaders,” in the context of either the child sexual exploitation cases in Rotherham or the Stockholm terror attack, intensified his feeling of concern for the group, the mythically homogenous global white community, increasing the fusion of his fate with its destiny, and the attendant *emotional* need to act in its defence, i.e. “to do something”. Accordingly, the final stage of Tarrant’s radicalisation becomes one in which there is no prevarication, no ambiguity, and nothing left to contest in terms of how to act. The final challenge, or rather the final stage in the one evolving challenge (the emotional/motivational through-line in Tarrant’s radicalisation narrative), is that of acquiescing to and embracing the undisputed reality of the situation, and the normative demands it places on the adherent. Moreover, this final stage is the one which Tarrant

seeks to transpose onto his sympathisers, one in which the adherent has “only” to conquer his fear of death through self-sacrifice.

As with the terrorists discussed above, Tarrant’s struggle was first and foremost an internal one surrounding the need to resolve a period of deepening inability to accept the status quo, to the point where, as an adherent to a RWE narrative, he had no alternative but to give himself over to, to “*dedicate*” himself in the etymological sense³⁸ to the cause identified by his narrative, and actively participate in its normative-ontological structure, one which he has internalised as defining reality itself, and a structure which constitutes the uncontested understanding of reality, both of the present and future. In conceiving and planning his action, Tarrant deliberately set out to be an exemplar through whom his own radicalisation can be replicated within others, propagating his narrative and the emotional cadences which underpin it to the latent white community so as to activate it, and bring it into self-consciousness. He wants them to share his private despair, guilt, and rage, in order for them to similarly feel the need to conquer, and channel those emotions through action, and ultimately the acceptance of their fate, that of the self-sacrificial heroes of the cause, erroneously seen by the unenlightened and hostile as “terrorists”. These challenges, and their solutions, which make up the narrative’s emotional cadences and give it a kind of telos (Broncano 2013), necessitate the adherent’s acts of terroristic self-sacrifice intended to spread the narrative further, which is also itself fundamental to the logic of a narrative which equates ignorance and denial (of its own ultimate truth) with genocidal destruction.

³⁸ Dedicate: to "set apart and consecrate to a deity or a sacred purpose," as with a church building (etyonline 2023)

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Chapter 5

Discussion of Narratives and Development of Heuristic

Introduction

The three manifestos analysed in the previous chapter appear to contain certain recurring core aspects, that may be fundamental to contemporary RWE narratives, particularly (and most importantly) those aspects that relate specifically to radicalising individuals towards participating in acts of terrorism. This, of course, should be unsurprising, given that each manifesto was principally aimed at justifying the violence of its respective author, and convincing others within the idealised global white ethnic community to follow suit by awakening their awareness of the imminent existential threat faced by their kind, and the need for them to participate in a global concerted action to combat it. Indeed, the manifestos were themselves selected in large part because of their articulate rationalisation of terrorism. It should also be highlighted that the narratives of individual RWE, like those of any other political movement, are influenced by one another, and evolve as part of a wider social conversation, however directly or indirectly, either between those in a network (e.g. 4chan, or 8chan users), or as a result of one terrorist inspiring another in so-called “copycat” attacks carried out by those who subsequently adopt and modify the core narrative of prior terrorists, according to other narratives and ideas, as well as the specific historico-cultural context, which influence their thinking. The latter was clearly the case with the narratives analysed above, as all three adherents claim to have taken inspiration from previous terrorists, and often quote previous manifestos within their own. For example, Gendron quotes Tarrant, and Krajčičik quotes both Tarrant and Gendron, as one terrorist inspired the next, which of course accords with the proximate goal of their attacks (to inspire a chain of self-perpetuating

violence, through their exemplary act of dedication to the cause which factored in the risk of martyrdom). What follows is a discussion of all three narratives, that will compare and contrast their various elements, motifs, and interpretive frames, and which will help to further develop the heuristic proposed by this study, by demonstrating its relevance and utility in understanding the narrative dynamics involved in the specific RWE cases analysed here, and possibly other cases which are significantly similar (i.e. in terms both the adherent's narrative and their individual circumstances). Finally, the chapter will conclude by outlining key arguments surrounding how narratives should be conceptualised in the context of RWE radicalisation, and what are the implications in terms of counter-radicalisation, counter-narratives, and future research.

Fear and the Sacred Group

In the cases analysed above, a core feature of what each attacker seems to emulate from their predecessors, and seeks consequently to replicate in their sympathisers, is a state of overwhelming fear and existential anxiety regarding the future of white Europeans. What Atran (2016) describes as “identity fusion,” has by this point become total. Identity fusion, to reiterate, describes the psychological moral binding of an individual with their sacred values, and the wider in-group community in which such values are (imagined to be) embodied. The greater the sense of threat to the in-group community, the greater the sense of sacrality with which the fanatical individual invests that group. In the process, their identity becomes increasingly infused with the experience of belonging to the latent ethno-cultural community (in the cases described above the white race), along with all those aspects of the world which have come to be defined historically, culturally, and religiously, as integral to their sacred values, due to their connection with the higher, sacralised organic entity (e.g. the Hagia Sophia and WW1

graves in the case of Tarrant). This dynamic is evident in the narratives of all three terrorists who come to find ultimate purpose in the defence of their sacralised communities (i.e. white Europeans). The sacredness of this community, and the felt sense of obligation towards it, appears to increase in degree the more that community is perceived to be threatened by hostile outgroups. Indeed, it is precisely because these othered and hence (according to Manichean logic) evil antagonists seek to destroy this community that it is held with more reverence. By defining the intentional states of their adversaries, indeed the very essence of their adversaries (particularly in the case of the Jews), as being focused on the destruction of the in-group, RWE come to narratively centre their in-group as being of the highest value, and their defence of it as being the ultimate life purpose of anyone who has achieved a sufficiently high state of awareness (gnosis) of belonging within that group. Accordingly, the sacred value and community is defined in opposition to that which represents its total negation, which takes the form of a concretised hostile-community, who are not just out-groups in the sense of being different, but are fundamentally the antagonists of the in-group. To realise the sacred value thus means to destroy this anti-nomic adversary.

The aspect of analysis empathised here would appear to suggest the relevance of the work by the theologian Paul Tillich, particularly his concept of faith as “ultimate concern,” and his argument that this forms part of a person’s basic ontological and existential condition, or what he termed “the courage to be.” For Tillich (2014), “The courage to be is an expression of faith and what ‘faith’ means must be understood as the courage to be.” (p. 158). This courage, he argued, alongside the fear and anxiety it seeks to overcome, has an ontological status, in that it is fundamentally grasped as part of one’s being. Anxiety, fear, and courage, he argues, are ontological in that they pertain to the nature of being itself; the underlying reality of being makes possible the ethical

understanding of courage, i.e. recognising and pursuing what is good in the face of difficulty. Believing that there is a good at all which ought to be pursued, is for Tillich, part of the courage to be, which, he argues, is an essential part of being human, (p. 3-4), hence his inclusion of secular forms of “ultimate concern”. A crucial part of Tillich’s argument is that the courage to be which defines faith, does so precisely because it exists in the face of doubt, and even existential despair. It is courageous because it negates that which threatens to negate its own existence. To ascribe and affirm moral, and even sacred meaning to aspects of the world, is according to this view, to do so *against* the possibility of a meaningless existence. To use Berger’s terms, the nomos is ultimately legitimated by the anomy it serves to stave off and overcome.

Indeed, Tillich argued, a person’s self-affirmation (their self-attributed significance within their own Significant Quest) must necessarily be realised through their courage to overcome non-being, as they encounter its various representations within the world they experience. “Courage is self-affirmation “in-spite-of,” that is in spite of that which tends to prevent the self from affirming itself.”...“For if being is interpreted in terms of life or process or becoming, nonbeing is ontologically as basic as being.” (p. 31) The nomos and that which threatens it, are thus co-constitutive. Importantly, Tillich offered several examples of the how a person might find the courage to be, one of which he termed the “courage to be as part.” Specifically, he discussed the courage to be as part of what he termed the “neo-collectivist” movements of the 20th century, of which Nazism and Communism he gave as examples. The courage to be a part of these movements was, he argued, often partly predicated on dissatisfaction with the courage to be as oneself individually and/or the dissolution of more traditional collectivisms under the impact of modernity. (p. 90). What is important however, in the case of neo-collectivist movements is their totalising nature, whereby the individual becomes ...“infinitely concerned about

the fulfilment of the group. And from this concern they derive the courage to be.” (p. 92).

Combining both these strains of Tillich’s thought, in this context, might suggest that the courage to be as part of the collective is realised through apprehending – in the dual sense of fearing and understanding – precisely that which represents *the nonbeing of the collective* so as to overcome the anxiety induced by the prospect of its loss. It is these real or imagined forces of entropy which represent the “in spite of” element that reaffirms the individual’s ultimate concern for their in-group. That a world can be imagined in which the collective from which the individual derives all meaning, has been entirely negated is an essential part of what makes that collective the object of ultimate concern. The greater the threat of the sacred group’s nonbeing, i.e. the more salient it’s mortality becomes, the greater the ultimate concern for, and devotion towards, that group, on the part of those who rely on it for their courage to be. The being of one’s sacred group would, in this instance, be contingent on the nonbeing it stands against, as its survival is necessarily contingent on its overcoming all that which represents its destruction. From Tillich’s standpoint of ontological anxiety, fear, and courage, the being of the group is defined by its continuity in the face of nonbeing, or that which it exists “in spite of.” Clearly, in RWE narratives, this nonbeing is concretised in the form of essentially hostile outgroups, who are either deemed entropic to the being of the in-group by their mere presence in Western nations, or are deemed to be intentionally entropic by purposefully and collectively attempting to destroy and subjugate white Europeans. As the above narratives gave greater salience to these forces of nonbeing, they in turn reinforced the status of white Europeans as the ultimate concern for adherents, with the sacredness of this group appearing to increase in proportion to the salience of its mortality, an increase that is similarly driven by the salience, indeed the mere presence of, those groups which

it is *defined against*. These enemy groups, and especially their perceived manifestations, increased each adherent's concern the more omnipresent they are perceived to be.

This dynamic or syndrome is perhaps most evident in the case of Krajčák's narrative, in which all forms of perceived degeneracy became the frontline of a war waged by Jews on white populations. Homosexuality, transgenderism, and other perceived manifestations of "ZOG" (defined by its anti-whiteness) were deemed also to be forms of "nihilism." From the perspective of this RWE narrative these, would, of course, be nihilistic, or rather anti-nomic, to the extent that they represented the dissolution and eventual nonbeing of the sacred community. Identity-fusion, particularly of the kind which inspires devoted actors towards violence, would thus appear in these cases to be an interpretive process in which the sense of threat is reinforced with the continued evolution of the narrative and the adherent's narrative understandings. For instance, rather than having more moderate right-wing perspectives on immigration, through the continued entrenchment of RWE narratives (particularly their race war ontology/narrative structure), the adherents came to view immigration *per se*, and other perceived sources of in-group dissolution, as part of a conscious effort to destroy their in-group and sacred values. Moreover, these are made all the more threatening by their deliberateness (assured by the attribution of intentional states following Bruner's paradigm), which in turn instils a greater threat of significance loss, or nonbeing, and a greater obligation to commit deontic violence. The fact that they are both intentional and covert makes these sources of threat even more intolerable, wherever they are encountered, precisely because they are unrecognised for what they are by society at large. Indeed, for the above RWE the omnipresent nature of the threat of nonbeing, i.e. its normalisation is what makes it insidious.

The Promise of Violence

Notwithstanding their individual differences, and different areas of emphasis, the manifestos analysed, and the accounts of individual radicalisation pathways (life-narratives) described therein, can be said to exemplify varying permutations of a single ideal-typical kind of *violent* RWE narrative, one which distinguishes it from non-violent RWE narratives. How well this ideal-type might apply to other narratives will be discussed further below, however, that they do share a similar general narrative structure seems clear from both their contents (especially with regard to emotional impetus), and from the fact that they occur in a chain with one terrorist's narrative informing subsequent attackers whom they helped to inspire. Within this shared narrative, violence and destruction underlies and is the precondition of all change, be it desirable or otherwise. The changing nature of Western societies is seen as inherently destructive: "entropy on blitzspeed" in the words of Tarrant. The only question, or at least the only question that matters, is whose destruction will be the outcome of this zero-sum arrangement. Not only are historical ambivalence and the multiple scenarios they subsume significantly reduced, but what little ambiguity is left (the only question left unanswered) is one that pertains fulfilling one's moral duty. Here, Koehler's (2015) notion of radicalisation as "de-pluralisation" is clearly apposite. These RWE narratives would thus appear to truly gain violent potential at the stage at which they make the present order (indeed the nature of human existence in general) irredeemably destructive, by projecting *fixed* (that is essentialised) intentional states onto their antagonists, be they Muslims, Jews, of leftist conspirators. While it is important not to reduce narration to the kind of deterministic "conveyor belt" explanations criticised by McCauley and Moskalenko (2017, p. 211), it is certainly possible to talk of "logical conclusions". Certainly, that is, to the extent that such conclusions result from the de-pluralised reality depicted in violent RWE narratives,

which render whole groups, and the status quo in its entirety, inherently inimical to the continued being of the sacralised in-group.

In the narratives described above, adherents overcome their despair and anomy through the potentially cathartic realisation that you have to kill “them” (demonised out-groups), and destroy “it” (the current system, or “ZOG”), before they destroy all that you value and which gives your life meaning (the sacred community and the possible sanctuary of a racially pure and ethnically enlightened future for civilisation). For such narratives, it is a cathartic realisation, or one that promises catharsis when acted upon, to the extent it gives an individual an escape from their state of anguish, and the futility of their continuous seething rage over the reality in which they feel trapped (whether they do this alone or in communion with like-minded others online). What is thus being realised is a possible future idealised self, one that must follow a future narrative arc demanding acts of redemptive violence which affords the adherent with a means of escaping the looming nomocidal narrative arc of sleepwalking denial that spells the death of meaning, or at least, the arc in which they would passively allow this catastrophe to transpire. *Catharsis in the face of catastrophe*; this is the promise of such a narrative’s violent ending, in which adherents sacrifice themselves through a final act from which they can never return to their former, morally inadequate, socially conformist, self. The sacrifice thus serves as the ultimate reassurance that they did all they could in the time they were given, and that their life had meaning, despite the perceived entropic forces of evil arrayed against them.

Indeed, it is the very fact that the adherent has to give up everything, that makes violence the most assured means of redeeming themselves and the world around them, and leaving a legacy by awakening the slumbering (in this case white) community which guarantees a form of self-transcendence. What for Krajčák was the “beautiful thought” (p.

57) of such a sacrifice, may represent the kind of “courage to be,” described by Tillich, that is, a courage to be “in spite of” the finitude of the individual’s life, and the perceived forces of evil, or “nonbeing,” arrayed against them, and that which constitutes their ultimate concern. Certainly, in this case, it is the courage to be as part of a sacralised community, one which itself constitutes the “ultimate concern” of each of the discussed RWE terrorists. Importantly, what it means to find this courage is to give one’s life entirely to resisting the status quo, defined, as it were, by the nonbeing and anomy of not realising the higher truths and calling of one’s ethnic identity. Because the narrative implicates this status quo in the destruction of the adherent’s sacred values and community, it allows for only one possible life-narrative ending, one that enables the adherent to realise their courage to be, that of (readiness for) self-sacrificial violence. To be able to meet the demands of their conscience, or the projected heroic future self, the adherent must believe that *in spite of* their fate, and all the forces pushing in the opposite direction, they overcame fear, and particularly the fear of death, by embracing their perceived sacred duty, and the possibility of death itself.

The promise of violence is thus not simply that it will put an end to despair, but as part of this, it will also guarantee the adherent’s life will have the ultimate meaning and purpose, despite (and in a sense precisely because of) the terrifying nomocidal reality which confronts them which provides his or her *raison d’être*. In this regard, the heroic self is the ultimate manifestation of the courage to be, though crucially it is both sought as the ultimate goal of RWE narratives, and once identified, necessitated by them, as the narrative progressively renders the world as evil/nomocidal to their adherents. That is, by reducing the range of possible actions for securing the adherent’s sacred values, the narrative re-defines these sacred values as the complete overcoming of the status quo, one which has come to represent the “nonbeing” of such values, and which the true values are

accordingly defined in opposition to. Terrorism might, for these adherents, also provide another aspect to identity fusion, as the terrorist not only binds their fate with that of the sacred community, but also with that of the previous attackers who inspired them, and the subsequent attackers they hope to inspire. Participating in violence, means participating in the same narrative as their fellow terrorists, and thus allows them to concretise their “courage to be as part,” over and against the fear of nihilism and future nomocide, which they all share.

Dialectical Saliency and De-pluralisation

To apply Griffin’s (2017) paradigm, the final realisation afforded by the above RWE’s Manichaeic narratives of “us vs them,” not only demands a heroic response, but is itself a “call to arms,” delivered by the heroic double, the adherent’s, as yet nascent, projected future self, whose perspective comes to define the adherent’s longing for a resolution to their quest of restoring/defending ultimate meaning. Accordingly, the heroic double effectively becomes the voice of the potential future idealised self, whose realisation through violence is the longed-for solution that promises to end the state of anomic despair. This does not mean to suggest a kind of schizophrenic dynamic, where the individual cannot appreciate the degree to which the “voices” (or rather in this case perspectives) they hear are fundamentally internal to themselves. On the contrary, it is the belief that this call of conscience represents their truest self, which represents the complete fulfilment of their life quest: the teleological end of their life narrative. Following Berger (1967), to internalise a worldview is to be completely convinced of the objective external reality of the world as seen from that viewpoint. To internalise a narrative which makes moral claims, therefore, is to fundamentally reject the notion that such claims are relative to one’s perspective. By internalising such claims, in this context,

the narrative's adherent believes they are being "honest with themselves," when they acknowledge their stark moral, self-sacrificial duty, one which they are certain the world imposes upon them. It is important to remember the essentially dialectical nature of the socialisation, by which Berger argues sacred canopies are secured or lost, alongside Gadamer's (2004) notion of hermeneutics as a dialogue between the interpreter and that which they interpret. Additionally, in light of the above analysis, it will be useful to discuss the role of narrative in the formation of the heroic double (or the role of the heroic double in radicalisation narratives).

While it might be argued that a lack of meaning, together with the threat of nomocide, represent push factors that drive individuals towards the formation of their heroic doubles, it might also be argued that the ideal of a heroic double represents a pull factor to which the adherent is drawn. Indeed, this would be resonant with the Significance Quest Theory (SQT), which according to Kruglanski, Belanger and Gunaratna (2019, p. 44) distinguishes between the motivation to restore significance, and the allure of potential significance gain (whilst still acknowledging that both are not mutually exclusive). Regarding the RWE terrorism discussed here, however, both formulations may be inappropriate to the extent that they imply a segmented process, whereby the arousal and fulfilment of a need occur *entirely* one after the other. To draw on a Heideggerian perspective of narratives, both the pull of the heroic self which calls the adherent to violent, self-transcendent action, and the state of anomy which pushes them towards such action, inhere within the narrative structure in which they participate (in Gadamer's sense).³⁹ Indeed, when outlining his theory of interpretation, Gadamer (1985, p. 264) describes the "claim to truth" made upon the interpreter; a claim which he

³⁹ See Chapter 2, p. 100.

argued must first be *recognised* before it can be introspectively evaluated, and potentially be internalised.

Here, Gadamer's emphasis on recognition is key, and it is worth highlighting what is meant by the term *re-cognition*. To recognise, according to Gadamer (2004), means more than to simply acknowledge what one already knows; rather it involves a degree of insight. "In recognition what we know emerges, as if illuminated, from all the contingent and variable circumstances that condition it; it is grasped in its essence" (p. 113). Hence, for Gadamer, recognition is deeply ontological in nature, as the interpreter recognises the universal in the particular, i.e. that something is a particular instance of an underlying aspect of reality. In the context of norms, this means having the ability, or attunement, to recognise in which particular situations a norm has been transgressed, and for the devoted actor, when a sacred value is threatened. Accordingly, recognition and participation are part of the same unified phenomena of interpretation, and as such, when a person participates in a narrative, he or she recognise its claims to truth. Following the hermeneutic circle, the questions which that narrative claims to answer, as well as the framing of the questions themselves (indeed, the two are co-dependent), are recognised at the same time as the answers which the narrative provides.

In terms of the above RWE, this would suggest that both the push of anomic despair, and the pull of heroic transformation, increasingly *exert themselves together*, and not in a linear sequence, during the act of recognition in which adherents increasingly feel themselves to be a part of RWE narratives. Following Gadamer's and Berger's insights, to the extent that narration is a dialectical phenomenon, then narratives can be said to form part of an evolving conversation through which RWE understand reality, or their being-in-the-world. This is perhaps one advantage to conceptualising narratives through a heuristic that draws on perspectives that do not rely on a Cartesian dualism, which

differentiates between an external reality and its mediation through purely internal ideas. Rather than conceptualising narratives as mediating reality through any abstract ideological axioms on which such narratives may be based, narratives themselves concretise ideology *by making aspects of the world salient* in a way that reinforces the narrative's overall perceived verisimilitude, and thus the degree that it is internalised. To reiterate, here, internalisation means taking as fact a certain perspective on external reality, and thus apprehending the world with regards to certain possibilities. That is, apprehending, or making salient, aspects of the world according to the possibilities (for being-in-the-world) which that perspective makes salient.⁴⁰ Moreover, verisimilitude can here be equated to a narrative's integrity or integrating function, in terms of its capacity to integrate past, present, and future into a convincing narrative arc, in this case, one that can only culminate in revolutionary destruction. As the narrative evolves, so too does the way in which the individual attunes themselves to reality, and vice versa. This narrative attunement defines the adherent's "care," and thus their being-in-the-world.

As an example, Tarrant describes his radicalisation process as being driven by a sequence of separate events, which progressively reinforced his genocidal narrative, and intensified his sense of despair. These included Islamist terror attacks, the presence of non-whites in the European countries which he visited, and the outcome of the French general election. In their own way, either by demonstrating the fundamental hostility of Muslims, the threat of demographic replacement, or the blindness of Western publics, each event served to further entrench the total negative certainty, and sense of moral duty, that characterised the final stage of his narrative. In this respect, the narrative is largely able to feed and entrench itself, through both stirring the adherent to find solutions, and

⁴⁰ To draw on Berger's terminology further, to internalise nomic-ontological (formally "objectivated") structures of how the world works world means to have those structures "...determine the subjective structures of consciousness itself" (1967 p. 14-5), that is to think (or project) in terms of those structures, and the possibilities they make available/unavailable.

reinforcing the scale of the challenge, by making increasingly salient the demonised out-groups to destroy or expel.

For instance, Tarrant describes the mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, as a “...Pakistani muslim invader,” and identifies him as an, “...open sign of the disenfranchisement and ethnic replacement of the british people in the british isles.” (p. 39). The narrative is therefore inseparable from the act of narration, wherein the whole, and its individual parts, reaffirm each other’s meaning, making the projected catastrophe more certain, and thus intensifying the adherent’s hatred, in this case towards signs of “disenfranchisement and ethnic replacement”. The underlying race-war ontology is recognised in the particular instance where it is believed to be relevant, i.e. a Muslim mayor. Put in the terms of Furlow and Goodall (2011), Tarrant’s “root war metaphor” of a 1300-year-old civilizational struggle between Islam and white Europeans is both recognised and made salient by those events and people to which it is perceived to be relevant. At the same time, this root war metaphor/race-war narrative, structures the “care” of his being-in-the-world, so that something can only be made morally salient by its being a part of this structure. Seen from this light, radicalisation is a form of attunement (towards that which is cared for) which has evolved as part of the evolution of both one’s life narrative, and the wider master narrative within which it has become integrated. In this context, attunement, life narrative, and master narrative are inseparable, and co-evolve with the ongoing interpretation of events.

Narrative Understandings and Actions

This notion of evolving attunement would seem consonant with the work of Dreyfus and Taylor (2015), who (partly following on from Heidegger and Gadamer) propose a “contact theory” of understanding reality, in which the interpreter initially

develops their beliefs through their “prelinguistic and preconceptual familiarity with the world” (p. 88). Unsurprisingly, this kind of familiarity has a functional resemblance to Gadamer’s (2004) notion of prejudices as the “conditions of understanding,” (p. 278) and, it might be added, the expectancies through which individuals project their life narratives, following Roth (2017). According to Dreyfus and Taylor, the interpreter interacts with the world by way of their expectancies which serve to order experience, only for this ordering to then be reappraised as the experience passes, the task is completed, or the question answered. (p. 88). Beliefs are thus confirmed or modified, and developed further through their application, during the interpreter’s interactions with the world.

Dreyfus and Taylor’s theory is useful for the heuristic being developed here, as it potentially illuminates another aspect of narration, regarding the link between narrative understandings and RWE actions. Specifically, the way they incorporate the work of phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty (1962), who argued that the, “...body is not an object for an ‘I think’, it is a grouping of lived-through meanings which moves towards its equilibrium” (p. 153). Finding this equilibrium, for Dreyfus and Taylor (2015), means orientating oneself in order to find, “...an optimal grip on the object or objects that are salient in the visual field” p. (89). That is, through their contact with reality, a person constantly reappraises their orientation (what is found salient and how), to find the best accordance between themselves, their beliefs, and the world they encounter. The active reappraisal of narrative understandings or “lived-through meanings” that constitute one’s understanding of the narrative so far, is thus an embodied act, in which making sense of the world means finding an “equilibrium” between those meanings and that which one encounters.⁴¹

⁴¹ With this in mind, it is perhaps worth noting that Jerome Bruner’s 1987 book on narrative psychology was titled *Acts of Meaning*, and is centred on the agentic creation of meaning as a person attempts to make sense of the world according to their “folk psychology” (cultural understandings) and adapt current meanings in instances that challenge this psychology.

Whilst “the visual field” might refer to a person’s immediate physical surroundings, in the context of ideological narratives the scope for what is visualised is broadened in both time and space. Indeed, this may range from events in other countries, viewed digitally, or imagined futures that appear on the horizon and thus warrant an effective response. By providing the expectancies, or pre-understandings by which new experiences or events are made salient, narratives also simultaneously place moral expectancies on their adherents. These lived-through meanings by which someone continuously interprets, and reinterprets, their life narrative (and the wider master-narrative in which it is integrated) evolve as they pursue their equilibrium. Furthermore, what constitutes “equilibrium” evolves reciprocally with these lived-through meanings, through the adherent’s active participation in their own narrative. The narrative does not therefore constitute an abstract schema for action, or a set of ideological principles (though these can be derived from it), but is rather more a kind of continuous and context-specific questing (Heidegger’s “care”), one that arises from, as is shaped by, the adherent’s contact with reality. Likewise, narratives themselves both arise from, and reciprocally shape the desire for, “optimal grip” as part of this contact. Care, and what is cared for, shape one another, in the pursuit of bodily, and particularly in this context, emotional, equilibrium.

Whilst narration may not appear to be an action by itself, for RWE this is not a disinterested exercise, but constitutes the wider quest of trying to restore significance and secure one’s nomos. The narrative is thus inseparable from the quest. For Merleau-Ponty (1962, p. 139) “...to move one's body is to aim at things through it; it is to allow oneself to respond to their call, which is made upon it independently of any representation.” Phenomenologically speaking, understanding this call is inseparable from the task of trying to answer it through one’s own actions. Where a narrative projects a future heroic

self as that which is called forth by the world as it is encountered, and that which is made salient within it, it does so because the adherent is purposefully seeking to *act* in accordance with the intensely felt situation with which that narrative confronts them. Here, finding the “optimal grip” on a morally charged situation is always done with a view to finding what actions are required for the situation’s resolution. What exists in the present, and what should exist in the future, are both narrated with each other in mind so as to afford the adherent the capacity to *act* effectively and achieve both nomic control and agency.

Indeed, this may partly describe the phenomenology of truth, value, and control effectiveness as outlined by Higgin’s (2014) work on motivational psychology.⁴² To restate Higgins’ central premise, humans have an innate desire to exert effective control over their environment; they have a fundamental need, “...to be effective in life pursuits,” (p. 41) and to be, “...directing choices in order to be effective” (p. 42). This overarching motivation, Higgins argues, expresses itself in the mutually informing forms of truth, value, and control effectiveness. For RWE such as those discussed in this study, finding what Dreyfus and Taylor (2015) term the “optimal grip” on the world, means achieving equilibrium between the truth of one’s situation as it pertains to one’s sacred values, in order to effectively control that situation in accordance with those values. Consequently, the pragmatic and epistemic function of narrating the world, in pursuit of this optimal grip, are heavily interdependent. In the case of these RWE narratives, the perceived evil of the status quo becomes progressively reaffirmed, to the point where the adherent rejects it entirely, as its continuance completely negates any form of being-in-the-world, characterised by Higgin’s three ways of being effective. Escaping this status quo thus becomes the only viable means of retrieving this kind of effectiveness, and according to

⁴² See Chapter three, p. 144.

RWE narratives, this escape can only be achieved through a complete inversion of the present reality. Having optimal grip subsequently becomes having one's being-in-the-world entirely attuned to achieving this inversion. Moving towards an equilibrium with one's embodied meanings, means embodying this complete rejection of contemporary society through one's actions. Terrorism might be seen as apposite in this regard because it entails the most severe rejection-inversion of those societal norms which, according to RWE, are both hypocritical and destructive, as they mask the real homicidal intentions of their antagonists.

This might also explain the desire to invert norms more generally. If the status quo is perceived to be fundamentally genocidal towards white Europeans, then the plainest and most explicit inversion of this is to embrace the kind of totalising white supremacy which characterises neo-Nazism. Moreover, this specific ideology relies entirely on the kind of race war ontology which structures RWE narratives (including those which might not otherwise be considered neo-Nazi). Indeed, it might be tempting to call this an entirely neo-Nazi type of narrative. However, this would perhaps obfuscate some of the important differences amongst RWE narratives, at least those analysed above. Whilst Gendron and Krajčák explicitly embrace a neo-Nazi narrative (one characterised by Manichean anti-Semitism), there were degrees of difference between them, and Tarrant himself evinced a somewhat different kind of zero-sum racism, (despite using Himmler's Black Sun symbol on the front of his manifesto and referencing the SS on his weapons). These differences might be viewed as differing degrees, and kinds of white supremacism, some of which might be more archetypally Nazi in character.

Tarrant, for instance, identified racial survival with complete racial segregation, and thus held sustainably reproductive white hyper-"purity" to be the specific goal of the revolutionary race war which he aimed to bring about. This goal was also shared by

Gendron and Krajčák. However, whilst Tarrant's antagonists were primarily Muslims and an allegedly anti-white network of institutions, Gendron and Krajčák were entirely convinced that their ultimate enemies were "the" Jews, who purposefully presided over a genocidal system in the form of "ZOG." The protagonists in any narrative that centres on a Jewish cabal, who machinate towards the destruction of white racial purity, are perhaps inevitably going to be some permutation of neo-Nazi whose entire life purpose, for that matter, only makes sense within this type of narrative. The point being, that different RWE narratives can necessitate the inversion/destruction of the status quo in differing ways, all of which might afford their adherents with absolute closure, moral certainty, and practically unqualified hatred. Nevertheless, the varying types of antagonists, and the varying ways in which they are defined as antagonists, can render certain ideological answers, or rather types of inversion, more necessary/appealing than others.

Importantly, that it is an inversion of the status quo might be key to understanding how and why these RWE use violence to achieve equilibrium with the embodied meanings, that evolve with the progressive de-pluralisation of their narratives. This becomes clearer when it is remembered that de-pluralisation is here effectively equated with rejection. It is not just that reality does not meet some abstract standard generated by ideological propositions about what is good and sacred, rather, it is that what constitutes this standard is defined in opposition to actually existing reality as it is experienced in the present. To effectively enable this rejection and ensure moral certainty, RWE narratives describe a process of deterioration that explain how the present has become so intolerable, and why it will necessarily deteriorate further in the future. RWE narratives are able to do this through the interpretive process in which they are continuously applied by their adherents, in the manner suggested above. The trajectory

towards an apocalyptic final end game, as the precondition of a new totalising white supremacist world, is made increasingly salient with every instance wherein it is perceived to be relevant according to the narrative perspective. Here, what is perceived as relevant is also made salient by its relation to the projected apocalyptic future. The proximate salience of the world as encountered, and the ultimate salience of the projected world to be, are thus co-reinforcing.

This continuous application of the narrative to interpreting the evolution of contemporary history makes the world progressively more intolerable for the adherent, who finds no avenue for resolving the issues which only their specifically tailored narrative can address by becoming more extreme (in its rejection of the status quo). It is appropriate here to reiterate Tarrant's despair at reality, as he helplessly watched it unfold before him, "Why were we allowing the invaders to conquer us?," "...WHY WON'T SOMEBODY DO SOMETHING?" (p. 9). These RWE narratives appear, therefore, to unify a narrative arc, including an individual's own life narrative arc, following Roth's (2017) paradigm, so as to provide a stable basis for acting effectively, in order to optimally accord oneself with one's (narratively rendered/defined) nomos. By implicating the reality of the present order of things in a sinister plot to destroy one's sacred community, destroying this reality becomes a moral duty, and the final and ultimate certainty with which RWE, like those discussed here, can be assured that they left no avenue to radical change unexplored, no stone unturned.

According to this view, the desire to act effectively is part of the wider desire to be in optimal accord and conformity with "true" reality, to know that is, how that which one cares for (i.e. ones sacred values) is best secured. The desire to act effectively is thus inherent in the perspective of a narrative which depicts one's nomos, and particularly the depiction of forces which are perceived to threaten it. Rather than just

mediating ideology, RWE narratives are applied as a way of being-in-the-world for the adherent. Narratives frame events, people, and groups, as part of the interpretive process by which these aspects of reality are made salient, and as part of the adherent's "contact" with the world. Indeed, rather than being a road map for securing sacred values and restoring significance (though they can also serve this function), narratives themselves constitute the road as it is travelled, i.e. in terms of where one has been, and where one is going. They demarcate the horizons, following Gadamer, of what is probable, possible, and impossible. To perhaps extend the analogy further, what is certain, or most probable, becomes foregrounded and most salient, constituting the road itself, whilst what is less probable and least salient, falls to the periphery (like a distant hill or tree).

Needless to say, in the case of these RWE narratives, the road leads inescapably towards a catastrophe which defines the horizon, giving the adherent both the experience of existential dread, and at the same time, the potential for, indeed the duty to carry out, heroic transformation. That this catastrophe is perceived to be the ultimate destination makes the road definitively a road, or a clearly demarcated route towards the future. The temporal unity of Heidegger's notion of *care*⁴³ would suggest that what is made salient to the adherent is that which is relevant towards this ultimate event, with its ultimate meaning stemming from its decisive relation to the adherent's ultimate concern (as per Tillich), i.e. the sacred community. Additionally, the speed at which the adherents perceive themselves and their sacralised community to be travelling towards this catastrophe, increases the salience of events, people, and the perceived forms of degeneracy which are believed to demarcate the road, adding further to the adherent's sense of dread. Demographic projections appear to be the primary factors which give these narratives their urgency, as Tarrant, Gendron, and Krajčák all emphasise birthrates

⁴³ See Chapter 2, p. 115.

within their manifestos, and this can be said to unify all three terrorist's manifestos as part of a single, or at least overlapping, temporal unity of care, which together undergirds their individual life narratives. Krajčík perhaps demonstrates this unity by quoting Tarrant's introductory lines, "it's the birthrates, it's the birthrates, it's the birthrates." However, it is important to note that the perceived degeneracy of Western societies is also believed to be steadily eroding the potential for palingenetic rebirth, and thus the prospects for racial safety (equated by adherents with complete racial segregation and purity). Thus, cultural trends also add to the sense of urgency, as these represent the "suicidal nihilism," in Gendron's words, which, because they are perceived to be an omnipresent design feature of the status quo, necessitate revolutionary violence to avert disaster.

Narrative Projections as Emotional Projections

Here, the notion of a narrative's trajectory being analogous to a kind of road, defined by emotional salience, may also be useful for understanding the strategy of "accelerationism," which underpins the rationale of the violence committed by the terrorists analysed above. Evidently, if one is traveling at an ever-increasing speed along a road characterised by ever increasing threats, it is entirely rationale to concentrate on the road, especially if not to do so would be to resign oneself to certain destruction. It is precisely because they must be concentrated on, and cannot be ignored, that gives narrated events both in the present, and those projected into the future, their ontological status; they are salient because they are most real. They are the most certain possibilities of Tillich's "nonbeing." Ending this threatening situation (and the state of terror and demoralisation with which it is experienced emotionally), thus amounts to radically altering the direction of travel. Because these RWE narratives hold that modern society is completely irredeemable, as, by design, it is fixed on its current path by rails that

purposely lead to genocide/nomocide, they leave no option other than complete derailment, and because there is no other option, this derailment becomes a sacred duty on the part of RWE. Crashing the system before it can fulfil its evil purposes, amounts here to destabilising society through increasing polarisation, in Tarrant's words, adding, "...momentum to the pendulum swings of history." (p. 6).

Accelerationism, in this context, means making what are perceived to be the system's inherent destructive tendencies *totally* unmanageable for the narrative's antagonists, it's would-be génocidaires, (be they Muslims, Jews, or leftist NGOs). Thus, it is perhaps more akin to deliberately causing a car to lose traction, by yanking the steering wheel under sudden acceleration, rather than just acceleration on its own. It is the antagonist's perceived control over events, and the fate of the sacralised community, that must be broken in order to secure the communities survival. Moreover, the rationale of accelerationism is deeply enmeshed within the narrative's aspirations for a gnostic racial effervescence, as the more the antagonists are forced to play their hand in their attempt to reassert their control of society and its future, the more the fundamental malignancy of the status quo will be visible *for all to see*. This supposed unmasking, gives these RWE the promise that their violence will be truly epiphanic, and therefore heroic. According to them, the ability of their enemies to maintain control over society (and over the narrative's trajectory), is predicated on their ability to hide their evil intentions. To have these intentions made visible, is thus the primary means of both rendering that control untenable, and also mobilising the sacred community around the scapegoated enemy.

Achieving this unity of purpose is precisely what accelerationism is supposed to achieve, by making the sacred community stare the essential malignancy of the status quo in the face, alongside the inevitability of the community's own destruction on its current

trajectory. “Facing” both of these aspects of RWE narratives, was an essential part of all three terrorists’ own radicalisation process, and something which they hoped their violence would replicate onto those who would become future attackers, as well as the wider population. In order for such RWE to replicate their own cycle of despair, rage, and sense of deontic duty (all of which may be combined to varying degrees simultaneously by the adherent) onto their wider in-group, they believe they must bring into sharp relief the apocalyptic future projected by their narratives. Accelerationism is designed to achieve this by making the perceived certainty of that future an inescapable fact for that group. Polarisation, state-repression, and reciprocal violence, are all thus believed to function as intermediaries for replicating the adherent’s own radicalisation process, by transposing the adherents emotions, and beliefs, indeed their entire being-in-the-world, onto others.

Accordingly, they seek to make their own goals, which they themselves modelled on those of others (real or imagined), to be truly mimetic, in the Girardian sense⁴⁴. To build on the insights provided by Framing Theory, particularly as employed by Koehler (2015) in the context of VE “contrast societies,”⁴⁵ whilst the attacks are clearly intended to be “framing acts,” in which the terrorists sought to realise and take part in their race war narrative/root war metaphor, it is also clear that they were intended to engender *future* framing acts, which would reveal what they believed to be the underlying reality of their narratives. Here, the logic of accelerationism is that one framing act will lead eventually to a cascade of others, not just in the form of inspiring future attackers, but also by making the government and wider establishment take actions which will themselves serve as framing acts, and that will subsequently confirm the “truth” of the RWE narrative, and the nomocidal trajectory it projects into the future.

⁴⁴ See Chapter 3, p. 169

⁴⁵ See Chapter 2, p. 37

Following Benford and Snow's (2000) outline of Framing Theory, the antagonists of these RWE narratives, who are depicted as orchestrating the status quo, are supposed to be unwitting accomplices in the struggle to contest the meaning of RWE attacks, alongside the governmental/societal responses they provoke. If such narratives serve to "contest" (the governments frames) and "de-contest" (RWE frames), and thus "arrest" the meaning of ideological concepts, to borrow terms from Freedman's (1996) paradigm,⁴⁶ then the fulfilment of those narrative's projections (i.e. the events predicted after the attack), are a key part of this process of contestation. In this context, the meaning of these ideological concepts, (e.g. what defines race, racial survival, and what threatens it) is fixed, or concretised, in the eyes of incumbent RWE, according to the reality depicted within these RWE narratives. What this dynamic suggests, is the way that such narratives enable themselves to be self-perpetuating. The narrative is not only realised by a single attacker's single framing act, but by the subsequent events they inspire. For such adherents, the narrative (which to them constitutes the ultimate truth), must be propagated as a moral obligation, as it is only through this propagation, so they believe, that their sacred values can be secured. By predicting the reactions to their attacks, RWE aim to make their antagonists, indeed reality in general, *participate overtly* in their narrative.

Notably, the idea of provoking future reciprocal framing acts coheres with the reciprocal/dialectical dynamics of narration and moral/emotional salience, outlined above, according to which, the potential adherent internalises the terrorist narrative by applying the narrative to events as they unfold, and specifically to those events which the narrative makes salient. These events subsequently confirm the narrative's validity, and intensify the emotional forces it brings to bear on the adherent, or potential adherent. Because the narrative frames the adherent's questions (which are themselves defined by

⁴⁶ See Chapter 2, p. 39

the narrative's implicit norms), they make those aspects of reality more salient which are believed to answer these questions, and thus establish, or re-establish, moral certainty for the adherent. This certainty can be both negative, in the sense of inevitable decline, and positive, in that they can escape despair by sacrificing themselves to the cause. What is important is that the potential adherent begins to find aspects of the world salient, following the care-structure of the RWE terrorist's narrative. The provoked governmental responses are intended to provide the material for generating this salience, and with it, the overall integrity of the RWE narrative, especially in terms of its mobilising force. The logic of accelerationism, according to each terrorist's manifesto, is that these responses will provide the *fait accompli*, or the answers to the questions framed within their RWE narratives, for potential adherents in their search for meaning, and their desire to understand and secure their sacred values.

Narration or Interpretation?

At this point, there may be the objection that to conceptualise narratives in such a way is overly broad, to the point of offering little utility, as this effectively equates them entirely with all interpretation, and that this simply amounts to a description of the experience of radicalisation, regardless of any influence of narratives themselves. That is, it would amount to arguing that those who are radicalised change how they see the world, and that to describe this change is to describe radicalisation, rather than to offer an explanation of the role of narratives. It would thus merely employ a circular explanation, whereby a person who is radicalised is someone who necessarily has developed their beliefs, and they have thus become radicalised because of this development. This would lead back to the same problems identified by Gøtzsche-Astrup (2018), in his review of empirically based radicalisation theories, whereby narratives (often used interchangeably

with ideology) can either be seen as key drivers, or post-hoc rationalisations of violence, with the difference depending on how broadly narratives/ideologies are defined (p. 96).

Hopefully, the account given above of how narration and salience can evolve dialectically to progressively ascribe moral certainty to events and groups and induce emotional states within adherents, gives some indication of *which specific aspects* of interpretation are at play during RWE radicalisation. Indeed, accentuating these aspects of interpretation, and for that matter radicalisation, is the objective of the heuristic being proposed here. Clearly, the heuristic employs a broader definition of narrative, one which does involve much of what many might simply describe as interpretation, or perception. However, this definition refers to the specific ways in which RWE, such as those analysed above, might apply narratives as part of the process of interpretation, and how this can make salient those aspects of the world they interpret. Whilst it is true that there may be no easily discernible line between interpretation from within and without a RWE narrative, what is being suggested here is that adherence to such a narrative is something that can occur by matters of degree, and in differing individual forms. The more integrated an individual's interpretation of the world is within a continuous overarching master narrative, which unifies past, present and future, the more they can be said to be adhering to, participating in, or applying that narrative.

In this context, the degree of integration is likely somewhat analogous to a person's degree of radicalisation, though it is important to remember that such integration is not necessarily enough *on its own* to induce someone to engage in terrorism. What this heuristic suggests is a way of understanding how narratives can develop a person's beliefs by framing challenges and questions in a way that leads to increasingly de-pluralised meanings regarding how to understand one's (ultimate) nomos, and the necessary actions to ensure its survival. It is the interdependence of meanings, as part of a unified whole

narrative, which makes groups and events more threatening to the adherent, as these are ultimately connected with the destruction of all meaning resulting from the projected future nomic. The framing of nomic challenges, and the emotional need for their resolution, i.e. the need to secure meaning and escape anomy, give RWE narratives their ultimate purpose.

Accordingly, there is, to a certain extent, some truth to the equation of experience and narration, in the sense that to describe the role of narratives in these cases of radicalisation is, in large part, to describe how radicalisation is experienced both *ontologically and emotionally*. What this heuristic appears to indicate, in the three cases analysed, is the extent to which both elements are fundamentally inseparable. Indeed, for those RWE the experience of radicalisation can be equated with the adherents' attunement to (what they come to see as their ultimate or essential) reality, simultaneously comprising of the way they orientate themselves, and the emotional states for which they seek resolution. Whilst it is true that narratives must be adopted, and do in fact exist before their adoption by adherents, in cases like those analysed, it is through the application of, and participation in, these narratives, that radicalisation takes place. More specifically, for those who follow this kind of radicalisation pathway, it is by applying RWE narratives that the de-pluralisation towards a complete rejection of the status quo takes place, which in turn morally obliges RWE to engage in acts of terrorism.

With the final certainty that the world is irredeemable, the only choice left for the adherent is seemingly heroic self-sacrifice, or to continue living in knowledge of their own moral inadequacy, as they despair at the looming destruction of their sacralised community. Evidently, each RWE narrative is different, to the degree that it is applied by different adherents. However, the RWE terrorists analysed above share a common narrative trajectory, in which de-pluralisation becomes total to a point where they

engaged in murder of what they saw as enemies of their nomos. Within such a dynamic, the sense of danger, and the scope of the nomic challenge, increases reciprocally alongside the adherents need to resolve it. By failing to find satisfactory democratic answers in the earlier stages of their radicalisation, each adherent drew increasingly radical implications which in turn needed increasingly drastic resolutions, resolutions which were not forthcoming from events as they unfolded within their pre-terroristic narrative framing. Instead, they received increasing validation that their worst fears were, in fact, the guiding principle for the current order; that the system was not broken, but purposefully engineered to destroy or subjugate white Europeans.

Here, the unfolding (and de-pluralising) dialectic, in which narratives and meanings evolve, appears more closely linked to the heroic double, and thus to the Jungian shadow which it projects onto the world. The need for heroic transformation through revolutionary violence rose in direct proportion to the essential malignancy of the current order, and its agents, concretised in the form of enemy out-groups. The latter of these was a necessary aspect of the adherent's efforts to make moral sense of reality through narration, and particularly, of their own fundamental incapacity to effect change in the world. Because they thought in increasingly genocidal terms, so, they believed, must their adversaries. To project such intentions onto these perceived adversaries is to participate, following Gadamer, in the same narrative/game structure, that one attributes wholly to the enemy, and not themselves. That it is believed to be their enemy's intentions, and ultimately, or originally, not their own, appears to a large degree to be what enables this RWE narrative to compel its adherent towards seemingly heroic and cathartic self-transformative violence.

Conclusion

The above analysis and discussion have sought to apply and refine the heuristic which was preliminarily outlined in the previous chapter, and to demonstrate the relevance of those perspectives and theories which it synthesised to understanding the role of narratives in RWE radicalisation. Through its investigation, it has thus sought to throw into relief the diverse conceptualisations and theories of some of the processes involved in forming a coherent worldview, overarching value system, and totalising ideology, which provide both the moral legitimisation and, in this context, the motivation, for acts of symbolic action against “the system.” Our analysis has concentrated on those aspects of narratives and narration that pertain most to the radicalisation process, and vice versa. In the last chapter, these areas of focus were presented through the consideration of five overlapping aspects of VE narration: integration and projection, increasing futural clarity and motivational/emotional impetus for action, constraining possibilities and enabling (compelling) action, and intentional states. All three manifestos gave a significant indication of how these interlocking aspects of VE narration manifested themselves from the point of view of each individual adherents’ RWE narrative, and how these contributed towards their embrace of a terrorist agenda for overturning the status quo by, carrying out violence against the perceive enemies of their sacred values

Integration and projection appear to be a core function of narratives within the radicalisation process of each case analysed. Indeed, radicalisation here might be considered *itself* a kind of extreme narrative integration, wherein adherents become totally consumed and occupied with the sacred values, and goals, defined by the overarching master narrative. What is important, however, is that whilst integration may, like radicalisation more broadly, happen in degrees, to the extent that the adherent is more or less conscious of, and consumed by, their respective master narrative, the master

narrative itself can evolve as part of the adherent's pursuit of absolute answers. Clearly, the quest for meaning and the quest to define, erect and defend a sacred canopy, an absolute nomos, were inseparable for all three terrorists. Krajčik described how he spent much of his adolescence "...cruising the Internet, picking up shit along the way and throwing it away just as quickly." (p. 10). Whilst much of Tarrant's radicalisation took place offline during his travels in Europe (albeit in relation to his online activity), it would appear that his feeling that *something* was wrong with the world he encountered evolved into the conviction that *everything* was wrong, and deliberately so: the product of antagonistic, conspiratorial forces. Western societies, he came to believe, were engineered towards the destruction of white Europeans, and this all-encompassing plot (in both the narrative and conspiratorial sense) served to integrate his previous experiences of failing to find solutions to his growing sense of despair. Indeed, the despair itself was a product of this continued failure, and his "revelation" served to make sense of these failures, in order to resolve this despair. That is, the perspective that there never was any peaceful solution, and the game is in fact rigged, is a form of narrative integration, which, through its Manichaeic revolutionary-apocalyptic framing, affords complete moral certainty and purpose in one's actions.

Integration and projection are two sides of the adherent's process of narratively making sense of the world, and in this context, are also intrinsic to increasing futural clarity (lucid projections of nomocide, and nomocidal intent), and projecting genocidal intentional states onto demonised others, and subsequently the emotional/motivational impetus for action (deontic violence). For all three terrorists, this dynamic was made explicit in their recounting of their respective radicalisation pathways, which culminated in the absolute certainty of two Manichaeic alternatives, i.e. genocide of the sacred group, or its palingenetic rebirth through a kind of counter-genocide. Anxiety surrounding how,

and why, the world seemed unamenable to providing a stable sacralised nomos turned in to the total negative certainty of fear, as they struggled to find the “courage to be” within their evolving life-narrative (which itself evolved in concert with the master narrative into which it was integrated).

As the narrative de-pluralised meaning towards a complete moral invalidation of contemporary society, it did so by concretising in the mind of the adherent both the future secular (racial) apocalypse to come and the forces of evil seeking to bring it about, in the form of out-groups essentialised as being intentionally and inherently malign. To concretise evil in such a way, is to provide the certainty required for the courage to be, as this effectively concretises the sources of nonbeing, or entropy, the overcoming of which is required for realising the final security of assured being, and the ultimate meaning it represents but only through the paradoxical guarantee of the ultimate self-negation of one’s own being: the testimony not just of the words of the manifesto, but the physical testimony of facing death as a martyr for the cause, of being sacrificed in order to awaken the slumbering community (in this case of whites) to the existential threat it faces. In Heideggerian terms, the being-in-the-world of each adherent became defined by the constant state of threat posed by the identified nomic enemies, through whom certain aspects of the world were made increasingly salient (e.g. non-whites, politicians, gay people, fanatics of non-Christian religions, mindless materialism etc.). Such enemies constitute, in large part, the negative aspect of the adherent’s “care,” and the animus instilled within it through which they project future narrative arcs and interpret unfolding events.

In each manifesto, terrorist action was made a moral necessity to the point of inevitability both by the certainty with which the increasingly integrated RWE master narrative emplotted their various antagonists into their Manichaeian narrative and by how

these were framed as being *intentionally* genocidal. That the structure of the present reality is made fundamentally genocidal by these antagonists, and that there is subsequently no alternative to violent revolution, means that such narratives severely constrain possibilities of gradualistic, democratic, future scenarios, with the effect of nullifying non-violent actions entirely, and compelling violence by framing it as both effective and necessary, if the existential threat is to be ended. Following Griffin's paradigm, the terrorist must separate themselves permanently from their former lives, by realising their heroic double, one totally dedicated to the overthrow of the status quo; an act of creative destruction which is demanded by a Manichean narrative, that makes this the only, and for that matter the ultimate, form of the courage to be. Indeed, to narrate such a narrative, and to internalise its implications, is to fully adopt the perspective of the heroic double, that is, the potential terrorist self, as this narrative is ultimately designed to make moral sense, both of, and for, the heroic redeemers, which these RWE aspired to become, licensing mass murder for the sake of a transcendent cause. Devoting, and even sacrificing, one's own life in the present, in order to save the future, is for these adherents the only way of assuring one's life has meaning, indeed the ultimate meaning, after having fully integrated oneself into such a de-pluralised narrative. It is perhaps better described as escaping the anomic present to realise the reenchanting future, or simply saving the possible future from the actual present, by devoting oneself entirely to the destruction of the present via the destruction of those groups deemed responsible for the genocidal status quo.

This is not to suggest that the narratives given by the RWE terrorists analysed above were somehow "organic", progressing as self-contained sequences or "steps" that were followed or taken by isolated individuals. On the contrary, their narratives evolved according to the answers they found to the questions they asked, and these in turn

precipitated further questions, which, in their case, led to a final unknown that only they themselves could answer resolutely; the question of whether they would find the existential courage to fulfil their sacred duty. However, the answers and questions they found, and through which they framed their life-narrative, largely already existed in the RWE narratives they encountered, mostly it would seem online. Whilst each life-narrative may have been highly personalised, in terms of individual circumstances, and even though the content and grievances of their master narratives may have differed (at least in terms of antagonists), they can be said to have shared a fundamental core narrative structure, one which each terrorist adopted and modified according to their individual experiences and influences.

Tarrant, for instance, was heavily impacted by his visits to Europe, in which he likely developed his “1300 year old” war narrative, as he toured Balkan battlefields of wars fought between the Ottoman empire, and various Christian kingdoms. Gendron, and Krajčák, by contrast, fully embraced a neo-Nazi master narrative which centred on a Manichean anti-Semitism for its chain of causality and apocalyptic scenario. Their root war metaphors significantly differ in this regard. However, they all share the same kind of absoluteness of racial jeopardy, and the absoluteness of needing to destroy and invert the status quo, in order to achieve palingenetic renewal, which in turn is viewed as absolutely the only means of averting such jeopardy and securing the purified racial nomos which they come to define as their sacred value, or ultimate concern. Moreover, this ultimate concern not only totally consumed them as a goal, but it also totally consumed the reality that they experienced, every aspect of which came to be defined in relation to this overarching struggle. That is, the events and people that make up the continuous “facticity” of life are made salient by their role in the ever-threatening causal structure of narrative, which, for the RWE discussed above, appeared to exert a

cumulative effect and the need for emotional and affective resolution in the form of self-transcending sacrificial violence.

In another sense, also, they do share the same RWE narrative through the sequence of one attacker inspiring the next. It would thus appear that the pre-existent RWE narratives are able to direct and further de-pluralise the pre-existent master narratives with which potential RWE are already integrated. They are able to do this where potential adherents come to find their life questions convincingly answered and, to a certain extent, their own non-extremist answers convincingly questioned by RWE narratives, as part of the dialectic of socialisation described by Berger (1967), and the questioning and answering inherent to narration according to Bruner (1987), or the dialogic nature of interpretation following Gadamer (2004).

It is this dialogical/dialectical aspect which provides RWE narratives with their supposed revelatory function. The “finality drive” of ideologies to de-contest meaning, as described by Freeden (2015), is here comprehensively served by narratives that call for the complete inversion of the world they depict, and of the nomocidal trajectory they project into the future. Fear towards this future, and a corresponding enmity to all those who would purportedly bring it about, is itself the final answer for these RWE to their search for meaning, as it is this fear that they believe will make society (particularly their in-group) accord with the terrifying “reality” revealed to them. That their revelation is believed to be wholly the truth, the culmination of their search for answers in the form of an incontestable knowledge, makes it seem all the more promising that they can replicate for society at large the radicalisation process they have themselves undergone. That is, it is because radicalisation (towards violent revolution) is felt as being so ultimately real, that RWE believe they can replicate this process for others.

Because RWE terrorists such as these feel certain, from their own experience, that radicalisation is not only possible, but, at some stage in the future, inevitable, for the wider in-group, they are consequently compelled to bring about this reality for others before it is too late. For such individuals, the increasing of fear (of the kind that defines their own life narrative), and the survival of the sacred community/restoration of the nomos, thus come to amount to the same thing. In order to shatter the reality of the present system, they must make this community fear it for what it is. So sure are RWE of the reality of the (as yet clandestine) race war that defines their narrative, that for them rhetoric and online agitation alone is ineffective, but by making the war explicit through their own violence and the anticipated government response, they are convinced that they can shatter the false reality of the status quo. It is therefore up to them to make the facts on the ground accord with the “ultimate reality” they know, with absolute faith, to be the true order of things, and thus awaken both sympathetic non-terrorist RWE, and the sacred community at large, to the direction of travel of the world, as projected by their Manichean race war narratives. Making this future explicit, so they believe, according to their own experience of the radicalisation process, and the revelatory sense of existential dread and duty which marked its culmination, will also serve to realise their sacred values (the security of the sacred community equated here with a white supremacist effervescence), by “exposing” their enemies desire to destroy the sacred values/community. Fear and salvation thus become equated, as does faith in the cause and fanatical racial enmity. The final and perquisite phase of this RWE narrative, it would seem, is the realisation not only of the impending fearful future, but the attendant fear that the sacred community, on whom the adherent’s meaning in life depends, will not also share this same fear before it is too late, i.e. a fear of a lack of fear, on the part of the community for whom the adherent is fearful. Proselytising the redemptive racial gnosis,

therefore, necessarily means inculcating fear. In Girardian terms, the fear, and the narrative in which it is embedded, are consciously “mimetic,” in that to internalise them is to desire their replication in pursuit of a consensus mobilised around the scapegoated enemy.

Because fear and the sacred values of RWE are so intertwined in such a way, there is a stronger argument for a more holistic understanding of narratives, ideology, and their role in motivating violence. Rather than being simply violently committed to abstractions (be they political concepts or propositions), it is perhaps better to view the beliefs which motivate RWE such as those analysed above, as being integrated, or emplotted, groupings of “lived-through meanings,” or concretised aspects of the world, within a mythic-temporal horizon characterised by a Manichean racial struggle for survival, which demands from adherents violent (racially purifying) palingenesis as the only means of averting racial nomocide. Indeed, what might typically be considered as abstract, or simply imagined, ideas (existing only in the mind of the individual), which mediate perception, are in fact narrated integrations of various aspects of reality. For those like the above RWE, these integrations have a malign or entropic causal role, functioning as living forces which animate the world, and structure how it is experienced. Consequently, it would seem that in these cases, narratives, and the ideological meanings contained within them, are encountered through “contact” with the world, following Dreyfus and Taylor, as part of their projection and articulation by RWE milieus. In *The Symbol Theory*, the sociologist Norbert Elias makes a congruent point, when trying to outline an ontology of knowledge. According to Elias, “Applied to concepts the conceptual polarity concrete/abstract is unusable. What can be observed are concepts representing a lower level of synthesis, others representing a higher level of synthesis.” (p. 59). By “synthesis,” Elias is here referring to the degree to which a concept, following

the evolution of its usage over time, has come to encompass an ever-widening range of distinct phenomena, which subsequently come to be viewed as partaking in the essential meaning of the concept. The concretised manifestations of the above RWE narratives (i.e. groups, events, or cultural trends), can thus be seen as synthesised forms, which all participate (in some cases literally as combatants), in the overarching integrated narrative of racial struggle. Ideological motivation does not, therefore, mean here a commitment to abstract notions, but rather the commitment to synthesised understandings of what is encountered/made salient, as part of one's being-in-the-world. RWE master narratives may provide the horizons within which this synthesis is performed. In the case of the above RWE narratives, adherents seek to make this synthesis explicit, beyond all doubt, to their sacred in-group. What they see as the forces of entropy working underneath the surface to destroy this in-group, must be forced into the open, in order to secure the palingenetic effervescence required to save them. Moreover, in these case, this synthesis, is a higher or "ultimate" reality (Berger 1967), in which all of their experiences are understood as particular instances. In Gadamerian terms, this synthesis may constitute the universal structure, which gives these instances their sense of reality and meaning. Such RWE thus seek to pierce through what they see as the façade of contemporary society, with this absolute "reality," by manifesting it in their actions.

The kind of synthesis of meaning described here could add to Moghaddam's staircase model of radicalisation,⁴⁷ in terms of explaining the progression from one stage to the next. Accordingly, the view of RWE radicalisation presented here is characterised by an increasing integration of one's life narrative into the kind of master narrative centred on a racial war of annihilation, depicted within manifestos analysed above. With this increased narrative integration, the individual's sacred values become progressively

⁴⁷ See Chapter 1, p. 34.

de-pluralised, following the dialectical dynamic of emotional cadences and the need for answers, which appears central to the psychology of narratives in this context. As this process continues, the concepts, or “lived through meanings,” that constitute the adherent’s understanding of their nomic struggle, becomes progressively “synthesised” in a similar sense to that used by Elias above. However, it is a negative synthesis, as what is being synthesised is an ever-increasing range of distinct phenomena, which come to be understood as decadence, manifestations of entropy, and/or the machinations of hostile groups (e.g. Jews in Krajčák’s and Gendron’s narratives). For adherents of this narrative, these supposed frontiers in the war for racial survival highlight those aspects of the present order which must be negated to such an overwhelming degree that they seek a complete transformation of the present, in order to provide a new beginning from which they can realise their redeemed future. For this kind of RWE terrorist, the point has been reached where their inability to resolve their struggle (both in terms of coping psychologically and bringing about their desired change) means they feel compelled to enact this war against every aspect of society that has been negatively synthesised in their understanding of the present, and its nomocidal trajectory. To them, they are the advanced guard, firing the first shots of, what has been (until their attacks and those of previous attackers who inspired them), a racial cold war. Carrying out such attacks will, they believe, create the necessary conditions for others to share in the RWE being-in-the-world, one that has synthesised a notion of the *sacred*, an “ultimate concern,” defined by a complete rejection of the status quo, in pursuit of a hyper-racialised/racially purifying palingenesis.

Scope and Limits of Implications

Before beginning our analysis of three RWE cases, the issue of context specificity and wider applicability was raised, with regards to the overall functions and limitations of qualitative analysis. Such a method of analysis is not designed for generalisable conclusions, certainly in terms of the individual phenomenological level, and so the narrative dynamics discussed here cannot be confused with a definitive account of the phenomenology of RWE narratives, as they lead up to acts of terrorism. Nevertheless, those narrative dynamics that have been analysed here, and proposed as having explanatory utility, can contribute to current understanding, and further research into, the role of RWE narratives in radicalisation (particularly towards terrorism). Discussing to what extent this contribution is possible, and what it could look like, however, is a necessary part of definitively concluding this particular study. In short, in order to evaluate the potential utility of the heuristic proposed and developed here, it will be necessary, as part of this, to attempt to evaluate just what potentially can be said, based on the above analysis.

Firstly, it is important to reiterate that the preliminary heuristic was intended as a kind of pro-forma for interpreting VE narratives, based on a synthesis of general theories of narration/interpretation, moral/motivational psychology and general theories of radicalisation. At this stage, the heuristic was only context specific in the sense that it was intended to be applied specifically to radicalisation pathways, as opposed, for instance, to general theories regarding the role of narratives in life. Having been applied in the foregoing analysis, the heuristic's theoretical framework can only be said to be developed with regards to those cases analysed. These represent particular instances where this framework has been argued to be useful, based on what it suggests about the role of narratives and narration in each of the selected cases. What these cases tell us

about how the heuristic *might* be refined to make it more context-specific, would of course, only be applicable to those other cases which closely resemble those analysed.

Similarly, these cases do not necessarily indicate what dynamics might be present in others, particularly in terms of individual emotional experiences. For instance, each of the narratives used in this study described a highly similar kind of ruminating, and despair, over the future, as part of a much more drawn-out search for answers. Moreover, each terrorists' despair seemed to drive the search for answers, which when "found," themselves seemed to exacerbate the despair further, due to their dreadful implications for the future, and the newly "realised" stark set of choices which seemed to consume each adherent's conscience. This drawn out and deeply introspective (in the sense of apparent "soul-searching") aspect of these narratives might not exist to the same degree in the cases of other RWE, and might not be a key driver of the narrative stages of their radicalisation pathway/ideological development. Certainly, the terrorists discussed would appear to fit more into the "caring-compelled" typology outlined by McCauley and Moskalenko (2014), due to the emphasis each placed on sacrifice for the survival of their in-group, the threat to which was the source of their despair, rather than the "disconnected-disordered" typology (though this might also be somewhat applicable, particularly in the case of Krajčák who claimed to have previously considered suicide). However, as has been discussed in previous sections, experiences of anomy, or a loss of significance, are not mutually exclusive with narratives of nomic threat, however mild or severe these may be in their pre-terroristic stages.

In any case, it would be wrong to suggest that the heuristic, as applied and refined in the three (largely similar) cases analysed here, could be used to make concrete a priori judgements about the role of narratives in other cases of RWE radicalisation. It would therefore also be wrong to suggest that the implications regarding what may be effective,

regarding counter, or de-radicalisation, for cases similar to these (i.e. what might have prevented Krajčák, Gendron, or Tarrant from committing acts of terrorism) would necessarily also be effective in other cases of RWE. Moreover, because of the differences between cases, in terms of both ideology, (e.g. narrative antagonists) and individual circumstances (e.g. personality factors), the idea that a heuristic applied and developed in three similar cases can predict the narrative dynamics for all RWE is unrealistic. Following our analysis, it is possible to argue that the narrative dynamics identified here *can* motivate terrorism, and *may* do so in a way similar to those cases discussed here, particularly if those other cases are also similar (i.e. a lone actor, who has engaged with these overlapping manifestoes, or the same overall master narrative, albeit with variations, and has undergone emotional turmoil, and a sense of nomic obligation as part of their life narrative evolution).

The narratives themselves, or the overarching narrative structure to which all three terrorists adhered (one of an escalating race war, perpetrated by a genocidal status quo), is of course fairly consistent with other RWE, both contemporary and historical, as well as amongst political milieus that do not explicitly advocate violence. Moreover, this historical continuity is also, of course, no accident, as the reference to “ZOG” testifies. Although anti-Semitic conspiracy theories have a long history, specific references to “Zionist Occupation Government” (ZOG) are relatively recent, and appear to have been originally popularised by North American RWE in the 1970s and 1980s, particularly by William Pierce’s (1978) novel, *The Turner Diaries*, depicting an apocalyptic race war against ZOG. Notably, although being outside an Anglophone context, Krajčák quoted William Pierce, recommending both his novels, *The Turner Diaries* and *Hunter*, (p. 62) and appeared to be acquainted with (particularly American) RWE lore when, in trying to persuade his readers of the inescapable nature of their situation, he asks them, “remember

Randy Weaver?” (p. 54).⁴⁸ This suggests that for some, the global and totalising nature of the ZOG race war narrative allows it to be used and adapted across borders, integrating RWE from various contexts into a significantly Americanised neo-Nazi framing of the world. In much more general historical terms, there is a clear continuity with Hitler’s Nazism, and the narrative outlined in *Mein Kampf*, which likewise held there to be a covertly waged race war, the outcome of which would necessitate either the destruction of the “Aryan” race, or its triumphal subjugation of (and later extermination of) its alleged racial enemies, and furthermore that the natural order of human existence was predominantly a struggle between races.⁴⁹

Whilst these are contemporary terrorists, whose narratives and ideologies are orientated towards the 21st century, many of the key aspects of these significantly overlap with Griffin’s (2017) heuristic of fascism, particularly with regards to their aims for an ultranationalist (specifically racially purifying) palingenetic revolution. Drawing on Griffin’s (2015) work regarding “fascist temporalities,” Wilhelmsen (2021) highlights the way in which contemporary RWE movements and non-violent “right-wing radical” movements situate themselves historically. Specifically, he argues that the ideologies of both neo-Nazi Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM), and right-wing populist Generation Identity (GI) groups, are temporalized in a particular way, one which is characterised by

⁴⁸ The 1992 Ruby Ridge incident in Idaho involved an eleven-day standoff between US authorities and a group of “white separatists” consisting of the Weaver family and a friend Kevin Harris, at their forest cabin. The incident began on August the 21st after a surveillance operation by the United States Marshall Service turned into a firefight, in which Randy Weaver’s 14-year-old son Sammy Weaver was killed, before Harris shot and killed Deputy Marshal William Francis Degan. During the subsequent siege of the Weaver’s cabin an FBI sniper shot and killed Randy Weaver’s wife Vicki Weaver (after the bullet had initially pierced Harris’s upper left arm), whilst she held her baby daughter. The siege ended on August the 31st after Weaver surrendered. However, the incident served to re-entrench the narrative amongst American RWE, and right-wing dissident movements more generally, that they were at war with the government, whom had no compunction about killing their families (Wright 2007 p. 139-165). It was also a significant event in the radicalisation of the Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh, and became (alongside his reading of *The Turner Diaries*, and the 1993 Waco siege) “emplotted” within his overall master narrative of an escalating war with the federal government (Giordano, 2003, p. 16).

⁴⁹ See Chapter 2, p. 109.

a present that has degenerated from a heroic past, and must subsequently be regenerated to realise an idealised future.

According to Wilhelmsen, there is a continuity between the NRM, who promote violence to bring about a revolutionary upending of the current order (which, similarly to other RWE discussed here, is described with reference to the ZOG conspiracy theory), and GI, who also seek to radically upend the status quo, and regenerate European societies, though by means of non-violent media campaigns designed to “...sow seeds of an ethno-regionalist world view that they hope will grow strong, and result in ensuing radical upheavals all over Europe.” (p. 291). The two movements differ significantly, particularly as GI seeks a democratic route to its desired future, without *initiating* a continent-wide ethnic/civilisational conflict, and the conflict it has in mind is one with Islam, and Muslim communities in Europe, rather than overcoming the supposed Jewish machinations of ZOG. However, notwithstanding their differences in terms of framing, both ideologies do hold there to be an underlying racial/ethno-cultural conflict developing in European societies. Indeed, Brenton Tarrant had made a sizable donation (€1,500) to the Austrian branch of GI (BBC 2019), suggesting a degree of affinity between his narrative framing, at least at one point in his radicalisation process, or life narrative, and GI’s framing of European societies.

Moreover, Zúquete’s (2018) extensive research into GI branches across Europe highlights that whilst GI groups do not advocate for violence, the possibility, indeed for many the perceived inevitability of violence, features heavily in their projections of the future. These Identitarians, “believe that Europe will go through a period of social convulsion and strife sometimes characterised as a “civil war” along cultural and ethnic lines.” (p. 324), suggesting perhaps that the zero-sum framing evident in three cases discussed above, reflects (albeit according to different formulations and in different

degrees) the narrative framing of other groups which might likewise be considered “contrast societies,” following Koehler’s (2015) paradigm⁵⁰. What this also suggests is that whilst, following Wilhelmsen, the allure provided by an idealised future, in which the sacred community is restored over and against the degenerated present, is a significant aspect of certain anti-status quo right-wing movements, so too is the causal certainty that the status quo itself is fundamentally unsustainable. Zúquete’s work is important in this respect, as it highlights the degree to which fear of an expected ethnic reckoning pervades many such right-wing milieus, which hold varying degrees of support for violence (including initiating violence). The role of projected futures, and the certainty attributed to them, would thus seem to be an integral part of how many contemporary RWE experience their values through their temporalisation within overarching master narratives. To what degree hope and fear for the potentially redeemed, or potentially doomed, community, motivates RWE terrorists may however vary significantly between cases. Nevertheless, taken together the research of both Wilhelmsen and Zúquete’s would suggest that narrative projections of a cataclysmic revolutionary future are, if not a ubiquitous feature of RWE terrorist motivations, certainly an integral aspect of a significant proportion of contemporary RWE narratives. What remains uncertain is the extent to which other RWE terrorists, not analysed here, struggle, in a similarly drawn out, introspective, and consciously articulated way, to apprehend and act on these projected narrative futures, as part of a highly emotional process of individual life narration.

Alongside this uncertainty is the more controversial issue of identifying, and by extension, defining, terrorism, and in particular what constitutes RWE terrorism, and where, and to what extent, can this be differentiated from might simply be considered

⁵⁰ See Chapter 1, p. 37.

violent hate crimes. For instance, in *The Science of Hate*, Williams (2021) discusses a range of psychological perspectives of hateful prejudice, with a particular view to explaining hate crimes. Notably, in relaying the story of one hate crime, in which Adam Purinton shot and killed Srinivas Kuchibhotla in a restaurant in Olathe, Kansas, during 2017, Williams refers to Purinton as a terrorist (p. 12). The attack was pre-meditated and Purinton had specifically targeted Kuchibhotla and his friend because their ethnicity,⁵¹ having noticed them visiting the same restaurant on at least one previous occasion (p. 14). Before retrieving his firearm from his vehicle Purinton had an altercation with the pair, in which he asked if they were in the US legally, used racial slurs and called them terrorists. (p. 12). Whilst the attack was clearly motivated (later by Purinton's own admission) by hateful prejudice, this on its own might not qualify it as an act of terrorism, depending on the criteria.

The differences between expressional violence carried out without much regard for intended political consequences, and more instrumental violence designed to further an articulated cause, mean that explanations orientated around the latter might be ill suited to the former. However, both kinds of violence, or perhaps just aspects of similar violence, may also be difficult to disentangle, and may both be present to varying degrees in different cases. Whilst many or most acts of terrorism might also be hate crimes, of one kind or another, not all hate crimes are necessarily acts of terrorism, and certainly the rationale behind Purinton's attack, and any intended effects it might have, are of a significantly different kind from those of the terrorists analysed in this study. Consequently, the heuristic developed here, with its emphasis on the future projections and the emotional dialectic of each adherent's life narrative, would likely be severely limited in cases such as these. However, this does throw up the controversial debates

⁵¹ Whilst the pair were Indian nationals working in America on a H-1B visa, Purinton had mistakenly believed they were Iranian (BBC 2017).

surrounding how terrorism is defined, what it should include and what it should not, particularly with regards to the necessity of an identifiable political cause, the absence of which *might* be used to disqualify violence motivated mostly by an individual's hateful prejudice of certain groups, without regard for any wider political, or nomic project.⁵² Hate crimes, even those which border on terrorism, may be more effectively explained with a lesser emphasis on narratives, or with a heuristic of narratives that has a different emphasis to the one outlined here.

Needless to say, whilst the kind of RWE master narrative analysed here seems to have a significant degree of core stability amongst adherents across time and space, this does not mean that it is experienced uniformly by all adherents. For some, the prospect of a perceived heroic struggle against a hated evil enemy may exert more influence than the despair of a dreaded future outcome, of what is perceived to be a genocidal present. Likewise, it is unlikely that every adherent undergoes, to the same degree, as self-conscious and as comprehensive a narrative development and ideological transformation, including those studied here. The analysis of these cases has sought to throw into relief those narrative dynamics outlined in the preliminary heuristic, as they pertain to three specific examples. The analysis has sought to refine the understanding of how such dynamics manifest according to the individual cases analysed. These refinements, and the conclusions reached by the analysed cases, should only be understood as an attempted demonstration of the utility of the heuristic outlined in this study, one that can provide the basis, or a comparative “jumping off point,” for analysing and understanding other cases

⁵² Sedgewick (2010) has outlined the debates surrounding the utility of different approaches to defining terrorism, i.e. what he distinguishes as “...the general philosophical, the analytic, and the official” (p. 482). However, for the purpose of our discussion, it is notable that section 1 (1, c) of the Terrorism Act (2000) defines Terrorism as the use or threat of action where – “the use or threat is made for the purpose of advancing a political, religious, racial, or ideological cause.”

of RWE terrorism. In other words, the study has sought to demonstrate the utility of this heuristic in the cases analysed.

What utility it has, in terms of the specific narrative dynamics it seeks to throw into relief, in cases with significantly different individual circumstances, is yet to be explored. It has been argued that it is useful here, and may therefore have useful implications for radicalisation in cases that relate to these. To what extent it has utility to others is inevitably an open question. However, where there are different cases that are not so well assimilated into this heuristic, then this might suggest the need to create typology which itself can be useful, to the extent it creates a more nuanced and accurate understanding of radicalisation, and possibly the kind of measures needed to counter it in different cases.

Clearly, radicalisation is a multi-causal phenomenon, involving a range of factors spanning a range of discrete specialist disciplines and research areas. This much can be gleaned not only from the circumstantial differences between individual terrorists and their respective ideologies/movements, but also by the various theories/models of radicalisation offered by researchers, each with their own areas of focus, terminology, and proposed causal mechanisms. Nevertheless, the heuristic which this dissertation has set out to construct seeks to add another dimension, that is, *the way these various external and inner drivers are integrated in narratives*. Because narratives are at the nodal point of personality factors, environmental factors, and social context etc., they give interpretive form to the individual's experience as part of the very act of making sense of such experience. Based on the above analysis, narratives, are thus not just one isolated ingredient in driving radicalisation, they are the specific recipe, or pattern, by which other ingredients become enmeshed within the individual's perspective of themselves, reality, good and evil.

Implications for Counter-Radicalisation

Having developed and applied a narrative-based heuristic for understanding RWE radicalisation and the rationale of RWE violence, it is now possible to discuss how this might inform measures, or programmes, aimed at counter-radicalisation, particularly those which come under the rubric of “counter-narratives.” A key implication of the heuristic developed here, is that, while they may be rigid and uncompromising, the kind of RWE narratives that motivated the terrorists discussed above, are far from being clichéd, mindlessly adopted, and existentially empty ideological formulas, to which adherents pay lip service, or which they invoke mechanically as excuses for their acts. Nor do they resemble an unchanging catechisms or a static creed. On the contrary, in the process of being internalised by adherents in their struggle to interpret the world, these RWE narratives become dynamically and creatively reshaped and reformulated, to articulate the diagnosis of what is wrong with the specific status quo being experienced, the existential threat it poses to a sacred community, and concurrently the idealised nomos threatened by that status quo. At the end of this process, what is finally internalised, is a “heroic” understanding of the act of symbolic violence to be carried out against “the system,” in defence of this community. Radicalisation, in this sense, means acquiring a perspective that has evolved through narration of oneself (including one’s previous ideological perspectives), and the wider world. To apply Dreyfus and Taylor’s (2015), “contact theory,” such a perspective is one that has undergone significant changes and hardening in the process of narration, to reach the point where terrorism is viewed as morally necessary and effective with a degree of fixity and fanaticism necessary to break social taboos against killing and self-destruction. This would suggest that these narratives, and the heroic doubles which they can generate, are as much encountered through

“contact” with reality, as they are developed introspectively by the individual. Indeed, both the “reality” with which RWE believe themselves to be confronted, and their introspective “soul-searching,” are here interdependent aspects of their being-in-the-world.

Accordingly, those seeking to counter radicalisation, and particularly to combat RWE ideologies in the form they manifested for the terrorists discussed above, would likely do well to consider the phenomenon from outside of a Cartesian understanding, which holds that beliefs are *mediated* by narratives, in order to address emotions. Rather, an approach that recognised emotions as inhering in the act of interpretation and articulating themselves within the adherents *embodied* experience of *being-in-the-world*, would help to clarify the relationship between narratives, ideology, and emotions, specifically, those kinds of emotion which, according to McCauley and Moskalenko’s (2017, p. 209) “two Pyramids paradigm” are core drivers of VE. It is significant in this context that both authors argue that affects (emotions, feelings, and passions) drive radicalisation as a process largely independently of ideology.⁵³ Instead, by accounting for the interdependence, and mutual reinforcement, of emotion and ideology within narratives, the question of whether one is putting the ideological cart before the emotional horse can be seen for the misleading dichotomy that it is. Certainly, at least, this would be an implication regarding the RWE terrorists discussed above.

Following the heuristic proposed here, what specifically needs countering are those perspectives by which certain aspects of the world are made salient in a threatening way which, left unchecked, can lead some to seek not just solace but existential fulfilment in the pursuit of violent revolution. However, it needs to be recognised that this salience is an inseparable part of a whole narrative, one which, in the case of the RWE terrorism

⁵³ See chapter 1 p. 32.

described here, projects into the future the looming catastrophe of white genocide. Indeed, one of the main contributions of Gadamer's hermeneutics to this heuristic is the interdependency of the parts and the whole for their meaning. It is fundamentally a way of "caring" for (to borrow again from Heidegger), and attuning oneself towards the world, which leads such adherents to reject, in total, the plurality and multivalence of modern societies, and which reduces their scope for action to an all or nothing, absolutist choice between complete anomy and nomic redemption. Challenging how the world is made salient by a person, particularly in terms of emotional salience, must therefore be carried out in concert with challenging the projected apocalypse, and zero-sum framing, which inhere in these RWE narratives.

However, to make this challenge effective, it is necessary to recognise that belief in this apocalypse is itself dependent on the projection of evil intentional states onto allegedly essentially malign out-groups. This aspect becomes particularly clear in those narratives, which hold "the" Jews in the form of "ZOG" to be the archenemies of white Europeans, though a similar dynamic also exists in Tarrant's narrative, which attributes genocidal/nomocidal intentions to Muslims. In both cases, the root-war metaphor relies on root war enemies, whose intentions are viewed as inherently antithetical to the survival of white Europeans. As argued above, that such groups are depicted as intentionally threatening, serves to increase the sacredness of the adherents' in-group, which in turn inspires in them greater devotion and propensity for terrorism, on the part of adherents. Because projecting intentional states seems to be the primary mode of identifying the survival of the adherent's in-group with the destruction of these outgroups, challenging these projections should be a key aspect of any counter-narrative.

Importantly, this does not necessarily mean attempting to portray all those who could be considered members of these groups as essentially good, and replicating the all-

or-nothing thinking but in another direction. To do so would likely be unconvincing and counter-productive, particularly if the adherent's own narrative holds that the non-adherents of their own mythical community think in naïve uncritical terms and need to be made alive to the existential threat faced by their kind. Rather, it would require complicating any attempt to essentialise whole groups per se, particularly where these have a long and complicated history. For instance, it might be useful to emphasise the degree to which Jews themselves differ in views, when it comes to Zionism (in the none "ZOG" sense) and Jewish identity. Indeed, the often bitter divide outlined in Goodhart's (2017) *The Road to Somewhere* between (typically more parochial/nationalist) "somewheres," and (typically more cosmopolitan/internationalist) "anywheres" is one that exists in many communities in the wider context of globalisation, and (post?) modernity. De-radicalisation programmes might thus do well to focus on persuading RWE adherents that it is not just a divide that has been engineered to the detriment of their sacralised community. Moreover, that it is a truly global divide should be emphasised in a way that encourages greater solidarity with the rest of (non-white) humanity whom they perceive as being radically different and threatening (ironically, by projecting their own violent hyper-racialised thinking).

Most importantly, what needs to be addressed, as part of the wider need for meaning, is the desire to heroically face the moral demands of the world into which one is (in Heidegger's terminology) "thrown", and the subsequent need to project heroic narratives. Such narratives arguably function primarily to provide adherents with the "courage to be" by concretising the threats to their sacred values, in the form of a purposefully anti-nomic system whose overthrow demands of them readiness to sacrifice themselves for the higher cause of their ethnic community. Consequently, what is needed is for the adherents of these terroristic narratives to not only find alternative narratives for

their “courage to be,” but, as part of this, to consciously recognise this aspect of their inner needs. Acknowledging the desire to be heroic and find meaning, in spite of the perceived anomy of the status quo, should involve acknowledging the shadow side of this desire, particularly in terms of how the use of Manichean narratives can both exacerbate despair, and undermine any chance of the adherent’s aspired-for heroism, by providing instead its pretence, in a grossly simplified form. Indeed the systematic failure of past attempts to change the status quo through terrorist acts inspired by a wide range of causes and creeds should be included on the counter-radicalisation “curriculum”.

Coming to such a realisation, particularly in terms of reducing commitment to violence, is something that previous VE have in fact, to a significant extent, undergone as part of their own de-radicalisation pathways. Kruglanski, *et al*, (2018), for instance, highlighted ideological disillusionment as a key driver of de-radicalisation, particularly disillusionment with the use of violence, which comes to be viewed as immoral and counterproductive. They cite research by Neumann, (2015) which found that many IS fighters left the group, in part, because they could not justify the group’s killing of other Muslims, especially non-combatants. Similarly, research by Altier, *et al* (2017) which studied the autobiographical accounts of eighty-seven VE committing violence for a wide range of causes found that 60% of those extremists studied became disillusioned with the morality and effectiveness of their respective group’s strategy. More recently, a study by Kruglanski, Webber and Koehler (2020) which interviewed former German neo-Nazis to investigate their pathways into and out of VE, found ideological disillusionment to have affected 77.8% of interviewees (p. 163). Specifically, several interviewees identified the real-world ineffectiveness, and moral unacceptability of violence and other forms of extremist activism as causing their disillusionment with RWE ideology and groups. (p.166-7).

Given these findings, it is notable that all three of the terrorists analysed in this study lament what they see as the nihilism of the contemporary West, whilst simultaneously calling for the murder of innocents, including children. Evidently, they saw no contradiction themselves, only the greater good of their own ends, which to them, justify any means. That is not to say, however, that highlighting this contradiction is of no persuasive use for the purposes of de-radicalisation. By using what they perceived to be revolutionary, idealistic violence, in order to secure their sacred values, which had themselves previously been radically de-pluralised to the point of necessitating murder, all three terrorists, it might be argued, traded one nihilism for another, or at least, the real or perceived nihilism of modernity for the actualised nihilism of their actions. Rather than effecting any meaningful generative change, through their decision to carry out violence, they have effectively gone to war with all of reality, in an attempt to dissolve its present form, and by doing so, have ended up in a state of moral dissolution themselves, as would-be agents in the process of attempting to institute a new order. That is, in trying to decide their fate on what they perceive to be their own terms, and apprehend reality at its most fundamental level, these RWE have lost the autonomy to act effectively. In particular, by participating in violence in the enactment of their reductive and to a large extent emotionally and existential self-serving narrative fictions, they have, because of the totality of their de-pluralisation, become severely distanced from the reality they seek to change. In pursuing their narratives to their logical conclusions, they have ironically achieved the opposite of what they believed their narrative afforded them; an optimal grip on reality, and the opportunity to find transcendence within their own heroic avatar.

Whilst communicating this line of argument may not be straightforward, those engaged with communicating with potential or actual terrorists with a view to de-radicalising them, might at least find some fertile ground for empathetic interaction by

recognising the power of the will to know reality and act according to a higher moral imperative, which these RWE narratives seek to fulfil, no matter how perverse such ideals may seem in the light of the atrocities which they have been prepared to commit. However, this “will” should be utilised and cultivated, and the psychological force which drives it rechannelled, by emphasising the need for any potential VE to enact the Ancient Greek aphorism, “know thyself,”⁵⁴ particularly regarding how the desire to heroically save what is sacred can have catastrophic unintended consequences, largely because of the very strength of this desire, and the individual’s subsequent capacity for self-deception tends to override both normal societal moral principles and rational evaluations of the likely results of violent interventions in reality. Indeed, the very existential mindedness, or “care”, for having a normative-ontological “optimal grip” on one’s life as part of an integrated narrative of the world around them, i.e. the desire to make (moral) sense of one’s “thrownness,” is precisely the aspect of VE motivation that ought to be leveraged against the fanatical mind-set into which adherents have “argued” themselves through the construction of their Manichaeian moral universe with a view to dissuading them from unrealistic, de-pluralised, and self-destructive narrative frames and solutions. In other words, following the heuristic presented here, and the above cases to which it was applied, would suggest that effectively countering RWE narratives may mean enabling adherents to triumphantly overcome their current framing, just as they perhaps believed themselves to have triumphantly overcome their previous frames, which had hitherto allowed for non-terroristic solutions to their existential dilemma, or “thrownness,” before this had become radically de-pluralised. Giving oneself over to reality, as depicted

⁵⁴ Notably, alongside “Know thyself,” at the forecourt to the Ancient Greek Temple of Apollo at Delphi, were inscribed the aphorisms “Nothing in excess,” and “Certainty brings ruin,” (Szabo, 2008, p. 8) all of which are deeply relevant in this context, and if brought to the fore effectively, may significantly increase the effectiveness of any counter-narrative/radicalisation intervention which aims to re-pluralise the adherent’s perspective.

by the terrorist narrative, should be seen for what it is, a form of self-surrender to a deeply distorted ersatz sacred canopy, one which has been projected to serve the adherents' need to feel they can heroically transform themselves and achieve both agency and self-transcendence by saving their sacred community, and redeeming their world; but through inhumane acts which in fact do neither, and help no one.

Potential Application in Contemporary Interventions

In terms of what this might look like in practice, there several potential applications, depending on the degree and kind of radicalisation, as well as the setting (e.g. inside or outside of prison). Clearly, as discussed above, the potential utility of this approach to understanding narratives in radicalisation will vary from case to case. Therefore, the heuristic itself would need to be applied to radicalised *individuals*, and their narratives, narrated in their own terms as honestly as they can be (where this is possible). Whilst the ideological framing and narrative dynamics identified or inferred from one individual, or a group of similar individuals, may have significant relevance to many other cases, this cannot be guaranteed. Certainly, there is no guarantee that other individuals that adhere to the same, or similar narrative, will recognise the same radicalisation pathway, and (particularly in terms of emotions and “realisations”) the same self-narration as that experienced by others. To assess the relevance of this heuristic to an *individual's* case it would thus be necessary to try and apply it to their VE narrative, and as much as possible to their radicalisation process, after which point, it may be possible to address their narrative according to the holistic moral and motivational understanding proposed here.

Additionally, this emphasis on being individual-specific, highlights another key factor in radicalisation that might complicate de-radicalisation efforts, namely the role of groups and networks. Although the three terrorists analysed here acted alone, and indeed

described their radicalisation pathways (however accurately or inaccurately) in largely individual terms, with little reference to specific identifiable groups, they nevertheless were significantly influenced by the online networks (primarily it would seem on 4chan) with whom they seemed to find common cause. Moreover, many terrorists and potential terrorists (including RWE), are members of organised groups, and often have face to face contact with their radicalised network. Whilst this *might* not be as much the case in prisons (notwithstanding the issue of prison radicalisation), existing friendships and other relationships may still exert a powerful ideological influence over offenders after their release. It is also worth remembering that networks of like-minded others are crucial components in radicalisation theories/models, such as SQT, the DAM, and UIT, as outlined in chapter one's literature review. Fermenting disagreement with, and potential ostracism from, an individual's close network, is perhaps a de-facto implication of de-radicalisation, adding another layer of difficulty to the task of addressing RWE narratives. Although, this may vary from case to case, depending on the closeness of group ties, and the threshold for being considered a "sell out" or a "traitor," e.g. does this include simply repudiating violence, or ceasing to castigate certain groups wholesale ? Or, is there perhaps a workable level of agreeing to disagree within a given network. This latter point highlights a wider, and somewhat more controversial issue, regarding de-radicalisation in general, which Khalil, Zeuthen, and Mardsen (2023) describe in terms of the relationship between de-radicalisation and "disengagement" (from violence), specifically the extent to which these should be treated as separate objectives, and how much the latter can be truly achieved without the former. Often, as the authors highlight, an individual endorses armed struggle, following a VE ideological narrative, whilst not partaking in said struggle personally, often for personal reasons (e.g. familial responsibilities, or pressure of ostracism). In such cases the individual may be disengaged from violence, though not de-

radicalised in a meaningful sense. From the perspective of preventing future engagement in violence, this is probably unsatisfactory for many.

Nevertheless, disengagement (particularly as defined as long-term desistance from terrorism, or terrorism related offences) would seem a natural priority for interventions, with de-radicalisation being one route, albeit the most important, or for many, the minimum necessary for achieving this. Differentiating disengagement from de-radicalisation in this way would, however, seem to stress the degree to which the latter refers to change in attitudes and beliefs *about the world*, as well as *about how a person believes they should act in it*, which raises the somewhat more thorny issue of what constitutes de-radicalisation. Thorny, that is, at least to the same degree as defining what it means to be radicalised (as mentioned briefly above). As the authors note, this aspect of de-radicalisation can raise legitimate fears surrounding attempts to impose, or too bluntly circumscribe, what is “correct” political or religious thought. (p. 13). That said, basing what constitutes de-radicalisation, around a “...sustained reduction in/end to sympathy for ideologically justified violence” (p.15), is perhaps the most straightforward way of tethering the term to the desired outcome of disengagement. Moreover, where this disengagement is from identifiable crimes (i.e. violence or terrorism), then one might even argue that this is the most “objective,” or “non-partisan,” way of orientating the aims of de-radicalisation efforts as can be practically expected.

Although, even this might not be that so straightforward, and therefore practical to implement, in practice. For instance, there may be cases where an adherent of a particular narrative comes to reject violence as ineffective or inhumane, though still retains the belief that either all, or most, members of a particular group are seeking on some level the destruction of their own in-group. Such an adherent may be considered de-radicalised from the perspective of disengagement, but, if the looming existential threat

from the perceived antagonists, *whom they are still sure are their antagonists*, remains stable, for how long does their willingness to disengage in violence also remain stable ? And how can one be sure ? These questions are further complicated if the adherents themselves know the threshold for being considered disengaged, and, following the cynicism to which VE narratives often give licence, they mislead others about their ideological beliefs, regarding the use of violence for the “greater good” of their cause.

It is perhaps impossible to have absolute certainty when judging these issues in real world cases, with the final arbitrator being inevitably fallible humans relying on their interactions with, and experiences, of those whom they seek to de-radicalise. Whilst still ultimately subject to the honesty or dishonesty of the adherent, this does, however, perhaps point to the potential utility of the approach, which the heuristic proposed here seeks to provide; namely that of understanding the interaction of ideological narratives and the engagement in, or support for, terrorist violence. Because individual cases have their individual circumstances (and for that matter individual, or individually rendered narratives), and will therefore each need to be understood according to an individualised analysis, this heuristic *may* be apposite in those cases where ideological narratives, and the conscious drawing out, or projection of, narrative conclusions are central to adherent’s engagement in, or justification for, violence. However, before arguing in more detail why this may be, it will first be useful to discuss Khalil, Zeuthen, and Mardsen’s (2023) arguments surrounding de-radicalisation more broadly.

Based on their research into various de-radicalisation programmes, the authors recommended a multi-tiered approach, which prioritises disengagement above de-radicalisation, though recognising the latter as an important “intermediate impact” of any intervention. To achieve both disengagement and de-radicalisation, the authors outline five “outcomes” as prerequisites for which such interventions should aim, which

focus on networks, identity, ideology, needs, and well-being. For example, to address networks, they advocate as an outcome, "...Reduced ties to malign influencers & enhanced ties to prosocial alternatives," with "...Family liaisons, relationship support, recreational activities & mentorship," as example activities, whilst for ideology they argue for an, "...Enhanced willingness to question beliefs that legitimise & justify violence," with "...Religious gce, civic education, critical thinking training & mentorship," as example activities. (p. 15). Evidently, any heuristic for understanding ideological narratives would be more relevant in the latter outcome than the former. However, because this heuristic emphasises a more holistic approach to understanding ideological/narrative understandings of the world, one which seeks to integrate moral and motivational psychology, it would perhaps be more apposite for this kind of multi-tiered approach, because it explicitly integrates ideology with those other aspects of radicalisation, which the authors use as the basis for their five outcomes. Particularly relevant are the desired outcomes, of diminishing "...salience of social identities associated with violence," and "...improved psychological wellbeing" (p. 15), as these may well be inexorably bound up with an individual's life narrative of themselves, and the overarching master narrative of reality within which they situate themselves. Certainly, this was argued to be the case for the three terrorists analysed in this study.

Accordingly, to employ the heuristic and attendant moral/motivational approach proposed here, would mean seeking to understand, and to a large extent address, issues of social identities and psychological wellbeing, as part of their VE narrative, including how they see their lives as part of it. That is, these narratives, and the process of narration, should be aired in a way that fosters self-reflection regarding the kinds of existential and nomic needs, and the kinds of responses to such needs, which have underpinned this study's heuristic. This means taking the existential and emotional experience of holding

VE narratives seriously, by discussing their grievances, and particular narrative frames (especially those which generate a commitment to violence), from a perspective that is more specific to the experience of radicalisation (or at least of the kind of radicalisation described in this study). More specific, that is, because it takes a more existentially anthropocentric approach, in focusing on the human need to find meaning, and the corresponding need/desire to know reality, and to be heroic in the face of perceived nomic disintegration.

Though this somewhat more philosophical approach, and the kind of language used therein, might not be as consonant with other, more materially focused therapeutic approaches and nomenclature, which have perhaps more straightforwardly measureable goals (e.g. concerning wellbeing, and “prosocial alternative networks”), it nevertheless pertains directly to the primary outcome of disengagement from violence. Furthermore, because it addresses questions surrounding what it means to be human, and what is good, it may solicit greater engagement from adherents, as, by definition, it seeks to address that which they value, and how they “care” (in the Heideggerian sense) for the future. This, of course, does not mean attempting to give in-depth lectures on Heidegger or Tillich, rather, it means a rechannelling of the moral and motivational drives through reflective dialogues, which, following the above arguments, seek to have RWE narratives articulated in the context of nomic striving, or the wider human desire to be heroic, and find symbolic immortality in the form of higher values (again it is not necessary to use this exact terminology). Through such dialogues, the adherent would potentially be able to recognise the self-destructive, and self-defeating, nature of terroristic narratives, and understand (re-understand?) their meanings, as part of the broader phenomena of fear, and the desire to secure ultimate meaning resulting in the ultimate undoing of the adherents. Clearly, however, where an individual does have close ties to their ideological

network, particularly where this involves a high degree of emotional dependency, and is a significant source of life's meaning, then this will have to be addressed *in combination* with approaches that deal with narratives and narration.

Khalil, Zeuthen, and Mardsen (2023) identify mentorship as an example activity for achieving three of their five desired outcomes (those concerning networks, identity and ideology), and given the dialogical/dialectical nature, not only of this heuristic's theoretical framework, but also in the kind of intervention required to address RWE narratives *within the context of their moral and motivational aspects*, mentorship would thus seem to be the most appropriate context for applying the heuristic. Mentorship aimed explicitly at addressing that which adherents care for, and which acknowledges the moral feeling behind much of their radicalisation, would potentially also contribute towards establishing the kind of trust and rapport, which the authors "...routinely identified as a critical determinant of programme success" (p. 16) in their review of contemporary research. Though the aim is to bring about a change in their narrative or narratives of the world, in the direction of opposing violence, and opposing the scapegoating of whole groups, this approach necessarily means appealing to their moral and motivational aspirations, as part of the narrative processes by which they seek to understand reality.

In the UK "Intervention Providers" (IPs) are tasked with delivering "ideological and theological mentoring" to those identified as being at risk of radicalisation or terrorism, as part of the "Channel" process, which is aimed at "...providing support at an early stage to people who are at risk of radicalisation, supporting terrorism or committing terrorist acts," *not including those convicted of terrorism offences* (Home Office 2023). Outside the Channel process, IPs are also tasked with delivering Desistance and Disengagement Programmes (DPPs), to those convicted of terrorism related offences. These involve, "...a range of intensive, tailored interventions including mentoring,

theological, ideological and practical support, working to reduce the offending risk through direct engagement with the offender.” (Home Office 2023). The kind of moral/motivational narrative-focused approach to dialogue and understanding suggested here, could be applicable to both Channel mentoring and DPPs, though given that the above heuristic, and the radicalisation theories on which it draws, are primarily aimed at describing a *commitment to violence*, it may be more suited to the latter.

In addition to DPPs (which are run by the Home Office), the Prison and Probation Service also run the Healthy Identity Intervention (HII), for those convicted of terrorism or terrorism related offences. HII consists of, “...one-to-one programme aimed at addressing the psychosocial factors influencing individual engagement and involvement in extremism” (Keane, *et al*, 2023). Notably, HII is supposedly “...not ideologically based or intended to re-educate participants in a particular set of beliefs or doctrine,” (National Offender Management Service, 2013, p. 4) though is still intended to, “... encourage and support participants in reconsidering and re-examining their engagement and/or identification with an extremist group, cause or ideology,” (p. 5) and is explicitly aimed at, “...individuals who committed their offence/s because of their engagement and or identification with a specific extremist group, cause or ideology.” (p. 7). Here, it would appear that “not being ideologically based,” is intended to mean, not attempting to impart a new specific set of (perhaps similarly doctrinaire) beliefs, in order to replace extremist ones. This is understandable, but HII must *necessarily* be ideologically orientated, to the extent it is belief orientated, particularly where these beliefs pertain to a commitment to violence, at least that is, where these beliefs motivated the participants to commit their offences. Naturally, this does, of course, circle back to the recurring issue, of how one is defining ideology (particularly how narrowly or broadly), something which has been a frequent theme, indeed a seminal driver, of the heuristic outlined in this study. What *is*

important though, is that, according to this heuristic, addressing psychological factors, and addressing ideological beliefs, is something which should probably be done in tandem, as part of an overall understanding of the narrative dynamics involved in radicalisation (at least in cases like the three discussed above).

As part of their evaluative research of HII, (Keane, *et al*, 2023) highlight that “identity transformation” appears key to disengagement and desistance, based on much of the relevant literature. (p. 39). Using both qualitative and quantitative studies, the authors findings indicated some success from the HII amongst the research participants/cases, though they note that this does not demonstrate causality, given the limitations of their study. Amongst the qualitative findings, was the importance of having a good relationship with facilitators for achieving participant engagement, and the role of “pro-social life commitments” in redefining identity (e.g. family and work). Disillusionment with VE groups, ideologies, and causes, also played an important role for some, with disillusionment with violence being a key factor (p. 33-4). This was evidenced by one individual who, “...noted that those offending and acting off their own backs did not help the international plight for which they were fighting,” and another who commented that, “...in spite of their intentions, their actions did far more harm than good.” (p. 32).

All of the above aspects of desistance and disengagement pertain to the narrative processes discussed in this study, particularly where this involves the overlapping areas of life narratives, narrative identity, and self-development/understanding. Indeed, that life narratives and one’s identity, with the moral obligations these imply, are all intertwined aspects of self-narration, and the overarching master narratives used to structure this narration, is a core tenet of the heuristic outlined here. Specifically, it is the process of narration which fundamentally is underpinned by a reappraisal of one’s beliefs about

oneself, and others (including outgroups), as well as possibilities for the future, which is described in the context of radicalisation. The heuristic, and its moral and motivational approach, thus appears highly consonant with the goals, and much of the practical emphasis, of HII. What this heuristic might add to the implementation of HII, or certain sections thereof, is an approach to articulating and understanding VE narratives in a way that allows them to function as a kind of mirror into their moral and motivational aspects, which, however genuinely felt by the adherent, ultimately become their own undoing. That is, such narratives should be examined by adherents, in order for them to (re)examine the very process of narration by which they became adopted, and the moral, motivational, and existential psychological strivings which underpinned them, and which may not have been fully reflected upon by the adherent.

It is *through* their own life narratives, as part of their wider VE master narratives, that adherents can reappraise their self-understanding, including how their need to make moral sense of reality, and secure a meaningful world, can become a self-destructive pursuit of what Astell (2017) described as an “ersatz” kind of transcendentalism, and a corresponding ersatz kind of “heroism.” The idea being that, whereas before, their narratives constituted their “contact” with reality, to recapitulate Dreyfus and Taylor’s (2015) theory, these are now used to make greater contact with themselves, and the very process of narration itself, as part of the wider need for meaning, with the attendant risks of totalising fanaticism involved therein. Indeed, this greater introspective contact ought to be framed, as itself, a necessary part of the wisdom required for effective moral agency.

However, it is important to reiterate that this way of approaching the role of narratives in radicalisation is inevitably more appropriate to some cases than others. Evidently, the kind of approach just described presupposes the integral role of moral, motivational, and existential needs and narration, as drivers of radicalisation. It is

therefore perhaps more relevant, *and potentially limited*, to those which might fall under the “caring-compelled” typology outlined by McCauley and Moskalenko (2014), or perhaps, even a specific subsection of these, who follow a radicalisation pathway significantly similar to the three cases analysed above, in terms of their narrative dynamics. Although, in those cases in which it is relevant, for HII it might help provide a more holistic approach, that fosters a redefinition of identity, greater self-understanding, and an attendant resistance to totalising VE narratives, as part of modules and dialogues aimed at questioning narratives, and the commitment to violence.

Moreover, because this heuristic can be applied to different cases, with different narrative arcs, sacred values, demonised out-groups, and grievances, it may offer some scope for adaptability. Notwithstanding the issues concerning the potential scope of its implications discussed above, this might allow it to be incorporated into tailoring modules and dialogues to be more individual-specific. Though again, it should be stressed that what scope there is for adaptability might be limited, by the degree to which a participant has undergone a radicalisation pathway similar to that of the three terrorists discussed above. That is, the above analysis and conclusion has sought to discuss and argue for the utility of the heuristic in three specific, and largely similar, cases. Because the heuristic has been relevant and useful in these instances (according to the above arguments at least), does not necessarily mean it will be so in others. These suggestions for de-radicalisation are thus devised for those cases where the heuristic is also applicable, i.e. where the narrative dynamics resemble those it described.

That the heuristic *can* be used to provide a significantly *individualised* moral and motivational explication of the narrative dynamics of *some* individuals, may make it useful to one of (Keane, *et al's*, 2023) recommendations, which was for consideration of, “...additional optional modules better aligned with where an individual is on the

continuum between engaging and being disengaged.” (p. 39). By explicating their level of commitment, and how this relates to which ideological beliefs, or narrative frames, the heuristic might be used to assist in calibrating this alignment, as well as orientating these modules to the specific content of those beliefs/frames. Additionally, the authors suggest that “...HII could possibly be further developed for those who have not yet demonstrated evidence of desistance and disengagement, to focus on developing dissonance and encouraging disillusionment in a considered and sensitive way (so as not be counter-productive).” (p. 38-39). Because the heuristic is aimed at articulating narratives on their own terms (at least in terms of recognising the genuine emotional and moral sentiment behind them), it might be well suited to such a considered and sensitive approach. Certainly, it does not propose that nomic striving should be discarded, or is inherently suspect, rather, as mentioned above, it is something which should be re-engaged to drive de-radicalisation. There is, of course, no avoiding the fact that this necessarily means changing a person’s beliefs, perhaps with the inevitable risk of appearing to be not taking their views seriously, or simply condescending (the threshold and sensitivity for which might differ significantly between individuals). However, an approach explicitly orientated around understanding attempts to know reality, apprehend sacred values, and the need for meaning, might at least solicit greater and more genuine engagement from participants, precisely because it acknowledges, and seeks to understand, what it is they care for, and how.

With regards to counter-narratives, it would perhaps here be more apposite not to think of these as a kind of pre-formed standardised narratives with definite contents, as, clearly, the contents and emotional experiences entailed in RWE narratives are not themselves standardised, and can only be understood most effectively according to an individual-specific analysis. However, the general notion of attempting to re-engage

moral and existential strivings to encourage the rejection of “ersatz” transcendentalism, *because* they diminish moral agency, and are self-destructive, might be most effective way of orienting counter-narratives designed for the kinds of RWE, to which this heuristic is most applicable. Such a counter-narrative would itself, therefore, be a narrative of radicalisation itself, or rather an alternative narrative to that internalised by the adherent, one which narrates the process of radicalisation as the distortion of nomic strivings, resulting in a de-pluralised and deeply unbalanced fanaticism which serves neither the adherent, nor the world they wish to save. In the kind of one-to-one mentoring settings of HII, this could in practice mean that the IPs and the participant effectively build the counter-narrative together, following this basic structure. Again, it should be reiterated that whatever applicability this kind of general structure might have, would depend on the extent to which the narrative dynamics of a given case are accurately captured by the heuristic developed here. It can thus only be considered a hypothesis for how effective counter-narratives might be constructed, and because it necessarily pre-supposes the specific moral, motivational, and narrative psychology outlined in this study, it may well not be appropriate where this psychology is less involved.

Future Research

In terms of future research, there is much that could be gained from interviewing current and former RWE, particularly in a custodial setting, as the preliminary stage of a de-radicalisation programme. This research would aim to evaluate and refine the narrative-based heuristic proposed here, as it would involve its direct application in trying to understand the deep structure and generic features of (current or former) beliefs of (current or former) RWE, particularly in terms of how they themselves describe the evolution of such beliefs, as part of their radicalisation experience. Accordingly,

interviews might be carried out with members of the relevant groups (for instance those serving sentences for RWE related terrorism offences), which would seek a first-hand account of how RWE beliefs evolve, particularly regarding how RWE narratives frame issues, events, and groups, and how these relate to their proposed solutions. This kind of research could also be used to emphasise the differences between cases, in terms not just of ideology, but in terms of other factors, such as life experiences, mental health, and involvement of networks or influential people in radicalisation. Specifically, what bearing, if at all, these have on the kinds of narrative dynamics highlighted by this heuristic. Where there are significant differences, it might be useful to propose and develop typologies, which suggest the degree and kind of influence which narratives have in different cases, and any subsequent inferences which might be made regarding de-radicalisation.

Quantitative research designs might also be devised, which aim to measure the degree of de-pluralisation with which RWE adherents have come to view the world, i.e. to what extent they agree that zero-sum group conflicts best describe the reality of contemporary society. It would also be useful to devise context specific measures that seek to gauge a person's beliefs about the past and future, i.e. to what extent both are framed in Manichean terms.

These evaluations of the process and depth of radicalisation could be employed alongside other measures from previous research in this area, e.g. measures of external support and encouragement to commit violence, exposure to indoctrination, psychological need for closure, and significance loss, in the case of SQT, and measures of identity-fusion in the case of the DAM. Combining empirical data about such aspects of radicalisation might provide some quantitative insight into the relationships between narrative framing, and certain motivational and emotional states. However, in the context

of narratives, these research designs may be initially limited to suggesting relationships between such states, rather than describing the psychological dynamics of narration per se, which, following Bruner's (1987) work, fundamentally concerns *the active creation of meaning* by individuals, their groups, and their cultural canon. Nevertheless, such targeted research might provide the outlines of specific RWE-related dispositions, or traits, whether socio-cultural or psychological-experiential, from which an understanding of their narratives might be further developed.

Another, perhaps more obvious, way this heuristic might be developed further, would be by analysing a wider range of RWE narratives in the form of both manifestos of individual terrorists, but also other extremist material disseminated by groups/networks supporting these terrorists, or other acts of violence. For example, research into the "Atomwaffen Division," might be useful in understanding how RWE narratives can become formalised by self-organising networks. Also known as the "National Socialist Order," Atomwaffen became a proscribed organisation in 2021, under the Terrorism Act 2000. According to the Home Office, the group, "...celebrates a collection of essays which advocate the use of violence in order to bring about a fascist, white ethno-state by initiating the collapse of modern society by means of a 'race war'" (Home Office, 2021). The heuristic might also be applied, and adapted, in other radicalisation contexts, e.g. Islamist, Incel, Anarchist, or Left-wing Extremist violence, or those which draw on ideologies which do not neatly fit into these categories.

Again, the advantage of researching a wider range of ideologies and groups, is that this would allow for a more nuanced understanding of how the narrative dynamics discussed in this study might play differing roles, depending on the context. For instance, the projection of a cataclysmic race war and revolution, is a seminal part of many RWE narratives, and one of the defining features of the three analysed above. However, it might

be useful to investigate the extent to which a similar narrative dynamic exists in other ideological contexts, and how this is experienced emotionally on the part of different adherents. The aim being not to create a catalogue of narrative heuristics, or one grand meta-heuristic, but rather to apply and refine the understanding of the narrative dynamics at play in specific cases, using the preliminary heuristic outlined here, and its particular application in the above analysis, as both a comparative basis, and a structure for further analysis, in order to contribute towards a greater understanding the role that narratives can play in other individual radicalisation pathways. In addition, by understanding these pathways in more depth, it may be possible to devise counter-radicalisation and de-radicalisation efforts which are better able to address narratives, either in the actual cases analysed, or in cases which are significantly similar. There may also be an advantage in analysing the narratives given “corporately” by particular groups, where these are especially influential, as the narrative dynamics that can be discerned may have greater applicability or relevance to a wider range of adherents. Although, this is no guarantee that these adherents will all share the same emotional experiences of such a narrative, or even would be motivated to violence for the same reasons, but those who are/were motivated to commit terrorism, or related offences, for mainly ideological reasons, may be more likely to have undergone the same or similar narrative dynamics. Certainly, that is, to the extent that, as this study has argued, such narratives are not free-floating schemas, but comprise the “embodied meanings,” with which a person moves through the world and experiences it emotionally, and existentially. Indeed, there may be as much or more similarity, in terms of these emotional and existential embodied meanings between adherents of the same specific master narrative/narratives, as there is in terms of the words and phrasing, with which they use to articulate these narratives, either in written manifestos, or in actual speech. Although it would be impossible to say definitively, as

embodied meanings are, by their nature, not necessarily easily measurable dispositions of the kind suited to quantitative research (e.g. the need for closure), but are context-specific interpretations made by individuals, however consistent these may be with like-minded others. Having a better indication would, however, require further investigation.

Finally, future research should also attempt to incorporate insights from other highly relevant theories and paradigms, and seek to explore the perspectives already included above, in greater depth. Jungian psychology in particular, which has been discussed here briefly, regarding the role of the shadow (unconscious destructive tendencies), warrants greater emphasis than the scope of this study can allow. The development of consciousness and its relationship with the unconscious would likely further an understanding radicalisation as part of a person's life narrative and process of what Jung called "individuation," and how that person relates to the (archetypal?) projections of their master narratives. Other heuristic paradigms familiar from psychology and psychiatry could also be fruitfully applied. For example, research and perspectives arising from Dialogical Self Theory (DST), as outlined by Herman's (2001), may further refine the preliminary work carried out here, particularly given its relevance to the dialogical/dialectical dynamics of narration that have been emphasised within it. The heuristic forwarded here has, so far, only drawn on perspectives of the "narrative self," notably work by Roth (2017). However, it would also likely benefit from the breadth of research surrounding the "dialogical self," and the ways that different perspectives, or "I positions" within the self, can change a person's moral worldview and their motivational/emotional balance. That is, DST might also be applied in the context of narratives, to better understand how, following Griffin's (2017) paradigm, an adherent's heroic double comes to dominate or colonise their personality. Indeed, Oleś

(2020) has set a template for work carried out in this direction, by proposing a general framework for understanding radicalisation from a DST perspective.

Moreover, both DST and Jungian psychology have undergone significant development within a therapeutic setting, and therefore might allow for the use of proven techniques for changing destructive thinking and behaviour, in the context of de-radicalisation. These techniques may be usefully applied and adapted as part of the one-to-one mentoring involved in desistance and disengagement programmes, or HII. In the context of RWE radicalisation, both approaches would seem to afford a more effective understanding of narratives as being essential to a person's self-development, and how they relate to the world, within which they attempt to find meaning, and as part of this, their "courage to be." Moreover, Jungian psychology and DST, with their focus on narratives and identity respectively, may offer a more appropriate framework for structuring the kinds of dialogue aimed at addressing the moral and motivational dynamics discussed here, potentially offering a bridge between the kind of narrative analysis proposed above, and the discussion of those narratives in a de-radicalisation setting, such as mentoring.

In short, this dissertation has attempted to direct radicalisation research in a fresh direction, but its author is painfully aware that there is a long path to travel before the insights it has attempted to extract and formulate can prove their worth in a tried and tested de-radicalisation programme. But given what is at stake, it is not just an academic undertaking but more of a Significant Quest.

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