Pulling the Emergency Brake!

Why the Far Right is Successful in Juxtaposing
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door

Kirsten Ita Marianne Smeets
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te Den Helder

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Introduction

The religious dimensions of the European far-right landscape

'Make Europe Great Again' – was the motto that appeared behind the Hungarian minister for European affairs during the opening ceremony of the Hungarian presidency of the European Union on 1 July 2024 in Brussels. This motto raised eyebrows as it sounded suspiciously similar to the slogan used by far-right leader Donald Trump during his presidential campaigns: 'Make America Great Again'.[1] In addition to the presentation of the programme of the Hungarian EU presidency and its seven priorities, the event featured a performance by artists from the Müpa Budapest performing arts centre, entitled: 'Our European Heritage'. It combined the works of Johann Sebastian Bach and Hungarian composer Béla Bartók who according to the website of the Hungarian Presidency 'made significant contributions to the preservation of the cultures of the peoples of Europe'.[2] The website states that the performance aims at building a bridge between England, France and Italy and the Central and Eastern European region, 'pointing to our roots in the cultures of European peoples and nations and the cultural diversity born and reborn from their interconnections, wherein lies the strength of Europe.'

Moreover, on the eve of Hungary's assumption of the EU presidency, Viktor Orbán presented a new EU group of far-right political parties named: 'The Patriots for Europe'. Together with Andrej Babiš of the Czech political party ANO and Herbert Kickl of the Austrian party FPÖ, Orbán signed a manifest in Vienna that forms the basis of the new cooperation. This manifest, called 'A Patriotic Manifesto for a European Future', includes a belief in a Europe that 'safeguards and celebrates its European identity, traditions and customs, the fruits of its Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian heritage' and 'is determined to protect its borders, to stop illegal migration and to preserve its cultural identity'.[3] In the following days, the Portuguese party Enough! joined the alliance, together with the Spanish party Vox, the Dutch Party for Freedom, the Danish People's Party and the Belgian party Flemish Interest, thereby providing the alliance the minimum number of members required to officially establish itself as a new political group within the European Parliament.

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[1] Also shortened to 'MAGA'. The abbreviation for the European version is 'MEGA'.

[2] "Opening Event of the Hungarian presidency," Hungarian Presidency Council of the European Union, July 1, 2024, accessed July 12, 2024, https://hungarian-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/en/news/opening-event-of-the-hungarian-presidency/.

[3] "„Patrioten für Europa": Kickl (FPÖ), Orbán (Fidesz), Babiš (ANO) gaben Startschuss für neue patriotische Allianz!," FPÖ, June 30, 2024, accessed July 12, 2024, https://www.fpoe.eu/patrioten-fuer-europa-kickl-fpoe-orban-fidesz-babis-ano-gaben-startschuss-fuer-neue-patriotische-allianz/.

The motto, the title of the performance and the manifest are significant and cannot and *should not* be seen in isolation. They flow from the agenda of the Hungarian government, led by far-right leader Viktor Orbán who has turned Hungary over the past decades from a democracy into an increasingly authoritarian regime.[4] His agenda is characterised by the aspiration to establish a European identity that is founded on a common denominator of European countries, mostly denoted as 'the Greco-Roman' and 'Judeo-Christian' heritage that binds these countries together. As is evident from 'The Patriots for Europe' manifest that at the time of writing many far-right parties have already signed, he does not stand alone: this desire for an European identity is characteristic of a broader far-right movement within Europe that has been unfolding for years. This movement is not only present within far-right party politics, but also operates outside of the political arena on social media platforms such as Youtube, TikTok and Twitter, in so-called online echo chambers and during demonstrations of pan-European protest movements such as PEGIDA and the Identitarian movement.[5]

When I started my research on the European far right and religion in 2020, I investigated a video that had just been launched on Youtube from a Hungarian group called 'European Patriots Unite'; a name that bears a strong resemblance to the name of the new far-right EU group launched by Orbán in 2024.[6] This video contains statements from far-right individuals and groups from different European countries, some of them belonging to groups and networks that are designated as 'extreme right', such as the Dutch NVU, Europa Terra Nostra, and the Belgian PNE (Parti National Européen).[7] In the video, many of them refer to their national identities, Europe and Christianity that have to be defended against the threats posed by the elite, immigrants and Islam. These references seem to resonate with

4. Mike Smeltzer and Alexandra Karppi, *Nations in Transit 2024* (Freedom House), 11, https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2024-04/NIT_2024_Digital_Booklet.pdf.
5. PEGIDA is a pan-European far-right movement founded in the German city of Dresden that is against immigration and the presence of Islam in Europe. PEGIDA stands for: Patriotische Europäer Gegen die Islamisierung Des Abendlandes. The Identitarian Movement is a far-right youth movement that started in France with branches in multiple European countries, such as Germany and Austria. Its adherents see themselves as patriots and turn against the 1968 student movement, immigration and Islam. The Identitarians gained notoriety through provocative campaigns and actions (such as flash mobs) against mosques and NGO ships, footage of which was then posted on social media. See Ralf Havertz, *Radical Right Populism in Germany: AfD, Pegida, and the Identitarian Movement* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2021).
6. European Patriots Unite, "European Patriots Unite - Európa patriótái egyesítsétek erőiteket!," Youtube, 18 June 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZZhDRnccOcs.
7. 'Extreme right' is often used to designate movements and individuals who adhere to an idea of white or Aryan supremacy or that go against principles of the constitution. This is explained in more detail in Paragraph 1.1.

the 2024 manifest of 'The Patriots for Europe': calling for independent, sovereign nations that are united in their aim of protecting their peoples and European (cultural) identity against any threat, associating the halting of (illegal) migration with the preservation of cultural identity. What is different now compared to 2020, is that the articulation of a European identity, built on the exclusion of Others, resounds loudly within mainstream national and European politics, rather than the fringes of society and politics. The opening ceremony of Hungary's EU presidency on the 1st of July 2024 is a prime example.

Interestingly, the identity politics that has characterised the European far right in recent years, has been articulated in religious terms: far-right actors have identified Europe as Christian, or Europe is claimed to be steeped in its 'Judeo-Christian' history and heritage. Within their rhetoric (both off- and online), far-right actors recall historical narratives and symbols that designate the Christian signature of Europe, such as Joan of Arc, the Christian cross, nativity scenes, cathedrals and the Christan empire of Charlemagne. The identity construct of 'The Christian Europe' is often juxtaposed against 'Islam' or 'Muslim immigrants' who are said not to belong to Europe. This process of Othering is performed through a fascinating identity attribution in which Christianity is combined with features that ought to designate a unified 'European identity' to which Muslims do not belong, such as references to the Aryan race and whiteness, images of historical buildings and monuments, such as the Eiffel Tower or Neuschwanstein Castle, the mentioning of 'European' commanders and leaders, such as Napoleon Bonaparte and Julius Caesar, images of 'European' art, such as the Mona Lisa of Leonardo Da Vinci or paintings from Michelangelo, and portrayals of traditional food from different regions of Europe.

The process of Othering comes explicitly to the fore when far-right actors recall historical battles between Christians and Muslims on European soil and in the Middle East, and argue that like then, Europe must now be defended against Islam, with slogans such as: Defend Europe! Save Europe! Europe for Europeans! The articulation of two religious identities that are emphatically juxtaposed, such as 'The Christian Europe' against 'The Muslim Other' is what I call *religious contra-identities* and is the centre of interest in this dissertation.

The defining of a European ingroup and outgroup in explicit religious terms is remarkable, considering the increasing level of secularisation in Europe during the past decades. Research shows that there is an upward trend in the development of the national share of agnostics and atheists between 1991 and 2018 in different

European countries, especially in Northwestern Europe.[8] Moreover, many European far-right movements and political parties considered themselves non-religious, neo-pagan or anti-clerical during the twentieth century.[9] This holds especially for Western Europe; the ties between the far right and religion have remained quite strong in Eastern Europe.[10] In the post-war era, religion was not given priority on the agenda of the European far right. This changed, however, during the 1990s and especially after 9/11 when Muslims (and Muslim immigrants in particular) were assigned the role of villain in the script that the European far right came to write, and soon after the ingroup, 'the people' who were threatened by these 'outsiders', came to be defined in religious terms too: the white, Aryan race of people who belong to a Judeo-Christian Europe. Not to be forgotten, the hero was also written into the script: the far-right leader, portrayed as the strong and charismatic leader who claims to be the saviour of his people, and who defends Europe against the existential threats posed by the Muslim Other. The degree of far-right leaders' genuine religiosity has been rather ambiguous and contested; nevertheless, most far-right leaders claim an European identity that is marked by its alleged Judeo-Christian heritage. This religious identity attribution that is used by European far-right actors in their political rhetoric against immigrants, against the backdrop of a secularised society, raises the question why religious identity plays an important role in today's profiling and agenda-setting of European far-right political parties and movements.

In the academic literature, attention to the far right has increased significantly in recent decades, both in Europe and the United States. From the perspective of political science, attention has been paid to the defining of the far right, its ideology and characteristics with special focus on nativism and populism, explaining the success of the far right by demand-side and supply-side factors and

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8. Joep de Hart, Pepijn van Houwelingen, and Willem Huijnk, *Buiten kerk en moskee*, 10-12 (The Hague: Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, 2022).

9. Such as the French far-right party 'Le Front National' under the leadership of Jean-Marie Le Pen and the Austrian party FPÖ under the leadership of Jörg Haider. See Tobias Cremer, "The Rise of the post-religious right: Christanism and Secularism in the French Rassemblement National," *Party Politics* (2021): 3; Leila Hadj-Abdou, "The 'Religious Conversion' of the Austrian Freedom Party," in *Saving the People: How Populists Hijack Religion*, ed. Nadia Marzouki, Duncan McDonnell, and Olivier Roy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 30.

10. These strong ties can be (partly) attributed to the predominance of Orthodox Christianity in multiple Eastern European countries. Orthodox churches are often national churches, and there is a strong relationship between the nation and religion. Cas Mudde, *The far right today* (Cambridge: Polity, 2019), 43.

the response to the far right (e.g. by mainstream parties and the media).[11] From the perspective of political philosophy, attention has been given to the relationship between the far right and the predominant political ideas and institutions within Western democracies, with special focus on the idea of liberal democracy, causes of citizen discontent (such as globalisation, atomisation, meritocratic thinking, disembedding, secularisation) and the so-called 'degeneration of democracy' thesis.[12] From the perspective of sociology, there has been a lot of attention for the incentives and characteristics of European citizens to vote for far-right political parties and how macro-level sociological changes and developments such as globalisation, immigration, individualisation and secularisation have had an effect on the formation of far-right parties and movements. Within these studies, nationalism, populism, race and religion are measured and analysed as characteristics of both the far-right electorate, as well as far-right movements and political parties (e.g. as component of a far-right ideology).[13]

[11]   Piero Ignazi, "The silent counter-revolution: Hypotheses on the emergence of extreme right-wing parties in Europe," *European Journal of Political Research* (1992); Hans-Georg Betz, *Radical Right-wing Populism in Western Europe* (New York: St. Martins Press, 1994); Cas Mudde, "The war of words defining the extreme right party family," *West European Politics* 19, no. 2 (1996); Michael Minkenberg, "The Renewal of the Radical Right: Between Modernity and Anti-modernity," *Government and opposition* 35, no. 2 (2000); Cas Mudde, "The Populist Zeitgeist," *Government and Opposition* 39, no. 4 (2004); Roger Eatwell and Cas Mudde, *Western Democracies and the New Extreme Right Challenge*, Routledge Studies in Extremism and Democracy; 3, (London: Routledge, 2004); Stijn Van Kessel, *Populist Parties in Europe: Agents of Discontent?* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Elisabeth Carter, "Right-wing extremism/radicalism: reconstructing the concept," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 23, no. 2 (2018); Benjamin Moffitt, *Populism* (Cambridge, UK Polity Press, 2020); Léonie de Jonge, *The Success and Failure of Right-Wing Populist Parties in the Benelux Countries*, Routledge Studies in Extremism and Democracy, (London: Routledge, 2021); Andrea L. P. Pirro, "Far right: The significance of an umbrella concept," *Nations and Nationalism* 29, no. 1 (2023).

[12]   Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007); Larry Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, First Harvard University Press edition. ed. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014); Michael J. Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?* (London: Allen Lane, 2020); Craig J. Calhoun, Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, and Charles Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2022); Michael J. Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent: A New Edition for Our Perilous Times* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2022).

[13]   Rogers Brubaker, "Between nationalism and civilizationism: the European populist moment in comparative perspective," *Ethnic and racial studies* 40, no. 8 (2017); Marcel Lubbers and Marcel Coenders, "Nationalistic attitudes and voting for the radical right in Europe," *European Union Politics* 18, no. 1 (2017); Andreas Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten: zum Strukturwandel der Moderne* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2017); Jens Rydgren, "Radical right-wing parties in Europe. What's populism got to do with it?," *Journal of Language and Politics* (2017); Hans Joas, *Die Macht des Heiligen. Eine Alternative zur Geschichte von der Entzauberung* (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2017); Marcel Lubbers and Anouk Smeekes, "Domain-Dependent National Pride and Support for the Radical Right: Pride in the Nation's History," *Sociological forum* 37 (2022); Jan Willem Duyvendak, Josip Kešić, and Timothy Stacey, *The Return of the Native: Can Liberalism Safeguard Us Against Nativism?*, Oxford studies in culture & politics, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023).

Across these fields of research, religion often plays a secondary role in analysing the far-right landscape. In empirical research (sociological and political) it is often reduced to a mere characteristic of the far-right voter, far-right leader or outgroup that is targeted by the far right. Authors devote considerable attention to populism and nativism as part of a far-right ideology, and occasionally mention religion as a factor within exclusionary politics, but a deeper reflection and a more thorough analysis of how and why religion forms part of the far-right landscape is often lacking. For example, there is scant attention for religion as part of the conceptualisation of the far right. How is religion attached to a far-right ideology? Which types of theologies connect in particular to far-right ideologies? What is the relationship between religion and populism? What is the relationship between religion and racism? These are questions that are little investigated.

Moreover, Muslims are often mentioned as the main enemy of the contemporary far right, but an explanation why, and how religion plays a role in this hostility is often lacking. An explanation often comes down to the statement that the far right is just xenophobic and racist, but this is clearly not sufficient in explaining why immigrants and Muslims in particular are nowadays targeted in Western societies. Rather, it requires an analysis of macro-societal changes that have occurred in Western societies in the second half of the twentieth century, such as globalisation, secularisation and individualisation. Although political philosophy reflects on the foundations and macro-structures of our contemporary Western democracies, it often fails to ground its theories in data that provides one with the tools to make a sharp analysis of the question why the far right is currently successful in many European democracies. This leads to the conclusion that the far-right vote is a response, but it is not explained *to what* it is a response and how religion fits into the picture. The field of political science often restricts its explanation to demand-side and supply-side factors and often lacks an interest in religion or only perceives it as 'ticking-the-box'. The field of religious studies does hold an all-encompassing view on religion and scholars of religion have developed an interest in religious cultural heritage over the past years, but they often do not have an interest in politics and far-right politics in particular. Thus, there is a lack of interdisciplinary research on the European far right and religion, with some notable exceptions.[14]

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14. See for example Giulia Evolvi, ""Europe is Christian, or It Is Not Europe": Post-Truth Politics and Religion in Matteo Salvini's Tweets," ed. Maximilian Conrad et al., *Europe in the Age of Post-Truth Politics Populism, Disinformation and the Public Sphere* (Cham: Springer Nature, 2023); Tobias Cremer, *The Godless Crusade. Religion, Populism and Right-Wing Identity Politics in the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023); Markus Balkenhol, Ernst van den Hemel, and Irene Stengs, *The Secular Sacred: Emotions of Belonging and the Perils of Nation and Religion* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

As a consequence, much of what has been written about the far right and religion has been from a one-sided perspective, which fails to designate and illuminate the blind spot of the interrelatedness between the contemporary rise of the European far right, the increased usage of religious references, symbols and narratives by far-right leaders and adherents, the arrival of social media, and recent macro-societal developments such as globalisation, individualisation and secularisation. In this dissertation, I aim at filling this gap by taking an interdisciplinary approach in which I combine the insights from different fields of research, such as political philosophy, political science, religious studies, cultural memory studies, sociology, and media studies. This approach allows me to answer the questions why and how religion is used to construct two mutually excluding identities, 'The Christian Europe' and 'The Muslim Other' ánd reveals how this discourse is a symptom of a deep-rooted problem that torments European societies and its citizens today.

Research aim and questions

This dissertation sets out to explore the construction of what I have called 'religious contra-identities' in the anti-immigration discourse of the European far right. As I will explain later on, this key term denotes the articulation of two religious identities that are emphatically juxtaposed.[15] This research focusses on the religious identities of 'The Christian Europe' and 'The Muslim Other', as part of the anti-immigration discourse of the European far right. It examines how and why these identities are constructed within the political rhetoric of far-right leaders and adherents on social media platforms, and TikTok in particular. Although this study investigates the European far right in general, it has a particular focus on the Netherlands and Germany, drawing on many examples from the Dutch and German political and media landscape (such as political events, newspaper articles and TikTok videos) to illustrate the role of religion in far-right politics.

The main objective of this study was to gain insight into the causes and functioning of religious contra-identities within the anti-immigration discourse of European far-right political parties and movements. It seeks to answer the main research question:

[15.] See Chapter II, Paragraph 3.4

Why is the anti-immigration discourse of European far-right political parties and movements based on the use of religious contra-identities and how do they function?

A threefold set of research questions follow from this main question (*What, Why and How?*):

1. What are the characteristics of the religious contra-identities of 'The Christian Europe' and 'The Muslim Other' and how do they relate to each other in the political discourse of the European far right? (*What?*)
2. To what extent does secularism contribute to the intolerance of Muslims and why do religious contra-identities occupy such a prominent place in a secular context? (*Why?*)
3. To what extent does cultural memory theory help us to understand the construction of religious contra-identities? (*How?*)

It is evident from these questions that this research is interdisciplinary in character. As such, it aims to make a fivefold contribution to the existing body of academic knowledge on the far right. Firstly, it sheds new light on the defining and conceptualisation of far-right ideologies. Secondly, it provides insight into the new concept (and development) of 'religious contra-identities' in far-right political discourse. Thirdly, it fills a gap in the literature on the far right and social media by outlining a theoretical framework on the features of social media that facilitate the spread of far-right ideologies and by conducting a qualitative content analysis of TikTok in particular. Fourthly, it offers a fresh perspective to the academic debate on explaining the contemporary electoral success of far-right political parties in Europe by bringing together knowledge from different academic disciplines. Fifthly, it enhances our understanding of Muslims as the contemporary enemy of the far right by explaining *why* they are nowadays vehemently targeted by far-right actors.

Although this dissertation investigates the phenomenon of religious contra-identities, it delves deeper to search for the underlying factors in our contemporary Western democracies that have contributed to the inclination of European citizens to vote for the far right and express their identity in religious terms, based on the exclusion of others. The goal of this quest is to discover and show contemporary societal patterns and mechanisms that result in the construction of identities that exclude Others. This is not to deny the diversity and unicity among European citizens, institutions and societies, including the far-right landscape and the Muslim community. However, by casting light on recurring patterns and mechanisms

that are at work in multiple European societies, this research paves the way for knowledge and understanding of developments that are potentially destructive to the public interest.

As will become clear from reading this dissertation, some of the patterns are as old as time itself. History is not characterised by a linear process of development; rather, it proceeds through waves of stability and change, construction and disintegration, action and response. As such, history repeats itself. The question is, however, if we are willing to learn from historical pitfalls of anti-structures and identities that not only exclude others, but undermine democracy to such an extent, that the common good of all is jeopardized. This willingness not only involves the critical examination of mutually exclusive identities in which religion is instrumentalised to exclude others, but also concerns the eagerness to look in the mirror and recognise and acknowledge the flaws within the current system of our Western liberal democracies. That is where the will to change begins.

Overview

This dissertation has been divided into three parts and eight chapters. The first part (Chapter I) deals with the conceptualisation of far-right ideologies. It entails the defining of a far-right ideology and the outlining of its main characteristics. The first chapter addresses the problematic issues that have arisen in the attempt to reach academic consensus on a definition of the far right and argues that it is more helpful to choose a pragmatic approach. It argues for the use of 'the far right' as an umbrella term and proposes a new model in which characteristics of a far-right ideology are seen as dynamic fields that can appear in different constellations among individuals, social movements and political parties. It then moves on to discuss the six characteristics of a far-right ideology in depth: nationalism, xenophobia, racism, anti-democracy, authoritarianism and populism. It treats populism equally as one of the characteristics of a far-right ideology, which may or may not be present, rather than a fixed feature of far-right political parties and movements. This approach differs from other scholars (and journalists and editors) who often treat populism as a fixed feature of the far right.

The second part (Chapters II-IV) deals with religious contra-identities in the political discourse of the far right. It sheds light on this phenomenon on both a conceptual, historical and empirical level. The second chapter addresses the relationship between nationalism, civilisationism and religion and introduces the new concept of 'religious civilisationism'. Moreover, it traces the development of religious contra-

identities in the political rhetoric of the European far right and demonstrates how the writings of Samuel Huntington and Pim Fortuyn in the 1990s have significantly influenced the rise of religious contra-identities within European far-right discourse after the turn of the century. The third chapter lays out the theoretical dimensions of the relationship between the far right and the media and social media in particular. More specifically, it discusses the opportunity structures of media platforms (such as agenda-setting, framing, normalisation, radicalisation etc.) that have facilitated far-right political discourse. It fills the gap of research on how social media facilitate far-right rhetoric and provides an overview of five features of social media platforms that facilitate far-right actors in disseminating their far-right political discourse. The fourth chapter presents the theoretical framework, methodology and findings of a qualitative content analysis conducted on the social media platform of TikTok between April and August 2023. This study investigates the characteristics of (and relationship between) the religious contra-identities of 'The Christian Europe' and 'Islam' within the far-right landscape of TikTok videos.

The third part (Chapters V-VIII) presents a new theory on explaining why far-right political parties are currently winning support among European citizens on a grand scale. It argues that the far right functions as an emergency brake for European citizens to counter the increased complexity and accelerating speed of our contemporary Western societies. It contends that the core problem is a feeling of existential insecurity, which drives the European far-right electorate. This explanation is built on interdisciplinary research, combining insights from political philosophy, political science, sociology and religious studies. The thesis follows from an analysis of three societal developments that have profoundly changed European societies: secularisation, individualisation and globalisation. These three developments are successively discussed in chapter V, VI and VII and constitute the pillars on which the theory is built (see figure 1). Chapter VII then presents the theory of the far right as an emergency brake, arguing that the feeling of existential insecurity can be attributed to three factors that affect European citizens: a loss of identity, a loss of control and (accelerated) speed of change. It argues that these three effects stem from the process of (neoliberal) globalisation in conjunction with the process of individualisation and secularisation. From this account follows an explanation of the intolerance towards Muslims in Europe and the ensuing propensity of far-right adherents to also express their identity in religious terms ('The Christian Europe'). It is argued that the ethic of authenticity and the meritocratic ethic have led far-right individuals and movements to display a self-centredness (thinking in 'me'), which reacts destructively to anything that suggests or appeals to an idea of a cohesive community (thinking in 'we'). As

such, by explaining the contemporary far-right political rhetoric in which religious contra-identities come to the fore as a symptom of a deeper-lying cause, this chapter reconnects to the object of study with which this research began.

Figure 1.

Part I:
Conceptualisation
of Far-Right Ideologies

Chapter I.

Who Belongs to the Far Right?

Introduction

In this chapter, I establish the theoretical foundations for doing research on the far-right landscape. It consists of two paragraphs. In the first paragraph, I define 'the far right': whom am I writing about? Who are the actors that adhere to a certain ideology that includes references to Islam and Christianity as opposing identities? Firstly, I identify the problematic issues that have acted as stumbling blocks in reaching academic consensus on a definition. Secondly, I argue on the basis of previous academic research that it is not helpful to define the far right a priori. Therefore, I choose a pragmatic approach. Based on the work of Cas Mudde and Elisabeth Carter I employ a new method that consists of a basic definition and a selection of six characteristics that function as a searchlight in my quest for religious identities in the far-right landscape. This enables me to study the object in its entirety, without the risk of losing manifestations out of sight due to definitional limitations. Lastly, I suggest using 'the far right' as an umbrella term.

In the second paragraph, I discuss the six characteristics of the far right in depth: nationalism, xenophobia, racism, anti-democracy, authoritarianism and populism. This is necessary in order to develop a good understanding and subsequently identify the far-right constellations within the field. I have combined 'xenophobia and racism' in one paragraph as these are closely intertwined, but I argue the importance of keeping them separate on a theoretical level. Moreover, I approach populism as one of the characteristics of a far-right ideology that can be absent, rather than a permanent feature of the far right. I substantially differ from other scholars in this respect, but I deem this distinction to be important as populism seems to be overused in the academic literature, leading to the impression that populism is a defining characteristic of the far right, which is not the case. The same ambiguity and 'over usage' holds for nationalism, which led me to write at greater length on the characteristics of nationalism and populism, in comparison to other features.

Paragraph 1: Defining the Far Right

Paragraph 1.1: Problematic issues in defining the far right

Four problematic factors

The definition of the far right is still subject to intense academic debate, despite many attempts by scholars on right-wing extremism and radicalism (in short: the far right) to define their object of study. The past decades, scholars have provided a plurality of criteria and definitions that have been criticised by Cas Mudde and

Michael Minkenberg for resembling mere shopping lists rather than conceptually grounded definitions.[16] The difficulty of generating a widely accepted definition of right-wing extremism and radicalism is due to four factors. Firstly, the politicisation of the research field of the far right. This comes about in two ways: authors have defined right-wing extremism as the opposite of their own political viewpoints and the terminology of 'the radical right' and 'the extreme right' has been frequently used within the political debate for political purposes.[17] As a result, determining who does and does not belong to the far right has become clouded by a range of subjective views on the matter.

Secondly, defining the far right as 'right-wing' on the left-right political spectrum is not that straightforward; from a socio-economic perspective it is difficult to classify political parties as right-wing as radical right political parties often consider (socio-)economics as a secondary concern.[18] Because of this, many scholars take the perspective of social (in)equality, which seems to be more helpful in categorising right-wing extremism and radicalism. In this view, *left* would be those who want to reduce the social inequalities between people, which is considered to be a duty of the state. *Right* would be those who believe that the inequalities between people are natural and who do not consider it as a responsibility of the state to change this.[19] But even from this viewpoint, there are various political parties and groups that do not fit neatly into the left-right distinction.[20]

Thirdly, the terminology that has been used to designate the far right has led to confusion. This confusion has obstructed the unanimity on a general definition of the far right and is caused by two different issues that I will call the *proliferation* and *ambiguity* of terms. The *proliferation* of terms concerns the issue that multiple terms are used to describe the same object. The *ambiguity* of terms concerns a single term that is used to designate different things. The proliferation of terms occurs in both the horizontal and vertical dimension. It takes place simultaneously as

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16. Minkenberg, "The Renewal of the Radical Right: Between Modernity and Anti-modernity," 171; Mudde, "The war of words defining the extreme right party family," 228.
17. Nikki Sterkenburg, "Van actie tot zelf-verwezenlijking: routes van toetreding tot radicaal- en extreemrechts" (PhD diss. Leiden University, 2021), 25; Mudde, "The war of words defining the extreme right party family," 228.
18. Carter, "Right-wing extremism/radicalism: reconstructing the concept," 161; Cas Mudde, *Populist radical right parties in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 132-37.
19. Carter, "Right-wing extremism/radicalism: reconstructing the concept," 161; Mudde, *Populist radical right parties in Europe*, 25-26.
20. Maria Vliek and Martijn De Koning, *Beleidsinstrumenten en extremistische wereldbeelden. Een verkennend rapport*, Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen - Faculteit Filosofie, Theologie en Religiewetenschappen (Nijmegen, 2020), 46-47.

scholars use different terms to denote the same object (horizontal dimension). An example is how 'ethnic nationalism' is also termed 'nativism' or 'cultural or racial or exclusivist nationalism' by different authors. But the terminology has also changed over time (vertical dimension). For example, after the Second World War the dominant term for the far right changed from *neo-fascism* to *extreme right* in the 1980s, to *radical right* in the 1990s to *right-wing populism* at the beginning of this century, to *far right* more recently.[21] This has led to a variety of definitions of the far right in the post-war era. The second cause for confusion has been the ambiguity of terms. In designating the far-right movement and the various subgroups within, terms are used that are open to multiple interpretations. This is exemplified by the usage of the terms 'radical right' and 'extreme right'. Scholars on the far right have used these terms interchangeably to denote the same phenomenon. However, in various countries these terms are not interchangeable at all, because they refer to different things. In the United States for example, the radical right refers to those movements that are conspiratorial, but not race-based, whereas the extreme right is committed to white or Aryan supremacy.[22] In Germany, a movement is radical right or extreme right dependent on its relationship to the constitution; whether it is only in *opposition to* the principles of the constitution (radical right) or whether it is *unconstitutional* in itself (extreme right).[23] These cases illustrate that views on what is radical right and what is extreme right differ depending on geographic location. This has led to ambiguity of the terms 'radical right' and 'extreme right', which has caused confusion within the academic debate and literature.

Fourthly, the mainstreaming and normalisation of far-right movements in recent decades has made it difficult to demarcate the radical right from the extreme right on the basis of ideology. Scholars such as Cas Mudde, Tore Bjørgo and Jacob A. Ravndal have argued that the radical right and the extreme right should be seen as two subgroups of the far right.[24] Mudde maintains there is an ideological difference between the two. In his view, the *radical right* is (nominally) democratic, although it

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21. Mudde, *The far right today*, 6.
22. Kathleen M. Blee and Kimberly A. Creasap, "Conservative and Right-Wing Movements," *Annual Review of Sociology* 36, no. 1 (2010): 270.
23. Criterion is the official definition of the German Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (*Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz*) as published in their annual reports. See Mudde, "The war of words defining the extreme right party family," 230-31; Lee McGowan, *The radical right in Germany: 1870 to the present* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2014), 8-9.
24. The 'far right' is then used as the umbrella term to designate the entire range of far-right movements, see Mudde, *The far right today*, 7; Tore Bjørgo and Jacob Aasland Ravndal, *Extreme-Right Violence and Terrorism: Concepts, Patterns, and Responses*, ICCT (The Hague, September 2019), 3, https://icct.nl/publication/extreme-right-violence-and-terrorism-concepts-patterns-and-responses/.

opposes some fundamental values of liberal democracy, whereas the *extreme right* is antidemocratic in essence, opposing the fundamental principle of sovereignty of the people.[25] This would imply that the difference between the radical right and extreme right is whether one operates *within* or *outside* of parliamentary liberal democracy.[26]

Yet, this seemingly clear distinction is blurred by the mainstreaming and normalisation of the far right in Western democracies in recent years.[27] This not only bears upon the boundary between the political mainstream right and the radical right, but also the boundary between the radical right and extreme right. For example, some political parties can be classified as radical right, but simultaneously have a right-extremist wing of politicians and/or members who are willing to use extra-parliamentary means to achieve their goals. In what sense do these politicians then differ in their ideology from non-democratic extreme right activists? Illustrative is the case of the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) leader Björn Höcke, who founded the national-conservative faction 'Der Flügel' within the AfD. In 2019 a German court ruled that Höcke may be legitimately called a fascist, based upon his political utterances and his statements in his book 'Nie zweimal in denselben Fluss', which was published in 2018.[28] Fascism would not fall under the German category of 'radical' as it is seen as unconstitutional in itself and is therefore classified as extreme right. So in that sense, Höcke and the national-conservative wing of the AfD can be classified as extreme right. But at the same time, Höcke functions as a politician of an acknowledged political party that participates in democratic elections and thus operates *within* the democratic system. Should Höcke and his faction 'Der Flügel' then be labelled radical or extreme right?

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[25]. Mudde, *Populist radical right parties in Europe*, 31.

[26]. There is debate among scholars about this identifying aspect: some argue that the distinction should rather be made on the basis of the (lack of) use of violence or claim that the radical right is just a weakened form of the extreme right and the distinction as such, only a matter of degree. For further discussion, see Cas Mudde, "The Populist Radical Right: A Pathological Normalcy," *West European Politics* 33, no. 6 (2010): 1168; Sterkenburg, "Van actie tot zelf-verwezenlijking: routes van toetreding tot radicaal- en extreemrechts," 27.

[27]. Mudde explains that mainstreaming entails that far-right political parties and mainstream parties increasingly address similar issues and offer similar issue positions. This happens when far-right parties moderate, when mainstream parties radicalise or because of both changes. See Mudde, *The far right today*, 164-65. See also Tjitske Akkerman, Sarah L. de Lange, and Matthijs Rooduijn, *Radical right-wing populist parties in Western Europe: into the mainstream?* (London: Routledge, 2016).

[28]. "Björn Höcke darf als "Faschist" bezeichnet werden," Der Spiegel, September 28, 2019, accessed 02-09-2022, https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/bjoern-hoecke-darf-als-faschist-bezeichnet-werden-gerichtsurteil-zu-eisenach-a-1289131.html.

As this case clearly demonstrates, it is problematic to distinguish the radical right from the extreme right on the basis of ideology and as a consequence it is difficult to use this distinction in defining the far right. To conclude this section, it is beyond doubt that the four factors mentioned above, i.e. the politicisation of the research field, the difficulty of placing the far right in the left-right matrix, the terminological confusion and the mainstreaming of the far right, have considerably hampered the acceptance of a widely acknowledged definition of the far right. As a result, there is still a variety of definitions in the academic literature based upon scholars' own criteria and interpretations. But which definition of the far right will be used in this research? What is the criterion in knowing who does and does not belong to the far right? In the following paragraph, I will present my point of departure.

Paragraph 1.2: Beyond definitions

Finding consensus

Taking into account the aforementioned difficulties in defining the far-right movement and its various subgroups (paragraph 1.1), it is unsurprising that various definitions of the far right have emerged over the last couple of decennia. Cas Mudde, in his significant study of 1995, found no less than 26 definitions of right-wing extremism, with 58 different characteristics that are mentioned at least once.[29] In 2018, Elisabeth Carter reviewed the academic literature that has been published *since* the foundational work of Cas Mudde in 1995, providing us with an overview of recent definitions on right-wing extremism/radicalism by leading scholars in the field.[30] She concludes that a limited consensus has been developed. Notwithstanding disagreements about certain features of the far right, definitions have become more parsimonious and similar over the last 20 years.[31] Consequently, there appears to be more agreement amongst scholars as how to best define the concept. Two points of agreement are: 1) the concept of right-wing extremism/radicalism primarily describes an *ideology* and 2) this ideology is *right-wing*.[32] Thus, right-wing extremism/radicalism is *a right-wing ideology* that is composed of a number of characteristics.

This definition raises two questions: *what* characteristics does this right-wing ideology have and *which* features have to be present in order to classify an

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[29].   Mudde, "The war of words defining the extreme right party family," 229.

[30].   Carter, "Right-wing extremism/radicalism: reconstructing the concept," 161-67.

[31].   The disagreement concerns mainly the anti-democracy characteristic of right-wing extremism/ radicalism. There are two debates: whether far-right political parties are anti-system parties and whether far-right political parties should be described as anti-democratic or anti-*liberal* democratic.

[32].   Carter does note, however, that it remains difficult to classify some ideologies as right-wing on the political spatial spectrum.

individual or group as extreme/radical right? To answer the first question: in his study of 1995, Cas Mudde identified at least 58 features of right-wing extremism that were mentioned in the academic literature between 1980 and 1995 (during the so-called 'third wave'). Only five of these features were mentioned by more than half of the scholars: nationalism, racism, xenophobia, anti-democracy and the strong state.[33] Elisabeth Carter investigated whether these five features still dominate the definitions that have been advanced *since* 1995. She concludes that the characteristics that Mudde identified are still valid as those most commonly mentioned in the recent academic literature, although she argues that populism (including its anti-establishment rhetoric) should be added as a sixth feature.[34] Carter also argues that 'strong state' should be termed 'authoritarianism', as Cas Mudde arguably changed the term in recent decades. This results in the following six characteristics of right-wing extremism/radicalism: nationalism, racism, xenophobia, anti-democracy, authoritarianism and populism.

However, Carter contends that not *all* of these features are simultaneously applicable to radical or extreme right movements and individuals. This leads us to the second question: *which* combination of characteristics defines right-wing extremism/radicalism? There are three different methodological approaches to establish this: the quantitative, the qualitative and the mixed approach.[35] In the first approach all characteristics are equal and only the number of features is relevant. In the second approach some features are more important than others and the third approach combines the former two. Carter has chosen for the qualitative approach. She differentiates between *defining* characteristics and *accompanying* characteristics.[36] *Defining* characteristics must be present in order to classify an individual or group as extreme/radical right, whereas *accompanying* characteristics don't necessarily have to be present. Carter argues that right-wing extremism/radicalism has three defining characteristics: authoritarianism, anti-democracy and (exclusionary and/or a holistic kind of) nationalism.[37] The other features (xenophobia, racism and populism) should be seen as accompanying characteristics. This means that these

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33.   Mudde, "The war of words defining the extreme right party family," 229.
34.   Carter, "Right-wing extremism/radicalism: reconstructing the concept," 167.
35.   Mudde, "The war of words defining the extreme right party family," 229-30.
36.   Carter, "Right-wing extremism/radicalism: reconstructing the concept," 160-61.
37.   Carter explains *holistic nationalism* as a variation of nationalism 'in which the nation takes on independent attributes and which requires the individual to be subservient to the nation's will and goals'. *Exclusive nationalism* is a form of nationalism that defines membership of the nation in ethnic terms and advances policies of exclusion or expulsion for non-members. See Carter, "Right-wing extremism/radicalism: reconstructing the concept," 172.

last three features do not necessarily have to be present in order to classify an individual or group as extreme/radical right.

As a result, Carter constructs her minimum definition of right-wing extremism/ radicalism as: an ideology that encompasses authoritarianism, anti-democracy and exclusionary and/or holistic nationalism.[38] Although this definition has been adopted in multiple national policy reports and academic research on the far right, it is still not accepted as a general definition on the far right, due to the lack of consensus on especially the anti-democracy feature that Carter herself admitted is still strongly debated.[39]

Going beyond definitions

In this research, I will not focus on the a priori defining of the far right. The reason for this is that the answer to the question whether a political party or movement does or does not belong to the far right is dependent upon how one defines the far right. And as I have shown in the paragraphs above: 1) There is a wide range of definitions and 2) it is highly complicated to eliminate the differences and generate a widely accepted definition of the far right. This is exemplified by Carter's attempt to (re-)construct a general definition. Despite the great effort that she has put into defining the far right, for which she reviewed a large body of academic literature, she did not succeed in generating an indisputable definition.

Also the recent research of Nikki Sterkenburg illustrates the difficulty of defining clear-cut boundaries. Sterkenburg investigated the motivations of 36 people in the Netherlands to become and remain active as an extreme/radical right-wing activist. She deemed it necessary to define right-wing extremism/radicalism a priori as she did not want to rely on intuition or media reports in selecting her interviewees.[40] In defining the far right, she made an ideological distinction between the radical and extreme right, based upon the definitions of McGowan, Mudde and Carter. However, after thoroughly arguing in favour of this distinction, she nevertheless merged both definitions back into one, because she argues that there is too much diversity of parties, formations, groups and movements to maintain a distinction between the radical and extreme right; a difficulty she already acknowledged beforehand.[41]

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[38]. Carter, "Right-wing extremism/radicalism: reconstructing the concept," 174.

[39]. Carter, "Right-wing extremism/radicalism: reconstructing the concept," 174-75.

[40]. Sterkenburg, "Van actie tot zelf-verwezenlijking: routes van toetreding tot radicaal- en extreemrechts," 29.

[41]. Sterkenburg, "Van actie tot zelf-verwezenlijking: routes van toetreding tot radicaal- en extreemrechts," 38-39.

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These recent attempts by Carter and Sterkenburg show that it is extremely difficult to generate an indisputable definition of the far right. The diversity within the landscape of the far right increased significantly in the past decades, a diversity that is even greater when one adopts a European rather than a national perspective, as is the case in this research. This means that there is no unequivocal dividing line to date as to who belongs to the far right and who does not.

Therefore, I do not consider it helpful to define the far right a priori. Instead, I go beyond definitions by choosing a pragmatic approach, which is characterised by the words of Cas Mudde: 'we know *who* they are, even though we do not know exactly *what* they are.'[42] Even Carter argues that it is 'a matter of empirical investigation' to know which parties qualify for inclusion in the extreme/radical right party family.[43] This pragmatic approach entails the following. My starting point is what is generally agreed upon in the literature: that right-wing extremism/radicalism is a right-wing ideology that is composed of a number of characteristics. Based on the work of Mudde and Carter, I have selected six characteristics: nationalism, xenophobia, racism, anti-democracy, authoritarianism and populism. These characteristics are often not simultaneously present or they come in particular forms within far-right movements and individuals. Therefore, I view these characteristics as zones of activity, based on the work of Bert Klandermans who uses this term to signify particularly dynamic fields, such as the field of anti-Islam organisations.[44] Although he uses this term to refer to the social arena's in which actors appropriate economic, social and cultural capital, I will use the term to signify the dynamic field(s) of characteristics that are appropriated by actors with a right-wing ideology. This means that I search for constellations of right-wing political parties and movements that are outside of the liberal mainstream, in which two or more of the six characteristics reappear in different ways.

The advantage of this method, visualised in Figure 2, is that it opens up the possibility of studying the object in its entirety, without the risk of losing manifestations out of sight due to definitional limitations.[45] In this way, one can study *who* are the actors where these characteristics show activity and rather than *what* they are, the focus is on what they *do*. The second advantage is that it enables description and analysis of the interaction between different fields. This not only concerns the question how characteristics are related to each other but also the

[42]. Mudde, "The war of words defining the extreme right party family," 233.
[43]. Carter, "Right-wing extremism/radicalism: reconstructing the concept," 176.
[44]. Bert Klandermans et al., *Bedreigde identiteiten. De wisselwerking tussen anti-islambewegingen en de radicale islam* (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam 2016), 9-10.
[45]. See Figure 2 'Method' on page 27.

question how they are related to an external factor, such as religion. Accordingly, I can investigate the role of religion in relation to these characteristics and how this manifests itself in the diverse landscape of the far right. In applying this method I follow the footsteps of Cas Mudde, whom stated:

'Instead of putting so much effort into defining the object of study a priori on the basis of some (vague) notion of historical continuity, it would be more useful to study the object itself first and to try to define it later.'[46]

From this method also follows how I will deal with the terminology in this research; as I will not focus on the a priori defining of the object of study of this research, I will also put the terminological issue on the sideline by choosing for the inclusive term 'far right'. I have chosen this term over for example 'right-wing extremism/radicalism', as I view any distinction between 'radical right' and 'extreme right' problematic and therefore not useful. Moreover, what I deem essential is that the actors I want to investigate are those who adhere to a right-wing ideology ánd think and act outside of the liberal mainstream. Some will be more closely affiliated to the mainstream right, others will be more further away. Therefore, 'far right' seems an appropriate term to use as it covers the wide range of individuals and movements that can be found in the right flank of the mainstream right.[47] But how then are the actors that are referred to as 'the far right' identified? The answer is clear: the extent to which they encompass the six characteristics I have mentioned above. To know whether these characteristics are present, it is necessary to have a clear understanding of them. The next paragraph discusses the six characteristics in depth.

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[46]. Mudde, "The war of words defining the extreme right party family," 244.

[47]. In choosing the 'far right' as an inclusive term, I agree with Andrea Pirro that 'the far right' as an umbrella term is more helpful as the links between radical-right parties and extreme-right movements and groups have increased in recent decades. See Pirro, "Far right: The significance of an umbrella concept."

Six characteristics of a far-right ideology · *Empirical implementation in society*

Figure 2.   ▭ = social movement   △ = political party   👤 = individual

Paragraph 2: Characteristics of a Far-right Ideology

Paragraph 2.1: Nationalism

Ernest Gellner was one of the first scholars to redefine nationalism as a political doctrine rather than an attitude.[48] He defines it as primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent.[49] The national unit or 'the nation' consists of individuals who together constitute a political community, based on their common origin and historical experience.[50] The emphasis is on the shared national culture that conveys the collective spirit of the people, the so-called Volksgeist, which overrules differences between individuals in terms of economic or social status or political preferences.[51] The cultural aspect makes clear that what constitutes the nation is rather subjective. It is the group-binding imagery that lives in the minds of members of a nation-state. This is why Benedict Anderson describes the nation as an 'imagined community' and Minkenberg speaks of the 'nationalistic myth'.[52]

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48. Mudde, *Populist radical right parties in Europe*, 16.
49. Ernest Gellner, *Nations and nationalism*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 1.
50. Andreas Wimmer, *Nationalist exclusion and ethnic conflict: shadows of modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 52.
51. Wimmer, *Nationalist exclusion and ethnic conflict: shadows of modernity*, 53.
52. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, Rev. ed. (London: Verso, 2006), 6. Minkenberg, "The Renewal of the Radical Right: Between Modernity and Anti-modernity," 175.

Those who adhere to nationalism want to create a monocultural state, meaning that all individuals who live within the territorial boundaries of the state are part of the same culture. This monocultural state can be established through an internal and an external process. The internal process concerns the homogenising of the people who live within the state. This is called 'internal homogenisation'.[53] Those who do not belong to the nation should be separated, assimilated, expelled or killed. The external process aims at creating a monocultural state by bringing all members of the nation who live outside the state, within the territory of the state. This is called external exclusiveness, which can be achieved in two different ways: by transporting nationals back to their 'home country' or by expanding the territory of the nation-state to include externally living nationals. This last strategy is called *irredentism*. Which of these strategies is chosen, depends on what kind of nationalism is espoused by supporters.

There is, in fact, a variety of nationalistic views that is subsumed under the term 'nationalism'. These various types of nationalism differ in the way the nation is perceived, the criteria for membership (e.g. ethnicity, religion, citizenship), or the territory of the nation that is selected (inside and/or outside the state). For example, Elisabeth Carter writes about *holistic* or *collectivist* nationalism in which the nation has its own will and goals that should be served by the individual.[54] Furthermore, Cas Mudde uses the terms *femonationalism* and *homonationalism* to designate the usage of feminist or LGHTQ+ arguments to defend and protect the national culture against external threats.[55]

But the most important type of nationalism within the context of right-wing extremism/radicalism is *ethnic nationalism*, also labelled as *nativism*.[56] This particular kind of nationalism is characteristic for the far right and is distinct from the more moderate and liberal type of nationalism of the mainstream right.[57] Ethnic

53. Mudde, *Populist radical right parties in Europe*, 16.
54. Carter, "Right-wing extremism/radicalism: reconstructing the concept," 172.
55. Mudde, *The far right today*, 152-53.
56. Ethnic nationalism is also termed cultural, racial or exclusivist nationalism, but I only mention nativism as an alternative because it has been used as a prominent term since its introduction by Cas Mudde. There is a small discussion whether these concepts are interchangeable; according to Tamir Bar-On they are the same, according to Schwörer and Fernández-García they are substantially the same. Tamir Bar-On, "The Radical Right and Nationalism," in *The Oxford handbook of the radical right*, ed. Jens Rydgren (New York City: Oxford University Press, 2018), 25; Jakob Schwörer and Belén Fernández-García, "Religion on the rise again? A longitudinal analysis of religious dimensions in election manifestos of Western European parties," *Party Politics* 27, no. 6 (2020): 1169.
57. Liberal nationalism is also termed state, civic, state, territorial, republican or political nationalism. Mudde, *Populist radical right parties in Europe*, 17; Bar-On, "The Radical Right and Nationalism," 21; Wimmer, *Nationalist exclusion and ethnic conflict: shadows of modernity*, 53.

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nationalism or nativism is a political ideology that combines nationalism with xenophobia.[58] It is based on the idea that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group and that non-native elements are fundamentally threatening to the homogenous nation-state.[59] In other words, it emphasises and magnifies the danger that those outside of the nation (i.e. immigrants, Muslims, Jews, Roma etc.) pose to the nation and strives for their complete deletion from the nation-state. This follows from the idea that citizenship is exclusively reserved for those who belong to the nation, based on the principle *ius sanguinis,* which means that someone is a citizen of the state based on descent rather than residency (*ius soli*).[60] Those who have the right of blood (ius sanguinis) are strongly contrasted with those who do not own this right and are therefore excluded. A kind of dualism is present in the sense of Good vs. Evil between the ingroup (those inside the nation) and the outgroup (those outside the nation), which has led some scholars to speak of 'a Manichean nationalism'.[61] This radicalism (1) together with the longing for the formation of homogenous nation-states (2) and the obsession with the dominance of the main ethnic group (3) are the distinguishing features that set the nationalism of right-wing radicals and extremists apart from the nationalism of the mainstream right.[62]

Within the study of the far right, nationalism is considered by most scholars to be a core concept of the ideology of right-wing extremism/radicalism. Some even claim it is *the* core concept of the far right, as it pits an ingroup against an outgroup of which the ingroup is defined by a national identity that is perceived to be threatened.[63] Minkenberg for example, maintains that the core element of right-wing radicalism is 'the myth of a homogenous nation'.[64] He substantiates his position with an historical argument. He argues that right-wing radicalism is only

58. Mudde, *The far right today*, 27.
59. Mudde, *Populist radical right parties in Europe*, 19.
60. Wimmer, *Nationalist exclusion and ethnic conflict: shadows of modernity*, 58.
61. Matthijs Rooduijn, "Vox populismus: a populist radical right attitude among the public?," *Nations and Nationalism* 20, no. 1 (2014): 80. Manichaeism was a Persian religion founded in the third century CE that held a dualistic worldview centred on a struggle between the forces of good (found in the spiritual world of light) and the forces of evil (found in the material world of darkness). For further information, see Victoria Ballmes, "Manichaeism," ed. Mark Juergensmeyer and Wade Clark Roof, *Encyclopedia of global religion* (Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, 2012). 746.
62. Bar-On, "The Radical Right and Nationalism," 18.
63. Carter, "Right-wing extremism/radicalism: reconstructing the concept," 171-72.
64. Minkenberg, "The Renewal of the Radical Right: Between Modernity and Anti-modernity," 174; Michael Minkenberg, "The West European Radical Right as a Collective Actor: Modeling the Impact of Cultural and Structural Variables on Party Formation and Movement Mobilization," *Comparative European Politics* 1, no. 2 (2003): 151.

possible within the context of developed nation-states, as the far-right movement originated as a reaction against the modernisation process of the late 19th century that took place in Europe and the United States.[65] Modernisation brought about new developments, such as democratisation and industrialisation. Moreover, it led to a growing autonomy of the individual and the functional differentiation of society. This had a negative effect on the social cohesion within the modernised countries. Some people wanted to radically undo this social change by over-emphasising or radicalising images of social homogeneity, for which the image of 'the nation' proved very useful. This marked the beginning of the far-right movements.

Paragraph 2.2: Xenophobia and Racism

Xenophobia

Xenophobia is the general idea of antipathy towards foreigners. The term is derived from the (ancient) Greek language and literally means 'fear of strangers'. However, its meaning within the academic literature goes beyond 'fear'; it is much more understood as jealousy, resentment and even hatred against foreigners.[66] At the core of xenophobia is civic exclusion, also called 'civic ostracism', which means that people who are perceived to be 'foreigners' are not only treated unfriendly, but are also excluded from the civic mainstream.[67] This means that they cannot authentically participate in the cultural, linguistic or religious traditions of the nation they live in. They are seen as outsiders, culturally alien and they are said to not rightfully belong to the nation, not on the basis of blood (*ius sanguinis*) nor on the basis of soil (*ius soli*). This conclusion is often based on cultural, religious or ethnic identity markers, such as the colour of one's skin, which indicates that someone is not from 'here' and thus does not rightfully belong to the nation. When this idea of civic exclusion is combined with the idea that one's own nation is superior to all other nations, it is called *ethnocentrism*, which is a specific form of xenophobia.[68]

Just as 'the nation' is imagined, so too are ethnic minorities imagined to constitute groups that are not part of the nation. Jean-Paul Sartre has clarified the underlying idea of this division as a dichotomy between 'the real' and the 'abstract' nation. The 'real nation' includes only those with authentic claims based on blood and land,

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65.   Minkenberg, "The Renewal of the Radical Right: Between Modernity and Anti-modernity," 174.

66.   Ronald Sundstrom and David Kim, "Xenophobia and Racism," *Critical Philosophy of Race* 2, no. 1 (2014): 23; Cas Mudde, "Right-wing extremism analyzed: A comparative analysis of the ideologies of three alleged right-wing extremist parties (NPD, NDP, CP'86)," *European Journal of Political Research* 27, no. 2 (1995): 212.

67.   Ronald Sundstrom, "Sheltering Xenophobia," *Critical Philosophy of Race* 1, no. 1 (2013): 71.

68.   Mudde, "Right-wing extremism analyzed: A comparative analysis of the ideologies of three alleged right-wing extremist parties (NPD, NDP, CP'86)," 213.

whereas the 'abstract' nation is the 'official' nation where belonging is mediated through law and bureaucracy, thus including those who are not linked through blood and soil.[69] Xenophobic attitudes can be implicit or explicit, and can be expressed on the individual as well as the institutional level. The latter occurs when there is a collective intent or neglective orientation that excludes a group from the civic mainstream.[70] According to Cas Mudde, there are three conditions that make ethnic minorities more likely targets of xenophobic campaigns:

1) The ethnic minority is well-organised and claims minority rights or protection.
2) The ethnic minority is linked to the majority ethnicity of a bordering state.
3) The ethnic minority is part of the former dominating group in the country.[71]

The absence of these conditions explains why for example Chinese minority groups, despite their decades of residence in Europe, are almost never the target of xenophobic campaigns by far-right movements. Xenophobia is thus directed against civic outsiders, who can be part of a minority or majority group, immigrant or non-immigrant community, and who can be from European or non-European descent. The twentieth century has seen some shifts in the aim of xenophobic campaigns by far-right movements, ranging from indigenous ethnic minorities such as the Basques in Spain (during the Franco regime) to immigrant communities such as East-European asylum seekers.[72] However, the 'foreigner' came to be predominantly defined by the immigrant or refugee, and from the 1960's and 1970's onwards primarily from non-European descent and in particular: with an Islamic background.

Racism

The study of racism has long suffered from a reductionist perspective. Racism was generally understood to be an ideology that involved irrationality, biological characteristics, hierarchical ordering and domination.[73] However, Goldberg has convincingly argued that racism(s) is a multi-layered concept that is contingent and therefore comes in a variety of forms. Racism therefore, cannot be reduced to merely a set of beliefs; it also involves practices and institutions. It even concerns individuals who claim not to have the intention of being racist, but whose actions

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69. Sundstrom, "Sheltering Xenophobia," 71; Sundstrom and Kim, "Xenophobia and Racism," 28.
70. Sundstrom and Kim, "Xenophobia and Racism," 26.
71. Mudde, *Populist radical right parties in Europe*, 71-73.
72. Mudde, *Populist radical right parties in Europe*, 70-71.
73. David Goldberg, *Racist culture: philosophy and the politics of meaning* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 94; Anya Topolski, "The Race-Religion Constellation: A European Contribution to the Critical Philosophy of Race," *Critical Philosophy of Race* 6, no. 1 (2018): 74.

and/or statements can have an effect that is racially discriminatory or exclusionary.[74] I also follow Goldberg when he argues that racism has exclusion at its core. *Racism*, Goldberg states, entails: 'promoting exclusions, or the actual exclusions of people in virtue of their being deemed members of different racial groups, however racial groups are taken to be constituted.' *Racists* are then 'those persons who explicitly or implicitly ascribe racial characteristics of others that purportedly differ from their own and others like them.[75] It is noticeable that Goldberg does not speak of a racist *ideology*, which can be explained from his criticism that racism in the past has been reduced to an idea or belief, although it is now generally understood to also include practices and institutions.

Although it goes too far to give an inclusive account of the various dimensions of the concept of racism within this section, I do find it important to highlight two aspects of racism in relation to far-right movements and individuals, namely: the post-racial society in Europe and the relationship between racism and religion.[76] The first aspect concerns the prevailing idea that Europe has reached the historical stage in which societies are characterised by an equality of rights and opportunity for everyone, regardless of race. This idea however, has been unmasked as a myth.[77] The idea of Europe being a post-racial society is based on four erroneous assumptions:

1) Racism belongs to the past.
2) Liberal democracy does not allow space for racism.
3) Racism is about race (which is a biological category).
4) If there is no racist intention, then there is no racism.

After World War II, many academics, politicians and victims of racism believed that with the defeat of Nazism and fascism, racism had also been defeated.[78] Racism came to be reduced to an ideology and a praxis that only belonged to the Nazi's.

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74. Goldberg, *Racist culture: philosophy and the politics of meaning*, 98.
75. Goldberg, *Racist culture: philosophy and the politics of meaning*, 98.
76. I deem this to be very important as the characteristic of racism has received too little attention within the academic literature on the far right. This has to do with the fact that the vast majority of scholars working in this research field are political scientists, with little or no knowledge of critical philosophy of race. See also Aurelien Mondon and Aaron Winter, "Racist movements, the far right and mainstreaming," in *Routledge international handbook of contemporary racisms*, ed. John Solomos (New York: Routledge, 2020), 152.
77. In his book 'Are We All Post-Racial Yet?' Goldberg has shown how the concept of post-raciality is merely a new mode of racism. David Theo Goldberg, *Are we all postracial yet?* (Cambridge: Polity, 2017).
78. Topolski, "The Race-Religion Constellation: A European Contribution to the Critical Philosophy of Race," 71; Mondon and Winter, "Racist movements, the far right and mainstreaming," 152.

Secondly, liberal democracy came to be seen as a safeguard for racism. Racism was deemed illiberal and unacceptable in the liberal post-war era. The 'real' racism had been defeated (and thus belonged to the past) and present forms of racism only belonged to extreme movements such as neo-Nazis, who were regarded to be outside of liberal democracy. Thirdly, racism was thought to deal with 'race', which was perceived to be merely a biological category. After the war, the term 'race' came to be increasingly used for animals, whereas the term 'ethnicity' came to be used for human beings. Anya Topolski calls this the 'silencing of race-talk', which had two reasons:

1) Jews who had escaped the Holocaust did not feel comfortable with the word 'race'.
2) European governments and citizens avoided the term 'race' as they wanted to escape the shame of their genocidal and racial past.[79]

Fourthly, many governments, institutions and individuals assumed that if they did not have a racist intent, there would be no instance of racism. These four erroneous assumptions led to the idea that Europe had overcome racism, the idea of Europe as a 'post-racial' society. It denied the structural racism that was (and still is) present in Europe, which is denoted 'liberal racism', 'colourblind racism' or 'racism without racists'.[80]

Due to this liberal post-racial frame, far-right movements were pushed into the margins as the real 'racists'. To escape this position, far-right leaders reshaped their politics in the 1980's by claiming they were no racists. They seemingly moderated their far-right politics by renouncing biological racism and instead embracing ethnopluralism: the idea that people are divided into ethnic groups, which are equal but should remain segregated.[81] The focus of ethnopluralism (also known by the term cultural racism) is incompatibility, e.g. between cultures or religions, rather than 'race'. A good example of this moderation process, which Mondon and Winter call 'discursive reconstruction', is how Marine le Penn moderated the racist character of her father's far-right party 'Le Front National', by stressing the importance of certain liberal values and focusing on culture and Islam as threats to French society.[82]

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79. Topolski, "The Race-Religion Constellation: A European Contribution to the Critical Philosophy of Race," 72.
80. Mondon and Winter, "Racist movements, the far right and mainstreaming," 154.
81. Mudde, *The far right today*, 27.
82. Mondon and Winter, "Racist movements, the far right and mainstreaming," 155.

The second aspect of racism that has to be taken into account when identifying racist far-right movements and individuals, is the relationship between racism and religion in Europe. This is already apparent within the ideology of cultural racism, as adherents often defend themselves against the accusation of racism by stating that they are against Islam, which is a culture and/or religion and not a race; thus they are no racists.[83] However, de Koning and Topolski have shown that race is a social construct; therefore, religious minorities can also be racialised.[84] Topolski has also shown how religious categories turned into racial categories through 19th century European philology, by which she demonstrates that European racism is actually rooted in a hierarchical binary between Christian and non-Christian religions within medieval Christian theology. From this follows that islamophobia and antisemitism should be seen as forms of racism, as they are the result of historical processes of racialisation.[85]

The relationship between nationalism, xenophobia and racism

Nationalism does not necessarily produce xenophobia and racism, but it does provide a breeding ground for the cultivation of xenophobia and racism. This is apparent when nationalists adhere to a form of *extreme* nationalism or nativism, the idea that the state can be exclusively inhabited by members of the nation, whereas non-members are perceived to be a threat to the nation. Nativism, in its perception of non-members being threatening to the nation, is related to xenophobia. Xenophobia, in turn, is often intertwined with racism. This raises the question how these three are related. In the academic literature on the far right these terms are sometimes taken together, and sometimes they are separately defined. This leads to a lack of clarity as to what is exactly meant by the usage of these terms. Therefore, I think it is important to dwell on this briefly.

First of all, it is important to understand how nationalism in general gives way to xenophobia and racism. Mainly, this has to do with the distinction between the 'us' and 'them' that is inherent to the idea of nationalism. When striving for the congruency of the nation and the state, nationalists draw the line between those who are perceived to be part of the nation and those who are not. As philosopher

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83.   Topolski, "The Race-Religion Constellation: A European Contribution to the Critical Philosophy of Race," 74.

84.   Martijn de Koning, *Een ideologische strijd met de islam. Fortuyns gedachtegoed als scharnierpunt in de racialisering van moslims* (Uithoorn: Karakter Uitgevers, 2016), 12-13; Topolski, "The Race-Religion Constellation: A European Contribution to the Critical Philosophy of Race," 59.

85.   Topolski, "The Race-Religion Constellation: A European Contribution to the Critical Philosophy of Race," 73; S. Garner and S. Selod, "The Racialization of Muslims: Empirical Studies of Islamophobia," *Critical Sociology* 41, no. 1 (2015): 12.

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Ronald Sundstrom phrases it: 'the dynamics of nationalism transforms whole territories – enormous areas of land and collections of faiths, cultures and languages – into ours and not theirs.'[86] Thus, nationalism produces a dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. The main line of exclusion is not found *within* the nation-state, but found *between* those who are within and those who are outside of the nation-state. This distinction is captured by Andreas Wimmer: 'the legitimate 'owners of the state' are opposed to those excluded from the national 'we', to immigrants and other groups disturbing the amalgamation of the citizenry, the sovereign and the nation into one single 'people'.[87]

The distinction between the nation and other groups is often characterised by identity markers, such as language, ethnicity, culture and religion, that are often used as powerful instruments within the political discourse to substantiate the 'us' versus 'them' distinction. Moreover, the power of exclusion (of those who are deemed to be outside of the nation-state) is rooted in the idea of national self-determination: nations have the sovereign right to determine who is and who is not a member of their nation, which has been translated over time into legal criteria for citizenship and residency.[88] Due to this dynamics of inclusion and exclusion inherent to nationalism, xenophobia and racism can be understood as two forms of nationalist exclusion and as such, they are a consequence of the ordering of the modern world according to the principle of the nation-state.[89]

Secondly, if we look specifically at nativism, the academic literature shows that nativism, xenophobia and racism are interrelated and cannot be correctly understood in isolation. However, they are conceptually different. Xenophobia is the general idea of antipathy towards foreigners, which is at the root of nativism that can be perceived as xenophobia more explicitly engaged in the defence of the nation state.[90] This means that xenophobia without nativism can exist, but there cannot be nativism without xenophobia. An example of xenophobia without nativism would be xenophobic attitudes among members of a nomadic tribe or a diasporic community. Xenophobia and racism are also related to each other, due to 'their historical and sociological relatedness and interactions.'[91] Racism is a complex concept that involves many layers and depths. For this reason, philosopher David

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86. Sundstrom, "Sheltering Xenophobia," 73.
87. Wimmer, *Nationalist exclusion and ethnic conflict: shadows of modernity*, 200.
88. Sundstrom, "Sheltering Xenophobia," 72-73.
89. Wimmer, *Nationalist exclusion and ethnic conflict: shadows of modernity*, 201.
90. Sundstrom and Kim, "Xenophobia and Racism," 31-32.
91. Sundstrom and Kim, "Xenophobia and Racism," 33.

Theo Goldberg speaks of 'racisms' instead of 'racism'.[92] Moreover, as it is able to attach itself to other concepts, it is often called a 'scavenger concept'.[93] This has led to the entanglement of racism with xenophobia.

Nevertheless, both should be distinguished. Racism(s) concerns the promotion of exclusions, or the actual exclusions of people in virtue of their being deemed members of different racial groups, however racial groups are taken to be constituted.[94] Racism and xenophobia come together when the exclusion of people concerns members of a different racial group who are also considered to be foreigners or 'outsiders' to the nation. This is often the case, which explains why racism and xenophobia have historically been deeply intertwined. But this does not necessarily have to be so. *Racism without xenophobia* exists when, for example, a nation consists of minority groups that are seen to be part of the nation, but whose members are racially discriminated against or excluded by the dominant group. Or when a majority group, such as an indigenous population in colonial times, is racially discriminated against or excluded by the occupying (foreign) elite, although its members are the native inhabitants of the country. *Xenophobia without racism* then concerns the discrimination or exclusion of groups within the nation purely on the basis of their nationality, without racialising them as members of a different racial group. Sundstrom writes of 'civic ostracism' that targets a specific group because of its nationality, without reference to ethnicity or race.[95] Having elucidated the features of nationalism, xenophobia, racism and their interrelationship, I will now move on to consider the characteristic of anti-democracy in more detail.

Paragraph 2.3: Anti-democracy

Interestingly, despite the fact that an anti-democratic character is (almost) always attributed to the ideology of far-right political parties and movements, anti-democracy is currently one of the most heavily debated features of the far right. There is an intense debate about the question whether far-right political parties and movements are *always* anti-democratic. Some scholars, such as Cas Mudde, argue that far-right movements can be (nominally) democratic, as some are not against democracy *per se*, but against a specific form of democracy, i.e. *liberal* democracy.[96] Others, such as Elisabeth Carter, contend that anti-democracy is a central defining characteristic of the far-right ideology and attribute a major role to anti-democracy

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92.   Goldberg, *Racist culture: philosophy and the politics of meaning*, 90-116.
93.   Sundstrom and Kim, "Xenophobia and Racism," 33.
94.   Goldberg, *Racist culture: philosophy and the politics of meaning*, 98.
95.   Sundstrom, "Sheltering Xenophobia," 72.
96.   Mudde, *Populist radical right parties in Europe*, 138-57.

in defining the far right.[97] Most scholars researching the far right, however, opt for the middle ground and agree that contemporary far-right political parties and movements have a complex and variable relationship with democracy that can only be assessed through empirical research.[98] This has led, for example, to the development of three categories that comprise the attitudes of far-right political parties towards democracy, parliamentarism and pluralism: (1) parties that reject outright the existing democratic order and want to see it replaced, (2) parties that demand reform of the existing democratic order, which involves less democracy and more state intervention, and (3) parties that demand reform of the existing democratic order, which involves more democracy and less state intervention.[99]

In order to understand how far-right movements oppose (liberal) democracy, it is necessary to have an understanding of democracy itself. Therefore, it is important to distinguish between the *procedures* of democracy and the *substance* of democracy.[100] The *procedures* refers to the rules and institutions of the democratic system, which should include 'fully contested elections with full suffrage and the absence of massive fraud, combined with effective guarantees of civil liberties, including freedom of speech, assembly and association'. The *substance* of democracy refers to the fundamental values and principles of democracy, which include 'a belief in the value of diversity and tolerance of difference, the principle of political equality and the value of civil and political freedoms'. According to Carter, those parties and movements that reject either the substance ór the substance and the procedures of democracy can then be classified as anti-democratic.[101]

What causes the friction between the far-right idea of state government and the idea of (liberal) democracy as outlined above? According to Cas Mudde, it is caused by the idea of monism that is often present in far-right ideology. Political monism considers societies to be essentially homogenous collectives whereas political pluralism, which is inherent to liberal democracy, presupposes societies to be made up of groups of fundamentally different individuals.[102] Monism is often expressed in the idea of nativism, and more concretely in the idea of the 'ethnocracy': a

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97. Carter, "Right-wing extremism/radicalism: reconstructing the concept," 175-76.

98. Carter, "Right-wing extremism/radicalism: reconstructing the concept," 166-67.

99. Elisabeth Carter, *The extreme right in Western Europe: success or failure?* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 41-42.

100. Mudde, "Right-wing extremism analyzed: A comparative analysis of the ideologies of three alleged right-wing extremist parties (NPD, NDP, CP'86)," 214; Carter, "Right-wing extremism/radicalism: reconstructing the concept," 170.

101. Carter, "Right-wing extremism/radicalism: reconstructing the concept," 171.

102. Mudde, *Populist radical right parties in Europe*, 157.

democracy in which citizenship is based on ethnicity.[103] Adherents believe that a democratic nation-state belongs to only one ethnic group and that other groups can only live there if they accept the dominance of the prime ethnic group.[104] In addition to this appropriation of the state to one's own ethnic group, there is also the aim of creating a monocultural state, which promotes the creation and strengthening of only one official national culture.[105] Multiculturalism is therefore rejected. This idea of ethnocracy clearly shows how monistic ideas of state governance of the far right are at odds with the idea of liberal democracy in which minorities and their rights are not only recognised, but also seen as a constructive added value for society as a whole.

Paragraph 2.4: Authoritarianism

In the 1990s, Cas Mudde conceptualised 'the strong state' as one of the five features that were mentioned by more than half of the scholars working on the far right. He defined the strong state as 'a collective noun for sub-features that have to do with a strengthened repressive function of the state.'[106] The three sub-features of the strong-state were defined as: anti-pluralism, law and order and militarism. However, Mudde gradually dropped militarism as a sub-feature, because he found that the ideology of many, especially Western, far-right political parties do not entail a militaristic component; some even promote anti-militaristic ideas.[107] Therefore, Mudde started to focus on the law and order component of the strong state and came to emphasise the element of hierarchical authority promoted in far-right ideology. This led him to changing the term 'the strong state' with the more appropriate term 'authoritarianism', which Mudde defines as: 'the belief in a strictly ordered society, in which infringements of authority are to be punished severely.[108]

Like the concept of 'the strong state', authoritarianism is composed of a number of sub-features. In the footsteps of Mudde, Carter transfers insights from social psychology on authoritarian personalities (based on the work of Theodor Adorno and Bob Altemeyer) to far-right ideology, which leads her to the following three sub features: conventionalism, submission and aggression.[109] Conventionalism is reflected in 'policies that safeguard and promote traditional social norms, values,

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103.   Mudde, *The far right today*, 28.
104.   Mudde, *Populist radical right parties in Europe*, 144.
105.   Mudde, *Populist radical right parties in Europe*, 139-45.
106.   Mudde, "Right-wing extremism analyzed: A comparative analysis of the ideologies of three alleged right-wing extremist parties (NPD, NDP, CP'86)," 216.
107.   Mudde, *Populist radical right parties in Europe*, 150.
108.   Mudde, *Populist radical right parties in Europe*, 23.
109.   Carter, "Right-wing extremism/radicalism: reconstructing the concept," 169.

morality, roles and lifestyle.' Submission is reflected in 'the way a political party speaks of the values of order, discipline and compliance, and the duty to respect, defer to, and show pride in the authorities and the state'. Aggression is reflected in 'moral, social, political and legal punitive measures', which include 'condemnation of and discrimination towards those who violate the traditional social norms and who threaten society's cohesion' as well as 'strict law and order policies'.

Far-right actors argue in particular for authoritarian policies in response to something that is perceived to be a threat to the nation or 'the natural order of things'. This may be an act of crime, terrorism, or flows of immigration or unemployment that they believe jeopardises the security of members of the nation. The protection of the nation-state and the security of its members is of utmost importance and a key issue on the agenda of far-right politicians. Insecurity must therefore be fought and dealt with. For far-right politicians and activists there is only one solution: the iron fist, which is translated into authoritarian policies.[110] In light of the three-way division of policy instruments used against terrorism and extremism, i.e. 'sticks' (forms of repression), 'carrots' (positive activating tools such as grants and training) and 'sermons' (forms of incitement to good citizenship through public campaigns and counter-narratives), far-right actors choose the 'sticks': forms of repression to neutralize threats.[111]

In recent decades, far-right actors have increasingly attributed the insecurity of members of the nation to *external* threats, i.e. non-native actors who are the main cause for the insecurity of the members of the nation rather than *internal* threats i.e. native actors who endanger the nation.[112] Far-right actors often use the argument that destructive forces such as crime, terrorism, riots, domestic instability and welfare fraud are mainly exerted and perpetrated by migrants, who therefore ought to be removed from the nation as they are destabilising the public order.[113] However, these attributions often do not match the facts. For example, sociologist Hein de Haas has demonstrated that the idea that immigration leads to more

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[110.] Mudde, *The far right today*, 33.

[111.] Vliek and De Koning, *Beleidsinstrumenten en extremistische wereldbeelden. Een verkennend rapport*, 32.

[112.] In his research on far-right political parties in the nineties, Cas Mudde found that the German NPD, as well as the Austrian NDP and the Dutch CP'86 all attributed criminality to a native cause: 'a decline in values' caused by capitalism and left-wing policies, see Mudde, "Right-wing extremism analyzed: A comparative analysis of the ideologies of three alleged right-wing extremist parties (NPD, NDP, CP'86)," 216-17.

[113.] Jef Huysmans, "The European Union and the Securitization of Migration," *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 38, no. 5 (2000): 754.

crime is not supported by academic research; on the contrary, research shows that neighbourhoods actually become safer when more immigrants settle in.[114]

The perception of migration as a danger or threat is not just peculiar to the far right; it is part of a broader development within West-European societies from the 1980s onwards, in which migrants came to be seen as a challenge to societal and political stability and the effective working of the internal market.[115] Migration shifted from a socio-economic or human rights frame (post-war era) towards the framework of a security issue (1980s - now), a development that has been called the 'securitisation of migration'.[116] Migration as a security issue came to dominate the political and social discourse of national governments, grass roots organisations, European transnational police networks and the media.[117] Migrants were portrayed as a cultural Other, reifying their cultural identity as a danger towards society. Those who viewed the (cultural) challenge of migration as an opportunity for society, argued in favour of multiculturalism and liberal policies in which the social-economic rights of migrants were to be guaranteed. Those who viewed the challenge of migration as a threat (e.g. far-right actors), argued in particular for tougher authoritarian policies.

After 9/11, the securitisation of migration has only increased and has even reached its peak in it becoming normalised, even within the discourse of liberal scholars and governments.[118] Moreover, far-right politicians shifted their focus from the general threat posed by migrants and their different cultural identity in particular, to the threat posed by the religion of many of these migrants: Islam. Crime and terrorism came to be associated with Islam rather than the migrants themselves. The 'ideology' of Islam became the scapegoat: the religious doctrines were not only deemed *incompatible* with the idea of the nation, but downright *destructive* to the nation. Far-right politicians therefore increasingly advocated for tougher authoritarian policies on members of the Muslim community, such as a ban on mosques/minarets, a ban on the wearing of the niqab/burqa and the rejection or deportation of so-called 'hate-preachers'.[119] If we take a close look at this discourse,

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114. Hein de Haas, *Hoe migratie echt werkt: het ware verhaal over migratie aan de hand van 22 mythen*, trans. Alexander van Kesteren (Amsterdam: Spectrum, 2023).
115. Huysmans, "The European Union and the Securitization of Migration," 766.
116. Huysmans, "The European Union and the Securitization of Migration," 751-77. Maggie Ibrahim, "The Securitization of Migration: A Racial Discourse[1]," *International Migration* 43, no. 5 (2005): 163-87.
117. Huysmans, "The European Union and the Securitization of Migration," 758.
118. Ibrahim, "The Securitization of Migration: A Racial Discourse[1]," 163-69.
119. Mudde, *Populist radical right parties in Europe*, 149; Aristotle Kallis, "Breaking Taboos and 'Mainstreaming the Extreme': The Debates on Restricting Islamic Symbols in Contemporary Europe," in *Right wing populism in Europe: politics and discourse*, ed. Ruth Wodak, Majid KhosraviNik, and Brigitte Mral (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 62-66.

it is noteworthy that the ideological characteristics that are attributed to Islam and which are used to substantiate the claim that Islam is not compatible with Western democracy, are exactly the three features that characterise the far-right authoritarian ideology: conventionalism, submission and aggression. I will return to this in the second chapter.

Paragraph 2.5: Populism

Defining populism

Populism is an important characteristic of the far right and justifiably added as a sixth feature by Elisabeth Carter, although it was not included in Cas Mudde's original list of the most cited features of right-wing extremism. Reason for its inclusion is twofold. Firstly, the change in the defining of populism as a phenomenon. In the eighties and nineties, populism was regarded as a political style rather than a set of beliefs or ideology.[120] This view has changed considerably as more political scientists in recent decades have started considering populism to be a worldview, to such an extent that the so-called 'ideational approach' is currently the most widely used approach in the academic literature on populism.[121] Secondly, the number of far-right political parties and movements that endorse a populist discourse has risen significantly in past decades. This has led to the mainstreaming of the populist discourse in the politics of many western democracies, a development Cas Mudde refers to as 'The Populist Zeitgeist' we are living in today.[122] Populism can therefore no longer be excluded from characterising the far right.

What is populism? For decades, there has been profound debate about its definition. The lack of consensus is especially due to the fact that populism does not entail a commitment to principal values, such as liberty or equality. Paul Taggart has called this feature the 'empty heart of populism', which implies that the 'thin' ideology of populism often attaches itself to other 'thick' ideologies that do consist of core values.[123] Therefore, populism can be found across the entire political spectrum: left, centre and right. As such, it has a chameleonic character: it adapts itself to its context and often attaches itself to the political ideology that is most favourable to mobilising people.[124] This characteristic in particular makes it difficult to grasp the essence of populism.

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[120].   Carter, "Right-wing extremism/radicalism: reconstructing the concept," 173.

[121].   Moffitt, *Populism*, 12.

[122].   Mudde, "The Populist Zeitgeist," 562.

[123].   Paul A. Taggart, *Populism* (Buckingham Open University Press, 2000), 4.

[124].   Taggart, *Populism*, 76-84.

Nevertheless, it is possible to define populism, although its definition depends on the approach one uses in studying populism. Within the academic debate there are three principal approaches in studying populism: the ideational approach, the strategic approach and the discursive-performative approach.[125] I have chosen the ideational approach, as I view populism as a set of ideas that can be integrated in a far-right ideology. As such, I follow in the footsteps of Cas Mudde, whose work represents the ideational approach, and use the following definition of populism: 'an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* ('general will') of the people.'[126] As it appears from this definition, populism is a so-called 'thin ideology.' This means that it does not cover the whole range of political concepts on the political agenda, as it offers few specific views on political institutional or socio-economic issues.[127] Therefore, populism cannot stand alone as an ideology, but needs to attach itself to a host ideology, such as nationalism.

'The people, the elite and the general will'
Having defined populism, I will now move on to discuss the three notions within this definition: the people, the general will (of the people) and the elite. The first notion I will discuss is 'the people' that is seen as the core concept of populism. Populists claim to represent 'the people', which is contrasted with 'the elite'. This, however, raises the critical question: who belongs to 'the people'? The answer to this question is not straightforward; it depends on the context and history of the location where populism emerges and the concomitant rhetoric used by populist leaders. The people is thus a flexible idea, which can be moulded by populists as they see fit. From this follows that 'the people' is an imagined community, just as 'the nation' (see section 1.3 'Nationalism') or in the words of Mudde: it is a 'mythical and constructed sub-set of the whole population.'[128]

'The people' is generally characterised by five features: firstly, it refers to a multitude of people. Secondly, this multitude is homogenous in character; it constitutes a unity that can be ascribed singular features, such as 'one voice' or 'one will'. Thirdly, 'the people' is a moral category. Those who are perceived to belong to the people

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125.   Moffitt, *Populism*, 11-12.
126.   Mudde, "The Populist Zeitgeist," 543. In defining populism, Mudde drew on the work of Margaret Canovan: Margaret Canovan, *Populism* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981).
127.   Cas Mudde, "Populism: an Ideational Approach," in *The Oxford handbook of populism* ed. Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 30.
128.   Mudde, "The Populist Zeitgeist," 546.

are lauded because they embody certain virtues.[129] Fourthly, they are characterised as 'the silent majority' of hard-working, tax-paying citizens who live their lives in silence.[130] They are reluctant to participate in politics and only do so when they feel 'a sense of necessity brought on by extreme conditions – by a sense of crisis or collapse.'[131] Lastly, wisdom is not gained by consulting experts, but is obtained from the common sense of the common people. Populists advocate common sense solutions and oppose what they see as complex and opaque solutions proposed by the elite, which only stem from 'special interests.'[132]

Notwithstanding the above-mentioned five general characteristics, there is a widespread variety in the meaning of the concept of 'the people'. This variation does not imply that the concept is devoid of meaning; Paul Taggart uses the term 'the heartland' to get a grip on the populist notion of 'the people'. The heartland is the location in which, in the populists' imagination, a virtuous and unified populace resides.[133] It is an idealised conception of the community that they identify themselves with and which they aim to serve.[134] This core community is constructed retrospectively from the past, often perceived as a time in which things were better. Populists aim to reconstruct this community in the present in an attempt to restore what they believe has been lost.[135] As an idealised conception that stirs the emotions, it appeals to the heart and is therefore called 'the heartland'. Populist leaders draw heavily on their surroundings to construct narratives, myths and symbols that resonate with this conception of the heartland. In (re-)constructing this idea of a core community, which can be narrower defined than the imagined community of 'the nation', populists find a legitimisation for excluding those who do not belong to 'their heartland'. Or, in the words of Taggart: 'the heartland excludes the marginal or the extreme'.[136] As such, it draws a clear boundary between 'us' and 'them'. This leaves us with the intriguing question whether the conception of the heartland formed the basis for the populist exclusion of others or if the exclusion of others made it necessary to find an idealised heartland.

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129. Taggart, *Populism*, 92.
130. Taggart, *Populism*, 93.
131. Taggart, *Populism*, 94.
132. Mudde, "Populism: an Ideational Approach," 33-34.
133. Taggart, *Populism*, 95.
134. Paul Taggart, "Populism and representative politics in contemporary Europe," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 9, no. 3 (2004): 274.
135. Taggart, *Populism*, 95.
136. Taggart, *Populism*, 96.

The second notion of Mudde's definition is 'the elite'. The elite is opposed to 'the people', which is a distinction based on morality: 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite'. This moral distinction is connected to the virtues that are embodied in those who belong to the heartland: they are virtuous, they are pure, and trying to live honest lives, whereas the elite only pursues its own interests at the expense of the heartland. Moreover, the opposition between the people and the elite is a Manichean distinction in the sense that populists seem to divide the world into two categories: good and evil.[137] Clearly, the elite is identified as evil.

Two features of the notion of 'the people', i.e. the homogenous character of the people and the claim of common sense as wisdom, form the basis of the third notion in Mudde's definition: the general will or 'volonté générale' of the people. It is because of the homogenous nature of 'the people' and the idea that every human being has access to common sense, that it is possible to imagine 'the people' as having only 'one' will that should predominate politics; despite the fact that a nation-state includes a multitude and diversity of people who want and pursue different things.

(National) populism in the European far right

Contemporary populist political parties and movements in Europe maintain a clear anti-establishment rhetoric in their political discourse.[138] This is characteristic of what Taggart calls 'the new populism': a wave of populism that emerged in the second half of the twentieth century that explicitly opposed the post-war political institutions and the dominant mode of politics.[139] This new form of populism generally arises from criticism on the established political parties. Adherents criticise the elitism, liberalism and lack of transparency of the established parties and attribute political crises to these factors. Instead, they argue for direct democracy and an alternative way of organisation by choosing centralised and charismatic leadership.[140] However, in order to make a change, populist political parties are forced to use the political system they condemn so fiercely. This is what Taggart calls: 'the populist institutional dilemma.'[141] Due to this inescapable fact,

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[137]. Mudde, "Populism: an Ideational Approach," 32; Nadia Marzouki, Duncan McDonnell, and Olivier Roy, *Saving the People: How Populists Hijack Religion* (London: Hurst & Company, 2016), 2.

[138]. Carter found that the definitions of Minkenberg (2000, 2001, 2003), Givens (2005) and Rydgren (2005) all included the feature 'anti-establishment' within their definitions of the far right. See Carter, "Right-wing extremism/radicalism: reconstructing the concept," 163.

[139]. Taggart, *Populism*, 75.

[140]. Or in the apt words of Taggart: 'populists want the most extraordinary individuals to lead the most ordinary of people.' Taggart, *Populism*, 1.

[141]. Taggart, *Populism*, 100.

populist parties are doomed to become either less populist, are riven with internal conflict or they collapse as a whole. This implies that populism is already self-limiting within the core of its ideology and as a consequence only exists for a short period of time.

As I have mentioned above, 'the people' is a flexible idea. Populists tend to conceive of the people in three different ways: the people as plebs, demos and nation.[142] Brubaker explains their meaning as follows. The people as *plebs* refers to the common or ordinary people to whom recognition, respect or resources should be redistributed. The people as *demos* refers to the sovereign people to which power should be restored. The people as *nation* refers to a moral, cultural or political community which should be protected against various threats. It is in this latter sense that the concept of 'the people' and 'the nation' coincide, making populism and nationalism each other's bedfellows. This merging of the people and the nation in populist discourse has led to confusion and the blurring of the distinction between populism and nationalism.[143]

However, scholars such as De Cleen and Stavrakakis, Moffitt and Brubaker argue that populism and nationalism cannot be conflated. Rather, they are distinct concepts that should be kept separate on a theoretical level.[144] In praxis, however, they often intertwine in populist discourse. This happens on both the left and the right end of the political spectrum. What distinguishes far-right populists from left-wing populists who equate the people to the nation, is that they not only conflate the imagined community of 'the nation' with 'the people', but also hold a conception of the nation that is nativist in character. As the image of 'national populism' in Figure 3 shows, this idea is two-dimensional: it not only views the elite as its enemy (vertical dimension), but also those who are considered 'outsiders' (horizontal dimension).[145] The elite is excluded from the nation on the basis of moral criteria (as being 'corrupt'), outsiders are excluded on the basis of ethnic criteria (as

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142. Rogers Brubaker, "Populism and nationalism," *Nations and Nationalism* 26, no. 1 (2020): 49.

143. Brubaker, "Populism and nationalism," 51; Moffitt, *Populism*, 31.

144. Benjamin De Cleen and Yannis Stavrakakis, "Distinctions and Articulations: A Discourse Theoretical Framework for the Study of Populism and Nationalism," *Javnost - The Public* 24, no. 4 (2017): 312; Moffitt, *Populism*, 48; Brubaker, "Populism and nationalism," 45. Although Brubaker agrees that populism and nationalism should be kept separate as analytically distinct concepts, he does criticise the idea of 'conceptual purification', found a.o. in De Cleen and Stavrakakis (2017).

145. Brubaker, "Between nationalism and civilizationism: the European populist moment in comparative perspective," 1192; Cremer, *The Godless Crusade. Religion, Populism and Right-Wing Identity Politics in the West*, 16-17. Cremer describes this two-dimensional idea as the 'triangular national populist worldview'.

not belonging to the nation).[146] Far-right populists believe that the elite and the 'Others' help each other as they have special interests in doing so, e.g. left-wing politicians helping immigrants to enter their countries in order to gain increased voting power. As such, two enemies are created: the elite *and* 'The Other'. This set of beliefs has been called 'a populism of identity' or national populism.[147]

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN POPULISM AND NATIONAL POPULISM

Figure 3.

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146. Mudde, "Populism: an Ideational Approach," 33.
147. Carter, "Right-wing extremism/radicalism: reconstructing the concept," 173; Brubaker, "Between nationalism and civilizationism: the European populist moment in comparative perspective," 1192.

I

Part II:
Religious Contra-Identities in Far-Right Discourse

Chapter II:

Tracing the Development of Religious Contra-Identities in Europe

Introduction

In this chapter, I am tracing the development of what I call the 'contra-identities' of Christianity and Islam that are predominant in contemporary far-right political discourse. This chapter is composed of three paragraphs. In the first paragraph I shed light upon the academic debate regarding religion and the far right, thereby providing three points of criticism on the usage of religion within the literature in the field of political philosophy and political science. Subsequently, I focus on the relationship between nationalism and religion. I explain how religious in- and outgroups are constructed and how religion can function as an identity marker to distinguish 'us' from 'them'.

In the second paragraph I discuss the civilisationist rhetoric of the far right. Firstly, I explain the meaning and characteristics of the concept 'civilisation' as this is scarcely reflected upon, despite its over usage within the political field and the academic literature. Secondly, I provide a short history on the connotations of the concept and I explain which of them are currently connected to the term 'civilisation'. This is important as it determines the way in which 'civilisation' is understood and easily connected to other concepts such as modernity, secularism and liberalism. Thirdly, I explain how civilisationism is related to nationalism. I argue that civilisationism is both a form of ánd an alternative to nationalism; in the latter sense, it can be defined as a civilisational identity which I then explicate using the social identity theory of Henri Tajfel.

In the third paragraph I deal with the religious dimension of the civilisationist discourse of the European far right. Firstly, I describe how identity became politicised in the 1990's. I describe how the social identity of (Muslim) immigrants in Europe came to be focused first on their social-economic background (1980's), then on their cultural background (1990's) and recently on their religious background (after 2001). Secondly, I analyse the influence of Huntington's thinking ('The Clash of Civilisations') on the emergence of cultural-religious contra-identities. Thirdly, I explore the role of religious identity within the political ideology of Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn and how he has influenced the rise of religious contra-identities within the discourse of the European far right. I critically examine two of his books in particular: 'the orphaned society' (1995) and 'Against the Islamisation of our culture' (1997). In choosing these two books for analysis it is possible to trace the influence of Huntington on Fortuyn's thinking, as the Clash of Civilisations was published in the year between the publication of these books (in 1996). I conclude that Fortuyn can be defined as a national populist and that he has significantly influenced the

rise of religious contra-identities in far right discourse in three respects: firstly, he contributed to the rise of identitarian Christianism in identifying Western culture or civilisation with the ideologies of Christianism, liberalism and secularism and considering this to be a civilisational identity. Secondly, he contributed to the racialisation of Muslims. Thirdly, he constructed Islamic culture and Judeo-Christian humanistic culture as opposing identities. As such, he established Christianism as an identity of the native ingroup and Islamic culture as the identity of the outgroup. He thus provided the groundwork of religious contra-identities that far right actors would be eager to adopt and extend into a more religiously articulated framework.

Paragraph 1: Religion and Nationalism

Paragraph 1.1: Religion and the far right in the academic literature

What is the relationship between religion and far-right ideologies? This is a question that has received little attention in the academic literature concerning the European far right. Although there is an increased awareness for issues such as xenophobia, racism, culturalisation and Islamophobia within far-right discourse, religion as part of the conceptualisation of the far right has been notably absent in the academic debate.[148] There have been some studies about the relationship between religion and far-right voting, but questions such as: 'how is religion connected to a far-right ideology?', 'how is religion used as a mobilising or identifying factor?' or 'what and why a particular kind of religion is mobilised or opposed by the far right', are little dealt with.[149] This is due to a lack of interdisciplinarity between the fields of political science and religious studies; those who study the far right from a political perspective, often do not share an interest in or have the expertise in the field of theology and/or religious studies to conduct a thorough analysis. And vice versa: those who have received a theological training or followed a religious studies programme, often do not share an interest in the political field or lack the concepts of analysis to understand the political dynamics at play. This has led to an often superficial, flawed and restricted analysis of the role of religion within the far-right landscape. I would like to mention three examples that illustrate my criticism.

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[148]. Jolle Demmers and Sameer S. Mehendale, "Neoliberal Xenophobia: The Dutch Case," *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 35, no. 1 (2010): 53-70; Paul Mepschen, Jan-Willem Duyvendak, and Justus Uitermark, "Progressive Politics of Exclusion: Dutch Populism, Immigration, and Sexuality," *Migration and Citizenship*, 2014; Michael Minkenberg, "Religion and the Radical Right," ed. Jens Rydgren, *The Oxford handbook of the radical right* (Oxford: University Press, 2018). 366.

[149]. Minkenberg, "Religion and the Radical Right," 366. A study on far right voting and religion is for example: Kai Arzheimer and Elisabeth Carter, "Christian Religiosity and Voting for West European Radical Right Parties," *West European Politics* 32, no. 5 (2009).

Firstly, in his influential work on populist radical right parties in Europe (2007), Cas Mudde only briefly mentions the issue of Islamophobia, but does not elaborate on it, despite his acknowledgement that Muslims are the new enemy of the far right (replacing communists) and thus play a major role. This is illustrative of how religion is often mentioned in the academic literature, but not further explored.[150] Secondly, if religion is referred to in the academic literature on political philosophy and far-right political parties, it is often only mentioned in relation to nationalism or populism. Its relationship with other characteristics of a far-right ideology are hardly if not at all dealt with, such as the relationship between religion and racism, religion and anti-democracy, and religion and authoritarianism. This lack of attention is a loss, as these relationships are highly relevant in light of recent developments within the European far-right landscape and questions regarding the sustainability of the foundations of Western democracies today.[151] Thirdly, religion is sometimes observed to be connected to far-right politics, for example in the voting for populist political leaders such as Donald Trump in the United States or Giorgia Meloni in Italy, but there is little specific mention of what kind of religion or theology connects to certain aspects of the political ideology involved. This leads to generalising statements on religion and the far right instead of pointing out exactly where the connections lie, for example by bluntly stating 'religious adherents support far-right leaders', rather than explaining that there is a connection between conservative Christian theology and populist ideology that makes a far-right ideology more attractive to those who share a conservative theological background.

In what follows I aim at filling this knowledge gap regarding the relationship between the far right and religion. Although it is highly valuable to explore the relationship between religion and all six characteristics of a far-right ideology on a conceptual level, the scope and purpose of this dissertation is too limited to do so. In this study I focus specifically on religious identity and how Christianity is being attached to the ingroup and Islam is being attached to the outgroup. To achieve the objective of this study, I will therefore explicate the relationship between religion and nationalism in particular.

[150.]   Mudde, *Populist radical right parties in Europe*, 84.

[151.]   For example, it could shed light on processes such as the racialization of Christianity and the religionization of whiteness, the extent to which religious concepts of authority (transcendental beings, prophets, religious leaders) differ and correspond to authoritarian views of the far right as well as the role of religion in upholding anti-democratic views by far-right actors.

Paragraph 1.2: Religious ingroup and outgroup

Religion as a marker of 'us'

Nationalism produces a dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. It is based on an idea of sameness and difference; some people belong together and constitute 'the nation-state', while others are different and do not belong to the imagined community of 'the nation'. Adherence to a nationalist ideology implies an awareness of 'other' nations; or else there would be no impetus to define 'the nation' as a singular entity. This suggests that the process of Othering is inherent to nationalism: there is 'us' and there is 'them'. It is here where religion comes into play. Religion (like language or ethnicity) can function as an identity marker to define the 'us' and 'them'. This is possible because of religion's capacity to unite and divide.[152] Language also possesses this capacity. However, when one looks at liberal democracies in the last couple of decades, religion has been increasingly politicised and used as an identity marker, whereas national conflicts that centre on language have decreased.[153] This re-politicisation of religion is due to the increased visibility of religion in the public domain, which in Europe is the result of immigration flows in multiple European countries from the 1960's onwards and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.[154]

Religion is often part of the culture of either the nation-state or the culture of other nations. As nationalism 'demands cultural homogeneity within political units and cultural heterogeneity between them', religion functions either to denote the religious character of the (mono-)culture of the nation-state or denotes how religious Others do *not* belong to the nation-state.[155] Due to the homogeneity of the nation-state, only one particular religious identity is claimed; religious pluralism and nationalism therefore hardly coexist.

Religion as a marker of 'us' can demarcate the nation in two ways: firstly, it can determine the criteria for membership of the nation-state. Secondly, it can provide content for the national identity.[156] In both cases, religion marks the boundary between insiders and outsiders. In determining the criteria for membership of the nation-state, religion answers the question: who belongs? This implies that religious belonging determines national belonging and sameness. A good example is Jewish

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152. Rogers Brubaker, *Grounds for difference* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015), 86.
153. Brubaker, *Grounds for difference*, 99.
154. The re-emergence of religion in the public domain is also called the 'deprivatization of religion', a term coined by José Casanova. See José Casanova, *Public religions in the modern world* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 220.
155. Brubaker, *Grounds for difference*, 108.
156. Brubaker, *Grounds for difference*, 109-10.

Zionism, in which national and religious boundaries coincide in the desire to unite the people of Israel in a Jewish state. In weaker variants of this alliance between religion and nationalism, the religious community is not confined to the nation-state.[157] A good example is Catholicism in Polish nationalism.[158]

In its second function, religion provides content for the identity of the nation-state in supplying 'myths, metaphors and symbols that are central to the discursive or iconic representation of the nation'.[159] Religious history and religious tradition play a major role here. To construct an identity, groups need history.[160] Religious traditions often provide a rich source of narratives and imagery that can be used to construct a national identity. Religious narratives, motifs and symbols function as 'deep cultural resources' that provide the 'basic cultural and ideological building blocks for nationalists'.[161] They are often part of the cultural memory of a people, which are remembered and mobilised to construct a national identity. The Egyptologist Jan Assmann describes this process: 'Both the collective and the individual turn to the archive of cultural traditions, the arsenal of symbolic forms, the "imaginary" of myths and images, of the "great stories", sagas and legends, scenes and constellations that live or can be reactivated in the treasure stores of a people.'[162] Within this process, religion is used to answer the question: who are we?

Religion as a marker of 'them'
Religion as a marker of 'them' implies that outsiders are defined as not having the religion of those who belong to the nation. I differentiate between three variants: firstly, the national culture and religious praxis of a nation-state is identified with a specific religion, e.g. Poland with Catholicism or Iran with Islam. Anyone who adheres to a different faith does not belong to the nation and is thus seen as a 'religious Other'. Secondly, a nation identifies itself to be secular or atheist and those who are religious are seen to be outsiders, e.g. religious inhabitants of East-European countries under communist rule.[163] Thirdly, a nation perceives itself to be

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[157].   Brubaker, *Grounds for difference*, 109.
[158].   Mikołaj Stanisław Kunicki, *Between the Brown and the Red: Nationalism, Catholicism, and Communism in Twentieth-Century Poland: the Politics of Bolesław Piasecki* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012).
[159].   Brubaker, *Grounds for difference*, 110.
[160].   Theodor Hanf, "The Sacred Marker: Religion, Communalism and Nationalism," *Social Compass* 41, no. 1 (1994): 12.
[161].   Anthony D. Smith, *Chosen peoples* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 254-55.
[162].   Jan Assmann and Rodney Livingstone, *Religion and cultural memory: ten studies*, Cultural memory in the present, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 7-8.
[163].   I have categorized secularism and atheism separately, but it could be justifiably argued that secularism or atheism is also a belief and in that sense a religion; one adheres to the belief that religion is a private affair or that a transcendent Being does not exist. In that case, my second category would not be necessary.

secular or atheist, but views its national culture to be historically or traditionally bound to a particular religion; those who do not share this religious background, are seen to be religious outsiders to the nation. This last variant is a combination of the former two and is present in the ideology of many contemporary far-right political parties and movements.

Within the far-right landscape, religion is often used to construct a so-called 'negative identity': the ingroup is mainly defined *ex negativo* by describing the outgroup or by the exclusion of others.[164] This means that the ingroup is delineated by the characteristics of the outgroup, as a sort of mirror image: where 'they' are barbaric, immoral and unjust, 'we' are civilised, moral and just'. This mirroring shows that both the ingroup and outgroup are social constructs and as such, imagined.[165] As I have shown in the section on authoritarianism, this process can entail a form of projection or what is also called 'the pot calling the kettle black'; criticising the outgroup for its authoritarian characteristics (such as conventionalism, submission and aggression), whilst these characteristics can be similarly attributed to the ideology of far-right actors themselves. This characteristic of mirroring, together with the far-right perception of homogeneity, gives way to stereotypical imagery. An example is the nativist idea that 'all Turks are lazy and therefore they should leave the country as they are only making profit from the hard work of the 'native' people'. However, when one is confronted with that one hardworking colleague who is Turkish, the exception seems to confirm the rule: 'no, laziness does not apply to him, he is an exception!'[166] This mode of reasoning with regard to religious outgroups in particular is often found in the response of far-right actors.

The idealised mirror image of the nation often functions as a surrogate for a vague and/or vacant national identity. This surrogate identity often remains implicit, intuitive and superficial.[167] This also applies to denoting the religious identity of the nation. As the nation-state is perceived to be secular and post-Christian, the national culture is described to have religious origins, e.g. Judeo-Christian and those who belong to the nation are claimed to be 'culturally Christian'. The meaning of this religious identification and to what extent the nation is claimed to be religious remain rather unclear, due to the fact that religious identity is not linked

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164. Olivier Roy, "Beyond Populism: The Conservative Right, the Courts, the Churches and the Concept of a Christian Europe," in *Saving the People: How Populists Hijack Religion*, ed. Nadia Marzouki, Duncan McDonnell, and Olivier Roy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 201; Mudde, *Populist radical right parties in Europe*, 64.
165. Mudde, *Populist radical right parties in Europe*, 65.
166. See also Mudde, *Populist radical right parties in Europe*, 65, footnote.
167. Mudde, *Populist radical right parties in Europe*, 89.

to religious belief and religious praxis, such as church attendance, rituals, feasts etc. Where sociologist Grace Davie has argued that European citizens are increasingly 'believing without belonging', I argue that the reverse is true for the far-right landscape: religion is often used by far-right actors as a matter of belonging, rather than believing.[168] Belonging in this regard, is not understood as being part of a religious community or institution, but as belonging to the nation. As Olivier Roy has rightfully analysed, this makes religion just 'a nominal marker of identity', as it lacks a coherent system of belief and ethics that lies at the heart of religion.[169]

In the social sciences it is common knowledge that one needs to construct an outgroup in order to construct an ingroup.[170] Far-right actors however, mainly construct the identity of the ingroup from the perceived *threat* of religious Others.[171] This stems from a nativist idea; religious Others are perceived to be enemies as they threaten the homogeneity of the nation-state.[172] This goes beyond the mere defining of us-them on the basis of a nationalistic ideology. A (nominal) marker of religious identity is often taken up as a counterbalance to the 'existentially dangerous' religious identity of the Other. As Elcott has analysed, the nation then becomes 'an embodiment and expression of the majority's religious identity' and the alignment of national and religious identity is principally instrumentalised to marginalise the religious Other.[173] The religious outgroups, e.g. Jews and Muslims in majority Christian countries such as Hungary, are demonised. They would 'undermine', 'pollute' or contaminate' the nation and should therefore be kept out. If they already 'infiltrated' the nation because they are already living within the boundaries of the nation-state, they must leave as soon as possible. This idea gives way to dangerous ideas of religious cleansing that are centuries old, but have gained a new impetus within far-right circles. Geert Wilders, leader of the far-right political party 'Party for Freedom' (PVV) in the Netherlands, has been convicted of group insult in 2020 for his 'fewer Moroccans' statement he made during an election rally in 2014. He asked the audience whether they wanted "more or fewer Moroccans". After the audience chanted "less, less!", he replied, "Then we will arrange that." On 6 July

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168.   David M. Elcott, *Faith, nationalism, and the future of liberal democracy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2021), 23; Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

169.   Roy, "Beyond Populism: The Conservative Right, the Courts, the Churches and the Concept of a Christian Europe," 201.

170.   Mudde, *Populist radical right parties in Europe*, 63.

171.   This is confirmed by the research of Schwörer and Fernández-García, who have found empirical evidence that the pro- Christian discourses of radical right parties in Europe derive from their anti-Islam orientation. See Schwörer and Fernández-García, "Religion on the rise again? A longitudinal analysis of religious dimensions in election manifestos of Western European parties."

172.   Bar-On, "The Radical Right and Nationalism," 28.

173.   Elcott, *Faith, nationalism, and the future of liberal democracy*, 32.

2021, the Dutch Supreme Court ruled that the conviction was upheld.[174] This shows how the idea of 'national purification' is alive and well in contemporary far-right movements.

The demarcation between the religious ingroup and the religious outgroup by far-right actors is particularly visible in their rhetoric with regard to immigration and the visibility of religion in the public space. Certain religious minorities are discriminated against on the basis of their religion; they are not allowed to enter the country (e.g. the 'Muslim ban' of Donald Trump) or are relegated to second-class citizens (e.g. by banning Islamic schools, mosques, the Qur'an or the wearing of headscarves). Moreover, public space is used to fight the religious outgroup. 'Native' religious symbols are promoted to be clearly visible to all, such as nativity scenes and Christian crosses in schools and government buildings. 'Foreign' religious symbols in contrast, are promoted to be driven out of the public domain, such as minarets, burqas and mosques.[175] In both domains, the in- and outgroup is framed by or marked with religion. This creates a religious cleavage between those who belong and those who do not belong to the nation. Schwörer and Fernández-García label this trend as the rise of a 'new religious cleavage', as it is different from the traditional religious cleavage that existed in Europe: the separation between church and state, which led to conflict between anti-clerical or secular political parties who wanted to reduce the influence of the church on society and confessional parties that defended the role and privileges of the church.[176] Nowadays, political parties clash not so much over the scope and influence of religion within the nation, but the extent to which the nation should allow and tolerate 'foreign' religions. This pits the native religion (Christianity) against a foreign religion (Islam), and as such, it has created a religious divide between a religious native ingroup and a religious alien outgroup.[177] As a result, nationalism has moved from being the bearer of an anti-clerical ideology (as during the French Revolution), to becoming the bearer

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174. "Veroordeling Wilders wegens groepsbelediging blijft in stand," Hoge Raad, July 6, 2021, accessed September 28, 2022, https://www.hogeraad.nl/actueel/nieuwsoverzicht/2021/juli/veroordeling-wilders-wegens-groepsbelediging-blijft-stand/.

175. Nadia Marzouki and Duncan McDonnell, "Populism and Religion," in *Saving the people: How Populists Hijack Religion*, ed. Nadia Marzouki, Duncan McDonnell, and Roy Olivier (London: Hurst & Company, 2016), 4-5.

176. Schwörer and Fernández-García, "Religion on the rise again? A longitudinal analysis of religious dimensions in election manifestos of Western European parties," 2; Hanf, "The Sacred Marker: Religion, Communalism and Nationalism," 17.

177. It is important to stress that although this discussion has recently come to the fore in the political debate of multiple European countries, it is not the case that the 'Othering' of religious outgroups is new. There is a longer and more complicated history in which Muslims and Jews (together with black people and Roma) have become the constitutive Others of Europe. See Matthea Westerduin, "Race and Religion: Re-membering their displacements, supersessions, and geographies" (Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, 2023); Nadia Fadil, "The Anthropology of Islam in Europe: A Double Epistemological Impasse," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 48 (2019).

of religious identity.[178] In the next section, I will explain how the far right has expanded the national religious identity of the ingroup into a civilisational identity with religion as its foundation and, not to forget, a civilisational religious Other.

Paragraph 2: Civilisationism

In the last couple of decennia, far-right political parties and movements in Northern and Western Europe have increasingly articulated the ingroup in civilisationist rather than nationalist terminology. In this section, I will firstly analyse what the concept of 'civilisation' constitutes as the term is frequently used in the academic literature, but to date it remains a poorly defined term that gives way to a multitude of interpretations. In order to provide clarity I define the term 'civilisation', highlighting its various dimensions and characteristics. Secondly, I give an historical overview of the connotations generally associated with the term 'civilisation' and I explain which of these connotations are particularly prevalent within Western political discourse. Thirdly, I describe how civilisationism and nationalism are related.

Paragraph 2.1: The concept of civilisation

Civilisations can be defined as 'territorially expansive social forms, which co-ordinate both 'sources of social power', and the sites of symbolic and intellectual creativity in the form of historically enduring, expansive cultural surpluses'.[179] This definition is built upon two premises:

1. a civilisation relates to power techniques of control and expansion with empire-building as its implicit or explicit point of reference.
2. a civilisation relates to the long-term formation of intellectual and symbolizing activity, on the basis of enduring cultural products and identities.[180]

These premises indicate both a political dimension (1) and a cultural dimension (2) to the concept of civilisation. Although some scholars would argue that a civilisation is solely a cultural entity, I would rather argue that it is both, which is also apparent from the way (Christian) civilisationism is currently used by the European far right.[181] The imagery of a civilisation both encompasses territorial

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[178.] Smith, *Chosen peoples*, 10.
[179.] John Rundell and Stephen Mennell, "Introduction: Civilization, culture and the human self-image," in *Classical readings in culture and civilization*, ed. John Rundell and Stephen Mennell (London: Routledge, 1998), 4.
[180.] Rundell and Mennell, "Introduction: Civilization, culture and the human self-image," 3-4.
[181.] Samuel Huntington argues that a civilization is a cultural entity rather than a political one. See Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 44.

power dynamics as well as an overarching culture understood in the Durkheimian sense of identity formation and symbolic creation.[182]

Although there has been much reflection on and discussion about the concept of civilisation, four general characteristics can be discerned that are broadly agreed upon: firstly, a civilisation is an imagined construct of identity or in the words of Marcel Mauss 'a collective representation', whether in the past, present or future.[183] Thus, one might identify oneself or one's nation with a civilisation that has been long gone, such as the Islamic caliphate under Umayyad rule or the Carolingian Empire. Secondly, in contrast to the boundaries of a nation-state, a civilisation has no fixed or clear-cut limits.[184] It stretches beyond national boundaries through (former) expansion of power or as a result of cross-societal relationships.[185] As such, it is supranational and unites multiple political bodies or nation-states, but it is difficult to pinpoint its precise borders. Thirdly, civilisations are enduring historical entities. They develop over lengthy periods of time and outlive national histories.[186] Fourthly, a civilisation is the broadest cultural entity that someone can identify with.[187] Culture can be heterogenous at different levels of society; city culture might differ from forms of culture in rural parts of the country, and the national culture of one particular nation-state might differ from another nation-state. A civilisation, however, is characterised by one broader, overarching culture that someone identifies with, which can be defined by language, ethnicity, religion, customs etc. In the words of Huntington: 'civilisations are the biggest 'we' within which we feel culturally at home as distinguished from all the other 'thems' out there.[188]

Paragraph 2.2: The history of 'civilisation'

Historically, the concept of civilisation has undergone differences in connotations, which are important to grasp as they determine the imagery that is invoked when the concept of civilisation is used within political discourse. Originally, the word civilisation stems from a family of Latin words: *civilis* ('civil, patriotic'), *civis* ('citizen'), *civitas* ('civil rights, citizenry, municipality') and *civilitas ('conduct of citizens, administration, politics')*.[189] This etymology shows that the derived word 'civilisation'

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182. Rundell and Mennell, "Introduction: Civilization, culture and the human self-image," 21.
183. Marcel Mauss, "Civilizations: Elements and Forms," in *Classical readings in culture and civilization*, ed. John Rundell and Stephen Mennell (London: Routledge, 1998), 157.
184. Émile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, "Note on the Notion of Civilization," in *Classical readings in culture and civilization*, ed. John Rundell and Stephen Mennell (London: Routledge, 1998), 152.
185. Durkheim and Mauss, "Note on the Notion of Civilization," 153.
186. Durkheim and Mauss, "Note on the Notion of Civilization," 152.
187. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, 43.
188. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, 43.
189. Rundell and Mennell, "Introduction: Civilization, culture and the human self-image," 6.

has both a political meaning and another that denotes a way of life; both having permeated the development of the concept of civilisation and its connotations. Firstly, a civilisation is associated with morality and values. In the Greco-Roman period, a distinction was made between the citizen and the barbarian on the basis of accomplishments, conduct and virtues, that demarcated what was considered to be human (citizen) and inhuman (the barbarian).[190] This moral connotation of civilisation was taken up in the eighteenth century by the European middle-class intelligentsia whom promoted humanist and moralist ideals and values as a self-image of humanity. They shared a general belief in moral principles, in the rights of human beings and the natural progress of humanity.[191] This moral dimension is captured in the following definition of Durkheim: 'a civilisation constitutes a kind of moral milieu encompassing a certain number of nations, each national culture being only a particular form of the whole'.[192]

Secondly, the idea of progress clings to the concept of civilisation. Scholars such as Marcel Mauss made the distinction between 'Civilisation' (with a capital 'c') and 'civilisations' in the plural. 'Civilisation' refers to the idea of a single great human civilisation that progresses through time towards a 'better future' and leads to the development of humanity to a more advanced stage.[193] Thirdly, civilisation is linked to an image of 'us'. Civilisation (with a capital 'c') was usually associated with Western civilisation, the 'us' and not with 'the Other'. This changed with the voyages of explorers around the world during the 15th to 17th centuries when 'other' civilisations were discovered. This led to scholars becoming susceptible to the idea to differentiate between multiple civilisations and 'civilisations' (in the plural) came to dominate the academic debate.

Fourthly, nationalism led to a change in connotation of the concepts 'civilisation' and 'culture' with process and an orientation towards the future to the idea of an unchanging state and an orientation towards the past. Norbert Elias explains how the rise to power of the European middle classes between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries led to this change.[194] He describes this change as follows:

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[190]. Rundell and Mennell, "Introduction: Civilization, culture and the human self-image," 6.

[191]. Norbert Elias, ""Civilisation and "Culture": Nationalism and Nation-State Formation," in *Classical readings in culture and civilization*, ed. John Rundell and Stephen Mennell (London: Routledge, 1998), 229.

[192]. Durkheim and Mauss, "Note on the Notion of Civilization," 153.

[193]. Elias, ""Civilisation and "Culture": Nationalism and Nation-State Formation," 227.

[194]. Elias, ""Civilisation and "Culture": Nationalism and Nation-State Formation," 229-30.

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'While serving initially, each in its own way, as symbols of the we-image of forward-looking groups who found the emotionally most satisfying justification for their self-image and their pride in *general humanist and moral values and in their contribution to the continued progress of humanity,* they now came more and more to serve as symbols of the we-image of groups who found the emotionally most satisfying justification for their self-image and their pride in *the past achievements of their collective ancestors, in their nation's immutable heritage and tradition.'*[195]

This brief historical overview of the connotations of the concept of 'civilisation' shows that the concept has undergone a transformation in meaning. Within the contemporary political rhetoric, civilisation nowadays has an association with the following:

1.   the idea of multiple civilisations
2.   an unchanging state rather than a process
3.   progress (modern)
4.   moral values
5.   an orientation towards the past (heritage and tradition)

These connotations are clearly discernible in the civilisationist rhetoric of the European far right. Although the third and the fifth connotation seem contradictory, they often appear together in the ideology of far-right actors who identify themselves with a modern civilisation, which is paradoxically rooted in a past heritage (e.g. of humanism and Christianity) that is glorified.[196] Interestingly, however, two older connotations are also taken up in their imagery: the 'us'-image and humanist values. The us-image is used in the picture of a European or Western civilisation that stands central in many far-right ideologies, whereas humanist values are translated into the defence of the liberal values of freedom of speech, gender and sexuality (LGBTQ+) rights by (some) European far-right political parties and movements.

Paragraph 2.3 Civilisationism and nationalism

As may be clear from the foregoing history of the concept, the imagined construct of 'civilisation' stretches beyond the imagined community of 'the nation-state'. However, this does not directly imply that there is a different mode of belonging than in the case of the nation-state. Many European far-right leaders employ both nationalist rhetoric and civilisationist rhetoric; and those who are only using the

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[195].   Elias, ""Civilisation and "Culture": Nationalism and Nation-State Formation," 230.
[196].   For example within the ideas of Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn, see paragraph 3.3.

latter, can still adhere to the nation as the idealised 'heartland'. How then does civilisationism, i.e. identifying with a greater (imagined) civilisation, relate to nationalism, i.e. identifying with a particular nation?

According to Rogers Brubaker, civilisationism is both a form of nationalism as well as an alternative.[197] On the one hand, nationalist culture or identity can be articulated in civilisationist terminology (*form of nationalism*), but on the other hand it can be extended to a civilisationist identity (*alternative to nationalism*). The latter refers to an imagined community that transcends the level of the nation to the level of civilisation, which entails a different dimension of belonging then nationalism. If one considers nationalism to constitute the four basic dimensions: community, territory, history and destiny, as Anthony Smith has argued in his book 'Chosen peoples', this implies that civilisationism as a *form* of nationalism identifies 'community' as the nation, yet the three other dimensions (i.e. territory, history and destiny) are articulated in civilisationist terms.[198] In contrast, civilisationism as an *alternative* to nationalism, extends the community to include those who live beyond the borders of the nation-state (and often belong to other nation-states), but who are all perceived to belong to the same civilisation, such as Western civilisation or the Russian World as in the *Russkiy Mir* ideology. Territory, history, destiny and community are then all linked together in a civilisational identity that stretches beyond the borders of the nation-state.

What then is a civilisational identity? I understand it to be a social identity in the conception of Tajfel that does not primarily relate to a nation, but rather to a civilisation as the community one belongs to. Henri Tajfel defines social identity as 'that *part* of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership'.[199] It is built from the relationship between the individual and his or her social environment and includes a common mental construction and certain shared characteristics, such as nationality, language, ethnicity and religion.[200] These shared attributes make it possible to locate oneself in time and space. This localisation can occur in different dimensions simultaneously, creating a social identity on multiple levels. For example, one can

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[197.] Brubaker, "Between nationalism and civilizationism: the European populist moment in comparative perspective," 1211.

[198.] Smith, *Chosen peoples*, 31.

[199.] Henri Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories: Studies in Social Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 255.

[200.] Jolle Demmers, *Theories of violent conflict: an introduction*, Second edition ed. (London: Routledge, 2016), 22-23.

identify oneself to be an Amsterdammer, Dutch, Protestant, Christian, European and a Westerner. This implies that nationalism is not necessarily exempt from civilisationism; nationalist beliefs or identities are often articulated simultaneously with civilisationist identities.[201] Nevertheless, the primary point of reference is the civilisation that one identifies with, rather than the nation. In this section, I have defined the term 'civilisation' in its various dimensions, characteristics and connotations and I have described how civilisationism and nationalism are related. The section that follows moves on to consider the religious dimension of civilisationism and Christianism in particular.

Paragraph 3: Religious Civilisationism

Interestingly, the civilisationist discourse of the European far right has increasingly encompassed a religious dimension; European or Western civilisation is considered to have a religious foundation or Judeo-Christian roots and immigrants from the MENA-region have been increasingly portrayed as being part of an Islamic civilisation.[202] This is what I call *religious civilisationism*: a reification of identity on the basis of religion that stretches beyond the borders of the nation-state. National identity is expressed in civilisationist terms and religion forms the basis of the civilisation to which nations belong. *Religion* then can be understood as: 'actions, beliefs and institutions predicated upon the assumption of the existence of supernatural entities with powers of agency or impersonal powers possessed of moral purpose.'[203] This current feature of far-right rhetoric is interesting, as the European far right in the eighties and nineties of the previous century often considered itself to be neo-pagan or anti-clerical, as illustrated by the Austrian FPÖ and the French RN (formerly known as FN: le Front National).[204] This does not imply that all far-right parties were detached from religion; some did include religion in their ideology or their leaders sustained good connections with the churches. However, religious issues were not given priority on the agenda of far-right political parties and movements in post-war Europe.[205] The salience of religious issues slightly increased after the immigration waves in Europe during the 1960's and 1970's, but socio-economic and cultural issues kept dominating the political agenda of the far right. To understand how the religious civilisationist discourse of

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[201]. Brubaker, "Between nationalism and civilizationism: the European populist moment in comparative perspective," 1211; Durkheim and Mauss, "Note on the Notion of Civilization," 153.

[202]. MENA is an acronym that denotes the geographical area of the 'Middle East and North Africa'.

[203]. According to the definition of Charles Taylor. See Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 429.

[204]. Hadj-Abdou, "The 'Religious Conversion' of the Austrian Freedom Party," 30; Roy, "The French National Front. From Christian Identity to *Laïcité*," 79.

[205]. Minkenberg, "Religion and the Radical Right," 373.

the European far right came into being, it is necessary to understand how identity became politicised.

Paragraph 3.1: The politicisation of identity

Theodor Hanf argues that there have been many societies in which culturally distinct communities have lived together without a lot of tension.[206] Although these communities might have perceived the Other as 'strange', they did not come into conflict with each other, because they had little to do with one another. They did not disturb each other's way of life, and therefore, they coexisted peacefully. However, tension rises according to Hanf when 'groups move nearer to and have more dealings with one another – and start competing'.[207]

In Europe, this has occurred in the post-war era when guest workers from Southern Europe and the MENA-region were attracted to help rebuild the economy after the devastations of European cities and infrastructure during World War II. This led to immigration waves in multiple European countries, which on its turn led to the sudden confrontation of European citizens with large numbers of immigrants who often expressed a clear-cut cultural and/or religious identity. In addition, decolonization processes, globalisation dynamics and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 also contributed to the rise of multiethnic, multicultural and multireligious European states. This created a breeding ground for the politicisation of identity, whether ethnic, cultural or religious.

European citizens met the new immigrants with a distanced but rather positive response. Many thought the migrants should be treated with respect and compassion, which can be understood against the background of the cultural revolution of the 1960s (that celebrated pacifism and equality) and a feeling of collective guilt and a growing awareness of the atrocities of the Second World War (especially the Holocaust) and crimes committed in European colonies.[208] There was a general belief that the guest workers would stay temporarily to help rebuild Europe, only to return to their home countries again. However, in the 1980's it became clear that many guest workers would not return after their recruitment, but would stay together with their families. This led to an integration debate that

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[206]. Hanf, "The Sacred Marker: Religion, Communalism and Nationalism," 12.
[207]. Hanf, "The Sacred Marker: Religion, Communalism and Nationalism," 12.
[208]. Leo Lucassen and Jan Lucassen, "The Strange Death of Dutch Tolerance: The Timing and Nature of the Pessimist Turn in the Dutch Migration Debate," *The Journal of Modern History* 87, no. 1 (2015); M. Lubbers and P.L.H. Scheepers, "Het zijn aardige mensen, maar liever niet als buren...: Veranderingen in sociale distantie tegenover migranten, moslims en 'zigeuners' in Nederland in de periode 1990-2017," (2019).

developed itself into three different temporal phases in which the identity of immigrants became reified on different aspects of their social identity: firstly, their socio-economic status was problematised (1980's), secondly, the debate shifted towards their cultural background (1990's) and thirdly, their religious identity became their defining identity marker (after 2001).

It was in the 1990s, during the political integration debates that shed light upon the cultural background of immigrants and included the multiculturalism debate, that the civilisationist discourse emerged with Islamophobia as its main characteristic. Although a feared image of Muslims in the Western imagination is centuries old, Islamophobia, as the fear of Islam and Muslims, took centre stage in the post-Cold War era.[209] Hatem Bazian argues that the rekindling of Islamophobia was built upon the latent presence of Islamophobia in Western societies that sustained itself through Orientalist and stereotypical imagery of Arabs, Muslims and Islam.[210] Moreover, it was fueled by certain events in the post-Cold War era. Bazian argues that although the Iranian revolution of 1979 and the Salman Rushdie affair intensified the negative representation of Islam and Muslims in the West, it was only after the Cold War that Muslims became demonised on a large scale.[211] Events that directly contributed to this demonisation were the collapse of the Soviet Union, the outcome of the first Gulf War and the Palestinian uprising.[212] The disappearance of the communist enemy led to its replacement by a Muslim enemy, which became particularly evident in the writings of Samuel Huntington. In his renewed version of the 'Clash of Civilisation' thesis, the us-them distinction that had divided Europe during the Cold War era, became transferred to the Western civilisation (us) that would clash with the Islamic civilisation (them).[213] In what follows, I demonstrate how this thesis has influenced the thinking of far-right actors such as the Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn and how this us-them distinction will eventually develop into what I call 'religious contra-identities'.

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[209]. Sophia Rose Arjana, *Muslims in the Western imagination* (Oxford Oxford University Press, 2015); Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, Penguin classics, (London: Penguin, 2003).

[210]. Bazian Hatem, "Islamophobia, "Clash of Civilizations", and Forging a Post-Cold War Order!," *Religions* 9, no. 9 (2018): 1.

[211]. Hatem, "Islamophobia, "Clash of Civilizations", and Forging a Post-Cold War Order!," 4.

[212]. Hatem, "Islamophobia, "Clash of Civilizations", and Forging a Post-Cold War Order!."

[213]. Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?," *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1993); Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*.

Paragraph 3.2: Samuel Huntington and 'The Clash of Civilisations'

In 1996, the influential book 'Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order' by Samuel Huntington was published. This book was an elaboration on an article Huntington already wrote in 1993 entitled 'The Clash of Civilisations?', a phrase he borrowed from the British historian Bernard Lewis who argued in the 1950's already that Arab Muslim-majority countries and the West adhere to and promote conflicting values.[214] However, it was not until the nineties that Lewis' and Huntington's idea of an inter-civilisational conflict in the post-Soviet era started to resonate with academics and policymakers. This late reverberation can be explained from the aforementioned lack of attention given to the cultural and religious background of immigrants in the political discourse from the second half of the 20th century and a reshuffling of geopolitics after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the 1990s however, attention was increasingly given to the cultural background of immigrants and thus the idea of a cultural source of conflict found an audience.

Huntington's main line of reasoning is that the most important distinctions between peoples in the post-Cold War era are cultural (civilisational) identities, rather than political or economic ideologies as in former times.[215] He presents his theory as a new paradigm and argues that the world can be divided into eight major civilisations: Sinic, Japanese, Hindu, Islamic, Orthodox, Western, Latin American and African.[216] He rightly problematises the phrase 'Western' as indicating only a compass direction and not explicitly mentioning the religious heritage of Christendom (in contrast to Hindu, Islamic or Orthodox civilisations).[217] Huntington argues that Western civilisation will enter into conflict with both the Chinese and Islamic civilisations, due to inherent cultural differences. According to him, Western civilisation is characterised by the following features:

1. The classical legacy (inheritance from Classical civilisation: Greek philosophy and rationalism, Roman law, Latin and Christianity)
2. Catholicism and Protestantism
3. European languages
4. Separation of spiritual and temporal authority
5. Rule of law
6. Social pluralism
7. Representative bodies
8. Individualism

[214.] Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?."; J. Haynes, "From Huntington to Trump: Twenty-Five Years of the "Clash of Civilizations"," *Review of Faith and International Affairs* 17, no. 1 (2019): 13.
[215.] Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, 21.
[216.] Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, 46.
[217.] Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, 47.

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In his book, Huntington sets out to link culture and civilisation to religious identity. He argues that religion is a central defining characteristic of civilisations.[218] He explicitly connects Islam with the Islamic civilisation and Christianity with Western civilisation. Huntington even claims that Christianity is historically the single most important characteristic of Western civilisation, language only coming in second-place.[219] He argues from a historical perspective that Christianity and Islam have a deeply conflictual relationship, thus placing both religions in opposition to each other.[220] In this framework of conflict, Huntington clearly subjects the concept of civilisation to what Demmers calls 'a process of reification or crystallization of identity'.[221] Demmers argues that during and because of a violent situation or conflict, identities are transformed or even radically changed. Social identity often operates on multiple levels and thus includes multiple identities (Amsterdammer, Christian, Dutch etc.). When one of these identities becomes threatened in a situation of violent conflict, e.g. when people with explicitly this identity are being killed, it can lead to the transformation of a putative identity into 'something hard, unchangeable and absolute'.[222] This process is called the *reification* or *crystallization* of identity.

Although Demmers writes her argument in the context of actual violent conflict (e.g. between ethnic groups), I would argue that the reification of identity also takes place in *perceived* (violent) conflict, such as political discourse or rhetoric in which political framing is used, such as the paradigm of conflict that Huntington uses throughout his book. Clearly, Huntington reifies the multiple characteristics of Arab or Islamic civilisation to its religious dimension, i.e. Islam, and 'Western civilisation' predominantly to Christianity, although Huntington to a prevailing extent continues writing about Islam vs the West, thereby reducing the 'other' civilisation in particular to its religious dimension. With this emphasis on religious identity as a central aspect of civilisation, Huntington provided an impetus for the post-2001 phase in which immigrants are primarily framed on the basis of their religious identity, rather than their cultural background.

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218. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, 47.
219. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, 70.
220. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, 209.
221. Jolle Demmers, "Identiteit, geweld en conflict: Theoretische benaderingen," in *Conflict: over conflict en conflictbeheersing*, ed. Georg E. Frerks (Deventer: Wolters Kluwer, 2016), 58-59. See also Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, "Beyond "Identity"," *Theory and Society* 29, no. 1 (2000): 5.
222. Demmers, *Theories of violent conflict: an introduction*, 29.

Paragraph 3.3: Pim Fortuyn and the 'Judeo-Christian humanistic culture'

The book of Huntington became highly influential, not least among far-right actors. One of the intellectuals in Huntington's right-wing audience was the Dutchman Pim Fortuyn, who has called himself 'the Samuel Huntington of Dutch politics'.[223] He was a sociologist, columnist and in his last years a politician headed towards the position of prime minister, before he was murdered just shortly before the general elections in May 2002. Just as Huntington, Fortuyn politicised religion and especially Islam. He expressed his opinion in his writings in the highly influential liberal Dutch news magazine 'Elsevier Weekblad' and the books he wrote, such as 'Against the Islamisation of our culture. Dutch identity as a foundation' (original Dutch title: 'Tegen de islamisering van onze cultuur. Nederlandse identiteit als fundament').[224] This book was published in 1997 but republished in 2002 with a slightly different title in which he dropped the word 'against' and made a clear statement against the use of violence towards Muslims. Instead of writing about 'a Cold War' with Islam, he now wrote about 'an ideological struggle with Islam', which had to be conducted with words and debate as its weapons.[225] This review must be understood against the backdrop of the events of 9/11 and the violent political rhetoric in its aftermath from which Fortuyn wanted to distance himself.

Fortuyn's main concern was the decay of Dutch culture and identity. In his book 'The orphaned society. A religious-sociological treatise' published in 1995, Fortuyn problematised the erosion of collective norms and values in Dutch society. He criticises the cultural revolution of the 1960s and 1970s and his generation of 'baby boomers' who revolted against the establishment, but did not offer an alternative. Although they rejected the traditional, patriarchal structures and mode of identification, they did not develop new instruments of cultural transmission.[226] According to Fortuyn, this is due to an attitude of cultural relativism among his contemporaries that he finds very disturbing. Moreover, due to processes of secularisation, the churches in the Netherlands are no longer the bearer of collective norms and values. As the Church has not been replaced by a religious institution that is more suited to current times, Fortuyn concludes that the central place where the norms and values of the community were shaped, maintained and if necessary renewed, has disappeared.[227] Both developments, i.e. cultural relativism and secularisation, have led to the decay of the Dutch identity.

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[223] Matthew Kaminski, "Another Face of Europe's Far Right," *Wall Street Journal* (2002, May 3), https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB102037039985461320.

[224] Pim Fortuyn, *Tegen de islamisering van onze cultuur. Nederlandse identiteit als fundament* (Utrecht: Bruna, 1997).

[225] Pim Fortuyn, *De islamisering van onze cultuur*, Negende druk. ed. (Amsterdam: Vesper, 2021), 21-22.

[226] Pim Fortuyn, *De verweesde samenleving: een religieus-sociologisch traktaat* (Utrecht: Bruna, 1995), 184.

[227] Fortuyn, *De verweesde samenleving: een religieus-sociologisch traktaat*, 85.

II

The orphaned society

First and foremost, Fortuyn's book 'The orphaned society' is an indictment of the 'defaulting, cowardly and hesitant elites' whose cultural relativism has led to the erosion of the Dutch identity.[228] Fortuyn argues for the rearticulation and strengthening of Dutch culture and identity, for example by making Dutch national history a main subject in schools. He substantiates his argument by analysing how Dutch culture has arisen historically, how it can be characterised and why we should value it. In arguing the importance of Dutch culture and identity, he identifies three historical sources of Dutch culture: Jewish culture (which brought us 'The Law'), Christian culture (which brought us 'Community') and Humanist culture (which brought us 'The Individual').[229] These sources of culture have defined Dutch society as it is today, which he characterises as 'our Judeo-Christian humanistic culture'.[230] Thus, for the greater part of the book, emphasis is on the 'us' of Dutch society: problematising the flawed policies of the Dutch elite, criticising their ideology of cultural relativism, clarifying the erosion of collective Dutch norms and values and advocating for the revaluation of Dutch culture and identity.

Nevertheless, Fortuyn also sets a first step towards problematising and politicising Islam; a theme that he will elaborate on two years later in his book 'Against the Islamisation of our culture'. He starts his argument with problematising the arrival of immigrants who originate from a cultural area that he perceives as very different from Dutch culture. He has no difficulty with immigrants coming from 'the same' cultural area as the Netherlands, whom he characterises as foreigners, but 'with very recognisable behaviours both in an economic and cultural-mental sense'.[231] These include immigrants from West-European countries, the U.S. and Southern European countries, such as Spain, Italy and Portugal (which are interestingly perceived to be a separate category). Fortuyn argues that these immigrants integrate easily, which makes them 'quickly accepted fellow citizens'.[232] Therefore, they do not pose a challenge to Dutch society. However, problems arise with immigrants originating from countries with an Islamic culture, which Fortuyn characterises as a culture far removed from the Judeo-Christian humanist cultural areas. Fortuyn is quick to note

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[228]. Fortuyn, *De verweesde samenleving: een religieus-sociologisch traktaat*, 176.

[229]. Fortuyn argues that the Dutch Judeo-Christian humanistic culture has been defined by the Jewish culture that passed on its centrality of 'The Law' and the figure of the Father, Christian culture that passed on its sense of 'Community' and humanistic culture that puts 'The Individual' at the centre and emphasises individual responsibility. Fortuyn, *De verweesde samenleving: een religieus-sociologisch traktaat*, 72.

[230]. Fortuyn, *De verweesde samenleving: een religieus-sociologisch traktaat*, 71.

[231]. Fortuyn, *De verweesde samenleving: een religieus-sociologisch traktaat*, 183.

[232]. Fortuyn, *De verweesde samenleving: een religieus-sociologisch traktaat*, 183.

that immigrants from a non-Islamic cultural area different from Dutch culture (e.g. Chinese), actually cause little trouble, thereby excluding them from his analysis and main argument that these different cultures would pose problems to Dutch society. He subsequently focusses on Islamic culture, which he juxtaposes with the Judeo-Christian humanist culture, thereby creating an us-them dynamic.

To understand the threat that Fortuyn perceives in the Islamic background of immigrants, it is important to first explain how he perceives the relationship between religion and culture. According to Fortuyn, culture is 'the expression of the identity of a people and its individual members'.[233] Religion is part of a culture, the latter being a broader category. I want to focus on two important lines of thought with regard to religion: firstly, religion can be abandoned (in contrast to culture) and secondly, religion provides coherence to a culture. With regard to the first line of thought: Fortuyn has a primordial perception of culture; culture can never be abandoned, in contrast to religion that can be left behind. This idea should be understood against Fortuyn's own personal background: although Fortuyn rarely went to church anymore, he still identified as a Catholic and valued the Catholic tradition and Christian culture in which he had been raised. His abandonment of his Catholic faith had to do with his criticism on the churches that they had failed to build a bridge between the Christian tradition and the current generation of baby boomers and thus had failed to keep the church 'alive'. Fortuyn therefore spoke of a 'dead' church:

> 'Traditional institutions, such as the Churches and their associated organisations and associations, have virtually disappeared from our lives. They have failed to keep the tradition alive and make the Church a source of vitality, a source of life from which Western man can refresh himself at the moment of supreme thirst. Instead of respecting us and listening to us, Church ministers have either cloaked themselves in a vague kind of modernism that cuts us off from the rich tradition that has grown over centuries or have chosen the path of the ecclesiastical doctrinal magisterium that does not see tradition as a living cultural phenomenon that, like our system of norms and values, can sustain itself only if it remains among the living, i.e. grows with the lives of the living people, but which perceives tradition to be an absolute wisdom, which should be passed on to the living and, if possible, imposed. They are the representatives of the dead Church, the Church of the past, which denies the living their existence, their ideals, their attempts to grasp the meaning of their lives here on earth'.[234]

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[233].   Fortuyn, *De verweesde samenleving: een religieus-sociologisch traktaat*, 40.

[234].   Translated by the author. Original Dutch passage in: Fortuyn, *De verweesde samenleving: een religieus-sociologisch traktaat*, 83.

As the Church was 'too much a fossil and gave too little direction in his own existence', Fortuyn decided to leave his (active) religious life behind.[235] Nevertheless, Fortuyn continued to identify himself as a Catholic and he advocated for Christianity as an important formative part of his upbringing and a significant historical source of Dutch culture. Through this idea of religion as a component of culture, Fortuyn became an important forerunner of the culturalisation and heritagization of religion that has been most visible and explicitly articulated within far-right circles in recent years.[236] With regard to the second line of thought: Fortuyn argues that religion provides coherence to a particular culture, which he positively values. However, when a religion is characterised by fundamentalism, it makes a culture impervious to external influences and it may even turn against those outside influences.[237] This idea gives way to Islamic fundamentalism as one of the two threats of Islamic culture that Fortuyn already described in his book 'The orphaned society' and that he elaborated upon in 'Against the Islamisation of our culture', clearly influenced by Huntington in his ideas on Islam and culture.[238]

The threat Fortuyn perceived in the Islamic background of immigrants in the Netherlands is twofold. The first threat has little to do with Islam, but with Dutch society itself. The second threat has to do with a specific variant of Islam: fundamentalist Islam. The first threat concerns the cultural relativism that has made its appearance in Dutch society, promoting the co-existence of different cultures, but which, according to Fortuyn, has led to a neglect of one's own cultural experience and forms of cultural transmission.[239] He problematises cultural diversity:

> 'Cultural diversity, especially when important cultural values are at odds with each other, is an extremely difficult phenomenon for a society to manage. After all, a society has to rely on a minimum of commonly shared norms and values if it is not to lose cohesion'.[240]

Fortuyn believes that the integration of immigrants with an Islamic background is possible, but only when there is a dominant (homogenous) culture that is clearly articulated; and this is exactly what is lacking, due to the cultural relativism that is rampant. In Fortuyn's words: the development of our culture is biting its own

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235. Fortuyn, *De verweesde samenleving: een religieus-sociologisch traktaat*, 167.
236. See Chapter V, Paragraph 4.2 where I address this topic.
237. Fortuyn, *De verweesde samenleving: een religieus-sociologisch traktaat*, 183.
238. Huntington published his book 'The Clash of Civilizations' (1996) in between the publications of Fortuyn (1995 and 1997). Therefore, the influence of Huntington on Fortuyn's work published in 1997 is clearly distinguishable from his book published in 1995.
239. Fortuyn, *De verweesde samenleving: een religieus-sociologisch traktaat*, 184.
240. Fortuyn, *De verweesde samenleving: een religieus-sociologisch traktaat*, 192.

tail.[241] He believes that a relativist view of culture is weak and will lose from a fundamentalist view of culture. Fortuyn therefore fears that fundamentalist Islam will drive Dutch culture and identity further into the margins, if not destroy it altogether. Thus, the cause of the problem is not so much Islam, but the ideology of cultural relativism that predominates Dutch society.

The second threat that Fortuyn identifies is fundamentalist Islam. Interestingly, he defines it as a culture rather than a religion:

> 'The fundamentalist variant of Islam in particular is a life-threatening culture for our culture and society. We, meanwhile, are not opposing anything against it'.[242]

It is clear from this quotation that Fortuyn in his work sows the seeds of the political ideology that Rogers Brubaker has called 'Identitarian Christianism', which refers to a secularised notion of Christianity as a cultural or civilisational identity.[243] This identity stems from the idea that a contra-identity is needed against Islam; an idea that currently circulates within European far-right political discourse, but then related to religion: Christianity is needed as a counter-identity against Islam. Here, Fortuyn mainly writes of culture rather than religion; a cultural counter-identity is needed against the Islamic culture, and specifically fundamentalist Islam. Without a clearly articulated and lived counter-identity, Fortuyn fears that fundamentalist Islam will overrun and impose its conflicting norms and values on Dutch society.

According to Fortuyn, fundamentalist Islam (as culture) inherently clashes with Dutch norms and values on two aspects: gender equality and the separation of church and state. In his view, Islamic fundamentalists discriminate women by pushing them out of the public domain. Moreover, they adhere to theocratic views that conflict with the strict separation of church and state. These views should therefore be fought and if necessary banned.[244] In his book 'Against the Islamisation of our culture', Fortuyn elaborates on these aspects in which fundamentalist Islam clashes with the Judeo-Christian humanistic culture, clearly influenced by Huntington. In his book 'The orphaned society' however, Fortuyn mainly deals with the twofold threat as I have just described, threats that are both related like a double-edged sword that Fortuyn verbalizes as an opposition between cultural

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241. Fortuyn, *De verweesde samenleving: een religieus-sociologisch traktaat*, 185.
242. Fortuyn, *De verweesde samenleving: een religieus-sociologisch traktaat*, 191.
243. Brubaker, "Between nationalism and civilizationism: the European populist moment in comparative perspective," 1199.
244. Fortuyn, *De verweesde samenleving: een religieus-sociologisch traktaat*, 191.

II

relativism and Islamic fundamentalism that seriously threatens the already weakened Dutch identity and culture. In his subsequent book, published in 1997, Fortuyn will elaborate on his views about cultural relativism, Islamic norms and values, conflicting aspects between Islam and the West and the ambivalent positioning of Western societies.

Against the Islamisation of 'our' culture

Published only a year after Huntington's 'The Clash of Civilisations', Fortuyn's book 'Against the Islamisation of our culture' is evidently influenced by the writings of Huntington. Fortuyn starts using the term 'civilisation', he problematises Islam more broadly rather than just fundamentalist Islam, and he writes of conflict and a strained relationship between Islam and 'the West', thereby broadening his perspective from Dutch society to 'Western modernity' in general. Instead of an opposition between cultural relativism and Islam fundamentalism, Fortuyn now juxtaposes Islam vs. the West or Islam vs. Judeo-Christian humanist culture. Clearly, focus is more on Islam as a problem for Western modernity, rather than Dutch culture and the problematic elitist ideology of cultural relativism which was central to his former book 'The orphaned society'. Yet, Fortuyn maintains and expresses his firm criticism on the relativist attitude of elitist Dutch politicians, which according to him is the main cause for the problems with integrating (mainly Islamic) immigrants. I will now turn to a more detailed analysis of religion within his book.

Fortuyn argues that there has been a rise in regional conflicts in Europe and the rest of the world since 1991 due to the implosion of the bi-polar world: capitalism versus communism. The result is a constant and continuous flow of refugees, who have sought refuge in multiple European countries, among others the Netherlands. Fortuyn problematises the arrival of refugees who come from countries with a different (Islamic) culture, as it is difficult to reconcile with Judeo-Christian humanist culture. He does not perceive integration to be impossible, but he criticises the relativistic policies of many Western governments that do not only threaten Western culture 'to be snowed under by Islamic influences', but also offer Islamic immigrants 'a one-way ticket to the underclass of society'.[245] Fortuyn therefore argues for a new approach at a global and a national level: firstly, the international refugee treaties need to be drastically revised (he argues for more regional reception of refugees in the countries they come from) and secondly, a strong dispersal and integration policy needs to be launched nationally.[246]

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[245]. Fortuyn, *Tegen de islamisering van onze cultuur. Nederlandse identiteit als fundament*, 86, 100.

[246]. Fortuyn, *Tegen de islamisering van onze cultuur. Nederlandse identiteit als fundament*, 101, 93.

This brings me to the question why and how Fortuyn perceived Islamic culture to be difficult to harmonise with the Judeo-Christian culture of the West. Fortuyn articulates four areas of conflict:

1. Putting individual responsibility above collective responsibility.
2. The separation between church and state.
3. Dealings between the sexes.
4. The relationship between children and adults.[247]

The first inherent difference between Islamic culture and Western culture is that the Islamic culture is characterised by considerations and decisions based on family, clan or tribal affiliation, whereas Western society focusses on individual responsibility. Fortuyn sees this as a problem particularly in the economic sector.[248] Secondly, and most importantly to Fortuyn, Islamic culture does not acknowledge the separation of church and state. In his definition of Islamic fundamentalism, Fortuyn lists as one of its characteristics that it lacks a separation between church and state with the result that religious belief becomes totalitarian.[249] Although he states that fundamentalist Islam cannot be equated with Islam in all its forms, Fortuyn does argue (citing Islamic law as the ultimate example) that Islam in general does not acknowledge the secular state.[250] He specifically mentions that many Islamic countries struggle with parliamentary democracy, a secular rule of law, freedom of speech, an independent judiciary and press, the enforcement of human rights and dealing with minorities.[251] Fortuyn views this lack of appreciation of the secular state as highly problematic as the separation of church and state is a core value of Dutch society that has been fought for over centuries. According to him, it is 'one of the criteria of our economy and society' and it even 'determines our identity as a people' and therefore cannot be haggled with.[252] Thirdly, Fortuyn perceived a conflict with regard to gender relations. The emancipation of women and homosexuals in Western society (and specifically the Netherlands) is highly valued by Fortuyn. He writes:

> 'I attach the moral judgement that this is the greatest mental and
> cultural achievement of humanity in the modern world after the
> creation of the welfare state. A greater achievement and effort of

247. Fortuyn, *De islamisering van onze cultuur*, 24.
248. Fortuyn, *De islamisering van onze cultuur*, 63-65.
249. Fortuyn, *Tegen de islamisering van onze cultuur. Nederlandse identiteit als fundament*, 32-33.
250. Fortuyn, *Tegen de islamisering van onze cultuur. Nederlandse identiteit als fundament*, 36.
251. Fortuyn, *Tegen de islamisering van onze cultuur. Nederlandse identiteit als fundament*, 56.
252. Fortuyn, *Tegen de islamisering van onze cultuur. Nederlandse identiteit als fundament*, 46, 57.

> civilisation with more far-reaching consequences is not known to me, at least'.[253]

Similar to the separation of church and state, Fortuyn viewed the equality between men and women, of whatever sexual orientation, to be one of the core values of Dutch society.[254] He argued that it should be defended by all means whenever and wherever it is under threat. This is the case, for example, in what Fortuyn calls 'the fundamentalist interpretation of Islam'.[255] Interestingly, in using the word 'interpretation', Fortuyn shows that he differentiates between early Islam and contemporary Islam: what is written in the Qur'an and what was preached by the prophet Muhammad versus the current praxis and interpretations circulating within Islam today. This makes Fortuyn significantly different from other far-right politicians who reject Islam as a religion, such as Geert Wilders who condemns both the Qur'an and the prophet Muhammad. Wilders sees Islam not as a religion but as a totalitarian ideology, Muhammad not as a prophet but as a paedophile and he wants to forbid the Qur'an.[256]

With regard to gender, Fortuyn writes of 'a one-sided interpretation of the Qur'an at the very least', which has led to an Islamic belief that the position of women is subordinate to that of men, both in the private and the public domain.[257] He criticises women in Pakistan being blamed for being raped and suggests that Muhammed himself would have sharply condemned this practice as he was 'a progressive man' who 'owed his position in part to women, gave them credit for it and granted them an equal role to men in many ways, even in the public domain'.[258] Moreover, Fortuyn perceived the attire of Muslim women to be an expression of the oppressive regulations and their second-class status that prevents them from attaining an equal social and economic position to men.[259] In addition to the subordination of women, Fortuyn also mentions the futile position of homosexuals in many Islamic countries. He states that homosexuality in Islamic culture simply does not exist, although it does happen in practice among Muslim men.[260] In the

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253.   Fortuyn, *Tegen de islamisering van onze cultuur. Nederlandse identiteit als fundament*, 70.
254.   Fortuyn, *Tegen de islamisering van onze cultuur. Nederlandse identiteit als fundament*, 58.
255.   Fortuyn, *Tegen de islamisering van onze cultuur. Nederlandse identiteit als fundament*, 58.
256.   See "Verkiezingsprogramma Partij voor de Vrijheid 2021-2025 'Het gaat om u'," accessed 7-12-2022, https://www.pvv.nl/verkiezingsprogramma.html.
257.   Fortuyn, *Tegen de islamisering van onze cultuur. Nederlandse identiteit als fundament*, 70.
258.   Fortuyn, *Tegen de islamisering van onze cultuur. Nederlandse identiteit als fundament*, 70-71.
259.   Fortuyn, *Tegen de islamisering van onze cultuur. Nederlandse identiteit als fundament*, 72.
260.   Fortuyn seems to imply and write mostly about male homosexuality, although he does also mention female homosexuality as being totally non-existent in Islamic culture. See Fortuyn, *Tegen de islamisering van onze cultuur. Nederlandse identiteit als fundament*, 76.

revised book 'The Islamisation of our culture', Fortuyn gives a religious argument for the emancipation of homosexuals:

> 'For a religious human being - Jew, Christian or Muslim - we are created in His image and likeness. Would it then please Him to create homosexuals and then very sadistically forbid them to live according to and enjoy this natural orientation and shape it in love and sexuality?'[261]

In this argument, Fortuyn directly addresses the Dutch Christian politician Van Dijke and Dutch imam El Moumni, who both became discredited and persecuted in 1996 and 2002 after they made homophobic statements.[262] Clearly, Fortuyn advocates emancipation and sees Islamic culture as a challenge and a potential threat to what he perceives as an achievement of Western modernity. Fourthly, Fortuyn writes about the struggle of the second generation of immigrants, mainly from Turkish and Moroccan descent. He describes how the household of Dutch families changed in the second half of the twentieth century from a so-called 'command household' to a 'negotiation household' in which adults and young people interact with each other on the basis of equality.[263] Moreover, he explains how youngsters with an Islamic background are generally still raised in a patriarchal authority structure and how this clashes with the culture of equality in which many native Dutch youngsters have been brought up. This clash happens in the experience of Islamic youngsters that they have to conform to the demands and expectations of two very different cultures, which creates uncertainty. This uncertainty is amplified by the lack of perspective on the labour market, due to the deprived neighbourhoods in which these youngsters grow up and their falling behind at school. As a consequence, many of these youngsters not only find an easy path to criminality, but also to fundamentalist Islam.[264] Fortuyn argued therefore that the integration problems at a macro level will be particularly visible and expressed among Islamic youngsters. These four areas of conflict I have explained above lead to Fortuyn's idea that Islam is a cultural stumbling block in integrating immigrants with an Islamic cultural background in Western societies.

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[261]. Fortuyn, *De islamisering van onze cultuur*, 97.
[262]. For further reading on the content and judicial treatment of these two cases, see Kirsten Smeets and Carl Sterkens, "Religieuze voorgangers tussen Schrift en recht. Botsing van de godsdienstvrijheid en het gelijkheidsbeginsel in Nederland," *Tijdschrift voor Religie, Recht en Beleid* 5 (2014).
[263]. Fortuyn, *Tegen de islamisering van onze cultuur. Nederlandse identiteit als fundament*, 81.
[264]. Fortuyn, *Tegen de islamisering van onze cultuur. Nederlandse identiteit als fundament*, 84.

II

Regarding Fortuyn's view of Islam in this book, I have four observations. Firstly, in contrast with his previous book 'The orphaned society', Fortuyn seems to problematise Islam more broadly (i.e. also writing about liberal variants of Islam and political Islam) than just fundamentalist Islam. This may indicate an influence by Huntington, as it. Secondly, Fortuyn writes overwhelmingly about Islamic culture rather than Islam as a religion. He mainly criticises contemporary Islamic culture that has been influenced by Qur'anic interpretations of Islamic scribes, which may be (far) removed from the essence of Islam as a religion. It is contemporary Islamic culture that is at odds with the Judaeo-Christian humanistic culture of Western societies, rather than Islamic religion. Thirdly, Fortuyn perceives Islamic culture to be backward and connects Western civilisation to modernity. Fortuyn often speaks of 'the modern world' or 'modernity', referring to western societies.[265] In his view, modern civilisation (despite its flaws) is superior to Islam.[266] Religions such as Christianity and Judaism have gone through a process of secularisation and thus accepted the central norms and values of the Enlightenment and thus of modernity, whereas Islam has yet to embark on this or is in the midst of it:

> 'Christianity - which in its long history has many times incited the murder and persecution of 'pagans' and dissenters - and Judaism have gone through a profound process of secularisation. In that process of secularisation, except for some sects and fundamentalist groups, these world religions have accepted the central norms and values - about which more later on - of the Enlightenment and thus of modernity. Islam has sometimes yet to embark on this secularisation process or, at best, is now in the process of it. A process that takes time and proceeds by trial and error, which is shown by our own history.'[267]

Fortuyn thus believes that, unlike other religions, such as Christianity and Judaism, Islam still lags behind in its development towards modernity. Fourthly, Fortuyn creates contra-identities by pitting Islamic culture against the Judeo-Christian humanistic culture of Western societies. By contra-identities, I understand two identities that are emphatically juxtaposed against each other. When these identities are based on religion, they are called *religious* contra-identities. Although identity is arguably inherently constructed on the basis of contrast, contra-identities are the explicit emphasising of an identity to oppose another identity.

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265. See for example: Fortuyn, *Tegen de islamisering van onze cultuur. Nederlandse identiteit als fundament*, 70.
266. Fortuyn, *De islamisering van onze cultuur*, 19.
267. Fortuyn, *De islamisering van onze cultuur*, 19-20.

Fortuyn's work illustrates this dynamic; it already shows how Christianity becomes part of an identity discourse of the European far right, using it as an ideological weapon against Islam. First on the basis of culture, later increasingly on the basis of religion itself. Fortuyn often writes of 'us' and 'ours' (our culture, our society etc.). Illustrative is the word 'our' in his book of 1996 'Against the Islamisation of *'our'* culture. This word has been retained in the revised book of 2001: 'The Islamisation of *'our'* culture. His usage of 'us' and 'them' is thus deliberate and automatically creates 'Islamic culture' to be a contra-identity of the 'Judeo-Christian humanistic culture, although Fortuyn does not deliberately speak of Muslims as 'they' or 'them'. These contra-identities are mainly based on culture, but religion forms a part. Important to note is that in the construction of these contra-identities, the Islamic identity is the starting point for formulating the other identity. Fortuyn heavily criticised Dutch politicians that they should better articulate and strengthen their identity as a contra-identity to Islam; otherwise the Islamic identification would take over the Western identification.

Although the Islamic culture makes integration more difficult, Fortuyn did not see it as an insurmountable problem. In trying to find a solution, Fortuyn called for strong integration and dispersal policies.[268] He argued that the greatest threat was when Western politicians would do nothing and kept on clinging to their ideology of cultural relativism. He prophesied:

> 'We are particularly alert to anything that tends to emphasising individuality and excluding groups of people who do not fit entirely or do not fit at all. Given our history, this alertness is absolutely justified, but it should not tempt us to think that we can do without individuality. Indeed, if we continue to ignore this essential, human need to distinguish and experience individuality, we will thereby help pave the way for an experience of individuality that excludes outsiders. Specifically, we will pave the way for narrow-nationalist and ethnically 'pure' views. We then leave the formulation and experience of our individuality to far-right political groups.'[269]

With hindsight, these words of Fortuyn seemed worth to be taken seriously in light of the current rise of the European far right. The irony is, however, that Fortuyn's quote seems to have been a self-fulfilling prophesy: although Fortuyn distanced himself from extreme and radical right-wing ideologies, it has been his

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268.   Fortuyn, *Tegen de islamisering van onze cultuur. Nederlandse identiteit als fundament*, 93.

269.   Fortuyn, *Tegen de islamisering van onze cultuur. Nederlandse identiteit als fundament*, 106.

own writings that have profoundly influenced the ideology of the contemporary European far right, in particular its racialisation of Muslims and the identarian Christianism involved.

Paragraph 3.4: Fortuyn's influence on religious identity in European national populism

Fortuyn drew Huntington's ideas as described in his book 'The Clash of Civilisations' to a sharp and profound analysis of his own country: the Netherlands. Combined with the ideas of Huntington, Fortuyn developed his pre-existing ideas into a political vision that would lead to a new, particular form of European national populism that would spread among far-right politicians in Northern and Western Europe. It is characterised by a pre-occupation with Islam and an identification of the nation with the ideologies of Christianism, liberalism and secularism. As Rogers Brubaker has rightfully claimed, Pim Fortuyn can be seen as the pioneer of this movement.[270] Although Fortuyn himself was already influenced by the cultural theory of the nineties, Frits Bolkestein and Huntington, he was the first to transform cultural theory into a coherent body of thought that centralised the importance of the Netherlands as a nation and explicitly condemned the Dutch elite and Islamic culture that threaten Dutch society. Due to his charismatic character and flamboyant appearance, he was able to mobilise many thousands of supporters in the political domain. After his murder, his legacy of culturalism would live on, not only within mainstream politics but also on the far-right end of the political spectrum.[271]

Fortuyn can be defined as a national populist, because his political vision considered both 'the Elite' as well as 'Others' to be enemies of the nation. In his view, the two-dimensional triangle of national populism included the following: the people are 'the Dutch people', the elite is 'the Dutch elite (in particular leftist politicians)' and the Others are 'Muslim immigrants'.[272] Fortuyn argued that the Dutch elite supposedly helped Muslim immigrants by allowing them into the Netherlands in a delusion of cultural relativism and multiculturalism, but without profiling a clearly articulated Dutch identity. In this inaction, the Dutch elite not only enabled Islamic culture to undermine the Dutch cultural identity, but they also helped Islamic immigrants into a socio-economic abyss. Fortuyn excluded Dutch politicians (the Elite) on the basis of moral criteria and excluded Islamic immigrants (The Others)

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[270]. Brubaker, "Between nationalism and civilizationism: the European populist moment in comparative perspective," 1194.

[271]. Demmers and Mehendale, "Neoliberal Xenophobia: The Dutch Case," 68; Koen Vossen, "Classifying Wilders: The Ideological Development of Geert Wilders and His Party for Freedom," *Politics* 31, no. 3 (2011): 187.

[272]. See Figure 3 'National Populism' on page 48.

on the basis of *cultural* criteria. It is important to note, that Fortuyn's exclusion of immigrants with an Islamic background was not on the basis of ethnic criteria and thus not of a permanent nature; he believed that integration was possible and that Islamic immigrants could also belong to the nation, after a process of assimilation.[273] This however, required according to Fortuyn a clearly articulated Dutch national identity. Moreover, the threat posed by Islamic culture ('The Other') only existed under the condition that Dutch society lacked sufficient awareness of its own identity; if this identity would be clearly articulated by the Dutch elite, this would not only increase the possibilities for integrating immigrants, but also decrease the threat posed by Islamic culture.

Fortuyn has had a major impact on how religious identity has been used by the European far right in the 21st century. This influence is particularly visible in two domains of the national-populist triangle: the people and 'The Others'. Regarding 'the people', Fortuyn initiated the political ideology of what Brubaker has called 'civilisational or identarian Christianism' and regarding 'the Others', Fortuyn's political ideas have been pivotal in the racialisation of Muslims in Europe. I will explain below what I understand by these terms and how Fortuyn contributed to both developments.

Firstly, Fortuyn contributed to the development of 'identarian Christianism', because he was the first influential politician to connect Western culture or Western civilisation with the ideologies of Christianism, liberalism and secularism and consider this as a cultural or civilisational identity. Regarding Christianism, Fortuyn valued Christianity as a cultural identity rather than its religious institutions. This of course had to do with Fortuyn's criticism of the churches that they failed in bridging the Christian tradition with the people of today. His criticism led Fortuyn, despite his Catholic upbringing and faith, to abandon the church. He no longer actively attended church himself, although he certainly valued the Christian faith in itself. In the terms of Grace Davie, Fortuyn would be a typical example of 'believing without belonging'. However, Fortuyn did not neglect the importance of the human need for belonging; in fact, Fortuyn was concerned with another form of belonging; namely, being part of a society defined by a Christian culture; what he called 'the Judeo-Christian humanist culture'. Thus, Fortuyn shifted religious belonging from church

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273. It is not quite clear to what extent Fortuyn wanted Muslims to assimilate: on the one hand he advocates integration, but on the other hand he argues that Muslims should adopt the values of Judeo-Christian humanistic culture, effectively stripping them of their own identity. De Koning sees this as the result of a paradox within Fortuyns' cultural theory. See Koning, *Een ideologische strijd met de islam. Fortuyns gedachtegoed als scharnierpunt in de racialisering van moslims*, 47-48.

membership to religious-cultural belonging. In doing so, Fortuyn initiated the idea which has become predominant in many contemporary West-European far-right political parties and movements that Christianity is a cultural and civilisational identity, rather than a religious belief and way of life.

Secondly, Fortuyn identified Western society with liberalism. He perceived Western civilisation to be modern and progressive. He was a strong proponent of emancipation, advocating both women's rights and gay rights. In addition, he supported freedom of speech. Fortuyn was known to have his heart on his sleeve and he believed that debate and discussion should play a major role in the public space. He used the phrase 'The word as a weapon' not only to stress the importance of debate, but also to distance himself from legitimising violence against Islam and to emphasise that particularly the debate is so important in the dialogue with Islamic leaders. In contrast to the modern and progressive West, Fortuyn perceived Islamic culture to be backward. He criticised Islamic countries that restricted freedom of speech, women's and gay rights. This view of Fortuyn fuelled the contemporary idea in the European far right that the liberal West clashes with illiberal Islam.

Thirdly, Fortuyn connected Western civilisation to secularism. As is apparent from his writings, Fortuyn valued the secular state and held the principle of the separation church and state in high regard. Repeatedly, he writes about the historic fight for this principle and the impossibility of haggling over it as it is one of the core values of Western society. Where Christianity and Judaism have gone through a process of secularisation and now respect the secular state, Islam has not yet gone through this and therefore Islam clashes with the secular nature of Western civilisation. This idea of Fortuyn has resonated among far-right leaders that Islam is a threat to secular society.

Lastly, Fortuyn contributed to the racialisation of Muslims. Regarding the group that he considered to be the outgroup ('The Other') of the Dutch nation, i.e. immigrants with an Islamic background, it should be noted that Fortuyn writes of 'Islamic culture' and 'fundamentalist Islam' as if Islam consists of concepts rather than individuals. As a result, despite also nuancing in some areas, he homogenises Islam to be one mass or cultural conception that clashes with the modern West. In reality, this is of course not the case. Islam consists of different currents, law schools, mosques and religious beliefs and practices. It is also quite decisive from which Islamic country immigrants come from. Not forgetting to mention the fact that many Islamic countries host a diverse religious landscape. Many immigrants

from the MENA-region do not adhere to the Islamic faith at all; they adhere to a different religion such as Christianity, Judaism, Yazidism or to none at all. Moreover, he generalised that Islamic culture is backward as it would not promote freedom of speech. As Haziqul Quadir has shown in his research, this is not the case.[274] Also, with regard to liberalism, Fortuyn interpreted that the attire and attitude of Muslim women would be a sign of oppression. Hereby neglecting the fact that many Islamic women choose their way of life including their attire and forms of communication consciously; not as a form of oppression, but as an expression of their identity, pride and respect. With regard to secularism: Fortuyn argued that many Muslims would not respect the secular state; neglecting the fact that many Muslims were fitting neatly into the Dutch system of regulating religion[275].

Thus, Fortuyn lumped all Muslims together, categorising them into one group as a homogenous population. This is what Martijn de Koning calls 'the racialisation of Muslims'. Racialisation is a form of signification through which power is exerted on individuals and groups.[276] Racialisation happens when:

– Subsuming different groups of people under one category
– Giving generalizing and often negative explanations for individuals' behaviour
– Making stigmatizing value judgments about a group based on a negative generalizing idea about culture, 'race' or religion
– Prescribing how to deal with the individuals of 'such' a group or the group as a whole.[277]

According to De Koning, racialisation of religious minorities has often happened in history (e.g. the Irish in the United States and the Jews in Europe) and is therefore proof that a religious group can be racialised. De Koning argues that by putting a negative generalising stamp on a religious group, the space for a believers' individuality is reduced:

[274.] Dr. Haziqul Quadir compared the freedom of speech in liberal democracies with the freedom of speech in Islam. He argues in his dissertation that the differences between Islam and 'the liberal West' are not as great as has been thought. See Haziqul Quadir, "Freedom of Expression in Islam and Liberal Democracies: A Comparison" (PhD diss. Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2022).

[275.] Koning, *Een ideologische strijd met de islam. Fortuyns gedachtegoed als scharnierpunt in de racialisering van moslims*, 47.

[276.] Koning, *Een ideologische strijd met de islam. Fortuyns gedachtegoed als scharnierpunt in de racialisering van moslims*, 67.

[277.] Koning, *Een ideologische strijd met de islam. Fortuyns gedachtegoed als scharnierpunt in de racialisering van moslims*, 69.

> 'One's individual religiosity and other aspects of his or identity no longer matter, but one is categorized, questioned, explained and addressed on the basis of those negative definitions.'[278]

The often-heard argument of far-right actors: 'I'm not a racist because Islam is not a religion' therefore does not hold. Race and religion are often much more intertwined than is generally accepted.[279] Nevertheless, although he resisted the accusations of being a racist as he did not exclude Muslims on the basis of their ethnicity but their culture, Fortuyn did racialise Muslims as a group and in doing so, provided a homogenous Islamic outsider identity that far-right actors would be happy to copy.

So far, I have argued that Fortuyn contributed to the development of what Brubaker calls 'Identitarian Christianism' as an identity of the native people, and the racialisation of Muslims as an identity of the outgroup. To these I would like to add a third development with regard to religion and the far right that Fortuyn has significantly influenced, namely the emergence of Islam and Christianity as what I call 'contra-identities'. This term refers to two identities that are emphatically juxtaposed. Fortuyn does this with the identity of the ingroup (identitarian Christianism) and the identity of the outgroup (Muslims). However, he pits them against one another not yet on the basis of religion, but culture: two cultural identities are placed in opposition to each other, namely the 'Judeo-Christian humanist culture' versus 'the (fundamentalist) Islamic culture'. He does this by using terms of conflict and explaining how these cultures differ from each other, but most emphatically he does this by explicitly and repeatedly writing about 'us' and 'our' culture, society, history etc. He even used the word 'our' in the title of his books. Although Fortuyn does not explicitly refer to the Muslims as 'them', by claiming the Judeo-Christian humanistic culture to be 'our' culture and explicitly appropriating Dutch culture, history, society etc., Fortuyn automatically excludes Muslims from this culture. They belong to another culture that is not 'ours'. This us-them distinction happens on several fronts, thereby creating what Mudde calls 'mirror-images': with regard to secularism, 'they' (i.e. Muslims) do not respect the secular state, whereas 'we' (including Christians and Jews) do. With regard to liberalism, we are 'modern' and 'they' are backward. With regard to Christianism, 'we' derive from a Christian culture, whereas 'they' have an Islamic cultural

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278. Koning, *Een ideologische strijd met de islam. Fortuyns gedachtegoed als scharnierpunt in de racialisering van moslims*, 67-68.
279. Goldberg, *Are we all postracial yet*; Mondon and Winter, "Racist movements, the far right and mainstreaming."

background. This 'us' versus 'them' perception predominates Fortuyn's writings, regardless of the fact that many Muslims have lived in Europe for ages, and did not suddenly appear on the scene as a strange culture with the waves of immigration after the Second World War.[280]

The impetus for Fortuyn to construct the contra-identities of Islamic culture versus Judeo-Christian humanistic culture was his preoccupation with the Islamic background of immigrants who came to the Netherlands. Fortuyn believed that the elitist ideologies of cultural relativism and multiculturalism had eroded the Dutch national identity. He therefore advocated for a revived awareness of Judeo-Christian humanistic culture, that he defined and constructed on the basis of a historical and sociological analysis in his books. In doing so, he created Judeo-Christian humanistic culture as a contra-identity to Islamic culture. The impetus is thus Islam, which must be opposed by Western culture if it is not to fall.

This pre-occupation with Islam, as an impetus to create a Christian identity, is still visible among far-right actors and movements today. Schwörer and Fernández-García provide empirical evidence for the thesis that the radical-right focus on Islam as a new religious outgroup resulted in the construction of a Christian-ingroup and a Christian civilisational identity.[281] An anti-Islam focus as the basis for a native Christian identity is also supported by the research of Cremer who investigated secularism and Christianism among elitist politicians of the French Rassemblement National (RN): he found in his interviews with RN leaders, French mainstream politicians and Church authorities, that almost all RN politicians negatively reference Islam in their definition of Christian identity, whereas only a few mainstream politicians did the same and no members of the clergy did.[282] Moreover, although Fortuyn launched the idea of contra-identities among far-right actors, there has been a gradual shift in the framing of these identities among the European far right. Fortuyn initiated contra-identities on the basis of culture, but these have gradually evolved into contra-identities on the basis of religion: Fortuyn initiated a culture vs. culture conflict (Judeo-Christian humanistic culture vs. Islamic culture), which changed into a culture vs. religion conflict (The West versus Islam), which on its turn has changed into a religion vs religion conflict ('The Christian Europe' vs 'The Muslim Other'). This 'religious turn' was significantly triggered by the

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280. Koning, *Een ideologische strijd met de islam. Fortuyns gedachtegoed als scharnierpunt in de racialisering van moslims*, 70.
281. Schwörer and Fernández-García, "Religion on the rise again? A longitudinal analysis of religious dimensions in election manifestos of Western European parties," 10.
282. Cremer, "The Rise of the post-religious right: Christanism and Secularism in the French Rassemblement National," 6.

events of 9/11 and it is therefore particularly after 2001 that the shift from Islam as culture to Islam as religion takes place, which is exemplified by the rhetoric of far-right leaders such as Geert Wilders who has specifically targeted Islam as a religion.

II

Chapter III:

The Far Right and Social Media

'Better far right than far wrong!'

'Europe for Europeans!'[283]

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283. Two oft-expressed slogans in the comments on far-right TikTok video's: April-July 2023.

Introduction

On March 20, 2023, the first Arabic street sign in Germany was erected in a migrant neighbourhood in Düsseldorf, as a symbol of diversity and recognition of migrants. It was praised by local Islamic associations and the Green Party that commented: 'Bilingual street signs are also a symbolic expression of social inclusion. They show that people identify with their district and the diversity of their district'.[284] However, one week later on March 27, a far-right movement called 'Revolte Rheinland' vandalised the street sign, renaming it the 'Karl- Martell-Strasse' and picturing a horsed knight with a lance driving people away. It was accompanied by a German text that stated: 'By pushing back the Arabs at the battle of Poitiers in 732, Charles Martel brought an end to the Islamic conquest of Europe and thus secured the return of armies of foreigners to Europe. But unlike then, this time it has been surrendered. The sign above symbolises this process of subjugation that was once needed. Then the lance, today the deportation aircraft. Charles Martel do it again!'[285]

Soon after this act, images of the transformed street sign were shared on the Telegram channel of Revolte_Rheinland and circulated on other social media platforms as well, such as TikTok. It led to both responses of rejection and praise in the political discourse that unfolded on social media. The name referred to on the street sign, Charles Martel – grandfather of Charles the Great, is part of an Islamophobic discourse of the European far right. Martel, who defeated an Umayyad-led Muslim army at the battle of Poitiers in 732 CE, has become an important and recurring figure in the (online) far-right landscape who symbolises and identifies the past and contemporary 'Christian Europe' that has to be defended against Muslim immigrants in particular. This event illustrates not only how online and offline space have become interconnected in the political rhetoric of the European far right, but also demonstrates how far-right actors construct and articulate a Christian European identity in response to a Muslim Arabic identity.

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[284]. Translation by the author. German original: 'Zweisprachige Straßenschilder sind auch ein symbolischer Ausdruck gesellschaftlicher Inklusion. Sie zeigen, dass sich die Menschen mit ihrem Stadtteil und der Vielfalt ihres Stadtteils identifizieren.'"Ellerstraße und عراش ", Grüne Düsseldorf, 14 September 2023, May 16, 2023, https://www.gruene-duesseldorf.de/arabisches_strassenschild_ellerstrasse/.

[285]. German original: *'Mit der Zurückdrängung der Araber in der Schlacht von Poitiers leistete Karl Martell im Jahr 732 das Ende der islamischen Landnahme in Europa ein und sicherte damit den erneut Heerscharen von Fremden in Europa. Doch anders als damals bedarf es dieses Mal preisgegeben. Das obige Schild steht symbolisch für diesen Prozess der Unterwerfung je brauchten. Damals die Lanze. Heute der Abschiebeflieger. Karl Martell do it again!'*

This chapter explores the theoretical foundations of the relationship between the far right and the media, focussing on social media in particular. To understand how the European far right is using the media as a platform for their political rhetoric and specifically for constructing religious contra-identities, it is important to look into the characteristics of far-right groups and individuals against the backdrop of our current society. In the history of the European far right after the Second World War (hereafter: WWII), four different 'waves' can be distinguished: the first wave concerns the period from 1945-1955, which is characterised by neo-fascist groups and individuals who remained loyal to the old fascist ideology.[286] Despite attempts to reorganise themselves, they were politically unsuccessful and marginalised by the legal and political system, due to the hostile climate to fascist tendencies in the direct aftermath of WWII. The second wave concerns the period from 1955-1980, which witnessed a rise in populist far-right political parties and individuals who mainly opposed the postwar elites rather than nostalgically clinging on to a desired but defeated fascist ideology.[287] The third wave concerns the period from 1980-2000, which is characterised by the establishment of far-right political parties within various (West-)European countries.[288] The fourth wave started in the year 2000 and continues to the present day. According to Cas Mudde, the contemporary far right can be characterised by the following features:

1. The mainstreaming and normalisation of the far right.
2. Islamophobia as the defining prejudice.
3. The heterogeneity of the far right.
4. Growing electoral success and political relevance of far-right political parties.[289]

Mudde states that the fourth wave of the far right coincides with the ascendance of social media.[290] In this chapter I argue that the European far right has actively used social media to spread and mainstream their political rhetoric that includes, in particular, the construction and mobilisation of religious contra-identities. I demonstrate this with a study of academic literature, reports of intelligence services and a qualitative content analysis on the social media platform of TikTok. Though an exclusionary demarcation was not deliberately chosen because of the transnational character of social media (also extending outside of Europe), the focus is slightly more on far-right actors from the Netherlands and Germany.[291]

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[286]. Mudde, *The far right today*, 12.
[287]. Mudde, *The far right today*, 14.
[288]. Mudde, *The far right today*, 18.
[289]. Mudde, *The far right today*, 20-23, 163-70.
[290]. Mudde, *The far right today*, 110.
[291]. This is due to the language capabilities of the researcher: Dutch, German and English.

The main research question of this chapter is: 'what are the characteristics of the religious identity attributions of 'Islam' and 'The Christian Europe' and how do they relate to each other in the ideological self-definitions of European far-right political parties and movements on social media?

Before proceeding to the findings of the qualitative content analysis on TikTok, it is important to first understand how the far right has used the media for their own success and the mainstreaming of their far-right ideologies. Therefore, this chapter has been divided into two sections. The first section discusses the relationship between far-right politicians and the media in general, explaining the sales effect of the far right, political strategies such as agenda setting and framing and how the media have contributed to the mainstreaming of the far right. The second section gives an overview of the opportunity structures that social media in particular have offered far-right actors: (1) microtargeting; (2) bypassing the gate keeper function of the mass media; (3) emotional discourse; (4) transnational networks; and (5) radicalisation.

Paragraph 1: The Far Right and the Media

The media and the far right have always had a love-hate relationship and how they relate to each other is ambiguous at the least. On the one hand, far-right actors heavily criticise the media for being merely puppets of the leftist elite and they often accuse journalists of distorting, downplaying or excluding their message.[292] On the other hand, they have eagerly used the media as a platform to gain visibility, legitimacy and more voters. Previous research has shown, that the media can both limit ánd contribute to the success of the far right.[293] Léonie de Jonge has shown how different attitudes of journalists and editors in the Benelux region

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[292.] Thierry Baudet, leader of the Dutch far-right party Forum for Democracy (FvD), addresses this issue in his interview with the Muslim television host Salaheddine that was recorded and placed on Youtube on the 4th of November 2022. Salaheddine, "THIERRY BAUDET OVER DE DOOD, GOD EN HET HIERNAMAALS! GESPREK MET SALAHEDDINE," Youtube, 4 November 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=25_EXepY1dA. See also Antonis A. Ellinas, "Media and the Radical Right," ed. Jens Rydgren, *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018). 269.

[293.] Hajo G. Boomgaarden and Rens Vliegenthart, "Explaining the rise of anti-immigrant parties: The role of news media content," *Electoral Studies* 26, no. 2 (2007); Ellinas, "Media and the Radical Right."; Michał Krzyżanowski, "Discursive shifts and the normalisation of racism: imaginaries of immigration, moral panics and the discourse of contemporary right-wing populism," *Social Semiotics* 30, no. 4 (2020); Jonge, *The Success and Failure of Right-Wing Populist Parties in the Benelux Countries*; Katy Brown and Aurelien Mondon, "Populism, the media, and the mainstreaming of the far right: The Guardian's coverage of populism as a case study," *Politics* 41, no. 3 (2021).

have led to substantial differences in opportunity structures in those countries; the Luxembourgish and Walloon media landscape have been resilient to far-right tendencies, whereas the Dutch and Flemish media landscapes have been accessible and accommodating towards the far right.[294] De Jonge explains these differences from broader macro-level changes such as secularisation and depillarisation that have impacted the degree of politicisation and commercialisation of the media, the method of subsidisation and views on what is 'good' or 'bad' journalism.[295] Other authors have mainly demonstrated how the media contributes to the success of the far right through (un)intentional strategies of agenda-setting, framing, normalisation and legitimisation. Antonis Ellinas for example has argued that the media can affect political demand and legitimise the political space in which the far right thrives through agenda-setting and framing.[296] Michal Kryżanowski has demonstrated how anti-immigration discourse and racism in particular are normalised in Polish media discourse.[297] And Katie Brown and Aurelien Mondon have shown in their research on the coverage of a series on populism by British newspaper 'The Guardian' that the careless and uncritical use of the term 'populism' can lead to the legitimisation of far-right groups and actors.[298]

Despite the significant role that the media plays for far-right politics, there has been little attention for the subject and future research, especially on the individual level, is much needed.[299] Therefore, I make an attempt to identify the main factors that contribute to the success of the far right, based on the existing academic literature. Although I do not endeavour to give an all-encompassing account of the role of media in far-right politics, as it is not the main subject of this dissertation, I do think it is important to give an overview of the role of the media in creating a breeding ground for the far right, in order to understand the role of *social media* in particular compared to the traditional media (newspapers, television, radio). In what follows, I identify three different factors that build an opportunity structure for far-right political parties and movements and therefore contribute to its success

294. Jonge, *The Success and Failure of Right-Wing Populist Parties in the Benelux Countries*; Léonie de Jonge and Elizaveta Gaufman, "The normalisation of the far right in the Dutch media in the run-up to the 2021 general elections," *Discourse & Society* 33, no. 6 (2022); Maximilian Grönegräs and Benjamin De Cleen, "Negotiating the boundaries of the politically sayable: populist radical right talk scandals in the German media," *Critical Discourse Studies* 20, no. 6 (2023).

295. Jonge, *The Success and Failure of Right-Wing Populist Parties in the Benelux Countries*, 159, 72-75.

296. Ellinas, "Media and the Radical Right."

297. Krzyżanowski, "Discursive shifts and the normalisation of racism: imaginaries of immigration, moral panics and the discourse of contemporary right-wing populism."

298. Brown and Mondon, "Populism, the media, and the mainstreaming of the far right: The Guardian's coverage of populism as a case study."

299. Ellinas, "Media and the Radical Right," 279; de Jonge and Gaufman, "The normalisation of the far right in the Dutch media in the run-up to the 2021 general elections," 774.

in the political arena. These factors can be designated as: (1) the 'sales' effect (2) agenda setting and framing and (3) mainstreaming and normalising. What follows is a description of each of these three factors.

Paragraph 1.1: The 'sales' effect

Firstly, the mainstreaming of the far right is due to the sales effect of the far right. The media have shown a profound interest in or even fascination for figures such as Donald Trump, Geert Wilders or Victor Orbán, due to their radical statements or flamboyant appearance. Media search for newsworthy material and this is often found in people, events or has led to ideologies that deviate from the mainstream. As far-right leaders promote a radical view on politics and society and often have an extraordinary or charismatic appearance (which, of course, is also done or chosen deliberately), it interests the audience and therefore media report it out of commercial ends. To put it short: the far right sells.[300]

Moreover, there has been a tendency in the media in recent decades to focus more on politicians' personalities rather than their policies, due to technological and economic changes in the media landscape. In many countries, public broadcasting monopolies have been dismantled and replaced by a multitude of private media conglomerates. This has led to an increased competition between private media companies to attract greater audiences and higher advertising revenues, which has made the audience the primary indicator of the newsworthiness of information. Antonis Ellinas argues that this has led to the production of 'sensational, simplified and dramatized content', which he calls the 'dumbing down of news' or 'the turn to infotainment'.[301] This has also influenced the reporting on politics, leading to a main focus on 'entertaining, sensationalist and dramatized politics' that clearly is in favour of far-right political parties and movements.[302] De Jonge has found evidence that Dutch and Flemish media representatives are more commercially oriented in their thinking than their counterparts in Luxembourg and Wallonia.[303] This correlates with a more neutral stance among editors and journalists towards the representation of the far right in the media, to which they are more accommodating than their media representatives in Luxembourg and Wallonia who have (in)formally put up a so-called *cordon sanitaire médiatique*, which implies exclusion of far-right individuals from representation in the media.[304]

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[300]. Mudde, *The far right today*, 108.
[301]. Ellinas, "Media and the Radical Right," 277.
[302]. Ellinas, "Media and the Radical Right," 271.
[303]. Jonge, *The Success and Failure of Right-Wing Populist Parties in the Benelux Countries*, 173.
[304]. Jonge, *The Success and Failure of Right-Wing Populist Parties in the Benelux Countries*, 164.

III

Paragraph 1.2: Agenda setting and framing

Secondly, the media has facilitated the far right in setting the agenda and framing issues that are at the top of the agenda of far-right political parties and movements.[305] The issues of immigration and crime have received significant attention in the media since the 1980's, which are both issues that the far-right thrives on. In the 1990's, the integration debate took centre stage in the public debate of many West-European countries, as a response to the many non-European guest workers who came to Europe in the 1970's to help rebuild and strengthen the economy after WWII, who did not intend to return to their countries of origin, but rather aimed for settling permanently with their families in Europe. This debate received a lot of media-attention, but arguably even more attention was given to right or far-right politicians who turned against the idea of multiculturalism and cultural relativism, for example the charismatic Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn whose ideas were widely covered in the (international) media. The popularity of immigration as a newsworthy topic in subsequent years continued unabated and was particularly evident after 9/11 and the post-2010 immigration of citizens from mostly non-European Islamic countries, and may well have found its peak in the reporting of the immigration crisis in 2015. However, immigration continues to rise as a newsworthy item today. Crime has also been part and parcel of the daily news, and especially in combination with the issue of immigration, which was apparent in the discussion that arose after 9/11 with regard to Islamic-inspired terrorism, it has provided a breeding ground upon which the authoritarian views of the far right could fully mature.

According to Ellinas, the media has not only played a role in setting the agenda, but also in framing the issues of immigration and crime in such a way that the far right has benefited from it. The media has often been criticised for negatively framing contemporary politics and creating distrust in the government. Journalists have reported and stressed the failure of the government or its policies to address issues such as crime or immigration. An example is how the asylum application centre in the Netherlands became overcrowded in the summer of 2022, forcing people to sleep outside and to live in poor hygienic conditions. This news reached the international press, especially after a baby died and the organisation of 'Doctors Without Borders' had to intervene for the first time in the Netherlands.[306] This widely reported news, including all of the literally 'dirty details', was of course grist to the mill of far-right politicians.[307] Brown and Mondon have shown how even

305.   Ellinas, "Media and the Radical Right," 270.
306.   Daniel Boffey, "Baby dies in 'inhuman' Dutch centre for asylum seekers," *The Guardian* 2022, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/25/baby-dies-in-inhuman-dutch-centre-for-asylum-seekers.
307.   The Dutch media published in late August 2022 multiple articles and video's containing images of dirty toilets and garbage, people sleeping in the open, violence between asylum seekers etc.

liberal, leftist newspapers such as the British newspaper 'The Guardian', where the aforementioned event was also reported, contribute to amplification of the far right by priming and framing the issue of immigration as a major concern.[308] Another example of this agenda-setting and amplifying effect was the international media attention given to the assassination of the Dutch crime reporter Peter R. de Vries and the ensuing criticism in the Dutch media that De Vries's security had been substandard, making him a victim of the Dutch criminal circuit.[309] This discussion facilitated and amplified the agenda of far-right politicians who argued in favour of more authoritarian policies against crime.

Paragraph 1.3: Mainstreaming and normalising

Thirdly, the media have helped to mainstream the far right by granting new far-right political parties or movements validation, momentum and/or legitimacy.[310] *Validation* refers to the idea that when the media reports or covers new far-right actors and their ideologies, this automatically adds to the perception of them being important. By reporting on them, the media turns political outsiders into players in the political game. De Jonge has demonstrated this effect with her research on the Dutch far-right party 'Forum for Democracy (FvD) led by Thierry Baudet during the run-up to the 2021 Dutch general elections.[311] She has shown how the views of newcomer Baudet were extensively covered by the media, with newspapers publishing direct quotations of his conspirational and racists views without pushback. This led to Baudets ideas being placed on par with mainstream viewpoints and created the perception of his far-right rhetoric as the main counter-narrative to the ruling coalition with Baudet as the sole legitimate oppositional force to Prime Minister Rutte.[312] As such, Baudet was turned from a political outsider into a major player in the Dutch political arena by the media. This mechanism is also called 'the validation effect'.[313]

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[308]. Brown and Mondon, "Populism, the media, and the mainstreaming of the far right: The Guardian's coverage of populism as a case study," 289.

[309]. Persistent criticism on the alleged substandard security of De Vries led the minister of Justice and Security to launch an independent investigation. "Onafhankelijk onderzoek naar beveiliging Peter R. de Vries," NOS, July 15, 2021, https://nos.nl/artikel/2389411-onafhankelijk-onderzoek-naar-beveiliging-peter-r-de-vries.

[310]. Ellinas, "Media and the Radical Right," 273.

[311]. de Jonge and Gaufman, "The normalisation of the far right in the Dutch media in the run-up to the 2021 general elections."

[312]. de Jonge and Gaufman, "The normalisation of the far right in the Dutch media in the run-up to the 2021 general elections," 783.

[313]. William A. Gamson and Gadi Wolfsfeld, "Movements and Media as Interacting Systems," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 528 (1993): 116; Ellinas, "Media and the Radical Right," 273.

Momentum refers to the idea that the media, or far-right media organisations in particular, give attention to the political growth or relevance of a far-right actor or movement, even though it is not yet that significant. In doing so, the media creates a self-fulfilling prophesy; because of the media attention, the far-right actor or movement does indeed become politically relevant. An example is how the American news channel Fox news became sympathetic to and closely associated with Donald Trump. It is argued that the extensive media coverage by Fox News of Donald Trump in the early stages of his campaign has contributed to establishing his presidency.[314] Another example is how the British newspaper 'The Guardian' covered the Sweden elections of 2018 with disproportionate attention to the far-right party 'Sweden Democrats' and warnings of its imminent rise, although this did not show in the election results.[315]

Legitimacy refers to the idea that media-attention can remove the negative perception or stigma of far-right political parties. An example is how Marine le Pen used the media to create a softer image of her party Le Front National and create more distance to the fascist associations of the party under the previous leadership of her father. This strategy of de-demonisation (*dédiabolisation)* included her distancing from the extreme right and the anti-Semitic and racist convictions of her father. During the presidential elections of 2017, she put this strategy into praxis by only using her first name 'Marine' and using a blue rose as the symbol of her party instead of the flame that her father used. This strategy is mostly about perception management, as Marine le Pen has hardly changed anything in the party's ideology.[316]

Moreover, removing a stigma is not only done by far-right actors *through* the media, but can also be done by the media *itself*. Editors and journalists can use 'softer' terms to replace 'more accurate and derogatory qualifiers'.[317] Brown and Mondon call this *euphemisation,* which signifies the usage of less stigmatising terms such as 'populism' to denote racist, nativist or far-right politics.[318] They argue that the media has been reluctant to use terms such as 'racism', which can be attributed to

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[314]. Thomas E. Patterson, "Pre-Primary News Coverage of the 2016 Presidential Race Trump's Rise, Sanders' Emergence, Clinton's Struggle," (2016). https://shorensteincenter.org/pre-primary-news-coverage-2016-trump-clinton-sanders/.

[315]. Brown and Mondon, "Populism, the media, and the mainstreaming of the far right: The Guardian's coverage of populism as a case study," 288.

[316]. Mudde, *The far right today*, 162.

[317]. Brown and Mondon, "Populism, the media, and the mainstreaming of the far right: The Guardian's coverage of populism as a case study," 285.

[318]. Brown and Mondon, "Populism, the media, and the mainstreaming of the far right: The Guardian's coverage of populism as a case study," 291.

the predominant idea that Europe is a post-racial society.[319] This not only gives way to patterns of racialisation and racist views, but also legitimises the far-right actors who are not perceived as 'racists' but 'populists' who are acceptable as representing 'the people'. This contains the risk of normalising racist and far-right discourse under the heading of acceptable terms.

However, media attention can also have the opposite effect by calling into question the legitimacy of a far-right political party. This was the case when WhatsApp conversations containing anti-Semitic and racist statements within the youth organisation of the Dutch far right party 'Forum for Democracy' leaked to the media in November 2020.[320] Images of these conversations were published, which led to great commotion in the media as well as the party itself. It led to a new leadership election of the party leader Thierry Baudet, who was accused by the party leadership of turning a blind eye and even making antisemitic statements himself during a dinner. It also led to the resignation of the entire European delegation and the majority of the party faction in the Dutch Senate. Eventually it led to a party split with most of the former representatives joining the new party JA21, founded by the two former FvD leaders Annabel Nanninga and Joost Eerdmans. This case shows how media attention can not only legitimise, but also delegitimise a far-right party through a strategy of confrontation.[321]

Thus far, this section has elaborated on the role that the media plays in contributing to the success of the far right. One might conclude that the mass media have played an important role in establishing two of the four characteristics of the fourth wave of the far right: the mainstreaming and normalisation of the far right (1) and the growing electoral success and political relevance of far-right political parties (4). However, it can be argued that digital media or the so-called *new media* have contributed most to the mainstreaming and success of the far right. New media, including social media, are characterised by the distribution of information through

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319. Brown and Mondon, "Populism, the media, and the mainstreaming of the far right: The Guardian's coverage of populism as a case study," 285. See also the section on 'Xenophobia and Racism' in Chapter I.

320. "'Jongeren FvD blijven extreemrechtse berichten versturen' ", NOS, November 21, 2020, https://nos.nl/artikel/2357471-jongeren-fvd-blijven-extreemrechtse-berichten-versturen.

321. Léonie de Jonge distinguishes between three different responses to the far right: demarcation (treating them as 'outcasts' and isolating them though a so-called 'cordon sanitaire médiatique'), confrontation (treating them as 'normal' players, but criticising and demonizing them) and accommodation (treating them as 'friends', incorporating their rhetoric and covering their topics). She has rightly argued that it depends whether the confrontation response leads to delegitimisation or normalisation. See de Jonge and Gaufman, "The normalisation of the far right in the Dutch media in the run-up to the 2021 general elections," 776.

computers and mobile devices and offer more opportunities for connectivity and creativity when compared to the established mass media such as television, radio and newspaper. [322] In the following section, I demonstrate how the rise of social media has played a leading role in facilitating and shaping the far-right landscape today.

Paragraph 2: The Far Right and Social Media

Social media have become a powerful platform for the far right to establish and profile itself. Cas Mudde even considers the development of social media one of the prime causes for the emergence of many new far-right media organisations in recent decades.[323] Within the academic literature, however, the relationship between the far right and social media is little investigated. There have been some authors who have studied an aspect of this relatively new phenomenon, e.g. anti-Semitism on social media, post-truth politics or online radicalisation and mainstreaming. Nevertheless, a systematic overview of the features of social media that facilitate the far right does not yet exist.[324] Therefore, the following aims to fill this gap by providing an overview of five different features of social media that facilitate the spread of far-right ideologies. It is based on the work of a range of scholars who have published on this topic, in particular the work of Cas Mudde, Giulia Evolvi, Antonis Ellinas and the reports of the German 'Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz' (hereafter: BfV), the Dutch 'Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst' (hereafter: AIVD), and the U.S. report on transatlantic far-right violent extremism.[325] I argue that

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[322]. Giulia Evolvi, "Theoretical Approaches in Digital Religion Studies," ed. Heidi Campbell and Pauline Hope Cheong, *The Oxford Handbook of Digital Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022).

[323]. Mudde argues that the second cause is the success and mainstreaming of the populist radical right. Mudde, *The far right today*, 56.

[324]. The relationship between the far right and social media has been understudied to date. Cas Mudde argues in his book on The Far Right Today (2019) that social media have been more important for smaller and more marginal extreme right groups and subcultures than for bigger and successful populist radical right parties. However, this conclusion is already outdated; European far-right political parties such as the German AfD and the Dutch FvD and PVV have a visible presence on a range of social media, as my research will show. Nikki Sterkenburg, who interviewed far-right activists in the Netherlands, did not investigate the online-behaviour of her interviewees due to time-constraints. De Jonge also did not include social media in her research, although she acknowledges its importance for future research. Mudde, *The far right today*, 112; Sterkenburg, "Van actie tot zelf-verwezenlijking: routes van toetreding tot radicaal- en extreemrechts," 342; Jonge, *The Success and Failure of Right-Wing Populist Parties in the Benelux Countries*, 195.

[325]. With regard to the reports of the BfV and the AIVD, it is important to bear in mind that these reports are written from a state centred security perspective; nevertheless, they are valuable in their analysis of recent far-right activity on social media platforms, which is why I have used these reports alongside the academic literature.

the far right has benefited from social media due to the new opportunities it offers, which I divide into five categories: (1) microtargeting; (2) bypassing the gate keeper function of the mass media; (3) emotional discourse; (4) transnational networks; and (5) radicalisation. The sections below describe each of these five features.

Paragraph 2.1: Microtargeting

One of the new opportunities that social media has offered that has benefited far-right political parties is the strategy of 'political microtargeting'.[326] This implies that political parties select targeted groups or individuals to whom they send a specific political message by analysing their personal data. In the days before the rise of social media, it was much harder to do this. To gain power, far right political parties had to garner votes. They did this by spreading a message through the mass media (newspapers, radio, television) that allowed them to reach as many people as possible. Indeed, mass media proved to be a far more powerful platform than the soap box at a Speakers' Corner. However, far right parties had to adapt their message; if their message was too radical, they would not reach the social middle and thus would not reach as many people as possible. Therefore, they often softened their message (or image, as Marine le Pen did with her *dédiabolisation* strategy) as to become acceptable in the public eye and to avoid sidelining from the political arena. Only face-to-face contact with individuals or small groups allowed them to spread a radical message without offending anyone with xenophobic, racist, or fascist ideas.

However, with the advent of social media, this 'acceptance barrier' of a mainstream message disappeared. Social media have allowed for easy direct contact with potential voters or activists, and even simultaneously by sending one specific message to many smaller groups and individuals at the same time.[327] Through data collection, algorithms and social networks, a targeted message can be sent to specific groups such as young white men or Christian families etc. In this way, far-right political parties are able to send messages to which these people are highly susceptible, given their personal background. For example, on issues such as immigration and crime, they can send messages to young women about the danger of African immigrants physically harming women or to house-seekers about the risk of losing potential locations in the house-market to asylum seekers. As social media has created multiple platforms to directly influence potential voters, it has become possible for the far right to circulate more radical messages and ideas.

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[326]   Brahim Zarouali et al., "Using a Personality-Profiling Algorithm to Investigate Political Microtargeting: Assessing the Persuasion Effects of Personality-Tailored Ads on Social Media," *Communication Research* 49, no. 8 (2022).

[327]   Ellinas, "Media and the Radical Right," 276.

Yet, far-right actors have not received a *carte blanche*, as they cannot do without the mainstream message that they spread through the mass media and their party programmes. There is an increasing interaction between the mass media and social media, which has led mass media organisations such as the NOS (The Dutch Broadcasting Foundation) to investigate social media platforms of far-right political parties or movements.[328] Vice versa, politicians themselves spread messages through their social media accounts such as Twitter or Instagram and are cited in mass media such as television programmes, radio and newspapers. This implies that information shared on social media can become public and can receive disapproval. Nevertheless, many far-right actors seem to care less about the general disapproval of their radical statements on social media, than about using social media to create publicity and attention for their far-right ideologies and movements.

Paragraph 2.2: Bypassing the gate keeper function of the mass media

Since their inception, the mass media (newspaper, radio, television) were soon perceived as a means of power to influence society. Two parameters could be steered: *the content* that is broadcasted to the people at home as well as *who* is allowed access to use the platforms of the media. The media have therefore developed into a powerful political tool, which political actors and parties aim to control. This has led into an everlasting power struggle between the media and politics; does the media remain independent i.e. does it broadcast a message independent of the political landscape, or is there a conflict of interest with the political views of a government? In countries such as Hungary and Russia, the media act more or less as an extension of the government, which inherently leads to the predominance of the main political views and the exclusion of alternative or minority political opinions.[329] In this way, the media function as a watchdog that is kept on a leash by the dominant political power in selecting who and what is broadcasted.

This is evident in the case of Russia. With regard to selecting *who* is allowed access, Russia has used the media to systematically sideline political opponents. This

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[328]. NOS Stories, a department of NOS that reports on the experiences of youngsters from 13-18 years old, has for example conducted research on tens of thousands Telegram messages within the far-right landscape. "Extreemrechts bereikt jongeren via TikTok en Instagram: 'Soms pas 13'," NOS, April 17, 2023, https://nos.nl/artikel/2471751-extreemrechts-bereikt-jongeren-via-tiktok-en-instagram-soms-pas-13.

[329]. Benjamin Ward, *"I Can't Do My Job as a Journalist: the Systematic Undermining of Media Freedom in Hungary*, Human Rights Watch (New York, 2024), https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/02/13/i-cant-do-my-job-journalist/systematic-undermining-media-freedom-hungary; Svetlana S. Bodrunova, "Information disorder practices in/by contemporary Russia," ed. Howard Tumber and Silvio R. Waisbord, *The Routledge Companion to Media Disinformation and Populism* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2021); Andrei Richter, "The Legal Death of Media Freedom in Russia," ed. András Koltay and Paul Wragg, 1st ed., *Global Perspectives on Press Regulation, Volume 1: Europe* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2023).

can be seen in the case of the Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who has been framed in the Russian media as a criminal rather than a critical opponent of the Russian president Vladimir Putin. Moreover, the case of the Russian journalist Marina Ovsjannikova has clearly exposed the gatekeeping function of the media with regard to *the content* that is broadcasted. On 14 March 2022, she appeared behind the news anchor of a live broadcast about the 'Russian military invasion of Ukraine' and showed a poster with English and Russian anti-war statements. After a few seconds the broadcast cut away and afterwards the recording of the news programme was not available for download.[330] However, the video-fragment went viral and was shared by many news outlets across the Western world. These two cases in Russia clearly illustrate how the gate-keeping role of the mass media is influenced by political interests and as a consequence leads to the sidelining of political outsiders.

Moreover, the gate-keeping function is influenced financially. Political parties generally have more financial resources and thus have a greater say and more control on the mass media to spread their message. Marginal or new political outsiders generally struggle to find the financial means to claim airtime or writing space with the mass media. Far-right political parties and movements have been restricted by this gate-keeping function of the mass media, as they were seen as political outsiders after World War II. However, social media have dramatically changed the balance of power within this dynamic between the mass media and politics. I argue, in line with Mudde, that social media have played an important role for the far right, because 'it provides an opportunity to circumvent traditional media gatekeepers and push your way into the public debate'.[331] Social media have facilitated the far right to bypass the gatekeeping function of the mass media. This happens both in terms of content and media access.

Regarding *the content*, social media platforms have provided the far right with the means to articulate and spread hate speech as well as fake news or conspiracy theories on a large scale. Much of this content would not have reached the audience of mass media due to the gate-keeping role of editors, journalists and politicians and the accompanying rules and regulations of mass media platforms to limit or censor hate-speech and fake news. Sterkenburg argues that far-right actors had to hope that the press would pay attention to their events, whereas social media have enabled them to take matters into their own hands by reporting (e.g.

[330.] "Channel One editor Marina Ovsyannikova burst into a live broadcast with a poster "Stop the War, You're Being Lied to Here".", March 14, 2022, https://theins.ru/news/249289.

[331.] Mudde, *The far right today*, 111.

via livestreaming) their actions themselves and simultaneously monitor how their actions are portrayed.[332] Although social media nowadays are not free from rules and regulations concerning the content that is posted on their platforms, far-right actors have experienced quite some freedom to post and share their content online. First of all, this can be attributed to the fact that it has taken a while before rules were implemented. Because of the speed at which social media emerged, rules and regulations that should have accompanied these platforms lagged behind.[333] Far-right actors in the past decennia have benefited from this lack of regulation, which gave them the freedom to spread their uncensored far-right ideologies. Secondly, when social media companies did start moderating, it still proved to be very difficult in practice to monitor and regulate content, which is still the case today.[334] The difficulty is due to the fact that the monitoring algorithm cannot cover a 100% of the content as illegitimate content sometimes resides in metadata, music or images of posts on social media. This implies that a video on TikTok for example is allowed as there is no hate speech in the texts of the video, but it does record a 'Sieg Heil' fragment voiced by Hitler in the background music of the video. To effectively monitor *all* content including the metadata, it would be necessary to check all types of online behaviour in every language spoken in the world, for which there are just not enough resources, technology or financial incentives for companies to do so.[335] Thirdly, policymakers of several social media platforms choose deliberately not to impose too many rules on its users, as in the case of Twitter. With Elon Musk taking office as the new owner and CEO of Twitter in October 2022, he reversed the censorship of Twitter content, claiming to be a champion of the right to freedom of speech.[336] As a result, the accounts of far-right figures such as rapper Kanye West and

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[332]. Sterkenburg, "Van actie tot zelf-verwezenlijking: routes van toetreding tot radicaal- en extreemrechts," 348.

[333]. The same thing happened with the launch of ChatGPT at the end of 2022, which led to a widespread public debate about its societal and educational impact. The European parliament was surprised by the rapid developments within AI research and had to hurry in 2023 to generate policy and regulations. "Europese regels voor AI stap dichterbij, dit zijn de plannen," NOS, May 11, 2023, https://nos.nl/artikel/2474663-europese-regels-voor-ai-stap-dichterbij-dit-zijn-de-plannen.

[334]. Ellinas, "Media and the Radical Right," 280.

[335]. Meera Alfalasi et al., *Far-right Violent Extremism: Transatlantic Linkages*, New York University: Center for Global Affairs (December 2022), 2.

[336]. In November 2022 Musk tweeted: 'My commitment to free speech extends even to not banning the account following my plane, even though that is a direct personal safety risk' (@elonmusk, November 7, 2022). On 17 April 2023 Twitter (@TwitterSafety) updated its policy on freedom of speech, which reads the following: 'Our mission at Twitter 2.0 is to promote and protect the public conversation. We believe Twitter users have the right to express their opinions and ideas without fear of censorship. We also believe it is our responsibility to keep users on our platform safe from content violating our Rules.' "Freedom of Speech, Not Reach: An update on our enforcement philosophy," April 17, 2023, https://blog.twitter.com/en_us/topics/product/2023/freedom-of-speech-not-reach-an-update-on-our-enforcement-philosophy.

president Donald Trump, the latter being banned from the platform after posting tweets that incited violence during the attack on the Capitol on the 6th of January 2021, were reinstated on the platform. This case illustrates how social media not only give way to controversial content, but also give greater access to far-right actors to enter the public arena and influence a wide audience.

Regarding *media access*, social media facilitate far-right actors as these media platforms do not require greater financial means to publish or air content. On social media, everyone can make an account for free or for a limited amount of money. This has removed the financial barrier that limited or sidelined (new) far-right political parties or movements. Moreover, social media are accessible to younger age categories to publicize content to a greater audience. This is due to its simplicity in installation (app on a smartphone or computer) and usage, as many platforms were at their inception specifically aimed at social networking among younger people. Lastly, social media have facilitated far-right actors to articulate and spread far-right ideologies on their media platforms, without having to identify themselves by remaining anonymous (except for the necessary digital personal data) or using pseudonyms as account or user names. For example, Telegram's popularity among far-right actors is partly due to the fact that you cannot see each other's phone number.[337] This is more difficult with the mass media such as television, radio and the newspaper, where the identification of the individual broadcasted is much easier and even necessary before spreading a message.

Paragraph 2.3: Emotional discourse

The far right, and the populist far right in particular, has benefited from the emotional discourse that is highly prevalent on social media. I argue that it facilitates and strengthens populist rhetoric and thus contributes to the amplification of far right ideologies on social media ánd the mainstream media. According to Karin Wahl-Jorgensen, social media facilitate and privilege emotional engagement, due to its inherent 'emotional architectures'.[338] Emotions, e.g. in the form of emoticons, are expressed and provoked widely on social media platforms, more so than in mainstream mass media. This is not only due to social media's emotional hardwire, but also to the lack of an ideal of objectivity on social media that has ruled the mainstream media for the past decades. Wahl Jorgensen argues that the public debate has been influenced by a Habermasian ideal of rationality, which demands

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337.   Sterkenburg, "Van actie tot zelf-verwezenlijking: routes van toetreding tot radicaal- en extreemrechts," 348.

338.   See Karin Wahl-Jorgensen, "The emotional architecture of social media," ed. Zizi Papacharissi, *A networked self and platforms, stories, connections* (New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2018).

that 'discussion must be rational, open to all those with an interest in the issue, and participants in the discussion should be judged purely on the merits of their arguments'.[339] This ideal merged with a liberal democratic model that understands the news media as a 'watchdog', holding governments and corporations accountable through objective reporting.[340] As a result, mainstream media have been characterised by an ideal of objectivity, disregarding emotionality. However, with the rise of social media, the yardstick of objectivity seems to have been largely replaced by a yardstick of subjectivity, as not only citizens but also journalists seem to give more attention to personal narratives and emotional expression. Due to the hybridity of media platforms, social media have influenced the mass media to adopt this changed focus on subjectivity.[341]

Emotional discourse, however, is more prone to facilitate and connect to hate speech or antagonistic discourse. Although Jorgensen is right to point out that emotions in the media can also be used for a normatively good purpose, e.g. sharing compassion as was the case with the global outburst of emotion on social media after the Notre-Dame fire in 2019, emotional discourse is frequently used to display negative emotions or create an antagonistic discourse.[342] According to the 2020 annual report of the AIVD (The Dutch Intelligence and Security Service) social media played a major role in expressing anger by Dutch activists protesting against the government. For some activists, sharing it online functioned as an outlet for their negative emotions, for others it functioned as a bellows.[343] Social media can also create an antagonistic discourse. For example, Evolvi has shown in her analysis of the Twitter account of Matteo Salvini, leader of the Italian far-right political party Lega Nord, how Salvini mobilises emotions by 'employing the textual and visual potential of Twitter'.[344] She shows how Salvini activates emotions connected to the 'Judeo-Christian' heritage or culture of Italy and Europe, and how he uses this to ally Christians with Jews and exclude Muslims.[345]

[339]   Karin Wahl-Jorgensen, "Questioning the Ideal of the Public Sphere: The Emotional Turn," *Social Media + Society* 5, no. 3 (2019): 1.

[340]   Wahl-Jorgensen, "Questioning the Ideal of the Public Sphere: The Emotional Turn," 2.

[341]   Wahl-Jorgensen, "Questioning the Ideal of the Public Sphere: The Emotional Turn," 3.

[342]   See for the analysis of the emotional discourse on Twitter after the Notre-Dame fire: Frederik Elwert et al., ": Emoji and Religion in the Twitter Discourses on the Notre Dame Cathedral Fire," *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture* 11, no. 2 (2023).

[343]   AIVD, *AIVD-jaarverslag 2020* (2021), 5.

[344]   Evolvi, ""Europe is Christian, or It Is Not Europe": Post-Truth Politics and Religion in Matteo Salvini's Tweets," 137.

[345]   Evolvi, ""Europe is Christian, or It Is Not Europe": Post-Truth Politics and Religion in Matteo Salvini's Tweets," 142.

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Moreover, she demonstrates how Salvini uses emotional discourse on Twitter to criticise his opponents and give alternative interpretations of the facts through generalisations, hyperboles and misleading connections.[346] As such, emotional discourse becomes connected to antagonistic discourse and post-truth politics. This is a trend that can be observed across multiple social media platforms and far right discourses on social media in particular. This is not surprising, as the ideology of populism is built upon antagonism and polarisation. Reiterating the definition of Cas Mudde, populism is 'an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and *antagonistic groups*, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite'….'[347] Particularly with regard to religion, Evolvi argues that political antagonism and emotional discourse are connected, as religion involves deeply held beliefs and identities and therefore easily evokes an emotional discourse.

In her analysis of Salvini's Twitter account, Evolvi shows how Salvini uses religion to provoke emotional reactions and hate-speech by Othering Muslims against Christians and Jews.[348] In doing so, Salvini mobilises his followers around shared religious identities and he uses antagonistic discourse to oppose those who do not belong to this shared Judeo-Christian identity, in this case Muslims. Evolvi's analysis leads her to the conclusion that 'the Internet, and social media in particular, often do not constitute a public sphere for rational debate, but are characterised by emotional antagonism when it comes to topics such as religion'.[349] Thus, both religion and emotion are forces that can either unite or divide. However, it seems that they are predominantly used in the far-right landscape on social media to create division, especially when connected to political antagonism and post-truth politics. When they are brought together on social media platforms and connected to political antagonistic discourse, they become a powerful mobilising instrument that facilitates populist rhetoric.

Paragraph 2.4: Transnational networks

The far right has traditionally been characterised by a lack of transnational cooperation. According to Mudde, this can be attributed to ideological as well as mundane factors. Firstly, the far right is characterised by nationalism, which is inherently difficult with transnational alliances as it puts the interests of its own

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346. Evolvi, ""Europe is Christian, or It Is Not Europe": Post-Truth Politics and Religion in Matteo Salvini's Tweets," 138-43.

347. Mudde, "The Populist Zeitgeist," 543.

348. Evolvi, ""Europe is Christian, or It Is Not Europe": Post-Truth Politics and Religion in Matteo Salvini's Tweets," 144.

349. Evolvi, ""Europe is Christian, or It Is Not Europe": Post-Truth Politics and Religion in Matteo Salvini's Tweets," 145.

nation and people first. Nevertheless, Mudde acknowledges that nationalism or nativism can be combined with support for some form of European cooperation 'based on the belief in a shared European culture (or civilisation) and the fear of huge external threats that the own nation-state cannot fight off alone.'[350] Thus, the nation needs to align itself with others or include itself in a greater imagined whole in order to secure its own primary interests against foreign threats. But when push comes to shove, far-right nationalists primarily take care of their own interests. Secondly, Mudde argues that far-right political parties have been restricted in establishing transnational relations through a combination of mundane factors, such as lack of infrastructure, the ego of key leaders, the unstable position of far-right parties and the low saliency of the European issue.[351] However, the rise of social media has drastically affected the transnational network of the European far right. I argue that social media platforms have facilitated the far right to:

1) establish and maintain international relationships more easily
2) spread far-right ideologies on a larger scale
3) organise (international) activities, such as demonstrations and protests.

With regard to *international relationships* (1) social media enable the far right to establish and maintain international relationships more easily. Social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Twitter and Youtube have enabled politicians and far right leaders to respond more directly to each other's statements and actions, thereby expressing support for each other's political manifestations, while simultaneously seizing upon events in other countries for their own political agendas. Examples are how the Dutch politician Geert Wilders and Belgian politician Filip de Winter act together in their 'fight against Islamisation' by posting videos and statements of each other on their Twitter accounts. For example, Filip de Winter posted an image of Geert Wilders protesting in front of the Pakistani embassy in The Hague, along with the text:

'Courageous @geertwilderspvv #wilders protests in front of the embassy of #Pakistan in The Hague against fatwa's he receives from that country for criticizing #Muhammad #islam. Soon we will protest in front of @EmbassyPakBel Belgian #Pakistan embassy too! #BoycottPakistan'.[352]

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350. Mudde, *Populist radical right parties in Europe*, 182.
351. Mudde, *Populist radical right parties in Europe*, 182-83.
352. Filip de Winter (@FDW_VB), Tweet, May 27, 2022, https://twitter.com/FDW_VB/status/1530094234262556672

Geert Wilders on his turn has posted videos of him and Filip de Winter walking together towards the Brussels district of 'Sint-Joost-ten-Node' where they were stopped by the police as they were forbidden to visit the borough of Molenbeek for what they called an 'Islam safari'.[353] The leader of the Dutch branch of the anti-Islamic far-right movement Pegida also frequently retweets statements from both De Winter and Wilders. And Marine le Pen expressed support for the Dutch farmers in their fight against the nitrogen measures of the Dutch government in the summer of 2022. She tweeted:

'Au moment où les agriculteurs Hollandais manifestent contre les expropriations, je tiens, en tant que Présidente du groupe @RNational_off à l'Assemblée nationale, à leur apporter mon soutien.'[354]

and posted a video in which le Pen is seen writing a note in Dutch, stating: 'ik steun de Nederlandse boeren!', signing it with her autograph.[355] Thus, social media have enabled far right leaders to interconnect more swiftly and easily with one another and hijack or copycat the political statements and actions of other far right leaders abroad for their own political agenda. However, these relationships tend to be informal and individual, rather than an official cooperation between far right leaders and/or movements. This is also confirmed in research conducted by the Center for Global Affairs of New York University on the transatlantic linkages between violent far-right extremism in the United States and Europe.[356] Although the report found strong evidence for informal networking and collaboration between violent far-right groups within the US and across the Atlantic, it did not find evidence for the existence of formal linkages or in-depth operational cooperation between groups. This seems to indicate that the international relations established by the far right in the online space remain individual and informal in character, as they have traditionally been.

With regard to *the spread of far-right ideologies* (2), social media have enabled far-right actors to spread their ideologies faster and more widely, crossing international

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353. Geert Wilders (@geertwilderspvv), Tweet, May 13, 2022, https://twitter.com/geertwilderspvv/status/1525069366949289985, "Geert Wilders en Filip Dewinter tegengehouden door Brusselse politie," NOS, May 13, 2022, https://nos.nl/artikel/2428667-geert-wilders-en-filip-dewinter-tegengehouden-door-brusselse-politie.

354. Translation: 'At a time when Dutch farmers are demonstrating against expropriations, I would like, as President of the group @RNational_off in the French National Assembly, to offer them my support.' Marine le Pen (@MLP_officiel), Tweet, July 23, 2022, https://twitter.com/MLP_officiel/status/1550871272598405120

355. Translation: 'I support the Dutch farmers!'

356. Alfalasi et al., *Far-right Violent Extremism: Transatlantic Linkages*, 3.

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borders and blurring the border between marginal and mainstream ideologies. Where the far right used to be able to spread a radical message only through face-to-face contact with individuals and small groups, today 'virtual communities provide a vital resource for spreading their ideologies far beyond face-to-face interactions'.[357] The shared ideologies, identities and symbols that circulate online form the basis of the international relations of the far right. According to the report of the Center for Global Affairs, they facilitate informal collaboration (1), allow for the bottom-up creation of 'affiliates' or chapters abroad (2) and help individuals traverse group boundaries online and offline (3).[358] Examples of internationally shared ideologies online are the SIEGE ideology (inspired by the similarly titled book of neo-Nazi James Mason), accelerationism, the Great Replacement Theory, QAnon, White Supremacy and Antisemitic conspiracy theories (that often include George Soros).[359] Moreover, symbols and identities (denoted by numbers and phrases) are spread internationally, such 'Pepe the Frog', 88= Heil Hitler (H=the 8th letter of the alphabet) and 'Blut und Ehre'.[360] Interestingly, multiple symbols and phrases include religious references, such as Pepe the Frog, who ought to represent 'Kek', a chaotic, god-like deity who has given authority to Donald Trump and white racists. Moreover, far right actors use the abbreviations FGRN ('For God, race and a nation') and RAHOWA ('Racial holy war'). Moreover, perpetrators of mass casualty far-right attacks (such as Brenton Tarrant who attacked two mosques in Christchurch, New-Zealand) are often idolized as 'saints' in certain online communities.[361] Social media in particular are attractive to spread far-right ideologies as they are easy to use, the amount of followers or likes quickly increases, they provide multiple possibilities to not only describe ideologies but also visualize them with images and videos and it can be done anonymously or under pseudonyms. According to the 'Verfassungsschutzbericht 2021' (Report on the Protection of the Constitution) of the BfV (The Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution of Germany),

357. Alfalasi et al., *Far-right Violent Extremism: Transatlantic Linkages*, 1.

358. Alfalasi et al., *Far-right Violent Extremism: Transatlantic Linkages*, 3.

359. Alfalasi et al., *Far-right Violent Extremism: Transatlantic Linkages*. Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, *Verfassungsschutzbericht 2021*, Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat (Juni, 2022), 70-72, https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/SharedDocs/publikationen/DE/verfassungsschutzberichte/2022-06-07-verfassungsschutzbericht-2021.html. Racism and processes of racialization are often present within these ideologies, especially within replacement theories. See Sarah Bracke and Luis Manuel Hernandez Aguilar, *The Politics of Replacement: Demographic Fears, Conspiracy Theories, and Race Wars* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2024).

360. German for 'Blood and Honor'. Verfassungsschutz, *Verfassungsschutzbericht 2021*, 55-57.

361. Alfalasi et al., *Far-right Violent Extremism: Transatlantic Linkages*, 1; Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, *Verfassungsschutzbericht 2022*, Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat (Juni, 2023), 64, https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/SharedDocs/publikationen/DE/verfassungsschutzberichte/2023-06-20-verfassungsschutzbericht-2022.html.

the anonymous space of social media platforms leads to the uncontrolled exchange of anti-Semitic and right-wing extremist ideas.[362]

Social media platforms function as an 'entry point' for far-right extremists.[363] Those who want to post more extreme content and whose content is removed on social media platforms due to moderation, shift to fringe platforms such as 4chan, 8kun or Parler. Those who call for extremist actions and attacks turn to extremist sites on the dark web or use Whatsapp, Telegram and Discord to call for direct violence and organise attacks. Just how much impact the spread of far-right ideologies via the Internet and social media in particular has had on the transnational network of the far right, has been demonstrated by what Hannah Strømmen calls the 'Terrorist right'.[364] She argues that the identification of far-right terrorist as lone actors or lone wolfs, often does not adequately illuminate the extent to which these actors belong to an online network of other far-right actors who share the same ideologies. She illustrates her argument with the case of Anders Breivik who killed 77 people in the 2011 Norway attacks. His worldview, as written down in his manifesto that he spread online just before the explosion, was influenced by an international far-right milieu and both his manifesto and his social media posts were written in English.[365] In the pithy words of Strømmen: 'While Breivik may have acted alone, he did not think alone'.[366] Also in the case of Thomas Mair, who killed British member of Parliament Jo Cox in 2016, it appeared that he was influenced by a foreign ideology of the American white supremist group 'National Alliance'.[367] Both cases of Breivik and Mair illustrate how far-right ideologies spread across borders and influence far-right actors abroad, using the online space and social media in particular as a vehicle that has never travelled so fast before. The argument of Strømmen is substantiated by the report of the Center for Global Affairs that found that violent extremist ideologies in the online space provide a 'dog whistle' to lone actors or small groups of individuals willing to take action.[368]

However, the proliferation of far-right ideologies is not limited to only extremist far-right actors. Social media have greatly contributed to the mainstreaming of far-right ideologies into the middle of society. According to the Verfassungsschutzbericht

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[362]. Verfassungsschutz, *Verfassungsschutzbericht 2021*, 70.

[363]. Alfalasi et al., *Far-right Violent Extremism: Transatlantic Linkages*, 2.

[364]. Hannah M. Strømmen and Ulrich Schmiedel, *The claim to Christianity: responding to the far right* (London: SCM Press, 2020), 39.

[365]. Strømmen and Schmiedel, *The claim to Christianity: responding to the far right*, 39.

[366]. Strømmen and Schmiedel, *The claim to Christianity: responding to the far right*, 39.

[367]. Alfalasi et al., *Far-right Violent Extremism: Transatlantic Linkages*, 37.

[368]. Alfalasi et al., *Far-right Violent Extremism: Transatlantic Linkages*, 1.

2021, anti-Semitic content is disseminated into mainstream society through influencers that spread it in coded or subtler forms.[369] The report of the Centre for Global Affairs also concludes that aspects of the ideologies of far-right extremist groups have permeated mainstream society.[370] And a report of the BfV on mainstreaming in social media concludes on the basis of empirical research of 200 Telegram channels of the German anti-Covid movement 'Querdenken' between 2020 and 2022, that Telegram functioned as a bridge between the far-right landscape and the general population, forwarding messages that originate from far-right channels that disseminate content related to the QAnon conspiracy ideology.[371] Ideological characteristics that are shared between 'Querdenken' and the far right are exclusionism, xenophobia, conspiracy theories, misinformation and anti-elite content, which easily leads the far right to use communication on Telegram for strategically mainstreaming their ideologies.[372] This research shows how the digital environment of Telegram, with an emphasis on visual material and external links to mainly Youtube videos, creates a breeding ground for far-right ideologies to grow into mainstream society. This also holds for far-right political parties, who have used social media such as Twitter, Youtube and TikTok to spread their political views among the general public. An example is how Thierry Baudet, leader of the Dutch far-right party 'Forum for Democracy' used social media platforms such as Youtube and TikTok for his online campaign during the provincial elections; he deliberately collaborated with well-known Muslim Dutchmen to change his anti-Islam image, for example by making a rap song against the Dutch government or going to the gym with an Islamic 'fitfluencer'.[373] Therefore, I disagree with Cas Mudde when he argues that 'social media has been more important for smaller and more marginal extreme right groups and subcultures than for bigger and successful populist radical right parties'.[374] I would rather argue that social media is important to both far-right movements and political parties to spread their ideologies more easily and on a larger scale, regardless of whether one operates inside or outside of parliamentary liberal democracy.

369.   Verfassungsschutz, *Verfassungsschutzbericht 2021*, 70.
370.   Alfalasi et al., *Far-right Violent Extremism: Transatlantic Linkages*, 59.
371.   Zentrum für Analyse und Forschung am Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, *Mainstreaming und Radikalisierung in sozialen Medien*, Ludwig-Maximilians Universität (München, November 2022), 59.
372.   Verfassungsschutz, *Mainstreaming und Radikalisierung in sozialen Medien*, 9.
373.   "Hoe Baudets campagne gericht lijkt op jonge moslims en waarom die werkt," NOS, March 19, 2023, https://nos.nl/artikel/2468047-hoe-baudets-campagne-gericht-lijkt-op-jonge-moslims-en-waarom-die-werkt.
374.   Mudde, *The far right today*, 112.

With regard to *organizing activities* (3), social media have contributed to the easy and widespread dissemination of information about upcoming demonstrations and protests by far-right movements. This has enabled far-right movements and political parties to reach people from different regions or even across borders, and bring them together in joint actions. Examples are the protests of the anti-Islam movement Pegida in cities like Dresden, bringing together thousands of people from different localities.[375] Also the pan-European far-right movement of the Identitarians are known for their usage of social media to organise and publicize mediagenic protests in public spaces.[376] And social media played a role in gathering people from the far-right landscape to break into parliamentary buildings in Berlin, Brasilia and Washington.[377] The COVID-19 pandemic played a major role in the increased usage of social media to bring people together, as governmental rules and regulations prohibited or restricted citizens to meet face-to face. According to the 2020 annual report of the AIVD, social media played a major role in the organisation of demonstrations by Dutch activists protesting against the government.[378]

However, social media may also cause a decline in protests and demonstrations. According to Nikki Sterkenburg, who followed and interviewed 36 Dutch far-right activists, social media can also decrease the amount of new recruits or participants in demonstrations, because it offers people the opportunity to vent their emotions through posting and sharing angry messages.[379] This makes far-right actors feel they have already made their voices heard, already made a minimal effort to the collective cause and therefore don't need to join a demonstration anymore. Sterkenburg encountered multiple activists who repeatedly emphasised that they

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[375]. Interviews with PEGIDA protesters in Dresden revealed that somewhat over 40% were from the region (Saxony), 40% were from Dresden, 10% from other East German states and 6% from West German states. Hans Vorländer, Maik Herold, and Steven Schäller, *PEGIDA and New Right-Wing Populism in Germany* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 78-79.

[376]. Mudde, *The far right today*, 94-96.

[377]. The storming of the Reichstag building in 2020 was called by the German movement Querdenken that mainly communicated via Telegram, the U.S. Capitol in 2021 was largely coordinated on Twitter and Parler, and the Brazilian Congress attack in 2023 was mainly organised on Telegram where dates, times and routes were posted. BBC, "Germany coronavirus: Anger after attempt to storm parliament," (August 30, 2020), https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-53964147; Johannes Jakubik et al., "Online Emotions during the Storming of the U.S. Capitol: Evidence from the Social Media Network Parler," *Proceedings of the International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media* 17 (2023); "Come to the 'war cry party': How social media helped drive mayhem in Brazil," The Washington Post, January 9, 2023, https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2023/01/08/brazil-bolsanaro-twitter-facebook/.

[378]. AIVD, *AIVD-jaarverslag 2020*, 5.

[379]. Sterkenburg, "Van actie tot zelf-verwezenlijking: routes van toetreding tot radicaal- en extreemrechts," 348-49.

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were the ones who were really doing something, by which they meant that they were going out and did more than just post angry messages on the Internet.

Lastly, social media platforms can fulfil a performative function: they are often used as a digital theatre where actions of far-right leaders or movements are staged. For example, although the Identitarian movement currently only uses Telegram to communicate due to international bans, they were very active in using social media accounts to disseminate reports, videos and pictures of the demonstrations and actions they organised.[380] Pegida has also livestreamed their protests via Youtube.[381]

Paragraph 2.5: Radicalisation

Social media have also contributed to radicalisation. The notion of radicalisation has become ambiguous as it is often used to denote both the process of developing extreme beliefs (becoming an 'extremist') as well as engaging in extreme actions (becoming a 'terrorist').[382] In general, it 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'.[383] According to Koehler, radicalisation is tied up with a certain type of ideology that inherently denies individual freedom to persons not part of the radical person's ingroup. Considering far-right ideologies, radicalisation then relates mainly to the two characteristics of racism and xenophobia that excludes migrants or 'The Other' from the nation (the ingroup) to which they do not belong. The academic literature often distinguishes between offline and online radicalisation. However, Whittaker argues that this is a false dichotomy as the online and offline spaces are ontologically inseparable, due to the fact that the online space has come to supplement our lives in such a way, that it is hard to make a clear distinction as to when we are online and when we are not.[384] Whittaker rather argues for a holistic approach, in which online platforms are analysed as part of a wider environment that affects its users in such a way, that they become radicalised. He hypothesizes that the differences between online platforms such as Youtube and Facebook might be far greater than the differences between online and face-to-face communication.[385]

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380. Verfassungsschutz, *Verfassungsschutzbericht 2021*, 73.
381. Strømmen and Schmiedel, *The claim to Christianity: responding to the far right*, 67.
382. Joe Whittaker, "Rethinking Online Radicalization," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 16, no. 4 (2022): 27.
383. Koehler Daniel, "The Radical Online: Individual Radicalization Processes and the Role of the Internet," *Journal for Deradicalization* 2014 (2014): 125.
384. Whittaker, "Rethinking Online Radicalization," 30.
385. Whittaker, "Rethinking Online Radicalization," 35.

Regarding social media platforms in particular, radicalisation happens in three different ways: first of all, due to the digital opportunities of social media platforms, far-right groups and individuals are able to spread their radical beliefs among a great (global) audience. Radical ideologies and insults and hate against minorities, elites, politicians, academics and journalists can be found on a large scale on the Internet and social media in particular.[386] Secondly, social media enable people to easily find and engage with radical or extreme ideologies and groups and individuals, which leads to so-called *Selbstradikalisierung* (self-radicalisation).[387] Thirdly, the technical architecture of social media platforms leads to radicalisation. The algorithms of social media are aimed at engagement that can lead its users with each click to recommended videos with increasingly more emotional, violent or radical content.[388] Furthermore, social media moderate their platforms, which leads its users with too radical content to fringe platforms, such as 4chan, Parler and Gab (this process is called *de-platforming*).[389] Although monitoring counters the mainstreaming of radical ideologies, it however increases the radicalisation process on fringe platforms.

Radicalisation, in any form, boils down to the basic mechanism that a person surrounds him or herself with others who repeatedly affirm a shared ideology, which leads to the confirmation of their own rightness. Social media would reinforce this process of radicalisation due to the algorithms of platforms that lead its users to consume personalized content with little to no room for other opinions. These online spaces are also called 'filter bubbles' or 'echo-chambers', defined as pockets of online communities that share and consume nearly identical belief-confirming information.[390] Social media would facilitate this confirmation bias more than traditional media such as newspapers, radio and television that allow for a diversity of opinions and dissenting voices to be heard.[391] However, Becker and Sterkenburg criticise the idea that people become absorbed in echo chambers. Becker argues

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[386]. Verfassungsschutz, *Mainstreaming und Radikalisierung in sozialen Medien*, 11.

[387]. Verfassungsschutz, *Mainstreaming und Radikalisierung in sozialen Medien*, 15.

[388]. This has been proven for Youtube. See Joe Whittaker et al., "Recommender systems and the amplification of extremist content," *Internet Policy Review* 10, no. 2 (2021); Marc Tuters, "Fake news and the Dutch YouTube political debate space " in *The Politics of Social Media Manipulation* (Amsterdam University Press: Amsterdam, 2020).

[389]. Verfassungsschutz, *Mainstreaming und Radikalisierung in sozialen Medien*, 16.

[390]. Eli Pariser, *The filter bubble: how the new personalized web is changing what we read and how we think* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012); John Priniski et al., "Rise of QAnon: A Mental Model of Good and Evil Stews in an Echochamber," *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society* (2021): 1754.

[391]. Kazutoshi Sasahara et al., "Social influence and unfollowing accelerate the emergence of echo chambers," *Journal of Computational Social Science* 4, no. 1 (2020): 383.

that research on online echo chambers is often conducted on a single platform, which is not representative as individuals generally collect information across the entire media environment.[392] Sterkenburg concludes that, although many of her interviewees are in contact with like-minded people on social media, none of them are in the so-called 'bubble'. Almost all of her interviewees claimed to have dissenters around them in the form of partners, friends, colleagues and/or family.[393]

Social media also enhance the spread of misinformation in the form of fake news or conspiracy theories. According to the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, the pandemic in 2020 and the Russo-Ukrainian war in 2022 have accelerated structural shifts towards more digital, mobile, and platform-dominated media environments.[394] Interestingly, video-led networks such as Youtube and TikTok have become more important in bringing the news, where audiences pay more attention to celebrities, influencers and social media personalities than journalists. However, without a journalist as a watchdog and gatekeeper, these platforms easily give way to alternative facts, fake news and conspiracy theories. This holds especially for the far-right landscape where mainstream media outlets are accused of giving a distorted view on social reality. Social media platforms then become a main stage for post-truth politics. Giulia Evolvi has analysed post-truth narratives about religion on the Twitter account of Matteo Salvini, leader of the Italian far-right party Lega-Nord. She distinguishes between three strategies of post-truth diffusion that are used: generalisations (all migrants are Muslims), hyperboles (Muslim migrants force Italians to give up their traditions) and misleading connections (anti-Semitic attacks are examples of Muslim violence against Israel).[395] She argues that the mobilisation of religious identity is both a consequence and a cause of the contemporary post-truth climate.[396]

The online climate of post-truth politics also creates a breeding ground for polarisation. This is not unique to an online environment; misinformation also leads to polarisation in offline spaces. For example, Caroline van der Plas, party leader of the Dutch Farmer Citizen Movement (BoerBurgerBeweging, BBB), complained

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392. Marcel Becker, "Privacy in the digital age: comparing and contrasting individual versus social approaches towards privacy," *Ethics and Information Technology* 21, no. 4 (2019): 310.

393. Sterkenburg, "Van actie tot zelf-verwezenlijking: routes van toetreding tot radicaal- en extreemrechts," 349.

394. Nic et. al Newman, *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2023*, Reuters Institute (Oxford 2023).

395. Evolvi, ""Europe is Christian, or It Is Not Europe": Post-Truth Politics and Religion in Matteo Salvini's Tweets," 137-43.

396. Evolvi, ""Europe is Christian, or It Is Not Europe": Post-Truth Politics and Religion in Matteo Salvini's Tweets," 131.

during a debate in the Dutch House of Representatives about the polarisation and scare tactics among members of Parliament with regard to the asylum debate.[397] However, polarisation occurs more easily in digital environments where anonymity leads to what Whittaker calls a process of 'deindividuation': aligning behaviours with the group and creating a diffusion of responsibility.[398] This implies that users identify with a specific ingroup, while increasing hostility towards the outgroup that is seen as a threat to the identity of the individual. In this way, an image is created of a common enemy. In the far-right landscape, the image of the enemy often involves anti-Semitic ideas and conspiracy theories such as a secret Jewish world conspiracy that would interfere in the Russo-Ukrainian war or the great replacement theory that assumes that the white European population is gradually replaced by non-white people from mostly Muslim-majority countries through mass immigration and a low birth rate of white Europeans.[399] This narrative of a common enemy invokes the good versus evil archetype, connecting the good people to the ingroup and the bad people to the outgroup. Hence, a sense of community, a common identity and a simple construct to explain for complex issues is created that excludes those who are identified as the outgroup.

Thus, the overview above has identified five different opportunity structures that allow for a more widespread and rapid proliferation of far-right ideologies on social media: microtargeting, bypassing the gate keeper function of the mass media, emotional discourse, transnational networks and radicalisation. In the following section I focus on how religion is used within far-right political discourse on social media, both by far-right leaders and adherents. Specifically, I investigate how the religious contra-identities of 'The Christian Europe' and 'The Muslim Other' are constructed on the social media platform of TikTok.

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397. "Van der Plas hekelt polarisatie in asieldebat: 'Ik word er schijtziek van'," NOS, June 28, 2023, https://nos.nl/artikel/2480618-van-der-plas-hekelt-polarisatie-in-asieldebat-ik-word-er-schijtziek-van.

398. Whittaker, "Rethinking Online Radicalization," 28.

399. Verfassungsschutz, *Verfassungsschutzbericht 2022*, 68-69.

III

Chapter IV:

**'The Christian Europe' vs. 'The Muslim Other'
in the Far-Right Landscape of TikTok**

Introduction

This chapter explores the religious contra-identities of 'The Christian Europe' and 'The Muslim Other' within the political rhetoric of the European far right. It aims at answering the question: what are the characteristics of the religious contra-identities 'The Christian Europe' and 'Islam' on social media and how do they relate to each other? To answer this question, this study investigates the social media platform of TikTok. Since its launch in 2017, TikTok has become one of the most popular social media platforms worldwide and has increasingly hit the headlines due to the growing usage of the medium for political ends, notably by the far right. This chapter presents the theoretical framework, methodology and findings of a qualitative content analysis conducted on TikTok videos between April and August 2023. It investigates the characteristics and relationship between the religious contra-identities of 'The Christian Europe' and 'Islam' within the far-right landscape of TikTok. This chapter is composed of four sections. The first section gives a description of TikTok as a social media platform. The second section describes the theoretical foundations on which the social media research is built, in particular the theory of hypermediation as described by scholar of religion Giulia Evolvi.[400] The third section is concerned with the methodology, focussing on the method of 'the dedicated device' and the key terms used for searching. The fourth section then describes and analyses the findings, which are categorised as: 1) the context of religious contra-identities, 2) the characteristics of 'The Christian Europe', 3) the characteristics of 'Islam', and 4) the relationship between 'The Christian Europe' and 'Islam'.

Paragraph 1: TikTok

TikTok is currently one of the most popular apps. According to David Curry, head of the App data section on Business of Apps, it was the most downloaded app globally in 2022 with 672 million downloads.[401] With this number, it defeated Instagram and Facebook that ranked second and third place in the list of most popular apps worldwide. TikTok was launched in 2017 by the Chinese company Bytedance as an international counterpart to the Chinese app Douyin. The app facilitated its users to create and upload 15-second videos that could be edited with background music

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[400]. Evolvi, "Theoretical Approaches in Digital Religion Studies."

[401]. "Most Popular Apps (2023)," David Curry, updated February 28, 2023, https://www.businessofapps.com/data/most-popular-apps/. Although these numbers should be critically assessed as it is not clear to what extent these numbers are influenced by the interests of the app business industry, it is widely acknowledged that TikTok is a highly popular app with more than a billion users. See also Ozge Ozduzen, Nelli Ferenczi, and Isabel Holmes, "'Let us teach our children': Online racism and everyday far-right ideologies on TikTok," *Visual Studies* 38, no. 5 (2023).

and interactive formats. After merging with the popular app Musical.ly in 2018, TikTok became the name of the new social media app. Alex Zhu, co-founder of Musical.ly and former vice president at TikTok explained the choice for the name as follows:

> "TikTok, the sound of a ticking clock, represents the short nature of the video platform. We want to capture the world's creativity and knowledge under this new name and remind everyone to treasure every precious life moment. Combining musical.ly and TikTok is a natural fit given the shared mission of both experiences."[402]

IV

The reason for studying TikTok with regard to the far-right landscape is threefold: TikTok's wide audience, its time-consumption and the politicisation of the social medium. Firstly, TikTok became the fastest growing app worldwide after its fusion, combining the creation of content from broader real life moments (TikTok) with the platform for singing and dancing to background music (Musical.ly).[403] Since then, it has been mainly popular among children and teenagers. According to a survey carried out in 2019, 41 percent of TikTok users were between the ages of 16 and 24, of whom more than 90 percent used the app daily.[404] Currently, the popularity of the app has spread among younger ánd older generations. Although TikTok Terms of Service has set a minimum age limit of 13 years and older, the Guardian reported in March 2022 that 16 percent of British toddlers (aged 3 and 4) watch TikTok content.[405] Moreover, many adults seem now to be using the app, as was evident from the international political debate in February and March 2023 about banning TikTok on government phones.[406] Thus, it seems TikTok has acquired a wide range of users spread across different age categories.

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[402]. "Short video service Musical.ly is merging into sister app TikTok," Jon Russell, updated August 2, 2018, https://techcrunch.com/2018/08/02/musically-tiktok/?guccounter=1.

[403]. "Musical.ly and TikTok Merge to Become One Platform," Gabriel Li, updated August 2, 2018, https://pandaily.com/musical-ly-and-tiktok-merge-to-become-one-platform/.

[404]. Chris Beer, "Is TikTok setting the scene for music on social media?," *Trends*, January 3, 2019, https://blog.gwi.com/trends/tiktok-music-social-media/.

[405]. TikTok Terms of Service includes a paragraph 'Minimum age' that states: 'You can only use the Platform if you are 13 years of age or older. We monitor for underage use and we will terminate your account if we reasonably suspect that you are underage.' "TikTok Terms of Service," updated November, 2022, https://www.tiktok.com/legal/page/eea/terms-of-service/en. Jim Waterson, "TikTok being used by 16% of British toddlers, Ofcom finds," *The Guardian* March 29, 2022, https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2022/mar/29/tiktok-being-used-by-16-of-british-toddlers-ofcom-finds.

[406]. The European Commission and the European Council were the first to prohibit the usage of TikTok on the phones of its own officials on the 23rd of February, 2023. The Canadian and American government followed, as well as Belgium, the United Kingdom, and many other countries in March 2023.

Moreover, users seem to spend large amounts of time on the social app. This is due to its conceptual design: firstly, it only allows for short videos between 3 seconds and 10 minutes, which enables users to watch multiple videos in a short time and makes it tempting to keep on watching. Secondly, TikTok is aimed at maximizing engagement: it studies how long users watch a video in order to analyse what its users like and keep them engaged. This has been critiqued as the 'rabbit hole effect', borrowing its name from the story of Alice in Wonderland in which Alice enters a distorted world after falling down a rabbit hole, and by which is meant that TikTok users are recommended ever more extreme content that draws them from the mainstream to the fringe.[407] Just as Alice, they fall 'down a rabbit hole' where they face a distorted world from which it is difficult to escape.

In addition, TikTok not only succeeds in engaging people of different ages and consuming large amounts of their time, but also starts to include many more areas of life than just singing and dancing. This includes the political; TikTok has been increasingly politicised. This is done both on a metalevel, which was the case when the app took centre stage in the international geopolitical debate whether it provided the means for China to espionage foreign governments through the app on government phones, but also at the level of its users.[408] TikTok users have been increasingly posting videos that contain political statements, and politicians have used it for recording official events and promoting their campaigns during elections.[409] This has also led to more extreme content, such as racist statements, calls for attacking minorities or ethnic groups, antisemitism and neo-Nazi propaganda.[410] According to Weimann and Masri, it is the combination

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[407]. Jennifer A. Harriger et al., "The dangers of the rabbit hole: Reflections on social media as a portal into a distorted world of edited bodies and eating disorder risk and the role of algorithms," *Body image* 41 (2022): 292; Tuters, "Fake news and the Dutch YouTube political debate space " 219.

[408]. On the 23rd of March TikTok CEO Shou Chew was critically questioned by the U.S. Congress that was concerned whether TikTok violates the security of U.S. citizens and 'the American values of freedom, human rights and innovation'. "TikTok-baas stond tegenover uiterst wantrouwend Amerikaans Congres," NOS, March 23, 2023, https://nos.nl/artikel/2468575-tiktok-baas-stond-tegenover-uiterst-wantrouwend-amerikaans-congres.

[409]. In Februari 2023, there was commotion surrounding Norwegian minister of Justice Emilie Enger Mehl for having TikTok on her government phone and posting pictures and videos of official occasions she attended. Moreover, Dutch politician Thierry Baudet of the far right political party Forum of Democracy, used TikTok to recruit voters during his campaign for the provincial council elections of 2023. "Noorse minister zegt sorry omdat ze TikTok op werktelefoon had," NOS, February 8, 2023, https://nos.nl/artikel/2463034-noorse-minister-zegt-sorry-omdat-ze-tiktok-op-werktelefoon-had; NOS, "Hoe Baudets campagne gericht lijkt op jonge moslims en waarom die werkt."

[410]. Gabriel Weimann and Natalie Masri, "New Antisemitism on TikTok," ed. Monika Hübscher and Sabine Von Mering, *Antisemitism on social media* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2022). 167.

of popularity, exposure and openness of TikTok that has made it attractive to extremist, racist and radical groups.[411] Therefore, the three factors of TikTok's wide audience, its time-consumption and the politicisation of the social medium, contribute to the relevance of studying the scope and influence of far right actors making or participating in TikTok videos that include religious contra-identities.

Paragraph 2: The Theory of Hypermediation

To study the religious contra-identities of Islam and 'The Christian Europe' on TikTok, I use the theory of hypermediation as conceptualised by scholar of religion Giulia Evolvi. Hypermediation is a theory that has been developed in digital religion studies and is defined as 'a theoretical approach that builds on mediation and focusses on the interconnections among digital media platforms.'[412] It is used to study 'new media', i.e. media that distribute content through computers and mobile devices and offer more opportunities for connectivity and creativity than the traditional mass media.[413] It focusses on the way users create and circulate content across different platforms on the internet, which is why Evolvi speaks of 'hyper'-mediation, the Greek prefix indicating that it goes 'beyond' or is 'excessive': it does not study a single medium, but it studies how meanings and values are intensified and rapidly expanded through multiple platforms and actions.[414] According to Evolvi, media can be studied in three different ways: as material objects, institutions and technologies.[415] Moreover, hypermediation focusses on the hybrid intersections between virtual and physical spaces, which Evolvi describes as a 'third space'.[416] The theory of third space studies religious practices and identities that exist between online and offline experiences.[417] It argues that online and offline are not necessarily separate spheres, but that they can be interconnected in 'a third space', which exists between the public and the private. Here, religious groups and individuals can negotiate identities in a spatial or digital imaginary, which is also called 'the religious digital', i.e. a form of religiosity that is specifically conditioned

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411.   Weimann and Masri, "New Antisemitism on TikTok," 167.
412.   Evolvi, "Theoretical Approaches in Digital Religion Studies."
413.   Evolvi, "Theoretical Approaches in Digital Religion Studies."
414.   Evolvi, "Theoretical Approaches in Digital Religion Studies."
415.   Giulia Evolvi, "The Theory of Hypermediation: Anti-Gender Christian Groups and Digital Religion," *Journal of Media and Religion* 21, no. 2 (2022): 72.
416.   Evolvi, "The Theory of Hypermediation: Anti-Gender Christian Groups and Digital Religion," 74.
417.   Nabil Echchaibi and Stewart M. Hoover, *The Third Spaces of Digital Religion* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2023).

by the Internet.[418] This third space allows for the articulation of (complex) identities, that often exist outside of 'the traditional or hegemonic religious institutions'.[419]

The theory of hypermediation is particularly adequate for my research in its characteristic of studying multiple media platforms, its focus on (religious) identity construction, and the concept of third space (hybridity off- and online). Secondly, I focus on religious identities that are expressed in videos, comments and/or images. However, rather than focusing on the digital religiosity of religious individuals or communities, I study how religious identities are constructed by *political* communities, i.e. far right leaders and their followers. Therefore, I apply Giulia Evolvi's theory on a political landscape, rather than a religious landscape, although one could argue whether it is possible at all to clearly distinguish between these two within my field of research. Thirdly, I study how religious identities are constructed, which often considers an imaginary that includes both on- and offline spaces. Examples are videos posted by far-right leaders where they have recorded themselves burning or tearing up a Qur'an in the streets or promotion videos of transnational far right groups such as 'The European Patriots Unite' that show far-right actors in different countries in Europe in physical spaces that include flags and objects related to their message.[420] Therefore, the theory of hypermediation allows me to study the digital complexity of the religious dimension within the far-right landscape. Before proceeding to the findings of my research, it is important to clarify my methodology.

Paragraph 3: Methodology

This study is based on the monitoring of TikTok over four months, between April and August 2023. The research period was divided into two distinct phases: the first two months is the phase of so-called 'ß-testing', the two subsequent months cover a period of so-called 'in-depth analysis' of TikTok videos.[421] The ß-testing

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[418]. Evolvi, "Theoretical Approaches in Digital Religion Studies."

[419]. Evolvi, "Theoretical Approaches in Digital Religion Studies."

[420]. For example, Dutch Pegida leader Edwin Wagensveld tore up a Qur'an in The Hague on the 22th of January 2023, but as he was not allowed to burn it in the street due to city regulations, he recorded himself burning the Qur'an in a pan at an unknown location and uploaded this video on the Youtube channel of the Dutch Pegida. This video was later removed from Youtube. The European Patriots Unite, a far-right movement, uploaded a video on Youtube on June 18th, 2023 in which multiple far-right individuals and politicians from different European countries shortly address their viewers, often accompanied by national symbols or flags. Unite, "European Patriots Unite - Európa patriótái egyesítsétek erőiteket!."

[421]. The ß-testing period ran from 13 April to 31 May 2023. The in-depth analysis ran from 14 June to 14 July 2023.

period involved trial and error in searching for the right key terms that would lead to the religious dimension of the far-right landscape of TikTok. This phase was necessary for two reasons: firstly, to get the researcher acquainted with the platform. Secondly, to let the TikTok algorithm get to know the researcher, so that the researcher (in the identity of a far-right individual) would become embedded in the far-right landscape of TikTok. This two-step method was chosen to ensure that the findings would not only represent the fringe of the far-right landscape, but are also representative of the more radical and extreme scenes of the far-right landscape of TikTok ('to go deep into the rabbit hole'). In the investigation period, more than 3000 TikTok videos were collected and studied on the basis of a list of key words that related to Christian and Muslim identities within the far-right landscape. Subsequently, a qualitative content analysis was carried out on 153 videos that referenced religious contra-identities. In the following, the method is explained in more detail, focussing on 'the dedicated device' and the key terms used for searching.

Paragraph 3.1: Dedicated device

In order to study religious contra-identities on TikTok, the app was repurposed as a research device.[422] This means that rather than primarily being studied by the algorithm of TikTok (which is inescapable) for commercial ends, the researcher used the algorithm to study the app for academic ends. Thus, the 'rabbit hole effect' of TikTok was used to gather knowledge about the research topic (i.e. the far right and religion). Key words were entered that were relevant to search and dive into the far-right landscape of TikTok that includes religious contra-identities (see the list below). To this end, the researcher used a dedicated device on which the app TikTok was installed. The reason for using a clean smartphone with a new sim-card is three-fold. Firstly, it avoids the contamination of the TikTok algorithm with the researchers own personal data. Secondly, it creates a safe space as radical or extreme content might be encountered that the researcher is not keen on having on a private smartphone. Thirdly, the data archive of the findings is stored on a device that is only used for academic ends; this enables the verification of the findings by handing over the phone at any time, without cutting the researcher off of access to his or her own personal usage of a smartphone.

A new Google account was created that showed the researchers own positioning, but which was not directly retraceable to the researcher personally: K.onderzoeker@

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422. In the same way as Marc Tuters did with Youtube. See Tuters, "Fake news and the Dutch YouTube political debate space " 221.

gmail.com.[423] The researcher's interaction with the app TikTok was used as the basis of this research and snowballing was used as a method, which implied that key terms related to the research field were entered and selection of the videos continued on the basis of the findings. This was facilitated by TikTok's algorithm as it gives recommended videos on the basis of previously watched videos. The advantage of this method was that the researcher could find videos related to the far right and religion that would not be easily found when entering straightforward terms such as 'far right' and 'religion'.

This study analysed videos on TikTok by using a companion browser extension called 'Zeeschuimer', which was installed in a separate clean browser of Firefox: 'Firefox Developer Edition'.[424] It was ensured that no other browsers were open when enabling Zeeschuimer to gather data from TikTok.[425] In using this extension, the researcher could retrace trajectories on TikTok as it gathers the data of the videos the researcher watched as if a snapshot was made of every video. Consequently, data of Zeeschuimer was forwarded to the 4CAT Capture & Analysis Toolkit that ordered the data so that analysis of the data (e.g. through word frequency lists) was made more accessible. Lastly, the researcher visualized the data by making wordclouds.[426]

Paragraph 3.2: Key terms

Regarding the key terms used, it is important to note that the researcher selected an 'agnostic' approach, which implies that no clear definitions or theories were used beforehand, as if the researcher had no idea or was ignorant before investigating TikTok. Thus, key terms were selected on the basis of their usage by far right actors themselves, rather than selected by the researcher on the basis of a theory. The reason for this choice is twofold. Firstly, the researcher aimed to know what far right actors themselves are stating about religion (and not what the researcher *thinks* what is happening). Secondly, the researcher aimed to avoid personal bias by entering terms that are framed in the mind of the researcher. Thus, key words were used

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[423]. Indirectly my account can be retraced to me personally, due to address and credit card information. My google account is: K.onderzoeker@gmail.com and my name in this account is Kim S. (Kim referring to the initials of my first names, S to my last name).

[424]. I used Zeeschuimer, because TikTok does not have API (in contrast to social media such as Twitter). A new browser was necessary as I already used Firefox as my main browser and using it for my research would contaminate the algorithm of TikTok (as TikTok uses the data in the history of my browser).

[425]. I installed the app TikTok on my dedicated device, which is safer than installing it on my computer. As Zeeschuimer can only be used on a computer, I use a separate browser and log in to my google account of TikTok in order to connect to my TikTok video history. Although a wholly dedicated computer would be ideal to avoid algorithm contamination, I aimed at using a separate browser to be sufficient.

[426]. For this purpose, the website www.wordcloud.com was used.

that are defined by far right actors themselves. In selecting these words, a video was used of 'European Patriots Unite', a transnational far right movement that uses religious images and words to identify Europe and on the basis of that identity aims to connect far right actors in Europe against Islam.[427] This video was utterly fitting for this study as it was posted on the 18th of June 2020, just before this PhD research started.[428] In addition, the video is an edit of multiple short videos of far right actors from different European countries, which makes the vocabulary more representative of the European far right. Therefore, the video gave the researcher access to the vocabulary of far right actors across Europe with regard to the religious identities of 'The Christian Europe' and Islam, which is the landscape this study aims to explore on TikTok. The following relevant key words were identified (See Figure 4):

Islam	Ideology	The Nation's Europe
Christianity	Border-tight policy	Immigration
Europe	Reception of asylum seekers in their own region	Opinion dictatorship
Christendom	Fatherlands	Multiculturalism
Continent	Tough approach to casino capitalism and politics of Soros	European United States
Civilisation	History	Fight
Culture	Nationalists	American economy and globalisation
Saving	Cooperate	Unity and Strength
(European) Patriots	Stand together	Unite our forces
(European) nations	Common enemies	Save our identity
Danger	Strong	Freedom for Europe
Multiculturalism	European future	Multiple aggression
War	Patriotist and Nationalist movements	Pride
Illegal migration	Save Europe	Bravery
Territory	Strangers	Folk
Defend	Unite	Let's give Europe back to the Europeans
Home	Win	Fight for what is ours
Christian values	Threatened	Countries
National identity	Mass immigration	Save our free, self-conscious, values saver
Work together	Demographic catastrophe	Christian nation's Europe
Comrades	Radically speeding political Islam	

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[427]. Unite, "European Patriots Unite - Európa patriótái egyesítsétek erőiteket!."
[428]. This PhD research ran from September 2020 until September 2024.

Conservatives	European culture
Homeland	Existence
Protect	Difficult situation
Globalisation	Traditions
Liberalisation	Our enemies
Globalists like Merkel, Soros, Gates	Destroy

Figure 4.

The researcher used these key words to dive into the rabbit hole of TikTok. As the algorithm of TikTok is not (yet) known, the researcher deemed it important to apply a systematic approach. First, all the terms related to the 'The Christian Europe' (defined as the ingroup) were explored without entering terms related to Islam, to investigate whether and when Islam pops up as the antithesis or contra-identity. Perhaps it does not, and Islam is suggested as the ally of Christianity. In choosing this approach, I can test whether my idea that religious contra-identities predominate in the far-right landscape is correct. Moreover, as I also do not yet enter terms related to 'far right' or specific far right parties or movements, I can check whether and when religious contra-identities are related to a far right landscape. In doing so, I can check to what extent religious contra-identities are appropriated by the far right and check whether they also exist in other landscapes. After having entered all the key words related to a Christian Europe, I can use the keywords related to Islam and the remaining terms to systematically lead me to the algorithmic landscape I want to be in. To this end, I divide the key words of the video in three categories: those related to 'Christian Europe', those related to 'Islam' and a category with remaining keywords (See Figure 5):

What is immediately apparent from the contents of this table is that the characterisation of 'The Christian Europe' contains a significantly more diverse set of words than the characterisation of Islam. What this might indicate will be discussed later.

The key words within the table are so to speak my sensitizing concepts that guide me through the rabbit hole of TikTok. Dependent on my findings I will enter key words in TikTok that lead me to the far-right landscape I want to investigate. I start with the key term 'The Christian Europe' and consequently I enter the other key words that are in the left column. I start with my TikTok search 15 minutes a day, and I keep track of which key words I used and in which sequence. Zeeschuimer will keep track of the data I found. After a TikTok session, I store a file of that session on my computer. I begin my TikTok track with the English language (as I expect

Christian Europe	Islam	Remaining
Christianity	Islam	Saving
Europe	Strangers	Ideology
Christendom	Illegal migration	Border-tight policy
Continent	Demographic catastrophe	Reception of asylum seekers in their own region
Civilisation	Radically speeding political Islam	Tough approach to casino capitalism and politics of Soros
Culture	Our enemies	Globalists like Merkel, Soros, Gates
(European) Patriots	Immigration	Liberalization
Fatherlands	Multiple aggression	Globalisation
History	Common enemies	Cooperate
Nationalists	Mass immigration	Stand together
Homeland	Multiculturalism	Protect
European future		Bravery
Patriotist and Nationalist movements		Strong
Save Europe		Unite
(European) nations		Danger
Territory		Unity and Strength
Home		War
Christian values		Defend
National identity		Work together
Comrades		Win
Conservatives		Threatened
European culture		Pride
Traditions		Existence
The Nation's Europe		Difficult situation
European United States		Destroy
Unite our forces		Opinion dictatorship
Save our identity		Fight
Freedom for Europe		American economy and globalisation
Folk		
Let's give Europe back to the Europeans		
Fight for what is ours		
Countries		
Christian nation's Europe		

Figure 5.

transnational oriented far right actors to use English as a shared language), but I will also enter key words in German or Dutch, as some far-right nationalists will speak and write in their own languages on TikTok. In choosing this approach I hope to be as systematic and reproducible as can be, although objective reproducibility is not possible when doing social media research.

Paragraph 4. Findings

Paragraph 4.1: The Context of Religious Contra-Identities

In general, six main themes can be identified within which the religious identities of 'The Christian Europe' and 'Islam' are mobilised within TikTok video's: immigration, the mapping of Europe, the cultural and historical heritage of Europe, the Islamisation of Europe, the European far right, and apologetics. To a smaller extent, religious contra-identities come to the fore within the context of sports.

Six key themes on TikTok regarding religious contra-identities:
Immigration
The mapping of Europe
The cultural and historical heritage of Europe
The Islamisation of Europe
The European far right
Apologetics

Figure 6.

This identification does not imply that these different themes only appear separately; it is often the case that multiple themes are combined within one video. The theme that is clearly predominant with regard to religious contra-identities is immigration. Most video's in the far-right landscape that pit (Christian) Europe against Islam, relate to immigration and illegal immigration in particular. Immigration is often connected to crime and Islamisation, which particularly affects women and children. All videos portray Islam in a negative way, framing immigrants as being always Muslim, disregarding the fact that many immigrants come from non-Muslim countries and that many of them have a different religious (and even Christian!) adherence or no religion at all. TikTok videos display short fragments of tv-programmes with debates about immigration, news programmes reporting on heightened numbers of immigration, fragments of speeches of far-right party leaders such as Geert Wilders or local and national leaders of the AfD who argue against immigration. Video-footage or images of recent news events

that are related to immigration are also quickly circulated on TikTok and mobilised to argue against immigration, such as the refugee ship that capsized off the coast of Greece in June 2023. A video called the migrants 'invaders' with the text 'Tragic', reporting that 79 bodies had been found up to that moment whilst a speech of Hitler is heard in the background music of the video. The seemingly sarcastic and racist nature of the video is confirmed by the comments that accompany the video, which include statements such as 'Sad it wasn't 500 🥲' or 'So you're telling me the sea is now contaminated?' and: 'Nothing of value was lost, thousands more must sink, there is nothing tragic about that…Good news…thank God…' Other events related to immigration, such as the Syrian refugee who stabbed four young children in Annecy, France and the riots in France related to the death of the teenager Nahel Merzouk in June 2023, are used in a similar fashion to argue against immigration. Moreover, three particular types of videos that relate to the theme of immigration reappear frequently in the algorithm of TikTok: videos that show images of Christians in Islamic countries (held captive or beheaded by ascribed Muslim terrorists) and Muslims who have immigrated to Christian countries (portrayed as happy families), videos that portray Europe now and in ten or twenty years (2030 or 2050) with heightened numbers of Muslims and videos that rapidly show the headlines and short pieces of newspaper articles that report on crimes committed by (illegal) immigrants, which are usually the humiliation, abuse, rape and/or the killing of women and children.

The second theme where religious contra-identities come to the fore are videos that show the map of Europe, indicating with colours, symbols or percentages which countries belong or have belonged to Islam or Christianity or have high or low percentages Muslims, Christians or immigrants. Some mapping videos demonstrate the percentage of votes of European far-right political parties in each European country. Multiple mapping videos appear neutral, but some are made from a pro-Islam stance, commenting that Europe needs more green (green indicating European countries where Islam is growing fast), and some are from a pro-Christian or European stance, arguing that Europe is Christian and Islam does not belong to Europe. Videos containing high immigration numbers are often accompanied by the slogan 'Save Europe'.

The third theme is the cultural and historical heritage of Europe, which is demonstrated in videos that portray elements of the history and culture of one or more European countries. A type of video that is often circulated is a compilation of images and short video fragments of the culture and history of different European countries that alternate quickly in the video, thereby creating an image

of a seemingly uniform European identity. This is done through the collection of images of multiple cultural icons such as the Eiffel Tower or Neuschwanstein Castle, or images of cultural food, traditional clothing, art, important figures in the history of Europe such as Napoleon, historic events such as the crusades or important battles fought on European soil (Battle of Poitiers, Battle of Covadonga), sometimes also interspersed with national socialist pamphlets or posters. Through this eclecticism of historical and cultural elements of different European countries, the rapid alternation of the images and video fragments within the video and thirdly the combination with texts referring to Europe (such as 'Defend Europe', 'Defend our culture', 'Europe for Europeans' etc.), the makers of this type of video create the impression of a single European identity that one can identify with. This identity is clearly not connected to the European Union, which is sometimes also explicitly stated in the accompanying text. Europe is mainly linked through territory, culture, religion, its history and the people. The nature of videos differ due to their highlighting of different aspects from this list: some lay more emphasis on the (political) union of European territory, in the sense of a European federation (a United States of Europe), some emphasise the ethnicity of Europe (that is white) and include statements such as 'remember your ancestors' and some emphasise the importance of people who made or united Europe or show so-called 'Christian warriors' that fought against the Muslims, such as the Frankish leader Charles Martel or the Albanian commander Skanderbeg.

The fourth contextual theme is the Islamisation of Europe, which is generally considered a problem and a threat to the identity of the 'native' Europeans. This theme is often linked to events surrounding the Qur'an burnings by far-right activists in Europe, showing the emotional reaction of Muslims to the burning of the Qur'an and reinterpreting this as an aggressive attitude of Muslims who actively want to Islamise Europe. Videos also include European flags that turn into symbols of Islam (adding crescents to the stars) or maps of Europe that show European territory once conquered by Muslims. Videos often refer to the slogan 'Wake up, Europe', thereby implying that Europeans are insufficiently aware of the threat posed by the mass immigration of Muslims into Europe. This idea that Europe is not aware of the threat of Islam is also apparent in the references to conspiracy theories such as the replacement theory or criticism on the leftist elite who just tolerate the influx of Muslims, disregarding the fact that this will inevitably lead to the downfall of Europe (See Image 1).

Image 1: Image that appeared in a TikTok video that portrays criticism on the leftist elite regarding the Islamisation of Europe

The fifth theme concerns videos that clearly relate to the European far right. There are two types of videos: those that report on European far-right political parties and leaders within the democratic system and videos that are more extreme right, with references to violence and far-right symbols. The first type of videos include speeches of far-right leaders such as Giorgia Meloni, Geert Wilders and Viktor Orbán on the issue of immigration or Islam in Europe, or fragments of tv-programmes and news broadcasts that report on this issue or interview far-right individuals such as the British media personality Katie Hopkins or PiS politician Dominik Tarczyński. Videos also contain campaign videos or posters or lists or graphics of votes on far-right political parties (for the greatest part of the AfD). The more extreme far-right videos contain memes such as Pepe the Frog, recurring cartoons of a face with bloodshot eyes or lightning bolts coming out of their eyes, often with techno music in the background or audible fragments of speeches by Adolf Hitler or Oswald Mosley.[429] Comments often include the text 'based' or references to other social media platforms such as Discord. When entering key terms to search for more videos of this kind, TikTok blocked the content with a warning that my search was associated with hate speech or behaviour that violated TikTok's guidelines. Some of the more extreme far-right videos seemed to want to circumvent this blockade

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[429].   Oswald Mosley (1896-1980) was a British politician who was the leader of the British Union of Fascists (BUF) during the 1930s. This group was known for its anti-Semitic propaganda and the wearing of Nazi-style uniforms and symbols.

(apparently successfully) by adding the text 'NO HATE' in the title of the video, even though the content was hateful towards Muslims.

The last theme is apologetics, both from the perspective of religion and the far right. Religious contra-identities appeared in videos that were made as a response to other TikTok videos. Fragments from the video being responded to are often included in the new video or the title mentions the video's creator or the video that is referred to. Most apologetic videos are made by Muslims who respond to videos with far-right ideas that portray Muslims in a negative way, excluding them from Europe or videos that report on the burning of the Qur'an as a good thing. Some videos are made by Christians who argue that Islam and Christianity have much in common. Interestingly, two videos appeared of influencer Andrew Tate and his brother Tristan, Andrew arguing in favour of Islam and Tristan aligning Christianity and Islam against the common enemy of moral degeneracy. On the contrary, there are also videos of Christians stressing the differences between Christianity and Islam and videos that show theological debates between Christians and Muslims. There are a number of videos with statements of Christian leaders who speak emphatically against Islam or videos that claim to show parts of a church documentary teaching Christians about 'Islam taking over the world'. Lastly, there are also apologetic TikTok videos that aim to defend far-right individuals against accusations of racism and not promoting diversity. In these videos, concepts used by left-wing politicians in their rhetoric against the far right, such as diversity, minority and racism, are reversed: firstly, the far right is in favour of diversity (but within the cultures of Europe!), secondly not Muslims, but whites are currently in the minority and thirdly the far right is not racist at all, but is itself discriminated against.

For the remaining, smaller amount of videos that featured religious contra-identities, most were in the context of sports, showing either Christian or Muslim athletes in e.g. soccer teams or boxing and asking the question who will win. No videos were found that indicated that Muslims belonged to Europe. Interestingly, a substantial number of videos were made by creators who identified themselves with Eastern Europe and the Orthodox Church (Poland in particular). Moreover, multiple videos had a transnational character in their contextualizing of their own countries and nationalism in the context of Europe or in visualizing a number of European far-right parties and leaders in one video. Slogans such as: 'Europe for Europeans! Save Europe! Defend Europe! Europe, wake up! Better be far right than far wrong! Christ forever!' also contribute to the transnational connection between far-right individuals from different countries by sharing these slogans in the content and comments of TikTok videos. Lastly, several videos displayed an

interaction between different social media platforms (e.g. showing tweets or links to Discord) and an interaction between online and offline spaces (e.g. the figure of Charles Martell who both appears online and in the vandalism of the street sign of the Ellerstraße in Dusseldorf, Germany).

In addition to the thematic analysis above, a hashtag analysis was carried out that shows the frequency of the specific hashtags connected to the videos in which religious contra-identities came to the fore. This gives an impression of the themes that the makers themselves deemed important when pitting 'The Christian Europe' against Islam in their videos. The most frequently appearing hashtags are visualized in a table, as well as in a word cloud below:

IV

Figure 7: Wordcloud Hashtag (#) analysis TikTok.

Hashtag (#)	Frequency	Hashtag (#)	Frequency
europe	905	based	160
christian	652	religion	160
islam	554	germany	158
muslim	428	european	156
history	369	saveeurope	150
christianity	355	nationalism	149
politics	228	catholic	146
jesus	211	uk	137
orthodox	184	usa	134
afd	167	news	131

Figure 8: Hashtag (#) analysis TikTok, Top 20.

Paragraph 4.2: The Characteristics of 'The Christian Europe'

In this study, I focused on 'The Christian Europe' as an identity. This implies that I searched for videos that pit the historical majority religious identity of Europe, i.e. Christianity, against Islam. Europe is religiously identified as being Christian, which is apparent from videos that state in the title or in its content that Europe is Christian. Examples are that Europe is said to be a Christian continent or Europe has a Christian culture with Christian values that should be upheld. Far-right leaders such as Viktor Orbán speak of the 'Judeo-Christian heritage' of Europe or claim that western values equals Christian values. Some far-right politicians such as Dominik Tarczyński even argue that Christianity is in the DNA of Europeans and that Europe must return to its roots, implying a re-Christianisation of Europe. According to Tarczyński, Europe is Christian *'by the faith, by the culture, by the law, identity as a past and a future.'*

Moreover, videos foreground specific countries within Europe (e.g. France, Poland, Hungary and Italy) that are arguably Christian, and demonstrate this by showing images of Christian warriors, kings, churches or Christians carrying Christian symbols or attributes such as rosaries and crosses. The Orthodox Church and to a somewhat lesser extent the Catholic Church play an important role, which is apparent from references to and images of popes and the symbol of the Eastern Orthodox Cross that repeatedly emerged on TikTok. Videos also portray the European flag with in the centre a Christian cross or maps of Europe with the symbol of the Christian cross on all European countries, indicating that Europe is Christian. Many videos also show crusaders or Templars fighting Muslims. Interestingly, many authors have given themselves names with an overtly Christian identity (see Table 2).

Author name:	Frequency	Author name:	Frequency
that_catholic_guy.1	19	greekorthodoxy	5
Vereinteschristentum	18	Far_right_christian	4
based.crusaderr	16	Great.christianity	4
based_christian_2	11	Orthodox_girl	4
christi.bellator	5	Crusader_33	3
.catholic_church	5	crusaderrunner	3
christianmarxist	5	Christian.warrior1	3
christistheonlyway	5	Orthodoxeschristentum.de	2
Christanus_turcicus	5	orthodoxtheocrat	2
Followerofjesuschrist2ac	5	britishcrusader	2

Figure 9: Christian author names on TikTok, Top 20.

Within the selection of videos that attribute a Christian identity to Europe, I came across ten different characteristics of the religious identity 'The Christian Europe':

1. It is threatened or in danger
2. It is ignorant or dormant
3. It is military, prepared to fight or use violence
4. It has an eclectic or mosaic identity
5. It is white and xenophobic
6. It dominates the world or is strong
7. It is nationalist or far-right

There are three other characteristics that were attributed to 'The Christian Europe, but only in a few videos. Therefore, they are mentioned, but will not be further elaborated upon:

8. It must be politically united
9. It fights globalisation
10. It is tolerant

With regard to the first characteristic, videos often state that Europe or European civilisation must be saved or defended. 'Save Europe' or 'Defend Europe' is a popular slogan that repeatedly emerged on TikTok, both as a hashtag, a comment or as a text within the content of a video. Sometimes it is argued that women and children in particular should be saved. But more often Europe is religiously identified as a Christian civilisation that must be saved or the Christian faith in particular. Frequent references are made to Charles Martel, the grandfather of the Frankish king

Charlemagne, who is said to have saved Christianity by defeating the Moors in the battle of Poitiers in 732 CE. Some videos refer specifically to the borders of European countries that should be defended, with a special role for Hungary as the so-called 'defender state' of Europe. This raises the question of whom to defend against or from whom to save Europe? The answer is manifest: the invasion of immigrants and Islam in particular. There is also an enemy within the European ingroup: the leftists or bureaucrats, who allow for mass immigration or who aim to remove Christian references in order to be inclusive. Emmanuel Macron, Ursula von der Leyen and George Soros are some of the names mentioned of those being bracketed among the leftist elite who are destroying European heritage. Videos with slogans such as 'don't let them take what is ours', texts stating that Europe is falling and

European countries are to rest in peace (R.I.P.) are used to indicate the magnitude of the threat to Europe. Videos are obviously made to instil fear about the consequences of allowing immigrants and Muslims in particular into Europe. An example is a video that refers to the fall of the Byzantine Empire in 1453 by the Ottoman army, which is called 'one of the darkest moments in Christian history'.

The second characteristic closely relates to the first one, as the perception predominates that Europeans are dormant or ignorant about the imminent danger of mass immigration. Therefore, attempts are made to both mobilise TikTok viewers to vote for nationalist parties and to make viewers aware by using the exclamation 'Europe, wake up!'

The third characteristic is that 'The Christian Europe' is military or prepared to use violence to defend it. Both (historical) religious leaders, military leaders and battles are named and pictured in the videos, often portrayed in a rapid alternation of images. In a number of videos church leaders who rallied for military expulsion such as pope Urban II with his infamous 'Deus Vult' speech are invoked.[430] But for the most part, historical battles between lay Christians and Muslims (mostly Ottomans and Moors) are recalled and Christian warriors or commanders are praised. Videos show images of the crusades, for which TikTok users often use fragments of the 2005 film 'Kingdom of Heaven' directed by Ridley Scott. Moreover, references are made to battles won by Christian armies, such as the battle of Poitiers (732)

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[430]. On 27 November 1095 Pope Urban II addressed a great mass of people outside of the cathedral of the city of Clermont (France) and urged his listeners to join what would later came to be known as 'The First Crusade' (1096-1099). According to eyewitness accounts, the crowd shouted 'Deus vult!' (God wills it) in response to his call. See Louise Riley-Smith and Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The Crusades: Idea and Reality, 1095-1274* (London: Arnold, 1981); Christopher Tyerman, *God's war: a New History of the Crusades* (London: Allen Lane, 2006).

in France, the battle of Eger (1552) in Hungary and the battle of Vienna (1683) in Austria. Other videos praise Christian commanders who fought against Muslims in history. These commanders are mostly European, which leads to the sometimes remarkable enlisting of supposedly Christian military leaders who were definitely not Christian (as Christ did not even exist at the time), such as Alexander the Great (356-323 BCE) and Julius Caesar (100-44 BCE). Other military commanders that are ascribed to be Christian are: Constantine the Great (272-337), Charles Martel (689-741), Henry IV (1367-1413), Skanderbeg (1405-1468), Baldwin IV (1161-1185), Guy of Lusignan (1150-1194), Vlad III (1428-1477), John III Sobieski (1629-1696), Godfrey of Bouillon (1060-1100), Đorđe Petrović (1762-1817), Mihai Pătrașcu (1558-1601), David IV of Georgia (1073-1125), Belisarius (500-565), Gustavus Adolphus (1594-1632), Basil II (958-1025) and Arthur Wellesley (1769-1852). Most commanders are from European descent, representing a diverse range of European countries, such as France, Poland, Georgia, Romania, Italy and England. Interestingly, a significant number of military commanders are from Eastern Europe or the Byzantium Empire. All of them are praised for their military capacities and are ascribed Christian, although just a number of them actually fought against Muslims. Among these commanders, Charles Martel (also called 'The Hammer') stands out as the most acclaimed Christian warrior. He reappears in different TikTok videos as an important European leader who stopped the Muslim expansion on the European continent. He even appears as a 'deep fake', as if he is an actual person speaking directly to the viewer with commenters asking Martel to return to the present to save Europe once again. Some TikTok authors refer to Charles Martel in their name or use his image as their TikTok profile picture. The names of other Christian commanders are also used in the names of video creators. In this way, the legacy of ascribed Christian military leaders is used to actively mobilise viewers on the basis of religious identity. An example is a video that states: 'Muslims are invading Europe: pick your general', followed by a range of images of Christian commanders. Videos also list the qualities of a 'soldier of Christ' and show footage of catholic church services attended by armed soldiers with the accompanying text 'Bless us, Christ, for the battle.' Lastly, some far-right videos show images of Nazi's or soldiers driving in tanks with simultaneous calls to vote for European nationalist parties.

The fourth characteristic is that 'The Christian Europe' has an eclectic or mosaic identity. This means that videos portray Europe as a single identity, with religion and/or race as a unifying marker, i.e. Christianity and the Aryan race. However, this identity is composed of multiple cultural identities, because a monolithic European identity does not exist. This is creatively done by sequentially showing pictures of art, clothing, food, monuments, religion, kings and military leaders

from different European countries. Examples are images of Swiss mountains, the Mona Lisa of Leonardo Da Vinci or paintings from Michelangelo, the Eiffel Tower or Neuschwanstein Castle, Spanish bullfighting, Nativity scenes, Napoleon Bonaparte etc. These sort of 'slideshows' are often followed by slogans such as 'Defend Europe' or 'Save Europe' and accompanied by texts stating it is 'your land', your culture' etc. that is under threat. In making this, TikTok users create the impression of a single European identity or a European civilisation to which all the cultural forms previously shown belong, with which the citizens of European countries (i.e. white Christians) should identify. Within this amalgamate identity of 'The Christian Europe', culture is combined with religion and ethnicity. For example, some videos list ethnic peoples of Europe (Roman, Celtic, Nordic etc.) or list those European peoples closest to Germans and urge viewers to go back to their roots, remember who they are and make their ancestors proud. Interestingly, on the one hand the diversity of European cultures and peoples is used to create a single European identity. On the other hand, this diversity is stressed to argue that Europe does not need to be inclusive of immigrants as Europe 'has all the diversity it needs'.

The fifth characteristic is that 'The Christian Europe' is white. Multiple videos explicitly or implicitly state that Europe consists of people with a white ethnicity and those who differ, are said not to belong to Europe. There are outright racist videos on the basis of ethnicity or religion that consist of excluding black people or Muslims from Europe. Examples are images of Muslim immigrants behind fences or audio fragments of speeches of Hitler ranting about Jews and shouting the German phrase 'einmal wird unsere Geduld zu ende sein'.[431] Clearly, this phrase does not refer to Jews but to Muslims in our current society. Moreover, there are comparisons of birth rates among Muslims and white Europeans with a call for white Europeans to increase their birth rate so that the minimum number is achieved to maintain European culture. Commenters proudly state that they are on their fourth or fifth 'white baby'. This call is related to the fear that Muslims will become the majority in Europe due to immigration and a higher birth rate and whites will thus become a minority. It is also criticised, by Katie Hopkins among others, that diversity never refers to whites but always to others, by which she seems to imply that it is in fact white people who are discriminated. And although whites are in the majority on the national level, whites are a minority when one looks at the big cities with a large amount of non-white immigrants. This tactic of turning the argument around is often used by far-right leaders. Similarly, Geert Wilders and other far-right individuals aim to reverse the perpetrator and victim role by claiming that it is not they who discriminate, but that they are discriminated against. They argue that they

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431.   English translation: 'one day our patience will come to an end'.

have to defend themselves against accusations of racism that are unsubstantiated, while immigrants who assault police and tear down a country, for example during the riots after the death of the French teenager Nahel Merzouk in June 2023, can just freely go about their business.[432] Other videos that had clear racist overtones were videos that glorified the white ethnicity, for example by stating 'white is beautiful' or 'Europe is a better place because of the white man' or videos with lists of European ethnic groups that are closest to Germans. Notable are also the recurring references to rapper Kanye West, who is infamous for his antisemitic remarks, both in the content of TikTok videos, comments and profile pictures.

The sixth feature of 'The Christian Europe' is that it is strong and that it dominates the world. Firstly, strength is associated with the inhabitants of Europe, that is white Europeans. Videos argue that 'the white man' is physically stronger by showing maps of European countries with the amount of medallists of the World Strongest Man competition. Some videos show bodybuilders with images of Christianity or crucifixes. Another video identifies the so-called 'Generation Z' (people born between 1997-2012) with several emoticons, including one that denotes Christianity, a forest and fitness. Secondly, videos claim that Europe was or still dominates the world. This is illustrated by many videos that show that Muslims tried to Islamise Europe, but failed in the past. References are made to strong (Christian) military leaders, such as Charles Martel. Sometimes it is argued that Europe is currently falling (into the hands of Islam) and calls are made to make Europe strong again. The slogan MEGA (Make Europe Great Again) also appeared, as a counterpart to the U.S. political slogan MAGA (Make America Great Again) used by Donald Trump during the 2016 presidential elections. In other videos, especially those of the thread 'Europa Invicta', it is argued that Europe still is an all-powerful force, both culturally, religiously and politically (See Image 2).

The seventh and last main feature of 'The Christian Europe' is that it is nationalist or far-right. Many videos contain political rhetoric to vote for European nationalist political parties, as a way to save Europe from Islam. Videos also contain fragments of speeches of far-right leaders, who identify Europe or a European country as Christian and that it has to be protected from Islam. This particularly concerns speeches by local or regional AfD party leaders or speeches of Giorgia Meloni defending Christianity, such as her famous speech: 'I am Giorgia, I am a woman, I

[432.] The 17-year-old Nahel Merzouk was killed by a French police officer after not complying with a request to turn off the ignition of the car he drove. The incident was followed by widespread riots and protests in France against police violence and racial profiling, as Merzouk was of Moroccan and Algerian descent.

Image 2: Image of a far-right thread that reappears in TikTok video's

am a mother, I am Italian, I am a Christian, and you can't take that away from me!'.[433] The image of the traditional family is clearly a bridge between Christianity and the far right, expressed in images of a happy white European family, i.e. a mother, father and often two children. In a few videos about France, the figure of Jeanne d'Arc is used as both a religious and a national symbol. Moreover, there are more extreme-right videos in which Nazi propaganda or Nazi flags are shown and far-right slogans are expressed such as 'Never lose your smile' and 'Based'. Images frequently appear of far-right leaders such as Geert Wilders or Giorgia Meloni and even Jesus Christ with a bar in front of their eyes that states 'based', which has a multi-layered meaning, but seems to indicate that you agree with something or that you are true to yourself without reservations.[434] Videos also show maps of Europe with Christian symbols and audio fragments of Hitler in the background shouting 'Sieg Heil'. The general assumption seems to be that far-right political parties and leaders have a common cause in saving Europe from Islam, despite their different national interests.

Paragraph 4.3: The Characteristics of 'Islam'

As a polemical identity pitted against 'The Christian Europe', Islam has five main characteristics that are featured within the analysed TikTok videos:

1. It is violent
2. It is the religion of immigrants
3. It is oppressive
4. Muslims want to Islamise Europe
5. It does not belong to Europe

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433. Speech held in 2019 in Rome, Italy.
434. "What does 'based' mean on TikTok? Origin behind viral slang explored," August 1, 2022, accessed 14 September 2023, https://www.sportskeeda.com/pop-culture/what-based-mean-tiktok-origin-behind-viral-slang-explored.

There are five other characteristics that were attributed to Islam, but only in one or a few videos. Therefore, they are mentioned, but will not be further elaborated upon:

6. It is uncivilised
7. It is incompatible with Christianity
8. It destroys heritage and desecrates churches
9. It is not tolerant
10. Muslims are evil

With regard to the first characteristic, Islam is often portrayed as violent, criminal or terrorist. The logic underpinning this claim is prevalent within many TikTok videos: the first generalisation is that immigrants (especially from the MENA-region) are criminal. The second generalisation is that all immigrants are Muslim. Therefore, Muslims are criminal. Many videos report immigrants committing crimes, especially against women and children. Whether Islam or Muslims are explicitly mentioned or not, it appears that it is assumed that immigrants are adhering to Islam, and not any other religion. Therefore, many videos show the headlines or newspaper articles about immigrants from the Middle East or North-African countries who have (sexually) assaulted West-European women and children. The cases are mainly about murders and rapes, citing cases that received a lot of media attention, such as the case of the French girl Lola Daviet, who was murdered by an Algerian female immigrant in October 2022.[435] Videos also mention cases of Arab children who bullied and stabbed white European children. Interestingly, although the victims are almost always white West-European women and children, the Muslim perpetrators are both men, women and children. Moreover, Islam is seen as a violent religion in itself, as it would allow for violence or terrorism committed in the name of the religion, with Muslims calling out Allahu Akbar (God is Great) after having committed a crime. The prophet Muhammed is also seen as a violent figure, who is contrasted with Jesus Christ who is seen as non-violent. As a bible teacher on TikTok claims: Jesus never did any of the violent acts that Muhammad has done: killing an estimate three thousand people, leading armies and holding slaves. The Polish member of the European Parliament Dominik Tarczyński also argues in different tv-interviews, of which fragments are shown in TikTok videos, that Polish or Christian people have never blown themselves up because of their religion, in contrast to Muslims. Videos also circulate in which violence is specifically directed against Christians. Examples are news reports about Muslims killing Christians in a

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435. "Lola Daviet: 12 year-old girl found dead in box has France reeling," October 18, 2022, accessed 14 September 2023, https://globalnews.ca/news/9206772/lola-daviet-12-year-old-girl-found-dead-box-france/.

supermarket, or videos showing the names of Christians who refused to convert to Islam and were consequently killed, or pictures of the 2015 video of the 21 Coptic Orthodox Christians in orange jumpsuits who were beheaded by Islamic State (IS) or speeches of AfD leaders who report that Muslims are smashing church windows or videos showing an Arabic man taking down the cross of a Baptist Church in the UK.

The second characteristic of Islam that dominates TikTok videos is that Islam is a religion that came to Europe with immigrants, and is thus not a 'native religion' of Europe. Only in some apologetic Muslim videos that appeared in the TikTok algorithm did the claim appear that Islam is native to Europe, with only two videos with the hashtag #europeanmuslim. In none of the videos of the far right Islam was perceived to belong to Europe. On the contrary, it is assumed that Islam is the religion of immigrants and illegal migration is a problem that concerns Muslims from the MENA-region, not Christians or others. This is apparent in a video that shows an interview by the host of the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT) with Tarczyński, discussing the perception that Christian Ukrainians are welcome in Poland, whereas Muslim migrants are seemingly rejected. When immigration is not explicitly connected with Islam, however, visual features and descriptions indirectly indicate that Muslims are involved. For example, Viktor Orbán argues in a video that 'immigration increases crime, especially criminal acts against women and brings a virus of terrorism into our midst'. Another video about immigration portrays Muslims (recognisable because of their dress) behind a fence, unable to enter Poland. A good example of the generalisation that all immigrants are Muslims is the video of the Syrian immigrant who stabbed multiple young children in Annecy, France in June 2023. Despite the fact that the man was a Christian, carrying a Christian name (Abdalmasih means 'servant of the Messiah' in Arabic) and shouting 'in the name of Jesus Christ' during the attack, a video circulates on TikTok that claims that the man was a Muslim economic migrant, followed by the slogan: Europe, wake up! Other videos were quickly launched on TikTok to comment that this statement was not correct.

The third characteristic is that Islam is oppressive and not tolerant to other ways of life, whether secular or religious. Videos feature Muslims who allegedly form a vigilante group that wants to impose sharia law in the public domain by approaching British citizens claiming that they are not permitted to use alcohol or wear skirts above the knee in so-called Muslim areas. Videos also show news reports of west-European children who are humiliated or forced to apologize by Muslim children. Moreover, far-right videos show broadcasts from Al Jazeera reporting on the

Muslim protests in response to the burning of the Qur'an by far-right individuals in European countries. The emotional reaction and gathering of Muslims seems to be reinterpreted as an active aggressive attitude of Muslims that threatens Europeans, as the videos are accompanied by texts stating: 'They want us to obey', 'We have to defend our western democracy against oppression!', 'We will never submit ourselves to Islam', neglecting the fact that the protests are a secondary response to an action that offended many Muslims. Lastly, Muslims are said to be oppressive to Christians in particular. Far-right individuals such as Katie Hopkins or Dominik Tarczyński argue in television interviews or discussions that Christians countries are tolerant, whereas Muslim countries, such as Saudi Arabia, are not. The argument is made that it is possible to be a Muslim in a Christian country but not vice versa, as Christians will be suppressed or killed. When Muslims arrive in Christian countries, it is argued, they aim at changing this free, tolerant and open character of Christian countries. Videos also feature the book of Robert C. Davis 'Christian slaves, Muslim Masters' with citations that argue that white Christian Europeans were violently forced to become Muslim Turks in the Ottoman empire.

The fourth characteristic, which is the most frequently mentioned feature attributed to Islam, is Islamisation, meaning that Muslims are thought to want to politically and religiously expand Islam into Europe, conquer European territory and replace its people by Muslims. Words often used to characterise Muslims are: 'invaders', the 'invasion of Muslim refugees', the 'wave of Islam' into Europe or Muslims 'taking over' Europe, all words indicating a high quantity and an active and deliberate attitude on the part of Muslims. This so-called 'invasion' is often directly connected to mass immigration. Many videos claim that the number of Muslims in Europe is rapidly rising. Some show European countries with the lowest or highest numbers of Muslims. Others demonstrate a dichotomy between 'then' and 'now' by showing on the one hand years in the past or present (e.g. 2000 or 2023) and connecting it to images of white Europeans and European culture and on the other hand showing years in the future (e.g. Europe in 2030 or 2050) and connecting it to images of large numbers of Muslims with typical Islamic characteristics, such as the burqa, Islamic flags or the call to prayer of the muezzin. European countries or cities are also sarcastically Islamised by calling London 'Londonistan' or Sweden 'Swedistan', thereby making claims that these cities have 'fallen' and Europe must be saved.

Videos also feature far-right leaders from different European countries, such as Geert Wilders, Filip Dewinter, Viktor Orbán and AfD leaders who argue against the Islamisation of Europe in speeches or interviews. For example, Viktor Orbán argues that the number of illegal immigrants that came to Hungary is three times the

number of the army of Genghis Khan when he invaded Europe. This comparison implicitly connects immigration to conquest. Islamisation is also connected to the increasing amount of cities where the call to prayer is reportedly allowed or the decrease of children who speak the native language. In addition, videos demonstrate Islamisation by showing European maps with Islamic symbols on each country or showing the European flag with moons painted alongside the stars, thereby making it into a symbol of Islam (See Image 3).

Moreover, Islamisation is connected to conspiracy theories, such as the replacement theory. For example, some videos argue that 'Europe has all the diversity it needs', therefore it needs no 'other' immigrants and aim at stopping the so-called 'replacement of Europe'. Many videos also emphasise how Islamisation in the past, referring to Muslim conquests into Europe, have failed against Christian military leaders. Videos feature Muslims who are defeated by Christians, often crusaders or other famous military leaders such as Charles Martel. In most cases, Muslims are from the Umayyad dynasty, Ottoman Turks or Andalusian Moors. Islamic commanders that are mentioned include Khalid ibn al-Walid, Ali ibn Abi Talib, Saladin, Genghis Khan, Osman I and Mehmet II.[436] One video expresses the belief in the failure of Islamisation due to Christianity very clearly: 'Ottomans trying to Islamise Europe. Sorry, Europe is already defended by the Christian God..'

Lastly, videos include Christian preachers or leaders who proclaim the threat of Islamisation, for example videos that allegedly cite Pope Pius X: 'You will see that Islam will invade Europe not by arms but by mass immigration'. Other examples are preachers who claim that Islam wages a conquest against Christianity, a news report of the self-immolation of the German pastor Roland Weisselberg in 2006 for fear of Islam's expansion in Europe and a so-called church documentary that claims that Islam is taking over the world as it is the fastest growing religion worldwide due to high immigration and fertility rates.

The fifth characteristic that is attributed to Islam is that it does not belong to Europe. Videos feature far-right leaders who proclaim that Islam does not belong in Europe or specific regions in countries. For example, AfD leaders state 'Der Islam gehört nicht zu [German city or region]'. They argue against a so-called 'Parallelkultur' or 'Parrallelgesellschaft' in which Islamic communities live separate from German society. Another example is a video that is widely shared on TikTok of Geert Wilders who clearly states that Turkey does not belong to Europe:

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436. Genghis Khan is mentioned as an Islamic commander but was not actually a Muslim in real life.

Today, I have a message for the Turks. Your government is fooling you into believing that one day you will become a member of the European Union. Well, forget it. You are no Europeans and you will never be. An Islamic state like Turkey does not belong to Europe. All the values Europe stands for, freedom, democracy, human rights are incompatible with Islam. [...] We do not want more but less Islam. So Turkey, stay away from us. You are not welcome here.[437]

IV

Image 3: Image of a TikTok video that portrays the Islamisation of Europe.

Image 4: Image of a TikTok video that portrays Islam as a thief who wants to steal Europe – which is stopped by a 'Christian' hand.

Videos also show cartoons of Muslims with a prohibition symbol on their back or show texts stating: 'no Arabic in Europe'. One image portrays Islam as a thief stealing away Europe, implying that Islam is an outsider (See Image 4).

In general, when looking at the five characteristics attributed to Islam, it can be concluded that Islam is portrayed in a negative way. This also becomes apparent when looking at the hashtags connected to the videos: the most frequently used hashtags are 'neutral': 'Islam' and 'Muslims', but there are hashtags in the Top 20 that have an implicit negative association with Islam: 'afd' (referring to the German

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437.   Transcript made by the author.

far-right party AfD that is anti-Islam), 'saveeurope' (from Islam and its left-wing collaborators) and 'nationalism' (excluding Muslims as the outgroup).

Paragraph 4.4: The Relationship between 'The Christian Europe' and 'Islam'

How do the identities of 'The Christian Europe' and Islam relate to each other in the TikTok videos analysed? In general, this relationship is characterised by the following five features. It is:

1. Exclusionary
2. Violent
3. Adversarial
4. Unequal
5. Incompatible

Firstly, the relationship between 'The Christian Europe' and Islam is *exclusionary*, in the sense that both exclude one another. They are defined as two different categories, two different groups with (Christian) Europeans belonging to the ingroup and Muslims to the outgroup. These two groups cannot co-exist, as they (especially Islam) will destroy each other. It is assumed that Muslims threaten Christian Europeans to such an extent that they cannot live peacefully side by side. This is evident from recurring statements such as 'Don't let them take what is ours'. However, the 'ours', i.e. what is supposedly threatened, seems rather vague. References to culture, religion and the people seem to indicate that far-right individuals fear that Islam will take away their identity. Another example of the exclusionary character of the relationship between 'The Christian Europe' and Islam is a video that shows an image of Jesus Christ, accompanied by the text: 'Ottomans trying to Islamize Europe. Sorry Europe is already defended by the real God.'

The second characteristic is that the relationship is *violent*. This is apparent from many videos in which Christian Europeans, often crusaders, fight Muslims. A lot of videos contain references to and images of historic battles between Christians and Muslims. However, only battles won by Christians are presented, thereby clearly portraying Muslims as the losers. Moreover, within the theme of immigration, videos show news reports of Muslim immigrants committing acts of violence against innocent white (Christian) Europeans. Examples are reports of European children who are bullied at school for being 'infidels' or reports of atrocities against women and children, such as rape and murder committed by immigrants from the MENA-region who are often assumed to be Muslims. Muslims are also shown demolishing or desecrating Christian churches.

The third characteristic is that the relationship is *adversarial*. This means that Christian Europeans and Muslims are seen as opponents. It is apparent in videos in which Christian warriors are opposed to Muslim warriors; first listing famous Christian commanders (illustrated by the sign of the cross), to be followed by a list of Muslim commanders (illustrated by the symbol of Islam). For example, the Muslim military commander Saladin is set against the so-called 'Leper King' Baldwin IV of Jerusalem. Other videos show competing Muslim and Christian teams in the field of sports, such as boxing or soccer. Muslims and Christians also compete on a religious level. Examples are theological debates between Muslims and Christians and a church documentary in which Christians are called upon to spread the gospel, because Islam will otherwise 'take over the world'. Only the video of Tristan Tate, the brother of influencer Andrew Tate, portrays Islam and Christianity as brothers united against a common enemy, rather than opponents.

The fourth characteristic is that the relationship is *unequal*. This implies that Islam or Islamic civilisation is not seen as the equivalent of 'The Christian Europe'. Rather, Islam is portrayed as the loser, inferior to 'The Christian Europe' and uncivilised. 'The Christian Europe' however is portrayed as the strong civilisation, the winner that has defeated Islam in the past and that is capable to throw out Muslim immigrants if they do not submit to Europe's rules and demands. Examples are images of Muslim who are trampled and defeated in historic battles. However, the unequal relationship is sometimes reversed. Some videos show the domination of Muslims over Christians in Muslim countries, for example in portraying the beheading of the Egyptian Christians in Libya or giving accounts of Christian slaves during Ottoman rule.

The last feature is that the relationship between 'The Christian Europe' and Islam is *incompatible*. This is argued in terms of belief (Islam does not know mercy), their religious leaders (Muhammad and Jesus Christ differed greatly) and human rights (Islam does not know freedom of religion or freedom of speech). Examples are videos of demonstrations by Muslims as a response to the burning of the Qur'an by far-right individuals. This footage is not only used to show the aggressive nature of Muslims, but also to show that their values are incompatible with the values of Judeo-Christian Europe. Another video shows images of the film The Matrix with the blue pill representing 'Convert to Islam' and the red pill 'Save Europe from Islam', inviting viewers to make a choice just as the protagonist Neo had to make a choice between the two pills in the film.

IV

In addition to the five characteristics of the relationship between 'The Christian Europe and Islam mentioned above, it is notable within many TikTok videos that the identities of 'The Christian Europe' and Islam are constructed in a direct response to one another. This is often done by firstly showing images or footage of Muslims with an ironic comment or question, such as 'the new Europeans' or 'Europe 2030?'. Secondly, the video shows a compilation of images of 'real' Europeans or what constitutes Europe for real (which clearly excludes Muslims and sends the message that they do not belong). Although many examples can be given, there is one clear example of this construction of religious contra-identities that reappeared frequently on TikTok. It concerns the videos that report on the vandalism of the Arabic street sign in Düsseldorf by the German far-right movement Revolte Rheinland (See Image 5 and 6). Pictures were not only shared on the Telegram channel of the far-right group, but also circulated on TikTok: images of the (vandalised) street sign were displayed together with headlines of newspaper articles reporting on the Ellerstraße incident along with audio comments or background music both condemning the Arabic street sign, the way the 'leftist' media have reported on the incident and the reaction of the authorities (the mayor of Düsseldorf), as well as expressing support for the 'patriotic' action of the far-right group. This case not only illustrates the so-called 'third space' of Giulia Evolvi, in which online and offline space become interconnected (with the figure of Charles Martell), but also shows how a Christian European identity is constructed and articulated in response to a Muslim Arabic identity. This case substantiates Evolvi's argument that a third space allows for the articulation of identities that exist outside of the traditional or hegemonic religious institutions, as the identity of a Christian Europe that deports Muslim immigrants is not what is generally preached from the pulpit of mainstream Catholic and Protestant Churches.[438]

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438. Evolvi, "Theoretical Approaches in Digital Religion Studies." See also the work of Cremer who argues that there is a powerful religious immunity in France and Germany to right-wing populism. Tobias Cremer, "A Religious Vaccination? How Christian Communities React to Right-Wing Populism in Germany, France and the US," *Government and Opposition* (2021): 177.

Image 5: The Arabic street sign on the 20th of March

Image 6: The Arabic street sign after 27 March

Part III:
The Far Right as an Emergency Brake

'The more secular the European political scene becomes, the more vocal are the calls to reclaim Europe's 'Christian roots.'[439]

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439. Roy, "Beyond Populism. The Conservative Right, the Courts, the Churches and the Concept of a Christian Europe," 192; Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1944).

Introduction

In the previous chapters, I have traced the conceptual and historical development of religious contra-identities in Western Europe and described their characteristics and relatedness in contemporary far-right political discourse on social media. I have described how the civilisationist discourse of the European far right has taken on a religious dimension, in which the idea of 'The Christian Europe' is contrasted with 'the Muslim immigrant', or 'The People' vis-à-vis 'The Other'. I have explained that this so-called *religious civilisationism* has been particularly prevalent in recent decades in the political discourse of far-right political parties and movements in North-Western Europe in particular. This is noteworthy, because North-Western European society has simultaneously been characterised by increasing secularisation: the number of Europeans who identify themselves as a convinced atheist or non-believer has significantly increased over the past forty years (even doubled in some European countries), as is shown by the report 'Buiten kerk en moskee' (translated as: 'Outside church and mosque') of the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP).[440] Thus, whereas European society has become increasingly secular, religious identities within far-right discourse are increasingly emphasised. This seems contradictory and paradoxical to say the least, but in this part I argue that the development of emerging religious contra-identities is in fact very logical, considering the historical background of socio-economic developments in the 20th and 21st century in North-Western Europe.

Whereas in the previous chapters I mainly studied the questions 'what' (what are religious contra-identities?) and 'how' (how are they constructed and related to each other), I will now focus on the question 'why': why are religious contra-identities currently so prominently present in the political discourse of the European far right? Why is Europe once again identified with Christianity despite its secular context, and why are Muslims or Islam first and foremost chosen to argue against and exclude from the nation or Europe as a whole, rather than other groups and individuals? I have condensed these questions into the following research question:

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[440]. Hart, Houwelingen, and Huijnk, Short Buiten kerk en moskee, 10-12. SCP's figures are based on international research: the European Values Study (EVS) and the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP). Fourteen European countries were studied, namely: The Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, Czech Republic, France, Denmark, United Kingdom, Hungary, Germany, Slovakia, Austria, Spain, Switzerland and Slovenia. All these countries show an upward trend in the development of the national share of agnostics and atheists between 1991-2018. Only the Czech Republic shows a different trend, but is still one of the most secular countries in Europe.

To what extent does secularism contribute to the intolerance of Muslims and why do religious contra-identities occupy such a prominent place in a secular context?

To answer this question, it is necessary to understand how West-European society has changed from a religious to a secular society, what is meant by the term 'secular' and 'secularisation' and what socio-economic changes have led to the present-day society. I will therefore describe three developments that are interrelated and have influenced each other, but which I will initially describe as three separate pillars so that the reader understands what these developments entail. The first pillar is the development from a religious to a secular society. The second pillar describes the development from a communitarian to an individualistic society and the third pillar analyses the shift from a local economy to a global economy. I describe these three pillars in the following three chapters. A good understanding of the content, impact and interrelatedness of these three developments helps to clarify:

1. Why far-right political parties and movements are gaining more supporters?
2. Why the far right is constructing a new identity based on religious notions?
3. Why Muslims are seen as 'the Other' (Islamophobia)?

And most importantly: a good understanding of these three developments and their interrelatedness is critical in answering the main research question of this part of the dissertation. In the last chapter, I explicate how the effects of secularisation, individualisation and globalisation (pillar 1,2 and 3) have created a breeding ground for the European far right and how this has led to the religious contra-identities as described in the second part of this dissertation. Moreover, I explain why Muslims in particular are vehemently targeted by European far-right actors. The common thread in this narrative is the relationship between religion and identity. I begin.

Chapter V:

The Secularisation of Christian Europe

Paragraph 1: Defining religion and secularity

What does it mean that Europe has changed from a religious to a secular society? This is not only the question of this paragraph, but also the central question of an often heated debate among scholars who discuss the so-called 'secularisation thesis', often associated with its (former) proponents: Steve Bruce, Peter Berger and David Martin.[441] The opacity of the term 'secular' or 'secularisation' can be explained from the fact that the secularisation thesis is a multifaceted theory; it includes multiple dimensions as it claims that different aspects of society have become secular. Charles Taylor argues that the confusion is due to the imprecision of scholars what facet of the secularisation theory they are exactly talking about.[442] He compares the secularisation thesis to a 'three-storey dwelling' with each level representing a different dimension of secularisation, whereas other scholars such as Van der Tol & Gorski speak of 'the secularisation family'.[443] The different dimensions that Taylor distinguishes are: firstly, the factual claims that religious beliefs, practices and the influence of religious institutions have declined, secondly the explanations for these changes and thirdly the discussion about the place of religion today. According to Taylor, what is at the centre is the proposition that modernity has led to a decline in what Taylor calls the 'transformation perspective' or God in our lives. Although this idea of decline is often traced back to sociologists of religion Max Weber and Émile Durkheim, Van der Tol & Gorski argue that this is exaggerated and that it in fact dates only from around the mid-twentieth century.[444]

Taylor is critical of the secularisation thesis. He clearly distinguishes between disenchantment and secularisation, arguing that disenchantment (which according to Taylor is driven by religion itself) does not inevitably lead to religion being pushed to the margins.[445] Moreover, Taylor's main argument is that modern changes such as urbanisation, industrialisation and migration do not make religion *as such* redundant, but that it negatively affects *previous forms* of religion.[446] This creates space for new forms of religion and spirituality within contemporary society. His

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441. Steve Bruce, *Secularization: in defence of an unfashionable theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Peter L. Berger, "A Sociological View of the Secularization of Theology," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 6, no. 1 (1967); David Martin, *A General Theory of Secularization* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978).

442. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 432.

443. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 431-32; Marietta van der Tol and Philip Gorski, "Secularisation as the fragmentation of the sacred and of sacred space," *Religion, State & Society* 50, no. 5 (2022): 496.

444. van der Tol and Gorski, "Secularisation as the fragmentation of the sacred and of sacred space," 496.

445. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 426.

446. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 436.

argument is based upon the axiom that every human being strives for fullness, and that this experience is not excluded from secularity:

> 'For one thing, the way I'm defining it, secularity is a condition in which our experience of and search for fullness occurs; and this is something we all share, believers and unbelievers alike.'[447]

Taylor also critiques the view of secularisation as a linear development. He rather describes the change through the usage of ideal types that have alternated through history. He elaborates on the following ideal types: the Age of l'Ancien Régime, the Age of Mobilization and the Age of Authenticity. In describing these ideal types, Taylor wants to show how European society has changed from a religious (Latin Christendom) to a secular society. But what then does he define as religious and secular? With regard to religion, Taylor follows the definition of Steve Bruce:

> 'Religion for us consists of actions, beliefs and institutions predicated upon the assumption of the existence of either supernatural entities with powers of agency, or impersonal powers or processes possessed of moral purpose, which have the capacity to set the conditions of, or to intervene in, human affairs.'[448]

In defining 'secular', Taylor draws on the etymology of the word, i.e. coming from the Latin word 'saeculum', which means: 'a century' or 'age'.[449] This leads Taylor to use a temporal framework to define 'secular'. He also argues that it is a counter concept: it opposes another state of being 'in time'. Therefore, Taylor defines secular as ordinary time as opposed to higher time:

> 'People who are in the saeculum, are embedded in ordinary time, they are living the life of ordinary time; as against those who have turned away from this in order to live closer to eternity. The word is thus used for ordinary as against higher time. A parallel distinction is temporal/spiritual. One is concerned with things in ordinary time, the other with the affairs of eternity.'[450]

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447. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 19.
448. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 429; Steve Bruce, *Religion and modernization: sociologists and historians debate the secularization thesis* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 10-11.
449. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 54.
450. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 55.

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'Secularity' or 'secularism' then is defined by Taylor on three different levels of understanding, which Taylor calls secularism 1,2 and 3. The first considers the public space of society and relates to how public spheres have been emptied from God and religion.[451] The separation of church and state plays an important role here; other scholars have called this level therefore the 'political'.[452] The second level of understanding considers 'the falling off of religious belief and practice, in people turning away from God, and no longer going to Church'.[453] This relates to the actual religiosity of citizens themselves and how religion (whether the teachings or way of life) shape their lives. This has also been called the 'sociological'. The third level of understanding considers what Taylor calls 'the conditions of belief' and focusses on the societal context or background factors that have changed within a secular society. It considers the shift of secularity which according to Taylor consists of a move away from a society where belief in God was taken for granted (it was unchallenged and unproblematic) to one where belief in God is one option among many others.[454] This level of secularity has also been called the 'existential'. This is the 'new' level that Taylor adds to the secularisation debate, which is the main focus of Taylor in his book 'A Secular Age'. This existential level is also what I will focus on in what follows, not only with regard to secularisation, but also the processes of individualisation and globalisation in the subsequent chapters. This understanding, of how these processes have affected the existential level within European societies, is necessary to explain why far-right movements are currently on the rise. I will now turn to shortly describing the change of the place of religion within Western societies, according to the three ideal types of Taylor. I will start with medieval Latin Christendom, or what Taylor calls: l'Ancien Régime.

Paragraph 2: The Age of l'Ancien Régime

To understand how modernity has changed the place of religion in Europe, it is important to first understand the role of religion in premodern society. According to Taylor, belief in God was an inescapable part of living one's life before modernity.[455] Religion encompassed the whole of society, without any distinction between spheres or spaces, which is indeed implicated within the modern notions of transcendence versus immanence or religious versus secular.[456] Belief in God was taken for granted and it formed a natural part of life. This self-evident place of

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451. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 2.
452. Arto Laitinen, "Book Review: A Secular Age," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 13, no. 3 (2010): 353.
453. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 2.
454. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 3.
455. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 43.
456. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 16.

Christianity could exist, due to premodern ideas about God, society and the world. Taylor describes three features of the premodern condition:

1. The natural world people lived in, which had its place in the cosmos they imagined, testified to divine purpose and action.
2. God was implicated in the very existence of society.
3. People lived in an enchanted world.[457]

In the following, I elaborate on these three features, which I refer to as: cosmos (1), enchanted world (3) and society (2). I start with cosmos.

Paragraph 2.1: Cosmos

In the premodern period, people perceived their world differently than we are used to nowadays, due to the Newtonian conception of a universe that is governed by rational and understandable laws.[458] This idea of an exceptionless, mechanic universe was however not the worldview in premodern society. Rather, people viewed their natural surroundings as a cosmos, a hierarchical order that was limited and bounded and which essentially reflected the human order on earth. It was filled with meaning and at the centre of this ordered whole was God.[459] Events such as droughts, thunder and misfortune were all considered to be deliberate acts of God, rather than inevitable consequences of natural processes. This view of the world as 'cosmos' was closely connected to the idea of eternity, as a reality or idea that people aspired to achieve not only after their demise, but also during their earthly lives. This earthly experience of eternity was done through what Taylor calls 'higher times' in opposition to 'secular time'.[460] Whereas secular time refers to ordinary time, higher time refers to moments in which people turn away from secular time in order to live closer to eternity. One should think of hermits, the ministry of a priest, the moment of consecration, rites-de-passage, the veneration of saints etc.

According to Taylor, these higher times re-order secular time and give it a dynamic, multiplex character. There are three kinds of higher times: firstly, Plato eternity, which relates to perfect immobility and impassivity that one aspires to by rising out of time. Secondly, God's eternity, which doesn't abolish time, but gathers it into an instant. Thirdly, 'a time of origins', which relates to a time past when the order of things was established (e.g. the creation of the world or the origins of a people).

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457. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 25.
458. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 98-99.
459. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 60.
460. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 55-57.

This time can be reapproached in contemporary time, which is often done through rituals. As such, secular time (horizontal dimension) was interspersed with higher times (vertical dimension), which in Taylor's view differs from the modern notion of secular time, which is conceived as a homogenous, empty container that needs to be filled.[461] Space and time in the premodern period were thus interconnected in a meaningful way in the idea of 'cosmos', which reflected the hierarchical order of medieval society.

What Taylor fails to mention, however, is that every human being had his or her meaningful place within this ordered cosmos. This place was considered to be unique, just as leaves on a tree are all different, although they are interconnected through the branches and ultimately the trunk of a tree, the nexus being God in premodern times. This would change with the Newtonian conception of the mechanic universe in which human beings came to be seen as insignificant parts of the whole, like easily replaceable gears in a clockwork.

Paragraph 2.2: Enchanted world

Taylor's notion of 'the enchanted world' or 'enchantment' is derived from the notion of 'disenchantment' by the sociologist Max Weber, who used this term to indicate the process in Western culture of technology and calculation replacing magic as a means to control or implore the spirits.[462] However, this is only one of many different interpretations of how Weber used the term 'disenchantment'. As Hans Joas has rightly pointed out, nowhere in his oeuvre does Max Weber clearly define what he meant by disenchantment, which has led to the ambiguity of the term and the subsequent entanglement with what Joas calls *'gefährliche Prozeßbegriffe'*, i.e. differentiation, rationalisation and modernisation.[463] According to Joas, these notions are dangerous as they are misleading to sociologists and others who seek to give their analysis of the present an historical foundation. Joas argues that 'disenchantment' is first and foremost aimed at *'Entmagisierung'* and is clearly not a simple theory of secularisation.[464] Therefore, to understand the notions of 'enchanted world' and 'enchantment' that dominated the premodern world, it is important to stress that 'disenchantment' is understood here in the

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461. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 58.
462. In his lecture 'Science as a Vocation', Max Weber describes disenchantment as follows: 'One need no longer have recourse to magic in order to control or implore the spirits, as did the savage for whom such powers existed. Technology and calculation achieve that, and this more than anything else means intellectualization as such.' Peter Lassman, Irving Velody, and Herminio Martins, *Max Weber's 'Science as a vocation'* (London Unwin Hyman, 1989), 13-14.
463. Joas, *Die Macht des Heiligen. Eine Alternative zur Geschichte von der Entzauberung*, 355-56.
464. Joas, *Die Macht des Heiligen. Eine Alternative zur Geschichte von der Entzauberung*, 360.

narrow interpretation of 'discarding a magical worldview' that both Joas and Taylor maintain, and not in a broad sense of a process of rationalization, modernisation or even secularisation that could possibly be interpreted from the definition I have given above. Taylor defines the process of disenchantment as:

> 'the disappearance of this world [red. the world of spirits, demons and moral forces which our predecessors acknowledged], and the substitution of what we live today: a world in which the only locus of thoughts, feelings, spiritual élan is what we call minds; the only minds in the cosmos are those of humans […]; and minds are bounded, so that these thoughts, feelings, etc., are situated "within" them.'[465]

When Taylor writes of the enchanted world, he refers to 'the world of spirits, demons and moral forces which our predecessors acknowledged'.[466] This description already betrays the hallmark of the enchanted world: meanings are not predominantly ascribed to the human mind, but rather found external: in things, natural forces or in extra-human or intra-cosmic subjects.[467] Meaning in the premodern world is thus often exogenously imposed or induced, rather than merely attributed to the human mind as is often the case in our secular society today. In the premodern period, people believed there were other forces at work, which allowed objects to influence human beings and other things in the world. This is what Taylor calls 'charged objects' that can exert inhuman forces.[468] This made people feel they were not fully in control of that which could potentially affect them. This led to feelings of vulnerability, fear and a sense of powerlessness that were lifted by appealing to the protection of God. This explains the 'naivety' or 'taken-for-grantedness' of the belief in God in the premodern period. Not believing, or rejecting God, meant that you were at the mercy of the forces of the cosmos all alone, which was quite a risky decision.

With modernity, however, the idea of 'the porous self' changed and was replaced by what Taylor calls 'a buffered self'.[469] According to Taylor this is a very defining change in the existential condition of human beings.[470] Meanings are now attributed to the human mind alone, which leads to a clear boundary between the human self and everything outside of it. This created a safe space where it is possible to disengage,

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465. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 29-30.
466. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 29.
467. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 33.
468. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 34-35.
469. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 37-38.
470. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 38.

to take a distance and reflect, resulting in a feeling of invulnerability and self-control.[471] With a mind-centred buffer that makes one feel invulnerable, it was no longer necessary to appeal for the protection from the realm of God. This turn in man's existential condition, will prove pivotal in the development of secularisation of Western society, and will give way to what Taylor calls 'a self-sufficing or exclusive humanism'.[472]

Paragraph 2.3: Society

Similarly to the premodern cosmos worldview, society had a hierarchical structure in which everything and everyone had their own defined place. This provided citizens with stability and a sense of identity. Due to the medieval theistic worldview, society was inextricably linked to God. Just as God constituted the centre of the cosmos, God also constituted the centre of medieval society. This was and still is visible in urban planning; the European landscape has traditionally been characterised by villages with the church at their midpoint. The locality of the church symbolised the centrality of the church within daily life; together with the ringing of church bells, it encompassed the whole spatial-temporal dimension of life.

Unlike today, people in the Middle Ages did not see themselves as detached, autonomous individuals. Rather, they were part of a community that defined their identity. Therefore, in an enchanted world where extraneous forces impacted one's own life and that of others in your surroundings, it was important that the entire community would appeal to the patronage of God, and not only the individual. If any member of the community failed to do so, it could mean the downfall of the entire community. This idea that 'all are in it together' explains according to Taylor the prevailing dualism between orthodoxy and heterodoxy and the main battlefield that was fought on this ground in medieval times, such as the persecutions of the Cathars in Southern France during the Albigensian Crusade in the 13th century and the witch hunts in medieval and early modern Europe.[473] The institution of the inquisition clearly shows how the contrast between sacred and profane appeared to be porous in praxis. Moreover, it shows how the spiritual and worldly affairs (or Church and State) were closely intertwined, with a proclaimed hegemony for the Church, which can be traced back to the doctrine of the two swords that was laid down in the papal bull *Unam Sanctam* in 1302 by pope Boniface VIII, who interpreted the doctrine of pope Gelasius I as the primacy of the pope to exert influence over

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[471].   Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 39.

[472].   Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 19.

[473].   Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 42-43.

both the spiritual as well as the temporal sphere.[474] Thus, God was implicated in every facet of life during the age of l'Ancien Régime. Or as Taylor puts it:

> 'The ancient régime model interwove church and state, presented us as living in a hierarchical order, which had divine endorsement. In societies on this model, the presence of God was unavoidable; authority itself was bound up with the divine, and various invocations of God were inseparable from public life.[475]

Within medieval society, there was a so-called 'equilibrium in tension' between two kinds of goals: on the one hand those who aimed for ordinary human flourishing and those who aimed for self-transcendence, a life beyond the ordinary human flourishing.[476] It created the difference between the lay people who aimed for human flourishing, such as marriage or honour in bravery and the clergy who strived for the highest vocations and aspirations, such as celibacy and hermitage. These two goals ordered life as a whole and functioned as complementary dimensions within society. This medieval societal structure created stability and identity, based on a social bonding rooted in the sacred.

However, it also implied that it was very hard, if someone wanted, to escape this order. Taylor argues that in order to keep the equilibrium between the ordinary and the higher vocations in balance, and in more general terms to preserve society as a whole, a so-called 'anti-structure' was created that allowed people to temporarily escape medieval societal structure. In medieval times this anti-structure was facilitated by festivities such as Carnival and the feasts of Misrule, where everything was turned upside down, but most importantly roles were reversed: fools were made king, and boys were made bishops etc.[477] Taylor goes further to argue that all structure needs an anti-structure; below I will argue that the contemporary European far right is also a form of anti-structure vis-à-vis the current societal structure of Western democracies. Taylor defines structure as 'the code of behaviour of a society, in which are defined the different roles and statuses, and their rights, duties, powers, vulnerabilities'.[478] Societies need reversal in order to keep them in balance, which closely relates to African enthroning rituals mentioned by Taylor in which the candidate is reviled and mistreated by his future subjects. This idea

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474. Smeets and Sterkens, "Religieuze voorgangers tussen Schrift en recht. Botsing van de godsdienstvrijheid en het gelijkheidsbeginsel in Nederland," 58.

475. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 446.

476. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 44.

477. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 45-46.

478. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 47.

of preserving social order through reversal relates to the mimetic theory and the scapegoat mechanism of René Girard who argues that when a society is at risk, a person is singled out as a scapegoat to whom the cause of the problems of the society is attributed. When the individual is violently removed, it simultaneously implies the removal of the problems of society and thus the social order returns.[479] The scapegoat theory of Girard and Taylor's idea of anti-structure relate to each other in the sense that both mechanisms ensure the preservation of societies and social order in particular. Nevertheless, they differ as Taylor's anti-structure *prevents* social unrest from happening by incorporating a reversal of the societal structure within society itself, whereas the scapegoat mechanism *restores* social order after social unrest has occurred and escalated.

The concept of anti-structure is important, because Taylor argues that its disappearance on the level of the whole society, the so-called 'eclipse of anti-structure', preceded and helped to bring about the secularisation of the public space.[480] According to Taylor, the need for anti-structure retreated to the private domain as it was no longer recognised in relation to the official, political-jural structure.[481] This implies that within modern society, anti-structure is found in holidays, social media, festivals, carnival, where people can in the words of Taylor 'drop out, throw of their coded roles, think and feel with their whole being and find various intense forms of community'.[482] But just because it is voluntarily, and not widely shared at the macro-level of society, Taylor argues it can lead to isolation and loss of meaning.

In alignment with Taylor's concept of anti-structure, I argue that it is due to this need for an anti-structure on a macro societal level, that people are currently trying to elevate anti-structures from private to public space and from a societal microlevel to a macrolevel. I contend that far-right movements are anti-structures in themselves, protesting against the democratically elected establishment, that provide their adherents with tangible models by which they can build political and cultural anti-structures within modern society. Although far-right activists and politicians accuse Muslim immigrants in Europe of living in a so-called 'Parallelkultur' or 'Parallelgesellschaft' and advocate integration, they themselves offer alternatives for contemporary society in new forms of state, politics and culture. Examples are the parallel society 'Forumland' of the Dutch far-right political

479.   René Girard, *La violence et le sacré* (Paris: Grasset, 1972).
480.   Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 50, 52.
481.   Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 50.
482.   Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 52.

party Forum for Democracy and the Reichsbürgerbewegung in Germany that pretends that the historical German 'Reich' (1871-1918) still exists, thus rejecting the Federal Republic of Germany with its legal system and democratically elected representatives.[483] These parallel societies include their own institutions, such as its own education system, currency, dating app and even passport.[484]

As such, the far right creates countercultures based on far-right ideologies, which include racist or white supremacist ideas combined with Christian cultural memory or secular values. In contrast to the temporary anti-structure of Carnival in former times, which even into the twentieth century encompassed the handing over of the administration (symbolised by a key) of the city to prince Carnival, a 'new' police service, the local burning of life-size puppets in party clothes at the last day of Carnival, the day after which the mayor was back in charge again and everyone had to be back in church in the morning to get an ash-cross and Lent would begin, far-right activists and politicians live in their illusion 365 days a year and aim to institutionalize their parallel society permanently. However, Taylor warns for the dangers of imposing an anti-structure without any (moral) limits or principles that contradict it, which he calls 'the spirit of totalitarianism'.[485] Taylor argues:

> 'All structures need to be limited, if not suspended. Yet, we can't do without structure altogether. We need to tack back and forth between codes and their limitation, seeking the better society, without ever falling into the illusion that we might leap out of this tension of opposites into pure anti-structure, which could reign alone, a purified non-code, forever.'[486]

In Chapter VII I will further elaborate on the far right and its relationship with anti-structure. Having described the role of religion within premodern society (God as midpoint, community, hierarchical order), I will now move on to discuss the second ideal type of Taylor, the so-called 'Age of Mobilization'. It is here where the change, that has been called secularisation, begins.

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483.   Verfassungsschutz, *Verfassungsschutzbericht 2022*, 104.
484.   "Wat drijft de Reichsbürger? 'Duitsland is bezet gebied, nog altijd!'," NOS, December 16, 2022, https://nos.nl/artikel/2456674-wat-drijft-de-reichsburger-duitsland-is-bezet-gebied-nog-altijd; Tobias den Hartog, "Baudet wil eigen samenleving 'Forumland', met eigen munt, datingapp en scholen," *Het Parool* June 4, 2021.
485.   Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 51.
486.   Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 54.

Paragraph 3: The Age of Mobilization

The Age of Mobilization runs roughly from 1800-1950 and is introduced by Taylor to describe a historical phase in which the role of religion within society has radically changed.[487] Taylor understands this phase as a period in which Christendom is no longer the unchangeable backdrop of legitimacy, as in the age of l'Ancien Régime. Rather, people are induced through the actions of governments, church hierarchies and/or other élites to adopt new structures or alter their social imaginaries. Mobilization then designates 'the process whereby people are persuaded, pushed, dragooned, or bullied into new forms of society, church, association.'[488] Thus, religion has become an option rather than the existential framework of society and as such, the Age of Mobilization represents an important step in the process of secularisation.

As it may appear differently, it is important to note that Taylor is eager to stress that the process of secularisation is certainly not a linear process and that the change from the age of l'Ancien Régime to the Age of Mobilization did not happen overnight. He describes at great length in his book *A Secular Age* how this change came about; although it is certainly not my aim to reiterate his narrative, I do find it important to highlight key aspects of religious transformation that paved the way for the Age of Mobilization.

First of all, Taylor argues that the Reformation played a major role in changing the place of religion within society. Due to its focus on the individual relationship with God, salvation and Gods mercy came to depend on the inner transformation of the individual rather than intermediated spaces of sacred power (e.g. saints or charged objects). These were regarded to be blasphemous; Gods power was no longer perceived to be omnipresent in an enchanted cosmos, but rather worked through the inner transformation of the individual human person. Consequently, emphasis was laid upon individual responsibility and judgement after death; rather than the medieval communal judgement at the end of time.[489] This new form of spirituality and theological framework thus not only set in motion the wheel of individualisation, but also the rationalisation of the world – i.e. disenchantment – and a different conception of the ordering of sacred and secular time.[490]

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[487]. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 471.
[488]. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 445.
[489]. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 67.
[490]. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 79-80.

Secondly, Taylor stresses that the Reformation was not an isolated event – it was the fruit of what Taylor calls 'the drive or spirit to Reform' that took place on a much larger scale in society. This drive to reform was rooted in a dissatisfaction with the predominant hierarchical equilibrium of medieval society, which created the drive to remake society to higher standards – leading to the Renaissance ideal of 'civility', which on its turn ultimately culminated in the secularised ideal of 'civilisation' in the modern period.[491] Thus, before the Reformation there was already a broad movement in society (which Taylor calls 'proto-reformations') that aimed for religious renewal; this was visible in a turn to a more inward and intense personal devotion (influenced by among others Meister Eckhart and Thomas à Kempis), a greater uneasiness with sacramentals and church controlled magic and the new idea of salvation by faith.[492]

Thirdly, the Reformation, through reordering secular time, led to the rise of (exclusive) humanism. Taylor argues that Reformation theology not only implied a new standard of personal morality, but also a re-ordering of society.[493] Protestants aimed to achieve order (which gave them confidence and control) in three different areas of life: a disciplined personal life, a well-ordered society and the right inner attitude. This idea led to the Renaissance worldview of humanism, by replacing God as the ultimate goal of order with pure human flourishing and by replacing God's acting power with mere human capacities.[494] As such, Reformation theology contributed to the rise of what Taylor calls *exclusive humanism* as a viable alternative to the enchanted cosmos shaped by Christianity.[495] This was a development of epoch-making significance as the age of l'Ancien Régime never knew an alternative to belief in God. The emergence of exclusive humanism therefore marked the beginning of what Taylor calls 'the nova effect': the steadily widening gamut of new positions -some believing, some unbelieving, some hard to classify – which have become available options for us.[496] Belief in God is no longer a given, but an option.

Alongside the development of religion becoming an option, religion is also changing shape in the Age of Mobilization. These two processes cannot be separated. Taylor argues that class conflict and a disruption of the old community forms (due to urbanisation and industrialisation) were at the root of a religious alienation of the people, leading many to choosing exclusive humanism as an

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[491]. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 63.
[492]. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 75-76.
[493]. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 82-83.
[494]. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 84.
[495]. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 63.
[496]. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 423.

alternative to Christianity. This prompted the Catholic church to respond; it started mobilising people into membership organisations, which led to new forms of collective action, created by participants themselves.[497] This proved to be successful, as it fuelled a need among the people in the cities who were searching for new forms of community as their ties to the old (village) connections had been disrupted by their new way of (city) life. It led to the new structure of what Taylor calls 'denominationalism', in which religion transforms from a sacred existential hierarchical framework to the pluralistic horizontal form of a denomination that exists alongside other denominations.[498] Taylor calls these 'free churches' that are instruments of mutual help whereby individuals are brought in contact with the Word of God and mutually strengthen each other in ordering their lives along Godly lines.[499]

Moreover, religion re-establishes itself on the level of society through the theological idea that God is no longer found in the sacred (as the world becomes disenchanted), but is however present through his 'design' of the world.[500] God is now perceived as the author of a design or plan that the society has to carry out, which, as such, connects Christian theology to political identity.[501] Taylor shows how denominational identity becomes linked to the state as denominations perceive themselves as belonging to a wider whole (that is however less structured than the Christian hierarchical cosmos in the age of l'Ancien Régime), which can find expression in the state.[502] Taylor calls this link between religion and the state *neo-Durkheimian*, which stands in between the paleo-Durkheimian mode of former 'baroque' Catholic societies and the post-Durkheimian mode in which the religious has become unhooked from the political.[503] A comprehension of this *neo-Durkheimian* form of religion is crucial in understanding the construction of religious contra-identities in the contemporary political rhetoric of the European far right. In its neo-Durkheimian form, God is present through His Design around which society is organised. Moreover, it is connected to civilisational order and superiority:

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[497]. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 445.
[498]. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 454.
[499]. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 453.
[500]. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 447.
[501]. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 453.
[502]. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 454.
[503]. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 455, 87.

> 'In this neo-Durkheimian form, religious belonging is central to political identity. But the religious dimension also figures in what we might call the "civilisational identity", the sense people have of the basic order by which they live, even imperfectly, as good, and (usually) as superior to the ways of life of outsiders, be they "barbarians", or "savages", or (in the more polite contemporary language) "less developed" peoples.[504]

Religion, political identity and civilisation come together in a social-political identity in which God forms the moral base of civilisational order and the basis of civilisational superiority (Christendom). Taylor argues that this sense of civilisational order and superiority provides security; when this is breached from outside or within, it triggers a reaction of great insecurity and often leads to the search for a scapegoat to restore the order within society.[505] In contrast to the premodern understanding of citizens being embedded in the hierarchical, mediated microcosmos of medieval society, the modern citizen social imaginary in the Age of Mobilization implied that people came together as equals in a political entity that was constructed. This construction required two things: mobilisation and a (re)definition of identity (understood as a reification of identity with regard to the membership of the new political entity). This led to what Taylor calls 'religiously-defined political identity-mobilisation' or the neo-Durkheimian effect: senses of belonging to group and confession are fused, and the moral issues of the group's history tend to be coded in religious categories.[506]

The parallels between Taylor's description of the relationship between religion and political identity in the Age of Mobilization and the way religious identity is currently used in the political rhetoric of the European far right are striking. Firstly, the neo-Durkheimian form of religion comes close to what I call *religious civilisationism*: a reification of identity on the basis of religion that stretches beyond the borders of the nation-state.[507] National identity is expressed in civilisationist terms and religion and God are understood as the basis of the civilisation to which nations belong ('The Christian Europe'). Secondly, this civilisation is considered to be superior to other forms of civilisation such as the Islamic, which finds expression in the exclusion of Muslims as part of Europe. Thirdly, the enemies from outside and within that threaten civilisational order are defined in the political rhetoric of the

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[504]. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 455.
[505]. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 456.
[506]. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 458-59.
[507]. See Chapter I, paragraph 5.

European far right: Muslims are the external 'Others' that threaten the civilisational order of Europe, as well as the leftist elite who is defined as the internal enemy that destroys the civilised West by 'collaborating' with the external enemy, i.e. Muslim immigrants. The trigger of great insecurity can be recognised in the overreaction of far-right individuals to criminal acts committed by immigrants and the failure of governments to implement policies and fight corruption, often resulting in the spread and adherence to conspiracy theories. Fourthly, the identity of 'The Christian Europe' is a *constructed* political entity and not a self-evident reality, which is obvious from the process of secularisation in North-Western Europe that clearly contradicts the idea of a continuation or return to a European Christendom. Fifthly, 'The Christian Europe' as a construction, rather than an ontological reality, makes it necessary to indeed mobilise its adherents and redefine their identity first and foremost as belonging to this political identity and only secondly as citizens of a particular European nation. This reification of identity is apparent in the social media posts of far-right individuals on TikTok.[508]

Based on the aforementioned commonalities, it seems that the European far right uses religious identity in a similar fashion to what Taylor calls the neo-Durkheimian form, in which group belonging and religion are intertwined. Taking into consideration that the far right emerged in the modern period (thus during what Taylor calls the Age of Mobilization) as a new political movement centred around a radical political ideology, it seems that religion now and again, at different times and geographical areas, has become attached to the political identity of the far right in a form that is characteristic of the Age of Mobilization, i.e. the neo-Durkheimian form. Religion then negatively relates to the state, as it is connected to a political identity that is in opposition to the established authorities, what in Taylor's terminology could be called a modern form of anti-structure.[509]

Returning to the narrative of secularisation, Taylor's account of the neo-Durkheimian form of religion shows how religion is able to adapt and accommodate to the spirit of the age. The changes in society during the 19th and 20th century, such as a more modern social imaginary and the mobilisation of independent voluntary organisations and political parties, led to the change of religion in its Ancient Régime form (paleo-Durkheimian) to religion in the neo-Durkheimian form, as described above. Thus, Taylor argues that modern religious life under 'secularisation' is one of destabilization and recomposition, leading to new forms of piety and

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508.   See Chapter II, paragraph 3.
509.   Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 470. Joas also writes of 'anti-structure', but prefers the term 'alternative structure'. Joas, *Die Macht des Heiligen. Eine Alternative zur Geschichte von der Entzauberung*, 450.

church life, rather than a decline of religion per se.[510] It is the religious form of l'Ancien Régime that suffers in particular, but simultaneously, new forms of religion emerge during the Age of Mobilization that fit the spirit of the age. According to Taylor, these new religious forms pertain to the people rather than the elite and combine four characteristics of the Age of Mobilization: spirituality, discipline, political identity and an image of civilisational order; characteristics that will also mark the religious civilisationism of the far-right landscape in the 21st century.[511]

Hans Joas also turns against the idea of secularisation as a linear process of development that ultimately leads to the demise of religion. He argues that even Max Weber, with his narrative of disenchantment, envisioned a future for religion as Weber argued that religion would change (not disappear!) under the circumstances of disenchantment.[512] Critiquing the ambiguity and the limitations of Webers narrative, Joas offers an alternative view on the relationship between what he calls 'the sacred' and power. As such, he does not speak of new forms of religion as Taylor does, but rather of ongoing 'processes of sacralization and desacralization'.[513] As such, Joas does not confine himself to religious forms, but extends the religious dimension into the broader category of 'the sacred'. He speaks for example of contemporary forms of secular sacredness.[514]

According to Joas, the notions of 'sacred', 'transcendent' and 'religious' are not synonymic.[515] 'The sacred' relates to a universal anthropological phenomenon that arises from the human experience of self-transcendence. 'Transcendent' indicates a separation between the divine and earthly realm, with a localization of the true in the realm of the divine. The notion 'religious' is according to Joas only meaningful in relation to its opposite term 'secular'. Based on these three different definitions, he distinguishes between three different processes that show an ongoing interaction or dynamic in human history:

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510. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 461.
511. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 472.
512. Joas, *Die Macht des Heiligen. Eine Alternative zur Geschichte von der Entzauberung*, 217. 'Es ist ja davon die Rede, wie Religion sich unter den Bedingungen »zunehmender Entzauberung der Welt« wandelt oder wandeln muß.'
513. Joas, *Die Macht des Heiligen. Eine Alternative zur Geschichte von der Entzauberung*, 254. 'Prozesse der Sakralisierung und Profanisierung (Entsakralisierung)'.
514. Joas, *Die Macht des Heiligen. Eine Alternative zur Geschichte von der Entzauberung*, 480.
515. Joas, *Die Macht des Heiligen. Eine Alternative zur Geschichte von der Entzauberung*, 253-54.

1. Processes of sacralization and profanization (or desacralization)
2. Processes of transcendentalization and immanentization
    (or detranscendentalization)
3. Processes of religious revitalization and secularisation.[516]

As this distinction clearly shows, these three processes cannot be conflated with a linear meta-process of disenchantment or secularisation. In what follows, I will focus on the first process of (de)sacralisation, as this process in particular proves to be highly relevant in the context of the European far-right landscape. Reckwitz argues that processes of (de)sacralisation are inherently connected to power. Indeed, a process of sacralisation or the sacred, as the experience of self-transcendence in contrast to everyday experiences, cannot exist in a power vacuum.[517] Joas writes of 'the power of the sacred' as a source of vital force that gives meaning to our lives:

> 'In den Erfahrungen, die ich zu benennen versuche, und in den Bildungen, die aus diesen Erfahrungen hervorgehen, liegen tiefe Quellen unserer Lebenskraft und unserer Bereitschaft, Wünsche und unmittelbare körperliche Bedürfnisse zu beherrschen und zurückzustellen. Das Opfer zumindest unserer Bequemlichkeit, vielleicht aber sogar großer Vorteile oder unserer ganzen Existenz, kann uns als durch und durch sinnvoll erscheinen. Wir können uns, so klein unsere Stellung im Universum ist, als bedeutungsvollen, in unserer Individualität einmaligen und zur Mitwirkung aufgerufenen Teil eines Ganzen empfinden, bei aller ständigen Gefährdung als berechtigt zum Vertrauen in eine uns tragende Ordnung.'[518]

This idea of 'the power of the sacred' is important with regard to understanding the process of secularisation. Joas argues that a multitude of people, collectives, objects and ideas can be sacralised: a leader and a country, the people and the nation, race or class, science or art, the church and the market.[519] What is sacralised, however, does not need to be perpetual; it can change. This also holds for the sacralisation of religious belief systems or institutions; a religious attachment can change to other dimensions of life that can be sacralised, such as political ideologies. This implies that secularisation need not be perceived as a homogenous linear process of the demise of religion; rather, it should be perceived as an interplay between

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[516] Joas, *Die Macht des Heiligen. Eine Alternative zur Geschichte von der Entzauberung*, 254.
[517] Joas, *Die Macht des Heiligen. Eine Alternative zur Geschichte von der Entzauberung*, 441.
[518] Joas, *Die Macht des Heiligen. Eine Alternative zur Geschichte von der Entzauberung*, 440.
[519] Joas, *Die Macht des Heiligen. Eine Alternative zur Geschichte von der Entzauberung*, 444.

processes of sacralisation and processes of power formation, in which new forms of sacralisation and idealisation may also emerge.[520] Joas formulates this as follows:

> 'Zu zeigen ist vielmehr, wie aus der Gesellschaftsgeschichte der Menschheit immer neue Sakralisierungen oder Revitalisierungen alter Sakralisierungen hervorgehen, was deren Wirkungen auf Prozesse der Machtbildung sind, wie die Entstehung von Transzendenzvorstellungen die Tendenzen zu kollektiver Selbstsakralisierung prinzipiell in Frage stellte, aber doch nicht verhindern konnte, daß auch Transzendenzvorstellungen selbst wieder Mittel kollektiver Selbstsakralisierung werden. Das Verhältnis von Sakralität und Macht, Religion und Politik bleibt damit ein Spannungsverhältnis, das immer neue konkrete Auflösungen hervorbringt, aber nie als solches verschwinden wird.'[521]

This leads to the intriguing question how processes of sacralisation have played a part in the far-right movements that emerged during the Age of Mobilization. Before answering this question, it is necessary to understand the different relationships between the sacred and power that Joas has distinguished: the collective self-sacralization of egalitarian tribal societies, the sacredness of rulership, the sacralization of the people or nation, and the sacredness of the person.[522] These forms are not exclusive nor do they necessarily succeed one another. Rather, Joas argues that there is a multiplicity of relationships between sacredness and power that can co-exist. The first form, *the collective self-sacralization*, refers to societies before the emergence of state structures in which the sacred is attributed to the collective. Rituals play an important role in the sense of belonging and everyday life is temporarily interrupted by so-called 'anti-structures' or 'alternative structures' in which ideal conditions are made tangible.[523] Those who participate in the ritual or 'the sacred world' gain more power; those who do not participate or those who are seen as outsiders are perceived to be less sacred or even unholy, a kind of 'shadow beings'.[524] The collective is thus a social form of sacredness that feels elevated as a whole.

The second form, *the sacredness of rulership*, emerged together with the historical birth of the state. The king, who rules everything, is sacralised by regarding him as a god or of divine origin (1), sent or chosen by the gods (2) or as a supreme or sole

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520. Joas, *Die Macht des Heiligen. Eine Alternative zur Geschichte von der Entzauberung*, 445.
521. Joas, *Die Macht des Heiligen. Eine Alternative zur Geschichte von der Entzauberung*, 445-46.
522. Joas, *Die Macht des Heiligen. Eine Alternative zur Geschichte von der Entzauberung*, 483-84.
523. Joas, *Die Macht des Heiligen. Eine Alternative zur Geschichte von der Entzauberung*, 450.
524. Joas, *Die Macht des Heiligen. Eine Alternative zur Geschichte von der Entzauberung*, 454.

priest (3).[525] Joas argues that in our secular age it has become difficult to ascribe divine attributes to a ruler, due to the transcendent idea that there is a boundary between heaven and earth that no ruler can tread. This boundary used to be much more diffuse or porous (see Taylor's description of the enchanted world), which made the sacralisation of the ruler or emperor much more prevalent, such as in the Roman Empire. However, Joas cites the example of the cult around Hitler and Stalin as 20th century examples of the sacredness of rulership.[526]

The third form, *the sacralization of the people or nation*, is inherent to the sacredness of rulership. Because the ruler represents a people (it is 'our' ruler), the sacredness of rulership includes a collective self-sacralisation that has repeatedly in history been used as an opposing force against the ruler.[527] Rule, according to Joas, is essentially always the controlling of counterforces. These counterforces can desacralise the sacredness of the ruler, but they can also lead to an alternative sacralisation of their own leader or the forces themselves, namely 'the people'. In the latter case, Joas writes of 'the sacralization of 'the people' or 'nation'. He argues that the sacralisation of a people is often based on ethnicity, but is not just limited to the people themselves. It goes beyond, which he describes as follows:

> 'Sie geht immer darüber hinaus und bezieht ein bestimmtes Territorium mit markanten landschaftlichen Qualitäten und historischen Erinnerungspunkten, eine Vergangenheit mit Siegen und Niederlagen, Helden und Märtyrern sowie Sitten, Werte oder Rechtsvorstellungen ein. Die Sakralisierung der Nation kann sich auf ein existierendes Staatsgebiet richten oder dessen Erweiterung anstreben, weil weitere Gebiete als von Natur aus zugehörig empfunden oder behauptet werden. Es kann um die Wiederherstellung »authentischer« Sitten und Institutionen gehen, die durch profanisierende, »verunreinigende« äußere Einflüsse oder durch eigene Achtlosigkeit verlorengegangen sind. Wo Staatlichkeit schwach entwickelt ist, kann sich die Sakralisierung der Nation auf das Volk ohne Staat richten und die Unabhängigkeit von vorhandenen staatlichen Ansprüchen oder die Gründung eines eigenen Staates als Ziel entwickeln.'[528]

[525.] Joas, *Die Macht des Heiligen. Eine Alternative zur Geschichte von der Entzauberung*, 462-63.

[526.] Joas, *Die Macht des Heiligen. Eine Alternative zur Geschichte von der Entzauberung*, 464.

[527.] Joas, *Die Macht des Heiligen. Eine Alternative zur Geschichte von der Entzauberung*, 473.

[528.] Joas, *Die Macht des Heiligen. Eine Alternative zur Geschichte von der Entzauberung*, 467-77.

Joas argues that the collective self-sacralisation of a people can lead to a renewed revival of the sacredness of politics. He gives the example of Italian cities in the Late Middle Ages where a republican tradition emerged. Rather than perceiving this as a desacralising tendency of the monarch, Joas writes of a new collective sacredness in Christian Europe that drew on the fusion of sacrality and power of Greco-Roman antiquity.[529] Moreover, the sacralisation of the people includes an entanglement between a (moral) universalism and particularism.[530] It is accompanied by the motive of a specific historical mission. This often leads to a belief in itself as 'the chosen people', which not only has a moralising and disciplining effect inwardly, but also a justifying and motivating effect for expansion outwardly. Lastly, Joas argues that the sacralisation of a people or nation does not necessarily need to take religious forms – forms of secular sacredness can also emerge.[531] He gives the example of France that shows a continuity in its history of perceiving itself as the oldest daughter of the Church and the secular-revolutionary idea of perceiving itself as the nation of human rights.

The fourth form, *the sacralization of the person*, implies the sacralisation of every human being, regardless of (non-)religiosity or deeds. It describes the process that led to the institutionalisation of human rights and the idea of universal human dignity.[532] Joas argues that this process demands a desacralisation of the state, ruler, nation or community and therefore contends that it is no coincidence that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was drafted in 1948, after ending the historical phase in which the sacredness of rulership and the nation dominated through the ideologies of fascism and national-socialism. These four forms of the relationship between sacredness and power illustrate Joas' theory of perceiving history through the lens of the different constellations of processes of sacralisation and power formation. Rather than perceiving history as a linear and teleological development of secularisation, we should consider human history as one consisting of wave motions, in which action and reaction succeed one another as do processes of sacralisation and desacralisation. Religion and sacredness can both act as forces and counterforces in this process. Joas describes this as follows:

'Eine Theorie, die demgegenüber die Vielfalt der Konstellationen von Macht und Sakralität hervorhebt, erwartet eine Vielfalt von Formen, da die Macht der einen die Gegenkräfte der anderen mobilisiert, und das oft in ganz unerwarteten

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529. Joas, *Die Macht des Heiligen. Eine Alternative zur Geschichte von der Entzauberung*, 477.
530. Joas, *Die Macht des Heiligen. Eine Alternative zur Geschichte von der Entzauberung*, 478.
531. Joas, *Die Macht des Heiligen. Eine Alternative zur Geschichte von der Entzauberung*, 480.
532. Joas, *Die Macht des Heiligen. Eine Alternative zur Geschichte von der Entzauberung*, 481-82.

Richtungen. So können aus allen achsenzeitlichen Traditionen Formen des religiösen Fundamentalismus oder des Nationalismus hervorgehen, aber auch Formen des Widerstands gegen diese. Diese Religionen können sowohl Hindernis wie Treibmittel kollektiver Selbstsakralisierung sein. Das soll nicht heißen, daß alle Formen der Macht jederzeit möglich sind, wohl aber, daß alle religiösen und säkularen Traditionen ein beträchtliches Maß an Flexibilität in sich haben, was ihre Anpassung an Machtverhältnisse betrifft. Es gilt, der »Hegelschen Versuchung« teleologischer Geschichtsdeutung zu entgehen, ohne dabei zu vergessen, daß die Menschheit eine einzige Geschichte hat.'[533]

Having described the different forms of the relationship between the sacred and power, let us now return to the question how processes of sacralisation have played a part in the ideologies of far-right movements. I argue that these ideologies contain elements of different forms of sacralisation as described by Joas. First of all, far-right ideologies are often characterised by a collective self-sacralisation though the elevation of the ingroup as a whole; those who participate have more power through their participation in the defined sacred world (defined for example as 'Das Dritte Reich', 'The Christian Europe', 'the Aryan race'). They are contrasted with outsiders who are perceived to be less sacred or even unholy; this can be easily recognised in the portrayal and handling of the traditional and more recent enemies of the far right: Jews, Roma, Muslims and the LGTBQ+ community. Secondly, populist far-right movements are often characterised by a sacredness of rulership in the sacralisation of their leader. Opposing liberal and pluralistic democracy, far-right movements present themselves as an anti-structure that sacralises not only the people as a whole, but often the leader of the oppositional force as well.[534] The leader is elevated, not only above the corrupt leftist elite of the status quo, but also above the people it represents. Simultaneously, the leader is seen as 'a people's man', which leads to his paradoxical status of a 'primus inter pares'. This elevation or sacralisation of the leader is facilitated by the authoritarian and charismatic characteristics that a far-right leader typically has.[535] Thirdly, far-right ideologies are most frequently characterised by the sacralisation of the people or nation, due to the feature of nationalism (or civilisationism) that is almost always present. The elevated status of the ingroup (the people or nation) is often based on ethnicity or race, which excludes 'Others' (Jews, Muslims, Roma etc.) who do not belong. They are seen as contaminating influences on the nation and the carelessness of the elite is seen as the cause of the downfall of the nation-state. Moreover, the collective

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[533]. Joas, *Die Macht des Heiligen. Eine Alternative zur Geschichte von der Entzauberung*, 485.
[534]. Minkenberg, "The Renewal of the Radical Right: Between Modernity and Anti-modernity," 174.
[535]. Mudde, *The far right today*, 72.

self-sacralisation that is inherent to the sacralisation of the nation is present in the focus of far-right political parties and movements on a glorious past that needs to be restored. This retrospection is often accompanied by a desire to restore an original territory or realm, which can transcend the borders of the contemporary nation-state, such as the idea of 'a Christian Europe'. Interestingly, where Christian Europe in the Late Middle Ages recalled the fusion of sacrality and power of Greco-Roman antiquity, nowadays European far-right political parties and movements recall the fusion of sacrality and power of 'The Christian Europe'. This seems to be a recurring motif.

However, as Joas has argued, the sacred does not necessarily need to be religious. This can be observed in the political rhetoric of both the European far right in the twentieth century that often considered itself to be neo-pagan or used anti-clerical language (such as the Austrian FPÖ) and the contemporary far right that uses religious references to a 'Judeo-Christian heritage' or 'Christian culture', but do not link it to Christian doctrine, ethics and institutions.[536] As such, the far-right landscape seems to hold both processes of sacralisation and profanisation in which the religious can be desacralised and the secular sacralised. This substantiates Joas' view of the history of religion as a dynamic of processes of (de)sacralisation that are multiform and that co-exist, and therefore cannot be limited to a homogenous world-historical process as Max Weber understood the process of disenchantment to be.[537]

Paragraph 4: The Age of Authenticity

In the second half of the twentieth century, a cultural revolution takes place that will destabilize the hitherto dominant (neo-Durkheimian) religious forms of the Age of Mobilization. This cultural revolution, with the 1960s as its pivotal point, gives birth to what Taylor calls an 'expressive individualism', which leads to the separation of religion or 'the sacred' with political identity or allegiance.[538] The time period in which this change comes about is what Taylor calls 'The Age of Authenticity' as the third ideal type within his theory of secularisation. Before turning to the consequences of this change for the place of religion in North-West European societies, I first describe the nature of this individualising development that emerged after World War II.

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[536].   Cremer, *The Godless Crusade. Religion, Populism and Right-Wing Identity Politics in the West*, 255.
[537].   Joas, *Die Macht des Heiligen. Eine Alternative zur Geschichte von der Entzauberung*, 223.
[538].   Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 473, 87.

Paragraph 4.1: A cultural change of individualism

During the time of post-war reconstruction in the 1940s and 1950s, prosperity increased. Middle-class people were increasingly able to afford things that only the rich in former times could buy. As a result, many people were no longer dependent on direct interpersonal relationships and they gradually came to focus on private space, usually the nuclear family.[539] In addition, global mobility increased with the invention, optimalisation and wide distribution of new means of technological communication, such as radio and television, which meant that people were no longer tied to a stationary location. This 'consumer revolution' as Taylor calls it, led to a newly individuated space in which consumers are encouraged to express themselves, e.g. with clothing, goods, music etc.; something only the rich were able to spend time on in previous centuries. Taylor describes this development as a new form of expressive individualism that unlike the Expressivism in the Romantic period, has now become a mass phenomenon.[540] He calls it the 'ethic' or 'culture of authenticity', which he defines as 'the understanding of life which emerges with the Romantic expressivism of the late-eighteenth century, that each one of us has his/her own way of realizing our humanity, and that it is important to find and live out one's own, as against surrendering to conformity with a model imposed on us from outside, by society, or the previous generation, or religious or political authority.[541] Taylor writes of 'an ethic' or 'a morality' as the ethic of authenticity is an attitude that finds its origin in the notion that human beings are endowed with a moral sense or intuitive feeling for what is right and wrong and that this is not the outcome of a rational calculation, but rather anchored in our feelings.[542] Morality comes from within, rather than being imposed through connecting to an external moral framework (such as religious or political doctrine). This ethic is therefore often accompanied by statements such as: 'find or listen to the voice within, do your own thing and be true to yourself'.

The ideal of authenticity developed together with the ideal of self-determining freedom: the idea that I am free when I decide for myself what concerns me, rather than being shaped by external influences.[543] According to Taylor, these two ideals have often been confused with each other, despite the fact that they are inherently different. The ethic of authenticity inevitably leads to what Taylor calls 'a soft relativism': 'let each person do their own thing, and we shouldn't criticise each

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[539]. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 474.
[540]. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 473.
[541]. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 475.
[542]. Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 26.
[543]. Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 27.

other's values'.[544] The limits on what Taylor calls the 'pursuit of (individual) happiness' have been clearly set aside, except for the harm principle and the one thing that is not tolerated: intolerance.[545] In the 1960s, this ethic gained widespread support in society, especially among youngsters, who revolted against the conformist society of the 1950s that Taylor describes as follows:

> '…a system which smothered creativity, individuality and imagination. They rebelled against a 'mechanical' system in the name of more 'organic' ties; against the instrumental, and for the lives devoted to things of intrinsic value; against privilege, and for equality; and against the repression of the body by reason, and for the fullness of sensuality.'[546]

From this description, it is not surprising that the cultural revolution was mainly fought over sexual mores.[547] This is also the area where the collision with religious traditions was felt hardest; the ethic of authenticity with regard to sexuality collided (and still does) with the often strict ethical code of sexual conduct of religious institutions. This is also what explains the contemporary harsh criticism and anger surrounding the disclosed sexual abuse within the Roman Catholic Church during the post-war era: the church has always been committed to maintaining a strict code of sexual conduct despite the call for change during the cultural revolution of the sixties and seventies, whereas it now turns out that many authoritative persons within this institution failed to adhere to it themselves.

Paragraph 4.2: Religion

Moving on to religion, how has the ethic of authenticity affected the place of religion in North-Western European societies? Most importantly, the idea that one has to find his or her own path by listening to the voice within, has eroded the idea that one has to conform to an external religious framework. In the Age of l'Ancien Régime, religion was no choice; society and religion were co-extensive and you were born into the overarching matrix of Christendom. In the Age of Mobilization, however, religion did become a choice; one could choose a denomination and together with the choice for a particular church, came your political allegiance. But in the Age of Authenticity, even the framework of a denomination or church is seen as potentially limiting your personal spiritual development when it does

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544. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 484.
545. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 484.
546. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 476.
547. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 485.

not 'feel' right or when there is not a full match with who you perceive yourself to be as a person. Influenced by the culture of consumerism, religion is now seen more as a product that has to fit a human character and if it does not, it is religion that has to adapt rather than the other way around. This has led to the widespread phenomenon of religious eclecticism or what I call 'shopping for religion': essentially fabricating your own religion by adopting theological ideas and/or religious practices from different religious traditions that one sees fit. According to Taylor, it becomes more difficult to maintain a broader framework, whether religion or the state, when a self-centred focus prevails.

Within the Age of Authenticity, the link to the sacred no longer requires embedding in a broader religious or political framework. Religion or the sacred is no longer directly linked to society or political allegiance, which is why Taylor calls this form of religion 'post-Durkheimian'.[548] The catalyst for this change has been the individual consumer culture that arose from the increase in prosperity after WWII. Taylor argues that the expressivist revolution of the 1960s then accelerated the shift of the place of religion in public space. The ethic of authenticity destabilised the religious-political forms of the Age of Mobilization. Moreover, it undermined the link between Christian faith and civilisational order that predominated in former times.[549] This is due to the new form of spirituality that arose with the ethic of authenticity that has an unlimited pluralism built into it, which is only restricted by the harm principle.[550] Furthermore, it is built on a self-centredness, a form of radical anthropocentrism, that has led religion to become detached from society and politics.[551] As such, the shift from 'orthodoxy' towards 'feeling' has led to the erosion of many religious communities.

In response to this new religious paradigm, Taylor argues that there are attempts of religious groups and institutions such as 'The Christian Right' in the U.S. and the Catholic Church that try to return to the neo-Durkheimian form of religion, in which the idea is prevalent that Christian faith and civilisational order are connected.[552] I argue that far-right movements are currently moving in the same direction; they turn against the relativism and unlimited pluralism that has been celebrated in the 1960s and go back to the neo-Durkheimian form of religion. An example is how Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn railed against the cultural relativism of his contemporaries (the generation of 'the baby boomers') and the idea of

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548.   Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 487.
549.   Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 492.
550.   Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 489.
551.   Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 58.
552.   Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 488.

multiculturalism as forms of unlimited pluralism that would destroy Dutch society and identity. He deliberately attaches the religious identity of 'the Judeo-Christian humanist culture' to Dutch society and more broadly 'the West'. As such, he re-establishes the link between civilisational order and religion.

In the same way, current movements such as PEGIDA and far-right political parties such as the Dutch 'Partij voor de Vrijheid' (Party for Freedom) and the Hungarian Fidesz party, have connected Christian values to European civilisation in the political rhetoric of 'a Christian Europe' that is opposed to Muslim immigrants. However, the difference with the Age of Mobilization is that the contemporary far right is not so much linking Christian *faith* to civilisational order, rather than a Christian *identity* that is reinstated, in the form of 'culture' or 'heritage'. Generally, this is an emptied form of Christian identity in which Christian theology, ethics and its institutions are ignored or even dismissed.[553] This is why the former leader of the 'Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij' ('SGP', a conservative Christian political party in the Netherlands) Kees van der Staaij made the following statement about the so-called 'cultural Christianity' of far-right political parties: 'cultural Christianity is like a bunch of flowers: beautiful looking, but without roots and quickly withering'.[554] Thus, it is a new appearance of the neo-Durkheimian form of religion within the European far-right political landscape. This, of course, begs the question why religious *identity* rather than religious *belief* is reinstated by the European far right; I will return to this in a moment.

The post-Durkheimian ideal type has characterised the place of religion in our contemporary society. As demonstrated above, it has led to a breakdown of the neo-Durkheimian forms of religion to which many different religious institutions and political movements (including the European far right) have reacted in the following decades. The breakdown involved three changes: firstly, an undermining of churches with a strong national or minority identity. Secondly, the estrangement from much of the ethics and authoritarian style of these churches, and thirdly, the decay of religion as the mainstay of civilisation morality, especially with regard to sexual ethics.[555] But simultaneously, new forms of the sacred emerged. In response to the moralism of institutionalized religion in the 1950s, which was often experienced as oppressive, a new form of spirituality developed that was driven by emotion rather than reason and characterised by 'unity, integrity, holism

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[553]. See also: Cremer, *The Godless Crusade. Religion, Populism and Right-Wing Identity Politics in the West*.
[554]. Reformatorisch Dagblad, "Van der Staaij (SGP) en Baudet (FvD) in debat over de problemen van Nederland | Complete debat," Youtube, 14 December 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GpnpTm6SYG4.
[555]. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 505.

and individuality'.[556] Influenced by the ethic of authenticity, it emphasised seeking one's own spiritual path, leading to what Taylor calls 'bricolage' or what I have called 'religion shopping'. This new form of religion resonated with young people in particular who, due to their tendency to rebel against the religion of their parents, explicitly called this new form of the sacred 'spirituality' rather than 'religion'. As such, spirituality and religion became two poles of the sacred, with spirituality being associated with 'autonomous exploration' and religion with 'surrendering to an authority'.[557]

This explains why many people in West-European societies experienced difficulty with the religion of Islam that came with the immigrants from the MENA-region in the 1960's and 1970's. The ethic or culture of authenticity and its coexisting form of individual spirituality collided with their perception of Islam as an institutionalized religion that asked its adherents (Islam literally means 'submission' in Arabic) to surrender themselves. Islam, with its commandments to pray five times a day, adhere to strict sexual ethics and dress a certain way (e.g. headscarf), reminded many of the religious straitjacket they had just liberated themselves from. Moreover, the new individual-focused spirituality became increasingly detached from community or group belonging, whether religious or political. There was an increasing prevalence of what Grace Davie has termed: 'believing without belonging'.[558] Islam however, represented the neo-Durkheimian form of religion, which is at odds with the post-Durkheimian form of religion that was increasingly present in West-European societies. Thus, one could argue that the perceived difficulties with integrating Islam in North-Western Europe are partly due to a friction between the neo-Durkheimian form of Islam that became more visible with the guest workers in the second half of the twentieth century and the culture of authenticity that predominated West-European societies.

How does the post-Durkheimian form of religion as described above relate to far-right political parties and movements? I have already explained that the far right harks back to the neo-Durkheimian form of religion, in which Christianity and civilisational order are connected, only with the difference of focusing primarily on religious *identity* rather than religious *belief*. Describing it as a development in the terminology of Davie, it can be explained as a transition from the coincidence of 'believing and belonging' during the Age of Mobilization, to 'believing without belonging' during the Age of Authenticity, to a 'belonging without believing'

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556.   Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 507.
557.   Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 509.
558.   Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging*.

among European far-right political parties and movements.[559] This de-theologized religious form, often described as the 'culturalisation' or 'heritagization of religion' has been made possible by the cultural revolution of the 1960's that loosened the link between national identity, a certain ecclesiastical tradition, strong common beliefs and a sense of civilisational order.[560] According to Taylor, this has significantly weakened the hold of theology.

In addition, Christendom, as a civilisation where society and culture are profoundly informed by Christian faith, did not disappear but retreated to the background of European societies as a historical-cultural identity. Taylor argues that Christianity, in its neo-Durkheimian form, is still present at the margins of contemporary life, for which he uses different descriptions such as: 'Christian nominalism', 'diffusive Christianity', or 'vicarious religion'.[561] The neo-Durkheimian form of religion has thus not disappeared, but has changed and retreated to a certain distance, from which it can be recalled. Taylor describes this as a transformation from a 'hot' to a 'cold' form of religion: the 'hot' form demands a strong, participating identity and/or an acute sense of Christianity as the bulwark of moral order. [562] The 'cold' form allows a certain ambivalence about the historical identity, as well as a certain degree of dissidence from the Church's official morality. In its cold form, Christianity remains powerful in memory.

As such, I argue that Christianity has become part of what Jan Assmann has called the 'cultural memory' of a people. Cultural memory is the degree to which the individual memory is not only socially, but also culturally determined.[563] It refers to the memories of past events or experiences of a particular group that are deemed important to pass on to the next generation and which are therefore stored in fixed objects, such as books, monuments, rituals, feasts etc. Assmann defines cultural memory as follows:

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[559]. See also Cremer's definition of 'belongers without belief': individuals who may identify with the cultural heritage of a particular faith, its symbols, language and derived rules in society (belonging), but do so without identifying with its values, beliefs and institutions (believing). Cremer, *The Godless Crusade. Religion, Populism and Right-Wing Identity Politics in the West*, 35.

[560]. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 514; B. Meyer, "Recycling the Christian Past. The Heritagization of Christianity and National Identity in the Netherlands," in *Culture, Citizenship and Human Rights, 64. Routledge* (2019); Markus Balkenhol and Ernst Van den Hemel, "Zwarte Pieten, moskeebezoek en zoenende mannen. Katholiek activisme van Cultuur onder Vuur en de culturalisering van religie," *Religie & Samenleving* 14, no. 1 (2019).

[561]. Taylor borrows the terminology from other scholars such as Grace Davie. See Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 520-22.

[562]. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 522.

[563]. Assmann and Livingstone, *Religion and cultural memory: ten studies*, 8.

> 'It is a projection on the part of the collective that wishes to remember and of the individual who remembers *in order to belong.* Both the collective and the individual turn to the archive of cultural traditions, the arsenal of symbolic forms, the "imaginary" of myths and images, of the "great stories", sagas and legends, scenes and constellations that live *or can be reactivated* in the treasure stores of a people'.[564]

Two key elements in this quote need to be addressed: firstly, Assmann argues that cultural memory has an important function in belonging or political identity. Memory of the past, regardless if it is factual history or not ('myth'), creates the basis of the identity of the remembering group. Secondly, cultural memory need not be actively shared, but may exist as a kind of archive that can be reactivated. An important incentive to revive cultural memory is power. According to Assmann, power requires origin, which automatically leads to the remembrance and need for preservation of the past. Rulers, whether religious or political, therefore turn to the past and establish genealogies, lists of kings etc. This is what Assmann calls the 'retrospective side' of the alliance between power and memory.[565] Simultaneously, power can also lead to the intentional forgetting of past events or experiences. Communication and or technology might then be used to resist the memory of past events.[566]

In a similar fashion to how Assmann describes the power of memory, Taylor argues that the neo-Durkheimian 'cold' form of religion can be recalled and ignited into its 'hot' form to give colour to a political identity; this can range from a deeply felt religious allegiance to the sheer manipulation of a religious marker in order to mobilise people.[567] A good example is the coronation of Charles III in Westminster Abbey on the 6th of May 2023. The ceremony, in which Charles was not only crowned head of state but also head of the Church of England, was full of traditions and historical artefacts that recalled the history of the British Empire. This also included a religious ceremony with rituals such as the anointing with holy oil from Jerusalem, which was widely celebrated by Britons as part of their shared national identity, despite the fact that less than half of the Britons identified as Christian.[568]

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[564]. Assmann and Livingstone, *Religion and cultural memory: ten studies*, 7-8.

[565]. Jan Assmann, *Cultural memory and early civilization: writing, remembrance, and political imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 54.

[566]. Assmann, *Cultural memory and early civilization: writing, remembrance, and political imagination*, 55.

[567]. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 515; Marzouki, McDonnell, and Roy, *Saving the People: How Populists Hijack Religion*.

[568]. "Religion, England and Wales: Census 2021," Office for National Statistics, 29 November 2022, https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion/bulletins/ religionenglandandwales/census2021#religion-in-england-and-wales.

However, the cultural or 'cold' memory of Christianity is not only evoked when a momentous national (political) event takes place, but is also used in identity politics and by the European far right who use the religious marker against the status quo. I argue that the latent or 'cold' presence of Christendom in European societies in the form of cultural memory allows far-right political parties and movements to revert to Christianity as a religious identity marker. Moreover, they can more easily ignore the theological and dogmatic content of Christianity due to the weakened position of theology following the cultural revolution of the 1960's. As a consequence, the European far right tends to remember the way in which Christianity influenced European societies and culture (phrased as 'cultural Christianity' or 'The Christian Europe'), but 'forgets' the theological ethics and theological content as this often contradicts their own ideological framework, e.g. with regard to sexual ethics, their stance on immigration etc. In reconstructing this Christian identity from the past, the European far right aims to build a political identity that serves as a counterweight to Islam. This illustrates the theory of Assmann how power can be a motivating force to revive a religious past into the political rhetoric of secular political parties and movements.

To summarise this section, I have attempted to provide a brief overview of the development from a religious to a secular society that took place in most of North-Western European societies in the 20th century. It began by defining the multi-layered concepts of religion and secularity and was followed by a description of the transformation of the place of religion within European societies, according to the three ideal types of Taylor: the Age of l'Ancien Régime, the Age of Mobilization and the Age of Authenticity. Along the way, I have tried to clarify how Islam and the European far right relate to this development. Most importantly, I hope to have demonstrated two things: firstly, that the development of secularisation did not imply the demise of religion; rather, it meant the degeneration of older religious forms and simultaneously led to the creation of new forms of religion or the sacred, of which the religious identity as used by the European far right is also a manifestation. Secondly, that the process of secularisation has culminated in a culture of authenticity that has led to a greater form of self-centredness that not only affected the whole of European societies, but also individualised contemporary forms of religion. In the next section, I describe the development of individualisation that has taken place on a larger scale in European societies and how this has effected the rise of the European far right in recent decades.

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Chapter VI:

The Individualisation of European Societies

Paragraph 1: Defining individualisation and individualism

The terms individualisation and individualism are frequently used in recent academic literature and research reports analysing developments in contemporary society, whether cross-national (such as the reports of the European Values Study) or regarding particular nation-states (such as the Netherlands Institute for Social Research). Here within, the term individualisation is often mentioned in combination with processes of globalisation, secularisation and emancipation to explain certain outcomes (such as a loss of social cohesion or solidarity). One might expect based on its usage in these reports that the terms individualisation and individualism are clearly defined. However, this definition is often lacking or used ambiguously. If one delves into the academic literature on the subject of individualisation, it appears that there is great debate about the meaning of the term. Many books and articles mention that the term is too broad and ambiguous and observe that there is no consensus and that a clear definition is hard to find.[569]

This is also evident from a review of the literature; the meaning of the term is fluid, definitions are diffuse and its operationalisation in empirical research is rather arbitrary without structural parameters. In addition, the academic literature seems outdated. There is only a limited amount of recent academic literature of which much refers back to an academic debate on individualisation following the turn of the century (2000's), which includes sociologists Zygmunt Bauman and Ulrich Beck and political scientist Robert Putnam.[570] References go even further back in time by mentioning the classical sociologists from the 19th century who have occupied themselves with the subject of individualisation in relation to modernisation, such as Émile Durkheim, Max Weber and Georg Simmel.[571] This is striking, considering how widespread the term is used in contemporary academic literature, research reports and the public debate. A clear definition is significant, especially when thorough investigation shows that the meaning of the terms individualisation and

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[569.] Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten: zum Strukturwandel der Moderne*, 56-57; Paul de Beer and Ferry Koster, *Sticking Together or Falling Apart? Solidarity in an Era of Individualization and Globalization* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), 54; Jan Willem Duyvendak, "De individualisering van de samenleving en de toekomst van de sociologie," *Sociologie* 51, no. 4 (2004): 495.

[570.] Zygmunt Bauman, *The Individualized Society* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001); Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and its Social and Political Consequences* (London: SAGE, 2002); Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001).

[571.] Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten: zum Strukturwandel der Moderne*, 57; Beer and Koster, *Sticking Together or Falling Apart? Solidarity in an Era of Individualization and Globalization*, 54.

individualism differ substantially from each other. Therefore, I deem it important to first demarcate my understanding of these terms and what they describe, before turning to the history of individualisation in Europe and its effect on the formation of the European far right.

Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim define individualisation as 'institutionalised individualism'.[572] This implies that central institutions of modern society are geared to the individual and not to the group. According to them, individualisation destroys the given foundations of social coexistence; as such, they define it as 'disembedding without reembedding'.[573] Pierre Bréchon defines individualisation as 'a process of growing valorisation of individual liberties at the same time as the weakening of traditional constraints'.[574] Moreover, they distinguish individualisation from individualism; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim argue that individualisation as 'institutionalised individualism' should be kept clearly distinct from the neoliberal idea of the free-market individual, which entails an image of the 'autarkic human self' or the 'self-sufficient individual' who is not tied to others.[575] Pierre Bréchon, who carried out the European Values Survey in France, argues that data from this survey show that individualisation and individualism are not of the same nature.[576] Individualism entails the satisfaction of personal or private interests: 'people think first of themselves, of their own welfare and personal development'.[577] Bréchon argues, following Loek Halman, that there are two different types of individualism: *a utilitarian individualism* centred on the search for personal interest and *a qualitative or expressive individualism* through which the individual seeks personal fulfilment.[578] De Beer and Koster explain the distinction between individualism and individualisation as follows: whereas individualism is understood as a personal attitude or preference, individualisation refers to a macro-social phenomenon, which may reflect changes in the attitudes of individual persons.[579] Based on a review of the literature (including Beck and Bauman), they argue that

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[572]. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and its Social and Political Consequences*, xxi.

[573]. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and its Social and Political Consequences*, xxi.

[574]. Pierre Bréchon, "Individualization and Individualism in European Societies," ed. Pierre Bréchon and Frédéric Gonthier, *European Values: Trends and Divides over Thirty Years* (Leiden: Brill, 2017). 233.

[575]. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and its Social and Political Consequences*, xxi.

[576]. Bréchon, "Individualization and Individualism in European Societies," 232.

[577]. Bréchon, "Individualization and Individualism in European Societies," 232.

[578]. Bréchon, "Individualization and Individualism in European Societies," 233.

[579]. Beer and Koster, *Sticking Together or Falling Apart? Solidarity in an Era of Individualization and Globalization*, 54-55.

individualisation has three characteristics: detraditionalization, emancipation and heterogenization.[580] *Detraditionalization* entails the gradual loss of adherence of individuals to traditional institutions. Beck argues that the development of the welfare state in the era after the Second World War, led to 'an individualization of unprecedented scale and dynamism':

> 'Against the backdrop of a comparatively high standard of living and social security, a break in historical continuity released people from traditional class ties and family supports and increasingly threw them onto their own resources and their individual fate in the labour market, with all its attendant risks, opportunities and contradictions.'[581]

The second characteristic of individualisation is *emancipation*, which entails 'a declining influence of social groups and institutions on individual attitudes and behaviour, resulting in a greater freedom of choice.'[582] The third characteristic is *heterogenization*, which entails an increasing heterogeneity in biographies; resulting in a greater diversity of opinions and attitudes.[583] Although these three characteristics are contested, they do shed some light on the concept of individualisation. In this dissertation, I choose to follow the footsteps of Beck and Beck-Gernsheim as well as Bréchon by defining individualisation as *a macro-societal process in which institutions relate to citizens as individuals rather than groups ('institutionalised individualism'). Simultaneously, it entails a micro-level process of a growing valorisation among citizens of individual liberties leading to detraditionalization and disembedding.* As such, the process of individualisation involves a dialectical relationship between the macro and microlevel of a society that reinforce one another, leading to the disembedding of citizens without becoming re-embedded. Moreover, individualisation creates a breeding ground for individualism, which entails *a self-centredness in a utilitarian sense, i.e. primarily focusing on one's own interests, without concerning for the collective or common good*. From these definitions follow that I focus on human subjects; although Andreas Reckwitz has argued that the process of individualisation can also be applied to

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[580]. Beer and Koster, *Sticking Together or Falling Apart? Solidarity in an Era of Individualization and Globalization*, 55-56.

[581]. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and its Social and Political Consequences*, 30.

[582]. Beer and Koster, *Sticking Together or Falling Apart? Solidarity in an Era of Individualization and Globalization*, 55.

[583]. Duyvendak, "De individualisering van de samenleving en de toekomst van de sociologie," 496.

objects, spatialities, temporalities and collectives, I will only concern myself with human subjects and individualised collectives of human beings.[584]

Whereas one's biography is naturally given through birth within traditional, local communities in the premodern period, one is obliged to create one's own biography within an individualised society. For example, instead of naturally becoming a miller due to the fact that one is born as a miller's son, one *chooses* to become a miller *or not* in an individualised society. Citizens have to create their own biography, which is why Zygmunt Bauman has argued that human identity has changed from being a 'given' to a 'task'.[585] There are two paradoxes here: firstly, the process of individualisation (centring the individual human being) comes through institutions. Secondly, although individualisation is characterised by a greater freedom of choice, it is in itself not a choice, as it is imposed on individuals living within an individualised society. Bauman has therefore argued that 'individualisation is a fate, not a choice'.[586] Beck also writes of 'a risk society' and argues that in contrast to former times when one was part of a local community, one now has to confront and fight the risks of life alone.[587] Bauman articulates this as follows:

> 'If they [red. men and women] fall ill, it is because they were not resolute and industrious enough in following the health regime. If they stay unemployed, it is because they failed to learn the skills of winning an interview or because they did not try hard enough to find a job or because they are, purely and simply, work-shy. If they are not sure about their career prospects and agonize about the future, it is because they are not good enough at winning friends and influencing people and have failed to learn as they should the arts of self-expression and impressing the others. This is, at any rate, what they are told – and what they have come to believe, so that they behave 'as if' this was, indeed, the truth of the matter.'[588]

This idea is strengthened by the political system of 'meritocracy' that is present in many contemporary western democracies. Political philosopher Michael Sandel has

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584. Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten: zum Strukturwandel der Moderne*, 57.
585. See Foreword by Zygmunt Bauman in: Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and its Social and Political Consequences*, xiv.
586. Bauman, *The Individualized Society*, 46.
587. Ulrich Beck and Mark Ritter, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (London: Sage, 1992); Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and its Social and Political Consequences*, xvii.
588. Bauman, *The Individualized Society*, 47.

explained its tyrannical side in his book 'The Tyranny of Merit', in which he argues that responsibility now rests solely on the shoulders of the individual, which creates a great (moral) burden on individual citizens.[589] As such, it seems that the process of individualisation (as an institutionalized focus on the individual), has led to quite some irritation and insecurity on the level of the concrete individual. Although individualisation is often celebrated for its achievements of moral equality and acknowledgement of the natural rights of the individual, it simultaneously seems to have come with a price. It has formed a breeding ground for individualism that, in combination with meritocratic thinking, has led to an existential decontextualization of the individual, resulting in mental and physical illness.

Moreover, it has led to a lack of solidarity among citizens. The nature of the bonds between citizens has changed, especially in comparison to traditional communities. Duyvendak has rightly observed that the bonds between citizens have become weaker, compared to the bonds between citizens in pillarized and ideological societies.[590] These bonds were stronger and more intimate as individuals were often connected through ideology (e.g. religion) in a local community. Nowadays, individuals often have more connections than citizens in the premodern period, but these connections are often indirect rather than direct, and often fleeting rather than intimate. Therefore, one could argue that these are not so much intimate social bonds based on friendship, but rather 'networks'. Duyvendak refers to these as 'communities lite'.[591] Networks on social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and TikTok provide clear examples of this development.

Interestingly, individualisation is strongly related to religion. Data from the European Values Survey show that Western Europe is more individualised than Eastern Europe and particularly pronounced in the Scandinavian countries, The Netherlands and France.[592] Bréchon argues that this geographical distribution can be explained by two religious factors: firstly, the religious legacy or culture of a specific country (Bréchon calls this 'the religious matrix of culture') and secondly the religious disposition of the individuals. Regarding the first factor, Bréchon argues that the high level of individualisation in Scandinavia, The Netherlands and France can be explained from their historical Protestant legacy, which 'led to a rapid spread of literacy, an early recognition of individual liberties and a tolerance in regard to

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[589]. Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?*
[590]. Duyvendak, "De individualisering van de samenleving en de toekomst van de sociologie," 497.
[591]. Jan Willem Duyvendak and Menno Hurenkamp, *Kiezen voor de kudde: Lichte gemeenschappen en de nieuwe meerderheid* (Amsterdam: Van Gennep, 2004).
[592]. Bréchon, "Individualization and Individualism in European Societies," 238.

other people's life choices'.[593] Thus, Protestantism promoted the values of individual autonomy and respect of others that are the core values of individualisation. The low level of individualisation in East-European countries is explained by the strong presence of the Orthodox and Islamic religious matrix of culture. The level of individualisation within European countries with a Catholic tradition depends largely on the degree of secularisation.[594] Where Catholicism remains very socially embedded, individualisation is rather weak. In countries where secularisation has made deep inroads into a historical Catholic culture, individualisation has become very extensive. Regarding the second factor, Bréchon argues that 'the more individuals exhibit a weak religiosity, the more he or she has taken on the values of individualisation.[595]

Similarly, Michael Sandel argues that there is a relation between the contemporary meritocratic way of thinking, which has strengthened the process of individualisation, and Christianity. Sandel argues that the idea of Western meritocracy finds its roots in biblical theology, which has influenced Western culture. Drawing on the reasoning within the narrative of Job, he argues that Christian theology considers God to not randomly bestow rewards and punishments, but rather according to people's merits.[596] Moreover, although Protestantism was born as an argument against merit, Sandel argues that the protestant work ethic provided the faithful with a means to prove that they were in the state of grace; thus, that they would be among those saved by God. As such, it brought meritocracy back in and with it the idea that one is wholly responsible for its own fate. Sandel argues that this 'providentialism' still persists in the moral vocabulary of secular societies.[597] Sandel argues:

> 'It is tempting to attribute the triumph of mastery and merit to the secular bent of our time. As faith in God recedes, confidence in human agency gathers force; the more we conceive ourselves as self-made and self-sufficient, the less reason we have to feel indebted or grateful for our success. But even today, our attitudes toward success are not as independent of providential faith as we sometimes think.'[598]

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593.   Bréchon, "Individualization and Individualism in European Societies," 238.
594.   Bréchon, "Individualization and Individualism in European Societies," 241.
595.   Bréchon, "Individualization and Individualism in European Societies," 241.
596.   Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?*, 36.
597.   Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?*, 42.
598.   Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?*, 42.

The political philosopher Larry Siedentop has also argued that there is a relationship between the process of individualisation and Christianity. In his book 'Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism', he convincingly shows how the principle of equal liberty arose from Christian moral intuitions, which led to the blueprint of contemporary liberal democracy as an association of individuals rather than groups.[599] He describes how the individual became the organizing social role in Western societies, which, according to Siedentop, begins with a fundamental change in the moral belief of human beings as 'individuals'.[600] From this perspective, i.e. how changes in belief or mindset can have social and political consequences, Siedentop shows how Christianity (and the Catholic Church in particular) played a central role in the development of the individuated model of European society. He states: 'The foundation of modern Europe lay in the long, difficult process of converting a moral claim into a social status.'[601] The next section will describe how European societies transformed from group- to individual based societies though the work of Siedentop as well as the book 'Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten' of sociologist Andreas Reckwitz. To understand how Christianity has affected the social structure of European countries, we have to return to Europe in the Greco-Roman era.

Paragraph 2: Changing the bedrock of European society: from groups to individuals

Paragraph 2.1: The zoon politikon in Graeco-Roman society

'Hence it is evident that the state is a creation of nature, and that man is by nature a political animal.'[602]

It is beyond doubt that Graeco-Roman culture has had a significant influence on Europe, not only on a political and cultural level, but also on a social level. Siedentop describes how Europe within Graeco-Roman antiquity was based on the idea of groups rather than individuals. The famous quotation above, from the Greek philosopher Aristotle, reflects this belief in citizens as primarily belonging to a community, as so-called 'political' or 'social' animals (in Greek: *zoon politikon)*.

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[599]. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*.
[600]. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 2-3.
[601]. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 339.
[602]. Aristotle, *Politics* 1253a3. The quotation is based on the 1984 translation of Jonathan Barnes, with the corresponding numerals based on Immanuel Bekker's standard edition of the Greek text of Aristotle of 1831. Jonathan Barnes, *Aristotle: The Complete Works. Electronic Edition*, Volume II (Charlottesville: InteLex Corporation, 1992).

Aristotle describes in his book 'Nichomachean Ethics' how men are 'sociable by nature' and in his book 'Politics' how citizens are naturally inclined to function as part of 'the polis' (the city).[603] According to Aristotle, society functions at three different levels of groups: the family (household), the village and the city, of which the polis is the highest form of human community.[604] As such, the end (telos) of the polis, as a political community, is the end towards each citizen must strive. Sharing this communal end, citizens do not live alongside one another doing the same or other things, but rather complement one another in doing different parts of a single task.[605] As Jean Roberts explains: the Aristotelian political community is not a useful means to attain independently recognised individualistic ends, but rather 'the individuals' ends are defined by the more final end of the community'.[606]

Aristotle compares the polis to the functioning of a human body and certain groups of animals; Aristotle understands members of a community as the different parts of a body, of which one part cannot be destroyed or hurt without effecting the whole body as such. He also compares the relationship between citizens and the city to bees in a bee hive or ants in a colony; they share a common function. From this perspective, it is logical to understand that it was inconceivable for Aristotle to place oneself outside the community:

> 'The proof that the state is a creation of nature and prior to the individual is that the individual, when isolated, is not self-sufficing; and therefore he is like a part in relation to the whole. But he who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god: he is no part of a state.'[607]

Thus, to be part of a political community (polis), in which political implies social but not vice versa, comes natural to human beings; and therefore one can conclude that human beings are social in nature.[608]

The three levels of family, village and city that Aristotle describes are reflected in Siedentop's description of Graeco-Roman society. Drawing on the work of

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603. Aristotle, *Nicomachean* Ethics 1097b11. Barnes, *Aristotle: The Complete Works. Electronic Edition*.
604. Jean Roberts, *Aristotle and the Politics*, Routledge Philosophy Guidebooks, (London: Routledge, 2009), 31.
605. Roberts, *Aristotle and the Politics*, 35.
606. Roberts, *Aristotle and the Politics*, 32.
607. Aristotle, *Politics* 1253a29. Barnes, *Aristotle: The Complete Works. Electronic Edition*.
608. António Rocha Martins, "The *zoon politikon*: Medieval Aristotelian Interpretations," *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* 75, no. 3 (2019): 1542.

19th century French historian Fustel de Coulanges, Siedentop argues that 'the family' was the basic unit of social reality in the ancient world, which simultaneously provided the basis for religious identity.[609] Siedentop warns that 'family' should not be understood in the modern sense of a 'nuclear family'.[610] Rather, it was more extensive in both its social and temporal dimensions: it could include younger sons and their offspring, dependants and slaves, and was extended through time by, for example, ancestors (connecting the family from the past to the present and into the future). Moreover, the ancient family was both the focus and medium of religious belief.[611] Graeco-Roman antiquity was characterised by a domestic religion, which centred around the family hearth. Every house contained a family altar with a hearth that was connected to religious beliefs in the sacred fire and the remembrance of divine ancestors.[612] The task of the eldest male of the family, the *pater familias*, was to protect and preserve the family cult. This religious task gave him his authority over other family members (women, younger sons, slaves) and as such, an inequality was created on the basis of religion that was considered to be natural.

Human beings living in the ancient world were primarily understood as family members, rather than individuals; and it was their family worship that gave them their personal identity.[613] Siedentop explains that fulfilling obligations attached to a role in the family was everything; which reflects the Aristotelian view that every human being naturally functions as a part of a whole, just like certain animals such as bees and ants. Taking up this role, was considered to be fulfilling your duty and connected to the value of *pietas*, which translates both in religiosity, duty and loyalty. As such, the different meanings of the value of *pietas* show how the values of loyalty, religiosity and duty were seen as one, with the family as its main focus. Those outside of the family domain, were considered to be strangers and enemies.[614]

How then, if Graeco-Roman antiquity was characterised by the family as its basic unit, with its members excluding those outside of the family domain and identifying themselves by their domestic religion, could larger groups, such as villages and cities, emerge? Siedentop argues that religious identity played a pivotal role in this process. By acknowledging a shared ancestor with another family, Greeks

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609.   Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 12.

610.   Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 20.

611.   Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 10.

612.   Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 11.

613.   Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 13.

614.   Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 12-13.

and Romans extended their family worship to a common worship, creating a clan (also called a *phratry* or *curia*).[615] When this new association of families increased in size, it led to the establishment of a tribe with its own altar and a god (often a deified man or hero). The city (*polis*) then emerged as an association of multiple tribes that founded a common worship, often supplementing the forms of worship among the previous associations of clans and tribes. According to Siedentop, this corporate religious identity is crucial in understanding the polis, as it dominated the formal organisation of ancient cities.[616] He mentions several examples: children were included in the family worship just a few days after birth and youngsters were initiated into the cults of curia and tribes.[617] Gods were consulted in matters related to city leadership and warfare. Magistrates were originally also the city's priests and laws flowed from religious belief.[618] Ancestry was linked to the land on which the city was located; defending this land was therefore of paramount importance to its citizens as they were essentially defending their (religious) identity. Siedentop describes this as follows:

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> 'When defending his city, the ancient citizen was therefore defending the very core of his identity. Religion, family and territory were inseparable, a combination which turned ancient patriotism into an overwhelming passion […]. Everything that was important to him - his ancestors, his worship, his moral life, his pride and property – depended upon the survival and well-being of the city.'[619]

Therefore, in the minds of ancient Greek and Roman citizens, losing their city to the enemy or being ostracized was seen as the most dreadful thing, as it meant losing their own personal identity. In Aristotle's philosophy, it would imply that you no longer function as part of a larger political whole (the polis), and since this is natural to human beings, losing it makes you fall into the category of a beast. Important to note here is the difference in the meaning of city as *urbs* and *civitas*, with *urbs* indicating the physical location of the city, whereas *civitas* indicated the moral nexus i.e. the religious and political association of citizens.[620] When the urbs was lost to the enemy (as in the story of Troy) or left because of relocation, soil was

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615. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 20.
616. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 21.
617. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 22.
618. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 23.
619. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 25.
620. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 26.

often taken from the homeland and ritually used at the site where the new city was to be founded, symbolic of preserving one's own identity.[621]

From this ancient moral philosophy centred on religious identity, also followed the virtues that were deemed to be important, such as civic virtue, patriotism and unlimited devotion to the welfare of the city.[622] Honour took precedence over pleasure and narcissism was seen as subverting the civic spirit.[623] Ancient citizens deemed themselves to be warriors who primarily defended their cities; they did not engage in labour as this was associated with defeat (after the loss of a city) and social inferiority (slaves); therefore, labour was seen as dishonourable.[624]

Another important characteristic of the political association of ancient citizens was that the polis was based upon natural inequality. Citizens were only men, heads of families, clans and tribes, and excluded women, slaves and foreigners.[625] Thus, the category of citizens only applied to a small part of 'the people'. In time, this led to a class conflict based upon the discussion who should be included and excluded from the citizen class with its additional privileges. Siedentop argues that over time, a social revolution took place that slowly eroded the inherited inequalities. He mentions two major changes in this regard: the disappearance of primogeniture and the acquisition of freedom by the clients of a family.[626] This led to an increase in the number of citizens and the undermining of the traditional religious authority of the paterfamilias, magistrate and priest. Moreover, the rise of the Roman empire and the empire of Alexander the Great, led to the centralization of power at the expense of local autonomy. Although many citizens eventually welcomed the inclusion of their cities in a larger political whole, because it ended the social conflicts in their cities, it also led to an identity crisis as the polis as the higher end of its citizens lost its significance.[627] On a religious level, centralization led to the replacement of civic gods by one remote power, such as 'Rome'.[628] As a consequence, many philosophers began to question the long-standing assumptions on which the aristocratic life in the polis was founded.[629]

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621. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 24.
622. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 36-37.
623. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 37-38.
624. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 39.
625. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 29.
626. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 30.
627. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 40.
628. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 52.
629. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 46.

To conclude, within the Graeco-Roman model of group expansion, the family functioned as the basic unit that could be enlarged through shared religious worship. Siedentop explains that this model supported the worship of polytheistic gods and forces of nature, as these gods could be shared more easily than the ancestors of a particular family.[630] As such, Greeks and Romans understood their society as an association of families, rather than an association of individuals, as is common in the modern notion of society.[631] Moreover, the main distinction was between the public and the domestic sphere, rather than the modern distinction between public and private (understood as the domain of individuals with rights).[632] Thus, Europe in the Graeco-Roman world was based on the idea of groups rather than individuals, and these groups were based on a strong religious identity. Or in the words of Siedentop: 'Gods and groups marched hand in hand'.[633]

Paragraph 2.2 The arrival of Christianity

With the rise of Christianity in the Roman empire, the ground for human identity radically changed. Siedentop describes how the Graeco-Roman conception of society as an association of families gave way to the image of European society as an association of individuals, based on moral equality rather than natural inequality.[634] Focused on the church in the centuries leading up to the Renaissance, Siedentop shows how Christianity brought about this change. Without repeating this history in its full extent here, I would like to mention some essential features and events within the history of Christianity that Siedentop describes, which have contributed to the individualised structure of European life. In doing so, I categorise Siedentop's features into two phases of church history: early Christianity and medieval European Christianity.

First of all, early Christianity starts with the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth as the core of Christian belief, which were passed on to his disciples who spread the word in their surroundings and written down in the New Testament. This message was characterised by the moral equality of all individuals within society; Jesus spoke of God the father who loved all his children, including those on the margins of society.[635] This radically differed from the Graeco-Roman conception of natural inequality, in which women, foreigners and slaves were excluded from public society and citizenship. Slaves were perceived to be 'living tools', which is also

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630. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 21.
631. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 17.
632. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 18.
633. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 21.
634. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 129.
635. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 57.

evident from Aristotle's texts.[636] In contrast, the Christian community welcomed everyone, regardless of social status and background. Moreover, Christian belief focused on the individual who is to be judged by God and according to his or her rightful moral thinking and actions, will be granted a place in heaven. Regardless of social status, background, role in society or membership of a clan, tribe or city, the individual soul will be judged according to the moral criteria that the Christian God deems important. Following God's directives may well go against and even cut family ties; something that could hardly be conceived as a moral act in Graeco-Roman society.

The narrative of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ also plays an important role in the centralization of the individual. According to Siedentop, the individual moral agency of Jesus Christ created a unique window into the nature of things, which replaced the family with the individual as the focus of immortality.[637] In addition, the apostle Paul strengthened the idea of the moral equality of individual souls, by spreading a universal message of love that did not apply to a specific ethnic group (e.g. Jews), but to the whole of humanity. He overturned the Graeco-Roman assumptions of natural inequality by making belief in Christ the primary role of individuals, with their social roles (father, daughter, official, priest or slave) only becoming secondary in place.[638] This primary role of belief in Christ can be shared equally, which creates the basis for a moral equality that requires a human will that is pre-social.[639] Siedentop explains:

> 'The Christ provides a foundation in the nature of things for a pre-social or individual will. Individual agency acquires roots in divine agency. The Christ stands for the presence of God in the world, the ultimate support for individual identity. Delving below all social divisions of labour, Paul finds, beneath the conventional terms that confer status and describe roles, a shared reality. That reality is the human capacity to think and choose, to will. That reality is our potential for understanding ourselves as autonomous agents, as truly the children of God.'[640]

As such, Paul created a theological foundation for moral equality, the individual will, and the autonomous individual, which contrasted the characteristics of

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636. Aristotle *Politics* 1253b24. Barnes, *Aristotle: The Complete Works. Electronic Edition.*
637. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 58.
638. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 62.
639. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 64.
640. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 65.

natural inequality, reason and group membership of ancient Graeco-Roman society. Together, they provided an ontological foundation for the concept of 'the individual'.[641]

In the early church, the individualist mindset began to took shape through the work and legacy of apologists, martyrs, monks and church fathers. Firstly, in the context of the persecutions of Christians within the Roman Empire due to their refusal to participate in the emperor's cult, many Christian apologists advocated equal liberty and the right to freedom of conscience. Siedentop describes their reasoning as follows: 'If God has created humans as equals, as rational agents with free will, then there ought to be an area within which they are free to choose and responsible for their choices.'[642]

Secondly, Christian martyrs and the veneration of saints that followed, changed the idea of heroism; rather than the ancient hero as an aristocrat and/or demi-god who was a social being in essence (e.g. Odysseus, Achilles), Christian martyrs demonstrated the strength of the individual will and conscience in the public domain. They often stood alone in the face of burning pyres and wild animals, with only their reliance on their relationship with God as their solace. Rather than being pre-selected hero's from the upper class of society or divinity, Christian martyrs unlocked a model of heroism that was open to all; as such, Siedentop argues that 'they democratized the ancient cult of the hero, for the moral triumph they celebrated was a triumph open to everyone.'[643]

Thirdly, Siedentop shows how Christian monks unlocked a new form of association based on individual conscience, rather than political membership of a polis. Ascetic monks who retreated to the desert, acquired moral authority in their solitary way of living with God. They did what was deemed to be inhuman and a punishment in ancient society; become disconnected from the life in the polis. Siedentop describes how the solitary form of ascetism gradually changed to a more communal form as ascetics started living together in groups. He argues that this led to a new conception of community and a new group identity:

> 'Little wonder, then, that monasticism was acquiring a group identity, both in the eyes of the monks and for outsiders. The first striking thing about that new identity was that its basis lay in voluntary association,

641.   Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 63.
642.   Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 77.
643.   Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 190.

in individual acts of will. This was a radical departure from the beliefs and practices of the ancient world. Family cult, civic status and servitude had been assigned by birth or imposed by force.'[644]

Siedentop argues that monasticism suggested a new form for social order, which valued labour as part of a religious life; contrasting sharply with the lack of appreciation for work by Greek and Roman citizens of the ancient world.[645] Fourthly, some church fathers and Augustine of Hippo in particular, embedded the individual will in the conception of the self.[646] Augustine connected the human will to intention and feeling, rather than reason as the main motivation for behaviour (as was prevalent in the ancient world).[647] The human will is complex and is the sphere of dialogue, rather than silence. Siedentop writes:

'Inventing the individual – in the sense of acknowledging the equality of humans in the face of their maker – is not an exercise leading to isolation. Instead, it is the creation of a self-consciousness that undercuts merely social identities, statuses conferred by the conventional terms of a language. The deepest struggles of the self are pre-linguistic. They are struggles to find words that do justice to our feelings both of freedom and of dependence.'[648]

Through his theological thinking and writing, Augustine had a major impact on thinking about the self in Christianity.

The subsequent history of the church that Siedentop describes, is the phase within church history that is often referred to as medieval European Christianity. Within this phase, local bishops, the Carolingian empire, the papacy and the canonists played a major role in creating the individual as the basic social unit in Western Europe. Firstly, bishops came to replace the paterfamilias as the religious authority, who de facto ruled the medieval cities and exhibited a rhetoric of inclusion rather than exclusion.[649] Siedentop describes the period after the invasions of 'barbarian' tribes into the Roman empire as 'an age of transition' in which Christianity played an important role.[650] He argues that Christian beliefs destroyed the ancient family

644. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 94.
645. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 95,99.
646. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 101.
647. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 103.
648. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 105.
649. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 120-21.
650. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 124.

as a religious association.[651] The *paterfamilias* no longer functioned as the religious authority; instead, authority shifted to the priests and the local bishop in particular. The *basilica* as a place of religious association in which everyone was seen as morally equal, became the model for the medieval city. Bishops became the most important figures in the city; they employed a rhetoric that included everyone, also women, the poor, and slaves. This gradually changed the conception of European society, namely as founded on moral equality, rather than natural inequality and as an association of individuals rather than families.[652]

Secondly, during the reign of Charles the Great (748-814 CE) 'the individual' became the unit of subjection, which involved both a social role as well as a moral status.[653] In his aim of creating a Christian empire, Charles the Great wanted to secure the allegiance of the Christian people by asking every individual, including women and slaves, to swear an oath. He demanded that the oath should be understood by the individual, and therefore it was translated in different vernacular languages. From the perspective of the Christian message of universality, Charles the Great appealed to the individual will of his subjects, treating every Christian person in his empire as a moral agent.[654] It must be noted that this did not apply to those outside of the Carolingian empire, such as Saxons and Muslims. They were seen as 'the Other' or the enemy who fell outside of the category of humanity, not having individual souls like the Frankish Christian subjects. Nevertheless, through his oath, Charles the Great extended the moral category of the individual to all people within his realm and used it within a centralised political and legal framework.

Thirdly, the papacy played a crucial role in translating 'the individual' from a moral category (through Christian belief) into a social role by proclaiming themselves a sovereign power in the sacred sphere, with the individual as its basic unit of legal subjection.[655] This claim of sovereignty was accompanied by a process of centralisation and legalisation within the Church and had profound consequences for the ordering of European society; which is why Siedentop writes of 'the papal revolution'.[656] The claim of papal sovereignty was stimulated by the monastic reform movement of the 10th century, which reacted to the social chaos and disorder following the disintegration of the Carolingian empire. After the demise of centralised political control, local lords seized power and applied an arbitrary

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651. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 115.
652. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 129.
653. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 154.
654. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 155.
655. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 204.
656. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 252.

form of law and justice.[657] Due to the entanglement of the secular and the sacred sphere, churches and clergy came under the sway of local rulers, which threatened to compromise the church. Moreover, a moral vacuum was created due to the varying norms and values that came to depend on local lords; rather than the eternal and immutable principles of right and wrong based on a unified and stable (religious) moral system, as during the reign of Charles the Great. This variation led to resistance, chaos and violence among the people in Europe.

The church responded to the violence by establishing the 'Peace of God' and 'Truce of God' movements that appealed to arms-bearers to take an oath to protect the defenceless: the clergy, the weak, the vulnerable and the poor. In addition, the Church called for periods during which all violence should cease. The popes also called for crusades against those outside of Europe, i.e. Muslims (Saracens), as a brilliant strategy to not only channel the energy of the local violent groups outwards, but also to create unity within the church by creating a common enemy. People from different European countries, from all social ranks, joined the crusades, which led to the creation of a new European identity in the sense of 'The Christian Europe' rather than the previous idea of 'a Christian Empire' as envisioned by the Roman emperor Theodosius and Frankish emperor Charles the Great.[658] Alongside solving the problem of violence, the Church started to emphasise Gods eternal law and natural law as a means to fill the moral vacuum.[659] A systematic reform took place within the Church that was largely supported by the monasteries; in particular the abbots of Cluny played an important role within this reform. To escape the compromised church by corrupt local bishops and rulers, they appealed to the pope for general reform and became directly subordinate to the authority of the papacy.[660] As such, they stimulated the claim of papal sovereignty.

The medieval popes gradually appropriated their own sacred domain in which they declared themselves sovereign and independent from secular rulers, which became evident during the conflict between Church and state that has come to be known as 'the Investiture Controversy'.[661] At the moral level, the papacy perceived itself as responsible for 'the care of individual souls'.[662] At the legal level, the papacy gradually transformed into 'a court of appeal' where abbots, bishops and secular rulers could turn for an ultimate judgement on ethical, theological and legal issues.

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[657]. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 169.
[658]. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 193-94.
[659]. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 182.
[660]. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 185.
[661]. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 198.
[662]. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 216.

It is therefore not surprising, according to Siedentop, that many medieval popes were both theologically ánd legally educated.[663] The legal framework of the church, could not arise, however, without the basis of an equal morality of individuals who are the subjects of the pope's overarching authority, but also vice versa, this legal system strengthened the primacy of the individual (rather than one's social role as e.g. member of a family or clan) in relationship to the pope as sovereign authority within the Church.[664]

Fourthly, canon lawyers within the church developed a legal system that was based on individual agency. They created a sphere of personal autonomy that related to and protected individual choice, responsibility and intention. This led to natural law as the basis for justice, with natural rights being inherent to the individual. Siedentop describes this as follows:

> 'The canonists' egalitarian concern for individual conscience and free will led them gradually to recast natural law as a system of natural rights: pre-social or moral rights inhering in the individual. In that way, the canonists converted the primordial Christian concern with 'innerness' into the language of law.'[665]

Siedentop argues that this idea of pre-social natural rights of the individual is the precursor to modern liberalism; as such, the idea of moral equality gave rise to the idea of equal liberty.[666] Moreover, it enabled canonists to apply the method of comparison and make universal claims (which would eventually lead to the idea of human rights); something that was not possible in the ancient world:

> 'Such rules projected and privileged the image of society as an association of individuals, each endowed with conscience and free will. By creating 'universal' claims and thus fostering the habit of comparison, canon law also provided a model for the growth of secular authorities able and willing to promote such claims.'[667]

In seeking unity after the disintegration of the Carolingian empire, the Church had succeeded in establishing a unified legal system within the church, based on the moral equality of individuals who became subject to the sovereign authority

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663.   Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 214.
664.   Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 220.
665.   Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 244.
666.   Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 244.
667.   Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 239.

of the pope. However, and this is what Siedentop calls 'the paradox of the papal revolution', in doing so, they simultaneously created the secular government.[668] Siedentop argues that secular rulers adopted the papal model of a unified legal system in order to overcome the pluralism of European society.[669] It led to a form of kingship based on a territorial basis, with a jurisdiction over the individuals living on that land. As such, the papal model initiated the process that led to the birth of the European nation-state.[670] Siedentop argues that the writings of modern political philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau reflect the development that had already taken place in medieval canon law: Hobbes insist on human equality and equal subjection, Locke defends human freedom by identifying a range of natural rights and Rousseau argues for the sovereignty of the people and self-government.[671]

Thus, within this brief reflection of the historical work of Siedentop on how the individual was invented, I have demonstrated how in the early church the individualist mindset was shaped through the work and legacy of apologists, martyrs, monks and the church father Augustine. Moreover, in the following historical phase of medieval European Christianity, the individual was created as the basic social unit in Europe through the work, statements and (legal) policies of local bishops, the Carolingian empire, the papacy and the canonists. The unified legal system of the Church was subsequently adopted by secular rulers who then reconstructed society as an association of individuals governed by a sovereign authority rather than groups. As such, Christianity led to a social revolution in Europe that gave the individual primacy over the group. In the next section, I show how moral equality has led to a radicalisation of the logic of the general within the modern era, which subsequently triggered a process of singularization within the postmodern era. This has caused the creation of new communities based on a self-centredness (which Andreas Reckwitz calls *Neogemeinschaften*), of which far-right political parties and movements are illustrative.

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668. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 273.
669. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 256.
670. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 221.
671. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 359.

Paragraph 3: Individualisation and the European far right

Siedentop has given us an historical account of the individual as a moral notion; and how Christianity in particular contributed to the process of individualisation: the rise of the individual as the organizing social role within European societies. However, Siedentop clearly distinguishes between this ontological reasoning of the individual as a moral notion and the individual as an aesthetic notion.[672] The latter arose with humanism and Romanticism as a 'cult of individuality' that centred around subjective experience, a cultivation of the self and aesthetics. Siedentop argues that utilitarianism turned it into an atomised model of society, which he describes as: 'a model in which individual wants or preferences are taken as a given, with little interest in the role of norms or the socializing process.[673] This definition seems to come close to the concept of individualism as described in the first section of this paragraph. Therefore, Siedentop distinguishes between a process of individualisation on the macro-societal level (with individuals still living in association with one another) and individualism as an atomised model of society. Siedentop clearly states that the moral notion of the individual does not relate to atomism: although the individual is recognised as an autonomous individual with pre-social rights, it is still associated with others (in the premodern period mainly through religious belief). When this association dissolves, then one can speak of atomism. And it is this form of individualism in particular, as well as the Romantic notion of expressive or aesthetic individualism ('the authentic individual'), which, according to political philosopher Charles Taylor and sociologist Andreas Reckwitz, cause problems for contemporary society. In the following, I describe the criticism of both authors on these two forms of individualism.

Charles Taylor perceives individualism as one of the three 'malaises of modernity'.[674] Although he argues that individualism has brought freedom of choice and conscience, he is worried that with the abandoning of the larger social and cosmic horizons (which would confine citizens' individuality) something important has been lost.[675] With the loss of the premodern hierarchical orders, or what Taylor calls 'horizons of significance', people 'no longer have a sense of a higher purpose, of something worth dying for'.[676] The dark side of individualism is 'a centring on the self, which both flattens and narrows our lives, makes them poorer in meaning, and

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672. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 337.
673. Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: the Origins of Western Liberalism*, 337-38.
674. Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 1.
675. Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 3.
676. Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 4.

less concerned with others or society.'[677] He therefore mainly criticises the radical anthropocentrism that follows from individualism. He sees this as problematic, as it comes at the expense of solidarity and political participation.

Taylor refers to political philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville, who warned for a modern form of 'soft or mild despotism' and the emergence of a paternalistic government that infringes the freedom of the people with too many rules. De Tocqueville attributed this development to the principle of equality, which forms the very foundational principle of democracy. Due to equal social conditions, he argues, people are inclined to retreat within their own private sphere. They will display a self-centredness, rather than being committed participants of a flourishing civil society. As a consequence, they hand in their autonomy to the government, as they do not want to bother themselves with 'thinking and the troubles of life'.[678] In de Tocqueville's view, this would not lead to a violent despotism that was characteristic of, for example, Roman antiquity, but a mild despotism, which he describes as follows:

> '[…] it does not break men's wills but it does soften, bend and control them; rarely does it force men to act but it constantly opposes what actions they perform; it does not destroy the start of anything but it stands in its way; it does not tyrannize but it inhibits, represses, drains, snuffs out, dulls so much effort that finally it reduces each nation to nothing more than *a flock of timid and hardworking animals with the government as shepherd*'.[679]

Thus, Taylor argues that self-centredness or social atomism prevents citizens from being active participants in politics and civil society, which creates space for the threat as described above. Atomism goes hand in hand with instrumentalism; citizens perceive society as purely instrumental in their own aims of self-fulfilment, rather than the common good. According to Taylor, it has been the scientific outlook of instrumental reason that fuelled atomism, which already developed before the Industrial Revolution among the educated classes of Western Europe and the United States.[680] It has created a culture of narcissism, which Taylor defines as 'an outlook that makes self-fulfilment the major value in life and that seems to recognise few moral demands or serious commitments to others.'[681] Communities

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677. Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 4.
678. Alexis de Tocqueville, Gerald E. Bevan, and Isaac Kramnick, *Democracy in America: and Two essays on America*, Penguin classics, (London: Penguin, 2003), 806.
679. Tocqueville, Bevan, and Kramnick, *Democracy in America: and Two essays on America*, 806.
680. Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 99.
681. Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 55.

are seen as instrumental, which also includes the political community. When people no longer identify with the political community, it leads to a fragmentation of society which on its turn nurtures social atomism, because the absence of effective common action throws people back on themselves.[682] As such, social atomism leads to a downward spiral of a degeneration of democracy.

Andreas Reckwitz sees in the aesthetic notion of individualism the origins of the process of what he calls *Singularisierung*.[683] He argues that in West-European societies (and in North America) society consists of a dual structure of the 'social logic of the general' and the 'social logic of the particular'.[684] The first is intertwined with the process of rationalisation and the latter with the process of culturalisation. Although both have always been present within society, thus also within premodern or traditional societies, Reckwitz argues that in the modern era the two have become radicalised. From the beginning of the 18th century, the logic of the general became predominant, pushing the logic of the particular to the background; from the 1970s and 1980s onwards, a reversal took place in which the logic of the particular became predominant.[685] According to Rechwitz, this reversal has led to an increase in autonomy and self-development of individuals that is unsurpassed. Nevertheless, he also argues it has led to three problems within western societies: firstly, it has led to mental overload problems (such as the typical western disease of a 'burnout') due to the high demand of self-development that often leads to disillusionment. Secondly, it had led to a new social and cultural polarisation and inequality between different societal classes and way of life and thirdly it has led to a rise in postmodern forms of nationalism, fundamentalism and populism with their accompanying antagonisms between what is valuable and worthless.[686] Reckwitz calls these *Neogemeinschaften* that have emerged as a new social form of imagined communities within postmodernity, to which I will return later in this section.

What does Reckwitz understand by the 'logic of the general'? Reckwitz argues that modernity should mainly be understood as a process of rationalisation, rather than functional differentiation or capitalism. Rationalisation or *formal rationalisation* as Reckwitz understands it, is the process in which 'modernity transformed society in such a way that traditional customs are replaced by large scale complexes of predictable rules, which in turn entailed technically or normatively

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682. Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 117.
683. Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten: zum Strukturwandel der Moderne*, 47.
684. Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten: zum Strukturwandel der Moderne*, 92.
685. Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten: zum Strukturwandel der Moderne*, 103.
686. Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten: zum Strukturwandel der Moderne*, 22.

regulated manners of behaviour.[687] Formal rationalisation is guided by the telos of optimization, whose vanishing points are an efficient processing of nature and a transparent ordering of the social.'[688] He argues that behind this process of rationalisation is the more abstract 'logic of the general': 'in rationalizing the social world, modern practices attempt to impose their generic forms and configure the world according to them.'[689] When this logic is exercised (what Siedentop calls in English 'doing generality'), it entails the four practices of observation, evaluation, production and appropriation.[690]

Although Siedentop acknowledges that premodern societies also exercised processes of rationalisation, he sees these more as typifications of similarities that served a purpose or a normative framework.[691] As we have seen in the previous section, the idea of moral equality, or the equality and freedom of the individual, and the idea that every individual owned its own ratio, enabled canonists to apply the method of comparison and make universal claims. The idea of moral equality was thus an important stepping stone to the emergence of the primacy of 'the logic of the general' and the process of rationalisation that came to predominate the modern era. This process of rationalisation, however, goes beyond the method of comparison; it entails the institutionalization of systems and an expansive systematization of the world in the form of standardization, formalization and generalization.[692] Reckwitz writes: 'Es ist diese Ausbreitung der sozialen Generalisierungsmaschine, die wir »moderne Gesellschaft« nennen.'[693] Rationalisation not only concerns human subjects; also objects, spatialities, temporalities and collectives can be formatted according to the logic of the general. These are what Reckwitz calls 'the five units of the social.'[694] As I mentioned earlier, in this dissertation I will only focus on human subjects and collectives. Reckwitz argues that individualism continues within this logic of the general, which he seems to understand similarly to what Siedentop understands as moral equality:

> 'Es gibt auch innerhalb der sozialen Logik des Allgemeinen einen »Individualismus«, aber dieser ist einer der gleichen Rechte und Pflichten sowie einer des eigenverantwortlichen Handelns, das

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687. Andreas Reckwitz and Valentine A. Pakis, *The Society of Singularities* (Cambridge: Polity, 2020), 19.
688. Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten: zum Strukturwandel der Moderne*, 28.
689. Reckwitz and Pakis, *The Society of Singularities*, 20.
690. Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten: zum Strukturwandel der Moderne*, 29.
691. Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten: zum Strukturwandel der Moderne*, 31-32.
692. Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten: zum Strukturwandel der Moderne*, 33.
693. Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten: zum Strukturwandel der Moderne*, 33.
694. Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten: zum Strukturwandel der Moderne*, 37.

> von jedem Subjekt verlangt, seine Pflichten und Anforderungen in gleicher Weise zu erfüllen.'[695]

Reckwitz categorises modernity into three distinct phases: the bourgeois modernity, the organised modernity and late modernity.[696] He argues that the rationalist logic of the general reaches its climax during the second phase, the organised modernity. This phase is characterised by the industrial revolution and mass production, in which people primarily perform a particular function and play an instrumental role within society.[697] Traditional communities based on personal relationships that characterised the premodern era, are replaced by organisations in which relationships are impersonal and indirect.[698] As a result, citizens become replaceable commodities within a larger system. Reckwitz therefore argues that the logic of the general coincides with the interchangeability of subjects.[699] This idea of the societal replaceability of human subjects was strengthened by the rise of the Newtonian mechanistic worldview, which Reckwitz arguably would perceive as deriving from a radicalisation of the logic of the general. Moreover, the logic of the general led to an opposition against anything or anyone who did not conform to the uniformity of the social or what was considered to be rational. It led to fights against deviant opinions and appearances in the first half of the twentieth century, such as homosexuals, communists and dark-skinned people. It also influenced the church; the drive for uniformity drove away many religious adherents. Many felt they could not experience their individuality and felt squeezed into a straitjacket. This experience of those citizens who felt excluded by the logic of the general, sowed the seeds of a radical turn towards the logic of the singular in the second half of the twentieth century.

What does Reckwitz understand by the 'logic of the particular'? The logic of the particular is an opposing trend to the logic of the general that found its radical expression in the Romantic period and established its reign during the postmodern era.[700] The term 'Singularität' is a neologism, which Reckwitz defines as follows:

> 'Bei Singularitäten handelt es sich um Entitäten, die innerhalb von sozialen Praktiken als besondere wahrgenommen und bewertet,

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695. Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten: zum Strukturwandel der Moderne*, 39.
696. In German these are called: der Bürgerlichen Moderne, der Organsierten Moderne und der Spätmoderne.
697. Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten: zum Strukturwandel der Moderne*, 36.
698. Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten: zum Strukturwandel der Moderne*, 40.
699. Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten: zum Strukturwandel der Moderne*, 36.
700. Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten: zum Strukturwandel der Moderne*, 96-97.

> fabriziert und behandelt werden. Singularitäten sind das Ergebnis von sozial-kulturellen Prozessen der *Singularisierung*. Sie kommen innerhalb einer sozialen Logik des Besonderen zur Geltung. In einer solchen Logik werden Objekte, Subjekte, Räumlichkeiten, Zeitlichkeiten und Kollektive in Praktiken der Beobachtung, der Bewertung, der Hervorbringung und der Aneignung zu Singularitäten gemacht, es findet ein *doing singularity* statt.'[701]

A singularity is characterised by its intrinsic complexity and inner density. It is unique, and therefore has no common denominator; it is characterised by its incommensurability.[702] Due to its unique character, it cannot be replaced. The logic of the singular coincides with the process of culturalisation, in which value is assigned to an object, place, human being, collective etc. This value is assigned based on the inherent complexity of what is socially perceived as valuable; it is thus not instrumental, but an end in itself.[703] However, someone or something can also lose its assigned value; this is what Reckwitz calls 'entsingularisieren'.[704] Within a society, the process of culturalisation coexists with the process of rationalisation, but they bring about an opposite effect (or logic). Rationalisation seeks to reduce complexity, whereas culturalisation actually creates complexity.[705] Reckwitz argues that within the postmodern era, around the 1970s and 1980s, a structural change took place when the social logic of the general lost its supremacy to the social logic of the particular. From now on, the logic of the general provided the infrastructure or the backdrop against which singularities could develop.[706]

Similar to the logic of the general, the logic of the particular applies to all five units of the social; however, I only focus on human subjects and collectives. Firstly, the singularization of human subjects happens when their uniqueness is socially recognised and valued, when social recognition is actively sought and worked on.[707] Singularised human subjects are irreplaceable, such as magicians, prophets and rulers. Their uniqueness lies in character traits, behaviour, outward appearance and biography; and often do these have to be performed to be recognised as unique.[708] Typical contemporary examples are posts on the social media platforms

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701. Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten: zum Strukturwandel der Moderne*, 51.
702. Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten: zum Strukturwandel der Moderne*, 54.
703. Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten: zum Strukturwandel der Moderne*, 78.
704. Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten: zum Strukturwandel der Moderne*, 67-68.
705. Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten: zum Strukturwandel der Moderne*, 85.
706. Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten: zum Strukturwandel der Moderne*, 103.
707. Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten: zum Strukturwandel der Moderne*, 59.
708. Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten: zum Strukturwandel der Moderne*, 60.

of Instagram, Facebook and TikTok where people show off their unique character, outward appearance or biography, or the internationally highly popular television shows such as 'The X-Factor' or the Voice of..[country] where people are judged by their unique talents. Reckwitz argues that the social recognition of someone's uniqueness, often leads to forms of competition and competitive thinking within what he calls 'cultural singularity markets'.[709] The two examples above clearly illustrate this effect.

Secondly, singular collectives are characterised by the unique cultural value they have for their participants.[710] Reckwitz argues that singular collectives are 'complete cultural universes of their own with high degrees of communicative, narrative and affective complexity and significance.[711] Members of such a collective share both practices, narratives and imaginations.[712] An example is the idea of the nation-state that emerged in the 19th century. Collectives were seen as a historical singularity, and as such an 'imagined community' that was perceived as homogenous and incommensurable. Reckwitz perceives this as the first wave of post-Romantic cultural essentialism.[713] The second wave is in the postmodern era (since the 1980s) and concerns the construction of what Reckwitz calls *Neogemeinschaften*, which are a new or modern form of communities that engage in a singularization and culturalisation of the social and political.[714] They are characterised by cultural essentialism and cultural communitarianism; the collective is seen as the bearer of authenticity and the core or origin of the identity movement (religion, nation or ethnicity) is its unquestionable essence.[715] They establish clear borders between those who belong to the ingroup ('us') and those who belong to the outgroup ('them') and perceive these groups to be homogenous.

Neogemeinschaften distinguish their cultural community from others, which implies that they automatically focus on those who are outside of their borders. This focus often involves 'a culture of negativity', which means that the identity of the ingroup is dependent on a sharp demarcation from the Other (e.g. the unfaithful, the uncultivated, the enemies of the Nation).[716] This often leads to conflicts of

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709. In German: 'Kulturelle Singularitätsmärkte' Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten: zum Strukturwandel der Moderne*, 106.
710. Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten: zum Strukturwandel der Moderne*, 62.
711. Reckwitz and Pakis, *The Society of Singularities*, 42.
712. Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten: zum Strukturwandel der Moderne*, 63.
713. Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten: zum Strukturwandel der Moderne*, 399.
714. Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten: zum Strukturwandel der Moderne*, 394.
715. Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten: zum Strukturwandel der Moderne*, 396.
716. Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten: zum Strukturwandel der Moderne*, 397.

culture. [717] The identity of the ingroup is characterised by a positive affirmation of the individual as part of 'us', using collective memory to confirm this identity, the 'us'. Reckwitz argues that *Neogemeinschaften* are part of a singularised society. Although Reckwitz refers to the French sociologist Michel Maffesoli who argued that tribal communities would return in the postmodern era, Reckwitz clearly states that Neogemeinschaften are not a return to the communities of the premodern era, but rather a reaction to modern culture from within.[718] Reckwitz explains this as follows:

> 'Erst vor dem Hintergrund der formalen Rationalisierung und wissenschaftlichen sowie moralischen Universalisierung der sich heranbildenden Moderne können Gemeinschaften nun als eine *attraktive Lebensform* erscheinen, die Schwächen der Moderne kompensieren oder überwinden will. Dies ist der zentrale Unterschied: Traditionale Gemeinschaften schienen als impliziter Hintergrund alternativlos gegeben, moderne, postromantische und posttraditionale Neogemeinschaften hingegen müssen erst neu institutionalisiert und kreiert werden, und die Subjekte entscheiden sich dazu, an ihnen teilzunehmen, da sie eine kulturelle und affektive Attraktivität ausstrahlen.'[719]

Thus, whereas one belongs to a traditional community by being born into it, the individual *chooses* to belong to a Neogemeinschaft.[720] As such, Reckwitz' concept of *Neogemeinschaften* connects to Polanyi's theory of the double movement and social dislocation; Neogemeinschaften can be understood as a reaction to the process of individualisation and disembedding.[721] Reckwitz distinguishes four types of Neogemeinschaften: ethnic communities that are involved in identity politics, cultural nationalism, religious fundamentalism and right-wing populism.[722] Regarding the latter, he argues that what stands central is that the nation in its distinctness, singularity and authenticity is preserved.[723] It not only turns against the hybridization of culture and universal mechanisms (the logic of the general), but also turns against other cultures ('the Other').

[717.] Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten: zum Strukturwandel der Moderne*, 110.
[718.] Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten: zum Strukturwandel der Moderne*, 398.
[719.] Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten: zum Strukturwandel der Moderne*, 399.
[720.] Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten: zum Strukturwandel der Moderne*, 264.
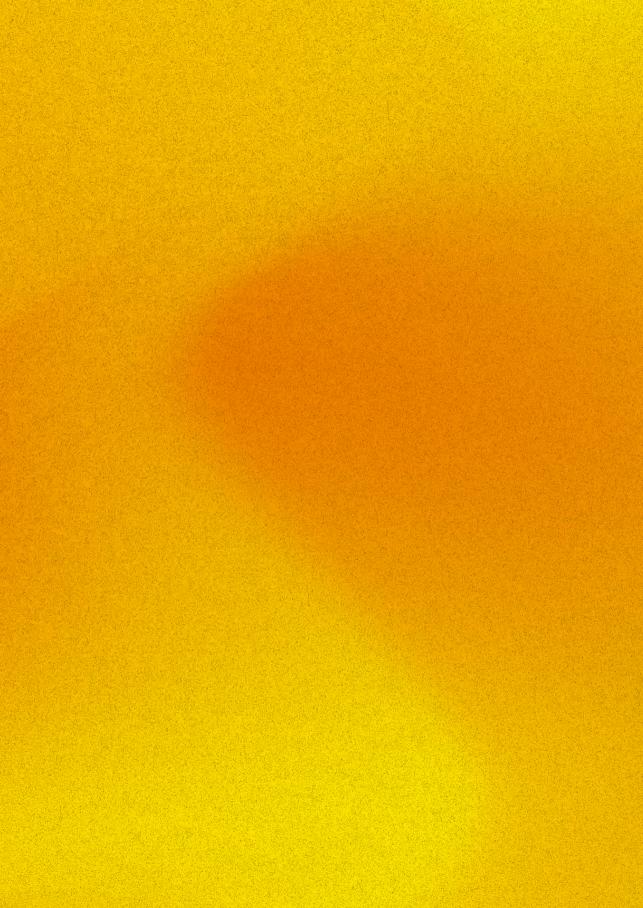[721.] See Chapter VII, Paragraph 1.
[722.] Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten: zum Strukturwandel der Moderne*, 394.
[723.] Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten: zum Strukturwandel der Moderne*, 417.

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Chapter VII:

Europe in a Globalising World

Introduction

Charles Taylor describes in his book 'A Secular Age' how the God-centred hierarchical cosmos of the premodern period transformed during the Renaissance era into an understanding of being in the world as a mechanic universe in which human agency came to be redefined in instrumental terms.[724] Rather than symbolism, acts of God and a blend of the sacred and profane world, the human worldview came to involve mechanism, an exceptionless order and a bounded self. Rather than a cosmos in which everything and everyone had their own place and meaning, human beings now become just a gear in a clockwork, as an insignificant and replaceable part of the whole that can be replaced if it no longer functions.

This mechanical worldview would not remain limited to the natural world; it would also profoundly affect the ordering of Western society. The transformation of the world as a symbolic cosmos into a mechanic universe marked the starting point of the idea of replaceability of products and people that comes to predominate the modern era, and which has intensified with the processes of industrialisation and globalisation that were set into motion in the nineteenth century and continue to this day. In what follows, I will explain the process of globalisation, its consequences for the market and the social structure of Western societies and how it has changed local communities into large-scale, complex societies that have led many people to pull the emergency brake of the populist far right, due to the speed of change, loss of control and identity, failure and distrust of governments and accompanied feelings of replaceability and insecurity.

Paragraph 1: The Transformation of Local Communities to Large-scale Complex Societies

The local communities that were characteristic of l'Ancien Régime have gradually transformed into large-scale complex societies during the modern era. One of the great catalysts of this development has been the Industrial Revolution. In his book 'The Great Transformation', Karl Polanyi, an economic historian writing against the backdrop of the Second World War, describes how society during the nineteenth century radically changed due to the expansion of the market and the rise of corporations. He writes:

[724.]   Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 99.

'A new way of life spread over the planet with a claim to universality unparalleled since the age when Christianity started out on its career, only this time the movement was on a purely material level.'[725]

Polanyi is critical of the effects of the self-regulating market in this time-period. He argues that the expansion of the market led to social dislocation. He describes how the focus on economic profit neglected the accompanying destructive societal effects such as the exploitation of workers, destruction of family life, the devastation of neighbourhoods and the disruption of folkways.[726] Class played a major role in this development; the middle class became the bearer of the market economy and the working class became the force of production. According to Polanyi it was the increase in economic influence and political power of the trading classes, together with failures in the market system and tensions between the social classes, that led to the fascism of the twentieth century.[727]

Moreover, Polanyi writes of an emerging dynamic within modern society that he describes as 'a double movement': the action of two organizing principles in society that each have specific institutional aims, support of definite social forces and their own distinctive methods.[728] He is referring to the dynamics of the rise of a movement that calls into being a countermovement; or what Craig Calhoun has called 'disruption and response'.[729] In the context of nineteenth century society, Polanyi refers to the principle of *economic liberalism* (with its aim of the self-regulating market, the support of the trading classes and its method of 'laissez-faire') and the principle of *social protection* (with its aim of conserving man, nature and productive organisation, the support of the working and landed classes and its method of protective legislation, restrictive associations and other instruments of intervention).[730] Calhoun adopts these two concepts of Polanyi of *dislocation* (which Calhoun calls 'disembedding' or 'displacement') and *the double movement* to describe how local communities evolved into complex societies in the modern period and how this has changed the social structure of society. In his description, Calhoun shows how societal disruption triggers a response and how periods of turbulence alternate with periods of relative stability, roughly identifying three periods (though not exclusively) of disruption: The Industrial Revolution, the two World Wars including the Great Depression and the 1960s. Without pursuing and

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[725]. Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 130.
[726]. Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 133.
[727]. Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 133-34.
[728]. Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 130,32.
[729]. Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 85.
[730]. Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 132.

claiming to give an exhaustive description of the societal changes in the nineteenth and twentieth century due to the processes of industrialisation and globalisation, in the following I aim to give a brief overview of the societal transformations that changed local communities into complex societies during the Age of Mobilization by focusing on these three major shifts as described by Calhoun.

Paragraph 2: Two Double Movements (and the In-Between)

Paragraph 2.1: Industrial Revolution – Fascism

Drawing on the work of Polanyi, Calhoun describes how the Industrial Revolution disrupted local communities in a process that he calls 'disembedding'.[731] Not only workers, but also the elites moved towards the cities in a process of urbanisation that was initiated by the new market economy. Whereas elites chose to move to the city because of the opportunities that city life gave them, such as access to higher education, jobs and cultural and musical entertainment, many workers were forced to move to the cities because of declining opportunities in the older agricultural economies and craft production.[732] Because of the city's large scale and its corresponding high numeric ratio of people with whom it is impossible to maintain a direct, personal relationship, a city in itself is less communal than the local close-knit communities that people came from. Although some, especially among the elite, enjoyed the relative anonymity of the city that allowed them to escape ideological, moral and sexual constraints, many people tried to build new communities and organisations to replace the ones they lost in a process Calhoun calls 're-embedding'.[733] Workers in particular were dependent on these communities as these provided them with the social support that was very much needed for those who found themselves in a precarious economic situation. These new communities were mainly built by trade unions and religious organisations such as churches and synagogues.[734] However, despite their efforts, they were unable to replace the social structure of the local communities from which people came.

Calhoun explains that the societal focus was on expanding the cities rather than restoring the old localities.[735] In fact, the larger societal structure radically changed due to technological developments and market changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution. Technological innovations such as the factory, the assembly line (Fordism), the railway and the supermarket have had radical social effects.

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731. Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 74.
732. Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 75.
733. Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 76.
734. Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 76.
735. Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 85.

Calhoun argues that these have been disruptive of local communities, which he illustrates by the example of the replacement of coal fuel with diesel that enabled trains to travel longer distances. Although advantageous from the perspective of time and efficiency, it also led to the demise of local communities (so-called 'death by dieselization'), because trains no longer stopped in villages along the way.[736]

Moreover, Calhoun argues that changes in the capitalist market system have led to a different social structure. He draws on Polanyi to explain that markets themselves have become disembedded. Markets have led to depersonalization, a new web of social relations in which the reweaving of social embeddedness lags behind and indirect relationships.[737] Corporations have played a major role in constructing new social networks. Although they grew in importance for connectivity, both nationally and globally, they were often not able or did not invest in building communities among their employees; rather, they built networks of impersonal relationships based on contingency and volatility where one felt he or she could easily be replaced if needed for economic considerations.[738] Thus, the Industrial Revolution brought great social transformations.

According to the principles of the double movement as described by Polanyi and Calhoun, a response followed the disruption of the nineteenth century in a range of chaotic and open-ended reactions.[739] Calhoun argues that both socialist movements and trade unions, as well as fascism, were a reaction to the disruption of the nineteenth century. He contends that the second movement lasted too long, allowing the first movement (disruption) to continue in the form of two World Wars and the Great Depression, causing protracted suffering and loss. Thus, the disruption caused by the Industrial Revolution culminated in a reaction of which fascism and Nazism were part, thus establishing a Polanyian double movement of disruption and response. Only in the post-war era would stability be achieved by creating the welfare state.

Paragraph 2.2 Post-war Boom

The post-war era is described by Calhoun as an era of 'prosperity and relative equality'.[740] Because of the increase in affluence and (consequently) the number of children, this period between 1945 and 1975 has also been called 'the post-war

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736.   Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 84.
737.   Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 76-77.
738.   Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 78.
739.   Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 86.
740.   Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 86.

boom' or in French 'les trente glorieuses' ('the thirty glorious years').[741] According to Calhoun, this period ended at the end of the 1960s and early 1970s with the disruption that took place due to globalisation, new technologies, overinvestment in older lines of production and a new wave of giant corporations that capitalized on new computational and communications technologies.[742] Nevertheless, the post-war era was characterised by an utopian belief in the rebuilding of a better society than before, in which stability, solidarity and equality were seen as paramount. With the memory of the destructive consequences of the fascist and Nazi ideologies still fresh in everyone's mind, building a democratic society was given top priority.

In building democracy, state institutions became key in guaranteeing social and economic security. After all, no one wanted to return to the subsistence insecurity of before and during the war. Social democracy became the predominant form of democracy and the welfare state emerged. State institutions provided for healthcare, education and old-age pensions, which led to a higher quality of life, due to increased financial means and the development of vaccines against diseases that had plagued citizens for centuries, such as the mortality rate among woman who died in childbirth; this number significantly dropped in the post-war era. It also led to higher levels of education among great numbers of citizens who were suddenly enabled to go to university; an opportunity that used to be reserved for the elite. Social democracy also facilitated capitalism and led to rapid economic growth.[743] It brought more wealth for both the lower and the middle classes. Especially the middle classes benefited from the increased affluence; they could suddenly afford things that were previously only available to the elite. Consumerism became a characteristic of this period; cars, refrigerators and televisions became standard items in a middle-class household.[744] Also culturally, much more became available, such as visiting museums and attending musical concerts.

Moreover, with the new social democratic governmental structure and the increase in prosperity, social relations changed. Large-scale governmental structures now provided for the social security of citizens, which made citizens more dependent on the government for their standard of living. Calhoun emphasises that besides the proactive intervening role of the government, citizens simultaneously relied on mutual support in communities and associations.[745] Calhoun writes: 'Associational life was crucial. […] An enormous range of organisations proliferated in civil

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741.   The term *les trente glorieuses* was first coined by the French economist Jean Fourastié.
742.   Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 87.
743.   Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 90.
744.   Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 91.
745.   Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 86.

society, complementing what state institutions offered.'[746] A good example is the system of pillarization in the Netherlands: citizens were organized in social groups, divided by religion and associated political beliefs. There were roughly four different groups or 'pillars': the Catholics, Protestants, socialists and liberals.[747] They had their own social institutions and social organisations, which led to their own broadcasting organisations, political parties, trade unions, schools, hospitals, sport clubs etc. Thus, within the macro-structure of the governmental social provisions, communities were integrated that were active both on the local as well as societal level. This led to a reciprocal relationship between government and civil society that only strengthened the shared aim of social democracy. Calhoun phrases this as follows: 'Solidarity and social organisation were not only benefits *of* social democracy, thus, but also crucial resources *for* achieving it.'[748] As such, citizens became largely re-embedded, after decades of displacement and disembedding, due to processes of industrialisation and the consequences of war.

However, it should be noted that the process of disembedding did not disappear and was even triggered again by, for example, cars that had become widely available. According to Calhoun, this led to an increased mobility and consequently a reduced connection to local communities. Men increasingly worked away from home, whereas women stayed at home. Moreover, fewer people lived in extended families.[749] Instead, the nuclear family, i.e. parents and children, became the norm. This led to an increased isolation of people in their homes and working spaces. Nevertheless, the post-war era has been characterised as 'the great era of social democracy – the project of pursuing political democracy and a better society together against the background of relative capitalist prosperity'.[750] Moreover, it stands for an increased wellbeing of citizens and a more equitable sharing of costs and a more equal society – which is why many contemporary populist far right leaders nostalgically cling to this era and repeatedly refer to aspects of this period in their political rhetoric.[751] However, the stability of the post-war social democracies would soon be disrupted by a second double movement that became evident in the 1960s.

[746]. Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 89.
[747]. Rudy B. Andeweg, Galen A. Irwin, and Tom Louwerse, *Governance and Politics of the Netherlands* (London: Macmillan 2020), 28.
[748]. Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 99.
[749]. Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 96.
[750]. Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 98.
[751]. Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 102.

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Paragraph 2.3 Global, neoliberal and meritocratic inequality – Rise of the European far right

The hope and the optimism that had accompanied the utopian belief in the rebuilding of a better society during the post-war boom, waned in the 1960s. It was discovered that many of the promises were not fulfilled; the increase in prosperity proved to have its limitations. For example, it did not eliminate imperialism, inequality or racism. This led to protests in the 1960s against the exclusion of women and minorities and for peace, civil rights, and a better environment.[752] The revolutionary year 1968, with students all over the world revolting against the governmental authorities, is characteristic for the cultural change that was set into motion and marked the beginning of the end of the post-war boom.

According to Calhoun, the post-war boom came to a definitive end in 1973-1975.[753] He describes three different problems or what he calls 'catches' that came with the societal changes during the post-war boom. Firstly, *the Weber catch*, which entails that the process of democratisation inevitably went together with bureaucratization. Bureaucratization was needed to regulate public benefits, but it turned out to be 'too complex, too impersonal, too obsessed with rules, and too often ready to deny the benefits to those who made errors in their applications.[754] Secondly, *the Foucault catch*, involves the latent disciplining of citizens by the governmental system, which could turn into control, surveillance and policies that cast citizens into the same mould, thereby depriving them of their unique character and being.[755] This related to both gender, sexuality, morality and ideology; the Red Scare during the fifties is a prime example. Education was increasingly criticised as the vehicle of disciplining, of which Pink Floyds 'Another Brick in the Wall' is illustrative. Thirdly, *the Bourdieu catch*, entails 'the covert way in which social transformations […] are constrained by the reproduction of enduring inequalities.'[756] This implies that under the premise of more equality for all, and actual increased equality for more citizens in various sectors of society, some structural inequalities were covertly perpetuated. This applied to both structural racial and ethnic biases, which were indeed present but

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[752]. Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 106; Stefan Couperus, Pier Domenico Tortola, and Lars Rensmann, "Memory politics of the far right in Europe," *European Politics and Society* 24, no. 4 (2023): 439.

[753]. Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 106.

[754]. Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 103.

[755]. Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 104.

[756]. Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 105.

concealed by what Topolski calls the post-war 'silencing of race-talk', and also with regard to unequal opportunities in education.[757]

These three catches shaped citizens' discontent over the welfare state and led to a crescendo of questioning, protests and revolts, reaching its summit in the 1960s.[758] They led to a global cultural revolution and the rise of what Calhoun calls a 'counterculture' that 'flourished in opposition to unequal, rationalized and disciplinary society.'[759] This 'counterculture' or what I would call 'anti-structure' found its clear expression in the hippie culture, flower power movement and rise of new religious movements in the second half of the 1960s. Just as the anti-structure of Carnival during the Middle Ages and the populist far right in later decades, this new form of anti-structure turned against the established order and formed a parallel culture or society in which freedom and expression were paramount. As we shall see, both the counterculture of the 1960s as well as the rise of the European far right in recent decades, are forms of anti-structure reacting to structures of inequality. The three catches, however, not only led to the emergence of societal and cultural anti-structure, but also signalled the start of the disruption of the status quo of post-war society, and thus the beginning of a second 'double movement' of disruption and response.

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According to Calhoun, all three catches intensified during the neoliberal era but *the Bourdieu catch* in particular was reinforced, both by neoliberal reforms of government as well as meritocratic ideology.[760] It is the Bourdieu catch, i.e. structural inequalities that are covertly perpetuated and insufficiently addressed by public policies, which the far right will particularly agitate against in the following decades. This inequality increased in the second half of the 20th century, but widened enormously from the 1970s onwards, resulting in a social and economic disruption on a global scale. Cause for the widened inequality is due to three factors, which have reinforced each other: globalisation, meritocracy and neoliberalism. Michael Sandel describes their relationship as follows:

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[757]. Topolski, "The Race-Religion Constellation: A European Contribution to the Critical Philosophy of Race," 72; Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*; Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?* For example, Sandel explains that regarding the admission of students to the American Ivy League colleges, it was often the case in the post-war period that social background and financial means proved to be more important than academic ability, despite entrance exams.

[758]. Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 105.

[759]. Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 105.

[760]. Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 106.

> 'Even as globalisation produced massive inequality, these two outlooks
> – the meritocratic and the neoliberal – narrowed the grounds for
> resisting it.'[761]

In the following I will provide a short overview of these three developments.

The process of contemporary globalisation does not exist in isolation; as Peter Stearns has argued, 'it emerges from a more complex and longer-standing process of change'.[762] As the word 'contemporary' already indicates, globalisation is a development that has occurred throughout world history, often in waves of rise and fall. However, whereas some historians claim that 20th century globalisation is just a subsequent phase in a longer process of globalisation, others contend that the current phase is a revolutionary process that has radically altered human life.[763] Notwithstanding this discussion, it is widely acknowledged that the process of globalisation that has developed from the second half of the twentieth century onwards, represents a new stage in modern globalisation (which started around the 1850s through developments in transport and communication, such as trains, steamships, the telegraph, radio and the construction of the Suez and Panama canals). Globalisation is generally defined as 'the intensification of contacts among different parts of the world and the creation of networks that, combining with more local factors, increasingly shape human life.'[764] Stearns argues that although the process involves economic, technological, sociocultural and political aspects, it often focusses on economics; how national economies are integrated into an international economy 'through trade, foreign direct investment, capital flows, migration, and the spread of technology.[765]

Contemporary globalisation finds its beginnings in the Second World War with the leadership position of the United States, wartime research and the global devastation caused by the war as its breeding ground.[766] Firstly, as the U.S. emerged victorious from the war, it led to the establishment of transatlantic links and English as an international language. This proved to be important for international collaborations in post-war business and academia. Secondly, wartime research led to technological innovations that had a profound effect upon scientific developments in the post-war period (think of the mathematician Alan Turing who

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761. Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?*, 198.
762. Peter N. Stearns, *Globalization in World History*, Fourth ed. (New York: Routledge, 2024), 7.
763. Stearns, *Globalization in World History*, 166.
764. Stearns, *Globalization in World History*, 5.
765. Stearns, *Globalization in World History*, 5.
766. Stearns, *Globalization in World History*, 168.

used his wartime research on cracking the Enigma code to develop the forerunner to the modern computer or physicist Robert Oppenheimer who developed the first atomic bomb in the Manhattan Project). Thirdly, the destruction and dislocation of a great number of communities on a global scale, led many leaders in Europe and the U.S. to the implementation of international policies that would promote peace and economic growth.[767] This led to the establishment of new international institutions, agreements and treaties, such as the United Nations (UN), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the European Economic Community (EEC). As a result of these factors, the movement of people and goods around the world gradually increased. Technological innovations such as communication satellites (which facilitated international calls and television programmes) and the widened availability of cars and air travel for middle-class citizens, contributed to global interrelationships.[768] However, it was only after the 1970s that globalisation accelerated. The growth of the market economy skyrocketed, due to mainly economic factors, two of them being the abandonment of the Bretton Woods-system by president Nixon and the embrace of neoliberalism by an increasing number of governments.

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The first factor, the abandonment of the Bretton-Woods system, meant that the international financial agreement made between 44 allied countries in 1944 during a conference held in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, was annulled. This agreement entailed the adherence to fixed exchange rates, i.e. maintaining the exchange value of the participating countries' currencies in relationship to the price of gold through the U.S. dollar.[769] In fact, this meant the reintroduction of the gold standard after it had been repeatedly deserted by multiple countries in the early twentieth century to finance war. To achieve economic stability and prevent economic recessions such as the Great Depression following the stock market crash of 1929, it was necessary to reintroduce (an indirect form of) the gold standard. Moreover, the conference of Bretton-Woods led to the establishment of international financial institutions tasked with overseeing the international market economy, such as 'the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development' (which later became the World Bank) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).[770] However, when Nixon declared in his speech on 15 August 1971 'to suspend temporarily the convertibility of the dollar into gold or other reserve assets, except in amounts and conditions determined to be in the interest of monetary stability and in the best interests of

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[767]. Stearns, *Globalization in World History*, 168.
[768]. Stearns, *Globalization in World History*, 169-70.
[769]. Stearns, *Globalization in World History*, 172.
[770]. Stearns, *Globalization in World History*, 172-73.

the United States', he *de facto* ended the gold standard.[771] His economic measures, taken as a response to the inflation of the US dollar, came as a shock to other countries (therefore his measures are also referred to as the 'Nixon shock') as they were seen as an act of unilateralism.

The second factor that fuelled the growth of the market economy but has widened inequality has been neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is a liberal economic ideology that originated in the 1930s. It upholds the ideas that markets always generate the most just and freedom-promoting outcomes and that private property is the necessary basis of liberty and wealth.[772] It therefore advocates a laissez-faire approach to economics (which means deregulation and no restrictions) and a minimalist government. Although neoliberalism had seen an increase in followers for decades, it took off from the 1970s when economic interests began to set the political agenda.[773] Heads of government in Europe and the United States increasingly implemented neoliberal ideas in their policies, as for example Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan in the 1980s, Bill Clinton in the 1990s and Tony Blair in the 2000s. Consequently, neoliberalism transformed the Western political arena and market dynamics, which is why the period from 1970 until the economic recession of 2008 is also called 'the neoliberal era'.[774]

However, the accelerated and unrestrained economic growth of the global market economy, facilitated by neoliberalism, has come with a price. First of all, it has incorporated great risks into the global market. Calhoun argues that deregulation and finance-led wealth creation have made economies more volatile and risky.[775] As a matter of fact, abandoning the gold standard will have drastic consequences in the long run if there is no external intervention. Since money has no longer a fixed measure of value, the value of money has become totally dependent on the market. This has given exponential economic growth, yet like a cancer, the growth is unbridled; the financial system cannot regulate or correct itself and therefore needs external interventions. Without these, there will be adverse financial consequences, which were already felt with the recession of 2008, but will have far

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[771.] Formally, Nixon's decision did not imply the end of the Bretton Woods agreement, but since he took away an important part of the agreement, it did mark its end in practice. The definitive end came in 1976 with the Jamaica Accords. Nixon held his speech on August 15, 1971, which was broadcasted on television. Carl Menger Center for the Study of Money and Banking, "August 15, 1971 - Richard Nixon Closes the Gold Window," YouTube, August 15, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7_Xw5tWsOQo.

[772.] Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 109.

[773.] Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 108.

[774.] Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 115.

[775.] Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 115.

greater consequences in the long run. In other words, the old account of the Nixon shock is still open and has yet to be settled. Secondly, the accelerated growth of the global economy has been accompanied by great inequality in the distribution of the profits. Michael Sandel argues that 'neoliberal' or 'market-driven' globalisation has brought an 'unabated increase in inequality'.[776] Sandel argues that the rewards or fruits of economic growth due to globalisation only went to a limited number of people at the top, with many others, especially within the working classes, not noticing any financial improvement. He gives the example of the United States, where most of the nation's income since the late 1970s went to the top 10 percent, whereas the bottom half received virtually none.[777] He states that 'four decades of finance-driven globalisation has brought inequalities of income and wealth not seen since the 1920s'.[778] Calhoun also argues that since the 1970s there has been a growing gap between rich and poor, which has not only increased in the United States, but also in other wealthy democracies.[779] Thirdly, neoliberal globalisation has altered and negatively affected social relations and social cohesion within western democracies. Calhoun argues that the combination of capitalism, new ideologies and government policies during the neoliberal era have led to the disruption of workers and local communities.[780] Deindustrialisation has led to a loss of jobs, mainly among the worker class, as jobs in manufacturing came to be increasingly replaced by jobs in the service sector, due to more investments in technology.[781] Moreover, large (predominantly technology) companies seized the space created by neoliberal policies (more freedom, less government) to capitalize on the benefits of the accelerated market-driven globalisation. Although these brought many technological advancements and thus convenience and benefits for consumers, they negatively impacted what Calhoun calls 'the social foundations of democracy'.[782] For example, by impeding trade unions, by creating global networks of employees with indirect and impersonal relationships that have substituted (the social support of) communities, by easily replacing employees with outsourcing to low-wage countries, robots or artificial intelligence (AI) and by setting up short-term and temporary contracts instead of permanent ones.[783] Calhoun attributes this weakening of social support and stability to the underlying ideology of

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776. Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?*, 207.
777. Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?*, 22.
778. Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent: A New Edition for Our Perilous Times*, 322.
779. Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 126.
780. Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 127.
781. Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 122.
782. Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 121.
783. Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?*, 19; Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 77-78.

neoliberalism; through its focus on property rights and the idea that the common good is maximal freedom combined with maximal capital appreciation, it has placed the interests of property owners above any form of solidarity.[784] As a result, neoliberal globalisation has led to a social dislocation and disruption, just as it did in the nineteenth and early 20th century, during and after the Industrial Revolution.

A third factor that has widened and legitimised inequality and which has had a corrosive effect on social relationships in western democracies is the ideology of meritocracy. Michael Sandel describes how the global market economy has transformed western democracies into market *societies*.[785] According to Sandel, this is not only due to market-driven globalisation, but also due to the ideology of meritocracy that has gathered strength in the second half of the 20th century and has gained a hold on the public life and public culture of western democracies ever since.[786] The meritocratic ethic entails the idea that society should allocate economic rewards and positions of responsibility according to merit.[787] Sandel shows how meritocratic thinking is rooted in Christian theology and how this has influenced meritocratic thinking today. He calls it a 'providentialism without God', meaning that success and power are morally attributed to the individual's own effort and hard work – in contrast to some Christian protestant thinking wherein success is a reflection of whether or not man falls into God's grace. Success now moralises an individual's superior virtue.[788]

Although the meritocratic ethic has a strong side in the autonomy it gives to the individual, Sandel argues that the meritocratic ethic also has a tyrannical side, namely the responsibility for success or failure that is entirely placed upon the individual himself.[789] He raises the question to what extent this meritocratic ethic is tenable, as it ignores the factors in success or failure that reside in external circumstances, such as the talents that an individual is gifted with or the help that one has received from others. Sandel concludes that we are not self-made and self-sufficient.[790] An example that illustrates his argument is the following statement of Arnold Schwarzenegger, who is generally conceived as the epitome of the self-made man, in the foreword of the book 'Tools of Titans' and that he reiterates in his recently appeared Netflix documentary 'Arnold':

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784. Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 117.
785. Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?*
786. Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?*, 59.
787. Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?*, 34.
788. Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?*, 42.
789. Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?*, 35.
790. Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?*, 227.

'But it is not true that I am self-made. Like everyone, to get to where I am, I stood on the shoulders of giants. My life was built on a foundation of parents, coaches, and teachers; of kind souls who lent couches or gym back rooms where I could sleep; of mentors who shared wisdom and advice; of idols who motivated me from the pages of magazines (and, as my life grew, from personal interaction) […] You can admit that you can't do it alone. I certainly can't. No one can.'[791]

These words by Schwarzenegger contrast sharply with the idea that you owe your success entirely and solely to your own doing. According to Sandel, the meritocratic ethic stands in the way of solidarity and humility and leads to what he calls 'meritocratic hubris'.[792] He argues that this meritocratic hubris has been present among the winners of globalisation; those who reaped the benefits of four decades of market-driven globalisation think they deserve their success, whereas the 'losers of globalisation', those who got left behind, feel humiliation and resentment.[793] The basic idea that fuels these feelings is that both the winners and losers of globalisation deserve their lot. As such, Sandel argues that the meritocratic ethic is not a remedy but a justification of the inequality that has arisen as a result of market-driven globalisation.[794] Instead of governments countering the inequality by reforming the global economy, they tried to solve it by creating more equal opportunities that allowed their citizens to compete fairly on the market. The main vehicle became the provision and improvement of education. Sandel describes the rationale behind this strategy as follows: '…provided they operate within a fair system of equal opportunity, markets give people what they deserve. As long as everyone has an equal chance to compete, market outcomes reward merit.[795]

However, this has led to a credentialism that has not only eroded the efficacy of governments, but has also led to a loss of social esteem and recognition for those who do not have a college degree.[796] Sandel calls this 'the credentialist prejudice' that is present among the winners of globalisation who look down on those who are less educated. He argues that credentialism has deepened the divide between those who own a diploma and those who don't, what Sandel calls the 'diploma

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791. Timothy Ferriss, *Tools of Titans: the Tactics, Routines and Habits of Billionaires, Icons and World-Class Performers* (London: Ebury Publishing, 2016).
792. Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?*, 25.
793. Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?*, 25.
794. Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?*, 122.
795. Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?*, 62.
796. Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?*, 89.

divide'.[797] This diploma divide runs through classes in society: Calhoun argues that there has been a split in the middle-class; during the last fifty years, but especially during and after the financial crisis of 2008 and the economic crisis of 2020 due to the global spread of Covid-19, the upper middle class has made more money, whereas the lower middle class together with the working class lost ground.[798] This split is mainly based on education (which Sandel calls the 'diploma divide') and has affected voting behaviour: people with more education tend to vote for leftist parties, whereas those with less education are more inclined to vote for (populist) rightist parties.[799] It has led to the polarisation of two distinct groups of people within society: the first group consisting of mainly upper-class and upper middle class of people who own a college degree and who have profited from the benefits of globalisation. They are what Sandel calls 'the winners of globalisation'. The second group consists of mainly lower middle-class and working class people who have had less education and who have lost out on the benefits of globalisation. They are what Sandel calls the 'losers of globalisation'.

This division, which initially arose from economic inequality due to the process of neoliberal globalisation, has evolved into a cleavage based on identity. Sandel speaks of 'separate ways of life', whereas Tobias Cremer speaks of a new identity cleavage between liberal-cosmopolitans and populist-communitarians.[800] Cremer lists the different designations within the academic literature for these two distinct groups: 'Somewheres' and 'Anywheres', 'Sedentaries' and 'Nomads', 'Nativists' and 'Globalists', 'Communitarians' and 'Cosmopolitans' and 'Identity Conservatives' and 'Identity Liberals'.[801] Regardless of the discussion which designation fits best, these terms indicate a cleavage in identity related to the process of globalisation. Sandel and Calhoun both argue that the group of 'the losers of globalisation' or 'the populist-communitarians', feel anger and resentment against meritocratic elites and as a consequence vote for populist leaders who resonate this anti-elitist feeling.[802] According to Sandel, 'the populist backlash' is thus caused by the combined effect

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797. Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?*, 101.

798. Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 123.

799. Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?*, 101. Interestingly, Sandel notes that this pattern has been reversed during the twentieth century: people with more education tended to vote for rightist parties, whereas those with less education voted for leftist parties.

800. Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?*, 226; Cremer, *The Godless Crusade. Religion, Populism and Right-Wing Identity Politics in the West*, 26; Cremer, "The Rise of the post-religious right: Christanism and Secularism in the French Rassemblement National."

801. Cremer, *The Godless Crusade. Religion, Populism and Right-Wing Identity Politics in the West*, 32.

802. Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?*, 198-99; Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 123.

of market-driven globalisation and meritocratic sorting ('the diploma-divide'), which has led to loss of social recognition and esteem among the lower middle class and the working class.[803]

However, I argue that the choice of those who are called communitarians or 'the losers of globalisation' to opt for the far right is not so much situated in economic anxiety or anger about a loss of social esteem and recognition, but hits something much more essential, namely: a loss of identity. It is the combination of the acceleration of change, loss of control and the idea of replaceability that compels citizens to pull an emergency brake; which they find in the far right. Cause is the process of neoliberal globalisation, strengthened by the process of secularisation and individualisation, which leads to social disruption. This disruption then provokes a far-right response. As such, the double movement following the process of globalisation in the second half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century follows the same pattern as the double movement that was set into motion by the Industrial Revolution in the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the 20th century. Polanyi already warned against the effects of an unbridled growth and extension of a liberal market economy. He agrees with the founder of the cooperative movement Robert Owen that 'a market economy if left to evolve according to its own laws would create great and permanent evils'.[804]

This can be recognised in today's global economy, with the financial crisis of 2008 as a signal of the flaws inherent to the economic system. Indeed, a liberal market economy has no self-regulating or self-correcting capacity. If you let it run its course, it both blows up the economic infrastructure from within (examples are the stock market crash of 1929 and the financial crisis of 2008) as well as destroys the social structure of society (examples are the exploitation of workers and the breakdown of local communities during and after the Industrial Revolution and the impersonal networks and lack of social support during and after the process of globalisation). It therefore needs external correction, what Polanyi calls the second principle of the double movement, namely the protectionist measures taken in the interwar period to curb economic liberalism. However, these protectionist measures, that must be taken in order to curb the adverse effects of a liberal market economy, have the inevitable consequence of undermining democracy. Just as fascism was a 'kill-or-cure' remedy for the economy, seized out of necessity, as a last resort to save the economy, indeed helped to recover the economy during and after the Depression as a consequence of the Wall Street Crash of 1929 (which Hitler

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803.   Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?*, 208.
804.   Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 130.

did by establishing a war economy), it simultaneously undermined the democratic structure of western societies. Interestingly, Polanyi notes that fascism emerged in very different countries with no similarities whatsoever:

> 'Fascism had as little to do with the Great War as with the Versailles Treaty, with Junker militarism as with the Italian temperament. The movement appeared in defeated countries like Bulgaria and in victorious ones like Jugoslavia, in countries of Northern temperament like Finland and Norway and of Southern temperament like Italy and Spain, in countries of Aryan race like England, Ireland, or Belgium and non-Aryan race like Japan, Hungary or Palestine, in countries of Catholic traditions like Portugal and in Protestant ones like Holland, in soldierly communities like Prussia and civilian ones like Austria, in old cultures like France and new ones like the United States and the Latin-American countries. In fact, there was no type of background - of religious, cultural or national tradition – that made a country immune to fascism, once the conditions for its emergence were given.'[805]

Rather, Polanyi argues that fascism is rooted in a dysfunctional market society: 'Fascism, like socialism, was rooted in a market society that refused to function. Hence it was worldwide...'[806]

In the same way, the rise of the far right is a global phenomenon today; it is not only present in Europe, but also in other countries such as the United States, India and Brazil.[807] I argue that the rise of the far right is stronger in Europe because social disruption has been more widespread due to processes of secularisation and individualisation that have developed more profoundly in the European context. Consequently, there is a greater loss of identity and hence a greater tendency to pull the emergency brake of the far right. Thus, the cycle of the double movement that Polanyi has described regarding the nineteenth century, reiterates in our contemporary world: the extension and unbridled growth of a liberal market economy (due to neoliberal globalisation and the abandonment of the gold standard), leads to adverse effects and great risks for society that need to be mitigated externally to protect society (nature and citizens), but the protectionist measures simultaneously undermine the democratic structure of society. What was true in the early 20th century is also true today: because the liberal market

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805. Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 237-38.
806. Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 239.
807. Mudde, *The far right today*, 2.

economy is closely linked to international trade, there is little incentive to reform the global economy and therefore the system degenerates into what Polanyi calls a 'secular religion':
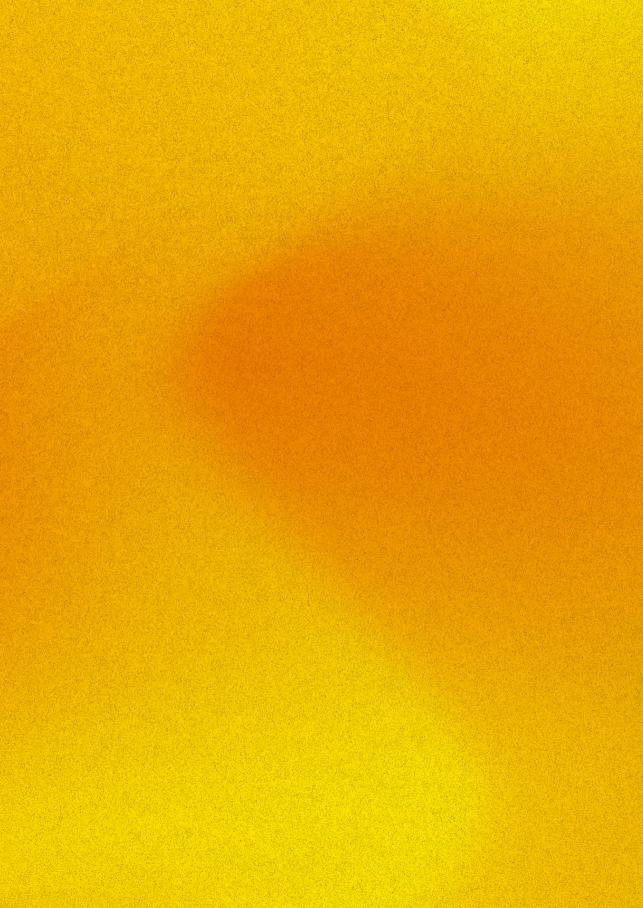
> 'The expansion of the market system in the nineteenth century was synonymous with the simultaneous spreading of international free trade, competitive labor market, and gold standard; they belonged together. No wonder that economic liberalism turned into a secular religion once the great perils of this venture were evident.'[808]

Similarly, Sandel argues that inequality resulting from neoliberal globalisation has not been adequately dealt with by governments, as if it were sacred, but handled by creating equal opportunities through education so that everyone could compete fairly on the market. However, this totally neglects the unequal distribution of the profits within the global economy that should actually be addressed. It has led to a competitive market society, with those who succeed looking down with disdain (what Sandel calls 'the meritocratic hubris') on those who fail and with success or failure only being reduced to one's own fault or merit.

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As such, the meritocratic ethic has led to a legitimisation of the status quo and has contributed to the market fundamentalism or 'secular religion' of global market dynamics. As a result of neoliberal globalisation and its legitimisation in meritocratic ethics, combined with the process of secularisation and individualisation, many feel they have lost their identities. The consequence is not only a greater number of mental health issues or self-inflicted deaths (known as 'deaths of despair'), but also an ever-expanding breeding ground for the far right, much like the rise of fascism in the 1930s.[809] In the next section, I demonstrate how identity (loss) plays a central role in the rise of the far right and how this has led to the emergence of religious contra-identities in the political discourse of the European far right.

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808.   Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 139.
809.   Anne Case and Angus Deaton, *Deaths of Despair and the Future of Capitalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021); Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?*, 200.

Chapter VIII:

A Breeding Ground for the European Far Right

Paragraph 1: Rise of the European Far Right

There is no doubt that the far right has been gaining ground in Europe in recent decades. This is evident from directly observable victories in the political arena of multiple European countries. In 2022, Hungary observed Victor Orbán's Fidesz party winning a fourth consecutive parliamentary election, France witnessed Marine le Pen's party Rassemblement National (RN) becoming the largest opposition party by winning more than 13 million votes in the presidential elections, Sweden saw right-wing opposition parties winning the *Riksdag* elections, making the far-right Sweden Democrats the second largest party in Sweden and Italy watched how Giorgia Meloni, leader of the Italian far-right party 'Fratelli d'Italia', claimed victory in the Italian parliamentary elections, becoming Italy's first far-right prime minister leading the most far-right government in Italy since World War II. In 2023, although the Spanish far-right party Vox lost 19 seats and Poland's Law and Justice party (PiS) is no longer part of the governing coalition (but still is the largest party in Poland), Europe witnessed the inclusion of the far-right party Slovak National Party (SNS) in the Slovakian government, a major victory for Geert Wilders with his Party for Freedom (PVV) in the Dutch elections and the far-right Swiss People's Party in Switzerland winning the national elections. In 2024, the Portuguese far-right political party 'Chega' (Enough!) finished third in the parliamentary elections, quadrupling its seats compared to 2022.

This *prima facie* predominant success of the European far right is confirmed by academic research. According to the latest PopuList (The PopuList 3.0), a database that includes data on European parties from 31 countries that can be classified as populist, far left, or far right and have won at least one seat or at least 2 percent of the vote in national parliamentary elections between 1989 and 2022, there is a significant growth in vote share of far-right populist political parties, especially from 2015 onwards.[810] Nowadays, one in three Europeans vote anti-establishment, half of whom vote for far-right political parties and it is this vote share that is increasing most rapidly and seems to come from a broader and more diverse voter base.[811] Mudde has argued that the mainstreaming and normalisation of the far

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[810]. Matthijs Rooduijn et al., "The PopuList: A Database of Populist, Far-Left, and Far-Right Parties Using Expert-Informed Qualitative Comparative Classification (EiQCC)," *British Journal of Political Science* (2023): 8; Matthijs Rooduijn, Andrea L.P. Pirro, Daphne Halikiopoulou, Caterina Froio, Stijn van Kessel, Sarah L. de Lange, Cas Mudde, and Paul Taggart "The PopuList 3.0: An Overview of Populist, Far-left and Far-right Parties in Europe," (2023). www.popu-list.org.

[811]. Jon Henley, "Revealed: one in three Europeans now vote anti-establishment," *The Guardian* 2023, 21 September; Daphne Halikiopoulou and Tim Vlandas, *Understanding Right-wing Populism and What To Do About It* (2022), https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/wien/19110-20220517.pdf. Anti-establishment implies: parties that are populist and/or far left or far right.

right is characteristic for the current wave of the far right.[812] Moreover, he argues that this mainstreaming has led to a radicalisation of centre parties and that the tolerance of the far right has widely grown.[813] Olivier Roy also argues that we are witnessing a new wave of right-wing populist movements that have proven to be more resilient than expected.[814] These have emerged due to extreme right parties that have softened their image and viewpoints (such as the RN due to the dédiabolisation strategy of Marine le Pen), the creation of new far-right parties or centre right parties that have shifted to the right. Roy argues that the year 2015, the year of the European migrant crisis, has marked a watershed in the mainstreaming of populist arguments.[815]

Both developments of the sustained rise of the European far right and its mainstreaming and normalisation in public discourse and politics have led to a growing anxiety that the far right will destabilize European democracies through the normalisation and establishment of authoritarian policies that pave the way for autocracy. This fear has led to an academic debate about the question whether western democracy is currently in danger and if so, how it is related to the far right.[816] Indeed, there is discussion to what extent the far right is the cause or the symptom of the degeneration of western democracies. Although the mainstreaming of the European far right is obviously a threat to the democratic foundations and rule of law of European democracies and as such will definitely erode democracy from within, I agree with both Michael Sandel and Craig Calhoun who argue that the populist far right is rather 'a political response' to a root cause that has already led to the degeneration of Western and West-European democracies in particular. Sandel writes that U.S. president Donald Trump was elected 'by tapping a wellspring of anxieties, frustrations, and legitimate grievances to which the mainstream parties had no compelling answer. A similar predicament afflicts European democracies.'[817] And he writes further down: 'They (red. the elites) do not see that the upheavals we are witnessing are a political response to a political failure of historic proportions.'[818]

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[812]. Mudde, *The far right today*, 164,68.
[813]. Jon Henley, "Revealed: one in three Europeans now vote anti-establishment," *The Guardian* 21 September 2023.
[814]. Roy, "Beyond Populism: The Conservative Right, the Courts, the Churches and the Concept of a Christian Europe," 191.
[815]. Roy, "Beyond Populism: The Conservative Right, the Courts, the Churches and the Concept of a Christian Europe," 187.
[816]. See for example: Elcott, *Faith, nationalism, and the future of liberal democracy*; Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*; Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent: A New Edition for Our Perilous Times*.
[817]. Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?*, 17-18.
[818]. Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?*, 19.

In addition, Calhoun writes: 'Populism has been one response, though it is neither a driver itself, nor able to stem the degeneration.'[819] Thus, the European far-right is a response, but to what? The answer to this question often fails in the academic literature; Calhoun does not answer it and Sandel formulates only part of the problem that causes the response. In the next sections, I aim at filling this gap by arguing that the far right is essentially a response to an increased feeling of existential insecurity among European citizens, caused by a loss of identity, loss of control and an accelerating speed of change, resulting in many citizens pulling the emergency brake of the far right.

Paragraph 2: Responding to existential insecurity

There is great academic debate about the question what motivates people to vote for the far right. This discussion is often conducted in terms of supply and demand factors to which the success of the far right is attributed. One of the main questions in this discussion is whether voters for far-right parties merely protest against the establishment or actually adhere to the far-right ideology of the party they are voting for. Cas Mudde argues that voters for far-right parties *both* protest against the establishment as well as support far-right parties.[820] I agree, as we will see in Paragraph 3, the far right is both perceived as an emergency brake as well as a solution to the problems citizens face.

Regarding the protest argument, Mudde argues that there are two categories of explanations for the far-right response: the first is the economic anxiety argument that maintains that far-right voters are responding to economic stress caused by neoliberal globalisation.[821] Far-right voters are the so-called 'losers of globalisation' protesting against their financial deprivation. The second argument maintains that far-right voters protest against mass immigration and the rise of a multicultural society (both aspects of neoliberal globalisation), which they perceive as a threat to their cultural identity. Mudde rightly observes that these two arguments have much in common, and they might be perceived as complementary; Mudde argues that it is 'the socio-cultural translation of socio-economic concerns' that explains most support for the far right.[822]

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[819]   Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 128.
[820]   Mudde, *The far right today*, 99.
[821]   Mudde, *The far right today*, 101.
[822]   Mudde, *The far right today*, 101.

This observation seems to be reflected in the explanations given by Michael Sandel. In diagnosing 'populist discontent', Sandel mentions three explanations: firstly, populist anger is a backlash against growing racial, ethnic and gender diversity. Secondly, populist resentment is due to 'bewilderment and dislocation wrought by the rapid pace of change in an age of globalisation and technology.' And thirdly, populist anger and resentment are due to the feeling of disempowerment among working class citizens as a consequence of the way mainstream parties have enacted neoliberal globalisation. More specifically, through their technocratic way of conceiving the public good and the meritocratic way of defining winners and losers.[823] As such, Sandel seems to argue similarly to Mudde that the rise of the far right can be explained from a socio-cultural translation (populist backlash against diversity) of socio-economic concerns (growing inequality due to market-driven globalisation).

However, Tobias Cremer adds a third explanation to the debate by arguing that there is insufficient evidence for the previous two explanations (which he calls the 'economic' and the 'culture-religion' cleavage) to explain for the recent surge of national populist movements and their use of religion.[824] Cremer speaks of an 'identity cleavage' between communitarianism and globalism; a new social cleavage centred around identity politics, which drives demand for right-wing populist politics, and in whose context religion can be politically used as a cultural identity marker.[825] He argues that voters are not so much divided because of struggles over class or culture wars, but rather because of 'a new contest over the status of ethno-cultural, racial and civilisational identities of majority populations in the West'.[826] Cremer maintains that the division between the so-called 'Communitarians' and 'Cosmopolitans' stems from the urge to define the 'us' and the 'other' in times of rapid social an demographic change, which is the core of the new identity cleavage.

Though all of these explanations correctly identify globalisation as the root cause of the contemporary far-right response, and while the factors mentioned are all part of the explanation why people are increasingly voting for the far right, they do not address the core problem that citizens are facing. It is not just financial deprivation, a loss of social recognition and esteem, a threatened cultural identity, but it is about something much more essential: the feeling of *existential insecurity*. This is the central claim of this dissertation, that existential insecurity drives the

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823.   Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?*, 18-19.
824.   Cremer, *The Godless Crusade. Religion, Populism and Right-Wing Identity Politics in the West*, 31.
825.   Cremer, *The Godless Crusade. Religion, Populism and Right-Wing Identity Politics in the West*, 31-33.
826.   Cremer, *The Godless Crusade. Religion, Populism and Right-Wing Identity Politics in the West*, 31.

far-right electorate, which is not to be understood in the existentialist way of uncertainty that precedes our existence, but rather as distress caused by societal macro processes such as globalisation, secularisation and individualisation. This distress is not limited to a particular dimension of life, but touches the very essence of our existence. The societal developments that I have described in the previous sections are perceived as threatening, rather than ensuring citizens' existential security. This perception is at odds with the demand that our existence requires an environment that provides certain securities, such as means for a living, a sense of belonging and the feeling of added value to a community or society at large. That is what provides one identity, and identity gives a feeling of worthiness, and worthiness gives a citizen the incentive to contribute constructively to society; and include others around you. When this intrinsic need and yearning for a sense of belonging is not fulfilled, citizens cry for basic certainty, which resonates with far-right individuals and movements that offer a simplification of the overly complex reality, implicating religion in this complexity reduction, by stripping it of theology and ethics and employing it only instrumentally as a cultural identity marker for the void that characterises the far right in terms of identity.

The feeling of existential insecurity can be attributed to three socio-psychological factors that affect citizens in Western democracies: a loss of identity, a loss of control and (accelerated) speed of change. These are the consequence of the societal macro-process of neoliberal globalisation, in combination with the process of individualisation and secularisation. A more detailed account of these factors are given in the following sections.

Paragraph 2.1 Loss of identity (replaceability)

The first cause of an increased feeling of existential insecurity is a loss of identity and the concomitant feeling of replaceability, as a result of the erosion of the two pillars of local community and religion. The contours of the position of citizens within society have become blurred, as the potential for replaceability has increased, partly due to the globalisation of products and people. In the premodern period, a blacksmith, for example, was usually guaranteed his place in a local community for the rest of his life.[827] He was known through direct, interpersonal relationships and experienced his added value to the community by utilising his qualities. Moreover, the religious outlook of the blacksmith entailed the theological projection of the

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[827]. Sociologist Hartmut Rosa argues that in the premodern era professions were passed down from father to son and therefore were stable across a lifetime and even across generations. This has changed in the modern era with often multiple job changes within a lifetime. See Hartmut Rosa, *Beschleunigung und Entfremdung. Entwurf einer kritischen Theorie spätmoderner Zeitlichkeit* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2022), 25.

enchanted cosmos onto society, which gave the blacksmith a distinct, unique place in God's ordering of the world. Thus, the two pillars of local community and religion gave the blacksmith a clearly defined place in society and thus a distinct identity. In our contemporary society however, because of cheaper Chinese products or through a cheaper labour force, the blacksmith may suddenly be replaced. Direct, personal relationships have been replaced by indirect and automated relationships. The blacksmith is no longer part of a closeknit community where everyone knows each other, but has a great chance of disappearing into anonymity due to an overly numerical ratio that prevails in cities or the indirect networks of international corporations. Markets are no longer a meeting place, but have grown into complex systems regulated by what Adam Smith has called 'the invisible hand'.[828]

Moreover, due to the rise of exclusive humanism and the process of secularisation, the theological cosmos has been substituted by a mechanical universe, in which human beings do not perceive themselves as a unique part in God's plan and ordering of the world, but rather an expendable link in a mechanistic worldview. The process of (atomistic) individualisation has caused citizens to no longer feel part of a group in which they experience their added value. This has become evident in the decline of group memberships across the full spectrum of western societies: not only churches, but also sport clubs, associations, trade unions and political parties.[829] Thus, having become an expendable link in a large-scale system, citizens feel they have become replaceable.

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Calhoun describes this process of replacement by arguing that the externalization of costs, which is characteristic of the neoliberal era, has led to the loss of 'good

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[828]. Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 78; Adam Smith, *An Inquiry Into The Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (Dublin: Printed for Messrs. Whitestone, Chamberlaine, W. Watson, Potts, S. Watson [and 15 others in Dublin], 1776).

[829]. Research shows that there has been a significant drop in political party membership in Europe: in the early 1960s the average percentage of party members in the electorate was about 15 percent; this percentage has dropped below 5 percent in the last years below 2010. See Gideon Rahat ̧ and Ofer Kenig, *From Party Politics to Personalized Politics? Party Change and Political Personalization in Democracies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 19. Church membership has also significantly declined in multiple (West-)European countries. In the Netherlands church membership has declined by more than half between 1966 and 2015 (from 67 percent to 32,2 percent). Ton Bernts et al., *God in Nederland 1966-2015* (Utrecht: Ten Have, 2016). Comparing multiple European countries, R. Hoekmann et al. conclude that European sport clubs have difficulty in retaining members, identifying individualism as one of the causes for people being less willing to commit themselves for a long period to a sport club. Christoph Breuer et al., *Sport Clubs in Europe: a Cross-National Comparative Perspective* (Cham Springer, 2015), 431. The same holds for membership of trade unions and associations.

old jobs', the disruption of communities and the displacement of citizens.[830] He also argues that right-wing populists have reacted out of fear that 'although they were the 'real' citizens and 'true' representatives of the legitimate nation, they were being replaced'.[831] Conspiracy theories that circulate in the far-right landscape in which the government or leftist elite collaborates with outsiders to the nation (such as Muslim immigrants), for example in 'The Great Replacement Theory', directly express this fear of being replaced.[832] Michael Sandel argues that the 'losers of globalisation' have reacted out of fear for growing obsolescence: 'the society in which they lived no longer seemed to need the skills they had to offer'.[833]

Although Sandel links this to a lack of social recognition and esteem as well as appreciation from society, I argue that this fear is in fact indicative of an increased sense of replaceability and an existential lack of feeling that one adds value to society. As such, it seems that consumerism as a consequence of neoliberal globalisation has led not only to the easy disposal and replacement of products, but also of people. Sociologist Hartmut Rosa has argued that technical acceleration has led to a different relationship between human beings and their material surroundings; he speaks of 'throwaway structures' due to the high rate at which we change clothing, cars, computers, food, schools, offices etc.[834] He argues that when things in the premodern era were broken or dysfunctional, they were usually repaired; nowadays, they are discarded and replaced by something new. I contend that this pattern of replacement is also being applied to human beings, which results in a loss of identity. In his encyclical letter 'Laudato Si', pope Francis writes about 'a throwaway culture' that not only affects the natural world of the planet, but also human society.[835] According to the pope, a throwaway culture 'affects the excluded just as it quickly reduces things to rubbish'.[836] This relates in particular also to mutual human relationships:

> 'Real relationships with others, with all the challenges they entail,
> now tend to be replaced by a type of internet communication which

[830]. Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 117, 22.
[831]. Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 13.
[832]. The Great Replacement theory was first expounded by the French author Renaud Camus, propagated by far-right politician Éric Zemmour and has become popular as a conspiracy theory among far-right actors in the West. Renaud Camus, *Le Grand Remplacement* (Paris: Reinharc, 2011).
[833]. Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?*, 206.
[834]. Rosa, *Beschleunigung und Entfremdung. Entwurf einer kritischen Theorie spätmoderner Zeitlichkeit*, 63-64.
[835]. Francis, *Laudato si'* (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 2015).
[836]. Francis, *Laudato si'*, sec. 22.

enables us to choose or eliminate relationships at whim, thus giving rise to a new type of contrived emotion which has more to do with devices and displays than with other people and with nature.'[837]

In this passage pope Francis warns for the dangers of new forms of media, in which human relationships tend to be replaced by superficial networks facilitated by technological innovations. In general, the pope argues that global change has negatively influenced the social cohesion of contemporary societies, and a loss of identity in particular:

'The social dimensions of global change include the effects of technological innovations on employment, social exclusion, an inequitable distribution and consumption of energy and other services, social breakdown, increased violence and a rise in new forms of social aggression, drug trafficking, growing drug use by young people, and the loss of identity. These are signs that the growth of the past two centuries has not always led to an integral development and an improvement in the quality of life. Some of these signs are also symptomatic of real social decline, the silent rupture of the bonds of integration and social cohesion.[838]

Pope Francis writes of global change that has led to a loss of identity. Tobias Cremer argues that group identities in Europe have been weakened or have entirely disappeared during the second half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the 21st century.[839] He argues that in most Western societies inherited group identities and associated social structures have been eroded and replaced by individualist acquired identities among cosmopolitans, while communitarians have been left with regret for the erosion of inherited collective identities.[840] Based on Cremer's argument, it might seem that global change has led to an 'identity cleavage' between the winners of globalisation or 'the cosmopolitans', who have managed to create an individual identity, and the so-called losers of globalisation or 'communitarians' who still yearn for a group identity that they aim at retrieving in far-right circles.

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837.   Francis, *Laudato si'*, sec. 47.
838.   Francis, *Laudato si'*, sec. 46.
839.   Cremer, *The Godless Crusade. Religion, Populism and Right-Wing Identity Politics in the West*, 33.
840.   Cremer, *The Godless Crusade. Religion, Populism and Right-Wing Identity Politics in the West*, 34.

However, the question is whether this apparent dichotomy reflects the diversity of the far-right landscape. Identity construction always involves stating boundaries in relation to something else and cannot be created in itself; thus, an 'individual acquired identity' does not exist. This is substantiated by Charles Taylor, who has argued that the ethic of authenticity that has influenced Western societies from the 1960s onwards, has led to the illusion that one can create one's own unique individual identity. Taylor critiques this claim, based on two arguments: firstly, defining oneself implies finding what is significant in one's difference from others. Thus, identity construction is a dialogical relationship that requires recognition by others.[841] Secondly, one can only define one's own identity against the background of things that matter, which he calls 'pre-existing horizons of significance.'[842] Taylor argues that in the premodern era, a person's identity was largely fixed by his or her social position. By this he means that the background that made sense of what the person recognised as important was to a great extent determined by his or her place in society and whatever role or activities attached to this.[843] He goes on to argue that during the premodern era there was no talk of issues of identity or recognition as one's place in premodern society was taken for granted; it was clearly defined and recognised by others, against a theological (cosmos) background that was seen as significant (as in the aforementioned example of the blacksmith). This sharply contrasts the situation in many Western societies today where the themes of 'identity' and 'recognition' are heavily discussed in the public debate, which is indicative of their contested status.

Thus, I argue in line with Taylor that the ethic of authenticity has undermined the notion of pre-existing horizons of significance and the importance of recognition of one's place in society. This not only holds for the so-called 'losers of globalisation' but for all (including the cosmopolitans) within contemporary Western societies who do not experience a well-defined place in society, who do not relate themselves to pre-existing horizons of significance, who do not feel their sense of worth and who *do* feel they can be easily replaced. The gig economy, with its short-term work opportunities that facilitates for example Uber drivers and the delivery drivers of Deliveroo, is an example par excellence of the reign of replaceability and volatility, but which utterly undermines an unwavering sense of worth and identity within present-day society.

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841.   Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 35,45.
842.   Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 38,40.
843.   Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 47.

Furthermore, the feeling of replaceability has been enhanced by meritocratic thinking and the primacy of instrumental reason. Firstly, as Michael Sandel has explained, the ideal of meritocracy has led to a credentialist prejudice. Combined with market-driven globalisation, this has led to a global economy in which international corporations compete for the best educated people all around the world. This direct global competition has led to the predominance of enhanced competitive thinking within the market economy. However, with the emergence of the market *society*, competitive thinking has also become predominant within social relations.[844] Over time, there has been a shift in thinking, from the predominance of complementary towards competitive thinking, which can be clearly attributed to the rise of a global economy, individualism, neoliberalism and the meritocratic ideal. These developments have caused people to see each other as potential competitors, rather than complementing each other as was predominant in the local communities of the premodern era. Within this competitive arena, the full responsibility for failure or success lies solely with the individual; the blame cannot be deflected onto anything or anyone else. This way of thinking is at the root of citizens deep-seated fear of being replaced by someone better than you; with only yourself to blame when you have indeed become replaced; which equals failure.

Secondly, the feeling of replaceability has also been enhanced by the primacy of instrumental reason. Taylor defines instrumental reason as a kind of rationality that people draw on when they calculate the most economical application of means to a given end.[845] He argues that the ethic of authenticity has pushed citizens to 'a personal understanding of self-fulfilment', which makes the associations and communities in which citizens enter purely instrumental rather than an end in itself or an unconditional commitment.[846] Rather than perceiving relationships with other citizens as a commitment, they are seen as instrumental and thus subordinate to one's own goals of self-fulfilment. According to Taylor, this has led to social atomism:

> 'A fragmented society is one whose members find it harder and harder to identify with their political society as a community. This lack of identification may reflect an atomistic outlook, in which people come to see society purely instrumentally. But it also helps to

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844. Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?*, 62.
845. Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 5.
846. Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 43.

entrench atomism, because the absence of effective common action
throws people back on themselves.'[847]

The primacy of instrumental reason has permeated all spheres of society: the
economic, political, and social; and both in the public and private spheres. The
high divorce rate in Western societies is partly due to instrumentalist thinking,
wherein partner relationships are mainly perceived as contributing to one's own
personal self-fulfilment rather than making an unconditional commitment that
holds 'for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, until
death do us part.'[848] Most importantly, however, instrumentalism has increased the
fear of replaceability given that citizens are not seen as ends in themselves but as
instruments to achieve a higher end, such as economic or personal fulfilment in life.
Based on the aforementioned arguments, I therefore argue that the erosion of the
two pillars of local community and religion due to the processes of globalisation,
individualisation and secularisation, has led citizens to lose their sense of worth
and identity within European societies, which on its turn has contributed to the
feeling of existential insecurity. In the next section I turn to the second cause of
increased feelings of existential insecurity: loss of control.

Paragraph 2.2: Loss of control

The second cause of an increased feeling of existential insecurity is the feeling of
many citizens that they are increasingly losing grip on what directly affects them.
This is a direct consequence of the transformation of local communities into large-
scale societies, due to industrialisation and market-driven globalisation. Neoliberal
globalisation has led to a growing inequality, with some (mainly big corporations
in technology) who reaped the benefits, whereas others have mainly experienced
the negative side of the increase in wealth (Calhoun calls this the 'illth' of neoliberal
globalisation), such as displacement, destruction of local communities, pollution
of our natural environment and loss of regular fulltime jobs. According to Taylor,
this inequality is both the cause as well as the consequence of a decline in citizen

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[847]. Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 117.

[848]. Part of the Catholic wedding vow: 'I, (name), take you, (name), for my lawful wife/husband,
to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in
sickness and in health, until death do us part.' According to Eurostat, the marriage rate in the
European Union has declined (relatively) by almost 50 percent between 1964 and 2022. See
"Marriage and divorce statistics," 2024, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/
index.php?title=Marriage_and_divorce_statistics#Fewer_marriages.2C_fewer_divorces.
Instrumentalist thinking can be recognised in the perception of marriage as an exchange
relationship that is accompanied by a subjective cost-benefit ratio. If the perception
predominates that the costs outweigh the benefits of a marriage, this can cause marriage
instability. See Dimitri Mortelmans, *Divorce in Europe: New Insights in Trends, Causes and
Consequences of Relation Break-ups* (Cham: Springer, 2020), 41.

efficacy within Western democracies since 1975, which leads him to perceive it as a downward spiral that he calls 'The Great Downgrade'.[849] He argues that a sense of citizen efficacy has been lost, which he understands as 'the sense that ordinary citizens can have in a democracy, that if they combine their efforts, they can influence government through elections, and thus redress grievances, and bring about tolerable conditions of life for themselves and their families.'[850] Consequently, as citizens feel they do not have any real power in relation to the elites, they refrain from participating in public life and voting.

This is indeed what is happening; according to Rahat and Kenig, there is strong evidence of a universal trend of growing public detachment from political parties.[851] This does not only hold true in Europe; countries such as Australia, New-Zealand, Canada and Israel are also experiencing a declining number of party members in their electorate.[852] Michael Sandel writes of a growing 'sense of disempowerment', which he not only attributes to the combination of market-driven globalisation and the meritocratic conception of success, but also to the technocratic approach to governance.[853] This approach has led to the increased technocratic character of the public debate, in which public questions are dealt with as matters of technical expertise that are beyond the reach of ordinary citizens. Citizens therefore, do not feel the efficacy to engage in public debate and do not feel they have control on the outcome of democratic procedures. They retreat into their own private 'bubble' and leave public and political questions to the government.

Drawing on the French political philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville, Taylor warns for the danger of this retreat and refers to Tocqueville's argument of 'soft despotism'.[854] Tocqueville observed within his own country that the more democratic it seemed to become, the more centralised the government became.[855] He warned for a new form of 'mild despotism' and the emergence of a paternalistic government that infringed the freedom of the people with too many rules. The cause of this development is found in the principle of equality that forms the very foundational principle of democracy. Tocqueville argues that due to equal social conditions,

849. Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 23.
850. Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 23.
851. Rahaṭ and Kenig, *From Party Politics to Personalized Politics? Party Change and Political Personalization in Democracies*, 19.
852. Rahaṭ and Kenig, *From Party Politics to Personalized Politics? Party Change and Political Personalization in Democracies*, 49.
853. Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?*, 20.
854. Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 9.
855. Annelien de Dijn, *French Political Thought from Montequieu to Tocqueville: Liberty in a Levelled Society?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 153.

citizens are inclined to retreat within their own private sphere. He predicts that they will display a self-centredness, rather than being committed participants of a flourishing civil society. As a consequence, they hand in their autonomy to the government, as they do not want to bother themselves with 'thinking and the troubles of life'.[856] According to Tocqueville, this does not lead to a form of 'violent despotism' as was characteristic of the Roman era, but a form of 'mild despotism', which he describes as follows:

> '[…] it does not break men's wills but it does soften, bend and control them; rarely does it force men to act but it constantly opposes what actions they perform; it does not destroy the start of anything but it stands in its way; it does not tyrannize but it inhibits, represses, drains, snuffs out, dulls so much effort that finally it reduces each nation to nothing more than *a flock of timid and hardworking animals with the government as shepherd*.'[857]

Although de Tocqueville attributes the withdrawal of citizens from the public sphere and the subsequent rise of mild despotism not to a loss of control, but to the democratic principle of equality, the effect is the same: an increased sense of political disempowerment. Taylor argues that a decline in participation (withering away the lateral associations) leaves the individual citizen alone in the face of the large-scale, centralised bureaucratic state; which leads to a sense of powerlessness.[858] Moreover, he argues that the alienation from the public sphere and the consequent loss of political control that Tocqueville writes about, can perhaps also be applied to 'our highly centralised and bureaucratic political world.'[859]

I argue that Tocqueville's argument can definitely be applied to our contemporary society; the transformation of local communities into large-scale complex societies has resulted in a greater distance between citizens and the centralised government by definition, regardless of the sense of political power that citizens experience. However, with the demise of the civil society and the retreat of citizens into their own private bubble, this feeling of disempowerment and loss of control has become greater, becoming indeed what Taylor calls 'self-feeding (downward) spirals' in citizen efficacy, and an increase of governmental control.[860] This civic retreat into privatization or what Taylor calls 'disengagement from the political system' is also

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856. Tocqueville, Bevan, and Kramnick, *Democracy in America: and Two essays on America*, 806.
857. Tocqueville, Bevan, and Kramnick, *Democracy in America: and Two essays on America*, 806.
858. Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 10,118.
859. Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 10.
860. Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 31.

fuelled by the increased opacity of large-scale societies.[861] This opacity has emerged because the development of Western large-scale societies has been accompanied by a complex bureaucracy that stands as an intermediary between the citizen and the government, the fragmentation of political parties and audiences (e.g. in echo chambers on social media) and the technocratisation of the public debate.[862] The opaque bureaucracy has led to complex regulation and indirect (and often digital) contacts, resulting in a lack of customised services, malpractices and widespread frustration of citizens who are sent from pillar to post. Politically, citizens feel it is difficult to influence political decision making and therefore they disengage. However, because they disengage, citizens become even more distant from the political system, which makes it even less intelligible. Taylor perceives disengagement therefore both as the cause and the effect of increasing opacity.[863]

Lack of unanimity, increased fragmentation of political parties and polarisation further undermine citizens' intelligibility of politics. A decline in intelligibility subsequently leads to a growing distrust of the government. Within the Netherlands, for example, trust in the monarchy as well as the government have decreased significantly.[864] This distrust exists both in the relationship between citizen and government as well as among politicians themselves. Both became painfully visible at events surrounding Prince's Day in 2022: during the traditional balcony scene where the king waves to the crowd, demonstrators were exhibiting boos, shouting 'traitor' whilst carrying upside down Dutch flags.[865] This was unique to this day. Moreover, during the general reflections after Prince's Day when the Cabinet was invited to the House of Representatives, the opposition denunciated the Cabinet and launched personal attacks. The entire Cabinet left the House of Representatives early after Thierry Baudet (leader of the far-right party 'Forum for Democracy') accused the minister of Finance implicitly of espionage because she had studied at St. Anthony's College in Oxford which was "little more than in fact

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[861]. Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 28.

[862]. Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 28-30.

[863]. Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 28.

[864]. Research from the Netherlands Institute for Social Research shows that trust in the Dutch government and the House of Representatives has declined since 2021 and is very low in comparison with the average over the past 15 years. Josje Den Ridder, Leonard Van 't Hul, and Andries Van den Broek, *Burgerperspectieven 2023 bericht 1*, SCP (20 April 2023), 14, https://www.scp.nl/publicaties/publicaties/2023/04/20/burgerperspectieven-2023-bericht-1.

[865]. "Boegeroep en gefluit bij rijtoer Glazen Koets en balkonscène, vijf arrestaties," NOS, September 20, 2022, accessed 22 September 2022, https://nos.nl/artikel/2445291-boegeroep-en-gefluit-bij-rijtoer-glazen-koets-en-balkonscene-vijf-arrestaties. On Prince's day, the Dutch king delivers a speech from the throne, officially opening the parliamentary year. The King's speech contains the government's key plans for the year ahead. See https://www.government.nl/topics/budget-day/princes-day.

a training institute for western secret services".[866] Never before had the Cabinet left the House of Representatives early, which made it a unique event in Dutch parliamentary history.

Political distrust is not only facilitated by a lack of intelligibility, but is also reinforced by governmental failures to protect citizens' rights and ensure basic needs, which is an essential component of the idea of the social contract that is the bedrock of Western democracies.[867] Although governmental failures often find their cause in a diversified combination of factors, one prevalent is the overly large distance that has developed between citizens and the government, causing malpractices easier to occur. An example is the so-called 'Dutch childcare benefits scandal', which led to the resignation of the third Rutte Cabinet in January 2021. In 2018, investigators revealed that about 26.000 parents had been falsely accused of making fraudulent claims regarding childcare benefits.[868] The Tax and Customs Administration discriminated parents on the basis of nationality (foreign backgrounds or double nationalities) and used their data unlawfully in determining eligibility for childcare benefits. It resulted in thousands of parents running up huge debts, forcing them to sell their houses and losing their children to youth welfare. It took years and tenacious investigators for this scandal to be brought to light; and even after its disclosure, it took long before parents were compensated in their debts and misfortune.[869] Parents demonstrated with placards saying 'we want a trustworthy government'.

This scandal illustrates how governmental failures lead to distrust. This feeling of distrust is strengthened by the fact that citizens depend on the government for their security and their basic needs, which forms the basic idea of the social contract. Instead, they are disadvantaged by the government, directly affected in their livelihood and powerlessness in the face of the massive governmental apparatus. In 2023, one of the main investigators of the childcare benefits scandal founded his own political party with the meaningful name 'New Social Contract'

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[866]. "Weglopen kabinet unicum in de parlementaire geschiedenis," NOS, September 21, 2022, accessed 21 September 2022, https://nos.nl/artikel/2445495-weglopen-kabinet-unicum-in-de-parlementaire-geschiedenis.

[867]. The Western idea of the social contract is heavily influenced by political philosophers Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), John Locke (1632-1704) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778).

[868]. Lucas Michael Haitsma and Maarten Bouwmeester, "Learning from control deficits in the childcare benefits scandal. A plea for multi-level analysis in law and policy research," *Recht der Werkelijkheid* 44, no. 3 (2023).

[869]. Many parents are still uncompensated to this day. The first of January 2024 was the deadline for wronged parents to register for restitutions; almost 70.000 parents registered before the deadline.

(NSC) and won big in the Dutch parliamentary elections in November 2023. His election programme stated:

> 'The Netherlands is a beautiful home with freedom-loving residents. But in recent years, the front of the home of our democracy has flaked off and the foundations have subsided. Our country went from crisis to crisis. We faced a COVID-crisis, a nitrogen crisis, a natural gas crisis and a housing crisis. The research reports on these carried titles like 'unprecedented injustice' (benefits scandal), spoke of 'systematic misunderstood suffering' (gas extraction survey) and saw 'despair in the eyes of reasonable people' (nitrogen crisis). Government and public authorities have failed the citizens of the Netherlands on a wide range of issues in recent years. And those responsible rarely took responsibility. It therefore comes as no surprise that trust in the government and in public administration was rarely as low as it is at the moment.'[870]

Important components of the NSC programme are: a thorough renovation of the Dutch public administration, a restoration of trust and safeguarding existential security. These priorities point precisely to the core issues that many citizens in Western democracies face today: existential insecurity, a loss of control what directly affects them and distrust of the government.

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According to the annual report 'Burgerperspectieven' ('citizens' perspectives') of the Netherlands Institute for Social Research that was published in 2022, roughly half of the Dutch citizens had little or no confidence in Dutch politics.[871] This percentage increased in recent years; the report of 2023 (which was additionally published prior to the Dutch parliamentary elections in which far-right politician Geert Wilders won the elections) stated a further increase of 58 percent of Dutch citizens who have little or no confidence in Dutch politics.[872] Respondents blame politicians for not being willing or able to solve problems, being too preoccupied with themselves and not listening enough to ordinary people.[873] They perceive a

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[870]. Pieter Omtzigt, Verkiezingsprogramma NSC. Tijd voor herstel. Vertrouwen. Zekerheid. Perspectief., 5 (2023). English translation by the author.

[871]. Josje Den Ridder et al., *Burgerperspectieven 2022 bericht 1* (1 September 2022), 26, https://www.scp.nl/publicaties/publicaties/2022/09/01/burgerperspectieven-bericht-1-2022.

[872]. Bram Geurkink, Emily Miltenburg, and Josje Den Ridder, *Burgerperspectieven Extra Verkiezingsbericht 2023* (24 October 2023), 7, https://www.scp.nl/publicaties/publicaties/2023/10/24/burgerperspectieven-2023-extra-verkiezingsbericht.

[873]. Geurkink, Miltenburg, and Den Ridder, *Burgerperspectieven Extra Verkiezingsbericht 2023*, 12.

great distance between 'The Hague' (the centre of politics in the Netherlands) and ordinary citizens, they think that politics is unreliable and that politicians are able to stay in office regardless of the amount of mistakes they make.[874] The childcare benefits scandal and the scandal of the damage settlement of gas extraction in Groningen are explicitly mentioned in this context. The political dissatisfaction seems to be more widely shared than has been the case on average over the last 15 years.[875] Moreover, this situation of decreased trust in the government does not only apply to the Netherlands; it is indicative of multiple European countries. Eurobarometer statistics show that trust in the government has decreased between 2021 and 2024, especially in West-European regions.[876]

Thus, political distrust is caused not only by unintelligibility through complexity, opacity and technocratisation of the public debate, but also by governmental failures to safeguard citizens' (existential) security. Governmental distrust on its turn forms the breeding ground for conspiracy theories. The spread and adherence to these theories is facilitated and fuelled by the fragmentation of public space, as online echo chambers incite citizens to believe and propagate conspiracy theories.[877] As will become clear in the next section, governmental distrust and conspiracy theories contribute to the breeding ground of far-right political parties and movements.[878]

Returning to the topic of this section, I have argued how loss of control in the political sphere leads to political disengagement and governmental distrust; of which all three factors also reinforce each other as in a downward spiral Taylor has written about. However, European citizens also experience a loss of control in the economic sphere, which is due to multiple factors. First of all, the transformation of local communities into large-scale societies has led to a transformation of the market. Calhoun argues, invoking Adam Smith, that the market has changed from

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[874]. Den Ridder, Van 't Hul, and Van den Broek, *Burgerperspectieven 2023 bericht 1*, 4.

[875]. Den Ridder, Van 't Hul, and Van den Broek, *Burgerperspectieven 2023 bericht 1*, 29.

[876]. The research of the Eurobarometer report is based on a division of Europe into multiple regions; the greatest decrease in trust can be found in regions within France, Germany, Austria, Sweden, Ireland and Portugal. European Commission, *Flash Eurobarometer 539. Public opinion in the EU regions* (January-February 2024), 29-31, https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3218.

[877]. See Rietdijk Natascha, "Radicalizing Populism and the Making of an Echo Chamber: The Case of the Italian Anti-Vaccination Movement," *Krisis* 41, no. 1 (2021).

[878]. Léonie de Jonge has argued, based on her research on right-wing populist parties in the Benelux, that broad societal changes brought about by post-industrialisation and globalisation have generated a general sense of dissatisfaction with mainstream politics, thereby paving the way for partisan dealignment. Jonge, *The Success and Failure of Right-Wing Populist Parties in the Benelux Countries*, 183.

a particular place that is open on certain days of the week, to a system that is perceived to be self-organising and self-regulating.[879] Although markets are socially organised systems, Calhoun argues that many citizens 'tend to confront markets as systems that operate by autonomous relations of cause and effect over which they have little control'.[880] Secondly, neoliberal globalisation has led to an increase in economic inequality, which has led to economic anxiety among mainly the working and lower middle class citizens. Sandel argues that the income gap has grown, as the benefits of market-driven globalisation have been bestowed unevenly, leaving the losers of globalisation with almost no gains, no compensation and foreign competition.[881] He argues that as the income gap grows, so does the fear of falling.[882] This fear is reinforced by the meritocratic ideology that predominates Western societies, which places the responsibility for failure or success entirely on the individual; along with the credentialist prejudice and the diploma divide, those who are less educated feel trapped in their fate, which increasingly leads to the so-called 'deaths of despair'.[883] Thirdly, globalisation has led to more complex chains of supply, due to outsourcing in foreign countries, multiple intermediaries and international supply lines. Although this has led to an increase in wealth in western societies, it is coupled with the risk that if something happens to the products or logistical supply lines abroad, it can directly affect the livelihood of citizens who do not feel the agency or control to change the conditions.

In Europe, many citizens experienced the financial consequences of disrupted production and logistical supply lines due to the spread of COVID-19 from China in 2020. Moreover, European citizens experienced how dependent they were on gas from Russia and grain from Ukraine when Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022. The pandemic and the war in Ukraine directly affected the lives of European citizens: their health, food, warmth, which are all basis necessities of life, were struck, without the possibility of many to directly address the source of their scarcity. Citizens were utterly dependent on the government to solve their financial problems and create existential security. However, in the view of many European citizens, governments failed to provide this, which led to governmental distrust and political backlash.

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879.   Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 78.
880.   Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 79.
881.   Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?*, 72,207.
882.   Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?*, 12.
883.   'Deaths of Despair' is a term coined by Anne Case and Angus Deaton, who argue that there is a link between the rise in drug overdoses, suicides and alcohol-related deaths in the United States. Case and Deaton, *Deaths of Despair and the Future of Capitalism*.

This was evident during the COVID-19 period, which was in multiple European countries characterised by national lockdowns. Citizens, mainly from the working and lower middle classes, were struck by financial insecurity and often felt restricted rather than supported by the government. The technocratic character of public discourse, strengthened by the medical jargon about this unknown disease, contributed to the unintelligibility of governmental policies surrounding COVID-19 and led to far-right political backlash and activist groups that adhered to conspiracy theories, such as Viruswaarheid ('Virus Truth') in the Netherlands. This protest stems from a reduced sense of agency and a loss of control in what affects citizens in their livelihood. This sense of agency was different in the local communities of the premodern era; when resources ran out, citizens first of all turned to their neighbours in their local community for support. If this proved insufficient, they obtained resources, voluntarily or forced, from other local communities. This gave citizens a much greater sense of agency and control than nowadays in the globalised large-scale societies that many Europeans find themselves in. Thus, the feeling that citizens are increasingly losing grip on what directly affects them in both the political and economic sphere, contributes to an increased feeling of existential insecurity.

Paragraph 2.3 Speed of change

The third cause of an increased feeling of existential insecurity is the feeling of many citizens that they are not only increasingly losing grip on what directly affects them, but also that this is happening with *an accelerating speed*. This factor is what I call the 'speed of change', which Polanyi also wrote about in his work 'The Great Transformation'. Polanyi describes the societal change in his time as follows:

> 'No explanation can satisfy which does not account for the suddenness of the cataclysm. As if the forces of change had been pent up for a century, a torrent of events is pouring down on mankind. A social transformation of planetary range is being topped by wars of an unprecedented type in which a score of states crashed, and the contours of new empires are emerging out of a sea of blood. But this fact of demoniac violence is merely superimposed on a swift, silent current of change which swallows up the past often without so much as a ripple on the surface! A reasoned analysis of the catastrophe must account for both the tempestuous action and the quiet dissolution.'[884]

In this quote Polanyi describes a societal change that unfolds in two phases: the first is a change that seems to go unnoticed as 'a swift, silent current of change which

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[884.] Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 4.

swallows up the past often without so much as a ripple on the surface'. This phase is succeeded by the second phase that is characterised by violence and war, which is described as 'tempestuous action'. Both are important, according to Polanyi, to explain for the cause of the downfall of an entire civilisation. He describes the transition or break between the two phases as 'sudden', 'abrupt' and 'with inconceivable rapidity'.[885] Characteristic is his usage of the word 'cataclysm', which he frequently uses in the terms 'cataclysmic events' or 'cataclysmic change' which he applies to events such as the Industrial Revolution and the First World War.[886] Gareth Dale, commenting on Polanyi's work 'The Great Transformation', argues that Polanyi perceived the transition from mercantilist capitalism to the liberal market economy as 'a sudden and traumatic rupture'.[887] Moreover, citing the work of Polanyi, he argues that rulers in general aimed at ensuring that the pace of social development was such that 'the dispossessed could adjust themselves to changed conditions without fatally damaging their substance, human and economic, physical and moral.' However, this did not happen with the transition to a market society at the end of the nineteenth century. Dale writes, citing Polanyi:

> 'As a result, the transition to the market economy occurred abruptly,
> exploding 'the unity' of mercantilist society. It was a switch so sudden
> that it made 'nonsense of the legend of English gradualism'.[888]

What makes the significant difference in result between gradual and accelerating change? It is what made former state leaders careful to impose change gradually: the reaction of the people. When one imposes change gradually, it has a great chance of going unnoticed. When change is imposed rapidly, however, this evokes feelings of resistance, which makes citizens more inclined to mobilise economically and politically; a result that rulers often do not want.

Hartmut Rosa has argued that modernity is accompanied by a change in time structure, in which an asymmetry has emerged with regard to tendencies to accelerate and decelerate.[889] As a result, social acceleration has come to predominate the process of modernisation. He speaks of an 'Akzelerationsdynamik' der Moderne that

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885.   Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 4.

886.   Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 157.

887.   Gareth Dale, *Karl Polanyi: The Limits of the Market*, Key contemporary thinkers series, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 51.

888.   Dale, *Karl Polanyi: The Limits of the Market*, 52.

889.   Rosa, *Beschleunigung und Entfremdung. Entwurf einer kritischen Theorie spätmoderner Zeitlichkeit*, 58.

is characteristic of Western societies, which he calls 'Beschleunigunggesellschaften'.[890] Social acceleration then refers to an accelerated transformation of the material, social and mental world of citizens.[891] Rosa distinguishes between three dimensions of social acceleration: firstly, *technical acceleration*, which refers to accelerated processes of transportation, communication and production of goods and services. Secondly, the *acceleration of social change* which refers to accelerated processes with regard to social and cultural institutions such as politics, the economy, work- and family arrangements. Lastly, the *acceleration of the pace of life*, which refers to a shortening of episodes of action and the perception that 'one lacks time and is pressed for time and in a stressful compulsion to accelerate as well as in anxiety about 'not keeping up'.'[892] According to Rosa, these forms of acceleration contribute to a general idea of aimless and rapid change that can lead on an individual level to pathologies such as depression, burn-out and alienation from oneself and one's surroundings.[893]

Thus, what matters is *the speed* of change. When change happens in an accelerating way, it causes processing issues and evokes feelings of resistance. This feeling of resistance is irrespective of whether the change involves sudden acceleration or sudden deceleration. In a traffic jam, for example, the speed of driving may suddenly decrease; this usually arouses feelings of resistance coupled with unreasonableness, after which the (emergency) brake seems to be the remedy. Yet, the emergency brake is also applied when there is a sudden acceleration in speed, as in the case of a train that travels at increasing speed and therefore is in danger of derailing. Thus, what matters is the speed of change that occurs. Polanyi's description of the two-stage process with a sudden break in between that he recognised in the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution, also holds for the process of neoliberal globalisation that took off from the 1970s onwards. After the abandonment of the gold standard in 1971, the global market economy entered a phase of unbridled growth, which led to increasingly complex societies and increased inequalities of financial means. As described earlier, this has given citizens the feeling they are losing grip on what directly affects them, both politically and economically, resulting in an increased feeling of existential insecurity. Calhoun and Taylor describe this feeling as follows:

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890. Akzelerationsdynamik can be translated as 'acceleration dynamics' and 'Beschleunigungs-gesellschaften' as acceleration societies. Rosa, *Beschleunigung und Entfremdung. Entwurf einer kritischen Theorie spätmoderner Zeitlichkeit*, 18,55.

891. Rosa, *Beschleunigung und Entfremdung. Entwurf einer kritischen Theorie spätmoderner Zeitlichkeit*, 16.

892. Hartmut Rosa, *Social Acceleration: a New Theory of Modernity*, trans. Jonathan Trejo-Mathys (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 71-80.

893. Rosa, *Beschleunigung und Entfremdung. Entwurf einer kritischen Theorie spätmoderner Zeitlichkeit*, 122-43.

> 'Anxiety and self-doubt reflect a tension between the pursuit of authenticity and […] 'a lack of citizen efficacy': to feel that your needs are not being met, that your standard of living is declining, that your children may not have the chances you have had; and all along to see this decline as the working of an opaque political system, which seems to offer no insight into the inner workings of cause and effect within it, and hence no levers for change that you can set in motion.'[894]

This is the first phase of societal change that Polanyi has described as 'a swift, silent current of change which swallows up the past often without so much as a ripple on the surface'. It is a gradual societal change, to which many citizens respond by retreating into their own private bubble and by adopting the meritocratic idea that if you work harder, you can bring about change and improvement in your livelihood. However, when this does not happen, when you feel that your work is not recognised and when you are disadvantaged by your own government despite your hard work, this not only leads to existential insecurity, but also fuels anger and resentment.[895]

The problem is that distant factors affect the private bubble of citizens, without them having any grip to change the effect. Calhoun describes this as 'distant systemic factors that keep impinging on local life' as a result of 'the growth of a distant, systemic organisation of social life'.[896] This feeling is exacerbated, when crisis, war or technological innovation leads to people's livelihoods being affected more rapidly and directly, with hardly any means to change this. This suddenly increases the speed of change, and is what Polanyi perceived as the sudden break between the first phase and the second phase of cataclysmic societal change. Examples are the financial crisis of 2007-2008, the pandemic in 2020 and the war in Ukraine in 2022; these events directly affected the private bubbles of European citizens, without the possibility of many to directly address the source of their scarcity. Due to the direct effects on their livelihoods combined with an accelerated speed of change, citizens can no longer remain in their comfortable private bubble of political disengagement, and they feel inclined to take action. Similar to the traffic jam narrative, citizens will apply the emergency brake in the face of accelerating change. In an increasingly complex society, where distant factors

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894. Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 137-38.
895. Good examples are the sentiments that prevailed among European farmers regarding government measures on nitrogen that led to the farmers' protests in multiple European countries in 2023 and 2024 and the sentiments that prevailed among parents suffering from the Dutch childcare benefits scandal between 2004 and 2019.
896. Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 80.

increasingly affect citizens' private sphere in a negative way, accelerated by crisis, citizens will want to shed anything that shows any opaque complexity, and return to what is peculiar to man, namely their own tribe, their own local community, their own nation, with leaders who offer simple solutions, that is: the far right. The following section moves on to describe the far-right response in greater detail.

Paragraph 3: The far right as an emergency brake

In the previous sections I have argued that the far-right vote is a response to an increased feeling of existential insecurity. I have demonstrated that this feeling is fueled by three socio-psychological factors that play a role within the minds of Western citizens, which are a loss of identity, a loss of control and an accelerating speed of change. These three factors are on its turn caused by three societal changes that have occurred within Western societies in recent decades: secularisation, individualisation and globalisation. Yet, the burning question, which is left unanswered within the academic literature, is: why then, does the (populist) far right constitute an apparent solution to many European citizens?

Foremost, the far right is a lever that European citizens can pull to stop the societal changes that occur with accelerating speed, and which encroaches their existential security, their well-being and their basic needs. As such, it forms an emergency brake that is pulled as a consequence of feelings of resistance, incomprehension and unreasonableness of the social changes taking place. An emergency brake, which can be defined as a device for stopping a vehicle, electrical appliance or machine in case of an emergency, is only used when the main brakes fail or are no longer sufficient to stop a potentially damaging or catastrophic outcome.[897] Similarly, I argue that the far right is perceived as an emergency brake and elected, when other political or societal alternatives are deemed insufficient in halting perceived harmful effects for the self-interest of citizens. In the following, I argue that the perception of the European far right as an emergency brake has to do with three main aspects of the far right: its simplicity, its return to the 'tribe', and its self-centredness.

[897.] This is my own definition, which is broader than the definitions related to only vehicles used within English dictionaries; the Oxford English Dictionary for example defines handbrake as: 'a brake operated by hand, esp. as used to hold a stationary vehicle (now esp. a motor car). In North America the more usual term is emergency brake'. The American Merriam-Webster dictionary defines emergency brake as: 'a brake (as on an automobile) that can be used for stopping in the event of failure of the main brakes and to keep the vehicle from rolling when parked.'

Firstly, the far right is characterised by its rejection of anything that exhibits opaque complexity. In response and aversion to technocratic discussions, complex decision-making processes, cumbersome bureaucracy procedures, tailored diversity policies or scientific jargon or knowledge of phenomena that are difficult to access for those with little to no understanding, far-right leaders and adherents advocate a return to simplicity. They simplify society and the world at large by using black-and-white categories, by classifying people into homogenous groups, by reducing complex issues to matters of (un)truth and by minimising decision-making procedures to common sense. This simplification can for example be found in the adherence of the far right to the idea of political monism, which considers societies to be essentially homogenous collectives and that is often expressed in an idea of nativism or ethnocracy. As such, the state is appropriated to belong to one ethnic group with one national culture. By adhering to the principle of *ius sanguinis*, the far right rejects the complex procedures of citizenship for those who do not belong and the complex idea of a globalised multicultural society.

Moreover, the far right often uses dualist and normative notions to classify people, such as 'corrupt versus pure' or 'evil versus good'. By applying this tactic they homogenise people within both the ingroup as well as the outgroup, which makes it easier to generalise and pass judgements on them (such as all of them having the same political agenda), rather than perceiving people as unique individuals with their own characteristics, talents, background, aims and motives, and political and ethical views on society. Another example is how the populist far right presents seemingly simple solutions to complex problems, with a call on common sense and authoritarianism to successfully apply these policies. This includes yes-or-no answers that are often expressed in one-liners, rather than complex technocratic or nuanced replies, of which Geert Wilders' infamous statement of 'fewer Moroccans' is a good example. As such, the simplification of the far right is attractive to citizens who cannot cope with the increasing complexity of contemporary large-scale societies and the incomprehensible technocratic discussions within the public debate about their own interests. In (over)simplifying society and the world at large, citizens experience a more manageable and comprehensible world and create an illusion of security and control that they feel they have lost due to the accelerating societal changes that have taken place in recent decades.

Secondly, the far right returns to what is naturally peculiar to man, that is 'the tribe', translated in its modern form of 'the nation'. According to political psychologist David Elcott, tribalism, which entails the loyalty to one's own group above anything

else, has been gaining strength globally in recent decades.[898] Both Elcott as well as psychologist Stevan Hobfoll argue that tribalism has genetic origins. Hobfoll states that human beings are not built for living alone, which he phrases as follows: 'I am biologically not an individual, but rather I am biologically clan or tribe'.[899] He argues that it is a key aspect of human survival to form strong social groups, as human beings would never have survived on their own when confronted with strong animals, scarcity of food or warring tribes. Everything and everyone that did not belong to the tribe, was deemed to be a potential threat. Instinctively, tribal behaviour included an us-them distinction. Thus, tribal affiliation was connected to both survival and protection; to survive, one must protect the tribe.

Hobfoll explains that the tribe is the principle biological grouping beyond the family, which was necessary for sustenance, food and protection.[900] Males and females within the tribe of about 100-150 people had to cooperate for their survival and had to protect their offspring against threats that came from the outside, such as the weather, beasts, vermin and neighbouring tribes.[901] Hobfoll explains that this has led to DNA based behaviour that is strongly cooperative within the tribe but strongly defensive against the outsider.[902] He argues that this behaviour is naturally a part of human beings, but becomes more prominent in the case of (existential) threat. Hobfoll states:

> 'When our personal, social, or material resources are threatened in ways that challenge survival or even our way of life, humans' tribal capacities are signaled and become prominent in orchestrating our thinking and behaviour.'[903]

Hobfoll gives examples from the far-right landscape to demonstrate how tribalism is still prevalent in present-day politics and argues that despite the idea that people in the West think they are rational individuals who do not succumb to tribal behaviour, tribalism and fear politics are becoming increasingly predominant both within the U.S. and Europe.[904] In the contemporary European far-right landscape, tribalism is translated in the political ideology of nativism. The tribe has become

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898. Elcott, *Faith, nationalism, and the future of liberal democracy*, 21.
899. Stevan E. Hobfoll, *Tribalism: The Evolutionary Origins of Fear Politics* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 24.
900. Hobfoll, *Tribalism: The Evolutionary Origins of Fear Politics*, 52.
901. Hobfoll, *Tribalism: The Evolutionary Origins of Fear Politics*, 53.
902. Hobfoll, *Tribalism: The Evolutionary Origins of Fear Politics*, 54.
903. Hobfoll, *Tribalism: The Evolutionary Origins of Fear Politics*, 43.
904. Hobfoll, *Tribalism: The Evolutionary Origins of Fear Politics*, 27.

'the nation', to which one belongs *ius sanguinis* (on the basis of blood), with clear-cut boundaries between the in- and outgroup. For example, Philip Gorski and Samuel Perry identify white Christian nationalism with 'beliefs that reflect a desire to restore and privilege the myths, values, identity, and authority of a particular ethnocultural tribe.'[905]

Moreover, non-native elements are seen as fundamentally threatening to the nation-state and should be excluded or even eliminated. This xenophobia often relates to ethno-religious identities that are deemed to be 'Other', such as Muslim immigrants. Important to stress is that the determination of nativeness is subjective or imagined; cultural memory is often used to construct the legitimacy of the 'native community' and to delineate who belongs and who does not. In addition to the elimination of foreign elements, also elements that transcend the nation are rejected, such as globalisation, the European Union and NATO. Mudde argues that populist radical right parties are among the most vocal opponents of globalisation.[906] They are also often Eurosceptics, which has led to Brexit and similar aspirations to leave the European Union, such as Geert Wilders' 'Nexit' (The Netherlands retreat from the European Union).

Thus, the far right brings citizens back to their tribal roots, translated into the modern imaginary community of 'the nation', which implies a significant curtailment of the world. In fact, it is a reversal of Hobbes' solution of installing a sovereign leader or representative assembly in order to solve the problem that Hobbes faced during his time, i.e. factions of civilians fighting one another during the religious wars of the 16th and 17th centuries.[907] By handing over one's rights to a sovereign leader, who on its turn provides protection and security for its subjects, Hobbes thought to have sidelined the (fear of) violence. However, in accusing the government of not adequately protecting its citizens (whether financially or from the crimes of Others), the far right rejects the elitist government and returns to the tribal structure that has provided protection since ancient times. The question remains whether this will rekindle once again the conflict that Hobbes tried to solve.

Thirdly, the far right is self-centred. The self then must be understood on both a group and an individual level. At the group level, the far right is focused on the interests of its own group or 'tribe', defined in modern terms as 'the nation' that

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905. Philip S. Gorski and Samuel L. Perry, *The Flag and the Cross: White Christian Nationalism and the Threat to American Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 14.

906. Mudde, *Populist radical right parties in Europe*, 184.

907. Thomas Hobbes wrote his work *Leviathan*, in which he developed his political theory of the social contract, against the background of the English Civil War (1642-1651).

often conflates with the populist notion of 'the people'. This imaginary construct demonstrates *prima facie* that it is based on exclusion; both from 'The Other' (i.e. other nations, races, cultures and religions) as well as within its own group (i.e. the corrupt elite). With nativism as a core element and often combined with ethnocentrism and political monism, the far-right ideology focusses primarily on the self-interest of its own subjectively determined imaginary collective, which needs to survive and overcome the threats it faces. It perceives itself as pure and authentic with (blood) origins in a cultural or religious past of a particular ethnic group, and because of that, it often perceives itself as superior above other groups.

The far-right construct of 'the nation' is what Reckwitz has called 'a singular collective', which is characterised by the unique cultural value it has for its participants and its communicative, narrative and affective complexity. It can therefore never be compared to anything else and thus also not be replaced. This explains why the far right has never been able to successfully unite on an international level; despite transatlantic and international linkages between far-right leaders and some transnational far-right movements, international collaborations between far-right activists and organisations have never been particularly successful.[908] Cas Mudde mentions reasons for this failure such as the far right's limited resources, its volatility, the dominant character of its leaders and its nationalism; although these factors all do play a part, I would rather argue that it is due to the fact that the far right is in essence self-centred.[909] This contrasts for example with the socialist movement that has been able to successfully forge international ties, due to its essentially social nature (i.e. an orientation towards the other). The far right is primary focused on the self-interest of their own nation, and European or international collaboration is only sought when it benefits their own group. This association or collaboration happens in particular when a far-right leader or movement achieves success; when a far-right party becomes too negatively associated with risky subjects such as racism or violence, contact is avoided or broken off. This demonstrates that international cooperation is not about any form of commitment or solidarity; it is rather the temporary instrumentalisation of others for the benefit of its own success.

At the individual level, the far right centralises its leader and the individual self-interests of its adherents. As the idea of nativism is built on threats posed by outsiders (xenophobia), sometimes in collaboration with insiders of the native group (often framed as the leftist Elite), the logical response is that the nation or 'the tribe', must be protected. The apparent threats are often framed in existential terms,

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908. Mudde, *The far right today*, 64.
909. Mudde, *The far right today*, 64-65.

which therefore requires drastic action to prevent the tribe's extinction. This usually translates into authoritarian policies or the so-called 'iron fist', which often leads to forms of repression (using the policy-instrument of 'sticks', as I have explained in Chapter I). It also comes with an authoritarian leader who is often perceived to save the nation or 'the people' from external threats, which makes far-right parties often leader-centric.[910] A prime example is how the Dutch Party for Freedom (PVV) of Geert Wilders is constituted of one single member; i.e. Geert Wilders himself. The party leader is often selected on the basis of his or her charismatic character, in the way Max Weber has described in his speech 'Politics as a Vocation'. Weber states:

> 'There is the authority of the extraordinary and personal *gift of grace* (charisma), the absolutely personal devotion and personal confidence in revelation, heroism, or other qualities of individual leadership. This is 'charismatic' domination, as exercised by the prophet or – in the field of politics – by the elected war lord, the plebiscitarian ruler, the great demagogue, or the political party leader.'[911]

The choice for charismatic authority as a form of legitimate political leadership is quite logical within the far-right landscape; in general, far-right leaders cannot ground their legitimacy in established traditions (what Weber calls 'traditional domination') or legal rules (domination by virtue of 'legality') as they often turn against the (elitist) establishment by proposing a societal anti-structure that is carried by the defined 'natives' or 'the people' and designed to protect the nation against threatening Others.[912] According to Weber, charismatic authority comes with a commanding leadership and is of an authoritarian character, which both connect to the authoritarian characteristic of a far-right ideology.[913] Moreover, charisma confirms itself through proof, which implies that the legitimate authority of charismatic rule depends on the victories or successes that the charismatic leader accomplishes. Sociologist Sam Whimster, commenting on Weber's theory, explains:

> 'The type of person who commands is the leader. The type of person who obeys is the 'disciple'. The leader is obeyed exclusively for his purely personal, non-everyday qualities and not for his legal position or traditional honour. This continues as long as these qualities are ascribed to him, and his charisma confirms itself through proof. If he

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910. See also Mudde, *The far right today*, 52.
911. Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 79.
912. Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, 79.
913. Max Weber and Sam Whimster, *The Essential Weber: A reader* (London: Routledge, 2004), 139-40.

> is 'abandoned' by his god, or he is robbed of his heroic strength or he
> loses the masses' belief in his leadership qualities, his rule collapses.'[914]

The importance of proof in legitimising their authority explains why far-right leaders put so much effort and energy in stressing their victories and successes within their political rhetoric. This rhetoric of success was evident, for example, in Wilders' response to his party's election victory in 2023; Wilders called the PVV 'the biggest winner', the 'biggest party in the Netherlands', and 'we are going to make sure that the Dutchman comes first again'.[915] The core message of his rhetoric was: this is the winning team, and if you join us, you are going to be successful too. Interestingly, many European far-right leaders congratulated Wilders, magnifying his success and broadening it to the European far right in general. For example, Marine le Pen congratulated Wilders with his 'spectacular performance', Matteo Salvini called it 'an extraordinary electoral victory' and stated that 'a new Europe is possible' and Viktor Orbán stated that 'the winds of change are here'.[916] As such, it seems they wanted to hitch a ride on Wilders' success, because this success contributes to the basis of their own legitimacy.

Moreover, the legitimising logic of a charismatic authority explains why far-right leaders overwhelmingly try to frame actual losses into apparent victories or even start twisting the truth in order to convince the masses that the loss is not their fault, but the blame of others (such as the corrupt elite). A prime example is how Donald Trump blamed his election loss to Joe Biden in 2020 on voter fraud, a claim for which no evidence has been found. Another example is the response of Wilders to the second place of his party in the European elections of the Netherlands. Wilders stresses repeatedly how he is actually the biggest victor in the European elections, despite the fact that the GreenLeft-Labour alliance has achieved one seat more.[917] Thus, success is magnified, loss is neglected, as charismatic authority requires success as the basis for legitimate rule. Charismatic authority is temporary, and has to constantly prove itself to not lose its legitimacy. This makes far-right leaders quite self-centred.

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914. Weber and Whimster, *The Essential Weber: A reader*, 139.
915. "Eerste reactie Geert Wilders: 'Met 35 zetels willen we, en gaan we ook besturen'," NOS, 22 November 2023, accessed 18 June 2024, https://nos.nl/collectie/13958/video/2498884-eerste-reactie-geert-wilders-met-35-zetels-willen-we-en-gaan-we-ook-besturen (video).
916. "Praise and fear after Dutch populist Wilders' election win," Reuters, 23 November 2023, https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/praise-fear-after-dutch-populist-wilders-election-win-2023-11-22/.
917. "PVV-leider Wilders: 'Kunnen toch nog de grootste worden'," NOS, 6 June 2024, accessed 18 June 2024, https://nos.nl/collectie/13972/liveblog/2523338-groenlinks-pvda-juicht-ook-wilders-blij-opkomst-flink-hoger-dan-vorige-keer (video).

Another characteristic of charismatic domination is that it is irrational. Whimster states: 'When measured against the standards of an enacted order, the actual revelation or creation, deeds and examples, or decisions on a case-to-case basis are all characterised by irrationality.'[918] Authority is not dependent on a legal framework or the customs of traditions, it depends solely on the extraordinary personality of the leader. Therefore, the charismatic leader does not primarily subscribe to a system of legal or ethical laws but only to his own arbitrary sense of what is necessary to acquire victory of the aim that he has set himself. The aim of achieving victory or power is more important than complying to legal or ethical principles. This has been apparent in a number of cases of right-wing politicians who have flouted ethical and legal rules in recent years. For example Boris Johnson, who breached regulations during the COVID-19 pandemic by throwing a birthday party at a time when gatherings were prohibited and who was reported to have lied about it and deliberately misled the British Parliament. Or Vladimir Putin, who has been accused of corruption, mock trials and murders of political opponents, such as the poisoning and imprisonment of Aleksej Navalny. Another example is Marine le Pen, who took out loans for large sums of money from Hungarian and Russian banks to fund her political party Rassemblement National, despite the authoritarian character of both regimes.[919] Or Donald Trump, who has been accused of influencing the election results of the swing state Georgia, encouraging his supporters to storm the Capitol, and who has been convicted of falsifying business records to cover up a sex scandal with a porn actress.

Despite these scandals and convictions, most of these far-right politicians have remained highly popular among their voter base. Donald Trump is again running for president in the United States elections of 2024 and has previously stated: 'They say I have the most loyal people, did you ever see that? Where I could stand at the middle of 5th Avenue and shoot somebody and I wouldn't lose any voters'.[920] And one could argue that he is correct. The Pew Research Center found that 62% of Christian voters who are regular churchgoers still support Trump over Biden if the elections were held today (i.e. April 2024).[921] This rate is even higher among white

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[918]. Weber and Whimster, *The Essential Weber: A reader*, 139.

[919]. According to the 2024 report of 'Nation is Transit', Russia is a consolidated authoritarian regime and Hungary is a so-called 'autocratizing hybrid', moving towards an authoritarian regime, which is illustrated by new restrictive laws such as the 'Sovereignty Protection Act'. Smeltzer and Karppi, *Nations in Transit 2024*, 11.

[920]. CNN, "Trump: I could shoot somebody and not lose voters " YouTube, 23 January 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iTACH1eVIaA.

[921]. "Voters' views of Trump and Biden differ sharply by religion," Pew Research Center, 30 April 2024, https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/04/30/voters-views-of-trump-and-biden-differ-sharply-by-religion/.

evangelical Protestant voters: 81%. More than half of white Christians (and 74% of White evangelical Christians) say that Trump was a 'great' or 'good' president and don't think he broke the law in an effort to change the outcome of the 2020 election.

This irrational outcome, i.e. Christians who uphold ethical values voting for a publicly immoral president, can be explained by the aforementioned reasoning that the charismatic domination of far-right leaders is based upon their (perceived) degree of success. Adherents do not choose far-right leaders for their religious or moral character, but for their level of success. They want to belong to the winning team, someone who will stand up for their own individual interests, and they think those interests are best served by joining 'the winning team'. Gorski and Perry phrase this as 'the fight has become more important than the faith', which they illustrate with the non-enthusiasm of many leaders on the Christian Right for a Pence presidency during Trump's first impeachment, despite Pence's evangelical credentials. Gorski and Perry argue that they wanted a fighter *for* Christians, not someone who fights *like* a Christian, as their goal is power, not piety.[922] Thus, the charismatic far-right leader is the charismatic authoritarian leader who portrays itself as the saviour of 'the people' who feel they are existentially threatened by Others (i.e. the leftist Elite and immigrants). They seek belonging and comradeship in a (online) far-right environment or movement that promotes their own interests.

However, based upon the flouting examples given above, it can be substantially doubted whether the quest of the far-right leader is genuinely concerned about the well-being of the nation or 'the people' or about their own self-interest in seeking power. Rather, I argue that the self-centredness of far-right adherents (due to their existential concerns) leads them to seek leaders who confirm their way of thinking. As the norm as measure is usually determined by projection from one's own thinking and doing, it will be the case that when self-centred individuals perceive far-right leaders chasing their own self-interest, they will recognise them as 'one of their own', that is their 'tribe', and acknowledge the leader to be theirs. He is elected to save them from their existential threats, and chosen to lead them to victory. And when the validity of the victories end….his or her adherents wait for another far-right charismatic authority to rise up and to whose successful tribe they can belong.

Thus, I have argued that the perception of the European far right as an emergency brake has to do with three main aspects of the far right: its simplicity, its return to

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922. Gorski and Perry, *The Flag and the Cross: White Christian Nationalism and the Threat to American Democracy*, 11.

the 'tribe', and its self-centredness. As a response to the increased complexity of society, it seems that European citizens cast their vote to far-right parties because they seemingly stop society from becoming more complex by applying black-and-white categories, by homogenizing people, and choosing 'one-liner rhetoric'. Moreover, they seemingly stop the increased feeling of displacement by giving citizens a sense of belonging as part of the nation or 'tribe'. The far right also stops the perceived stifling of citizens voices (lack of citizen efficacy) by giving them a voice through the appointment of a charismatic authoritarian far-right leader who speaks on behalf of the people. Having an authoritarian charismatic leader who fights for their self-interest, European citizens feel they have grip once again and a 'we' to which they belong that can stop the devastating effects of a society in which they do not feel seen or heard, in which they feel they are expendable, have no sense of belonging, have no grip on what directly affects them and in which societal developments are taking place with an accelerating speed of change. Far-right leaders such as Geert Wilders play on these feelings by articulating that citizens are saying 'stop' and that they are 'fed up'.[923] Moreover, they use political rhetoric that fuels these feelings of emergency; this rhetoric often includes terminology of necessity, distress, and almost apocalyptic doom scenarios that are used to emphasise that 'if we don't act now, devastating consequences will follow'. This rhetoric reinforces both feelings of existential insecurity as well as the need to pull the emergency brake. Thus, by casting their ballot to far-right party leaders, thereby pulling the emergency brake so to speak, citizens think they regain some grip on their surroundings, allowing their voice to rise above the surface again.

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The question is, however, whether pulling the emergency brake does one more harm than good. An emergency brake, as the word suggests, is a brake that is pulled in case of an emergency to stop a development that will otherwise lead to damage, but is not meant to be used when conditions are favourable.[924] An emergency brake should therefore not be confused with a sustainable solution. Using an emergency brake at accelerating speed can avert an imminent danger, but carries in itself also the risk of causing damage itself, and is therefore only used in case of extreme emergency. The crucial question is whether its usage, i.e. voting for the far right, damages the democratic constitutional state to such an extent that it does more harm than good to the wellbeing and interests of citizens. Here

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923. For example in his response to the announcement of the exit poll of the Dutch parliamentary elections in November 2023 in which Wilders' party became the biggest. NOS, "Eerste reactie Geert Wilders: 'Met 35 zetels willen we, en gaan we ook besturen'."

924. The meaning of the Dutch expression 'to pull the emergency brake', which means 'trying to stop an imminent danger' is telling in this regard. Dikke Van Dale Online Woordenboek, "noodrem," in *Van Dale Online*. https://zoeken.vandale.nl/.

I refer to Polanyi's reiterating cycle of the double movement, which describes how in the 1930's protectionist measures were taken to curb economic liberalism and mitigate its risks for society (nature and citizens), but led to fascism as a kill-or-cure remedy that wrecked democracy and instead created totalitarian states and war on a global scale.

Paragraph 4: The intolerance towards Muslims in Europe

In the previous sections I have described how the success of the contemporary far right is a response of European citizens to an increased feeling of existential insecurity, fuelled by a loss of identity and control due to the accelerating pace of change within an ever more complex society, as a consequence of processes of secularisation, individualisation and globalisation. Voting for the European far right seems to provide European citizens with a tool to regain grip on their surroundings, a grip that is felt again by pulling the emergency brake. But why then, is this voice of European citizens accompanied by a radical us-them distinction, in the form of a religious civilisational discourse that includes the religious contra-identities of 'The Christian Europe' and 'Islam'? Or to phrase it differently: why is Islam and why are Muslims so vehemently targeted as 'the dangerous Other'?

To answer this question, it is foremost important to understand that the far right has identified many enemies in the past and the present, including Jews, Roma, communists, the leftist elite, Muslims and the LGTBQ+ community. Some of these enemies are based on populism as a component of a far-right ideology ('the elite' as the internal enemy), but most of them are based on nationalism as the other component of a far-right ideology ('The Other' as the external enemy). As I have argued before, the process of Othering is inherent to nationalism, as it entails the defining of an ingroup and an outgroup that often leads to identity politics and the usage of identity markers (such as religion). The outgroup can easily turn into the frame of 'the enemy' when fear politics, based on xenophobia and racism, predominates the political discourse. Along the axis of nativism, Cas Mudde has categorised far-right enemies according to their being within the nation and/or the state, arguing that the classic enemy of the far right in the category 'within the state, outside the nation' is the ethnic minority.[925] Mudde argues that far-right movements in Eastern Europe mainly attack indigenous ethnic minorities whereas far-right parties and movements in Western Europe attack most often immigrants.

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[925]. Mudde, *Populist radical right parties in Europe*, 69.

In recent decades, or what Cas Mudde has called 'the fourth wave of the far right', the European far right has particularly targeted 'Muslim immigrants' as the dangerous Other, resulting in a political discourse that is characterised by Islamophobia.[926] It is noteworthy that within this discourse, Muslims and immigrants are used as synonyms, as if Muslims are always immigrants and immigrants always Muslims. This ignores the fact that many immigrants from Islamic countries are not Muslim (but adhere to another religion or are non-religious) and that many Muslims have been living in Europe for many years, especially the 2nd and 3rd generation of the guestworkers who arrived in Europe in the postwar era.[927] However, far-right actors often seem to care little about these facts, resulting in a far-right discourse in which Muslims and immigrants are used almost interchangeably, as was evident from the analysis of TikTok videos in chapter IV. Thus, the defining of 'The Muslim Other' cannot be isolated from the anti-immigration debate, a nexus that finds its cause in multiple factors, such as the integration debate in the 1990s, the rise of identity politics after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the usage of religion as the defining identity marker of immigrants in the post-2001 political discourse.

There is broad consensus in the academic literature that Muslims are the main 'outgroup' enemy of the far right in recent decades. Cas Mudde argues that Islamophobia has increased since the fall of the Berlin Wall, with far-right actors replacing communists with Muslims as the main enemy. He argues that the events on 9/11 have only extended the fear of Muslims in Western societies, making Islamophobia the defining prejudice of the fourth wave of the far right.[928] Moreover, Mudde argues that in contrast to 20th century anti-Semitism, Islamophobia is characterised by a fear of the numbers of the enemy rather than its qualities, which is apparent in the expressed fear of Islamisation and conspiracy theories such as 'The Great Replacement' and 'Eurabia'.

Marzouki and McDonnell have argued that the main 'others' of right-wing populists in Western democracies are immigrants and Muslims in particular since 9/11.[929] They argue that Muslims are feared because of the threat of Islamisation, in which the orientalist condemnation of the innate hypocrisy of the 'Moor' is connected to contemporary concerns about immigration, international terrorism and jihadism. Moreover, they argue that populists consider Islam not a religion, but 'a legal and military code and/or a political ideology that underpins the plan to conquer Western

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926.   Mudde, *The far right today*, 46-47.
927.   Mudde, *The far right today*, 32.
928.   Mudde, *The far right today*, 28.
929.   Marzouki, McDonnell, and Roy, *Saving the People: How Populists Hijack Religion*, 5.

liberal democracies'.[930] Roy argues that all right-wing populists share an anti-Muslim stance and perceive Islam as a dangerous, backward, conquering religion or even a fake religion.[931] He argues that the 'red threat' (communism) has been replaced by the Islamic threat as a physical and ideological enemy of Western civilisation.[932] Moreover, he argues that the anti-Islam backlash is connected to immigration and heavily triggered by events in 2015, such as the refugee crisis, terrorist attacks and attacks on women in Cologne by North African migrants.[933] Rogers Brubaker argues that national populists have a civilisational preoccupation with Islam in the form of a crude anti-Muslim rhetoric, and that this has increased due to the refugee crisis of 2015.[934] Tobias Cremer argues along the same lines as Roy and Brubaker and states that references to Christianity in the public debate are the result of national populists' civilisational definition of 'the other' as Islam.[935] Schwörer and García found support of these arguments in their longitudinal analysis of religious dimensions in far-right party manifestos; they found that anti-Islam discourse and pro-Christian discourse have increased between 2007 and 2018.[936]

However, although there is general agreement that Muslims are the main 'outgroup' enemy of the far right in recent decades, few authors offer an explanation why specifically this religious movement has been branded as the enemy of the European far right. As I have explained before, the outgroup or 'the ethnic minority' is an imagined construct (similar to the ingroup: 'the nation' or 'the people'). Therefore, who is defined as the hostile outgroup is an imagined construct that depends on a perception of who or what has to be protected.[937]

I argue that Muslims have been targeted as a consequence of the self-centredness of far-right movements that has increased in the post-war era due to processes of secularisation, neoliberal globalisation and individualisation. This self-centredness,

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[930].   Marzouki, McDonnell, and Roy, *Saving the People: How Populists Hijack Religion*, 6.

[931].   Roy, "Beyond Populism: The Conservative Right, the Courts, the Churches and the Concept of a Christian Europe," 187.

[932].   Roy, "Beyond Populism: The Conservative Right, the Courts, the Churches and the Concept of a Christian Europe," 186.

[933].   Roy, "Beyond Populism: The Conservative Right, the Courts, the Churches and the Concept of a Christian Europe," 187-88.

[934].   Brubaker, "Between nationalism and civilizationism: the European populist moment in comparative perspective," 1200.

[935].   Cremer, *The Godless Crusade. Religion, Populism and Right-Wing Identity Politics in the West*, 255.

[936].   Schwörer and Fernández-García, "Religion on the rise again? A longitudinal analysis of religious dimensions in election manifestos of Western European parties," 9.

[937].   Schwörer and Fernández-García, "Religion on the rise again? A longitudinal analysis of religious dimensions in election manifestos of Western European parties," 2.

of both far-right leaders as well as far-right adherents, has been stimulated by the emergence of neoliberal individualism, the rise of an atomised society, meritocratic thinking (I owe my success solely to myself) and an instrumentalist approach in dealing with others. The so-called 'losers of globalisation' in particular, have experienced a loss of social esteem, recognition and identity and pursue the protection of their own interests and a (successful) way of belonging. As Cremer has argued 'the yearning for group identity' has not waned.[938] This has led many citizens to seek leaders who affirm their way of thinking and who are often found among far-right leaders who establish in the terms of Reckwitz *neogemeinschaften* to which they can belong. Despite the rhetoric that is being employed with phrases such as 'our people' and 'our nation', these communities are not characterised by thinking in 'we', or 'the common good', but are mainly characterised by thinking in 'me'; my interest above the interests of others. Those who belong to far-right *neogemeinschaften*, choose to orient themselves towards a self-centred anti-narrative that primarily kicks against and destructively target all those who do think in 'we'. Muslims, who adhere to the Islamic way of life and religious teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith, are perceived to be a homogenous religious community with a high level of solidarity due to their similar-looking appearance, shared beliefs and religious practices, despite the fact that there is a lot of diversity within the Muslim community. The same holds for other 'within the state, outside the nation' groups, such as Jews, communists and Roma; the level of solidarity among group members is perceived to be high and is seen as different from the self-centred thinking of far-right individuals who rally 'round the flag' and associate themselves with like-minded people out of self-interest.

Nonetheless, I argue that the spotlight shifted to Muslims in particular due to the increased visibility of Islam in European societies following the immigration waves of the 1960s and 1970s. The far-right attention intensified when the communist enemy disappeared from the stage after the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991. After 1991, resentment against immigrants intensified; not only because of the outright racism and xenophobia that is inherent to a far-right ideology, but also because of the increasing numbers of (Muslim) immigrants who came to Europe. This created a breeding ground for narratives and conspiracy theories that immigrants would replace the native peoples of Europe. To put it in other words; the perception that the 'we' was becoming too big led to a more vehement targeting of Muslims. This idea also stems from the meritocratic ethic and the idea of the market society as a competitive arena. Instead of perceiving immigrants as an added value

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[938.] Cremer, "The Rise of the post-religious right: Christanism and Secularism in the French Rassemblement National," 35.

to society, thus as complementary, they are labelled as competitors to the interests of the 'native' people. In addition, the meritocratic ethic fuelled the idea that 'they (i.e. immigrants) do not deserve it'. This is a thought that Michael Sandel does not explicate in his book *Tyranny of Merit*, but which is apparent from the response of far-right individuals to (Muslim) immigrants. This idea was nurtured by the family reunification of guestworkers and the increasing number of refugees from abroad, who did not 'earn' their stay as the guestworkers did when they arrived in Europe in the 1960's and 1970's.

To what extent does secularisation play a role in this process of branding Islam and Muslims as the main enemy of the far right? To answer this question, it is important to realize that the self-centred thinking of far-right movements and individuals does not stand alone, but is part of a broader movement within European societies in which more focus has shifted towards 'the self'. As I have explained in the previous sections, it is the time-period that Taylor calls 'the age of authenticity' in which citizens centralise their authentic self above external frameworks, experience the cultural revolution of the sixties (more freedom with regard to sexual ethics), neoliberal individualism and rising inequality. With regard to religion, many West-European citizens abandoned their religious ties as they experienced the church as a straitjacket for their 'authentic self'.

However, many will not have realized that by uncoupling themselves from their religious communities, they so to speak 'threw out the baby with the bathwater', implying that they also threw away an integral part of their identity and their sense of belonging. As Taylor has argued, it is difficult to construct a new identity, based on cultural relativism and the individualised notion of 'the authentic self', without any pre-existing horizons of significance. And precisely in this time-period, European citizens are increasingly confronted with Muslims (guest workers and their families) who were seen to display a clear-cut religious and cultural identity within the public space of European societies. Moreover, Muslims are perceived to adhere to a neo-Durkheimian form of religion that encompasses both religion and politics, which is at odds with the post-Durkheimian form of religion, or non-religion of many Western citizens.[939] Also, the perceived institutionalized character of Islam and its religious and sexual ethics collided with the libertarian view on sexuality and gender after the cultural revolution. The question must be asked whether the same difficulty would have been experienced when large flows of Buddhists would have entered Europe within this period.

[939.] See Chapter V, Paragraph 3 for the neo-Durkheimian form of religion.

Within this context, far-right movements emerged as anti-structures against the cultural relativism of the sixties. Far-right individuals instrumentalised the broader societal friction between the ethics of Islam and the ethics of the 'liberal secularised society' to exclude Muslims as the outgroup. Mudde argues that it is especially in Islamophobia that populist radical right parties present themselves as defenders of liberal democracy and freedoms that were only secondary to these parties before (such as equality of the sexes, separation of state and religion).[940] Roy also argues that right-wing populists push for the secularisation of the public space in order to expel Islam from the public space.[941] The instrumental usage of secularism was also evident in some of the analysed TikTok videos in which German politicians were criticised for advocating the removal of biblical references on the Berlin Palace, while simultaneously allowing the muezzin in Cologne to call for prayer. This example shows that secularism seems to be used mainly to exclude Islam; but when it comes to Christianity, secularism is vehemently opposed.

With these examples, I aim to illustrate that the far-right self-centredness and the instrumentalisation of secularism to exclude Muslims cannot be isolated from the broader societal culture; a culture where self-centredness predominates notions of the common good and 'we-thinking'. The far right then, is a radical implementation of this orientation in associations that Reckwitz calls 'singular collectives' or so-called *neogemeinschaften* in which citizens aim at protecting their self-interest, reconstructing a sense of belonging and establishing success, with their *raison d'être* antagonizing those who, in their view, threaten their existence.

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The far right does not have an identity of its own; as I have explained before it is characterised by a 'negative' or 'mirror' identity.[942] This implies that the ingroup is mainly defined through the description of the outgroup; whereas the outgroup is described very clearly, the features of the ingroup remain rather vague or unspecified.[943] This has to do with the essence of movements that are built around a far-right ideology; they are born out of agitation of others, as an anti-structure against a current in society that they deem threatening to the existence of the ingroup. This leads to a political rhetoric that consists mainly of bashing others, rather than promoting a constructive vision for society. This characteristic explains

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[940].   Mudde, *Populist radical right parties in Europe*, 79.

[941].   Roy, "Beyond Populism: The Conservative Right, the Courts, the Churches and the Concept of a Christian Europe," 198.

[942].   Mudde, *Populist radical right parties in Europe*, 64; Roy, "Beyond Populism: The Conservative Right, the Courts, the Churches and the Concept of a Christian Europe," 201; Cremer, *The Godless Crusade. Religion, Populism and Right-Wing Identity Politics in the West*, 38.

[943].   Mudde, *Populist radical right parties in Europe*, 63-64.

why far-right parties often do well in opposition, but often have more difficulty when they are part of the government; as a ruling party, they are forced to replace their agitation with a constructive vision for society, which is often lacking or not clearly articulated.[944]

To fill up the vacuum of their own identity, far-right individuals have taken up Christianity as an identity marker against Islam. As Roy has explained, Christianity is not used because adherents of a far-right ideology want to promote Christianity as a religion, but because they want to fight Islam.[945] Similarly, Brubaker has argued that the identitarian Christianism of national populists has arisen from a preoccupation with Islam and Schwörer and García have found that a new religious cleavage has originated from the exclusion of Islam.[946] Schwörer and García argue that the religious dimensions addressed by the radical right derive from its anti-Islam orientation, which implies that anti-Islam messages lead to positive references to secularism and Christianity.[947] This leads to the paradoxical situation that far-right individuals are both stressing Christianity as well as secularism as markers of their identity. Because the far right cannot claim a cultural or religious heritage, they have to borrow from other traditions. And as their main enemy, i.e. 'Muslim immigrants', denotes a primary religious identity and as the religious background of immigrants became the defining identity marker of immigrants in the European political rhetoric after 2001, the far right borrowed or in the phrase of Marzouki 'hijacked' the religious identity of Christianity. As such, it is constructed as a religious contra-identity against Islam.

Important to note here, is that the far right uses Christianity primarily as a cultural identity. As Cremer has argued, Christianity has become an identity marker of 'us', even in highly secularised societies.[948] He identifies many far-right leaders as 'belongers without belief', defined as 'individuals who identify with the cultural heritage of a particular faith, its symbols, language and derived rules in society (belonging), but do so without identifying with its values, beliefs and institutions

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944. Mudde has argued that opposition parties have the advantage of not having a track record against which voters can judge the likelihood of delivering their commitments; therefore, they can get away with highly contradictory points in their party programs. This is more difficult when they are in government. See Mudde, *Populist radical right parties in Europe*.

945. Roy, "Beyond Populism: The Conservative Right, the Courts, the Churches and the Concept of a Christian Europe," 197.

946. Schwörer and Fernández-García, "Religion on the rise again? A longitudinal analysis of religious dimensions in election manifestos of Western European parties," 1.
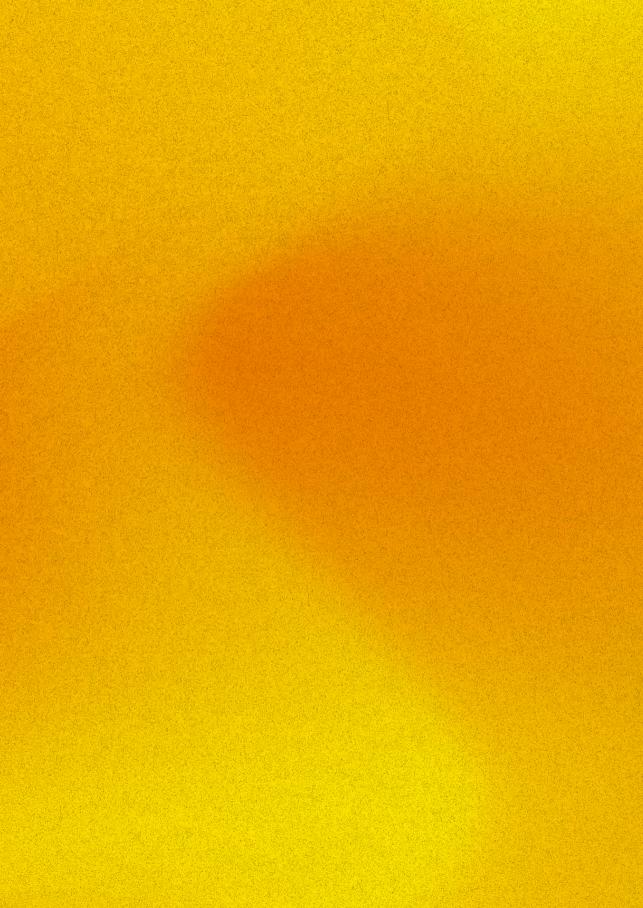
947. Schwörer and Fernández-García, "Religion on the rise again? A longitudinal analysis of religious dimensions in election manifestos of Western European parties," 10.

948. Cremer, *The Godless Crusade. Religion, Populism and Right-Wing Identity Politics in the West*, 39.

(believing).'[949] Cremer argues that this culturalisation of religion as an identity marker has two advantages for far-right individuals: firstly, a culturalised form of Christian identity does not compete with ethno-cultural or national identities and secondly, it is more malleable than religious belief and more accessible for irreligious voters.[950] As such, a form of group belonging is created without the need to commit to religious doctrine. I argue that this argument makes sense given the secularised context of West-European societies and the predominant ethic of authenticity. Moreover, I argue that the European far right reverts to the neo-Durkheimian form of religion of the Age of Mobilization in which there is a link between religion, political identity and civilisational order, as a mirror image of the Islamic neo-Durkheimian form of religion. This is done through the 'cold' presence of Christendom in European societies as cultural memory that allows the European far right to construct a Christian identity of Europe as a religious contra-identity against Islam or 'The Muslim Other'. These identities are constructed and as such imagined. Nevertheless, with reference to Jan Assmann: whether these identities refer to facts or factual history is not relevant; what holds is the lasting normative and formative power it becomes for the group who claims these identities. And that is what makes it real.

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[949].   Cremer, *The Godless Crusade. Religion, Populism and Right-Wing Identity Politics in the West*, 35.

[950].   Cremer, *The Godless Crusade. Religion, Populism and Right-Wing Identity Politics in the West*, 40-41.

Conclusion

Restating aims and questions

The aim of this research was to gain insight into the causes and functioning of religious contra-identities within the anti-immigration discourse of European far-right political parties and movements. To achieve this goal, I formulated the overarching research question: why is the anti-immigration discourse of European far-right political parties and movements largely based on the use of religious contra-identities and how do they function? The formulation of this question follows the dual structure of the research aim: understanding the causes (why?) and the functioning (what and how?) of religious contra-identities. This dissertation has focused on answering the question on the functioning of religious contra-identities in Chapters I-IV. The question of its causes has been dealt with in Chapters V-VIII, which coincides with the third part of this research: 'The Far Right as an Emergency Brake'. In what follows, I present a summary of the key findings with regard to both sets of questions.

Summary main findings

The functioning of religious contra-identities

In this dissertation, it has become clear that religious contra-identities are a prominent recurring feature of the contemporary political rhetoric of European far-right actors. I have defined religious contra-identities as: two religious identities that are emphatically juxtaposed. These religious identities are often found in a civilisationist discourse, in which these identities are connected to a geographical area that transcends national boundaries. The concept of civilisation is hereby associated with an unchanging state, progress, moral values and an orientation towards the past and is attached to the idea of multiple civilisations. Civilisationism is related to nationalism, as it can be both a form or an articulation of nationalism that transcends the level of the nation to the level of civilisation. As such, it holds the same 'us-them' dynamic or dynamics of exclusion as is prevalent in nationalism.

Religion can play a key role in civilisationism; civilisations can be considered to have a specific religious foundation or religious roots that are different from other civilisations. Religion plays a role in identifying a specific 'civilisational identity', which is defined as a social identity (according to Henri Tajfels social identity theory) that primarily relates to a civilisation as the community one belongs to. Religion then functions as an identity marker and becomes a marker of 'us', which demarcates the ingroup in two ways: it can determine the criteria for membership and it provides content for the civilisational identity in the form of a cultural

memory that contains narratives, imagery, myths etc., used to create a shared history and create a bond between people. However, religion has both the capacity to unite ánd divide. It can also function as a identity marker of 'them', those who do not belong to the nation or civilisation. There are three variants of this Othering on the basis of religion: firstly, those who have a different religion do not belong to the ingroup ('The religious Other'). Secondly, the ingroup is secular or atheist and rejects those who are religious as outsiders. Thirdly, the culture of the ingroup is historically or traditionally bound to a particular religion and those who do not share this history are seen as outsiders. This last variant is predominant in the political discourse of European far-right actors. Also, the identity of the Other is often used to construct the identity of the ingroup, a process phrased as 'mirroring'. The identity of the ingroup is then defined *ex negativo* by describing the outgroup or by the exclusion of others. As such, the idea of an ingroup and outgroup are social constructs and therefore imagined.

Moreover, this research has demonstrated how the concept of religion has become once again connected to the concept of civilisation within the political discourse of the far right. I have called this phenomenon 'religious civilisationism', which is defined as 'a reification of identity on the basis of religion that stretches beyond the borders of the nation-state'. This religious civilisationism emerged during the 1990s, as a consequence of multiple factors. First of all, the politicisation of identity as a consequence of immigration waves, decolonization processes, globalisation dynamics and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. This led to an integration debate in multiple European countries, in which the identity of immigrants was first reified (and problematised) on the basis of their social economic status (1980's), their cultural background (1990's) and after 2001 their religious identity. Secondly, I have shown the influence of Samuel Huntington and his book 'The Clash of Civilisations' (1996) on the idea of civilisational identities and the role of religion. I have argued that this book became influential among far-right actors, including the Dutch national populist Pim Fortuyn. Based on his writings, such as 'The orphaned society' and 'Against the Islamisation of 'our' culture', I have argued that Fortuyn has been a forerunner of constructing religious contra-identities and the culturalisation of religion that has been visible among European far-right parties and movement of recent decades. I conclude the following: Fortuyn contributed to the rise of identitarian Christianism (1) by identifying Western culture or civilisation with the ideologies of Christianism, liberalism and secularism and considering this to be a civilisational identity, (2) by contributing to the racialisation of Muslims and (3) by constructing Islamic culture and Judeo-Christian humanistic culture as opposing identities. In doing the latter, he attached Christian culture to the identity of the

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native ingroup and Islamic culture to the identity of the outgroup. He thus provided the groundwork of religious contra-identities that far-right actors and politicians (such as the Dutch politician Geert Wilders) would be eager to adopt and extend into a more religiously rather than culturally articulated framework.

What are the characteristics of the religious contra-identities of 'The Christian Europe' and 'The Muslim Other' and how do they relate to each other in the political discourse of the European far right? This is the first research question, which addresses the specific characteristics of and relationship between the religious contra-identities of 'The Christian Europe' and 'The Muslim Other'. To answer this question, this research investigated the social media platform of TikTok, to discover how religious contra-identities within the political discourse of far-right actors and politicians are constructed. In this investigation, the data of more than 3000 TikTok videos were collected and studied during four months (between April and August 2023). Subsequently, a qualitative content analysis was conducted on 153 videos that referenced the religious contra-identities of 'The Christian Europe' and Islam. This resulted in the following findings. Regarding the specific context in which religious contra-identities were constructed, the study found that there were six key themes: immigration, the mapping of Europe, the cultural and historical heritage of Europe, the Islamisation of Europe, The European far right and apologetics. Regarding the characteristics of 'The Christian Europe', the study found the following seven main characteristics: it is threatened or in danger, it is ignorant or dormant, it is military, prepared to fight or use violence, it has an eclectic or mosaic identity, it is white and xenophobic, it dominates the world or is strong and it is nationalist or far-right. Interestingly, the Frankish leader Charles Martel was a recurring figure in the videos, as well as the battle of Poitiers. Moreover, videos were often accompanied by the slogan 'Save Europe!' or 'Defend Europe!' Regarding the characteristics of Islam, this study found five main characteristics: it is violent, it is the religion of immigrants, it is oppressive, Muslims want to Islamise Europe and Islam does not belong to Europe. The fourth characteristic, i.e. Muslims want to Islamise Europe, was the most frequently mentioned feature attributed to Islam within the far-right landscape on TikTok.

With respect to the second part of the research question 'how do the contra-identities of 'The Christian Europe' and 'The Muslim Other' relate to one another?', this study found the following five characteristics of this relationship: it is exclusionary, violent, adversarial, unequal and incompatible. This confirms the theory within Chapter II on how religious contra-identities and religious civilisationism are constructed, i.e. on the basis of exclusion. Moreover, it was found

that within many TikTok videos the identities of 'The Christian Europe' and Islam are constructed in direct response to one another. These videos often follow the same logic: first they show images of Muslims or Islam and second they portray images or references to 'the real (Christian) Europe or Europeans' that clearly exclude Muslims. This finding also confirms how a pre-occupation with Islam leads to the articulation of the Christian identity of the ingroup.

The causes of religious contra-identities

The second part of this dissertation, entitled 'The Far Right as an Emergency Brake', deals with the question why religious contra-identities are constructed in the political rhetoric of the European far right. What are the reasons for far-right actors to use religion to identify themselves in increasingly secularised societies in Europe? And why are they vehemently targeting Muslims, a religious community? These questions are captured in the second research question: to what extent does secularism contribute to the intolerance of Muslims and why do religious contra-identities occupy such a prominent place in a secular context? The answer to this question is what can be summarised as 'The Emergency Brake Thesis'. This theory is laid out in Chapters V-VIII and is founded on three pillars: secularisation, individualisation and (neoliberal) globalisation (see also Figure 1).

The process of secularisation has transformed most North-Western European countries from religious to secular societies. This transformation does not imply the demise of religion; rather, it has led to the degeneration of older religious forms and creation of new forms of religion or the sacred, of which the way *religious identity* is used by the European far right is also a manifestation. Far-right actors reignite the idea of Christendom, which has retreated to the background as a historical-cultural identity, from its 'cold' form to its 'hot' form, to give colour to their political identity. In doing so, they hark back to the so-called *neo-Durkheimian* form of religion, in which religion is attached to political identity and civilisational order. However, influenced by the cultural revolution of the 1960's, many far-right actors reinstate Christian identity rather than Christian *faith* as the basis of civilisational order. Religion then comes in a form of the sacred, without religious doctrines, ethics or institutions, and can therefore be designated with the term 'belonging without believing'. As such, it is a form of the *sacred* in which the religious can be desacralised and the secular sacralised. This leads to processes of sacralisation of far-right leaders, the people or 'nation' and a collective self-sacralisation in which the ingroup as a whole is elevated.

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The process of individualisation has had a profound effect on the social structure of Western societies. This process, which can be understood as an altered orientation of institutions on the individual rather than the group, has been influenced by Christianity. Whereas Graeco-Roman society was founded on the basic unit of 'the family', with the village and the polis as the larger associations, Christianity's moral claim of equality led to the primary social status of 'the individual' within European societies. Within the modern era, however, the association between individuals (mainly based on religious identification) dissolves, which leads to a form of social atomism. This form of individualism (which is different from individualisation) has not only created a culture of self-centredness, instrumentalism and the risk of soft despotism (as Alexis de Tocqueville has argued), but also has led to the process that Andreas Reckwitz has called *Singularisierung*. This process denotes the primacy of the logic of the particular as a reaction against the predominance of the logic of the general during the modern period. This logic of the particular has led to singular collectives or so-called *Neogemeinschaften*. This new form of community is a reaction to modern culture from within and is characterised by a culture of negativity and cultural essentialism. The far-right landscape hosts many of these *Neogemeinschaften*, which turn against the hybridization of culture and universal mechanisms through the elevation of the distinct, authentic 'nation'.

The process of globalisation has transformed local communities that were characteristic of *l'Ancien Régime,* into large-scale complex societies during the modern era. The twentieth century has been characterised by two double movements, defined by Karl Polanyi as 'the action of two organising principles in society', which can be described as a process of disruption (first movement) and response (second movement). The first double movement was triggered by the (social) disruption caused by the Industrial Revolution and eventually led to fascism and Nazism in the 1930's. It was followed by a post-war era of stability and social democracy, which ended with the cultural revolution of the 1960s. This revolution heralded the rise of countercultures or anti-structures, such as European far-right movements. These can be understood as anti-structures that protest against the democratically elected establishment, using a neo-Durkheimian form of religion to build an alternative political and cultural vision for our contemporary postmodern society. Moreover, globalisation accelerated after the 1970s, and in combination with neoliberalist and meritocratic ideologies that predominated Western society and politics, it resulted in widespread inequality. This has led to an identity cleavage between the so-called winners and losers of globalisation and a breeding ground for far-right voting. As such, the second double movement reiterates the

pattern of the first double movement, resulting in far-right ideologies prevailing Western politics.

These three societal developments of secularisation, individualisation and globalisation have led to an increased complexity of Western societies. This has triggered a feeling of existential insecurity among European citizens, due to the experience of a loss of identity, a loss of control and an accelerating speed of change. As a result, this study has found that a feeling of existential insecurity has led to the incentive to pull the emergency brake of the European far right, as far-right leaders offer simple solutions to complex problems, they return to what is naturally peculiar to man, i.e. 'the tribe', and they are self-centred. Being primarily self-centred, far-right actors target those who in their perception think in terms of 'we' or display a distinct group identity, such as Muslims. Having a vacant identity, far-right actors then construct a mirror identity in opposition to the Other. Currently, Muslims are perceived as 'the Other', and as a consequence a mirror identity of a religiously defined 'own' identity is constructed. As Western societies have become increasingly secularised, far-right actors take up a culturalised notion of Christianity that they 'reignite' from the cultural memory of Christendom. This results in the so-called religious contra-identities of 'The Christian Europe' vs. 'The Muslim Other'.

Limitations, Significance and Future Research

The result you find is not always the one you are looking for. This also holds for the research conducted for and presented in this dissertation. This research began in September 2020, which was in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and just before the second wave of COVID-19 in the Netherlands and other European countries. This outbreak led to large-scale measures such as partial and full lockdowns, curfews, repetitive vaccinations due to mutations of the virus, distancing and hygiene regulations etc. The measures would last until March 2022 in the Netherlands, which resulted in a 1,5 year impact on the way this research has been conducted. Initially, the research proposal involved attending far-right demonstrations, manifestations and conferences, due to its transnational (European) focus. The idea was to do this in different European countries, with a particular focus on the Netherlands. This approach would allow me to interview the participants with regard to their ideological views and investigate how religion would be present in their political rhetoric. However, because of the restrictions and bans on gatherings, this option was no longer possible. Instead, the focus was shifted to social media as a platform for far-right political discourse as this was still (and perhaps even more) prevalent among far-right actors and leaders to disseminate their political views. Moreover,

although this research was originally designed as interdisciplinary, the pandemic did tilt the balance more towards theoretical rather than empirical research. Nevertheless, the modified approach has been fruitful. As stated before, what you find is not always what you are looking for. It might be even better.
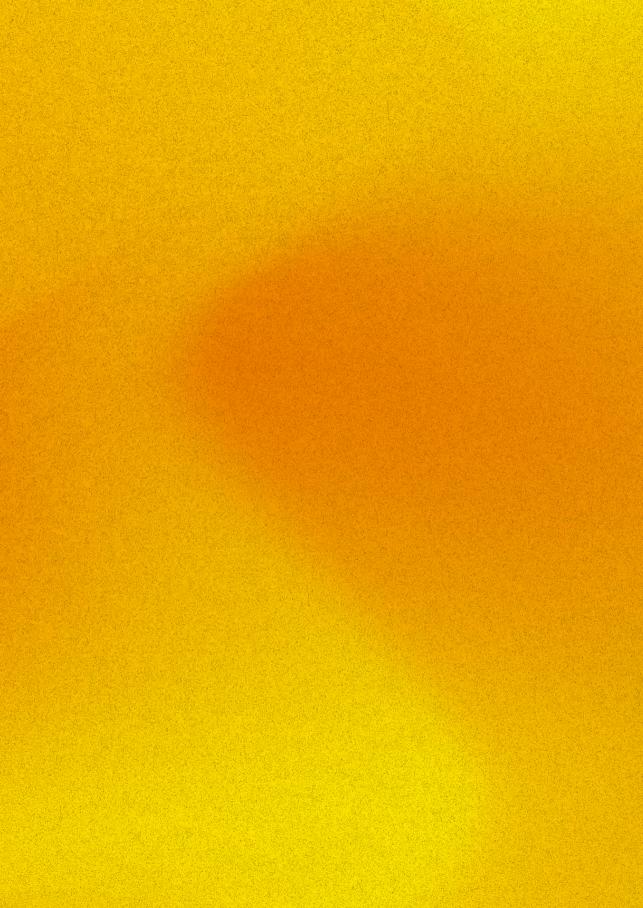
Regarding the content of the social media analysis, this study is limited to investigating only one social media platform. TikTok was chosen due to its wide audience, time-consumption and the relatively recent politicisation of the social platform. It was the aim to investigate other social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (nowadays called X) and Youtube. Although an initial scan did not find significant activity with regard to religious contra-identities on Instagram, these identities were however present on Youtube and Twitter. However, Elon Musk ended the free access of Twitter's API in February 2023 which made it difficult to get data from this platform. It would have been interesting to investigate Youtube simultaneously to the platform of TikTok in the same period and investigate the course of the political rhetoric on both platforms. However, due to time-constraints, this proved to be unfeasible. Regarding the method of the social media analysis, one has to bear in mind that the key terms that were chosen also define the algorithm path of the findings. These keywords were limited to the specific search for the religious contra-identities of 'The Christian Europe' and 'Islam'. Other key words (e.g. in other languages) would possibly have given different results. Nevertheless, the large amount of TikTok videos analysed, which also included videos in other languages that were found due to the algorithm, provides little evidence that this might be the case. Another limitation is that the focus of this research is on Western Europe in particular. Although this can be partly explained from its focus on the societal developments of secularisation, individualisation and globalisation that are pervasive within North-Western Europe, these developments would also be very interesting to investigate for the Eastern part of Europe. To what extent are these developments similarly present or is their effect different due to another dynamic with regard to religion and politics? To what extent do local communities in Eastern Europe still play a part in constructing identities and which role does religious identity play? In the analysis of the far-right landscape on TikTok far-right actors from Eastern Europe were clearly present with their own historical and cultural references to construct a 'Christian Europe' against a Muslim Other. This would be interesting for further research. Moreover, it would be interesting to investigate the Emergency Brake Thesis for the United States, where religion plays a different role within society than in secularised Europe.

Moreover, this study focused on Pim Fortuyn as a key player in the development of religious contra-identities within the far-right landscape. Although Fortuyn is significant in this development, it would also be very interesting to investigate how he has influenced the views of the Dutch politician Geert Wilders, who has clearly articulated his anti-Islam stance and speaks of the Judeo-Christian and humanistic roots of the Netherlands and Europe.

The last limitation of this research to be mentioned is that it initially set out to investigate a threefold set of research questions. Although I have answered the first two, I did not deal with the last one: to what extent does cultural memory theory help us to understand the construction of religious contra-identities? Although this study addressed cultural memory theory, it did not delve deeper into cultural memory theory to investigate how religious contra-identities are constructed from European cultural memory and how this theory can help us to illuminate this process. Although this is highly interesting for the contemporary far-right discourse, this study already found so much rich data and material to answer the first two research questions, that time was lacking to figure out how cultural memory can help us even further.

Notwithstanding these limitations, this study has demonstrated that it is fruitful to investigate religion and the far right from an interdisciplinary perspective. It has proposed a new model to study religion and far-right ideologies and it has introduced the concept of 'religious civilisationism' that adds to the understanding of the relationship between religion and nationalism in political discourse. Furthermore, this research has developed theoretical frameworks on the far right and (social) media that contribute to the understanding of far-right discourse on social media and it applied a new method to investigate TikTok that could be used for research on other social media platforms as well. Last but not least, it has developed a new theory (The Emergency Brake Thesis) that clarifies the societal impact of the processes of secularisation, individualisation and globalisation and adds to the discussion on explanations of the rise of far-right voting in Europe.

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In sum, the interdisciplinary approach of this research has borne fruit. Future studies should therefore continue this interdisciplinary approach to illuminate the remaining blind spots, such as the relationship between religion and other characteristics of a far-right ideology (such as authoritarianism, racism, anti-democracy) and the question if, why and how Western democracy is degenerating and how far-right movements play a role in this process. Regardless of external factors, to what extent do far-right leaders contribute to a political discourse of 'crisis' and 'emergency' that adds to the urge of citizens to pull the emergency brake and vote for the far right? Is the discourse

of religious contra-identities found on other social media platforms as well and does the 'Othering' dynamic have different or similar characteristics as those found in this research? To what extent does religion play a role in far-right conspiracy theories? Is the idea or feeling of existential insecurity found in interviews or surveys with far-right actors? How do religious narratives from American cultural memory play a role in the political discourse of far-right actors in the United States? To put it short: research on the far right and religion is far from exhausted. On the contrary; it has only just begun.

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Epilogue

'Together, we are protecting much more than physical safety.
We are collectively defending freedom and democracy.
The choice to put your life in the service of freedom
comes from a deep-rooted desire to be part of something bigger.
To be there for others.
To fight for the "we" in a world of "me".'[951]

951. "Speech by the Chair of the NATO Military Committee Admiral Rob Bauer on the occasion of NATO's 75th anniversary celebration with the NATO Secretary General and Ministers of Foreign Affairs," NATO, 2024, accessed 1-8-2024, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_224414.htm.

These words were spoken on the 4ᵗʰ of April 2024 in Brussels by the Dutch Admiral Rob Bauer, Chair of the NATO Military Committee, during the 75th anniversary celebration of the North Atlantic Alliance. In his speech, Bauer talks of democracy, freedom and fighting for the 'we' in a world of 'me'. This sentence raises the question: who is the 'we' and who is the 'me'? Further in his speech Bauer mentions authoritarian regimes that are 'desperately trying to portray an image of strength' and brutal tyranny 'that strives to take away the sovereign rights of peoples and nations'. It appears that the 'we' versus 'me' denotes the difference between those who are collectively fighting for democracy (freedom) and those who promote authoritarianism and tyranny (oppression). These words are of great significance against the backdrop of celebrating a military alliance that was established in the aftermath of the Second World War (in which allied troops fought against those who adhered to the ideologies of fascism and Nazism) ánd against the backdrop of the current Russo-Ukrainian war, which is the greatest military conflict on European soil since WWII. Ironically, three months later, in the same city, Hungary presents its slogan for its EU presidency: 'Make Europe Great Again'. As a country moving towards an authoritarian regime, with a head of government maintaining close ties with Russian head of state Vladimir Putin, presenting a 'Trump style' slogan that indicates civilisational strength, portrays precisely the image of 'me' that Bauer seems to oppose.

Regardless of how the 'we' versus 'me' distinction was intended, it gets at the heart of what I have tried to argue in this dissertation: that European far-right movements are essentially characterised by their self-centredness, i.e. thinking in 'me'. Although they are using a rhetoric of 'us' versus 'them', the 'us' does not denote a thinking in 'we' or the common good. Rather, it is an empty signifier of those who 'rally round the flag' and lump together with like-minded people who put their interest above the interests of others. As such, this 'us' is based on exclusion, rather than a 'we' that is based on inclusion. The 'us' destructively targets everyone who are deemed to think or portray a 'we', which explains its vehement targeting of Muslims and the leftist elite in Western societies. Regardless of the question whether people in these groups are truly thinking in 'we' and uphold the common good, it is true that the 'we' that cherishes the values of complementarity and togetherness, serves anyone who is part of it significantly better than those who are only primarily centred on the 'me'. Let us maintain and strengthen this as the basis of our Western democracies.

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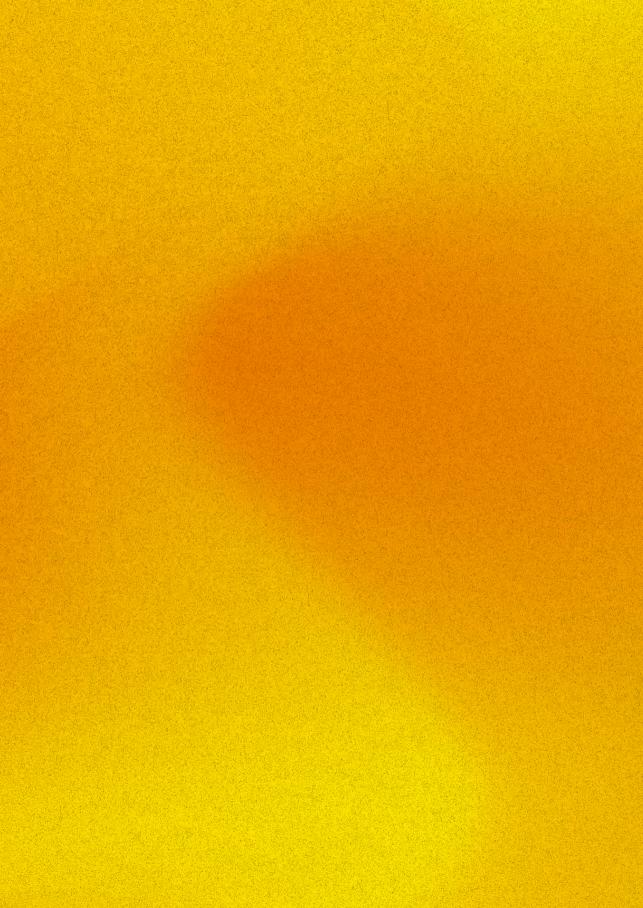
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B

Appendices

Data Management Plan
Summary (EN)
Samenvatting (NL)
Curriculum Vitae

Data Management Plan

Data collection

2.1 Will existing data be (re-)used for this research project? If yes, please specify the data, their source and terms of (re-)use.

No, no existing data will be (re-)used during the project.

2.2 Will new data be generated within the research project? If yes, please specify the collection process and the data that will be generated, including file formats.

Yes, new data will be generated during the project. The collection process and the data that will be generated are as follows:
I have used social media content of the social media platform of TikTok, data of which were collected by the tool Zeeschuimer. The data were subsequently analysed by the 4CAT Capture & Analysis Toolkit and wordcloud.com

Excel sheets with data on the TikTok videos analysed, based on selected keywords (The Christian Europe and Islam)

2.3 What is the total expected size of your data?

The size of my research data is 10 GB - 200 GB.

Personal data

3.1 Do any of the project's data allow identification of a person? In other words, are you working with personal data? List all types of data in your dataset which could be used for identification.

Do not forget about
- data that you use for participant recruitment, contact information, the key file of pseudonymised data, etc.
- data that can lead to identification when combined (e.g. place of residence and job description in some cases)
- personal data that you do not specifically ask for, but participants may provide in response to an open question in a questionnaire or during an interview

- Other, namely:
  Publicly available sources with information that may potentially lead to the identification of individuals (including pseudonyms unless they are relevant for answering the research question) will be deleted. With exception of performances of public officials.

3.2 Do your data contain special categories of personal data? List all categories and specify the data.

Be aware that special categories of personal data are subject to strict legal conditions.

- No, my data do not contain special categories of personal data
  Political, religious and philosophical opinions and beliefs are discussed but cannot be traced back to particular individuals.

3.3 Will you anonymise or pseudonymise the data in order to protect the privacy of your participants? Please specify how or why not.

Yes, I will protect the privacy of my participants by anonymising or pseudonymising (some of) the

3.4 Do you need approval from an ethics committee for your project? Please explain why (not).

No, I do not need approval from an ethics committee for my research, because:
Not applicable at the start of my project.

3.5 Do you need to use an informed consent procedure?

No, I work with human participant data but I don't need an informed consent procedure, because:
it is in the public domain. Precautions have been taken to secure the anonymity of people.

✳

Summary (EN)

This dissertation explores the relationship between religion and the European far-right landscape. It investigates the question *why* the anti-immigration discourse of the European far right is based on the usage of religious contra-identities that oppose Christianity to Islam as different and mutually exclusive religious identities ('The Christian Europe' vs. 'The Muslim Other'). Why does religion feature so prominently within contemporary far-right discourse, when Europe is characterised by an increasing process of secularisation? Moreover, it investigates *how* religious contra-identities function within the anti-immigration discourse of the far right. How are they constructed and how are they related to one another? This study uses an interdisciplinary method to answer these research questions, combining theoretical notions and insights from the academic fields of political philosophy, religious studies and sociology as well as conducting a qualitative content analysis on the social media platform of TikTok. The dissertation is divided into three parts and eight chapters. The first and second part focus on the research question *how*, while the third part focusses on the question *why*. The first part (Chapter I) deals with the conceptualisation of far-right ideologies: who belong to the far-right landscape and what are the characteristics of a far-right ideology? The second part (Chapter II-IV) deals with the functioning of religious contra-identities in far-right discourse. It involves an analysis of the relationship between religion and nationalism, the concept of religious civilisationism, the influence of Samuel Huntington and Pim Fortuyn on the emergence of religious contra-identities and a qualitative content analysis of far-right TikTok videos in which the characteristics and relationship between religious contra-identities are investigated. The third part (Chapter V-VIII) sets out a new theoretical framework that explains why the voter base of contemporary far-right political parties has increased significantly. It argues that the far right functions as an emergency brake to European citizens due to an increased feeling of existential insecurity. Processes of secularisation, individualisation and (neoliberal) globalisation have led to an increasing complexity of Western societies that has resulted in a loss of identity, a loss of control and an accelerating speed of change. These factors have contributed to feelings of existential insecurity, which form a breeding ground for calls of far-right leaders to return to simplicity, 'the tribe' and self-centredness. It argues that the far right targets those who are perceived to think in 'we' or 'the common good', of whom Muslims are targeted in particular due to broader societal changes in Europe. As such, the far right has taken up Christianity as a religious identity marker of Europe against Islam, which has resulted in the phenomenon of religious contra-identities.

*

Samenvatting (NL)

Dit proefschrift bestudeert de relatie tussen religie en uiterst rechtse bewegingen en politieke partijen in Europa. Het onderzoekt de vraag *waarom* het anti-immigratie discours van Europees uiterst rechts gebaseerd is op het gebruik van religieuze contra-identiteiten die het christendom tegenover de islam plaatsen als verschillende en elkaar uitsluitende religieuze identiteiten ('het christelijke Europa' vs. 'de islamitische ander'). Waarom is religie zo prominent aanwezig in het huidige uiterst rechtse discours, terwijl Europa gekenmerkt wordt door een toenemend proces van secularisatie? Daarnaast onderzoekt dit proefschrift de vraag *hoe* religieuze contra-identiteiten functioneren in het anti-immigratie discours van uiterst rechts. Hoe worden deze geconstrueerd en hoe verhouden ze zich tot elkaar? Dit onderzoek hanteert een interdisciplinaire methode om deze onderzoeksvragen te beantwoorden, waarbij het theoretische begrippen en inzichten toepast vanuit de wetenschappelijke disciplines van de politieke filosofie, religiewetenschappen en sociologie alsmede een kwalitatieve inhoudsanalyse toepast op het sociale media platform TikTok. Dit proefschrift is gestructureerd in drie delen en acht hoofdstukken. In het eerste en tweede deel staat de onderzoeksvraag *hoe* centraal, het derde deel gaat over de vraag *waarom*. Het eerste deel (Hoofdstuk I) behandelt de conceptualisering van uiterst rechtse ideologieën: wie behoort tot het uiterst rechtse landschap en wat zijn de kenmerken van een uiterst rechtse ideologie? Het tweede deel (Hoofdstukken II-IV) gaat in op het functioneren van religieuze contra-identiteiten in het uiterst rechtse discours. Het omvat een analyse van de relatie tussen religie en nationalisme, het concept van religieus civilisationisme, de invloed van Samuel Huntington en Pim Fortuyn op het ontstaan van religieuze contra-identiteiten en een data-analyse van uiterst rechtse TikTok video's waarin de kenmerken en relatie tussen religieuze contra-identiteiten worden onderzocht. In het derde deel (Hoofdstukken V-VIII) wordt een nieuw theoretisch kader uiteengezet dat verklaart waarom de aanhang van uiterst rechtse politieke partijen significant toegenomen is. Het stelt dat uiterst rechts functioneert als een noodrem voor Europese burgers vanwege een toegenomen gevoel van existentiële onzekerheid. Processen van secularisatie, individualisering en (neoliberale) globalisering hebben geleid tot een toenemende complexiteit in westerse samenlevingen, die geresulteerd heeft in een verlies van identiteit, verlies van controle en een accelererende snelheid van verandering. Deze factoren hebben bijgedragen aan gevoelens van existentiële onzekerheid, die een voedingsbodem vormen voor oproepen van uiterst rechtse leiders om terug te keren naar eenvoud, 'de stam' en naar ik-gerichtheid. Het stelt dat uiterst rechts schopt tegen degenen die (gedacht worden te) denken in 'wij' of 'het algemeen belang', waarvan moslims in het

bijzonder doelwit zijn, als gevolg van bredere maatschappelijke ontwikkelingen in Europa. Als zodanig heeft uiterst rechts het christendom opgenomen als een religieus identiteitskenmerk van Europa tegenover de islam, wat heeft geleid tot het fenomeen van religieuze contra-identiteiten.

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Curriculum Vitae

My academic journey started with studying both Theology and Religious Studies at Radboud University Nijmegen. After finishing both programmes in 2012 and turning my BA thesis into a peer-reviewed article for the Dutch journal *Tijdschrift voor Religie, Recht en Beleid*, I continued to obtain a double master in Theology and Religious Studies. Having specialised in Christian ethics and Islam, I graduated *cum laude* in Theology and won the University Award for writing a master thesis of outstanding quality in the field of Religious Studies.

In 2019 I started as an external PhD candidate at the Faculty of Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies (FPTR) of Radboud University Nijmegen to work on an interdisciplinary project on religion, identity and violence under the supervision of Prof. dr. Jean-Pierre Wils and dr. Martijn de Koning. In 2020 this project got funding from the Dutch Research Council (NWO) as part of the 'PhDs in the Humanities' programme. During my PhD, I worked within the department of Philosophical Ethics and Political Philosophy of the FPTR where I carried out my research and teaching.

I have been a member of various research groups, such as the Radboud Center for Philosophy and Society (RCPS), the Netherlands School for Advanced Studies in Theology and Religion (NOSTER), the Dutch Association for the Study of Religion (NGG), and the Race, Religion and Secularism Network (RRS). I have participated in and presented my research in these research groups as well as at international conferences in Rome, Oxford, Cambridge, Lund, Belgrade and Dublin. I have been a moderator, (co-) chair of multiple panels and lectures and member of the Research Review committee for the Faculty of Religion and Theology (FRT) at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. Part of my research has already been published by Routledge in the series 'Routledge studies in Religion and Politics'.

With regard to teaching, I have given lectures at Radboud University on the philosophy of management, the subject of identity and the relationship between religion and democracy. I have lectured to students of philosophy, religious studies, political science and public administration and supervised the BA thesis of philosophy students. Currently I am a lecturer at Utrecht University in the department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, where I teach courses at the intersection of religion, politics and philosophy both at Utrecht University and University College Utrecht.

Both during my studies and PhD, I have been active in presenting my research to a broader audience. I was named winner of the Theology Slam as part of the Theological Festival Wanderlust where I had to pitch my research to a wide audience. I have also presented my research for broader audiences at the 'Denkwerk' Festival and 'De Filosofische Kring' and written a blog for the website 'Religion in Praxis'. In addition to my work in academia, I am also active as a minister within the new religious movement 'Orde der Transformanten'.

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