

Jarosław Tomaszewicz\*

## The Ideological Component in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Terrorism

**Keywords:** terrorism, ideology, Islamism, far-right, far-left

**Abstract:** *The article analyzes transformation of the ideological factor of terrorism in 21<sup>st</sup> century. The author emphasizes transition from grand narratives (Marxism, fascism) to little narratives of new social movements. In his opinion terrorism without ideology is more dangerous than ideological terrorism.*

### Introduction, Materials and Methods

The aim of the present article is to define the role played by factor of ideology in the terrorism of the first two decades of the twenty-first century. The author advances the hypothesis that, notwithstanding the proclaimed ‘end of the age of ideology’, the influence of the ideological factor persists, albeit the ideologies concerned evolve with the spirit of the times. The answers to the following questions will serve to verify this hypothesis:

- 1) In what way does ideology influence the phenomenon of terrorism?
- 2) What new circumstances in particular condition the effect of ideology upon terrorism in the twenty-first century?

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\* ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9750-5256>. Associate Professor in the Humanist Department of the University of Silesia. E-mail: [jaroslaw.tomaszewicz@us.edu.pl](mailto:jaroslaw.tomaszewicz@us.edu.pl)

- 3) Which ideologies motivate the terrorists of the twenty-first century?
- 4) What changes have taken place in terrorist ideologies in the first decades of the twenty-first century?

In order to answer these questions, ideological texts that inspire terrorists will be compared with reports of instances of extremist violence. Classical observational methodology will be adopted on the one hand, and on the other, an analytical and critical approach to the literature and sources.

### **The ideological determinant of political violence**

Ideology plays a double role in terrorism. First, it is the crucial driving force of action. A terrorist group sets political goals resulting from a specific ideology; even if the very foundation of terrorism was a conflict of interest, it has become ideological over time. Ideology is also a driver of action in individual terms. A terrorist commits a criminal offence, risks his or her freedom, health, and sometimes even life. Terrorist groups usually can't afford to hire mercenaries. What they need is a person who deeply believes in the goals of the movement and is ready to sacrifice him- or herself to achieve them.

Second, ideology to a considerable extent determines the measures and means of action. Ideology defines the enemy standing in the way of achieving the goal, so the object of attacks. Some elements of ideology also affect the means used, which may be exemplified by actions of insurrectionary anarchists. They reject subordination and hierarchy in every form, even the simplest or temporary one, and so their actions are based on the "everyone does everything" rule, which means the measures employed by this movement are very primitive.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century creates special conditions for development of extremist ideologies. We may observe factors both impeding and furthering their dissemination. On the one hand, the unquestionable growth of prosperity in the majority of global regions within the last several decades has been diminishing the reach of extremists' appeal as well as the determination of potential terrorists. Especially in the Western world, a post-heroic orientation has spread, which rules out sacrifice of a man for any goals<sup>1</sup>. In the post-modern era, social ties get weaker,

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<sup>1</sup> It may be described as "Yossarian syndrome", after the surname of the main character of Joseph Heller's novel *Catch 22*.

while identities become increasingly vague, liquid, individually chosen, configured and modified, which also does not favour fanaticism. Ideology is treated as a theatre props room rather than a sanctuary, and changing one's political orientation is like playing a new role in a computer game rather than the conversion of Saul to Paul. Moreover, the technology development makes government and non-government (NGOs, the media) mechanisms of identification, prevention and repression get increasingly effective in detecting and suppressing any signs of extremism.

On the other hand, however, practically each of the named factors also shows an opposite effect. The atomization of society makes an individual stop feeling tied to his or her everyday environment, he or she may choose any identity they want and turn against their own group. Egotism appears to be an equally strong means of conveying violence as the ties within a community. Personal frustration needs no ideological grounds to become an impulse of violence. Globalisation, and particularly the free movement of information, may make people become aware of the differences in the lifestyle and standard of living, which sparks frustration and hatred. After all, fundamentalism is a defensive reaction to modernisation, as Karen Armstrong demonstrated<sup>2</sup>. It is worthy of note, by the way, that in the clash of a "civilised" man with a "barbarian", whereas the technical advantage lies with the former, the moral one (in the sense of morale, not ethical matters) lies with the latter. Easy access to information enables forgotten, as it might seem, ideas to be resurrected, ease of communication lets every misfit find a soulmate. Social media facilitate the creation of social bubbles gathering like-minded people, where extreme ideas are reinforced by the so-called "echo chamber". The surveillance of extremist circles exercised by security agencies (especially the Deep State) tempts to manipulate extremists instrumentally to achieve goals as may be needed. "Polit-technologists" from the government use, overtly or secretly, ideologies such as Eurasianism, ethnic nationalism or feminism in geopolitical games, for example in Ukraine or the Middle East.

## **Religious extremism**

In 1998, Bruce Hoffman admitted that as the year 2000, i.e. the true millennium, approaches, we are at the beginning of a new, potentially

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<sup>2</sup> K. Armstrong, *W imię Boga, Fundamentalizm w judaizmie, chrześcijaństwie i islamie*, W.A.B. 2005, pp. 10–11.

more dangerous era of terrorism<sup>3</sup>. This more serious type of terrorism was to be religious terrorism, which was to lend social conflicts a more apocalyptic trait and thus make them more ruthless. This forewarning has fully materialised. The attacks of 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001 indeed unlocked a new era of brutality. The first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century were a period of unprecedented global expansion of fundamentalist terrorism.

Although the focus of the global public opinion has been on Islamist terrorism, let us not forget that the extremist fever has been present in most world religions. Hindu terrorist groups have been responsible for numerous acts of violence: from pulling down the Babri Masjid mosque in Ayodhya (1992), to massacres of Muslims in Gujarat (2002), to terrorist attacks (e.g. in Malegaon in 2006). Jewish fundamentalism, consisting of messianic religious Zionism and the ultra-orthodox Haredi Judaism, gave rise to both organised terrorist groups and individual fanatics. Buddhism showed its aggressive face in Myanmar (the 969 Movement) and Sri Lanka (Bodu Bala Sena). Terrorism was employed even by microscopic religious sects: from the neo-Buddhist Aum Shinrikyō to the Anglo-Israeli Phineas Priesthood. Terrorist element is perhaps the least present in Christianity, where only the actions of the anti-abortionist Army of God in the USA may be counted as terrorist, to a certain extent also the Orthodox Christian State Holy Rus<sup>4</sup>.

The main element that makes religious extremism different from secular extremism is that the former is firmly anchored in theology. This means that where secular ideologists may create and modify their concepts however they think fit, religious ones need to reconcile their ideas, sometimes in the most arduous way, with the dogmas of faith. The explorations of religious extremists may follow various paths, so it is a mistake to describe every religious extremism as fundamentalism. Fundamentalism is a striving to get back to the “foundations” of the religion, a primal and uncorrupted faith. In this meaning, the entire Protestantism was a fundamentalist reaction to the Renaissance corruption of Christianity. Despite many superficial similarities, fundamentalism is

<sup>3</sup> B. Hoffman, *Oblicza terroryzmu*, Grupa Wydawnicza Bertelsmann Media 1999, p. 124.

<sup>4</sup> Ch. Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths* Routledge 2001, p. 173; A. Skorek, *Dekompozycja obozu Gusz Emunim i dalsza ewolucja radykalnego odłamu religijnego syjonizmu*, «Polityka Bezpieczeństwa» 2013, No. 1, pp. 19–34; J. Tomaszewicz, *Kahane: anatomia izraelskiego ekstremizmu*, «Arcana» 2002 No. 2; F. Wade, *Myanmar's Enemy Within: Buddhist Violence and the Making of a Muslim 'Other'*, Zed Books 2017, pp. 164–199; B. Hoffman, *Oblicza...*, pp. 116–123.

in conflict with traditionalism, which is the expression of the interests of the religious establishment and opts for keeping the religion in an unchanged form. The questioning of the religious status quo may also take the form of modernism, i.e. strivings for adapting the religion to the modern times (instead of returning to the past). Finally, religious extremism may take the form of heresy, which modifies the religion in a completely free way.

Let us outline this diversification with Islam as an example. The Muslim theological and legal-political thought, since the time of the so-called “closing of the gate of *iğtihād*”, has been based on the *taqlīd* rule, which means to refer to a whole chain of religious authorities with their roots in the Koran as the word of God. In this idea, not only the final conclusion is important, but also the path leading to it, which is why Qutbism (the schools of Sayyid Qutb) and Maududism (the system of Abul A'la Maududi), albeit similar in many aspects, are two separate ideologies. In addition, the world of Islam is torn apart between Sunni and Shia Islam, which both have created their own, also internally differentiated, variants of Islamism. The Khomeinism direction, which dominates today the Twelver Shia Islam and follows the *velayat-e faqih* rule, is contested by the Shia opponents of the political power of clergy; these are both modernists from the People's Mujahedin movement and traditionalists gathered around Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani and the Iraqi *marjayiah*. Also Yemeni Zaidiyah, a Shia “minority in a minority”, have created their own political doctrine. Even an extremist faction of Kharijites, the Azariqa movement, has been reborn in the group of *Takfir wal-Hijra*<sup>5</sup>.

Sometimes modernism is combined with fundamentalism, substantiating its strivings with the wish to reject the accrued perversions; in general, however, Sunni fundamentalists (*Salafiya*) are in conflict with the other Islamist factions. This conflict may also take the form of armed struggle: in Syria, an example are the battles of Jihadists from *ad-Dawlah al-Islāmiyah* (Daesh, IS) and *Jabhat an-Nuṣrah* with the formations of *al-Jaysh as-Sūrī al-Ḥurr* which bring together the supporters of Islamic democracy. In Iraq, Daesh sometimes fought, and sometimes

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<sup>5</sup> J. Danecki, *Podstawowe wiadomości o islamie*, Dialog 2002, Vol. I, pp. 226–228; G Hill, *Yemen Endures Civil War, Saudi Adventurism and the Future of Arabia*, Oxford University Press 2017, pp. 175–203; J.G. Jansen, *Podwójna natura fundamentalizmu islamskiego*, Libron 2005, pp. 99–120. See more: S. Kotob, *Islam religią przyszłości*, Stowarzyszenie Studentów Muzułmańskich 1995; S. A. A. Al-Maududi, *Zrozumieć islam*, Stowarzyszenie Studentów Muzułmańskich w Polsce 2003; S. A. Khamenei, *The General Pattern of Islamic Thought in the Qur'ān*, Islamic Propagation Organization 1985.

collaborated with Jaish Rajal Al-Tariqah Al-Naqshbandia, which may be deemed to be a militant wing of traditionalism. The conflict between modernism and traditionalism in Sunnism in the contemporary Middle East is expressed in a geopolitical play between Turkey and Qatar on the one part and Saudi Arabia and its allies on the other, which has its most fierce demonstration in Egypt (the overthrowing of Mohamed Morsi) and Libya. Let us note that also modernists accepting democracy sometimes employ violence: young members of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood prefer radical methods of struggle with the dictatorship of al-Sisi, and last but not least: worthy of note are also the heterodox sects, represented in Islam e.g. by the Nation of Islam<sup>6</sup>.

A completely different type of ideology is Muslim nationalism, which deems the Islamic minorities of the Indian subcontinent, the Philippines, Thailand, the Balkans to be separate nations, and demands their own, not necessarily confessional, state for them. Of a similar nature are communalist movements in multireligious societies: they defend secular interests of a group defined based on a religious criterion (e.g. in Lebanon, a secular group of the Shia minority, as opposed to confessional Hezbollah, is the Amal movement).

The question about the future of religious extremism remains open. Gilles Kepel noted the decline of Islamism already in the subtitle of his 2000 book *Holy War* (original title: *Jihad. Expansion et declin de l'islamisme*)<sup>7</sup>. In the next year, Al-Qaida destroyed the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center. In 2011, the killing of Osama bin Laden, or Operation Neptune Spear, allowed US President Barack Obama proclaim victory in a ten-year war on terrorism. Soon, the Islamic State, dreadful with its fanaticism, achieved an unprecedented success by submitting vast areas of Iraq and Syria to their control and winning supporters all over the Islamic world. As this paper is written, Daesh is already in ruins, there has been no spectacular attack of jihadists for long months. Is it finally over, or should another wave of jihadism, even more powerful, be expected?

There are grounds to suppose that jihadism has burnt out after four decades of fruitless struggle. In nationalist circles there is a notion

<sup>6</sup> D. W. Lesch, *Syria: The Fall of the House of Assad*, Yale University Press 2013, pp. 245–246, 258; *The next insurgency: Baathists and Salafis pool resources to fight Iraqi government*, «Gulf States Newsletter» 2010, No. 34; *Modern Islam in Indonesia: The Muhammadiyah After Independence*, «Pacific Affairs» 1954, No. 3, pp. 255–263; E. Nowicka, *Afrykanie z wyboru*, PWN 1979, pp. 481–191.

<sup>7</sup> G. Kepel, *Święta wojna. Ekspansja i upadek fundamentalizmu*, Dialog 2003.

of “Hollywood Nazis”, which means sociopathic individuals who gain knowledge about Nazism from its caricature picture in the Hollywood movies. Daesh with its ostentatious barbarity presented a similar caricature of Islam which was to attract socially excluded young people: immigrants from Europe for whom integration failed or young people trying to break free from the clan structures in periphery communities of the Middle East. “Hollywood jihadists” took Islam to absurd levels, just as the Khmer Rouge did with Marxism-Leninism 40 years earlier. The current Shia-Sunni war in the Middle East may be perceived as an analogy to the Thirty Years’ War in the 17<sup>th</sup>-century Europe, which effectively compromised the idea of a religious war. Research shows a progressing secularisation of Arab states (in 2013–2019, unreligious population grew from 8% to 13%), which makes Islamists treading on a shaky ground<sup>8</sup>.

Let us note that these developments are certainly not sealed. There may happen an event which will bring a new dynamics to jihadism. This could be e.g. the victory of the Taliban in Afghanistan, showing that the triumph of jihad is realistic (like in Latin America, where the success of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua brought the second wave of ultra-leftist guerrilla). In a pessimistic scenario, no government is capable of meeting the life aspirations of the Middle East inhabitants, which may turn them towards religion again.

## **The right wing**

Acts of terror of right-wing extremists are the bloodiest ones, like the attacks of Anders Breivik (77 casualties) or Brenton Tarrant (51 casualties)<sup>9</sup>. Usually, these are mass murders the victims of which are random members of groups deemed to be the enemy. Despite all the brutality, the ideology of the contemporary right-wing extremists is generally defensive. Their focus is to defend the quickly passing status quo (mostly demographic and cultural one), sometimes they call for a return to the not-so-distant past; revolutionary projects of a “new order” are rare. A hypothesis may be formulated that the brutality of right-wing extremists results, at least in part, from their despair. Pessimism har-

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.arabbarometer.org/2019/12/arabs-are-losing-faith-in-religious-parties-and-leaders/> (5.12.2019).

<sup>9</sup> F. Hartleb, *Lone Wolves The New Terrorism of Right-Wing Single Actors*, Springer 2020, p. 80, 85.

monises with other traditional traits of the ultra-right ideology, e.g. with elitism; in this vision, society is depraved, or stupefied to say the least, and collective responsibility has to be applied. A social Darwinist vision of life as permanent struggle justifies brutality.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, traditional ideologies of the extreme right, i.e. fascism/neofascism and reactionism (from “integral traditionalism” to monarchism), note decreasing popularity. Orthodox Nazism (Hitlerism) has practically died out along the extinction of the subcultures of Nazi skinheads and National Socialist black metals; today, it is restricted to alienated fanatics who find each other on the Stormfront forum or in prison gangs, such as the Aryan Brotherhood. Enlightening is the story of the main Nazi group in the USA, the National Socialist Movement, which was taken over by a black anti-fascist (sic). Groups such as the neofascist CasaPound in Italy or the neo-Nazi Nordic Resistance Movement (Nordiska motståndsrörelsen) in Scandinavia, vegetate at the periphery of political life, the Greek Golden Dawn (Chrysí Avgí) has lost its representation in the parliament, while the Hungarian Jobbik has surprisingly transformed into a party of the democratic-liberal centre<sup>10</sup>. Ideological experiments such as national Bolshevism or national anarchism have not been successful either.

The ultra-right wing, however, has not disappeared, but it has been mutating. Despite blurred lines, two main trends may be distinguished here. The first one is right-wing populism, an American faction of which is Trumpism. It is an amorphous phenomenon, ideologically inconsistent and politically unstable. Populism is a reaction to the effects of globalisation: faster demographic and cultural transformations, the erosion of democratic mechanisms within the national state, the loss of economic stability. The populist ideology needs to be reconstructed based on unclear and contradictory utterances of the leaders and supporters, or even the results of opinion polls. The very core of this view of the world is of course populism in its specific, right-wing option, turned both against the elites and the underclass (often identified with the new immigrants). Populism in this sense is strictly linked to selective, mostly anti-Islamic, xenophobia and punitivism, i.e. a striving to fight with criminality by increasing penalties and reinforcing police. Populist

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<sup>10</sup> J. Tomaszewicz, *Ideologiczne zaangażowanie subkultur skinheads i Black Metal w Polsce*, [in:] A. Klarman (ed.), *Historia-Pamięć-Świadomość*, IPN 2021; J. L. Brook, *Blood in Blood Out. The Violent Empire of the Aryan Brotherhood*, HEADPR 2011; D. Héjj, *Od partii narodowo-radykalnej do partii ludowej*, “Studia Politologiczne” 2018, Vol. 47.

aversion to the elites in general, and the political class in particular, makes such groups be eager proponents of plebiscite democracy, usually combined with a strong, charismatic leadership. With regard to foreign policy, “soft Euroscepticism” is the dominant attitude, defending the prerogatives of the national state within the European Union. With regard to the socio-economic area, populists oscillate between *laissez-faire* and welfare chauvinism, i.e. a programme to limit the state support to native citizens<sup>11</sup>.

More intellectually sophisticated is a minority trend within the contemporary ultra-right wing: the alt-right. The alt-right is a not so much consistent conglomerate of varying reactionist ideas: irrationalism, paleolibertarianism, cultural and biological racism (“white nationalism”), masculinism (protection of male interests), all of which are combined with enthusiasm about modern technology. The common denominator of the whole is elitism: the defence of the inequality principle in all its aspects (class, race, sex). The alt-right is not a monolith, its representatives express diverting opinions, among other things, about religion, Jews or homosexuality. The moderate wing of the movement is described as the alt-lite. The alt-right movement is pretty nebulous: born somewhere in the deepest corners of internet forums, it has not been capable of standing the confrontation with the realities of political struggle; after the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville in August 2017, submitted to a technical-administrative (so-called deplatforming on the internet), financial, political and physical pressure, it practically sank into oblivion<sup>12</sup>.

A European counterpart of the alt-right is identitarianism. It is the political aftermath of the European thought of the New Right (*Nouvelle Droite – Junge Rechte*). Its beginnings date back to 2003, when the organisation *Bloc Identitaire* with its youth branch *Génération identitaire* was established in France. In 2012, similar groups appeared, among others, in Italy (*Generazione Identitaria*), Germany (*Identitäre Bewegung Deutschlands*), Austria (*Identitäre Bewegung Österreich*) and the USA (*Identity Evropa*). The central notion of identitarianism is the “identity” ordered in a hierarchy from the regional, to the national, to the European one. For this reason, identitarians are against nationalism

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<sup>11</sup> More: J. Tomaszewicz, *Reakcja*, [in:] A. Adamczyk, A. Sakson, C. Trościak (ed.), *Migranci i mniejszości jako swoi i obcy w przestrzeni polityczno-społecznej*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe WNPiD 2019, pp. 71–86.

<sup>12</sup> P. Hermansson, D. Lawrence, J. Mulhall, S. Murdoch, *The International Alt-Right: Fascism for the 21st Century?*, *The International Alt-Right: Fascism for the 21st Century*, 2020.

(“chauvinism”, national egoism), and they support regional autonomy and pan-European cooperation against the USA and the world of Islam. Their socio-political views seem to be closer to conservative-liberal ones as compared to other branches of the far right; there is no social radicalism there, so characteristic of the third position supporters or autonomic nationalists<sup>13</sup>.

Difficult to classify is the Sovereign Citizen Movement, which has grown from the previous-century groups of Posse Comitatus and Free-men, finding a field to act at the extreme end of the Tea Party in the beginning of this century. The Sovereign Citizen Movement is, de facto, anarchist in nature: it rejects the tax system (sometimes also the monetary one, and prefers the silver coin), negates the government’s and the administration’s prerogatives and accepts only the power of elected sheriffs, denies the contemporary legislation and has its own interpretation of the US Constitution and common law. The sovereign citizens, however, look for the grounds of this practice not in Bakunin’s theories but in the American constitutional fundamentalism (which calls for a strict observance of the original 1776 Constitution) and the Old Testament. Furthermore, in its beginnings, the movement was linked to the racist right wing. Despite that, the theory of citizen sovereignty turned out to be attractive also to extreme factions of the black minority (the Moorish Science Temple of America) and the Native American minority (the Washitaw Nation). The movement of sovereign citizens has also emerged in other countries of English legal culture (among others in Canada, Australia, New Zealand) as well as in Germany as the movement of the Citizens of the Reich (Reichsbürgerbewegung), which questions the legitimisation of the Federal Republic of Germany<sup>14</sup>.

In all sectors of the radical right, a bigger or lesser tendency to apply violence may be observed (it is not by accident that MMA classes and tournaments are popular among them). Neofascism was the ground for terrorist groups such as the Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund (the only one which put words into actions) and the Atomwaffen Division, individual terrorists such as Luca Traini, Gianluca Casseri or Maxime

<sup>13</sup> L. Placet, *Vers une crise dans le mouvance identitaire?* «Resistance» 2003, No. 10; J. P. Zúquete, *The Identitarians: The Movement against Globalism and Islam in Europe*, University of Notre Dame Press 2018, pp. 105–319; T. Kosiński, *Ruchy autonomiczne lat 70. i 80. XX wieku w RFN i ich wpływ na współczesny niemiecki nacjonalizm autonomiczny*, «Pro Fide Rege et Leg» 2018, No. 79.

<sup>14</sup> Ch. M. Sarteschi, *Sovereign Citizens: A Psychological and Criminological Analysis*, Springer 2020, passim.

Brunerie, the paramilitary formation of the Soldiers of Odin, or the theorist of terror David Myatt. In the USA, an alt-right-linked militant group is e.g. the Rise Above Movement, and the Christchurch attacker's opinions were close to identitarianism. Boogaloo Boys have emerged at the interface of the sovereign citizens and the subculture of preppers in the USA; they believe a civil war is inevitable and defend the right to keep and bear arms. Members of the movement, due to their anti-government attitude, joined the protests against police violence which broke out in 2020 after the death of George Floyd. The right-populist section includes organisations focused on demonstrations or even street confrontations (like the English Defence League and the Football Lads Alliance in the UK, PEGIDA and HoGeSa in Germany, Patriot Prayer and the Proud Boys in the USA) and vigilante groups (e.g. border vigilante or state militias). The most famous of the right-wing terrorists of the recent years, Anders Breivik, was also a proponent of an ideology much closer to the populist right-wing than to neofascism. Trump supporters are also responsible for a number of violent acts. The American right is currently seeing a trend called "accelerationism", according to which the status quo may not be defended anymore and so the collapse of the system has to be accelerated and on its ruins the old values must be revived<sup>15</sup>.

## The left wing

The left wing has also been in a faith crisis. Global projects of a revolutionary transformation have been replaced with limited, partial, sometimes purely individual goals. Orthodox Marxist-Leninist groups have shrunk to a microscopic size, giving floor to formations based on the ideology of the New Left. Thus, they have lost their ideological

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<sup>15</sup> D. Koehler, *Right-Wing Terrorism in the 21st Century. The 'National Socialist Underground' and the history of terror from the Far-Right in Germany*, Routledge 2017; M. Mareš, R. Stojar, *Extreme right perpetrators*. [in:] M. Fredholm (ed.), *Understanding Lone Actor Terrorism*. Routledge 2016; J. Tomasiewicz, *Biały Wilk*, [in:] J. Piątek, R. Podgórzńska (ed.), *Wybrane aspekty bezpieczeństwa*, Vol. 2, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego 2007, pp. 169–171; F. Hartleb, *Lone...*, pp. 85–87; H. Vorländer, M. Herold, S. Schäller, *PEGIDA and New Right-Wing Populism in Germany*, Springer 2018, pp. 1–30; H. Pilkington, *Loud and proud. Passion and politics in the English Defence League*, Manchester University Press 2016, pp. 37–91; A. M. Stern, *Proud Boys and the White Ethnostate How the Alt-Right Is Warping the American Imagination*, Beacon Press 2020, pp. 74–78.

attractiveness which allowed for generating fanaticism and readiness to use violence. Symptomatic is the example of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, which at the beginning applied communist ideology in its Stalinist version in their fight for the Kurdish statehood, while in the 21<sup>st</sup> century they shifted to the position of a "democratic confederalism" inspired by anarchism and the New Left. Although the Maoist rebellion succeeded in 2006 in Nepal, it has not found many followers. Today, it flickers in some countries of Latin America (Columbia, Peru, Paraguay, Mexico) and Asia (the Philippines), and is considerable in size only in India (so-called Naxalites)<sup>16</sup>.

The place of communism in the far left has been taken by reborn anarchism. The dynamic development of the anarchist movement is accompanied with its progressing differentiation. Among many, there is also a faction based on the "propaganda with action". The theorist of the new mutation of anarcho-terrorism is Alfredo M. Bonanno, who promotes the necessity of uncompromising fight whatever the circumstances. The fight is to be individual (without waiting for anyone's help) and thus spontaneous. It would involve initiation of "preventive armed attacks" against the state infrastructure. The revolutionary movement would be based on the rules of "permanent contrariness", offensiveness and "self-management of the fight". The "permanent contrariness" idea can be boiled down to constantly identifying tinderboxes and escalating the conflict. To this end "an active minority of aware individuals" would form "autonomous basic units" based on personal relations. Their activity was to be flexible to the maximum possible extent: instead of putting a rigid plan into action, immediate adaptation to the changing conditions would be required.

Insurrectionism is primarily a strategy and tactic of action, and an idea of permanent, everyday protest without waiting for the right conditions. This way, an aware individual achieves individual, even if only temporary, liberation; this freedom in microscale, by spreading out, will eventually destroy the system. Part of insurrectionists (so-called social insurrectionists) use this modus operandi for the achievement of the traditional anarchist goal, i.e. the liberation of the society; direct action is aimed at waking up and enlightening the masses. An increasing faction of anarchists, however, draws further conclusions from the insurrection-

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<sup>16</sup> R. Pandita, *Hello, Bastar. Untold Story of India's Maoist Movement*, Tranquebar Press 2011, pp. 88–115, 155–171; T. A. Marks, *Maoist Insurgency Since Vietnam*, Frank Cass 1996, passim.

ist strategy: a stage objective, i.e. the self-liberation of an individual, becomes the ultimate goal, while the liberation of society gets out of sight. For insurrectionists-nihilists, a passive, consumerist, enslaved society is the enemy as an element of the system.

Insurrectionism is an elite movement, but there is another leftist, violence-applying movement that has become a much more mass phenomenon: Antifa. The name Anti-Fascist Action was adopted in 1985 by British anti-fascists and has since gradually spread all over the world (e.g. in 1995 in the USA Anti-Racist Action was born, while in 2007 Rose City Antifa). Antifa do not satisfy themselves with propaganda actions or counter-demonstrations, they physically fight people identified as fascists. In 1999, during the Seattle anti-globalisation rally, another phenomenon emerged, the Black Block, which was a group of black-dressed and masked individuals starting riots during the manifestation. This modus operandi was adopted by Antifa. The activity of Antifa was boosted by the election successes of right-wing populists, especially the election of Donald Trump for the US President in 2016. Then, Antifa groups gained, if not favour, then at least leniency from the liberal middle class<sup>17</sup>.

Antifa does not have any clearly specified ideology. They define themselves through the measures (physical confrontation) and negative goals (resistance against fascism). The notion of fascism, however, is treated very flexibly and, in fact, spans over any demonstration of rightism or even apolitical conservatism. Antifa activists often claim that fascism is inextricably linked to racism, sexism, homophobia, imperialism, capitalism finally, which perfectly expands the front line of the battle<sup>18</sup>.

Antifa is a movement with a remarkably decentralised, network structure, and prefers participation over formalised membership. This entails the diversity of the movement's social basis. The majority of the participants of the protests organised by Antifa are young people driven by impulse rather than ideology, who limit their participation to physical presence and drowning out the opponent. The core of those groups, however, is built of organised activists who undergo systematic training, sometimes are even armed with firearms (e.g. the John Brown Gun Club – Redneck Revolt). The activity of Antifa is not limited to street confrontations with the supporters of the right. Germany noted attacks against premises of right-wing political parties and cars of their

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<sup>17</sup> M. Bray, *Antifa: The Anti-Fascist Handbook*, Melville House 2017, p. 71, 107.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 63, 130.

supporters, as well as the people themselves. In the USA, in June 2017 anti-fascist James T. Hodgkinson shot Republican congressman Steve Scalise and some of his staff, while Michael Reinhoehl killed a supporter of Donald Trump during a demonstration in Portland in August 2020<sup>19</sup>.

The least violent among the offensive tactics of leftist organisations is to occupy public space, a tactic used by such movements as the Spanish Indignados or the American Occupy Wall Street with its abundant followers. Theoretical grounds for occupation have been developed by activists stemming from the anarcho-syndicalist movement. Having found that the traditional workers' strike and workplace occupation is ineffective in the contemporary post-capitalism based on consumption and non-material production, they decided that it would be more acute for the system to hinder the operations of social infrastructure. The tactic of occupation does not use violence, but it certainly goes beyond mere non-violent resistance, and as such violates public order<sup>20</sup>.

## Social movements

A social movement is a collection of organisations, informal groups and individuals striving not so much to achieve a common goal but moving towards a common direction; a collection, by its nature, decentralised, diverse and amorphous. Such a movement, although focused on specific problems, often develops an advanced ideology. New social movements are movements characteristic of post-industrial society, dealing with identity rather than existence problems. Such movements do not form a uniform front, to the contrary: they remain in conflict. Because action causes a reaction, the activity of the movements of change brings about a more or less organised resistance of the protectors of the status quo (backlash). On the other hand, a success of a movement often results in splits within it, when new, more radical factions start escalating their demands.

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<sup>19</sup> *Brief summary: 2019 Report on the Protection of the Constitution Facts and Trends*, p. 22; <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jul/11/redneck-revolt-guns-anti-racism-fascism-far-left> (18.07.2017); <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/06/14/homepage2/james-hodgkinson-profile/index.html> (15.06.2017); <https://www.zerohedge.com/political/portland-police-investigate-100-antifa-suspect-identified-4chan-hours-after-shooting> (31.08.2020).

<sup>20</sup> P. Dhaliwal, *Public squares and resistance: the politics of space in the Indignados movement*, «Interface» 2012, No. 1, pp. 251–273.

Social movements apply a wide spectrum of measures, among which the primary ones are lobbying, civil disobedience and propaganda. An important part of propaganda are happenings, which sometimes take the form of symbolic violence<sup>21</sup> (Femen excels in this kind of actions). Sometimes, social movements or their extreme parts reach also for physical violence. It may be noted that successful movements are less prone to act violently.

In terms of ideology, new social movements vary significantly. While some are linked to the left wing, others are to the right, many are ideologically indifferent, and in some others various ideas clash. Among the ones described as “leftist” the following may be named: feminism, LGBTQIA (sexual minorities), pro-choice, anti-pedagogy, anti-prohibition movements, prison abolition movement, tenants’ rights movements, pro-immigrant movement (No Border), anti-racist movement (including those fighting for the rights of the Aborigines), the movement for the universal basic income. Another group is composed of the “right-oriented” new social movements: pro-life, anti-vax movement, masculinists (so-called manosphere with its extreme wing of incels), opponents of fiat money, climate change negationists, promoters of home schooling and free access to guns, followers of various conspiracy theories (e.g. QAnon) and para-scientific ones<sup>22</sup>.

A third group consists of movements ideologically inconsistent. It is best exemplified by hacking, which was born as an information freedom movement, while today it is represented by all possible political orientations, often being simply an instrument of state intelligence agencies. Squatting is associated with anarchists, but it is this movement within which also the neofascist group Casa Pound was born. In appropriate circumstances also semi-criminal youth subcultures may become political, like in the case of Juggalos. The French movement of yellow vests concentrates both extreme left and extreme right activists. The same may be observed for the opposition against the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions or the 5G network. Environmentalism has both reactionist

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<sup>21</sup> The notion of “symbolic violence” as used herein is inspired by Pierre Bourdieu but transplanted on to the field of agonology with changed meaning. First, the “oppressed” ones can fight symbolic violence of the “dominators” by using their own symbolic counter-violence. Second, the focus here is not on counteracting the symbolic violence of the “dominators” in the form of, for example, counterculture, but more in the form of physical (destruction of symbols), verbal or visual violence.

<sup>22</sup> See: H. Azhar, A. Syed, A Madiha, H. Sheharyar, *The Anti-vaccination Movement: A Regression in Modern Medicine*, «Cureus» 2018, No. 7.

and anarchist roots: in addition to the leftist wing, one can also see conservative, and even fascist elements here<sup>23</sup>.

The environmental movement deserves special attention. The unfolding of the climate crisis may lead to radicalisation of the groups using direct action methods, such as Extinction Rebellion; it is not difficult to imagine a situation where they find mass sabotage a legitimate means to stop the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Moreover, misanthropic threads may also be found in environmentalism, they deem humanity as such to be the evil, which is a convenient excuse for attacks against people. According to the Gaianism philosophy, Mother Earth (Gaia) with her biosphere is a value in herself which is to be protected not for the human species but against it. In addition, the effects of the environmental crisis such as increasing migrations or the need to distribute depleting resources, will contribute to the eco-fascism rather than “green anarchism” trends<sup>24</sup>.

New social movements have a considerable potential of violence, difficult to control due to their multidirectional character and unpredictability. The biggest traditions in this area belong to environmentalists (Earth Liberation Front) and animal rights’ fighters (Animal Liberation Front), who since the 1970s have moved from civil disobedience, to ecotage, to terrorist attacks against buildings and people. Violence is employed, more or less incidentally, also by the radical feminist movement (e.g. the storm of the cathedral in San Juan, Argentina on 25 November 2013) and the LGBT movement (BashBack in the USA, Stop Bzdurom [Stop Bullshit] in Poland). Sexual frustration of incels sometimes also explodes with violence. A similar effect may be brought also by conspiracy theories (e.g. Pizzagate)<sup>25</sup>.

Special attention has been drawn lately by the anti-racist movement (Black Lives Matter is of multi-race nature, so it may not be identified with the movement of the black minority only). The BLM rallies are

<sup>23</sup> J. Tomaszewicz, *Ekofaszizm? Wątki ekologiczne na amerykańskiej prawicy*, «Pro Fide Rege et Lege» 2013, No. 71; T. Sikorski, *Prekursorzy zielonego anarchizmu*, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek 2020, *passim*.

<sup>24</sup> J. Lovelock, *Gaia: A New Look on the Life on Earth*, Oxford University Press 1979; see: K. Sawiński, *Pentti Linkola jako ekocentryczny ekstremista*, «Polityka Bezpieczeństwa» 2013, No. 1, pp. 47–55.

<sup>25</sup> R. Okraska, *Powrót Generała Ludda*, [in:] T. Kaczynski, *Spółczesność przemysłowa i jego przyszłość*, Inny Świat 2003, pp. 7–26; J. Tomaszewicz, *Zło w imię dobra*, Wydawnictwo Szkolne PWN 2009, pp. 180–196; Idem, *Przemoc w ruchu ekologicznym: od obywatelskiego nieposłuszeństwa do terroryzmu*, [in:] K. Liedel (ed.), *Terroryzm. Anatomia zjawiska*, Scholar 2006, pp. 166–197.

frequently connected with riots (shop plundering, attacks against the police), the activists have also temporarily seized the centre of Portland and made an anarchist “no-go zone” there. What is important, violent actions of the BLM bring about counteractions such as citizen militias who use violence against rally participants (in one of such clashes, 17-year-old Kyle Ritterhouse killed two protesters). In appropriate circumstances, the protection of property or rivalry between ethnic gangs may gain a quasi-ideological appearance.

## **Misanthropy**

There is no such ideology that couldn't be used to rationalise violence. So, would deideologization bring a decrease in the potential of aggression? No. Violence is born primarily from the conflict of interest, ideology is of secondary nature (even if it gets autonomic). At the same time, ideology makes its supporters become predictable, and because they express their goals very clearly, sometimes negotiations are possible.

Ideological violence is not the only form of social violence. Social atomisation brings about the increasing dissemination of egotism, a sort of practical, sometimes even unconscious, Stirnerism. An alienated and frustrated individual deems the entire society his or her enemy, without any attempt of differentiation or at least rationalisation. In my book, before 09/11, I predicted: “The decline of social ties in atomised societies will make the terrorist of tomorrow have no scruples to leave a bomb killing casual strangers”<sup>26</sup>. No ideology is needed to take “revenge” on other people. Increasingly frequent are mass killings made by people described as “mad”, like the massacres in Denver (2012) or Las Vegas (2017). In this context, the 2019 *Joker* by Todd Phillips seems to be a grim prophecy.

## **Results and Discussion**

Having completed a review of the principal ideologies inspiring extremist violence, one might venture to summarise conclusions as follows.

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<sup>26</sup> J. Tomaszewicz, *Terroryzm na tle przemocy politycznej*, Apis 2000, p. 367.

A. Extremist ideologies maintain their motivational and programmatic functions in the twenty-first century. Whilst various features of contemporary society serve to diminish the influence of ideology, others by contrast enhance it.

B. The most vital religious extremism in recent decades, having attained its most radical form in the Islamic State, followed by the latter's collapse, has lost, or so it would seem, its dynamism.

C. A deepening ideological crisis can be observed in right-wing and left-wing political extremism – a retreat from global projects for revolutionary change in favour of defensive postures (the defence of particular interests, individual micronarratives). In the case of extremism of the left, this move results in a mitigation and theatricalisation of violence ('soft terrorism'); in the case of extremism of the right, it leads, paradoxically, to increasingly brutalised behaviour.

D. The greatest dynamism is exhibited by the extremism of new social movements. Their ideologies tend to derive from a fragmentary and/or individual perspective, which moreover impels them towards the rejection of radical forms of violence.

Generally, as regards the ideological aspect of terrorism, we can observe an erosion of grand narratives and a growing individualisation. This process may increase terrorism's unpredictability.

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