

**YOUNG PEOPLE'S
TRAJECTORIES THROUGH
ANTI-ISLAM(IST) AND
EXTREME RIGHT MILIEUS:
COUNTRY LEVEL REPORT
UNITED KINGDOM**

**Understanding 'right-wing
extremism': in theory
and practice**



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DARE: Dialogue about Radicalisation and Equality

Young people's trajectories through anti-Islam(ist) and extreme right milieus: Country level report

UK

Understanding 'right-wing extremism': in theory and practice


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Executive Summary: Concern about the rise, and mainstreaming, of ‘right-wing extremism’ is growing in policy and practice circles. While there are myriad definitions of ‘right-wing extremism’, at minimum it is seen as an ideology that embraces authoritarianism, anti-democracy and some form of exclusionary nationalism. It is vital to have not only a clear conceptual understanding of what constitutes ‘right wing extremism’ but one that carries validity. By this is meant, that it corresponds to the real-life properties of the social phenomenon it seeks to describe. A concept that fails to do so, such that those it seeks to describe do not recognise themselves in the description, is unlikely to be able to inform policy and practice to counter extremism in a way that speaks effectively to those it targets.

This report draws on ethnographic research over three years with twenty young people active in a wide range of movements routinely referred to in public and academic discourse as ‘extreme right’ or ‘far right’. Through interviews, informal communication and observations at numerous events, it generates a picture of the diversity within the current ‘extreme right’ milieu but also shared positions among activists on what is wrong with the world, who is to blame and what should be done about it. By suspending judgement on the attitudes and behaviours of those active in this milieu, the study elicits what ‘extremism’ looks like to them and how far it corresponds to current conceptualisations of it.

The findings of the study are detailed in relation to six dimensions of the milieu: understandings of extremism, radicalism and radicalisation; encounters with, and responses, to radicalisation messages; the respective roles of ideas and emotions as drivers to action; social relationships, online and offline; the role of inequality and injustice, objective and subjective, in driving radicalisation; and the gendered dimensions of ideology and activism.

The study concludes that the notion of ‘right-wing extremism’ has limited validity. The extension of the term to encompass an increasing range of the political spectrum, and to include attitudes and beliefs, leads those active in the milieu it seeks to describe to consider it an empty signifier. They associate ‘extremism’ primarily with the use of violence and reject the application of the term ‘right-wing extremism’ to ideas or views alone. This does not mean all ideas are acceptable but that right-wing views participants consider ‘extreme’, as well as radical Islamist views, should be articulated so that they can be challenged and critiqued. The use of violence to impose ideas is seen as illegitimate and participants have clear thresholds for action and attitudinal positions that they would not cross.

Beliefs and ideological frameworks adhered to are highly diverse across the milieu. However, in relation to key dimensions of ‘right-wing extremism’, neither the criterion of ‘anti-democracy’ nor ‘authoritarianism’ are met in the milieu studied. The democratic system is viewed as the only way to achieve change. While some individuals call for order and discipline, the majority are concerned with disrupting the current order and freedom of speech is promoted (not least as a means to protect their own dissenting voices from being silenced). On exclusionary nationalism, views are more varied. For a few, a monocultural society is preferred and to be pursued through a process of ‘peaceful separation’. For most, existing multicultural society is an accepted status quo but further diversification through ‘uncontrolled’ immigration should be halted. Concerns about the ethnic or religious composition of society are framed as perceived threats, specifically of ‘Islamisation’ and of rapid social and cultural change associated with immigration. For some this threat is accompanied by the sense of the suppression of the ‘in-group’ or even the endangerment of its survival. This is indicative of the growing influence of both identitarianism and the ‘alt-right’ in promoting a sense of threat to white identities due to demographic change and commitment to multiculturalism among the political establishment. However, this co-exists with a continued discomfort in talking about race and acute awareness that the naturalisation of racial difference leads to racism, which is neither natural nor acceptable. An uneasy course is thus tracked between calls for the expression of pride in one’s own culture and the practice of this in a way that does not demonise others.

1. Introduction

Well extremists now, the word extremist is just, to me doesn't matter anymore. Because they're classing everyone as an extremist, you know what I mean. [...] they class me, obviously, they'd probably class me as a right-wing extremist. Which is, which is pathetic, 'cause I'm not. But they are just throwing that word about now. It's like the 'racist' word – it just doesn't mean nothing to me anymore. Someone calls me a racist, I couldn't give a flying fuck, to be fair. (Dan¹)

Dan is a 23 year old 'extreme right' activist described in October 2018 by the anti-hate politics campaign organisation Hope not Hate as one of the UK's leading 'faces of hate'². He does not represent or typify the milieu studied but his perception of the term 'right-wing extremism' as being emptied of meaning was found across the milieu. Amidst the heterogeneity of attitudes, opinions and forms of action encountered during the study of this contemporary 'extreme right' milieu³, what respondents agree on is that they are not who we think they are.

A series of conceptual starting points underpin the milieu studied in the UK and how the reader is guided through what was found there. The first is that violent extremism exists and matters; as Berger (2018: 2) puts it, violent extremism is one of the defining challenges of our age and failure to understand it has huge real-world consequences. At the same time our understanding and knowledge of it is situated; that is, what we know about it reflects the context in which that knowledge is produced and the social locations and identities of those who produce it, including the institutions which have a stake in addressing it. This makes the field deeply contested as demonstrated in the particularly contentious nature of the study of 'radicalisation'⁴. Radicalisation is intrinsically associated with a specific - 'Islamist' - terrorism and situated in attempts to understand, and counter, this apparent new security threat in the wake of the 9/11 attacks (2001), the emergence of 'home-grown' terrorism in Western Europe (2004-05) and the departure (and return) of 'foreign fighters' to support ISIS/IS. For some this means theories of radicalisation have become the lens through which western societies view Muslim populations per se as 'suspect communities' (Kundnani, 2014: 9-10) while others are concerned that by refuting the actuality of the phenomenon, 'radicalisation deniers' (Neumann, 2013: 873) risk failing to tackle a very real and complex phenomenon. A further question arises as to whether the extension of the application of radicalisation theories and models to other forms of extremism, such as 'right-wing extremism', alleviates the critique of its focus on Muslim communities or simply compounds and extends its divisive, stigmatising effects.

The second is that what constitutes (violent) extremism is discursively constructed and thus changes. In the recent period terrorism has been increasingly re-configured as the study of violent extremism, with the two terms often used interchangeably to refer to violent behaviours in support of a shared ideology or belief. Extremism is also subject to conceptual drift, being increasingly considered to relate not only to behaviour but attitudes, opinions, and beliefs that differ from established norms and have potentially dangerous consequences (Kruglanski and Orehek, 2012: 12).⁵ A key distinction is drawn between

¹ 'Dan' is an agreed pseudonym (see Section 3.3).

² The reference to the source is not given in order to protect the anonymity of the respondent.

³ A milieu is understood as the people, the physical and the social conditions and events in which someone acts or lives. To constitute a milieu suitable for study in the DARE project, it should also be a space where radical/extreme messages are encountered – online or offline - for example via the presence of recruiters, people of high receptivity to radical messages and/or people who have participated in radical/extreme activities (see Introduction to this series of reports).

⁴ The concept of 'radicalisation' is discussed in Section 4.2, but is broadly understood to be the process by which individuals or groups come to embrace attitudes, or engage in actions, that support violence in the pursuit of extremist causes.

⁵ Although, as discussed in Section 4.1.2, there are models of radicalisation that maintain the non-determinacy of opinion and action (see: Bartlett and Miller, 2012: 2; McCauley and Moskaleiko, 2017: 211).

extremism and radicalism, where ‘radicals’ are understood as actively supporting fundamental political change (Beck, 2015: 18-20) but being open-minded and employing critical thinking rather than displaying the closed-minded, rigid and dogmatic characteristics ascribed to ‘extremists’ (Schmid, 2013: 9-10). Finally, both radicalism and extremism may be treated as relative or relational (Bouhana, 2019: 7) - situating individuals or positions on a continuum of organised opinion in a particular time and place - rather than absolute concepts. This means both concepts are also subject to political re-framing. In the UK, for example, Onursal and Kirkpatrick (2019: 1-2) suggest that signifiers of terrorism and extremism have converged in recent British political discourse such that non-violent extremism is increasingly framed as a pathway into terrorism. It is on this pathway that Dan feels he is being, erroneously, placed.

The third starting point is thus that this discursive construction of (violent) extremism - where people are placed and how they are talked about - also matters. This draws on understandings from symbolic interactionism to suggest that extremism, like other ‘deviant’ behaviours, is the product of the interaction of all actors involved, not just those deemed deviant (Becker, 1997 [1966]: 183). Although starting from the perspective of the social psychology of terrorism, McCauley and Moskalenko’s (2008: 430) understanding of radicalisation - as a dynamic process in which significant events are the actions not only of the individual but also of others - shares the basic premises of Becker’s critical approach to the sociology of deviance.

The fourth starting point follows from this; the non-recognition of self as extremist by actors in what are identified exogenously as extremist milieus needs to be taken seriously. This is neither to accept at face value denials of ‘extremism’, ‘racism’ or intolerance by actors in ‘extreme right milieus’ nor to normalise the attitudes or behaviours they exhibit. It is, rather, to argue that the consistent dissonance between who is ‘classed’ (see Dan, above) as a right-wing extremist and who thinks of themselves as such should not be dismissed as a smokescreen but investigated. This is premised on earlier work that suggests that, when viewed up close, extremists rarely look like our mythologised images of them but are lived out amidst everyday realities of largely ‘normal’ lives (Pilkington, 2016). It suggests that our failure to recognise these ‘real-life’ extremists contributes to the emptying of signification of the term ‘extremist’ that Dan points to in the opening citation. This, moreover, has implications for efforts to prevent and counter extremism since it may lead to the diversion of attention to those inaccurately identified as on a trajectory to violent extremism whilst failing to recognise, and mobilise the agency of, those who act in radical milieus but practice strategies of non-radicalisation or maintain open-minded engagements with the world and whose experience could inform and enhance CVE practice.

This report thus sets out to understand ‘right-wing extremism’ as manifest and encountered in real life. In light of the discussion above, this raises the question of how to refer to an object of study - in this case the ‘extreme right milieu’ - if it shifts over space and time and is constructed differently from the inside and the outside. For this reason, where secondary literature is referred to, the term used to describe the movement, milieu or activist in that source is employed; this respects the designations of the cited authors. Similarly, except where respondents in this study are consciously talking about ‘extreme’ or ‘far’ right elements of the milieu, the designation used is ‘right-wing’; this respects the self-identification of most milieu members in the study (see Section 4.1.1.2). This is not to accept that self-characterisation uncritically, but to allow for such critical interrogation on the basis of the empirical data reported here without prejudging the conclusion. Where the object of study in general is referred to, rather than the particular milieu studied here, it is indicated by using inverted commas around the terms ‘right-wing extremism’ or the ‘extreme right milieu’; this reflects how the phenomenon or milieu is generally talked about.

The report starts by setting the scene in the historical and contemporary context of ‘right-wing extremism’ in the UK before locating the milieu studied in that scene (Section 2). The details of the field research conducted are set out in Section 3 together with a socio-demographic overview of the respondent set. Section 4 presents the key findings from the study. It starts with an exploration of respondents’ own

understandings of what constitutes ‘extremism’, focusing in particular on distinctions drawn between ‘ideas’ and ‘actions’. This is followed by the analysis of trajectories of radicalisation and non-radicalisation among respondents, exploring their encounters with, and responses to, radicalisation messages and agents. In the subsequent section the respective roles of ideas and emotions as drivers to action are considered. The discussion here is framed in the context of the tendency of respondents to articulate their views in terms of threats posed by ideologised enemies rather than through ideological frameworks and it is organised by distinguishing between racialised ‘others’ and establishment ‘others’. The fourth subsection considers selected dimensions of social relationships within the milieu, focusing on the interaction between online and offline activism and the role of ‘influencers’ and movements in radicalisation and non-radicalisation. The fifth theme relates to the role of structural factors in radicalisation, exploring in particular the role of inequalities and the relative significance of socio-economic and socio-political and objective and subjective (perceived) inequality and injustice in narratives of respondents. The final part of the findings section considers the gendered dimensions of ‘right-wing extremism’ including the role of women and LGBT+ actors, attitudes within the milieu to gender and sexuality and gendered ideologies. Section 5 concludes the report by outlining the implications of the research findings for our understanding of ‘right-wing extremism’ as it manifests in real life.

2. Setting the scene

In this section, the milieu selected is located in the historical development of political parties and movements on the ‘far right’ end of the spectrum in the UK. A brief overview of social trends shaping the resonance of these movements in the current period is provided, as well as of key events prior to and during the fieldwork period where these are considered important to understanding salient issues in the milieu or forces that have shaped it. In the final section, a broad brush portrait of the milieu is provided. Given the numerous parties, movements and organisations referred to throughout the report, a single list and brief details of the key movements is provided in Appendix 7.1 (see Section 7).

2.1 Historical context

Historically, the ‘extreme right’ in the UK has been politically marginalised. Electoral support for parties on the far right of the political spectrum in national parliamentary elections has remained lower than in other western European states (Minkenberg, 2013). No such party has succeeded in having a representative elected to the UK parliament and, notwithstanding pockets of success for the National Front⁶ (NF) in the late 1970s and, more notably, the British National Party (BNP) between 2002-08 (at its height the party held 55 local council seats), the ‘extreme right’ has had limited success even at local government level. Paradoxically, the greatest achievements for nationalist-oriented parties have been in elections to the European Parliament. The BNP won two seats in the European Parliament in 2009 while the populist anti-EU United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) took the highest proportion of the UK vote in the 2014 European Parliament elections (27%) and the Brexit party (led by former UKIP leader Nigel Farage) polled the highest number of votes to the European Parliament in the elections held in May 2019. The reasons for the lack of breakthrough into national parliament of any extreme right or populist radical right party⁷ is not due to a significantly lower popular appeal of the ideas they promote than in other European countries, where such parties have been electorally more successful and, in some cases, hold power in government, but, rather, a combination of factors. These include the UK’s first-past-the-post electoral system at national and local level (in contrast to the European Parliament elections where seats are allocated according to the share of votes for each party or individual in each electoral region),

⁶ See Appendix 7.1 for a brief description of the key parties and movements referred to in this report.

⁷ This distinction is based on Mudde (2007) and explained in Section 4.3.3.

which significantly reduces the incentive to vote for candidates with little chance of securing victory in a given constituency. It is also due to the failure of the BNP to move in the direction of a 'renewed' radical right of the kind that has emerged elsewhere in Europe (ibid.: 17), despite its declared intent to do so from the mid-1990s. The particular constellation of mainstream right-wing politics in the UK has also played a role. When the 'New Right' was establishing itself as an intellectual movement on the European continent, especially in France, in the UK the notion of a 'new right' was associated already with the neo-liberal political agenda of Margaret Thatcher, squeezing the space for the alternative vision promoted by Alain de Benoist, and others associated with the French '*nouvelle droite*', to take root (Macklin, 2020b: 9-10).

The trajectory of the 'extreme right' in the UK might be seen, therefore, less in terms of its development as either an intellectual force or a political actor than as a series of mobilisations, mainly at street level, accompanied by periodic, and largely unsuccessful, attempts to move off the street and into democratic institutions. Marches and demonstrations have been an integral part of the repertoires of action of fascist, far right and, more recently, anti-Islam(ist) groups in the UK (Macklin, 2020a: 7) and have often involved violent clashes with their opponents (usually anti-fascist but, more recently, also Islamist groups). Macklin and Busher (2015) identify four major 'waves' of such political mobilisations generating street violence in the post-war period: clashes between Oswald Mosley's Union Movement and anti-fascist activists in the 1940s; clashes between the National Front and the Socialist Workers' Party in the 1970s; clashes between far right groups and anti-fascists in the 1980s and 1990s; and clashes between various anti-Muslim groups and anti-fascists and Islamists in the late 2000s. The latter three 'waves' Macklin (2020a) suggests can be conceived of as part of a continuum of far right anti-immigration protest that emerged during the course of the 1960s.

Prior to the study reported on here, the last in this line of protest-oriented mobilisations had been that associated with the English Defence League (EDL). The EDL was founded in 2009 as a direct response to Islamist activists (linked to the since proscribed group al-Muhajiroun) in Luton who protested the homecoming parade of the Royal Anglican Regiment. Fashioning itself as a consciously single-issue movement against 'radical Islam', over the period from 2009-2013 and, drawing on football hooligan networks, it regularly mustered 2-3,000 (occasionally up to 7,000) people at demonstrations across the country. These demonstrations served a much greater purpose than expressing protest; they constituted the EDL 'family' as an emotional collective (Pilkington, 2016: 186-189) and created a space in which political voice was not only demonstrated but done so 'loud and proud' (ibid: 203-221). The resignation of Tommy Robinson⁸ and Kevin Carroll as leaders of the EDL in October 2013 dealt a serious although not fatal blow to the movement. The horizontal structure of the movement allowed it to reconstitute around a collective leadership of its Regional Organisers and sustain its presence albeit that demonstrations subsequently mustered numbers in the hundreds rather than thousands. The challenge had become whether the movement could create a structure and purpose beyond the street protests of 'Tommy Robinson's barmy army' (ibid.: 37) or whether its demise would mark the end of just another wave of 'extreme right' mobilisation.

Before the contemporary context for this study is outlined, it is worth noting an important dimension of the EDL (especially among its grassroots activists) that often passes unrecognised amidst the focus on the question of the relationship, and slippage, between 'anti-Islam', 'anti-Muslim' and 'racist' attitudes and behaviours in the movement. This relates to its reflexive engagement with 'extremism', which occurs at

⁸ While many commentators refer to Tommy Robinson by his legal name, Stephen Yaxley-Lennon, this practice is not adopted here as it is the political persona, known as Tommy Robinson, that is the object of discussion. Moreover, the aim of this ethnographic study is to understand the world as members of the milieu see it and in that world, it is Tommy Robinson not Stephen Yaxley-Lennon who is a key 'influencer'. While the political point of not using this name is understood, in practice the insistence on the use of Yaxley-Lennon is seen, within the milieu, as further evidence of the denial of political voice to them and thus, arguably, strengthens rather than undermines their cause.

two levels. First, as noted above, the EDL was founded against a background of longstanding, as well as a specific moment of, tension in relation to Islamist activism in Luton (Busher et al., 2019: 202-203). Moreover, when Tommy Robinson left the movement, he did so in a move brokered by the Quilliam Foundation - a counter-extremism think tank chaired by Maajid Nawaz and designed to counter (primarily Islamic) violent extremism (Pilkington, 2016: 40). Clearly Tommy Robinson's story is not one of a 'former' recanting his views and entering the CVE sphere; the Quilliam connection was short-lived and, arguably, borne more of mutual exploitation than mutual respect. However, it is a narrative of consistent motivation by fear, anger and concern about the manifestation of violent extremism. The second dimension relates to the evolution of the EDL as a process of acute reflexive engagement with its own representation, caricature and ridicule as composed of racist, drunken and uneducated thugs. Not only is this representation recognised as a major obstacle to efficacy but the failure to rid the movement of this association is ostensibly the reason for the resignation of its founding leaders. While this is often dismissed as an 'I'm not racist but...' attitude, it is important to return here to what was noted in the Introduction concerning the interactional construction of extremism. Whether one believes such self-reflection on extremism to be wholly strategic or, at least partially, genuine, it is essential to interrogate just what extremism means when it is not recognised, even consciously rejected, by actors labelled as such and the implications of that for countering extremism.

2.2 Contemporary context

The contemporary context in the UK is shaped by a heightened concern with anti-Muslim and extreme right sentiments as a result of both long term attitudinal trends and a number of critical events in the recent period. These are outlined below before summarising a series of government responses that have rendered issues around the extreme right more visible in counter extremism policy and practice.

2.2.1 Attitudinal trends

The overall political context of the UK throughout the field research period of this study has been dominated by the departure of the UK from the European Union (EU). The UK referendum on remaining in or leaving the EU on 23 June 2016, in which 52% of the population who voted opted to leave the EU, created a new and stark political polarisation in the country around so-called 'Brexit'. This is tangible not only in the media, social media and everyday talk but also in the interpretation of attitudinal data, where a new key variable has appeared, namely 'Leave' or 'Remain' voters. With specific relation to extremism, Brexit is said, by some, to have unleashed an unprecedented wave of xenophobia and hate crime while others claim this hate crime spike is a product of unreliable recorded crime statistics and a media-led demonisation of Brexit supporters. Brexit is thus a useful starting point to consider two dimensions of societal attitudes that are highly pertinent to understanding the wider context in which the milieu studied is located: current levels and trends in racial, ethnic and religious prejudice; and trust in political and other societal institutions.

Brexit was widely reported to have led to a sharp rise in the expression of xenophobic attitudes and racial prejudice including a significant spike in hate crime. In 2017-18, the police in England and Wales recorded the highest ever number of hate crimes marking a 17% increase on the previous year (Williams et al., 2020: 93). However, social survey data (Crime Survey for England and Wales), show a consistent decrease in total hate crime over the last decade; falling by 40% between 2007-2009 and 2015-2018 (Williams, 2019; CCE, 2019: 47). When crimes relating only to race and religion and the period around Brexit are isolated, then the figures do show an increase, but it is small; a rise of 4% between the annual average for April 2013-March 2015 and that for April 2015-March 2017. While, in general, the survey data are likely to be more reliable than the police figures (which are acutely vulnerable to changes in recording practices and reporting behaviour) by averaging out figures over a three year period, the survey data can obscure

short-lived spikes (Williams, 2019). Moreover, such spikes are important to understanding drivers of extremism and have been recorded not only in relation to Brexit but also immediately after terrorist attacks.

Further light is shed on the relationship between Brexit and xenophobic attitudes by the findings of a survey experiment conducted by Schwartz et al. (2020) before and after the Brexit referendum⁹, which suggests that the reported rise in hate crimes after the referendum was not accompanied by an increase in anti-immigrant attitudes. In what they term a ‘populist paradox’, the authors found that anti-immigrant attitudes actually softened after the EU referendum¹⁰, among both Leave and Remain supporters and that these effects held even one year after the referendum. This effect, they argue, is explained differently among those supporting exit from the EU and those voting to remain. Among ‘Leavers’, a greater sense of control over immigration after the referendum led to a reduction in anti-immigrant attitudes while a desire to distance themselves from accusations of xenophobia and racism explains the softening of attitudes towards immigration among both Leavers and Remainers (ibid.: 16-17). However, they also suggest that this does not necessarily mean the spikes in recorded hate crime were an effect of increased reporting alone; amidst a wider trend in the softening of attitudes towards immigrants after the referendum, it is possible that a small subset of individuals with strong anti-immigrant attitudes may have expressed their feelings more publicly after the referendum (ibid.: 18).

It is also possible that strongly negative attitudes are not associated with immigrants per se but particular minority groups. Thus, if hate crime figures are disaggregated, it is seen that that recorded *religious* hate crime has increased over twice as fast as other forms since 2015 (CCE, 2019: 4) while the police estimate that 52% of recorded religious hate incidents were against Muslims (ibid.: 47). Moreover, for the most serious crimes, for example prosecutions for inciting hatred, figures are at the highest level since recording began in 2010 and most convictions in 2017-18 were for inciting religious hatred against Muslims (ibid.: 46). Statistics on societal prejudice appear to confirm this pattern; while overall, racial prejudice in the UK is falling, it is rising towards particular groups, especially Muslims. Ford (2014) analyses data from the British Social Attitudes (2013) survey over a thirty year period on attitudes to ethnic inter-marriage (i.e. how people would feel if a close relative were to marry someone who was Black or Asian) and shows that while in the 1980s more than half of those surveyed expressed at least some discomfort about ethnic inter-marriage within their families, by 2013 less than a quarter did. However, concerns about white-Muslim intermarriage are significantly higher than about other inter-marriage; two thirds of those born in the 1940s or earlier and 28% of those born since 1980 oppose white-Muslim intermarriage (ibid.).

This is not an exceptional finding; there are persistent long-term trends in the growth of anti-Muslim and anti-Islam attitudes. According to Field (2012: 158), depending on the specific question asked, between one-fifth and three-quarters of the UK population hold anti-Muslim or anti-Islam attitudes. One explanation for these perceptions is that they are driven by the impact of 9/11 and other terrorist attacks, or by subsequent media debates and policy responses. However, while there is clear evidence of an immediate rise in anti-Muslim and anti-Islam sentiments following major events (Strabac and Listhaug, 2008: 274), a series of studies suggest that, across Europe, attitudes and policies show more continuity than radical break pre- and post-9/11 and that 9/11 had an immediate but short-lived impact on public attitudes to Muslim migrants (Helbling, 2012: 12). On the basis of European Social Survey data (for France)

⁹ The experiment was designed to test how populist victories shape anti-immigrant attitudes and was included in the online Aid Attitudes Tracker (AAT) panel survey before and after the referendum and then re-tested several months later.

¹⁰ Remainers were 9% and Leavers 4% less inclined to believe that ‘migrants take jobs’ after the Brexit outcome, relative to the baseline for this group established before the referendum (Schwartz et al., 2020: 6-7). Those supporting Remain were 12% and 7% less likely to believe that ‘migrants bring terror’ and that ‘refugees overwhelm services’, respectively, relative to their baseline. Leavers’ attitudes softened by 5% and 2% respectively (ibid.: 7).

and YouGov survey (for UK)¹¹, Sobolewska (2017) also finds relatively little change in people's views of Muslims and immigrants before and after the 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris. Indeed, overall, respondents expressed a little *more* tolerance towards Muslims following the attacks. However, when the samples were split between those respondents who expressed 'liberal' attitudes and those who expressed 'authoritarian' views, it appears that each group had become more committed to their values i.e. 'authoritarians' became more authoritarian while 'liberals' became more liberal. Since in both countries there are more people who hold liberal attitudes than authoritarian attitudes, the overall outcome was a slight increase in tolerance. However, Sobolewska warns, this initial resilience in the face of terrorism must be put in the context of a long term rise in anti-Muslim sentiment in the UK and thus we might anticipate that resilience may weaken as the cumulative effects of multiple attacks set in (ibid.). Indeed, public opinion polling shows Muslims continue to be viewed differently, and more negatively, than any other religious group. An unpublished YouGov poll commissioned by Hope not Hate (n= 2,244, 1-2 April, 2019) found that 10% of those surveyed had very strong negative views about Muslims - more than twice the proportion that see any other religious group in the same way (Mulhall, 2019: 15). These negative attitudes appear to be associated with perceptions that Islam is changing British society; 29% of those polled thought Islam to be a threat to the British way of life and 33% believed that there were 'no-go areas' in Britain where Sharia law dominates and non-Muslims cannot enter (ibid.).

Turning to the second dimension of societal attitudes - trust in political and other societal institutions - we also find somewhat of a paradox arising from Brexit. Those who voted to leave seem to have experienced a sense of empowerment, or greater control (see Schwartz et al., 2020 above) but, as the process of withdrawal became elongated and, in particular, it appeared that elected members of parliament held very different views about leaving the EU than the electorate, already very low reserves of trust in political institutions among 'Leave' voters, appear to have run completely dry. A series of YouGov polls commissioned by Hope not Hate chart this process. In February 2019, 55% of people polled thought that the political system was broken, with heightened proportions of those in the lowest socio-economic groups (C2DE) (58%) as well as UKIP voters (70%) feeling this way (Mulhall, 2019: 17). A Hope not Hate poll carried out in April 2019 found 72% of people felt that none of the main political parties speak for them and, when asked whether most members of the Houses of Parliament do or do not have the best interests of British people at heart, 60% believed 'Most of them do not' rising to 83% amongst 2015 UKIP voters. The same April poll found a general mistrust towards the mainstream media; 59% answered 'not at all' or 'not much' when asked if they trust traditional or established broadcasting or publishing outlets (ibid.).

2.2.2 Critical events

The feelings of lack of trust, even 'betrayal' around Brexit, strongly shaped the context of the field research for this study. A series of pro-Brexit demonstrations took place in London and around the country, generating large crowds and bringing together a much broader mixture of activists - including Tommy Robinson supporters, UKIP, Democratic Football Lads Alliance (DFLA) and Generation Identity activists - and previously non-active Brexit supporters. The researcher attended a number of these events, most notably, the pro-Brexit demonstration in London (9 December 2018) and the 'Brexit betrayal' event in London (29 March 2019) and witnessed the wide spectrum of people brought into contact with those already active in the 'extreme right' milieu, the employment of a populist 'anti-elite' and nativist 'our own people first' discourse in that new context and the dynamic by which some issues previously addressed exclusively within the more niche milieu - such as the threat of Islam to British culture - were aligned with mainstream party politics (specifically with UKIP under Gerard Batten's leadership). For example, at the

¹¹ These surveys - each including data from before and after an attack - revealed that, among both the French and the British samples, attitudes towards Muslims, minorities and immigrants appeared relatively unchanged by the events.

March 2019 ‘Brexit Betrayal’ event, Tommy Robinson introduced himself as someone who had been fighting the establishment for a decade and attacked the media for deliberately taking his words out of context (in relation to an interview with Jason Farrell of Sky News in October 2018 on the issue of ‘grooming gangs’) and what he sees as the media persecution of a teenager who had been accused of a racially motivated attack on another pupil (a Syrian refugee) in the school playground. This move of Tommy Robinson to the arena of ‘citizen journalism’ and the accompanying representation of the ‘grooming gangs’ issues as one of free speech and exposure of institutional cover ups rather than the cultural incompatibility of Islam is a key shift in the milieu over the period of research and, as will be seen in the findings presented below, is mirrored in the narratives of respondents in this study. Indeed this narrative has widespread public resonance. The YouGov poll commissioned by Hope not Hate (see above) found 51% of those polled agreed with the statement ‘Political correctness is used by the liberal elite to limit what we can say’, rising to 70% amongst Leave voters and 80% of UKIP voters in 2015 (Mulhall, 2019: 16). As Mulhall (ibid.) argues, the co-option of the defence of freedom of speech provides an issue on which there is widespread support and offers a route into the mainstream.

Other key events shaping the context in which fieldwork was conducted are a number of terrorist attacks occurring in the course of the fieldwork period. In terms of activating the milieu, the most significant of these were the series of Islamist-inspired attacks through the Spring of 2017: at Westminster Bridge (killing 5 people) on 22 March; at the Manchester Arena (killing 22 people) on 22 May; and at London Bridge and Borough Market (killing 8 people) on 3 June. Specifically, these attacks brought a significant new actor to the milieu in the form of the Football Lads Alliance (later the Democratic Football Lads Alliance), which declared itself to be bringing together football supporters across club rivalries to fight against ‘all extremisms’. It shot to prominence after its first march (London, 24 June 2017) when it mustered around 10,000 people. A march, on 7 October 2017, gathered 30,000. While the split in the movement in March 2018 led to significantly reduced numbers at subsequent rallies, it maintained some momentum before internal tensions emerged again over the violent actions of some responding to the call to protect statues amidst Black Lives Matter protests in June 2020.

Given the significance of self-reflection in this milieu, it is also the case that a series of far right terror attacks have shaped the milieu, giving cause not only for distancing but also reflection. These relate to the murder of MP Jo Cox (16 June 2016) and the Finsbury Park mosque attack (killing one person, 19 June 2017). Although these attacks were not linked to an organised movement, it demonstrated that perpetrators consuming similar material as those in the milieu could become violent. The Finsbury Park attack, as will be seen below, is a particular cause for concern, given its timing as an apparent response to the preceding Islamist attacks; this roused fears that others might adopt this violent response to violent extremism resulting in a cumulative effect. The terrorist attack by Brenton Tarrant on two mosques in Christchurch New Zealand in March 2019 (killing 51 people) also had a particular resonance in the milieu - partly because of its live streaming by the perpetrator but also because of reports that the words ‘For Rotherham’¹² had been scrawled on ammunition and firearms used to commit the massacre (Macklin, 2019b; Colley, 2019: 268; Roy et al., 2019).

This signals another set of important events shaping the milieu during the course of fieldwork; a series of trials and convictions of perpetrators of organised Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE). The concern with so-called ‘grooming gangs’¹³ had been a core campaigning issue for the EDL back to 2012 (Pilkington, 2016:

¹² A reference to the exposure of the extent of the activities of so-called ‘grooming gangs’ in the town.

¹³ The College of Policing defines child sexual exploitation as ‘a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual.’ (College of Policing, 2020). This is discussed in more detail in Section 4.3.2.1.

133). The independent inquiry conducted by Alexis Jay (2014) into CSE in Rotherham, which identified around 1,400 cases of CSE related criminal acts in the town and found that the majority of known perpetrators in the town were of Pakistani heritage (ibid.: 91-92), appeared to vindicate claims that the scale of offending had been hitherto underplayed. By May 2019, it was estimated that there were at least 73 such 'grooming gangs' operating in the UK (Hill, 2020) and that 'more than 18,700 suspected victims of child sexual exploitation were identified by local authorities in 2018-19' (Dearden, 2019b). A series of high media profile convictions of groups of men for organised CSE during the fieldwork period of this study kept the issue high on the agenda of groups active in the milieu and was given added impetus by the arrest and imprisonment of Tommy Robinson on charges related to his live streaming of the arrival at court of defendants in a Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) case at Leeds Crown Court (May 2018). Robinson's swift sentencing, initially, to 10 months for contempt of court and 3 months for breach of a banning order, led to numerous, large and small, support rallies and events which married grievances over the 'cover up of grooming gangs' and 'two-tier justice' already circulating in the milieu with the claim to the 'defence of free speech'.

A final key event shaping the extreme right milieu over the fieldwork period was the proscribing, for the first time in UK history of an extreme right organisation - National Action - and the subsequent imprisonment of its members on terrorist offences including, in the case of Jack Renshaw, conspiracy to murder. This marks a key moment in which the counter-terrorism spotlight was clearly shined towards the threat from the far right. As Allen (2019: 5) documents, National Action distinguished itself, consciously, from other parts of the extreme right political spectrum, situating itself as promoting a 'pure' nationalism, whose aim was to constitute Britain as a 'white homeland', and as distinct from inauthentic movements dominating the scene at the time (such as the EDL). Crucially, its members also followed a trajectory into violence (ibid.: 15-16), demonstrated most vividly in the conviction of Jack Renshaw for plotting to murder Labour MP Rosie Cooper and making a threat to kill a police officer (investigating Renshaw for child sexual offences) to which he pleaded guilty at his trial in June 2018 (Dearden, 2018).

2.2.3 Countering 'right-wing extremism'

As Allen (2019: 19) points out, while National Action as a movement distinguishes itself in a way that warrants this proscription, the government is not helped in this matter by its own definition of extremism - 'vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs [as well as] calls for the death of members of our armed forces' (HM Government, 2015) - which does not make any reference to violence. Indeed the failure to find a definition of 'extremism' that would stand up in law has stymied the 'Counter Extremism and Safeguarding' bill (2015) which aimed to introduce new powers to ban organisations and individuals radicalising young people, leaving law enforcement agencies to depend on existing Counter Terrorism legislation. The 2015 definition by the government, and the accompanying counter-extremism strategy, came as a result of the recognition of the need to counter extremism outside of terrorism. However, in a review of that strategy published in 2019 by the independent but Home Office appointed Commission for Countering Extremism concluded that it was 'insufficient', 'too broad' and based on a top-down approach that failed to draw on the 'voices of the wider public, victims and counter extremism practitioners'¹⁴ (CCE, 2019: 1). The Commission instead proposes a strategy that focuses on challenging 'hateful extremism' defined as:

¹⁴ In an attempt to draw on those voices, including voices critical of counter extremism policy and practice, the Commission engaged in a public consultation (receiving 3,000 submissions), conducted a series of visits and consultations in over 20 towns and cities, held 16 roundtables and commissioned 19 academic papers (CCE, 2019: 5).

Behaviours that can incite and amplify hate, or engage in persistent hatred, or equivocate about and make the moral case for violence;

And that draw on hateful, hostile or supremacist beliefs directed at an out-group who are perceived as a threat to the wellbeing, survival or success of an in-group;

And that cause, or are likely to cause, harm to individuals, communities or wider society.
(ibid.: 6)

Central to this definition is the movement away from an attitudes versus behaviours discourse (with its potential to infringe freedom of speech or even of thought) to a recognition of the social ‘harms’ that ensue from extremism. One of the driving forces behind this approach is the concern to identify the harms to social cohesion and integration of attitudes and behaviours (associated primarily with the ‘extreme right’) that fall short of violence, or the support of violence, but which cause fear and spread hate.

The growth of the ‘extreme right’ on the government radar is confirmed by data on referrals to Prevent and Channel programmes designed to ensure those (especially young people) ‘vulnerable’ to radicalisation are identified by stakeholding institutions (schools and FE/HE institutions, social services, prisons, councils, health service) and referred to appropriate agencies for support. Since 2015, Prevent has been a statutory duty for these bodies. While far from capturing an accurate picture of extremism in contemporary society, Prevent data show the steady relative rise of referrals for right-wing extremism (published from 2016). Figures on Prevent referrals in to March 2019 show, for the first time, an even proportion of referrals for Islamist and right-wing radicalisation concerns; 24% of referrals were for concerns related to right-wing radicalisation and 24% for concerns of Islamist radicalisation (Home Office, 2019). In terms of trend, this signals a 6% increase in the number of recorded referrals for concerns related to right-wing radicalisation, on top of a 36% rise in the previous year. At the same time, referrals for concerns related to Islamist radicalisation decreased by 56% following a decrease also the previous year by 14% (Home Office, 2018; Home Office, 2019) and confirming an overall trend since 2016. However, figures for cases referred and then adopted as Channel cases (a total of 561 cases in total), show that for the first time since the recording of data, more adopted cases were referred for concerns related to right-wing radicalisation (45%) than for concerns related to Islamist radicalisation (37%). The remaining adopted cases were for referrals relating to a mixed, unstable or unclear ideology (3%) and ‘other’ radicalisation concerns (14%).

For the purposes of this study, focusing on young people, it is also important to note that the majority of referrals to Prevent recorded have been of young people under the age of 20. In the most recent figures (for year ending March 2019) 58% were aged 20 years or under and 66% of those eventually adopted as Channel cases were under the age of 20. Whilst this age distribution is in part a product of the prominence of educational institutions among the statutory bodies undertaking Prevent duty, it reflects government prioritisation of preventing extremism among young people. The vast majority of referrals are also male; of referrals to Prevent for right-wing extremism in 2018-19, 92% were male.

Entering the field, therefore the ‘extreme right’ scene demonstrated significant historical continuity as the new player on the block - the FLA/DFLA – appeared set to take up the mantle as the latest in a series of street mobilisations. However, the environment into which it was stepping was changed, by both a series of ‘home-grown’ Islamist terrorist attacks as well as evidence that elements of the extreme right milieu were prepared to engage in violent extremism. On the one hand, this context was a cause for reflexive engagement among actors in the milieu, which might potentially facilitate engagement with a researcher from the outside, not least in order to differentiate themselves from violent extremism. At the same time, it meant the extreme right had fallen under the spotlight of counter-extremism in a way that was likely to increase distrust of outsiders and disincline individuals from engaging with research that might position them in relation to ‘radicalisation’.

2.3 Locating the milieu

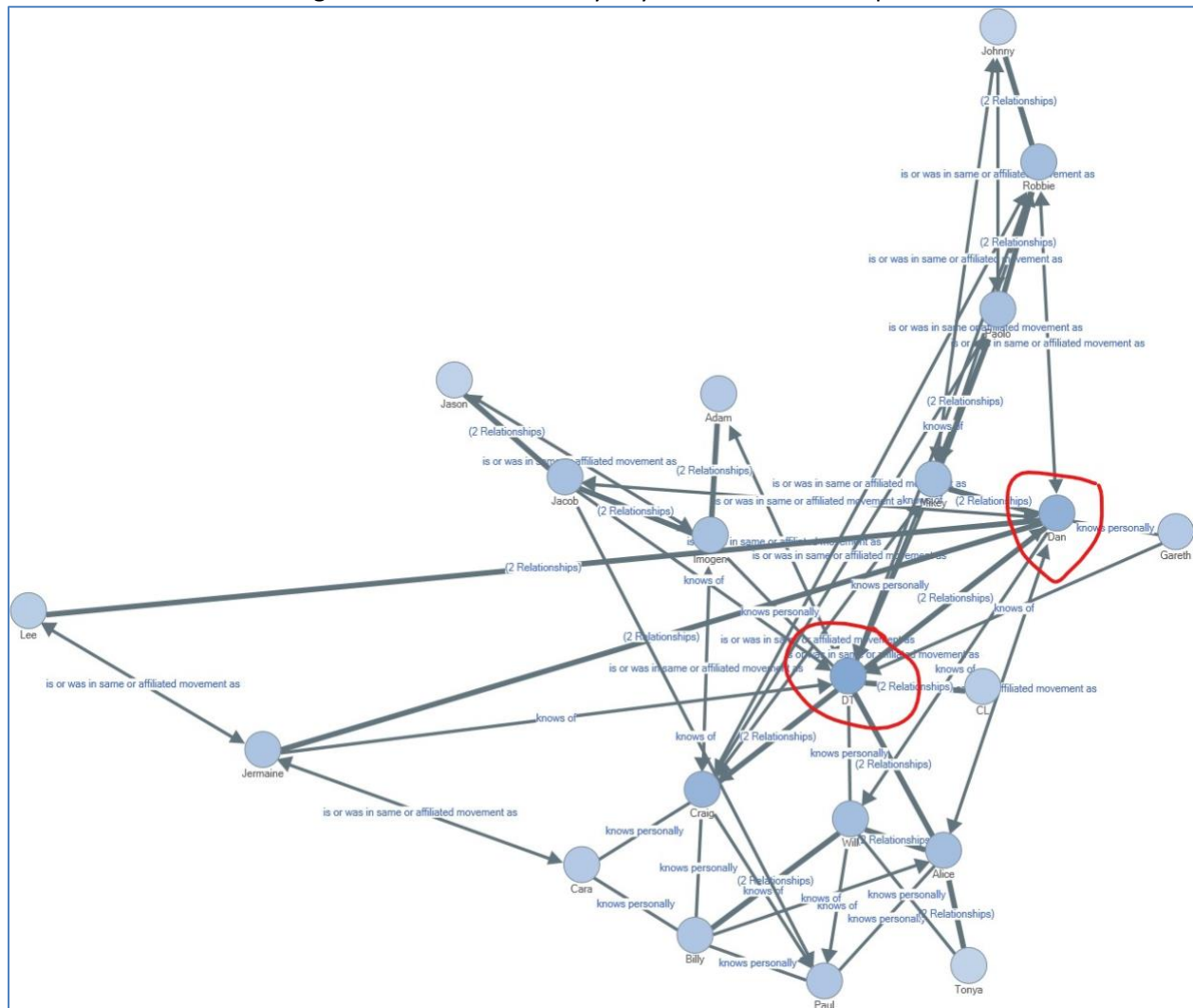
The milieu studied in the UK is neither territorially nor ideologically located. It consists of individuals active in, or connected through, a number of movements, organisations or campaigns associated in public discourse with the ‘far right’ or ‘extreme right’. The milieu is national rather than local in the sense that respondents are located across the UK from East to West and from North to South (although no respondents were based in either Scotland or Wales). This does not mean that local context is not important to individuals, in some cases, this local context is central to their identities and trajectories through the milieu. However, this regional context is not specified, or noted in general terms only, in order to protect the anonymity of the respondents.

In terms of ideological positioning, this is not a study of a single movement or cause. Respondents mention a total of 32 different movements they are/have been active in, affiliated with or in personal communication with. These cover a wide spectrum from Black Lives Matter and domestic violence support groups to Generation Identity, the British National Party and National Action. As with regional location, naming some of these groups - where they are small or specific to a city or region - would risk revealing the identity of respondents. For this reason, affiliations of individuals with smaller groups are described in terms of the type of movement only. In other cases, the movement is named but the position of the respondent in it is not revealed in order to preserve anonymity. All respondents, however, were, or had been, active in, affiliated with or attended events of at least one of the following movements: the English Defence League (EDL), the Democratic Football Lads Alliance (DFLA), the British National Party (BNP), Britain First, Generation Identity (GI) or Tommy Robinson support groups. A brief outline of all key movements and organisations to which respondents are or have been affiliated, or situate themselves in relation to, is provided in Appendix 7.1 (Section 7). While no claims to representativeness of the whole right wing milieu is made, respondents come from across the spectrum, from UKIP (one respondent) through the DFLA (four respondents), Tommy Robinson support groups and EDL/ex-EDL (five respondents), identitarian movements or those supporting identitarian ideologies (three respondents) to those having had links in the past to the National Front and National Action (one respondent). Given its focus on offline activism, the study also does not capture the full range of ideas with which people engage online although these ‘influencers’, including those from among the ‘alt-right’ sphere, are discussed in Section 4.3.2.6.

This milieu does not consist of a single group or network of people all of whom are known to one another. It constitutes a milieu, however, in the sense in which this concept is used in DARE (see footnote 3), namely it is a space in which respondents encounter radical or extreme messages. However, in practice individuals in the milieu are quite closely connected. Using the facility of Nvivo software to code and visualise relationships, three relationships are used below to illustrate the degree of connection between individuals in the milieu studied: *‘is or was in same movement as’*; *‘knows of’*; and *‘knows personally’*.

Figure 1 shows the connectedness of the 21 respondents in the data set by at least one of these three relationships. All respondents are connected to at least one other person in the respondent set, most to a number of people. Thicker lines show more than one relationship.

Figure 1: Connectedness by any of three relationships

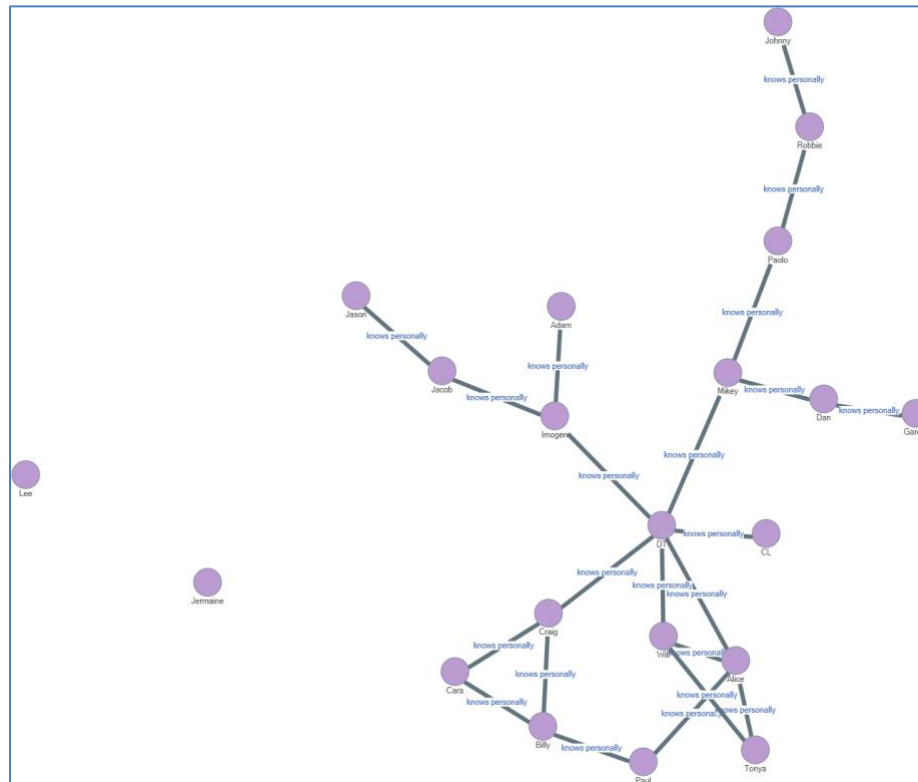


In Figure 1 we also see – highlighted in red - the two most central individuals in terms of connectedness: DT and Dan. DT is a high profile figure on the UK scene and his centrality is not surprising. Although not high profile in the same way as DT, Dan is well known because he has been active for a number of years and frequently attends demonstrations including giving speeches at them. His high level of connectedness also reflects his centrality to this particular study; he was a key respondent in the study, being the first interviewee and staying in regular contact through to the end of the study, alerting the researcher to upcoming events and facilitating other contacts on occasion.

Figure 2 shows only connections between those who are personally known to one another. By this is meant, not just having attended the same event, but people who have some kind of personal relationship. Just two respondents do not know any other respondent personally. This does not reflect their 'lone actor' or 'online only' status; both had been involved in offline activism and Lee had been very well connected. Their current non-connectedness reflects rather their status at the time of the research. Lee was on licence after release from prison and was under the supervision of Prevent (CVE intervention). Jermaine had been through a Prevent intervention, having been referred through his place of study, and had recently started working himself within the CVE sphere. Thus, one reason Lee and Jermaine are not connected to any other person is that I could not 'snowball' other contacts through them as they were both in the process of extracting themselves from their former friends and contacts in the milieu. Moreover, since they were interviewed when they were no longer active in the milieu, it was impossible

to observe who they knew and, for ethical reasons, it was impossible to ask if they knew other respondents without revealing the identity of other participants in the study. Thus, it was possible to record their relationships with others in the study only if they spontaneously mentioned them in interview.

Figure 2: 'Personally know' other respondent



Finally, in Figure 3 and Figure 4, a single respondent - Dan - is looked at more closely to establish degrees of connectedness. Both diagrams chart the other people Dan either 'knows personally' or 'is/was in same or affiliated movement to'. From Figure 3, it is evident that Dan is directly connected (1 step) to half the respondent set (10 of 20 others) while Figure 4 indicates that, at a 2-step connection, he is connected to all other respondents.

Figure 3: 1 step connectedness of Dan

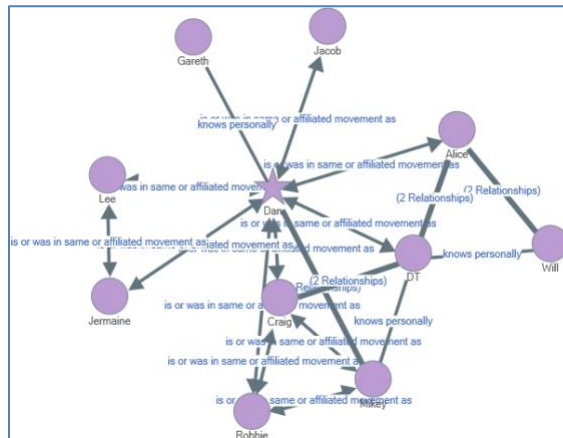
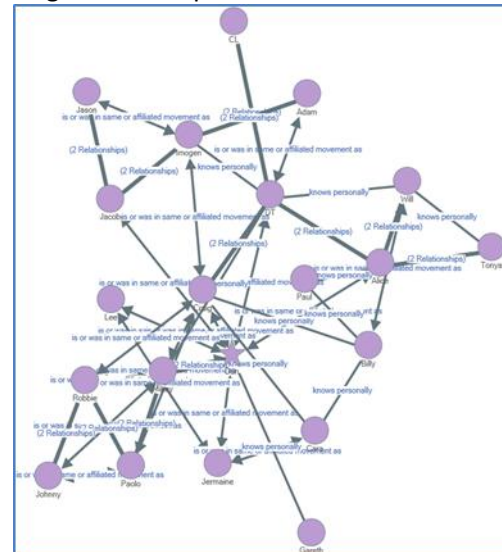


Figure 4: 2 step connectedness of Dan



Such network analyses have limited use for small samples such as this respondent set. They also fail to capture any of the differences in texture, strengths, weaknesses or emotional investments in the relationships between various individuals. Nonetheless, they provide a visual representation of how the people constituting the milieu studied are connected.

3. Field Research

This case is based on field research conducted from December 2017 to March 2020. Initially the intention had been to focus the research in a specific, spatially defined, milieu and a number of potential sites where 'extreme right' activity was anticipated to be present were explored. To this end, from January 2017 through to February 2018, a dozen meetings were held with experts in CVE, counter-terrorism police, local councillors, local authority youth workers, youth and community workers and a range of potential sites for study were identified and assessed. This included taking part in induction and volunteering at a city youth club (Spring 2018). However, none of these starting points led to the location of a suitable, territorially fixed, milieu that fitted the selection criteria that this should be a space where young people encountered radical or extreme messages via the presence of recruiters, people of high receptivity to radical messages and/or people who have participated in radical/extreme activities (see footnote 3). The focus was thus shifted to identifying people active in movements and organisations associated in public discourse with the 'extreme right' and tracing the milieus in which they moved. A potential respondent - a young man giving a speech at an EDL demo attended in April 2017 - was identified and contact established via a former respondent in a previous research project still active in the online scene. This person agreed to participate in the research and introduce me to his milieu. The date of commencement of fieldwork is thus counted as the first informal meeting with this individual, which took place in December 2017. The fieldwork was conducted by, first, following this respondent into his milieu - attending the events he attended or talked about, meeting some of his friends and acquaintances, following him on social media - and making new contacts at events attended or through introductions from people already met.

In contrast to research conducted previously, this process made the 'object' of study feel somewhat amorphous. Sites, movements and people were constantly shifting. The relatively fixed and territorially grounded 'milieu' of research I had imagined turned into the opposite. Without a single location or

movement on which to hook the study, it sometimes felt as if the milieu was being constructed by me, not lived out by the research participants. By the end of the research, however, this feeling of shifting ground and people, was understood not as a limitation of the research practice but as experiencing how the milieu felt to respondents too. The sense that research participants belonged to ‘one big family’ that I had found in earlier studies (Pilkington, 2016: 177-202) was still present for some (Jason, Paolo) but others were constantly alert to ‘infiltrators’ (Paul, Billy, Imogen, Will) or frustrated by those ‘egos’ (Alice, Imogen) in the movement grabbing every opportunity to serve only their own cause. There were moments of great optimism and momentum that the movement was growing and taking a new direction. Post-Brexit, and with populist movements gaining strength and sometimes power across Europe, there was a sense that the ‘The right have gone past the group stage now’ (Dan) and become ‘mainstream’ (Tommy Robinson recorded in Field diary, European Parliament election rally, Bootle, 19.05.2019). However, others felt they remained still very much on the ‘fringe’ (Will) or that the state of the movement was ‘awful’ (Jacob). For many, the way forward was ‘to stand and fight together’ (Adam, Imogen) and DFLA activists in particular mobilised around a ‘together we are stronger’ slogan (Field diary, DFLA demonstration, Manchester, 02.06.2018). However, there was disagreement also about how to make a difference. For some ‘going down the political road’ (Craig) was the only way, for others sometimes it was necessary ‘to go on the streets’ and ‘cause a bit of chaos’ (Jason). Still others were wearied by organisational instability and in-fighting and had decided it was time to ‘go down that solo route’ (Dan) or abandon politics for ‘creative stuff’ (Alice).

Attending demonstrations, actions and events described in the media uniformly as ‘far right’ or ‘extreme right’, I found the issues addressed ranged from the most personal to the most systemic. I listened to speeches that challenged journalists to find anything ‘racist’ in them, stood alongside crowds protesting about government inaction on a policy (withdrawal from the EU) voted for by the majority of the country and experienced the passion people felt about issues from involuntary adoption through child abuse in children’s homes, organised child sexual exploitation, the injustice of who gets legal aid, the historic prosecution of armed forces personnel, the dangers of ‘toxic femininity’, the violence of the ‘extreme left’, the evils of pornography, the speed of social and cultural change in the country, the lack of ‘integration’ among specific ethnic minority communities and the ‘suppression’ of white identities. It sometimes felt that what bound this milieu was not any particular cause or ideology but that, together (physically or virtually) they created a space in which individuals felt permission to express their anger and frustration and be listened to, at least by each other. The challenge for me was how to turn that experience into understanding if, and how, such milieus shape trajectories of radicalisation or non-radicalisation.

3.1 Data collection

This study can be described as ‘ethnographic’ in as much as it involved ‘direct and sustained contact with human agents, within the context of their daily lives (and cultures)’ (O’Reilly, 2005: 2). I engaged in the milieu and with its participants over an extended period and remain in contact with a number of individual research participants. However, as with many ethnographic studies, there is no precise beginning or end to data collection and the engagement was uneven over the course of those years. The first diary entry was in April 2017 when I attended an EDL demonstration to renew contacts with former research participants. It was then that I identified a potential respondent who, as described above, was instrumental in identifying the milieu and engaging with its participants. The final field diary entry is for April 2020, when I contacted a respondent after a video he had posted to YouTube had caused significant reaction across the milieu. However, most field diary entries related to events attended and interviews conducted in 2018 (22 entries) and 2019 (34 entries).

The data set consists of the materials set out in Table 1. Of the field diary entries, 25 are participant observations at demonstrations, protests, rallies, actions and movement launches related to a variety of

what respondents would call ‘patriotic’ causes. The exact events are not named because they include small, local movement launches or victim support events, the names or locations of which could potentially reveal identities of participants. Visual images used in this report are photographs taken by the author in the course of fieldwork; none depict respondents. Alongside the 25 events attended, two diary entries contain notes from my observation of the Crown Court trial of one respondent, prosecuted and convicted of violent disorder relating to violence occurring after a movement meeting. In addition, one diary entry relates to a mediated dialogue event organised with a total of six participants from the UK ‘extreme right’ and ‘Islamist’ milieus studied in the DARE project. The video interviews included in Table 1 also relate to this event, for which short video interviews before and after each event were conducted to gain participants’ anticipations of contact with their peers from the other milieu and their subsequent reflections on the dialogue. These interviews and field notes are included in the data set since, although strictly speaking conducted outside of the DARE research, the events were inspired by the expressed desire of DARE research participants to engage in such an exchange of views. In this sense, the events were not artificially constructed to elicit such dialogue but provided the space to enact it. Remaining diary entries record notes from informal meetings or phone communications with participants, some social media communications and additional contextual and verbal information before or after recorded interviews with participants.

Interviews were recorded with a total of 21 respondents, although the respondent set is considered strictly to comprise 20 individuals since one respondent was outside the target age range of the study. However, he was an active member of the milieu and the interview was used to inform the study. When this interviewee is cited, the reader is reminded that the respondent is older than the main respondent set. Transcripts of all interviews (audio and video), field diary entries and documentary materials were included in the Nvivo database. Primary documents included flyers handed out at protests and rallies setting out the key principles, aims and objectives of a range of movements, an ‘Activist Information Booklet’ in one case and an election campaign flyer in another. The total number of discrete data ‘sources’ was 100. In addition, more than 300 still and moving images were recorded at a total of 19 events attended and 45 secondary sources such as media and anti-extremist organisation reports about respondents or events were also used to inform analysis.

Table 1: Data set

	Number	Total length or brief description (as appropriate)	Average length
Respondent memos	21	n/a	n/a
Audio interviews	25	Total length of audio transcripts = 46 hours (2,761 mins)	110 mins (1 h 50 mins)
Video interviews	5	Total length = 221 mins (3.7 hours)	44 mins
Field diary entries	61	77,000 words (188 pages)	n/a
Still images	262	From 19 events attended	n/a
Moving images	65	From 13 events attended	n/a
Primary documents	9	Flyers, manifestos, leaflets received at observed events	n/a
Secondary documents	45	Media and Hope not Hate reports specifically mentioning respondents in the study. Texts relate to 12 of 21 respondents	

3.2 Access and researcher-respondent relations

As noted above, initial access to the milieu was established through an individual identified from an EDL demo attended in April 2017 with whom contact was established via a former respondent in a previous research project still active in the online scene. After verifying my trustworthiness by contacting mutual acquaintances within the milieu (people who knew me from earlier research) he agreed to meet and our first informal meeting took place in December 2017. The fieldwork was kick-started by initially following him into the milieu (as described above). Two separate ‘snowballs’ were started also at different points in the research. One was initiated by contacting an individual activist by personal messaging in Twitter because he was identified as a central actor in a movement of particular interest. The second was through a ‘gatekeeper’ known from earlier research who was highly respected in the milieu although currently not physically active in it. He put me in touch with two individuals based in different parts of the country, through whom other respondents were also met.

In this research, as never before, I felt positioned quite simply as a researcher. This is partially a result of the online space, which means potential respondents were able to ‘google’ me, sometimes even on their phones as we talked. This meant that what I had written before was known - indeed, in one case, a respondent pulled me up on terminology used in a particular published article (see Section 4.1). In another case a respondent checked out my public service positions leading to an interesting, and surprising, conversation about whom they would trust and not trust in the public sphere. That past history also meant, on occasion, respondents would ask me questions about the milieu or defer to my knowledge; especially where my attendance at events simply predated their own. This was at times useful, at others unnerving, as it effectively repositioned me momentarily as a milieu member rather than observer. Above all, however, it provided a natural context for our conversations that allowed us to get past that feeling in the relationship that I was gathering research on them while they remained in the dark about me. They had access to an online version of me which empowered them to engage and challenge me as I did them.

In terms of class, gender and ethnic positionalities that accompanied me into the field, the most telling was that of my employment at a university. This made me, objectively, part of the liberal elite and thus, as explored in Section 4, very much an ideologised enemy. However, those who chose to participate in the research were also those able to move past that ‘otherness’ and recognise motivations to my engagement with them beyond serving my own interests through the prior judgement of them. As outlined in Section 3.5, all of the respondents in the study were white, placing me very much as an insider in terms of race and ethnicity. However this was not a precondition on the part of respondents for engagement and three of them, who took part in the mediated dialogue with Muslim participants from the parallel Islamist case study in the UK, forged a positive relationship with the researcher conducting that study who is a British Muslim of Pakistani heritage. Being a woman, however, put me very much in the minority in the milieu (see Section 3.5). The nuanced gender relations of the milieu are discussed in Section 4.6 and shaped, but rarely constrained, research relations. The exception might be that the combination of age and gender prevented me sometimes from approaching young male participants at demonstrations or other events whom it would have been interesting to engage in the research, unless I could do this via an existing participant. This was not related to any concern about safety but simply out of a sensibility to their potential discomfort. In practice, once contact was made, age difference usually combined with gender in a positive way; respondents had many relationships with women of my age - mothers, aunts, teachers, work colleagues - to draw on as models for mutually respectful interactions and this was uniformly the case in my interactions with them.

As discussed above, the fact that the milieu studied was not naturally ‘bounded’ by a spatial or organisational location, meant access was an ongoing issue that was not resolved through a single agreement with a ‘gatekeeper’. The facilitation of access by those individuals mentioned above helped

greatly but did not guarantee a positive response to others approached. Outright, principled, refusal to participate was rare but happened. One leading member of a movement of particular interest approached was initially receptive but after receiving the 'information sheet' about the project, necessary to ensure informed consent, messaged to say that having read the materials, he felt there was no point talking:

'I don't believe there's much I can help you with (or vice-versa). There's naturally no possibility of us allowing non-members to participate in, or observe, our actions. If you want a cursory, written interview, I'm happy to oblige; anything more, in this case, would just feel like reducing our Movement to a petri dish'. (Field diary, 24.08.2018)

Three other potential respondents, approached initially by those already participating refused, citing concern about the consequences (e.g. being sacked from their job) if their activism was disclosed. Another, approached directly, was awaiting sentencing for a violent disorder offence and did not want to risk anything that might go against him. This speaks to the self-selection of the 'sample' in the sense that individuals who agree to participate are often those who feel they are already exposed and thus 'have nothing to lose' or who feel some benefit might ensue from expressing their positions to an external person.

For some of those who did agree to participate, the initial confirmation that I was trusted from a respected person in the milieu was crucial to engaging (Dan, Robbie). Others made a snap judgement to trust me because they had seen me at events, and concluded from that, that I was trusted by others there (Jason). Some were keen to get their message out in a world that was not listening (Imogen) or to test it out on a different kind of audience (Paul). Whatever the motivation for agreeing to participate, after initial contact was established, the single most important factor in maintaining the kind of relationship necessary for ethnographic research was feeling listened to without prior judgement. That did not mean being agreed with, or feeling you had converted the researcher. In fact, talking to respondents, it seemed that they understood being challenged as an important mark of being treated with respect. This is expressed by Dan, reflecting on his experience of participating in the DARE research to the facilitator of the mediated dialogue, in which he was to participate:

She's showed me nothing but respect. What I like about her is she never... even you can tell, when you're talking to her, she doesn't judge you. You can tell when someone's judging you – she doesn't. She listens to you. And even if she doesn't agree with you, she'll tell you, 'Look...' And I like that. I like that. (Dan)

Towards the end of the interview with Gareth, when he was asked what he thought would make a better society than the one we live in now, he also emphasised mutually respectful discussion:

More discussion. More people sitting down listening to each other, rather than standing on each side of a barricade, as you say, shouting at each other, getting nothing done. People coming together and sit down, have a conversation, like we've done today. Like I don't even know what you believe, but probably it might be different to what we believe. The fact is you gave me the opportunity to sit down, have a discussion. And that's where we start, do you know what I mean? (Gareth)

However, nothing can be taken for granted. This was brought home to the researcher, when at the end of a second interview with one respondent, he commented (as a sign of trust): 'I haven't recorded this by the way. I don't... you seem legit [...]' (Paul). Prior to beginning fieldwork, I had contemplated the possibility that respondents might record interviews for themselves so that they had a record of the conversation and could use it to challenge any misuse of the information. However, with time, my trust in respondents had grown alongside theirs in me and this prospect had ceased to be an active consideration. Paul's comment was a useful jolt back into the reality of the world respondents lived in characterised by mutual distrust and threat of exposure. It was also an important signal never to forget that the 'trust' in research relationships is less about the researcher's ability to gain it than respondents'

ability to give it. It is their capacity and willingness to do that, which makes research possible. I hope that they will find, amidst frustration with some of the conclusions drawn, grounds to recognise themselves in how the milieu, and their personal beliefs, concerns and doubts, are reflected. I also hope that they will take up the challenge this report sets out to continue to seek the space for meaningful dialogue in which neither side platforms their own views and fails to hear the other.

3.3 Ethical practice

Informed consent was obtained through the standard procedure of providing a participant information sheet and a consent form. No issues arose with the consent forms and all participants were happy to sign and retained a copy for themselves. It was important that I talked through the project with them first, in informal language – the GDPR legalese required in the information sheet, especially in the context of an EU funded project, could potentially antagonise as could the title of the project. It was important to put this in the context of our concern to listen to young people's own understandings of 'extremism' or 'radicalisation'. I did this when first inviting individuals to conduct an interview or, if the opportunity arose, when meeting them at a demonstration or over the phone prior to interview. While the case of the one negative response to this is detailed above, in general, I was struck by the politeness and even gratitude expressed by informants for suspending judgement and genuinely listening to them.

Much is said about the potential 'interference' of audio recording interviews in the field and the importance of respondents forgetting about the presence of the recorder in order to secure the most natural talk. In the current climate of doxing, trolling, exposing and shaming, I think this is of secondary concern. When conducting interviews, I always placed the audio recorder clearly on the table and asked permission to switch it on and, offered to switch it off at any point when it was evident that the respondent was hesitating about whether to say something. The role of the researcher is not to maximise what the respondent says but to allow them the possibility to make informed choices about what they say and do not say. Indeed much of what they feel uncomfortable saying on tape is generally about other figures in the milieu, and is rarely of significance for the sociological questions we are asking. It is simply not necessary for respondents to reveal everything or for everything to be recorded. Important reflections on feelings and emotions, for example, that help to understand the respondent can be shared in the course of natural interaction without being recorded.

No ethical issues of concern arose during fieldwork. Some dilemmas have emerged in the course of writing up the material for publication. These relate to the preservation of anonymity of respondents. The convention of pseudonymisation is used in this report as set out in the General Introduction, with respondents invited to choose their own pseudonyms if they wished. In two cases, however, respondents expressed the wish to be referred to using their real names. In these cases, a compromise was found. For the same reason no photographs are used in which respondents are visible although many respondents gave consent to use photographs. As noted in Section 2.2, the affiliations of some individuals to small or regionally located groups means that those organisations are not referred to directly as it might allow the identification of individual participants. While this is done in the interests of their safety and privacy, for some it potentially undermines their reason for participation; raising awareness about the issues of concern to them. As with the question of using real names, this approach is adopted bearing in mind not only the individual rights and wishes of respondents but the potential impact on other respondents who might be mentioned as participating in the same, or affiliated, groups and who wish to retain full anonymity. A series of other potentially identifying factors are also treated with caution such as city or region of origin, football team supported etc. In some cases this is frustrating as that local context is important to the understanding of the experiences, views or activism of respondents. Where it is essential to mention it, this is done at as general a level as possible and separately from any details of the respondent located there. Finally, a small number of respondents were 'influencers' or worked closely

alongside ‘influencers’ in the milieu. Their experiences are highly illuminating for understanding the dynamics of the milieu from the inside. However, any reference to specific events or people would allow respondents to be identified and these data are used only where they can be abstracted from the specific events or people. A larger number of respondents had featured in media reports or reports published by anti-extremism organisations. In some cases these sources are cited but no connection is made between these public figures and respondents in this study. This is not wholly satisfactory but one way to manage this conflict of interest between the preservation of respondent anonymity and sociological understanding.

In Appendix 7.2, socio-demographic data are recorded against each individual pseudonym in such a way as to allow the reader to check key factors (gender, age, religiosity etc.) related to an individual, and which cannot be repeated each time in the text, but not to be able to identify the individual.

3.4 Data analysis

As set out in Section 3.1, a total of 100 sources were included in the Nvivo 12 database for coding and analysis including: transcripts of all interviews (audio and video); field diary entries; and documentary materials (flyers, manifestos, leaflets) received at observed events. Other data (still and moving images, secondary sources such as media and anti-extremist organisation reports about respondents or events, respondent memos) were not uploaded to the database and coded but used to inform, contextualise or illustrate findings derived from the coded data.

Coding was conducted as per the method set out in the General Introduction to this series of reports. Seven additional Level 2 nodes were added to the ‘skeleton coding tree’ derived ahead of analysis. These captured references to: Activism; Football; Locality; Rational, intellectual and non-emotional stimuli; Research process; Trajectories; and Violence. The ‘Activism’ node reflected the need to capture the variety of movements and causes as well as types of activism in which respondents were engaged. A separate Level 2 node on Football reflected the importance of football to respondents from specific movements, namely the Democratic Football Lads Alliance (DFLA) but also other respondents who were keen football fans and were involved in football hooliganism or fighting as well as political activism. The Level 2 node ‘Locality’ reflects the significance for a number of respondents of their home town or city, its social or ethnic composition (or change in such), its political culture or leadership and its ‘neglect’ in terms of investment. The Level 2 node ‘Rational, intellectual and non-emotional stimuli’ was introduced to balance the Level 2 node on ‘Kicks, thrills and sensory stimuli’ included in the skeleton coding tree; this provided a place to gather reflections from those respondents for whom their activism was logically, rationally and ideologically motivated. The Level 2 node ‘Trajectories’ was added in order to collect specific references to contextual and situational factors as well as ‘critical moments’ in respondents’ journeys into and out of the milieu. This Level 2 node also gathered direct references to agents or drivers of radicalisation not related to respondents’ own personal trajectories but based on their perception of the milieu. A discrete Level 2 node on ‘Violence’ was included because it appeared as a crucial ‘threshold’ for many people in terms of their trajectories (a line not to be crossed) while for others the buzz or enjoyment of fighting (especially in relation to football) gave it a rather different significance.

One Level 2 node in the skeleton coding tree ‘Conflictual relationships’, on the other hand, was not populated. This Level 2 node had been designed to capture biographical experiences of conflicts with ‘out groups’ where these groups were not ideologically constituted such as the state, authorities, welfare offices, police, societal authorities, religious authorities etc. However, while in this case study a number of such groups (the state, the government, social services, local authorities, the police) were frequently discussed, it proved impossible to separate groups considered ‘ideologised enemies’ and those with whom respondents had ‘conflictual relationships’. Indeed one of the findings of the study is that there is a shift in the object of ideologised ‘other’ away from specific (ethnic or religious) ‘out groups’ towards

seeing an interlinked and colluding ‘other’ bringing state, media, educational institutions, police and protected ‘out groups’ together in opposition to ‘us’. For this reason, those groups were coded in the Level 2 node ‘Ideologised enemies’. Thus the database comprised a final total of 32 Level 2 nodes and 742 Level 1 nodes.

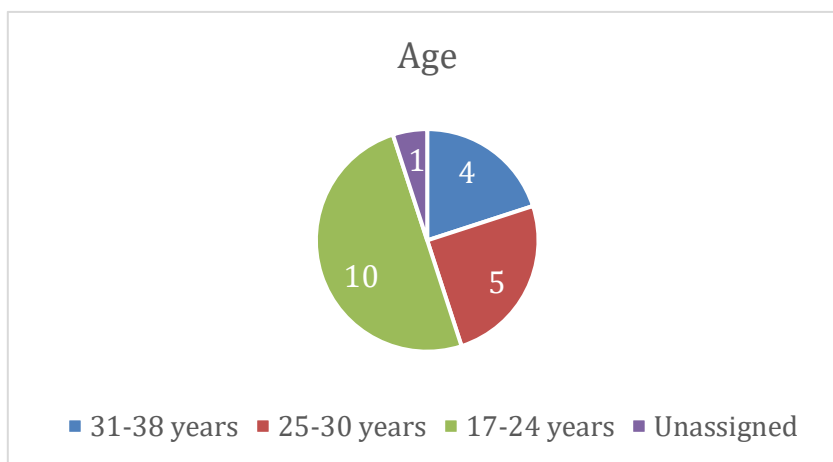
As noted in Section 3.3, anonymising data was both time-consuming and difficult. In terms of data analysis, this was particularly problematic in relation to contextualising attitudes and behaviours. In two particular cases, respondents came from cities/regions of the UK with a very specific political context that was crucial to understanding their perceptions of the world and how this had shaped their trajectories. Reference to these cities/regions is generally excluded since although indicating them in and of themselves would not risk revealing participants’ identities, alongside other data e.g. the movements they were engaged in, particular incidents or events they participated in, it could be used to identify individuals. However, quotes (from interviews, text messages or posts) are reproduced verbatim including regional colloquialisms or turns of phrases, grammatical inaccuracies etc. This reflects the importance of the right to expression without judgement by respondents. Where a typographic or grammatical error might lead to a misinterpretation, the intended meaning is conveyed in square brackets or clarified with a footnote. Text is only altered to shorten quotes, where appropriate. This has been indicated using the [...] convention.

3.5 Socio-demographic portrait of the respondent set

The respondent set reported on here consists of 20 of the 21 individuals interviewed. One respondent (Craig) is excluded from the official respondent set because, although a key milieu participant, he was outside the target age range. Where he is cited in the Findings section (Section 4), it is indicated that this is the older respondent. Thus, details of all 21 respondents are included in Appendix 7.2 (Section 7) but in this section the overview of the respondent set according to key socio-demographic criteria concerns the 20 respondents who are within the target age range.

Figure 5: Age of respondents

Half the respondents were in their late teens-early twenties (17-24 years) and three quarters were under the age of 30 (see Figure 5). Four were in their thirties of whom one was in his early thirties and engaged in the milieu in a very similar way to those under the age of 30. The three others played (or had played) a milieu-shaping role (establishing their own movements and initiatives) and all were, or had been, highly active themselves in the milieu. Moreover these respondents had a very strong sense of their role in mentoring, developing and protecting younger milieu members. In one case this was motivated, in part, by a feeling that this had been missing from his experience as a young milieu member. Thus these respondents made an important contribution to understanding generational relations within the milieu and were retained in the respondent set despite being in their late thirties.



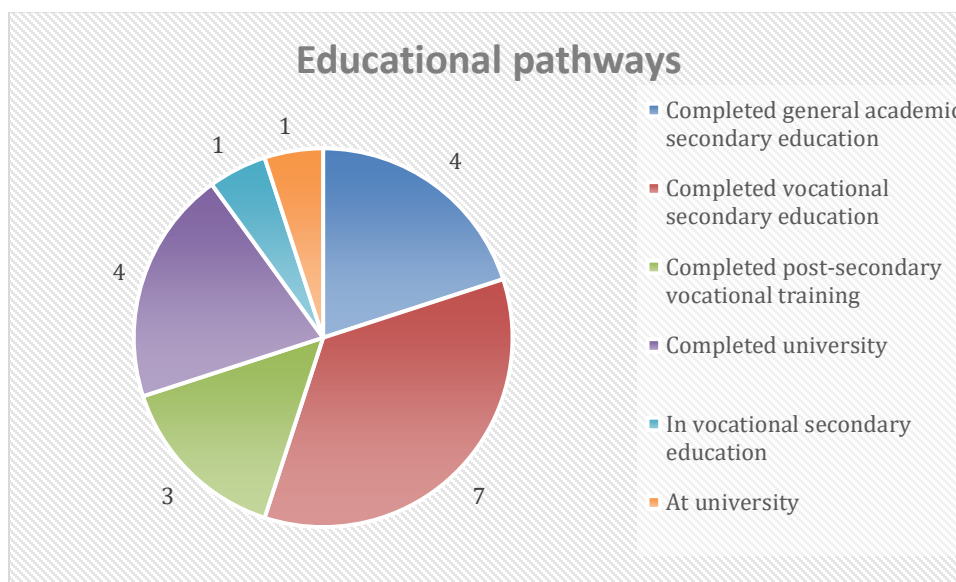
Of the 20 respondents, 15 were men and five were women. This reflects the gender composition of the milieu. The women respondents, while few, include those with a wide range of socio-economic,

educational and regional backgrounds as well as views across the ideological spectrum. The most significant difference between male and female respondents was that none of the female respondents had served prison sentences. With regard to sexuality, one respondent said they were bisexual but none said they were in a same sex relationship currently.

The socio-economic backgrounds of respondents were diverse and are discussed in Section 4.5.1 where interview data can be employed to determine their significance for identity and activism. Here the profiles of respondents in terms of educational trajectories and current occupation are simply detailed.

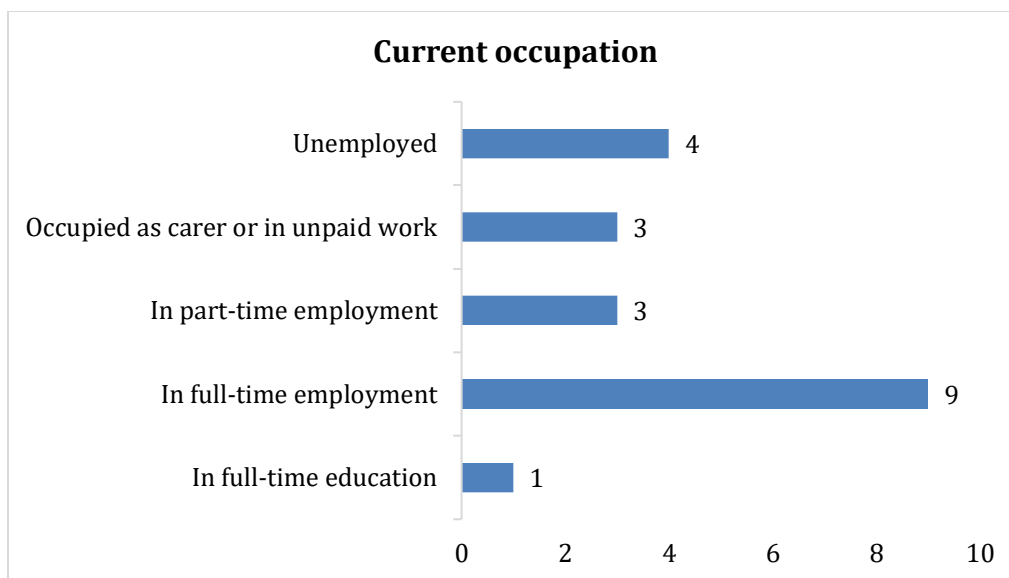
In terms of education (measured by 'most recent or current education'), the respondent set had very different experiences. Just over half (11) had taken vocational routes (10 having completed and one being currently in vocational education). A quarter had completed, or were in the process of completing, higher education; one other respondent had started studying for a Law degree with the Open University after interview (the point of socio-demographic data collection). The remaining respondents had completed general academic secondary education (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Educational pathways of respondents



At the time of interview, most respondents were in employment; nine in full-time and three in part-time employment (see Figure 7). One was finishing a degree and working and one was still in full-time secondary education. Three were occupied but in an unpaid capacity (volunteering, in activism or caring). Four said they were unemployed of whom two had been unable to find employment since release from prison and one had health problems that prevented employment. The fourth had recently been sacked because of his political activism. However, occupational status was quite fluid and changed over the course of the research for many respondents, especially in relation to losing their job due to their activism. Thus these data capture a snapshot in time.

Figure 7: Current occupation of respondents



The respondent set was ethnically highly homogeneous. All respondents were born in the UK and all were white. Eleven said they were 'White British', six said they were 'White English', one said 'White Northern Irish' and two were of mixed White European heritage.

A quarter of the respondents said they had 'no religion' (see Figure 8). However, when asked about religiosity, five said they were 'agnostic' and one said they were 'atheist'. The mismatch in numbers here is due to the fact that one respondent declared a given religion but felt herself to be agnostic. Interestingly, another respondent declared herself to be 'Christian-other' (she attended an evangelical church) and said she was a 'Believer, not practising'. However, in interview she said she was in fact a regular church goer but did not believe in God. Of the 15 who declared a religion, five said they were Protestant, five were Catholic, four said they had an 'other' Christian faith and one said they were pagan (see Figure 8).

Figure 8: Religion of respondents

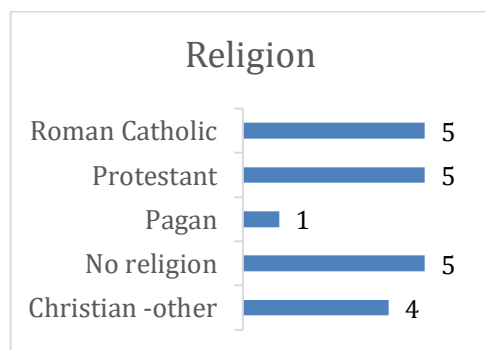
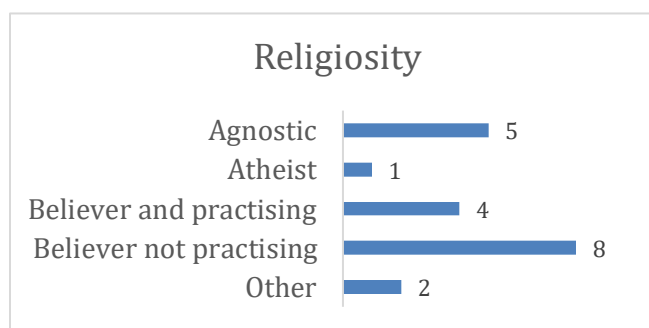


Figure 9: Religiosity of respondents



In terms of family status around half (11) of the respondents were single while five were married/living with a partner and four had a partner but were not living together. Seven respondents had their own children (ranging from two to six). Another two respondents had their first child during the research period but after the recording of the socio-demographic data presented here. Half of the respondents

lived independently of parents (seven with their own partner/children, two alone and one with friends. The other half lived with both parents (three), a single parent (four) or with other relatives (one).

The respondent set is of course not designed to represent the population nor even the ‘extreme right’ milieu. However, if we wanted to characterise its key differences, we might conclude that it is more white, more male and more precariously employed than a random sample of this age cohort would be.

4. Key Findings

In this section, key findings from the study are presented. It starts with an exploration of respondents’ own understandings of what constitutes ‘extremism’ (Section 4.1) followed by the analysis of trajectories of radicalisation and non-radicalisation among respondents (Section 4.2). In the third sub-section, the relative roles of ideas and emotions as drivers to action are discussed (Section 4.3) while the fourth considers key dimensions of social relationships within the milieu (Section 4.4). The fifth theme of the findings section relates to the role of structural factors, especially inequalities (Section 4.5), in radicalisation while the final part highlights the gendered dimensions of ‘right-wing extremism’ (Section 4.6).

4.1 ‘Extremism’: an empty signifier?

This report began with Dan’s weary dismissal of the object of our study: ‘the word extremist’, he says ‘to me doesn’t matter anymore. Because they’re classing everyone as an extremist’. Dan’s participation in, and contribution to, the research, it is argued here, demonstrates the opposite to be true; it matters very much what terms we use to understand the views he, and others in the milieu, express, the movements they affiliate with and the actions they take. It matters to respondents too; there were more than 300 references to ‘extremism’, ‘radicalism’, ‘radicalisation’ or ‘terrorism’ in the database. This suggests there is a concern about, and an engagement with, what it means to be ‘extreme’ that can be mobilised to bring young people active in ‘extreme right’ milieus into dialogue. If we are to do that, however, we need to know how they understand these terms and determine how this can inform our own understanding of what constitutes extremism and the process of radicalisation.

Since the purpose of this report is to understand anti-Islamist or ‘right-wing extremism’, it includes only the findings relating to how ‘extremism’ or ‘radicalism’ relates to the milieu and individuals at the heart of this study. However, it should be noted that this is not the primary association of these terms for them. Most frequently respondents understand and use concepts of extremism, radicalism or terrorism to describe: the attitudes and behaviours of ‘others’ (those identified as Islamic or Left-wing extremists); and how they themselves are labelled by others. With regard to the latter, a whole separate code (with over 150 references) was dedicated to ‘representations and stigmatisations of “us”’ and captured frequent reference to the experience of being labelled (in media and public discourse as well as by opposition groups) primarily as ‘far right extremists’, ‘Nazis’ or ‘fascists’ and ‘racists’. While bearing this in mind, this section of the report focuses, rather, on three issues: definitions (what constitutes terrorism, radicalism and extremism for respondents); thresholds (what is too extreme for respondents and how they make those judgements); and the implications of these understandings of extremism for the theory and practice of countering extremism.

4.1.1 Radicalism, (violent) extremism, terrorism: what is washed up after the conceptual drift?

Understanding exactly what is denoted by key terms in the field of violent extremism has become increasingly difficult for researchers and respondents alike. Classically the object of study in this field has

been terrorism, which has been distinguished from other concepts by its designation as a tactic (as opposed to a particular set of beliefs or behaviours). As Beck (2015: 20) puts it 'radicalism is an orientation, revolution is an event, and terrorism is a tactic'. Arguably, in recent times, terrorism has been re-configured as the study of violent extremism, with the two terms often used interchangeably to refer to violent behaviours in support of a shared ideology or belief.¹⁵ However, terrorism continues to retain a conceptual distinctiveness due to its separation of target and victim; terrorism employs violence (against civilians) in order to influence more distant actors (governments) to effect social or political change (Horgan, 2017: 199; Beck, 2015: 12).

For respondents in this study 'terrorism' was a concept that is distant from their own experience¹⁶. When talking about their own 'activism', 16 different 'tactics' are mentioned; neither terrorism nor violence of any kind is included among these. The only mention of terrorism in relation to tactics is negative; a warning that extreme action undermines the cause. As Will puts it, you might have legitimate concerns about immigration but 'if you have an anti-immigrant bomber, you know, it makes the whole thing illegitimate'. Jacob is the only respondent to talk about having entertained thoughts of 'self-sacrifice' for the cause - when he was ill and thought he was going to die - but had concluded that it was not 'effective':

I thought I was going to die, yeah. I thought I was real seriously ill – I was going to get cancer and something like that. And I started thinking about okay, how do I want to go out? And I remember a thought appearing of... so I was familiar with the Muslim problem, Islamisation. And it was, the thinking was something along the lines of going into like Birmingham town centre and drawing Mohammed, in the expectation that I might get killed. So yeah, so when I think about that now, it's part of my thinking that I don't think it works. I truly don't think it works. (Jacob)

Abstract conceptualisations of 'terrorism' are provided by just two respondents. On the one hand, Paolo repeats the axiom that 'one man's freedom fighter is another man's terrorist' in the context of reflecting on what he sees as the glorification of Nelson Mandela amidst ongoing violence in South Africa since the 'the outing of white control'. On the other, Paul, in response to the researcher's suggestion that he appears to admire the passion of Islamists who are prepared to kill themselves for their cause, explains that his admiration is 'for *heroism* not terrorism'. The former, he understands as sacrifices made by a heroic few against all the odds while the latter is 'people maiming and murdering civilians and people going about their daily business' (Paul).

When pushed to think concretely about right-wing terrorism respondents refer to the recent cases noted in Section 2.2.2. Dan, in particular, is concerned that right-wing terrorism is on the rise and that people might be 'stupid enough to do what he done in Finsbury Park¹⁷'. He condemns right-wing terrorism as hypocritical, asking 'How can you stand against radical Islam and then go out and do a terror attack?' (Dan). He is also angry that the exposed plot to murder a Member of Parliament by the proscribed group National Action (see Section 2.2.2) shapes how people view him:

[...] now, he'd [Jack Renshaw] be classed as right-wing, all the right as we're in. So people look at me now, they go, 'Oh yeah. You're National Action.' Which I'm not. But people like that spoil it for people like me, know what I mean. Killing MPs and police officers, like I said, it's just something that doesn't run through my mind and I don't... He's mentally ill - that's what I'm gonna say. He is, he's a mentally ill terrorist, that's what he is. He is, there's no beating around the bush there. And people who defend them then, they're the same, aren't they?

¹⁵ See, for example, <http://www.eip.org/en/news-events/eip-explainer-understanding-radicalisation>.

¹⁶ As noted above, their primary association for terrorism (and violent extremism) was Islamist terrorism followed by terrorism associated with the conflict in Northern Ireland, usually Irish Republican terrorism.

¹⁷ Darren Osborne was convicted of murder and attempted murder after driving into a group of people close to the Finsbury Park mosque on 19 June 2017. His motivation was determined to be a hatred of Muslims.

You can't defend a terrorist. Doesn't matter if he's on the right or left, does it, he's a terrorist.
He's planning terrorist acts, so... (Dan)

Turning to the concepts of 'radicalism' and 'extremism', as noted above, the key distinction made in academic literature between terrorism and extremism is that while the former is a 'tactic', the latter is a 'belief system' (see, for example, Berger, 2018: 30). However, with the rise of Islamist terrorism, the driver of which is so closely associated with a politicised religious belief, the notion of 'violent extremism' has increasingly been used to explain not the act but the phenomenon of violence to support the political aims of a shared ideology or belief. The conjoining of 'violence' and 'extremism' in this way begs two important distinctions, which structure respondents' engagement with the notion of 'extremism'. These are distinctions between violent and non-violent extremism and between attitudinal (cognitive) and behavioural extremism¹⁸.

There is an increasing tendency towards understanding extremism as related not only to behaviour but attitudes. Extremist attitudes, opinions and beliefs, according to Kruglanski and Orehek (2012: 12), are those that differ from established norms and have potentially dangerous consequences. This drift towards proscribing attitudinal as well as behavioural extremism is evident in the shifts in definitions of extremism at UK government level (see Section 2.2.3) and is of considerable concern to respondents in this study (see below). However, this drift is not universally maintained within academic circles. The non-determinacy of action and attitude is argued for in McCauley and Moskalenko's (2017: 211) two-pyramid model of violent extremism, for example, which envisages radical opinion and radical action as two separate pyramids. Bartlett and Miller (2012: 2) also consider radicalisation that leads to violence and radicalisation that does not lead to violence as two distinguishable phenomena.

It should be noted here that, with one exception, respondents in this study did not distinguish between notions of 'extreme' and 'radical'. The terms were used interchangeably and, most frequently, actors in this milieu talked about 'extreme' or 'extremist'. Thus understandings of 'radical' and 'extreme' are not discussed separately here, although the significance of this distinction in academic literature, and in the single case noted above, is discussed in Section 4.1.1.3.

4.1.1.1 *Extremism relates to behaviours not ideas*

This study found that, when talking about what constitutes extremism, respondents generally disapprove of what they see as a conceptual stretching of the term to encompass an increasing range of the political spectrum and to include attitudes, beliefs or even 'thoughts'. When talking about extremism, there is a consensus among respondents that extremism should refer to behaviours, or consequences, not ideas. Gareth believes that people have the right to any idea and to its expression, otherwise 'we're policing thought'. He illustrates this with an endorsement of the right to express an opposite, and extreme, position to his own:

[...] the line gets drawn from not what people say, it's from what people do. Like you should be able to say those things. [...] Do I believe in Sharia law? Absolutely not. [...] But do people have a right to say, 'I support Sharia law'? Yeah. Otherwise you're the tyrant just like the people who're calling you a Nazi to shut you down. (Gareth)

¹⁸ These distinctions might appear similar but should not be equated. Attitudinal support may be for movements or organisations that are either extremist or violent extremist and people may behave in an extremist but non-violent or a violent extremist way. Moreover, 'extremism' may either describe political ideas that are diametrically opposed to a society's core value such as racial or religious supremacy or ideologies that deny basic human rights or democratic principles, or the methods by which actors seek to realise their political aims, which disregard the life, liberty or rights of others (Neumann and Kleinmann, 2013: 365).

Paul, takes particular exception to the UK government's definition of extremism, which defines it in relation to the approval or non-approval of a government-determined set of 'values' rather than the 'fair' marker of violence or non-violence:

But what they mean as British values is their current narrow ideological field. So really, to them I'm the ultimate extremist, even though, by any logical or decent metric, I am someone with an opinion who advocates against extremism. You know, if aliens came down and said, 'Who's the extremist?' I wouldn't be in the extremist group, because I don't advocate for anything that's violent or extreme by any fair metric, I am not an extremist. I am only an extremist by an unfair metric that chooses to categorise my non-violent views as an extreme. (Paul)

Paul who is a respondent in his late thirties is adamant that the video materials he makes and uploads to his YouTube channel seek to discourage radicalisation amongst what he sees as a vulnerable demographic of 'younger nationalists'. He thus considers himself, not only *not* an extremist but an 'anti-extremist':

I don't want violence; I want peaceful solutions. I want the right to openly debate the situation. Because I'm an anti-extremist if anything. And you can back all this up. I have made videos against National Action. My video against National Action - somebody had that flagged and taken down. So I made a video [about] why people shouldn't join a terrorist group, and it's taken down. (Paul)

This marker of extremism as being the support for the use of violence is consistently found across the milieu studied here and is considered in detail in Section 4.1.2. While Paul is the only respondent who describes himself explicitly as 'anti-extremist', other respondents often refer to their activism as being motivated by a desire to counter all forms of terrorism and extremism. This relates especially to those affiliated with the DFLA whose logo is 'Against all Extremism' (see Plate 1).

Plate 1: DFLA 'Against all extremism' logo on pin badge



It is a source of particular frustration to DFLA activists that this positioning is dismissed as a smokescreen for 'anti-Islam' or 'fascist' ideologies, as explained by Mikey:

[...] for whatever reason, mainstream media has accused us of being some kind of anti-Islam group. We've been compared to the EDL, Britain First. We're often sort of compared to sort of like fascism groups, like National Action. And us, as an organisation, we wanted to dispel that myth. Because we don't stand for that. One of our logos is: 'Against all extremism,' and that includes obviously the usual suspects, things like IRA, Islamists, but also far-right groups like National Action. We just basically condemn extremism in all its forms. (Mikey)

This exemplifies not only the non-recognition of self as extremist discussed in Section 1, but the active engagement in dispelling that association through the recognition of the existence of extremism on the right wing, which is also to be condemned.

4.1.1.2 *Extremism is extremism (whatever its political hue)*

The second broadly held view regarding what constitutes extremism is that extremism does not relate to the substance of the idea or action but exists across the political spectrum. Indeed, one respondent believed it could be applied also to political *non*-engagement, meaning you could have ‘extremist apathy’ (Jacob). However, in practice, respondents believed ‘extremism’ is ascribed to the right wing more than other parts of the spectrum. A particular concern is that left-wing extremism is ignored:

And there's radical on the left that doesn't get mentioned. And they try and claim it's just the right - it's not. The left have it. Antifa are a group that are very violent. And I have seen Antifa, black masks, throwing stuff at me and that before. All black masks, throwing stuff at us on the veterans' demo. (Jason)

Moreover, when applied to the right wing, it is said, mainstream or centrist views are misrecognised as ‘radical’ or ‘extreme’. Confirming the difficulty of precisely defining radicalism since ‘one person’s radical is another’s moderate’ (Beck, 2015: 17), the vast majority of respondents in the study considered their views to be not ‘far’, ‘extreme’, or ‘radical’ right wing. On the contrary, they saw themselves as in the ‘centre’, ‘middle’ or even ‘pretty liberal’. Adam, who organises a grooming gangs awareness group, which is frequently labelled ‘far right’, for example, says that he thinks of himself and his group members as ‘clap bang in the middle’ in terms of the left/right spectrum. Dan says he is ‘pretty liberal on some things’ while Will says his views have stayed pretty stable around a ‘centre right to right’ position.

Most commonly, respondents positioned themselves as ‘right wing’ but strongly rejected the assumption that this made them, automatically, ‘far right’. Mikey, for example, says ‘I don't consider myself far right, and the organisation [the DFLA], we actively condemn it.’ He goes on:

[...] if someone asked me was I right wing, I'd probably say, ‘Yes, but not for the reason that society sort of puts on.’ [...] Well, effectively sort of anyone that's considered right wing is, in this day and age that term signifies someone that's racist, like ultra-patriotic to the point that this country's better than any other country and all the rest of it. (Mikey)

A frequently borrowed expression in the milieu to resist this equation deploys a play on words - ‘I'm not far right, just right’ (Johnny) - to simultaneously make claims to moderation and truth.

A small number of respondents recognise that their views are, at least in some respects, radical or controversial. This is particularly true of Jacob who I first chat to outside a pub after a demonstration in Leeds. He is conspicuously drinking water and is critical of others on the right for a lack of discipline (in relation to their lifestyles). He calls himself ‘proper far right’. Later, when I attend the launch of his new movement, he complains that some people had not attended because they did not want to share a platform with him because he is ‘further right’ than them. In interview he expands on this position:

[...] from what I can see from Mosley¹⁹'s lot, at least they, they had some discipline about them. They, right wing activists now aren't really right wing. They're right wing in some, some of their thinking, but I mean, I, I can't securely put Tommy Robinson and his followers on the right, because the arguments they use against Islamisation or Islam or Islamism, are all from the left. They're all, 'Oh, well, you know, it's the oppression of women, the oppression of gays and homosexual, homosexuals.' And it's just all anti-authoritarianism, and I don't think that's

¹⁹ This refers to Oswald Mosely, leader of the British Union of Fascists (1932-1940) and Union Movement (1948-1980).

a right wing position, so I'm not even sure there is a right wing activist movement at all.
(Jacob)

Jacob's goal is to create a 'proper' right wing movement and mentor its activists using techniques of 'self-development'.

4.1.1.3 *Radicalism versus extremism*

The most nuanced self-description was given by Will who concludes our long discussion about the meaning of the terms 'extreme' and 'radical' by stating, 'I didn't say I wasn't radical. I did say I wasn't extreme.' (Will). Will, a Generation Identity activist²⁰, was the only respondent to distinguish between the concepts of 'radicalism' and 'extremism'. He is keen to make clear that as a movement Generation Identity (GI) consistently tries 'to bash the far right' but thinks that people who end up with these views start with concerns about legitimate issues but no expression for them. Even of Anders Breivik, he says:

I don't doubt that probably he was an individual case, insane, but he probably had some ideas or things he was worried about that are fair enough and then he first of all built this more complex extreme world view around them and then acted on them in a monstrous way. (Will)

Reflecting on the distinction between extremism and radicalism, he concludes that extremism is a view that is outside the mainstream and is dangerous to society or carries a risk of violence. He distinguishes this from 'radical' in terms of its consequences:

[...] Like radical is you believe something outside of what is normal. Extreme is something that if it was implemented it would destroy. [...] I would limit extremism to [something that] would involve a violent destruction. (Will)

Substantively, Will attaches the notion of 'extremism' today to religious extremism and 'some of the far right as well' but, in contrast to many others in the milieu, considers no current left-wing groups to be 'extreme'. While the concept of radicalisation is discussed in Section 4.2, it is worth noting here Will's, unusual, view that radicalisation constitutes simply a shift in positions, without being tied to any specific outcome (such as violence or violent extremism). It is, he says, 'a route to a view rather than a route to extremism' (Will). In contrast to extremism, he says,

[...] in my view the idea of a radical opinion is, I would say, one that's not mainstream in present days I think it means one that's not liberal or socially democratic and even a certain fringe of social democracy is now radical. [...] it changes all the time but the accepted opinions is kind of neoliberal soft end of the social democrat everything else outside that is radical. Being a Leninist is radical obviously so is being a traditional Conservative is quite radical, in the present sense, because you're at odds with the mainstreams of society. (Will)

That current 'mainstream' is rooted in (post)Christian values, democracy and capitalism (what he calls 'commercial tendencies'). Will's understanding of how to bring about the social change he desires is, in essence, Gramscian - it works on the cultural terrain to shift hegemonic discourse to facilitate a more fundamental system change - and he consciously studies successful social movements from 'the left' to inform how to do this effectively. That Will is the only respondent to distinguish between 'radicalism' and 'extremism' and appropriate a positive connotation of the 'radical' is interesting. In Section 4.1.3, this is explored further through a discussion of the conceptual distinction between the two drawn by Schmid (2013) and an exploration of the evidence that many more respondents in this study actually show characteristics ascribed to a 'radical' rather than an 'extremist' mind-set.

²⁰ Although, when first encountered, Will was an activist in Generation Identity, he takes a critical position on some elements of identitarianism and thus his positions should not be taken as indicative of identitarianism more generally (see Section 4.3.2.4).

4.1.1.4 Extremism as an empty signifier

Finally, milieu activists suggest that the signifier ‘extremist’ has been emptied of meaning. Billy, says that the descriptors ‘extreme’ or ‘radical’ are automatically applied to the right, which means ‘Like anyone right of Lenin seems to be a radical’. Billy’s point reflects a certain conceptual imprecision arising from the fact that both radicalism and extremism may be used as relative or relational concepts (Bouhana, 2019: 7). Tonya struggles to explain what ‘radical’ means because, she says, ‘there’s no clear cut definition’ and ‘loads of words mean different things to different people’. This means that calling individuals, movements or ideas ‘radical’ or ‘extreme’ places them on a continuum of organised opinion and what is ‘radical’ or ‘extremist’ becomes dependent upon context, i.e. what is accepted opinion or political behaviour in a particular time and place. This lies at the heart of Paul’s criticism of what he sees as a particular branding of ‘traditionalist’ or ‘nationalist’ views as extreme:

[...] the ideas they try to brand as extreme are [...] basically morals or viewpoints that underpinned our society twenty, thirty years ago. Yet the ideas [...] which would have been seen as extreme twenty or thirty years ago are now being normalised. So it's almost like what they do is they say, 'Extremism and extremists are people who believe in traditionalism or things that would have been normal twenty, thirty years ago. And they're extremists just because they believe in it.' (Paul)

In practice, extremism represents a spectrum of beliefs rather than a fixed point on the scale (Berger, 2018: 47) and failing to acknowledge that renders concepts meaningless. As Robbie puts it: ‘If I’m far right, then you know, it’s not an offensive word. It’s become so loosely thrown around, that it’s, there’s no point even saying it now. [...] I’m on the right, but I’m not far right.’ As noted above, Onursal and Kirkpatrick (2019: 1-2) argue that, in British political discourse, non-violent extremism has been increasingly framed as a pathway into terrorism and that this used to justify an expansion of counter-terrorism powers which target ‘extremist’ ideologies. This is, however, potentially counter-productive. Dan’s reflection on this is worth repeating since it captures precisely how conceptual stretching can back people, who already feel ‘silenced’, into corners from which they have no other place to go and little to lose:

Well extremists now, the word extremist is just, to me doesn't matter anymore. Because they're classing everyone as an extremist, you know what I mean. You've got... they class me, obviously, they'd probably class me as a right-wing extremist. Which is, which is pathetic, 'cause I'm not. But they are just throwing that word about now. It's like the racist word – it just doesn't mean nothing to me anymore. Someone calls me a racist, I couldn't give a flying fuck, to be fair. (Dan)

This finding is particularly important for thinking about how we most effectively counter extremism. As discussed in Section 4.1.3, in fact Dan does care very much whether someone calls him a racist. Recognising this genuine capacity for self-reflection, notwithstanding exactly where an individual is positioned on the spectrum, has important implications for engaging young people in countering violent extremism.

4.1.2 Ideas and actions: boundaries and moralities

A key conundrum in the study of terrorism, and more recently of violent extremism, has been the relationship between ideas and behaviours. The fact is that only a small proportion of those who hold radical, or even extreme, ideas go on to commit acts of violence and not even all of those who engage in violent behaviour have radical beliefs (Horgan, 2012; see also McCauley and Moskalenko, 2017: 211). Yet, the focus of attention in the field has been, to date, on tracing the paths of those who end up committing acts of violence. In DARE, we address this by looking at the situations individuals encounter and the paths they follow where these trajectories are also ones of ‘non-radicalisation’ (Cragin, 2014; Cragin et al., 2015; Pilkington, 2017a). This is explored in detail in Section 4.2. In this section of the report, we focus more

narrowly on how respondents in this study understand the relationship between ‘ideas’ and ‘actions’. The findings presented below appear to confirm McCauley and Moskaleiko’s (2017: 211) conclusion that there is only a ‘weak relation between attitude and behavior’ leading them to develop a ‘two pyramids’ model which charts separate pathways of radicalisation of ‘opinion’ on the one hand and ‘action’ on the other. The ‘opinion pyramid’ starts, at the base, with those who pursue no political cause (*neutral*) and climbs through those who believe in the cause but do not justify violence (*sympathizers*), those who justify violence in defence of the cause (*justifiers*) to the apex where people feel a *personal moral obligation* to take up violence in defence of the cause. At the base of the ‘action pyramid’ are those not active in a political group or cause (*inert*), followed by those who are engaged in legal political action for the cause (*activists*), those engaged in illegal action for the cause (*radicals*) and, at the apex, are those engaged in illegal action that targets civilians (*terrorists*). In both cases, McCauley and Moskaleiko (ibid.) state, they are not presenting a ‘stairway model’; individuals can skip levels in moving up and down in the pyramid. Moreover there is no ‘conveyor belt’ from extreme beliefs to extreme action. Below we consider respondents’ understanding of violence as the marker of passage into ‘extremism’ but also when they consider violence might be acceptable, in theory, and when it materialises, in practice.

4.1.2.1 Extremism as use, threat or provocation of violence

The separation of beliefs and actions underpins respondents’ positioning of themselves as ‘non-extremist’ and what they consider to be genuine ‘extremism’. In relation to the two pyramids model, set out above, respondents, for the most part, would be categorised on the ‘opinion pyramid’ as ‘sympathisers’ and, on the action pyramid, as either ‘activists’ or ‘radicals’. On both counts, therefore, they are situated below the apex of the pyramids, which are characterised by a proactive commitment to violence. For respondents in this study, it is, precisely, this support for violence which marks the difference between extremist and non-extremist positions.

‘Extremism’ for respondents might be summarised as the use, threat or provocation of violence to impose ideas. At the generic level, extremism is taking a political, theological or ideological thought process and marrying it with violence:

[...] opinions aren't extremism. But they try to bring about their opinions, and they try to express their opinions through violence, through terror. So you can be somebody who believes in multiculturalism. But if you go around stabbing people who don't, you are an extremist. You can believe in an absolute Islamic caliphate. That's not really extremism. Extremism is going out and blowing somewhere up, because you believe in the caliphate. I can believe in, you know, you can have people who believe in the Third Reich or Adolf Hitler. Now that's not extremism until you start attacking people and imposing your will on others. (Paul)

The incitement of violence also constitutes extremism. Paolo illustrates this by reference to an influential Islamist actor in the UK, Anjem Choudary, who, he says, does not enact violence himself, ‘But he provokes it. He gets others to do his bidding’. For Will, even ideas can constitute extremism if violence is implicit in the ideas promoted, that is, if you could not achieve the ideas promoted without incurring violence:

[...] if you're a neo-Nazi and you believe that there's going to be a war between the different races. That can't be a simply radical opinion because there is no like peaceful way that's going to happen. You're counting on a civil war for what you want to happen - bloodshed and murder [...] (Will)

While not necessarily designated ‘extremist’, a number of respondents also suggest that actions of aggression and intimidation that fall short of violence are nevertheless ‘too extreme’ to be justified. Billy, for example, recounts how a ‘more radical’ splinter group from GI in his region had gone beyond the acceptable in his eyes when they leafleted the homes of immigrants: ‘It's not right to go and intimidate

people in their houses and whatever. People have kids and stuff and...' (Billy). Indeed, this crosses a threshold for GI. As Will explains, when deciding on actions ('stunts') to undertake, GI seeks to be entertaining and disruptive, in a harmless sense, whilst not causing political violence or intimidation because that 'undermines what we're trying to do as well as being morally wrong'.

Respondents in the milieu were more likely to talk about their rejection of violence than about when it might be justified. In part this a conscious response to representations of the movements they belong to as violent. However, from their reflections on violence and political activism, it is evident that they believe it serves no strategic purpose. At best 'it never achieves anything' (Mikey), at worst it 'backfires':

[...] maybe I'm just a coward and I'm trying to rationalise my, and excuse my position of non-violence. But particularly in this day and age when our opponents have, in my opinion, such a stranglehold on the media, it just... it backfires every time. Every time someone does some kind of stupid shooting... that's not persuading anyone of your cause. (Jacob)

In some cases, reflections on political activism hint at a preference for a kind of 'agonistic' politics based not on rational consensus but a vibrant public sphere of political contestation (Mouffe, 2005: 3). This is expressed by Dan who is proud of the fact that he has attended myriad demonstrations but never been involved in violence or arrested:

DAN: [...] touch wood, I've never been arrested on a demo. Never, ever.

INT²¹: Why do you think that is?

DAN: 'Cause I don't do anything to... All right, I get a bit mad. I shout a few things and that. But I don't do anything... I don't go for a fight, know what I mean. I don't go for...

INT: So you're not interested in goading the other side?

DAN: I'm not interested in a fight and things. I'm just interested... I love all that where you shout, and both sides are shouting at each other. Because that is democracy.

Craig, who is in his early fifties, also consistently advocates a political, non-violent activism but, is concerned that the over-policing of political communication, including on social media, sanitises political disagreement:

[...] any violence against the person is totally beyond the pale. You can't have that. You can't have this descending into anarchy. Everything has got to be done through the political process [...] It's got to be done through dialogue. It's got to be done through, through being able to insult each other. Not just insult each other's beliefs, but insult each other. (Craig)

These same respondents feel strongly that overzealous policing of these boundaries of acceptable political speech and activism is one of the main drivers of radicalisation (see Section 4.2.1).

Respondents also talk about their strategies for keeping away from violence. Dan admits that sometimes on demonstrations 'you've got the adrenaline kicking in' and many other 'youngsters' like him would get involved in any aggro that kicked off. His strategy is to stand and 'observe' because he doesn't 'want to be arrested for something stupid'. While he doesn't make these connections explicitly to his strategy, it is undoubtedly facilitated by the fact that he rarely drinks alcohol and has a dread of prison. Robbie is another interesting case. While he is actively engaged in football violence, he fully endorses the DFLA's stance of non-violence:

ROBBIE: That's, I think one of the reasons I like the DFLA is because... my dad said this to me and I thought it was spot on. He says, 'Ever since any of these sort of groups have started - National Front, BNP, EDL - it's always descended into violence.' [...] the public don't want to

²¹ 'INT' indicates the Interviewer, who is the report author unless otherwise indicated.

be a part of that. That's why the DFLA is good in that respect, because we march in silence sometimes. We're always courteous to the police, you know. Even when there's a counter protest from like Antifa or Stand Up To Racism, they goad us and they goad us, but no-one ever bites. And that's the good thing.

INT: Yeah. I'm going to say something provocative now. Is it because you're getting your violence somewhere else?

ROBBIE: No, no, it's not. You're doing it to be... to prove a point, that we don't need to be violent to try and make a change in sort of that situation.

My intervention in Robbie's explanation is provoked by the fact that at other points in the interview he talks about the 'big buzz' he gets from football violence; it is from those fights that he gets his 'bragging rights', 'battle scars' and 'entertaining stories' to recount in the pub afterwards. He also sports a tattoo reading 'Violence is golden'. We will return to this apparent contradiction between what is acceptable in the political and non-political spheres below as part of the discussion of the situational nature of violence.

4.1.2.2 When is violence acceptable?

Respondents in this study feel violence is justified rarely. The most frequently mentioned circumstance in which it would be justified to use violence was in order to protect oneself, one's family or those weak and in need of protection. In relation to political activism, Billy does not think violence achieves anything but he does believe that if you are attacked you should have the right to self-defence. Robbie is of a similar mind and, recalling an incident when a group of fellow DFLA activists had been 'cornered' by counter protestors, he says:

Yeah, if you get cornered, you can't just lay there and take it. 'Cause they won't stop, I don't think. They are the thugs really. They want to hurt you a lot more than you want to hurt them. [...] Because why else would they come masked up with, I know they've got placards, but it's a weapon. You know if you hit someone with that, it's gonna hurt. It's gonna hurt a lot. 'Specially if there's ten times more of them than there is you. (Robbie)

Outside the context of political activism, respondents also mention that protecting their family (especially siblings) or friends has necessitated 'using your fists' (Gareth). Paolo talks passionately about what he would do if anybody 'hurt my brother or a member of my family' (see also Section 4.1.2.3).

The second justification for violence cited is when democracy has been shown not to work. Gareth explains his position by referring to a hypothetical situation where, if there was a vote to abolish the monarchy and that vote was overturned and the monarch stayed in power and democracy had clearly not worked, then, as he puts it, 'it's time to 'get your pitchforks out'. Jason, although an activist in an established political party (UIKIP) and seeking a future career in politics, believes that voting is not enough anymore:

I believe that if we can't get listened to by basic democracy, it's our only choice. If you just sit there and take it and try and just talk to somebody, it won't work. So we have to take to the streets, we have to be more chaotic. We have to make a noise, we have to have strikes. We have to do this; it's our only way. Because if we don't, then... How it works is this: if you let the politicians ignore you this time, you'll be letting them do it again and again. (Jason)

The final situation in which violence is considered legitimate is in order to defend the country against terrorism or in war. Mikey, moreover, believes that there are 'just' and 'unjust' wars. He cites the Second World War as one where Hitler's policy of extermination 'needed to be stopped' and when diplomacy failed, violence (war) was the only alternative. In contrast he views Iraq as an unjust war because it was 'people being killed under false pretences'; since there were no chemical weapons, he concludes, the war was about oil. Afghanistan, he thinks, is arguably more 'just' because it had become the training ground

for the Taliban.

An earlier study of EDL activism showed how violence had become an issue of ‘strategy’; the leadership sought to eradicate it from the movement as it undermined credibility while some members contended that it was the only way to gain media attention (Pilkington, 2016: 51, 183-185). In the milieu studied here, in contrast, no strategic case ‘for’ violence was heard. Will, says he is aware of the fact that the mainstream media would only report on an event if there was violence but he would still not advocate it:

I would never say advocate kind of targeted violence [...] it would backfire because also you’ve got to bear in mind what the coverage is. The main thing is who we attract if all the coverage is ‘these are the neo Nazis beating people up’, we’re going to get neo Nazis apply and we’re going to get people that want to fight apply. So I’d rather there was no coverage and people who were vaguely interested saw it on social media and thought, ‘Oh that is quite interesting, that’s funny’ and then they joined. (Will)

Jacob, who is one of the most extreme of the respondents in terms of his views, also says that he is aware of arguments for strategic political violence but remains against them:

[...] rather than big examples of terrorism, there is, I could imagine that there are people out there that see a more pragmatic strategy and smaller, but more frequent, incidents of political violence. Harassment – repetitive harassment of communities that they disagree with [...] I remember someone suggesting that we should be, you know, just winding up Muslims and getting them to act out. And that would shift the... It was a, it was a hard one for me to counter, but I still stuck to my position of non-violence, because I’ve got... I’m confident in my ability to persuade. (Jacob)

Even symbolic violence is largely disapproved. While Will supports GI ‘stunts’ like covering female statues (such as that of Millicent Fawcett) with burqas or the fake slaughter of a cow, in order to make their point, he considers actions such as burning copies the Qur’an or throwing bacon into a mosque to be ‘hate crime’.

4.1.2.3 What explains the violence?

Notwithstanding that, when respondents in this study reflect on the morality and efficacy of political violence, they reject it, in practice around half of them had been involved personally in violence or fighting. Eight respondents talked about their own involvement in some form of violence or fighting and another three were known to have been involved in fighting around political activism, albeit narrated as being at the receiving end. So, if there is no ‘staircase to terrorism’ (Moghaddam, 2005), as McCauley and Moskalenko (2017), rightly, suggest, the question remains as to how we understand what, and when, radical opinions cross-over into radical actions?

Recognising the absence of an explanation for how individuals move from non-violent to violent positions in their ‘two pyramids’ model, McCauley and Moskalenko (2017: 213-214) invoke ‘the importance of emotions’ and recognise the possibility ‘that similar emotions are at work in moving individuals to both legal political activism and terrorist violence’. They do not provide empirical substance to the argument but point to the work of della Porta (2013) in identifying how radicalisation occurs in the dynamics of action and reaction in conflicts between activists and police as well as between competing activist groups (McCauley and Moskalenko, 2017: 210). Indeed there has been recent interest in patterns of interaction between meso-level actors (social movements and institutional actors) that might explain the dynamics of political violence (Malthaner, 2017: 3). In the study of extremism, this has been framed largely as a binary process of ‘cumulative extremism’ (Eatwell, 2006) although critical approaches argue for looking beyond the movement-counter-movement dynamic to include state actors and the media (Busher and Macklin, 2015). However, there is little insight to date into micro-situational interactions or interpersonal contacts that might explain these dynamics (Malthaner, 2017: 6).

Below, both emotional states and the contexts and dynamics of situations are considered in explaining those cases where respondents engage in violence. Specifically, a micro-analysis is conducted of the narratives of three respondents - Lee, Robbie and Paolo - for each of whom violence and fighting plays a different role in their lives. The findings of this analysis question whether involvement in violence and fighting is necessarily an indication that individuals have moved either 'up' one pyramid or 'across' pyramids. It appears, rather, that individuals may simultaneously take positions of both non-violence and violence, depending on the situation, the interactions that play out there and the relationship of these to their political opinions. Moreover, violence may not emanate from a political repertoire of action at all but be linked to the performance of other dimensions of identity especially masculinity.

Lee's story

In July 2017, due to a hangover, Lee missed a meeting at which Jack Renshaw revealed his plans to murder the Labour Party MP Rosie Cooper. One attendee at that meeting, Robbie Mullen, informed Hope not Hate about the plot and Renshaw was arrested, convicted under the Terrorism Act for engaging in conduct in preparation of a terrorist act and for making a threat to kill. He was sentenced to life imprisonment (with a minimum of 20 years). Others attending the meeting were charged on counts of continued membership of a proscribed organisation (National Action had been proscribed in December 2016). Lee recounts the situation thus:

Well they were... do you know the meeting they had in the [names pub]? [...] They're in jail for that now. Well me and two of my mates were meant to go to that meeting. [...] But because I'd been out the night before and I were rough and I were in bed, I didn't go. [...] there were a few of them meetings that we were meant to go to. But I thank God now that I didn't go. (Lee)

Later, in the context of Robbie Mullen having decided that - given what he heard Renshaw was planning - he had no other choice but to inform of the plan, I asked Lee what his own reaction would have been had he been there:

INT: Yeah. So I get that, I guess, so going back to that meeting that you didn't go to in the pub, with National Action. What would you have done, if you'd been sat round a table talking about...?

LEE: I probably would have let them do it, with mind-set that I were in then, yeah. I wouldn't have grassed them up or out. It's like honour, innit?

The brutal simplicity of Lee's response to the question shocked me. He was not a member of National Action and never had been. Although at an earlier point in time they had tried to recruit him, he had not wanted to leave his own group and so there had been what he called an 'unspoken relationship' to support each other's events. For this reason, with the 'mind-set' he had at the time, he says, he would have felt he owed them the loyalty not to 'grass them up'. His story demonstrates the strongly situational dimension of radicalisation trajectories. Had Lee attended that meeting, and not stopped the action planned by Renshaw, he could have become complicit in a terrorist act (that is moved to the apex of the 'action' pyramid) without any radicalisation of his beliefs. Moreover, his failure to prevent that act, would not have been motivated by the belief that it served a noble cause or grand idea, but his personal moral compass about what was the right way to behave in a particular situation. This speaks to Bouhana's (2019) understanding of the moral ecology of radicalisation whereby 'susceptibility' at the personal level is only one element of a bigger picture. Drawing on Bouhana's model, we see that, in Lee's case, the settings in which he is placed and the alignment of his moral compass with them play a crucial contextual role in his imagined response to 'let them do it'.

Lee's trajectory also speaks to the everyday nature of extremism. In his case, violence may be less a strategic or tactical choice pertaining to the sphere of political activism, but something deeply embedded in everyday life. From an early age, violence was not special but routine for Lee:

Yeah, it were, my, one of my main memories from being at school are, I think I were a first year, high school. And there was this, this lad in my, he were in my form and he were a Muslim lad, and well, waiting to go in, into the form room in the morning, and we ended up bickering, and we ended up fighting. And he were quite a bit bigger than me, but I ended up battering him and that were my first ever clash, kind of thing. But he, but I got a good buzz out of it to be honest, you know. I thought, 'Yeah,' that's... 'cause I battered him and that, and he were bigger than me. But then every, every time there were anything happened at school where there were like Asian lads fighting with white lads, we, we'd be there at the front of it all and, you know, it's, it was just the buzz. (Lee)

These fights were so routine that they became institutionalised into the way the school day was organised:

Well, it were, like we'd, we'd fight with them at dinnertime with the lads and then there were, their uncles and dads would come up after school. [...] They'd turn up with cricket bats and everything, so we'd, being, us being young lads like, game for it, we just wanted to get stuck into them. So it got to the point where they'd like, they'd take the school, about twenty minutes before school had finished, they'd come and collect the lads that they knew were involved in it. And they'd have the vans down, down the middle of the yard and they'd say, 'Right, you go down that way, and you go down that path. And you Muslim lads, go that way, your dads and that are waiting there.' (Lee)

And it carried over into the weekends when, Lee said, 'we, we used to make a point of going into their area, 'cause we, we used to get pissed and that and go looking for them and go, go looking for a scrap and that.' In his later teens and early twenties, he was heavily drinking and using drugs and the unthinking use of violence as an everyday routine led to a prison sentence when he was 20 years old:

To this day I can't remember it, but from what I was told, we were in, it were me mum's house on [names road] and she'd, it were when me mum were on drugs and me mum were bad on whizz, but she'd basically left the house and left us to it. So it were basically our house, it were a party house and we'd been up all, all weekend, no sleep or anything like that. So this were on a Sunday, we'd been on, drinking and taking drugs since Friday. And me mate said that there were a guy over the road that owed him money, this is what I've been told. So we've, we've gone over to the house and we've been kicking the door and that. And apparently this, this guy's dad has come, and his dad were like, I think he were fifty-odd, the guy. He's come and he had angina, but we attacked him and he's ended up having an angina attack, so we, my first recollection is waking up in the cells, thinking, 'What the fuck have I done?' And they told me, so I got, I only got six month, but it were, that were the first taste of it, so... (Lee)

Even after he came out of prison he remained on the drugs but after his son was born in 2006, he got a job and 'levelled myself out a bit'. It was at a rave with a friend in another town in 2009, that he got to know about an EDL march in a nearby city. After attending that, they set up a local division of the EDL. He describes the EDL milieu as also, first and foremost, a 'buzz'; 'I were getting a buzz that I used to get when I were a kid fighting and that' (Lee). Later, as he moved on from the EDL (after a well-documented split with the EDL leadership) to form his own movement, the conflict became 'more focussed on militant left'. Along the way, he rejected offers to join the BNP because 'I weren't into political side of it; I was there for the scrap' (Lee). When I ask him more about this conscious shift of the main focus to the Left when he broke from the EDL, it is clear that it is the buzz of fighting that continues to motivate most:

INT: So why were they such an object of hate then?

LEE: 'Cause they were left-wing, weren't they? They were promoting pro-immigration stance and stuff like that. We didn't like it so... but that were probably my main thing. [...] Because of the buzz I were getting out of kicking off with them. I used to love it.

INT: Did they fight back?

LEE: Some of them did, yeah. But they'd be... say if we did a demo and they turned up, they'd always outnumber us. But that were another part of the buzz.

INT: Part of the challenge?

LEE: Yeah. The [names demonstration] that happened in [names city], the National Action one, they got us. There ended up being a group of about thirty of us, and they got us and they pinned us down in [names station] train station. But that day were, wow... there were me and three lads who came from [names home town], and as soon as we got out the car and walked onto [names station] station, we were fighting. We went... four or five people were fighting their way through groups of thirty people and that. They started attacking me mates and we jumped in and started attacking them. And then we've ended up in the train station. And we've ended up with a group of about thirty National Action lads and all of a sudden they've just come from everywhere. And they fucking swarmed where we were. Police have had to put us in the lost luggage department, and they had to pull the shutter down on us. And then, as we were coming out, someone chucked a bottle - hit me full square in face, water bottle. There were eggs coming at us, all sorts. And then the police have like built a cordon round us like that, and we've gone outside. They've took us outside through the crowd. There's a crowd of about two hundred people inside they've took us through. Then we've got outside and it's like, I don't know... [...] there was like another five hundred people who they've had to take us through. They've had to pin us against the wall. And we ended up at the back of [names station] train station, there's a police station. They've had to take us through back door in police station, 'cause there were that many of them. But we buzzed off it. We loved it.

As earlier research on the 'demo buzz' has shown, the 'affect' that is experienced in a physically embodied way is almost impossible to capture adequately in narrative data (Pilkington, 2016: 181). Recognising this, Lee tries to evoke what the buzz felt like by showing me video clips from the events he is describing. One possible explanation for what happens in these situations is provided by theories of 'entrainment', which view emotions as transmitted from one body to another by chemical reactions as a result of the effect of pheromones (Brennan cited in Wetherell, 2012: 146). However, as Wetherell (ibid.) points out this does not explain why some bodies are entrained while others resist or why, on feeling 'the adrenaline kicking in' at demonstrations (as Dan describes it above), Lee becomes 'entrained' while Dan is able to keep his distance from violence. Rather than a response to unseen chemical stimuli, it is argued here, this 'buzz' is an emotional response to concrete stimuli – the 'swarm' of confrontational bodies in the account above – but also how these bodies are pre-configured and how such situations, and one's own response to them, are understood.

'Situation' here does not mean a one-off or chance occurrence but the immediate setting in which behaviour occurs (Birkbeck and Lafree, 1993: 115) and to which participants bring the emotions and consciousness generated from previous interactions and situations (Collins, 2004: 3). In Lee's case the violent settings encountered growing up had forged an etiquette of fighting based on, as he put it: 'Not running. Not running were one of big things. That, I got that from when I used to fight at school and that. [...] Never run, no.' (Lee). Once he had established his own movement, these intense collective experiences were a source not only of emotional 'buzz' but also of a sense of 'respect' and, as Lee put it,

‘people putting you on a pedestal, telling you you're the best thing since sliced bread’. In sharp contrast, Dan’s ‘Whoa’ moment, when he feels that affect passing through him at demos, comes up against his very different interpretative frame for these situations not as opportunities to gain respect but as potential traps to get you ‘arrested for something stupid’:

No, no. Like I said, it is hard, because you've got the adrenaline kicking in and you think 'Whoa.' And I'm only young, know what I mean. And you know, a lot of youngsters, you can't say when you're young, you don't like that sort of stuff. But like I said, I've got a bit of a brain for me age like. I don't want to be arrested for something stupid.

While Dan’s response is not to ‘run’ but to ‘observe’ (see above), he has no objection to others running as he explains in the following reflection on his response to violence erupting at a demonstration he was at:

I've seen a lad running away from the violence in London, and someone grabbed him, and went, 'What the fuck are you doing? Stop running.' Which you know, to be fair, if he wants to run, let him. (Dan)

Subsequent denouements in Lee’s story are recounted at later stages in the report. What is interesting here is the particular constellation of environment, actors and situational triggers that mediate the relationship between politics and violence for Lee. He is, as he says, not into ‘the political side of it’ – he is in it for the ‘scrap’. At the same time, in the context of football or leisure, he can walk away from the opportunity to fight. As an ardent football fan of his local town’s team, he ‘didn't get involved with football violence’ and he reflects that:

[...] the thing is as well with the fighting, I could... say we were out in town and someone started getting mouthy and that, I'd walk away from it. And I would then. But in that other situation, where it's political views were at stake, we... (Lee)

This is not to ‘explain’ or ‘excuse’ Lee’s violence by reference to his past. It is rather to demonstrate the situational nature of violence and to indicate the complex way in which the political is connected to violence. As is demonstrated in Section 4.2 (below), it is by replacing that ‘buzz’ of fighting political opponents by another ‘buzz’ of working for his local community that Lee is able to envisage a future that does not involve fighting, physically, for his political views.

As Collins (2009: 10) has argued, studying motivations for violence tell us little; socio demographic factors are weak predictors since there are many more of those people with apparent predisposing characteristics than will commit violence. This is still more the case for political violence or violent extremism. It is not so much individual motives, therefore, as moments of situational interaction filled with interpersonal emotional dynamics that forge and shape both individual trajectories and broader movements (Malthaner, 2017: 7). Rather than having a motive or a purpose, violent interactions in face to face encounters and in particular situational settings bring together a constellation of actors and situational roles and identities creating micro-situational interactions that have a logic of their own (ibid.: 6). It is the uniqueness of the constantly changing situation that brings the ‘buzz’ while the experience of previous encounters provides the ‘emotions and consciousness’ that ‘charge up’ the individual human body for the encounter. However, individuals differ as do their pathways through interactional chains and their mix of situations across time. These differences are illuminated below by comparing Lee’s pathway to that of Robbie and Paolo.

Robbie’s story

In sharp contrast to Lee, Robbie – a DFLA member – does not get involved in violence in relation to political activism. Robbie’s school experience was not saturated with conflict and fighting but largely uneventful. He was mainly brought up by his mum, but bonded closely with his dad (who had been a football hooligan in the seventies and eighties) over football, which they attended together at the weekend. When he was

17 he moved in with his dad. Once he was old enough to attend the football with his own friends, he got into 'casual'²² culture and fighting. Robbie's description of the buzz of football fighting, illustrates perfectly Collins' explanation of it as situational i.e. both profoundly 'in the moment' and yet saturated in all that has gone before:

ROBBIE: And obviously the people I went to football with after my dad, I'd met at football, so they had the same mentality as me. And just went from there. It's chance meeting in a service station or summat like that. Got a big buzz.

INT: [...] so you say chance meeting, so it wasn't organised?

ROBBIE: Not always, no. Sometimes it was, if you knew that they were bringing some people. You know, 'cause everybody knows everybody from other teams, with the DFLA, everybody knew who we were before we started. But yeah. Sometimes you'd just be walking through town and they'd be coming out of a pub, and you think, 'Here we go, we're on.' Sometimes it would be, 'Meet here. No coppers. No cameras. Sorted.'

With no video at hand to try to bring the situation of violence to life for me, Robbie abandons trying to communicate why it is fun and repeats 'the saying' that 'for those who were there no explanation is necessary. For those who aren't, no explanation is possible'. When I ask him, later, to describe one of the best recent fights, he describes a cup match when it 'just kicked off all game' inside and outside the stadium; 'it was just chaos' (Robbie). When I push Robbie on what it was that had made it special, he says, 'I honestly don't know. It was just, I wasn't expecting anything when we went'. During our second interview, this time together with his friend Johnny, he explains further:

ROBBIE: As I said last time, it's the chance meetings that are the best ones, at football. Where you walk round a corner and you're outside a pub. 'Get him.' And there's no coppers around because they don't know it's gonna happen. No-one knows it's going to happen. And you steam into 'em and it's just...

JOHNNY: You're pumped full of adrenaline.

ROBBIE: A minute later, you're both apart, and it's done.

A crucial element of Robbie's narrative is the difference between situation and environment. Robbie repeatedly finds himself in radicalisation-laden environments (or 'settings' – see Bouhana, 2019). His dad had been involved in the BNP and the National Front and it was with his dad and his dad's friends that he had attended his first DFLA demonstration. However, in terms of 'susceptibility' (ibid.), Robbie shows resilience to peer influence. In different conversations with him, he refers to a number of situations where he makes conscious choices that go against the grain. For example, at the age of 13, when a group of older friends joined the EDL, he chose not to follow despite the fact that 'it looked like a buzz' (see Section 4.2.2). Later, when at least one close friend was joining the National Front, he also took a very different route; hanging out with a punk crowd, going to football away matches sporting a Mohican and a pair of DMs and, at a particularly low time in his life, sleeping rough (in his car). Thus, when he chooses to get involved in football violence, he is making a choice, not following a crowd. The complexity of questions of 'susceptibility' and 'socialisation' are evident not only in Robbie's case but also in that of Dan. In both cases their fathers had been active in the extreme right milieu but that experience is transmitted in a way that produces a strong commitment to non-violence in their sons (see Section 4.2.2).

Paolo's story

The final example is found in the narrative of Paolo. Paolo is another DFLA activist but says he is first and foremost a football hooligan with a trademark reputation for head-butting people. Like Lee, he grew up

²² Casual culture revolves around a combination of football hooliganism and designer wear.

around violence and had formative experiences involving fighting with 'Asian kids':

[...] well, to be fair, school was hard. Because there wasn't many white kids. And there wasn't many black kids. It was mainly Asians. And if you had a dispute with one lad, you had it with another 60 lads. I mean, I remember one day, I was about thirteen. And I asked somebody just a basic question. And me and him used to get the same bus. And I was, 'What was your mum reading on the bus earlier?' The next thing I know... apparently that's an insult to the Qur'an. I've got 60 Asian kids trying to kick my head in, because I asked a simple question [...] So I learned early on that I'm gonna have to learn to fight, I'm gonna have to learn to look after myself. And then going to the football, that kind of helped. (Paolo)

Paolo had grown up in an area where participating in gang life was the only option and, echoing familiar phrases from current debates about soaring knife crime among young people in UK cities, you had to carry some weapon because 'It's better to have and not need, than need and not have' (Paolo). He regularly carried knuckledusters and coshes, although he had a personal aversion to knives. He says:

I wouldn't carry a knife. Never carry a knife. I've had knives, but I've never took a knife out of the house. Never took a knife out of the house and I never will. For the simple reason I think knives are too personal. If you stab somebody... my mate said this to me... I've got some pretty vicious pals. And one pal said to me, we was having this conversation, 'I'd rather shoot somebody than stab somebody.' And he went, 'I'd rather stab somebody and watch the life drain out of them.' I'm like, 'That's a bit strong, that is.' And I'm like, 'that's why I couldn't. Because it's personal - you're getting close.' Anyone can shoot a gun. It wouldn't... I wouldn't blink, it wouldn't bother me. I can shoot a gun tomorrow – wouldn't bother me. But to stab somebody, that's a lot worse in my opinion. (Paolo)

This position is shaped by the fact that one of his friend's from secondary school was serving a life sentence in prison for stabbing someone during a fight (at the age of 16); 'That's why I never carry, never carry a knife. Life's too precious' (Paolo). The detail with which Paolo talks about, and imagines, violence is striking and, as mentioned in the preceding subsection, he says that there are circumstances in which he would be prepared to use violence himself:

PAOLO: I tell you what, if anybody ever hurt my family. A member of my family ever got hurt in any sort of way regarding that, I'd go to war. And when I mean go to war, I mean every, every sense of the word. I would not be stopped.

INT: Even if it meant you ended up serving life?

PAOLO: I'd do that. Somebody hurt my brother, I'd do life happily with a smile on my face. And that's the realism: somebody hurt my brother or a member of my family that I love, I'd do life with a smile on my face. Because that's all we've got in this world. We can't take money with us when we go. We can't take possessions with us when we go. The only thing that's left when we go, is memories, is your family to live on for you. So if you can't... if your family don't mean anything to you, you got nothing in life. That's the way I see it. My brothers are the most important thing to me in the world. Anybody ever touched them, run. That's the only thing I'd be saying, 'Run.'

Paolo brings this past experience and future imagination into face to face encounters of violence. Unlike both Robbie and Lee, however, he does not take pleasure in fighting. Importantly, however, he gains respect. Repeatedly he references that he is small, in height, and, especially when younger, got badly hurt when he fought. He turns this physical disadvantage into a marker of courage by being the one who, nonetheless, is always 'up' for a fight. In this way, fighting takes on an important role in forging a working masculine identity:

I'm tiny. I admit that myself. I'm not the hardest bloke in the world; you can pick me up with one hand. You can... but I will always get back up. That's the way I see it. You hit me, I'm always getting back up. And that's why I'm loved by the [name of football firm] lot. My lot... They know full well that I'll end up getting [inaudible]. But I'm always the first one in. I'm always the one that's gonna always, always do something. I'm not gonna say I'm gonna do something and then not do it. They know full well if I say it, it's gonna happen. I mean, it's not that I enjoy fighting, but the respect and the notoriety that comes with it – that is more appealing than the actual giving a kicking bit. (Paolo)

He elevates this respect through fighting from the individual to the collective level, arguing that British national identity is rooted in the fact that 'Britain's always been a fighting nation. [...] we've always been built to fight: Saxons, Vikings, Romans. All we've ever known is war.' (Paolo).

The findings of this study thus seem to confirm Collins' (2009: 9) understanding of violence as a response to confrontational tension. Without focused micro-situational observation of individual situations of violence in each case, it is not possible to make a substantial contribution to the further theorisation of the situational micro-dynamics of violence. However, the data presented here provide food for thought. This relates, first, to the question of the relationship between violence in political and non-political contexts. For Robbie violence was a buzz but only at football - he rejects violence in political situations except in self-defence. Lee, in contrast, had never been involved in football violence and could walk away from situations that might lead to violence except when it related to a political cause. Yet his political trajectory - leaving the EDL, refusing to join the BNP - has been driven consistently by chasing 'the scrap' rather than an ideology or particular cause. Finally, Paolo is known for his fighting - especially his trademark 'head-butting' - but he does not get pleasure from it. What drives Paolo's fighting is the 'respect and the notoriety' he gains from others in the (primarily male) milieu that, being 'tiny', he struggles to gain in other ways. In all three cases, violence had been routinised in teenage years and become part of their repertoire of action for the presentation of self well before political causes were adopted. Secondly, it raises the question of what constitutes 'violence' and how this differs from 'fighting'. Malthaner's (2017: 6) definition of violence as 'bodily harm-doing occurring predominantly in interpersonal encounters or micro-situational interactions' seems to capture much of what is described in narratives of respondents even though they refer to it not as violence but as 'fighting', 'chaos' or 'standing your ground'. However, it bears little relation to the dominant forms of political violence discussed in the literature (acts of terrorism) or even those for which members in the milieu are most frequently prosecuted ('violent disorder'). In the case of the latter, a charge used for prosecution of dozens of demonstrators at, or after, violence at demonstrations, the burden of proof is placed on the impact of the action - causing bystanders to 'fear for their personal safety' - rather than the severity of any 'bodily harm' caused or the individual's role in it (see Section 4.5.3, also Pilkington, 2016: 167-169). From this perspective, it seems that the rejection of political violence by respondents in this study alongside the participation of many of them in such violence is explained less by individual shifts along a trajectory (or up or across pyramids) of radicalisation than by their personal repertoires of action formed in teenage years alongside a disjuncture between their own, and wider discursive, framing of political violence.

4.1.2.4 *"Too extreme for me...": Relational notions of extremism*

Given that extremism may be used as a relative or relational concept (Bouhana, 2019: 7), it is not surprising that respondents often explain what extremism means to them by placing themselves in relation to others' views and actions that they consider to be 'too extreme' or to be 'far right'. Indeed, if respondents found it difficult to talk about 'extremism' or 'radicalism' in general or abstract terms, they would be prompted to think about concrete examples of ideas, opinions, actions, movements and parties or individuals who they felt were 'too extreme' for them.

When describing what is beyond acceptable by reference to movements or parties within the broader right-wing milieu, respondents characterise those movements as ‘extreme’, ‘radical’ or ‘far right’. Three movements are generally described by respondents using at least one of these terms. The most frequently mentioned is National Action. This appears to be because it is directly associated with neo-Nazism:

And then obviously you’re getting the extreme right wing extremism with things like National Action, very much a neo-Nazi organisation, white supremacists, and you look at the, the emblems there on the parades and streets giving Nazi salutes. The insignia, if you look at it is very much based on, sort of the, the Nazi symbols that were used by Hitler’s regime during the war. (Mikey)

Two other groups mentioned as ‘extreme’, ‘far right’ and ‘radical’ are Combat 18 and the National Front; again the defining attribute making these movements extreme is that they are ‘neo-Nazi’ groups.

Respondents also distinguish what is too extreme by direct reference to ideologies or actions. The ideologies described as extremist are almost all ‘Nazism’ or ‘neo-Nazism’:

Nazism. Neo-Nazism. Nazi like, that’s extreme in my opinion. Just you know, when you’re willing to align yourself with someone who, a group that killed, you know, six and a half million people, innocent people. And you know, however many more, because that’s all that we know about. There’s probably millions more that we don’t. I mean, there’s incidences all over the place where you know, they just shot people in the head and just buried them in mass graves. And that happened all across, you know, all across Europe really, so if they want to align themselves with those groups, then they are extremist. They’re not welcome; they’re not welcome in any country, any state, you know. Just, you know, just sooner we get rid of neo-Nazis, the better. (Jermaine)

Behaviours or actions that are too extreme are also those considered to be racist. For Johnny, this means either repatriation of immigrants or racially-defined immigration restrictions:

Extremism is where they say they want... I think personally is where they don’t want anybody that’s not Christian or they don’t... anyone that’s a different colour or anyone that they think might be a problem is not allowed any more. (Johnny)

Cara says she views BNP material as ‘racist’ and would avoid using it while Adam describes ‘being racist to communities’ as ‘radical’ and feels both Britain First and the EDL go too far in that they go about ‘shouting race, shouting religion and things’. He also considers symbolic violence – such as writing offensive messages on mosques - extremist, although with a caveat:

If you’ve got evidence to say something’s happened at that mosque, they’re involved in terrorism, they’re involved in grooming kids, then yeah, then I think fair enough, you’re making your point, but when you’re just damaging something when you’ve got no evidence against, that’s extremism. (Adam)

Generation Identity is described by Dan as ‘too extreme’ because they are ‘white racist’ (Field diary, 18.03.2018). Dan also describes making a last minute decision not to attend an event organised by a regional Infidels group because he was worried by something he had seen online which he felt was a ‘Bit too racist, like they were a bit white pride’.

As discussed above, the use of violence is also seen as too extreme for most respondents in this study. This is expressed by Jermaine who sees National Action as extreme both because ‘they have a lot of neo-Nazis in them’ and because ‘they want violence’. On the same grounds, he views the EDL as ‘borderline’ extreme:

The EDL, some of the protestors are extreme, but the group itself was designed as a street protest. It was never designed to cause violence or cause harm. Unlike National Action where I think their, I guess you could say, manifesto, you know, does involve violence and threatening violence and things like that so... (Jermaine)

Jermaine's referencing of 'some people in' the movement, rather than the group itself, being 'extreme' is also a common trope among respondents and particularly frequently used in relation to the EDL, which is a group with which many respondents are well acquainted. The widest definition of 'radical' in relation to other parties and movements is given by Jason, who is a UKIP activist and says that UKIP denies membership to anyone who has had past membership of a specified list of groups: EDL, DFLA, BNP, Britain First and the New British Union (NBU). However, he clarifies that for him the NBU is one of the 'more real radical groups' (implying the others listed are not 'real' radical).

Finally, it is worth noting that while, in general, the pattern in understanding extremism is for individuals to see themselves as not extreme relative to others, individuals also talk about being positioned themselves as 'too extreme'. In one case this consisted of an ironic reflection on being accused of 'hanging out with far-right extremists' by some of the most well-known 'right wing extremists' in the country (Alice). However, two friends also discuss honestly where they are positioned relatively; Gareth thinks Dan is too radical just to be called 'right wing'. Dan, meanwhile, says he receives death threats for not being extreme enough; 'I've had death threats by the far right, as well as the far left.' (Dan).

4.1.3 Implications for theory and practice of countering violent extremism

In this final subsection, we consider the implications of respondents' understandings of 'extremism' and 'radicalism' for the theory and practice of countering (violent) extremism. As noted in Section 4.1.1.3, in the literature on radicalisation, an important distinction is drawn between (violent) extremism - seen as the end point of radicalisation - and radicalism, which is understood as the active support for fundamental - system-changing - political change employing extra-institutional means (Beck, 2015: 18-20). Although radicals, like extremists, may or may not engage in political violence, their rejection of the status quo is generally viewed as non-problematic (Schmid, 2013: 9; Bartlett and Miller, 2012: 2). Schmid's (2013: 9-10) distinction between 'radicals' and 'extremists' is based on his understanding of their fundamentally different personality traits and social orientation. He describes 'radicals' as open-minded, accepting of diversity and believing in the power of reason rather than dogma while characterising 'extremists' as closed-minded and seeking to create a homogeneous society based on rigid, dogmatic ideological tenets, which suppresses all opposition and subjugates minorities (ibid.). In the context of democratic societies, he says, (violent) extremist groups, movements and parties tend to have a political programme that is: anti-constitutional, anti-democratic, anti-pluralist, authoritarian; fanatical, intolerant, non-compromising, single-minded; rejecting the rule of law while adhering to an ends-justify-means philosophy; and aiming to realise their goals by any means, including the use of political violence against opponents (ibid.). The question addressed in this subsection relates to where individuals in the milieu are placed in relation to this distinction between radicals and extremists. The characteristics Schmid identifies regarding the use of political violence against opponents were discussed in Section 4.1.2 and support for anti-constitutional, anti-democratic and authoritarian political programmes will be discussed in Section 4.3. In this section, therefore, we consider the specific psychological distinction in outlook Schmid makes between '*open-minded*' radicals (who accept diversity and believe in the power of reason) and '*closed-minded*' extremists (who are single-minded, black-or-white thinkers, intolerant, non-compromising and prefer giving orders over dialogue).

While Schmid sees the radical/extremist distinction as applying across a range of extremisms (left-wing, right-wing, religious-fundamentalist or ethno-nationalist), the association of closed-mindedness and right-wing extremism has a long-established history, rooted in evolving theories of the authoritarian personality (Adorno et al., 1950; Altemeyer, 1981), dogmatism (Rokeach, 2015 [1960]) and prejudice

(Allport, 1979 [1954]: 9). Today it is ‘closed mindedness’ that is most closely associated with extremism. In psychological terms, closed mindedness is understood as an orientation to the world which inclines individuals towards seeking clear-cut knowledge of their social realities rooted in the prevailing consensus, intolerance of ambiguity, need for closure²³, uncertainty avoidance and aggressive intolerance towards challenges to their worldviews from members of out-groups (Kruglanski, 2004: 56). While identifications with an in-group as distinct from various out-groups is routine, Berger (2018: 44-48) suggests extremist movements are distinct in that their affirmation of the merits of an in-group (such as pride in a heritage or the values of a religion) is accompanied by evolving out-group definitions, starting with categorisation (exclusion from the in-group) and escalating as the in-group develops a more and more negative view of the out-group. Thus, extremists, he says (ibid.), are distinguished by the belief that an in-group’s success or survival is integrally connected to the need for hostile action - ranging from verbal attacks to discriminatory behaviour and violence - against an out-group and a call to action.

In Section 4.1.1, it was noted that, with one exception, respondents in this study used the notion of ‘extremism’ and ‘radicalism’ interchangeably and identified with neither; both were seen as pejorative labels (wrongly) applied to them, or as describing ‘others’ (Islamist and Left-wing groups as well as some ‘genuinely’ extreme right-wing actors). The single exception is Will who, choosing his words carefully, states: ‘I didn’t say I wasn’t radical. I did say I wasn’t extreme’. Indeed, Will’s own definition of a radical opinion as ‘one that’s not mainstream in present days’ and his aim to fundamentally shift hegemonic discourse is fully in tune with Beck’s (2015: 18) understanding of radicalism as a ‘contention that is outside the common routines of politics present within a society oriented towards substantial change in social, cultural, economic, and/or political structures, and undertaken by any actor using extra-institutional means’. ‘Radical’ goals and ideas, Beck argues, must involve changing society or social trends but can be a feature of the political right as well as the political left (ibid: 19) and radical action can be undertaken by anyone - individuals, organisations, movements or governments - as long as it uses extra-institutional means. Thus Beck (2015: 41) sees radicals as potentially coming from any segment in society and whether or not a particular social group is supportive of radicalism is more dependent on social and historical context than on any general rules. Applying the same logic, Will considers that, today, ‘being a traditional conservative is quite radical, in the present sense, because you’re at odds with the mainstreams of society’.

Although Will is the only respondent in this study to draw the conclusion that he may be a ‘radical’ rather than an ‘extremist’, many more would align with his view. His difference from others in the milieu is, arguably, less one of substance than that his degree in Psychology and engagement with a wide range of political thought from the study of new social movements through the French new right to both left- and right-wing versions of ‘accelerationism’ (see Section 4.3 and footnote 31) afford him a different place from which to speak. For other respondents, ‘radical’ is understood as no more than a synonym for extreme; a category attached to actors on the right to de-legitimise their ideas and close down the space for their expression. Thus, regardless of the lack of ‘claim’ to radicalism across the milieu, the way in which respondents talk about how they see the world gives reason to investigate in more depth just how far respondents in the study conform to the understanding set out above of the closed-minded right wing extremist, seeking clear-cut knowledge of their social realities, intolerant of ambiguity, needing closure, avoiding uncertainty and showing aggressive intolerance towards challenges to their worldviews from members of out-groups. Indeed, in the one direct reference to the psychological trait open/closed mindedness among respondents, Jacob (who had also studied Psychology at the Open University) states

²³ As a psychological measure, ‘need for closure’ is understood to be a motivated psychological state (as opposed to a fixed personality trait or type) comprising five dispositions: preference for order, structure and predictability; desire for secure and stable knowledge that is unchallenged by exceptions; desire to reach swift and firm decisions; sense of discomfort with ambiguity; and closed-mindedness (unwillingness to have their knowledge challenged) (Webster and Kruglanski, 1994: 1050).

‘I’m apparently high in trait openness’. Due to the ethnographic approach of this study, it is impossible to ‘test’, in any robust way, for psychological dispositions related to open or closed-mindedness. Rather, below, the implications of spontaneous references among respondents to openness and closedness are explored in relation to: dialogue; disagreement; difference; and contradictions, ambivalences or challenges to their views.

4.1.3.1 Openness and closedness to dialogue

During our first interview in May 2018, Dan reminded me of his initiative to seek dialogue with an Imam at his local mosque and how it had left him wanting more:

And I had the Imam of me local mosque out, speaking to him one-on-one, and he was an all right fella – shook me hand. Speaking to him outside the mosque, and he agreed with me like. He said, ‘Do you know, I think you’re right what you’re saying.’ And that’s what, all it takes is a little discussion, you know what I mean. Even, even now, where tensions are high. That’s why I’ve always said to you Hilary, I’d like to actually sit opposite a radical Muslim or someone with thoughts of being radical and have a talk with them, and just find out why, why it is he feels that way, you know what I mean. (Dan)

This openness to dialogue, especially with the ‘out-group’ appeared to directly contradict the expectation of closed-minded right-wing extremists and was reciprocated by individuals in the parallel study of the ‘Islamist’ milieu conducted in the UK as part of the DARE project. This inspired the researchers from the University of Manchester DARE team to set up a series of ‘mediated dialogues’ (facilitated by trained conflict resolution practitioners), which brought together three participants in each milieu to do exactly what Dan suggested; have a talk with each other. Prior to, and after, the dialogues, interviews were conducted with the participants and, with their agreement, included in the DARE materials for analysis. The experience of the dialogues has been published as a research to practice discussion paper (see: Hussain et al., 2019) and the process and outcomes are not discussed here. While the inclusion of these materials, where respondents were directly anticipating and reflecting on their participation in such dialogue, means the reference to openness (to dialogue, disagreement, difference) is greater in the data set than it otherwise might have been, these individuals (Dan, Gareth and Mikey) are not outliers in the milieu; similar outlooks are found widely across the respondent set. Moreover, these were not artificial scenarios devised by the researchers to ‘test’ for a particular psychological trait. The expression of the desire to engage in dialogue came from participants; the researchers simply provided a mediated space to explore and challenge their own openness; a space to which respondents would otherwise not have had access. Nevertheless, for the sake of fully informed interpretation of the findings presented, where the views expressed were in the context of anticipating or reflecting on participation in those mediated dialogues, this is stated.

The vast majority of respondents talk about their openness rather than closedness to dialogue. For some respondents this ‘dialogue’ is expressed more mundanely as ‘having a conversation’ but it similarly expresses the readiness for open and honest engagement with an ‘other’, with whom you anticipate disagreement, and in which you not only demand to be heard, but are open to listening. As Gareth puts it, in a discussion prior to his participation in the mediated dialogue process, disagreement and dialogue are crucial because that is how you challenge and, potentially, change your own beliefs:

We [indicating his friend Dan] very rarely agree, but it’s through disagreement and dialogue is where like you can have your beliefs changed. Because if you just go through life not having anything challenged, then you’re gonna stick to that belief system and you’re gonna have strength in that belief system. [...] it’s always nice to have the possibility of someone changing your mind. On anything. (Gareth)

He goes on to insist that it is vital you do not enter any discussion ‘closed-minded’ because that way ‘you don’t create a discussion but an argument’ (Gareth). When I first met Gareth, through Dan of whom he is a close childhood friend, he was about to embark on studying for a Law degree with the Open University and, in their friendly banter, he adopted the role of ‘thinker’ to Dan’s ‘activist’. He illustrates this with reference to social media, where, he says, ‘I don’t feel the need to get me point across’:

It's if they challenge me on something I believe, but it's more like in person. 'Cause there's arguments on social media that's not worth anyone's time really. Do you know what I mean? Especially I wouldn't argue with someone who's closed-minded and only like seeing their way. Because if they're not open to like have their mind changed, well then... [...] they live in their little bubbles of what they do like. Do you know what I mean? So I just think it's a bit all like too much for me so I just if I'm challenged on me belief systems or whatever, then personally I'll defend them. But other than that like I don't care to like impose them on other people. (Gareth)

Mikey, the third of three respondents to participate in the mediated dialogue process, discusses his existing experience of ‘dialogue’ from chatting with other volunteers at a homelessness charity:

Now, myself, we, we volunteer, sort of feeding the homeless in Birmingham once a week. And quite a few of the volunteers are Muslims themselves. And we have this conversation with them, and we actually learn quite a lot about Islam and the culture that we didn't really know before. [...] And they sort of learn about a lot of our concerns and think, 'Okay.' And that sort of, you know, you've got those, the boundaries coming down, and you sort of, you appreciate what the concerns are. You still might not necessarily agree with each other, but you, you've got that dialogue there going forward. (Mikey)

Echoing a key trope in the discussion of respondents’ own views on how to counter extremism (see Section 4.2.4), Mikey says that just ‘having the conversation’ is a crucial step to understanding and accepting difference. In an interview in advance of the mediated dialogue, he says, ‘we learn from just sitting down and asking “Well why do you believe that? Or why does me believing this offend you? How does it affect...?”’ (Mikey).

Tonya, makes the same point as Gareth (above) about her lack of need to change somebody else’s mind through such conversations; it is the exchange of views that interests her. As she puts it, ‘[...] people think I'm trying to convert or change their mind or whatever. It's like, “No, I just want to have a conversation. This is what I find interesting.”’ (Tonya). However, she goes on to say that people often fail to recognise that conversations mean *listening* as well as speaking. ‘If people were to open up their ears a bit more’, she says, ‘you're more likely to expand on your world view or your opinions, or you can learn a different perspective’ (Tonya). The importance of going into things with an open mind and being open to hearing the other person’s view is also one of the positives Mikey takes from his experience of participating in the mediated dialogue. He reflects, afterwards, that he was happy that people went into it wanting constructive dialogue and there was no heated debate or arguments. He had kept in contact with two of the Muslim participants afterwards and said it had encouraged him to find out more about Islam and associate more with Muslims; ‘That's actually brought some of the barriers down, to be honest’, he says.

Participants in the research, however, also reported negative attitudes to dialogue. Generally these related to negative experiences of attempts to engage in dialogue. Cara, an elected council representative at the time of interview, for example, had agreed to engage in a ‘frank conversation’ with people at the Islamic Centre, at the invitation of the BBC but, afterwards, felt she had been ‘lied to’. At the more everyday level, Robbie says that he now avoids discussing political issues with people because they do not even give you the respect to hear you out before they tell you, ‘you’re wrong’:

New Year's Eve, I was at a party. I had my badges on. And someone came up to me and was looking at them and says, 'So what's the DFLA then?' And I knew just summat, the way he said it, I knew he knew who they were. So I gave him the explanation, 'We're a sort of like, we're just a group of lads that march to make... you know, to raise awareness to certain causes.' And that was it. After I finished my explanation, he says, 'No, you're just a bunch of racists. Racists, far right. Don't talk to me. Blah, blah, blah.' Gave me a load of abuse. I just sort of stood there and took it, 'cause I didn't want to cause a scene. And then he walked off. That's what it's like. People, they give you their opinion and then leave before you can tell them... (Robbie)

Of course, there is a certain self-selectivity about respondents in this study who were all, by definition, open enough to engage with the researcher despite her university affiliation positioning her, for them, as part of the hegemonic liberal elite (see Section 3.2). Indeed, individuals who refused to participate in the research did so precisely because they saw 'nothing for us to gain by creating a dialogue with you' (Field diary, 24.08.1018). Dan also reported some push back from the wider milieu after his participation in the mediated dialogue. While he felt 'happy with myself' because, despite feeling some views he heard were 'a bit extreme', he had 'listened to them and gave them a chance', the posts he made about the event generated a mixed response including some criticism of him for engaging at all (Field diary, 21-30.01.2019). Dan's reaction, however, was not to regret either participating or even making public his engagement but anger at his own milieu for not recognising the importance of finding a dialogic way out of what he saw as the current critical situation:

Tbh its making me hate how naïve and negative some people are! I still feel the same way I do about Islam and that wont change but the last thing I want is a full blown war with people and thousands if not millions of lives lost because at the minute its heading that way! (Text message recorded in Field diary, 21-30.01.2019).

This call for dialogue is the single most frequently mentioned response to radical messages among the respondents in this study and is returned to below (see Section 4.2.3).

4.1.3.2 Openness and closedness to disagreement

Respondents uniformly expressed their openness to disagreement. A common refrain in these spontaneous statements is the importance of recognising that you can disagree with the views of a person but still respect, and like, them. Mikey expresses this below:

[...] even though you obviously strongly disagree with what another person thinks, you can still respect the individual for having a different belief to you. [...] And I think that's, that's the difference there. So instead of everyone trying to be politically correct and say, "You must respect that person's beliefs or views," I think just, you know, be a bit more flexible, allow some criticism, accept the fact that not everyone's gonna like what you stand for. But you can still respect them as an individual for believing something different to yourself, and I strongly believe that's how everyone's gonna get on. (Mikey)

Another theme is about the importance of robust debate that allows disagreement but does not descend into anger, abuse or heated argument. Jason describes being 'upset' by the experience of being frequently threatened, abused or 'called' for his views and seeks a way of debating without arguing:

I try to agree, that we can agree to disagree, but when they keep calling you and that. It's easier to walk away; it's the polite thing to do. I don't like it. I don't like arguing with people, I try and be polite. But debating and arguing are very different. (Jason)

Gareth says that he is taking what he has learnt from disagreeing with his friend Dan into the dialogue context. This respondent transposes that principle of maintaining respect regardless of disagreement as he approaches the dialogue event:

I'm probably one of Dan's biggest critics. And even though we have our like clashes and our disagreements, there's always that mutual respect, where like he's still one of my best mates, do you know what I mean? And that will never change, no matter what position he holds. I'll just challenge him on it, and then I'll tell him my position. And then maybe we can see where we disagree, and then where we agree, and then we can move forward. I think the biggest part of this project is let's move forward, but let's not be as isolated. Let's take that and push it to our further communities. And then maybe community leaders, or become community leaders even. And then build on that aspect, and then create a dynamic to where we can have disagreement, we can challenge each other's views, but do it in a way that is holding the integrity of like respect throughout the conversation and throughout the debate. (Gareth)

Mikey explains that on the DFLA Facebook page, the policy is to allow disagreement as long as it is kept respectful and not aggressive. This is his guiding principle as he anticipates participation in the mediated dialogue event which, he says he is going into with an open mind, expecting to disagree but to have 'a constructive conversation' not 'a heated argument where people are often talking over each other, being condescending, shouting at each other' (Mikey).

Again it is important to be aware of the self-selectivity of the respondent set and compare respondents in this study to the wider milieu. Jason, for example, recalls being frustrated at people on his own 'side' who have 'yelled' at people with different views:

[...] I've seen them start yelling at people that have gone past. And there's no need. It happens on both sides of politics. And I basically said, 'There's no need for that.' And I went over and apologised myself to the people, 'cause I don't care, we have different views - we need to embrace that and stop trying to pull people down. You don't make yourself shine brighter by putting out other people's lights. (Jason)

I also experienced the contradictory impulses around tolerance of opposing views whilst attending a pro-Brexit demonstration during fieldwork. Demonstrators affiliated to the DFLA (although not respondents in this study) next to whom I was standing began to be verbally aggressive to another person in the crowd:

Behind me an argument breaks out as one young man makes some comment about being pro-Remain and others (West Ham football fans) tell him to 'f*** off' if he thinks that. The guy tries to argue that you don't need to agree with everything that is said to be at the rally but the football lads are not listening and continue to call him a 'c***' until he eventually moves away. After that they start talking among themselves and establish that among them are West Ham and Millwall fans and laugh about how the DFLA has brought them together and that they never would have thought that could happen. They then laugh about how it will all be different when they meet at the football next time [...] (Field diary, Brexit Betrayal demo, 29.03.2019)

In thinking about the multiple contradictions in this scenario, it is worth noting Kruglanski's (2004: 58) understanding of the need for closure not as a stable personality disposition but as potentially affected by a wide variety of situational circumstances. Thus openness to difference, challenge (from rival fans) may be tolerated, even celebrated, in situations of the binding force of opposition to a bigger 'other' while having an apparent representative of that oppressive power within what had been thought of as a 'safe space' is not.

4.1.3.3 Openness and closedness to difference

As noted above, closed-mindedness is understood in psychological terms as an orientation to the world which includes aggressive intolerance towards any challenge to one's own worldviews from members of out-groups (Kruglanski, 2004: 56) and both closed-mindedness and intolerance are seen by Schmid (2013: 9-10) as characteristics of the 'extremist' (but not the 'radical'). This is because 'need for closure' (of which closed-mindedness is one component) is associated with a focus on one's own group and the stereotyping, derogation and support for violence against out-groups (Kruglanski and Orehek, 2012: 12). In exploring expressions of openness or closedness to difference, therefore, we are exploring a general disposition towards 'others'.

When talking about openness to people with different worldviews, some participants mention this in relation to political outlook. Alice, for example, expresses an interest in getting people together from opposing 'sides' but talking about everything *except* politics to see what happens. Robbie has effectively already tried this; he talks to his anti-fascist punk friends and they understand each other.

In practice, however, most respondents in this study relate to difference in terms of ethnicity or faith. Billy, who comes from a strong Protestant and Loyalist background explains how he had married 'across the peace line' while Robbie and Johnny talk about having grown up alongside 'gypsies' and always got on fine with them. Indeed Johnny, at another point in the interview talks about his frustration with how the local traveller community is negatively stereotyped. Adam goes beyond 'tolerance' to talk about a proactive desire to engage with and learn about people:

I would speak to anyone, I'm, even, when I'm at work and I work in factories, they're predominantly foreign, EU Nationals. You will have some Pakistanis there, Africans, so I purposely go out of my way to learn things about people, their nationalities, how they integrate. (Adam)

Reflecting on what he had learned about himself from the mediated dialogue in which he participated, Dan says he had learned that he is more tolerant than he thinks. He had been told he was intolerant for years - due to his activism - and had begun to believe it but the dialogue had shown otherwise.

I thought to myself, 'Well, I am a bit, I am tolerant, yeah.' People have called me intolerant for years, and I actually started to think I was a bit, but then that [the 'mediated dialogue'] happened, so... And I will be doing a lot more of it. I love doing it. (Dan)

This response is indicative of just how deeply engrained the association of extremism (especially right-wing extremism) with particular personality traits has become but also the importance of the dynamics of situations in precipitating or dissipating extremist attitudes and behaviours. Not everything had gone smoothly in the dialogue. As Dan puts it, 'When I first walked in and I started arguing with Mo John and that, and I thought, "Oh, this is gonna go tits up, this."'. However, as it progressed, it became clear that the dialogue had set up a space for non-judgmental interaction allowing the participants to recognise themselves in each other:

[...] when I said ISIS was Islam, I thought, I thought then it was gonna go sour, but it never, to be fair. [...] He [Mo John] was just saying it wasn't Islam. And I just said, 'Well, Saudi Arabia's Islam as well.' But he wouldn't have it. But like I said, he was more on my level. 'Cause I spoke to him outside, when I was having a smoke, and he was just like me. He was. Really was like me. But he was Muslim, followed the religion and that, but everything about him was me, so... I liked him, to be honest. (Dan)

Closedness to difference is only directly expressed by one respondent who says that people seek commonalities not differences and are more comfortable with their 'own'. This makes him open to those, of different ethnicities, who also want to stick to their 'own'.

PAUL: Human beings are happier, more contented, more at ease when they are around people who look like them, people who act like them, people who have shared belief systems, common goals. Because people naturally like to be around people who have similar, similarities with them.

INT: Maybe some people do, and some people like difference. I mean, could it not just be that actually there are different kinds of people?

PAUL: No, people don't like difference. People like commonalities.

As explored in more detail in Section 4.3, this is part of Paul's 'race-based outlook on the world', which gives him 'a shared interest with people of all different cultures and colours, who feel the same way about their people as I feel about mine'. The difference, as he sees it, is that 'they are allowed to express that'.

4.1.3.4 Openness and closedness to contradiction, ambivalence and challenge

Respondents in this milieu generally see the willingness to challenge your own views, or have them challenged, as a positive human quality. Tonya, for example, admires her friend in the milieu, Alice, for being able to relate to both far right and far left. In sharp contrast to a sense of discomfort with ambiguity characteristic of a need for closure (Webster and Kruglanski, 1994: 1050), Tonya admires Alice's capacity to see things as 'not black and white':

So like she [Alice] is, she can see things from a, from the middle ground; it's not black and white. And I like that she's able to kind of bring the very, what I would consider, far right, and the far left, she can somehow relate to them. (Tonya)

Tonya herself finds being on one side or the other, labelling people as left or right is not helpful; it brings out the worst in people and alienates people from one another. She had stopped attending milieu rallies and demonstrations precisely because she felt it was stifling her openness to challenges. She had come to realise that going to rallies just validated her opinion rather than challenging it. Now she sought out different and challenging views because 'it's just so much more fun and engaging. The conversation lasts longer; it's not just a nod and, 'Yeah' and 'Uh'.' A particularly illustrative moment is when Tonya talks about a conversation with her friend Alice that had helped her work through some of her own ambivalent feelings about transgender:

I don't know how we got onto this subject, but we were speaking about the trans issue of trans women being let into changing rooms and all that. And Alice was saying, she just randomly kind of got up and had a big rant about how she hates how a man can probably just self-identify as a woman and assume to know what it is like to live their whole life as a woman. [...] and she also brought up that she wasn't comfortable with trans women being in the changing rooms of women. And I'd kind of like reluctantly shook my head. Because that was like, that was an opinion I'd held for a while. But it's like they're not all the same. There are some who are genuinely just trying to live their lives as happy as they can be. But there are many instances where people abuse the identity of being trans, just to get their way with women or whatever. It happens. And it's those small few who ruin it for the rest. Because it is too big of a risk to take, to me. So I was with [names other respondent with pseudonym Alice] and I was like, 'Thank you for saying that because now I don't feel mean for thinking that.' (Tonya)

As noted in Section 4.1.3.1 Gareth also sees the capacity to change your mind as a vital human quality while his friend, Dan, enters the mediated dialogue with the aim of challenging himself:

[...] that's what I like, that's what I want to sit round the table on. Because you'll never know what could... you could talk to someone and before you know, you're getting on. Know

what I mean. That's what I just want to test meself. That's what I'm doing this for – to challenge my views a bit. (Dan)

In fact Dan was challenged by the dialogue although not so much in an ideational way but a quite visceral one. This is expressed in Dan's reflection on his reaction when one of the Muslim participants (Mo John who he felt was 'just like me') recited a call to prayer. He says, as he listened, 'My heart was going like mad all the way through'. Later, when reflecting on this in a post-event interview, he explains the very contradictory emotions the experience brought.

I'll tell you what was positive from my, my view, 'cause I was surprised I didn't do anything like... I wasn't angry. I didn't feel angry or nothing. But when Mo John done a call to prayer, that's another thing that stuck into my head, to be honest. I don't like it. I don't agree with Islam, but it was, like I said to you, it was very... I can't describe what the feeling was when I was listening to it. Part of me wanted to jump up and scream, but part of me was like, 'That's actually peaceful, like a peaceful sound.' I liked the sound. But that stuck in my head as well, actually. I've never heard anyone do it like that. (Dan)

This powerful reaction was because of the centrality of reading the Qur'an for himself in Dan's understanding of his own trajectory into activism. This new association of it with a 'peaceful sound' might not have changed his views or attitudes but it had widened his reference points for understanding what it, and Islam as a faith more broadly, means.

Although no respondents were consciously negative about openness to contradiction or challenging their views, Jacob seemed quite instrumental in his support for it. Again, how this relates to his wider world view is discussed in Section 4.3, here it is just noted that Jacob's encouragement of openness to alternative views is as a means to 'self-development' that will, in the end, further 'the movement':

[...] once I've found someone's position, then I'll start coaching them to the other end of their... their opposite. So I'll ask questions like, 'Okay, what do you think [is] the strongest argument your opponent has on that topic?' And I'll try and encourage empathy, because I want to expand people's thinking. [...] For self-development purposes. [...] the movement is full of conspiracy theorists. It's full of people that have become obsessed with these potential risks and dangers that they're faced with. And I believe that when you become too entrenched, as conspiracy theorists often do, that it's not good for their self-development. It's not good for the movement in general, because they come across as crazy, obsessed people. (Jacob)

In this section, the key distinction made by Schmid (2013) between radicalism and extremism has been explored and the question raised as to why respondents in this milieu are considered to be 'radicals' rather than 'extremists' from neither an emic nor an etic perspective. It has been suggested that while, in theory, Schmid's distinctions are anticipated to apply across different forms of radicalism/extremism (right-wing, left-wing, religious, ethno-nationalist), in practice the over-determination of studies of the right by variations of 'authoritarian personality' models mean that, while radicals might share characteristics with (violent) extremists such as a sense of discrimination and alienation from the state, they are attributed with a different mind-set. This is imbibed. Jermaine, a respondent who identified as a 'former', having started to work in CVE following a Prevent intervention, adopts this language to say of himself that he 'never really had no far right mind-set'.

Does it matter that respondents in this study feel labelled 'far right extremists' and do not, with one exception, identify as 'radicals'? It does if, as suggested above, crucial distinguishing factors such as open/closed-mindedness prove to be misapplied. At the theoretical level, there may be grounds for revisiting this distinction given the recognition that 'need for closure' is not a fixed personality trait or type but subject to situational influences and external cultural factors (Kruglanski and Webster, 1996: 266;

Onraet et al., 2011: 194). Moreover, there is some emerging evidence that the tendency of individuals high in ‘need for closure’ towards categorical processing can, paradoxically, result in increased sensitivity to new and unexpected information (Kemmelmeyer, 2015). Finally, when it comes to engaging effective measures for countering violent extremism, for Schmid (ibid.:10) distinguishing extremists from radicals is crucial since while ‘radicalism is redeemable’, i.e. radical militants can be brought back into the mainstream, extremist militants are much less open to this. Thus, potentially, misrecognising open minds for closed ones also means lost opportunities for engaging young people in positive ways to address social concerns in an open and dialogic manner.

4.2 Radicalisation and non-radicalisation trajectories

There is no agreed definition of ‘radicalisation’ (Neumann, 2013: 874) but it is widely understood to refer to *the process* by which individuals or groups come to embrace attitudes, or engage in actions, that support violence in the pursuit of extremist causes. This makes its definition path-dependent upon what is understood as ‘extremism’; in particular whether the definition of ‘extremism’ referred to includes attitudinal or only behavioural extremism (see Section 4.1). Bartlett and Miller (2012: 2), for example, consider radicalisation that leads to violence and radicalisation that does not lead to violence to be two distinguishable phenomena and this sharp delineation of violence as a threshold that should not be crossed prevails in the milieu studied here. This makes the description of individual trajectories as either ‘radicalisation’ or ‘non-radicalisation’ problematic. If we understand radicalisation as a process whose end point is violent extremism, then this milieu is a potentially fascinating case study of non-radicalisation, where ‘non-radicalisation’ is understood as the ‘resistance to violent extremism’ among ‘those individuals who have been exposed to radical ideologies and even flirted with radical mind-sets, but ultimately have rejected violence’ (Cragin, 2014: 342). However, since the movements respondents belong to, and a number of individual respondents personally, are routinely referred to by anti-extremism campaign groups as right-wing extremists and some have served, or are serving, prison sentences for violent disorder related to their activism, the notion of ‘non-radicalisation’ does not fit neatly either. For this reason, and in the context of the lengthy discussion of what constitutes extremism and the thresholds individuals associated with the passage into extremism in Section 4.1, the discussion of radicalisation in this section is undertaken from the position that it can end in either violence or non-violence. Moreover, it is not the end point that is the focus of attention, but rather the reflexive process of encounters with, responses to and brakes on radicalisation in which individuals engage.

Thus this section starts by considering what actors in this milieu themselves understand by ‘radicalisation’ and then, drawing on findings only in relation to radicalisation in the right-wing milieu²⁴, it focuses in on the processes of radicalisation including its identified causes or agents, respondents encounters and responses to radical messages, and finally the implications of this for countering radicalisation.

4.2.1 Understandings of radicalisation: causes and agents

The term ‘radicalisation’ in public, policy and academic discourse has been primarily associated with Islamist terrorism; prior to the September 11 attacks, the term was used infrequently and without a fixed conceptual framework (Neumann and Kleinmann, 2013: 362). This association is reflected in the milieu under study here for whom the single most salient association with the term ‘radicalisation’ was the perceived problem of Islamist radicalisation in prisons. In contrast, respondents often had to be prompted to reflect on whether radicalisation also happened in right-wing milieus. The term ‘radicalisation’ was generally alien to respondents and only two gave any general or abstract ‘definition’ of it. Interestingly these two references reflect exactly the conceptual dispute over ‘radicalisation’ in the academic field,

²⁴ As discussed in Section 4.1, the primary reference to ‘radicalisation’ among respondents in this milieu relates to ‘others’ i.e. Islamist radicalisation and radicalisation of the Left.

namely whether the term should be used in an *absolute* sense (pinned to a fixed outcome i.e. terrorism or violent extremist behaviour) or as a *relative* concept, i.e. a shift to a more radical position regardless of whether that leads to something that would be called 'extremist' or 'violent extremist' *and* whether that extremism is manifest in behaviour or ideas (Sedgwick, 2010). Thus, on the one hand, Mikey, pins 'radicalisation' precisely to the process of passing over the threshold into violent extremism:

I think, where radicalisation kicks in, is where you take it to the next level instead of just opposing something or disagreeing with something. You then actively seek out to persecute or even kill people of an opposing ideal. (Mikey)

And at the other end of the spectrum, Will sees radicalisation as not attached to an end point at all but simply a shift along a continuum, or, as he puts it, 'I view it [radicalisation] as a route to a view rather than a route to extremism'. He illustrates this with the following reflection:

I remember reading an essay in the kind of run up to Brexit by... she was she was, I think she was an MEP a Conservative MEP and she described how Michael Gove radicalised her on the issue of the EU and I think it's when you... radicalisation is people gaining a sense of mission. You can be radicalised to something that's not radical. (Will)

When talking concretely about radicalisation, and in relation to the right-wing milieu, respondents' narratives include reference to 'causes' and various 'agents' of radicalisation. At a general level, these narratives of what lies behind radicalisation are notable for being framed in terms of 'agents', and expression of agency or denial of political agency, rather than as 'drivers'. This appears to suggest that respondents see social and political processes, including radicalisation as driven not by structural forces but institutions or personified powers (such as political elites). Indeed, McCauley and Moskalenko (2008: 430) recognise that ten of twelve mechanisms of radicalisation that they identify are reactive in nature in as much as they 'begin from and depend on a dynamic of opposition in which the significant events are the actions of others'. It is clear from respondents' narratives in this study also that these 'actors' are not only identified 'out-groups' or oppositional non-formal actors, as are often the focus of studies of 'competitive escalation' (della Porta, 2014) or reciprocal radicalisation (Knott et al., 2018), but include state and institutional actors. The reactive or interactional nature of radicalisation is considered in Section 4.2.3 in the context of exploring responses to radical messages. First the 'causes' and 'agents' associated with radicalisation by respondents are outlined.

Two main 'causes' of radicalisation are talked about in respondents' narratives: anger and frustration; and the denial of political voice. Violence happens, it is posited, when people get angry and frustrated. A range of different reasons for that anger are suggested: not being able to 'speak about Islam'; people seeing their communities 'dying in front of their eyes' (due to immigration); the equation of the expression of (white) English identity with racism; and attacks on people who are voicing legitimate concerns. Two examples of how such anger or frustration can lead to radicalisation are given by Cara and Dan:

People are starting to get really frustrated. And that is when violence will happen. But people are going to get angry, and violence is going to happen, so long as we are constantly up against this brick wall when it comes to speaking about Islam. That's when you get people radicalising. (Cara)

In the context of describing the case of a man who had been sacked after 32 years working in the NHS for attending a demo, Dan writes:

[...] now you have a man sacked after 32 years for simply attending a demonstration now he has no job what's he got to lose? They are turning people into caged animals and we are about to break out of them cages. Even me for example im not going about it the wrong way I aint out there attacking innocent Muslims or vandalizing mosques etc no im trying to go about it the right way have my voice heard and make a change for the better but ive

constantly got police on my back and it is making me more angry. (Dan, recorded in Field diary, 06.09.2018)

These reflections already presage the other main cause of radicalisation on the right discussed by respondents; people being silenced and denied political voice. The older respondent included in this study, Craig, believes the denial of political voice is one of the main causes of radicalisation:

I think that's one of the biggest dangers that we're facing. Not that there's anyone sinister in these groups. But if a political voice and a political analysis is not allowed, because it's deemed to be too extreme or whatever, where do those people go and what do they do if they're not allowed a political voice? (Craig)

Paul, who is in his late thirties and has been involved in the milieu for many years also says that if liberals and the left shut down people expressing normal views then that is what 'radicalises' people (Paul, recorded in Field diary, 15.05.2019). A number of respondents talk either about social media bans or, for example, attacks on the election campaign by Tommy Robinson as examples of such attempts to silence legitimate views. Talking about social media bans and potential prohibition of marches, Dan fears that this would push people into more radical actions:

But if they ban them, I think you'd get a lot more people going, 'Well yeah, we can't go out and march or...' That's why even with social media, taking them off social media, you're just fuelling the fire, to be fair. That's what I think. What would you rather do, someone go on and have a little rant on Facebook, or someone go out and blow a mosque up? You know what I mean. [...] I think social media and marches do help people get their anger out, yeah, I do. Like I said, I do think if they back, they're pushing people into a corner, you know what I mean. (Dan)

Radicalisation is said to be fuelled not only by the denial of the expression of one's views, however, but also the failure to be listened to. Billy, angry at the rejection by parliament of the Brexit deal, says people become radical when they see that democracy is a lie:

[...] you want to know why people become radicalised. When the masses see that democracy is a lie, that they can't get what they desire through that lie, when MPs go against the people's demands then they will seek other means. That's when they will become radical... (Billy, cited in Field diary, 11.03.2019)

Jason also says it causes people to be radical, when they're not listened to:

Our system, we have a democracy and we have to maintain that. But if people won't listen to us, sometimes the only way to restore that is to stand up, to be more radicalised, to an extent. It causes people to be radical, when they're not listened to, when they're ignored. (Jason)

Paul hosts a weekly talk show (with around 90,000 subscribers at time of interview), which he sees as his means to reaching out and 'mentoring' young men who might otherwise take more radical routes. He is particularly frustrated with what he sees as state and corporation attempts to shut down social media space for communication by claiming messages encountered there are somehow causally responsible for the radicalisation of others. Having had material taken down, he is keen to argue that his material exposes problems and explicitly proposes non-violent solutions and thus must be allowed. Reflecting on his own potential accountability for influencing people who might conduct acts of violent extremism even if he was not explicitly encouraging them to do so, he argues that causality can be imagined everywhere - between people watching horror films or playing computer games and murders or school shootings for example - but this cannot be allowed to stop freedom of speech otherwise 'you've just got a nanny state

and a society that's not worth living in'. When directly asked about the potential for one of those people he influences to do something crazy, he says:

I'd be very disappointed if somebody went and did that. But ultimately, people have free agency and I can't be held any more accountable for somebody who does something foolish, to the people who made Doom or Call of Duty or Friday 13th or Nightmare on Elm Street or, you know, any number of films or computer games or other items of media. [...] are people who print bibles held up for people who go out and start religious cults based on teachings from the bible? Are people who print Qur'ans liable for people who read it and interpret it in a certain way and go and blow up something? No, they're not. And I can't be held accountable for mine. The only difference between what I say and what the Qur'an says, is the Qur'an does actually advocate for violence, whereas I don't. I do not, have never, and will never advocate for violent means. And I make that very clear. And if somebody did something, who had been watching my videos, I would be disappointed, but I wouldn't feel as if I'd done anything wrong. In fact, I would feel as if, 'Well maybe my video stopped other people doing this.' (Paul)

The responsibility for terrorist attacks by right wing actors such as Brenton Tarrant, Paul believes, thus lies not with him, but with those who take away the voice of angry people:

What upsets Hope Not Hate the most is actually patriots going out there and participating in the electoral system and getting people elected. Surely they should be happy about that. Surely they should be saying, 'You know what, there's legitimate concerns in this area and people acted like grown-up adults and participated in the political process.' But they don't want that. They try and run these people out of business. They try and break up these organisations. They try to push these people underground. Then when something crazy happens, like what happened in New Zealand, that isn't the fault of people like me, people who want to do things politically. That's the fault of people who took away the voice, the freedom of association, the freedom of speech. Took away any other form of discourse or recourse for angry people. They led to that, not me. (Paul)

It is clear from these references to the causes of radicalisation that it is not socio-economic structural factors but actors in the political sphere who are seen as the primary drivers of radicalisation. This question of structural drivers of radicalisation is explored in a more focused way in Section 4.5. Here we are concerned rather with the interactive process of radicalisation envisaged by respondents and, in particular, who the main actors in that interaction are perceived to be. The significant events and actions of others that McCauley and Moskalenko (2008: 430) propose can drive the dynamic of radicalisation are often terrorist attacks by 'others', where the others are Islamist radicals. However, these actions and 'others' can also be state and other actors associated with the state. As Schmid (2013: 18) states, central to the process of radicalisation is the movement towards political mobilisation outside the dominant political order because the existing system is no longer recognised as legitimate. This suggests that loss of legitimacy of the state is part of the radicalisation process; people who radicalise may not have an inherently anti-democratic position but have lost trust in the system. Loss of trust is deeply embedded in experiences of discrimination, itself perceived to be rooted in official institutions (Miller and Bartlett, 2012: 7-8; Pilkington, 2016: 154-76). This is discussed in detail in Section 4.3 along with a more detailed archaeology of those groups understood as 'ideologised others'. Below, this proposition is explored on the basis of direct references by respondents to state actors or institutions as drivers of radicalisation.

In the discussion of the state as a driver of radicalisation on the right, there are two main narratives: that the government, through its policies, is pushing people to the edge; and that this is exacerbated by curbing freedoms to speak out. Cara, in the context of discussing the Yellow Vests movement, says the situation is being stoked by state agencies, including the police: 'that's exactly what our government is doing -

pushing too far. Until people will just ignite.’ (Cara). Opening the speeches at the DFLA demonstration in Manchester, Gary Harris says they want to send a message to the government that it has pushed people far enough and the crowd strikes up a chant of ‘enough is enough’ (Field diary, DFLA demonstration, Manchester, 02.06.2018). Imogen, who campaigns against ‘forced adoption’ (having involuntarily lost access to both her children) says, in a way, whilst completely peaceful actions like the protest camp she has set up are ‘radical’, they feel ‘pushed to it by the state’ (Imogen, recorded in Field diary, 14.09.2019).

The state is seen as exacerbating radicalisation by failing to tackle the root causes of radicalisation (CL), not addressing the impact of terrorist attacks such as the murder of Lee Rigby (Dan) and currently ‘letting thousands of ISIS fighters back into this country’ (Dan). As discussed above, respondents also see the state’s policy of ‘silencing’ people as fuelling anger. In the period of fieldwork, a prime focus of debate was what was perceived to be the disproportionate, and counter-productive, response to the activism of Tommy Robinson. DT was motivated to become active by the arrest and imprisonment of Tommy Robinson in May 2018 (see Section 4.4.2), which he describes as a ‘total travesty’ that made him feel you are living in ‘a communist state’. Dan, says he fears Tommy Robinson will be killed by state agencies who believe he has too much power and influence:

DAN: [...] I can see him getting knocked off, Tommy Robinson. [...] Yeah. I can. I think he knows that himself. And I think when that, if that did happen, I think that's one of the ways a civil war could happen. But yeah, I can see them knocking him off, I can. He's got too much...

INT: Who's ‘them’?

DAN: [...] MI5, government, whoever does the dirty work these days. But he's got too much, got too much influence on people now, you know what I mean. He's got too much power I think for them. I don't think they'll like it, to be fair. Like I've just said, he could say he'll be here tomorrow, and there'll be thousands waiting for him. I don't think they like that.

For Paul, these two processes are intertwined; the ‘establishment’ stokes extremism through immigration of non-Europeans and denying freedom of speech to those who criticise this.

[...] I would say extremism is actually being stoked by the establishment on two different, in two different ways. Firstly, they are importing people who not only are very different to us Europeans, they have different value systems. But often people who hate our value systems and hate what we are, despise Christianity. They despise certain facets of western culture. And they come here, and that creates extremism, because it's a natural tendency. [...] But the establishment also stokes extremism by saying to anyone that says the things that I'm saying, 'You have no right to say that. You have no right to organise. You have no right to freedom of association, freedom of speech, freedom of expression. And when we take those things away from you, if we think you still hold those beliefs, we'll hound you. We'll make it so you can't get a job, we'll make it so you're a social pariah. We'll bring in laws that make sure you keep your mouth shut. So you can be dragged off in the middle of the night for just saying something to someone on Twitter.' (Paul)

This profound sense of inequality of political voice and its potential role in driving radicalisation is returned to in Section 4.5.4.

4.2.2 Encounters with radical messages

Radicalisation is largely associated in the minds of respondents with Islamist radicalisation and a small number of respondents deny that anything like radicalisation takes place in the right-wing milieu. Cara, for example, claims nobody justifies right-wing terrorist attacks such as that at Finsbury Park or the murder of MP Jo Cox; ‘Anyone I know’, she says ‘will say, ‘That's disgusting. It wasn't in my name. He didn't do anything for the cause that I stand for.’ She is making an implicit contrast here with Muslim

communities she feels fail to condemn Islamist terrorist attacks or resent the expectation that they should. Paul even claims that radicalisation on the right is often instigated by left-wing infiltrators who encourage people in the right-wing milieu to commit violent acts. He says he has been a target of this himself:

[...] the Left also inserts people into nationalism to divert nationalism. [...] more often than not, the undercover agent is the one who is endorsing violence. Because I've known people who are Hope not Hate plants, and they're the ones endorsing violence; trying to get other people to do violent acts. I've known people who are working for Hope not Hate, or it was revealed have been working for Hope not Hate, ring me up and ask me whether we should go and do something violent to try and sort of get a 'gotcha' on me. Well what is a group like that doing getting people to ring up nationalists, incite them to violence, so they can entrap them? That's not helpful. (Paul)

However, Paul also says that groups in the milieu - like National Action - are trying to radicalise people and older nationalists should try to stop that. Indeed, he is critical of what he calls an older generation of 'bitter people' in the nationalist movement 'who now live vicariously through younger people and it is right to shut those people down' (Paul).

Robbie says that people that carry out terrorist attacks like the shootings in Christchurch are 'definitely radicalised' and there are groups who push individuals towards certain videos on websites, but he has not personally encountered them. Dan says he had experienced attempts to radicalise him by neo-Nazis online (but never in person). Even Jermaine, who left the milieu after a Prevent intervention and is generally inclined to narrate his trajectory as a staircase of ever deepening engagement, thinks he himself was 'groomed' into the movement rather than 'radicalised' as such. The closest to an evocation of a radicalisation journey is Alice's description of a point at which she literally has to 'pack up and leave' her old life because it became too awkward to be among old friends who thought she was becoming racist. She moved out of the city to share a house with others working for the movement and compares the process to that of being an 'ISIS bride' (Field diary, 05.06.2019).

While respondents in general do not recognise widespread radicalisation within the milieu, they do talk about messages or materials that are extremist that circulate or are encountered there. Most frequently they report encountering radical messages online. These are described as people 'being racist' or saying inappropriate things in groups you belong to. Jermaine, in particular, narrated his trajectory into activism as very closely related to exposure to online radical messages having initially accessed a closed social media group for those interested in weaponry but whose members shared what he called far right material. He then watched numerous online videos of EDL and Britain First demos, at which violence broke out, as well as Tommy Robinson videos. He found new sources and channels to follow up through those mentioned in the 'Comments' on these videos. He also notes being deeply affected by graphic images of the aftermath of terrorist attacks or murders that were shared online. However, Jermaine did not just stumble across this social media group but was introduced to it by an offline friend, a skinhead, who was already communicating with the group. This confirms Robbie's reflection that people are pointed to radical websites and videos by others rather than encountering them by chance online (see Section 4.4.4).

Surprisingly few texts - books or manifestos - were mentioned as sources of radical messages. Markus Willinger's *Generation Identity*, the manifesto of the Christchurch extreme-right terrorist and *Mein Kampf* were mentioned but none of these were cited as 'influential' for the respondents. Indeed, Willinger's book is described as 'puerile' by one GI activist and the Christchurch manifesto had been read only 'partly' and found to be 'strange' by another respondent. More significant for respondents were the videos and live streams by 'influencers' that they watched and listened to (see Section 4.4.1).

Friends were another frequent source of contact with radical messages although these offline encounters often serve as points of reflection about how respondents draw their own red lines in terms of what they

believe or how they want to act. Dan says that some of his old friends from the EDL were shifting in the direction of Generation Identity, but he felt the movement was too extreme (Field diary, 18.03.2018). Robbie, a DFLA activist, continues to receive material from more radical friends but it goes to his private inbox only and, he says, if they tagged it on Facebook, he would remove them as 'friends'. Robbie had in fact made a conscious decision in his early teens not to follow these (older) friends into the EDL:

I was thirteen year old. And I saw, I remember the poppy burning which started it off. And I thought that's... I was same mentality as the EDL - that's wrong, it needs to be stopped. My friends were older than me. They were sixteen - fifteen, sixteen. They were going on these marches, and they told me what they'd seen, what they'd heard, what they'd said. And I thought, 'That's... it's not... I don't want to be part of that because it's...' Even at thirteen, I thought, 'That's not the right way to go about it.' You know, especially when there was that big one in Luton, where they just ran riot – seven thousand of them, didn't they, they just sort of ran riot. And obviously it looked like a buzz, but even then I thought, 'That's... I don't want to be a part of it.' (Robbie)

Thus Robbie had retained his friendship with those who remained active in parts of the milieu that Robbie considered too extreme without following their path. This considerable resilience to radicalisation was helped, he thinks, by his dad's experience in extreme movements from which he had concluded that violence was not effective, 'It needs to be dealt with differently' (Robbie). A similar capacity to manage friendships with those whose views she is critical of is communicated by Alice. She talks about tolerating ('chuckling along with') anti-Semitic and 'Nazi' sentiments of a friend in the milieu because in other ways he had 'come through' for her as a friend.

Most frequently, respondents say they encounter radical messages via other individuals in or around their movement. These people are usually described as 'nutters', 'crazies' or 'Nazis'. One attendee at the launch of a new movement organised by Jacob talked about conducting an effective 'coup d'état' through storming parliament. While Jacob dismisses the plan as 'delusional', he also worries that by surrounding himself with people with extreme views like that, he is becoming crazy himself. Jermaine says that during his time in the EDL he had encountered radical members who sported swastika or Combat 18 tattoos. As discussed in Section 4.1.2.3 both Dan and Lee had been approached by extreme groups within the milieu. Indeed, in three cases, those referred to as 'nutters' or 'Nazis' were, unbeknown to those respondents, also respondents in this study. The degree of threat felt from these more extreme forces varies. While Dan felt the presence of influence of neo-Nazi elements was on the decline, for the older respondent in the study, Craig, there was a real concern that 'the patriotic movement' was in danger of being hijacked by some 'nut job' or 'neo-Nazi fan boys' (Field diary, 13.04.2020).

4.2.3 Responses to radical messages: from cumulative radicalisation to non-radicalisation

Radicalisation is understood here as a dynamic process driven by interactions with 'others', events and messages emanating from both within and outside the milieu. In the case of the dynamic between extreme Islamist groups and anti-Islamist/extreme right-wing movements, this interaction has been understood as one of 'cumulative extremism' (Eatwell, 2006; Busher and Macklin, 2015: 885). In this section of the report, this interaction is understood through the lens of how respondents in this study respond to the radical messages they encounter. It charts the situations in which 'escalation' is the outcome but also responses which lead to the de-escalation or non-escalation of extremism. Indeed, and more frequently than anticipated, the study found that responses to radical messages were met with calls to 'call out' radical messages within the milieu and 'dialogue' or 'engagement' with 'others' outside it in a process that dissipated rather than precipitated radicalisation.

As might be expected, the most common response to terrorism, or extremism of 'others' (be it Islamist or Irish Republican) is to condemn it. The DFLA, in particular, is concerned to emphasise that they condemn

all forms of extremism (see Plate 1). In relation to the right-wing milieu, eight respondents also say they have responded directly to encounters with messages they see as too extreme, or simply wrong, by shutting them down or calling them out. Three respondents talk about how radical comments on their movement's social media group are quickly removed and Mikey explains that after a comment is removed from the DFLA page, if the behaviour continues, the person is blocked from the site. If known agitators attend demos, they are asked to leave. Paolo, who is also a DFLA member, says he would call out racist comments, preferably by making it known to 'the relevant people':

If I heard a racist comment, that'd be brought up, I'd have that nipped in the bud straight away. And I'd say to the relevant people, 'Listen. You deal with it or I deal with it. But I guarantee you dealing with it is gonna be better than me dealing with it. Because if I deal with it, someone's getting head-butted.' (Paolo)

Jason is inclined to use more peaceful means to persuade anyone not 'on message' to desist from unacceptable comments but equally determined to exclude them from events he organises. A number of other respondents talked about personally employing strategies of walking away when they got angry or resisting the instinct to retaliate when faced with expressions of hate in favour of seeking to calm the situation.

An unexpected finding from the study is that the single most commonly recorded response to radical messages is to seek 'dialogue' or engage with the 'other'. This 'openness to dialogue' was discussed in detail in Section 4.1.3.1. However, it is worth reiterating that for the most part actors in this milieu see themselves as ready and willing to 'sit down with' people with opposing views (usually a 'radical Muslim' or the 'far left') and just talk. They perceive their opposite numbers (especially the 'far left') as less willing, or unwilling, to engage primarily due to a culture of 'being offended' or 'political correctness'. A number of respondents believe having this dialogue is imperative to preventing the escalation of violence. Without it, they say, people 'will get angry' or 'radicalise' and lead to violence, sectarian violence or even civil war:

I think, if things continue as they are, and I think there's not the open dialogue which I think it needs to sort of put paid to people's concerns, build bridges, whatever needs to be done to secure peace, that unfortunately I think something like that is likely. (Mikey)

Indeed, Dan thinks that such dialogue needed to have taken place much earlier and fears counter-extremism initiatives have come too late.

'Escalation' in this study occurs primarily in relation to narratives rather than violence (on this distinction, see Busher and Macklin, 2015). 'Outrage culture' is blamed for escalating responses in an unhelpful way as each action on one side provokes a slightly stronger reaction from the other (Alice). Jason explains it as a coiled spring effect:

When they try and call everyone, threaten everyone for different views, that's what causes... it causes an opposite reaction. It's like a spring – you push it so far, but then eventually it's going to be going back and come flying at you. That's what happens – they push political correctness and spamming these things against people like me, calling us wrong and racist and threatening us, that causes the opposite reaction. (Jason)

Most routinely, escalation was observed at marches and public events. At one EDL event, in the absence of speeches due to a technical difficulty, the chanting and taunting between demonstrators and counter demonstrators is what, effectively constituted the event (Field diary, EDL demonstration, 12.05.2018). At other events antagonism between demonstrators and passers-by developed or was provoked by demonstrators, in the case of Asian taxi drivers (Field diary, Support Tommy Robinson demonstration, Leeds, 01.06.2018). To avoid such escalation, the DFLA as a movement tries to march in silence and avoid chanting; this rule breaks down, however, whenever demonstrators come close to counter demonstrators (Field diary, DFLA action, 30.03.2018).

These stand-offs are, for many, part of the enjoyment of demonstrations (as described by Dan, see Section 4.1.2.1) and rarely develop into actual violence. However, there is a sense that, as Robbie puts it, 'it's getting a lot more volatile at demonstrations'. He expresses concern that 'it might kick off really bad' at some point and illustrates this with an observation from a recent rally that the researcher also attended:

[...] when we were in Manchester or Salford for the Tommy Robinson thing, I was walking with a group of lads from Manchester, and they were baiting and baiting every leftie person they saw. And I think if everybody gets that mind-set, I reckon it will... [...] It's gonna be a violent affair at every demo. (Robbie)

This concern appears in a number of respondent interviews, expressed usually as a fear that this cumulative process will escalate into violent conflict or even civil war; for which people (on both sides) are said to be already preparing (Dan; Robbie; Field diary, pro-Brexit rally, 09.12.2018). An analogy that is frequently made is with sectarian violence in Northern Ireland:

What we're starting to see in this day and age, particularly in this country that perhaps we've never seen before, is the radicalisation aspect of it. You're starting to slowly but surely see the kind of sectarian violence that's plagued Northern Ireland for years, particularly amongst, say far right extremist groups and Muslim extremist groups. Those tend to be the biggest offenders, I think. (Mikey)

Billy had grown up amidst the devastating effects of the escalation of sectarian violence and had experienced himself how acts of violence may be committed simply to 'even the score'. He also envisaged the potential for mass violent response to terrorist attacks:

[...] if people don't become aware of what's happening, it will lead to endless bloodshed on the streets, I believe. Because Islam is, it's their idea to expand Islam and to take over lands and stuff. And they'll do it by any means: violence and... it'll get to the point where native Europeans won't sit around and accept having their Christmas markets attacked and their kids blew up at concerts and stuff. Unfortunately people will probably go out and retaliate. (Billy)

Notwithstanding these apocalyptic visions, respondents actively employ strategies of responding to radical messages to ensure the 'non-escalation' of violence or extremism. One such strategy is simply to not respond to provocation: 'Even when there's a counter protest from like Antifa or Stand Up To Racism, they goad us and they goad us, but no-one ever bites. And that's the good thing.' (Robbie). Mikey extends this non-retaliation approach to the discursive sphere, saying he does not approve of 'tit for tat' trading of untruths about each other in the form of a 'smear campaign'. Respondents' strategies when encountering people or messages they found too extreme was aimed at ensuring they did not just go with the flow, but made their own minds up and, where necessary, stuck to their own 'red lines'. This was expressed in memories about moments when they had had to make choices that were right for them. Dan explains how, on one occasion when there was significant pressure put on him by a more extreme group to join them, he had to stick to his principles despite direct threats:

I went into a full-grown argument with them. I was telling them Nazism, my ancestors fought against Nazism. Not gonna stand with one. That's what I said to them. And got a bit heated, at first... to the point where they were saying, 'If you're ever seen round [name of city where Dan lives]...' [...] 'We're gonna do you in.' But eventually anyway, the leader of their group, who was a bit understanding, to be fair, told them to back off. And said, 'Look, he's only young. Let him do what he wants to do. Doesn't have to come and follow us. Let him do what he wants to do.' So I've been left alone since then. (Dan)

Other respondents talk about simply demonstrating their lack of support for statements that are too extreme, or crudely put. For example, Robbie describes not applauding a speech he did not approve of at

a demonstration while Jason says that he has not joined in chanting or not taken a placard to carry when he did not agree with the message (Jason). In all cases, respondents stressed that it was crucial you 'think for yourself', 'make your own mind up' and, as Johnny formulated it, protect yourself from radicalisation by being sure of your own priorities and limits.

These findings on responses to radical messages appear to confirm Macklin's (2020a) suggestion that the study of the role of forces from within movements in putting the brakes on any potential escalation of violence ensuing from interaction with others and events merits further study. This is returned to in Section 4.4.3.

4.2.4 Countering radicalisation and deradicalisation: learning from respondents' experiences

Finally, we turn to the implications of respondents' views on the causes of radicalisation and their experiences of encountering and responding to radical messages for how we counter extremism effectively. It follows from the fact that being silenced and denied political voice was seen as the main cause of radicalisation, and the state a key agent of it, that preventing radicalisation is also placed in the sphere of politics and the state. Thus radicalisation can be tackled, respondents say, by 'giving political voice'. Craig, the older respondent in this study, describes the forming of a political alliance with UKIP as a conscious search for a political party that could become 'our political voice'. Dan criticises those (in the movement and beyond) who anticipate, and potentially stoke, a civil war as a way out of the current situation. In contrast, he says, the only way to change things is for people to try to get into parliament. Paul, a former BNP activist, also argues that activism provides political voice to frustrated people. He thus describes his BNP campaigning, over which he was prosecuted but acquitted, as preventing rather than creating extremism:

And it was brought up to me that I was kind of spreading hate. That I was stirring up all of this trouble. Now I wasn't stirring up any trouble. Do you know what I was doing? I was stopping trouble. And you're thinking how am I stopping trouble. Well if you go into an area where young white girls are being groomed by these Muslims, I can tell you there is anger, justifiable anger. And there is hatred, because people... who wouldn't hate seeing their daughter being sexually abused? But do you know what, that's going to boil over at some time or another. And we went into this area and we said, 'We know you have righteous anger. We know you hate the people abusing your children. But do not act in a violent way. Do not act with anger or hatred. Come to us and we will give you a political outlet. You can leaflet, you can knock on doors. You can speak to people like you and we will give you a positive, legal outlet for all the problems you've got.' That isn't how you create extremism. That's like letting off steam. That's like people say, 'I was so angry. But I went out there and I voted for Paul and Nick Griffin. I went out there and I heard Paul speak at a meeting. I went out there and I helped them leaflet and I made a change in my community. We got a councillor elected.'

(Paul)

Two respondents also argue that radicalisation can be prevented by 'listening to' so-called extremists, following the logic that extremists are more likely to listen to you if you listen to them.

References to current counter extremism policies and interventions are mainly negative. Most respondents see the government as failing to provide a robust response to terrorism and the Prevent programme is seen as 'not actually tackling the issue' (CL). CVE policies are seen as ineffective:

I mean, that's another thing that we should say – not enough's been done. You can download ISIS things off the internet. And that's how she [Shamima Begum] was radicalised. How a lot of them are. [...] That, surely that's step one of preventing radicalisation - put an internet ban on anything to do with that, be it videos, articles, you know, whatever else they use. (Robbie)

A number of respondents saw both state and NGO attempts to counter extremism as counter-productive. Will, who had lost his job after being exposed by Hope not Hate argued that this targeted action risked radicalising people by ostracising them and thus leaving them with nothing to lose:

[...] the aim of that [exposure campaigns] is like to apply pressure, so that you run out of money, and then you basically have to quit. But at this point, I've lost, you know, all of my income and it's now anything that I build up from has to be something that is not reputation-sensitive. So really there's no further social cost. If I'm careful what I'm involved with, you know, obviously if I became involved in something actually very extreme, there's a new level opens up. Yeah, I don't think it works as a kind of anti-extremism tactic, to throw people out of normal life. [...] Because I get, from that mentality it's like, 'Oh if this becomes normal, it's a danger.' But actually I think, I think the problem with these things comes because they are fringe [...] I think it's fringe groups that become extreme. [...] If it exists way outside the mainstream, it can never get in. Over time, it almost makes sense for them to become violent. [...] If you're completely locked out, it doesn't... I would never do it, but like it does make sense from the perspective of the group or idea to just shock your way in. So I think it backfires that, I don't think the kind of ostracisation thing works. (Will)

McCauley and Moskalenko (2017: 211-212) argue along similar lines that sometimes 'targeting ideas rather than actions multiplies the enemy by a hundred'. Paul also complained that explicit messages calling on young people not to get involved with extremist groups such as National Action had been taken down from his social media channel as extremist material, effectively undermining positive work that he was doing. Paul saw himself as consciously redirecting vulnerable young people away from movements that he considered extreme:

Ages ago I was in the BNP. Up until 2010. And then I just became an independent voice. But I try to reach out to everyone and say, 'National Action is a joke.' I've said... you know, I had a certain degree of sympathy when they were just taking young guys out into the woods and doing some camping and hiking. But it became a horrible group which attracted horrible people. And I tried to get the good people out of that horrible group. (Paul)

Two respondents had experienced Prevent personally and had quite different evaluations of it. Jermaine, who had been referred to Prevent through college, had struck up an instant rapport with his mentor:

Yeah. So I met [name of Prevent IP]. He told me about his upbringing and how he was involved in football. And we had very similar upbringing, so I had a lot of trust in him straight away. 'Cause as I say, I'm pretty good at taking people's things. And I trusted him, so I agreed to meet him again. (Jermaine)

The mentor had given Jermaine confidence that he could redeploy his skills successfully and, subsequently, he not only withdrew from EDL activism but started to engage in CVE by talking to young people about his own trajectory and experience.

The experience for Lee, who had an extensive history of 'extreme right' activism and had served three prison sentences for violent disorder related to it, was very different. After being released from prison the last time, he was assigned a Prevent mentor but contact had been minimal (Field diary, 01.10.2019). Lee was disappointed in the support he had been given and had the impression his mentor was more interested in gaining information about the movement from him than supporting his exit from it:

See whenever... he'd come in and he'd, he'd ask you what you'd been up to and that for about two minutes. And then it were, 'Have you heard about this? Have you heard about that? Have you...?' At one point, he came and said, 'Oh is [name of regionally based movement] setting back up? We've been told that they are.' Said, 'Well how would I know if I'm not involved with it anymore?' [...] Yeah, asking me stuff about Tommy Robinson and stuff

like that. Do I know anything about this? When Tommy were coming to [name of region] and that, they were all over me then. [...] Seeing if I knew what were going on and who were there and did I know where they were going. (Lee)

Lee had never been offered targeted counter extremism intervention and his move away from activism was not driven by a fundamental shift in his views but a new awareness of what the costs of it had been, and could be, for his family life. The decisive moment, had not been Prevent intervention, but a visit from social workers while he was in prison that last time when it was made clear to him that continuing on his current path risked social services intervening to protect his children or his girlfriend's children: 'If they hadn't threatened me with taking me kids away, I'd probably still be doing it. Just had to take that major fucking threat really.' (Lee). Lee sums up his trajectory in and out of the milieu as entirely his own responsibility: 'I radicalised myself, and now I've gone through it, and now I've deradicalised myself, if you know what I mean.' (Lee)

In this section the intention has been not to detail individual 'trajectories' of respondents in, through and out of radical movements, but to explore their understandings, encounters and responses to radical messages and radicalisation processes. The rationale for this approach is to highlight the reflexive engagement young people have with the milieu in which they act and their own pathway through it. None of the respondents in this study had crossed the threshold of passage into behavioural violent extremism. Even in relation to shifts towards more extreme attitudinal positions, respondents remained reflexive and monitored their own pathways, marking red lines that they would not cross and, when necessary, holding to those. In this sense, this study is as much one of trajectories of non-radicalisation as of radicalisation. Such studies are important because they allow us to understand why, in the presence of similar environmental factors, some people radicalise but the majority do not. Moreover, it reveals the role of young people's agency in this process. It understands people as active agents reflecting on their journeys, not pathological extremists or 'brainwashed' victims. It also allows insight into the everyday strategies individuals employ to challenge and resist radicalisation and how to engage and mobilise potential informal actors (peers) in prevention of radicalisation. Reflection and self-critique, it is argued, are the best mode of countering radicalisation but to deploy those capacities, young people's agency must be recognised and taken seriously.

4.3 Ideas and emotions: drivers to action

This study of a small cross-section of the 'extreme-right' milieu in the UK suggests individual actors are driven by a sense of what is wrong with the world, who is to blame and what should be done about it. These understandings are framed through discourses and narratives of nation, state, religion, diversity and identity found, usually²⁵, on the right of the political spectrum but draw eclectically and from a wide range of such ideological frames. Among respondents there exists no single 'enemy' nor a single, if any, vision of an ideal society, still less a road map for getting to it. Moreover, action is driven not only by ideas but emotions. Just as emotions 'are not just impulses but contain appraisals that have an evaluative content' (Nussbaum, 2013: 6), so too ideas are seared in emotion – not only of anger and hate but also of love and empathy.

In order to provide direction through the myriad ideas and their framings within the milieu, this section explores the data in so far as they suggest conformity to, or divergence from, two key substantive characteristics ascribed to extremism: the desire to create a homogeneous society based on rigid ideological tenets that suppresses opposition and subjugates minorities; and the pursuit of an anti-democratic political programme that rejects the rule of law and is prepared to use political violence to

²⁵ Exceptions include support for the NHS, company profit-sharing and the nationalisation of some public services including public transport (see Section 4.5.1).

achieve its aims (Schmid, 2013: 9-10). The wide spectrum of ideas found in respondent narratives are consequently explored in two sub-sections, which consider attitudes to: racialised ‘others’ (Islam and Muslims, immigrants and refugees, ‘grooming gangs’) and their place in society; and democracy, the use of political violence and political opponents (‘the left’, ‘the establishment’). This interpretative focus on both racialised and political ‘others’ reflects how emotions and ideas become entwined in the drivers to action for respondents. Political and societal issues and concerns are talked about often in terms of ‘threats’ or ‘dangers’, which even when recognised as rooted in structural processes, such as demographic change or globalisation, are understood to be driven by personified hostile forces (institutions, agencies or groups). In this sense the political or ideological frameworks used by respondents to understand the world and inform their activism cannot be separated from the emotions evoked in relation to the in-group (the ‘we’ who is threatened) and the out-group (or ‘they’ who threatens). The prominence and prevalence of threat in the sensibilities of respondents is explored below through considering how they perceive the future.

Notwithstanding the recognition of emotions and ideas as inextricably entwined, the final subsection considers emotional drivers to action. It highlights how, amidst a multitude of enemies and shifting and uncertain ideological goals, the compulsion to ‘stand up’ or ‘make a difference’ features as a constant driver to action. This echoes Nussbaum’s (2013: 3) argument that emotions directed at the nation can motivate people ‘to think larger thoughts and recommit themselves to a larger common good’. This subsection also looks specifically at the role of ‘anger’ in shaping individual trajectories and how emotions of hate and anger are ‘rationalised’ through notions, for example, of ‘righteous anger’ and mobilised in respondents’ quest to bring about social change.

4.3.1 Looking to the future: the looming civil conflict

Extremism has been understood as a (dysfunctional) defence mechanism adopted by groups during times of instability and insecurity, ‘when the in-group is facing an uncertain future, and there is a real possibility of serious in-group decline and even extinction’ (Moghaddam and Love, 2012: 249). Although, in objective terms, respondents in this study represent majority communities (in ethnic/religious terms) and have secure citizenship and residency rights, the sense of existential insecurity is palpable. This is particularly evident from their discussion of the future. Of 21 respondents, 13 talked about feeling a real threat, even immanence, of destructive civil conflict. Such views were also encountered among participants at milieu events attended.

When respondents talked about the future, the most frequent discussion was about their expectation of violent conflict or war. Billy, who grew up with the residual violence from the conflict in Northern Ireland, is not optimistic about the future. He fears that his own children will suffer more conflict than their parents: ‘the way things are going in Europe, with Islam and stuff, it might be a hundred times worse than what we experienced’ (Billy). The anticipation of conflict is not only related to Islam but to left/right polarisation, however, as Gareth indicates:

Because if you look at the political, you know, atmosphere in America, it's very volatile isn't it? Do you know the hate for Donald Trump on the left and, you know, the... and the hatred for the left [for their] hatred of free speech in the right-wing's mind, do you know what I mean? Like it's very volatile and unless people come round the table, then they will like... it will be inflamed like, it will, it'll grow [...] it'll become something it never needed to be. Do you know what I mean? And that could relate to war, stuff like that. (Gareth)

Dan talks about an immanent civil war on numerous occasions. He talks about it not because he thinks it could precipitate positive social change. On the contrary, he berates those who seem to want to encourage it and admits it is something he is ‘scared’ of:

DAN: I think we're... Britain now, I don't want it to happen, because I am scared. I'm only 24. Do not want it to happen. Even Britain especially, I can see civil wars breaking out – I can. I definitely can.

INT: Between...?

DAN: Just, I don't know who it will be between, to be fair. I think now, a lot of the anger now is towards Muslims. And I can see it going off between the Muslims and the non-Muslims in this country. But I don't think it'll just be that.

INT: What would that achieve?

DAN: I don't... it wouldn't achieve anything. Wouldn't achieve anything. It wouldn't, wouldn't. And that's what I'm saying – I'm scared. I am scared of that. 'Cause I'm 24 – don't want that to happen, don't.

However, Dan feels such conflict may be inevitable now because 'some people have just lost hope [...] of doing anything peacefully'. I encountered others who felt the same at a pro-Brexit rally, attended by a broad cross-section of the public. In the course of a general chat in a pub with a group of those attending, one middle aged man, married with four children and a good job, said he believed civil war was coming and that he was 'ready' for it. He explains that he has a barn in the countryside where he has shotguns (ostensibly for game shooting) and says he would not hesitate to use them against people if and when necessary (Field diary, pro-Brexit rally, 09.12.2018).

As discussed throughout this section of the report, the focus of concern for many in this milieu is wider than 'Islam'. While Dan thinks conflict will come, he is not even certain who it will be with. He thinks there will be 'more than two sides' and 'it would turn into a free for all'. The likely trigger could be a terrorist attack - either an Islamist attack or a far right terror attack on the Muslim community - or:

I've always had a feeling Tommy Robinson will be killed eventually. He will be killed by the state or by a Muslim. He will be killed in the end. And once that happens, that is when I think we will see a civil war in this country, is when Tommy gets killed. And I think it will happen, unfortunately, I do. (Dan)

There are those who doubt the civil war scenario but only because they see societal change happening as a gradual cultural change. Thus, Paul pours scorn on those who believe there will be a civil war, race war or conflict but says:

[...] it will happen town by town, city by city. It won't happen with a bang. It won't happen with an almighty conflict. It will happen like a creeping shroud falling over the west. It will happen like the sun setting. It'll be gradual. And if the white people of Britain did not revolt when London went, and they did not revolt when Birmingham went, they did not revolt when Leicester went. So are they going to revolt when Leeds and Manchester go? Where is the tipping point? There isn't. It doesn't happen like that [...] (Paul)

Given the small sample and sociological method employed in this research it is impossible to determine what might make those like Dan see catastrophic conflict as immanent while those like Paul dismiss such a scenario. However, as will be seen below, both perceive a real collective existential threat from current societal trends.

4.3.2 The pursuit of homogeneity? Racialised 'others'

As set out in the introduction to this section, the political or ideological frameworks mobilised by respondents in this study are closely entwined with their perception of the in-group (the 'we' who is threatened) and the out-group (the 'they' who threatens). But there is not one enemy; a total of 25 different 'out-groups' were identified in the narratives of respondents. These included: groups associated

with the Left ('Antifa', 'Hope not Hate', 'educators', 'snowflakes'²⁶); ideologically opposed and terrorist groups ('Irish Republicans', 'IRA', 'Nazis'); and government and 'establishment' groups ('government', 'politicians', 'police', 'mainstream media', 'local authorities', and 'social services'). Together these groups are understood not only as holding opposing views but as representing a series of personified threats to 'our' democracy and freedom and are discussed in Section 4.3.3. In this subsection, we consider a range of racialised 'others' and issues ('immigrants', 'Islam', 'Muslims', 'refugees', 'grooming gangs') and how they become mobilised in various ideological frameworks that seek to reset the relationship between nation, state, culture, ethnicity and religion. As noted above, it is important to recognise that it is these embodied figures of 'threat' that are paramount for the majority of respondents; they become embedded in elaborated ideological frameworks only for a few.

4.3.2.1 Grooming gangs

The single most discussed issue among respondents in this study is that of so called 'grooming gangs'. This term is used by respondents, and widely in the media, to refer to organised child sexual exploitation (CSE²⁷) by groups of men who abuse their victims, mainly girls, and traffick them to other towns and cities for abuse over long periods of time. Access to drink, drugs and other 'favours' is used to entrap and coerce, often vulnerable, girls and maintain their silence. In some cases victims believe they are in genuine relationships until their 'boyfriend' starts to pass them to other abusers. The first independent inquiry into this particular form of CSE was conducted by Alexis Jay who identified around 1,400 cases of such criminal acts in the town of Rotherham. On the particular question of the relationship between race, ethnicity and CSE, Jay concluded that, across the UK the greatest numbers of perpetrators of CSE are white men. The second largest category are those from a minority ethnic background, particularly those recorded as 'Asian' and, in the particular cases investigated in Rotherham, the majority of known perpetrators were of Pakistani heritage including the five men convicted in 2010 (Jay, 2014: 91-92). In the main period of fieldwork (2017-2019) there were high media profile convictions of groups of men reported as being of predominantly Pakistani heritage for CSE in relation to organised groups of abusers in Rotherham (2017, 2018, 2019), Newcastle (2017), Huddersfield (2018), Oxford (2018), Bradford (2019) and Telford (2019). Each trial and conviction served to confirm respondents' belief not only in the scale of abuse across the country but also its 'cover up' by the police and local authorities for fear of being accused of racism. While a series of investigations of the relationship between ethnicity and the perpetration of organised CSE have concluded that 'there currently just isn't reliable enough data to draw any conclusions' (Colley, 2019: 268), both media reporting and statements by politicians including the Home Secretary at the time Sajid Javid (Walker, 2018), have fuelled activists' claims that there is a relationship that warrants public discussion.²⁸

Concern over 'grooming gangs' was raised by 18 of 21 respondents in this study. One of the three respondents who did not mention it in interview, moreover, was observed holding a banner related to the issue at a demonstration. Thus while it may be more or less central to the views and activism of individuals, it is the single most salient issue across the respondent set. It is so because it touches upon

²⁶ 'Snowflakes' is used widely in social media and other discourse on the right to refer to (usually a younger generation of) people who are hyper sensitive to critique or 'offence' and use claims to offensiveness and political correctness to constrain freedom of speech.

²⁷ The term 'grooming gangs' is used in the milieu studied here to refer to a particular form of what is usually referred to as Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE). However, as Colley (2019: 280) notes, there is no actual official definition of a grooming gang or even crime of CSE; the latter is 'rather it is a term that incorporates a range of sexual crimes from those such as rape and sexual assault to meeting a child following sexual grooming to causing or inciting a child to engage in sexual activity and trafficking into or within the UK for sexual exploitation'.

²⁸ The Home Office review of CSE and profile of perpetrators promised by the Home Secretary appears to have been rolled into a wider inquiry into the prevalence of Child Sexual Abuse announced in May 2020 and to be headed by the former Home Secretary (Singh, 2019; Malnick, 2020).

three themes which reappear across the narratives of respondents on wider issues of politics and ideology, namely: the failure to recognise white victimhood; the complicity of authorities in injustice ('covering up'); and the threat posed by hostile 'others'. In relation specifically to 'grooming gangs', this is articulated in four tropes in the discussion: the failure, especially of local authorities and the police, to treat victims with respect and support; the distinction between different forms of child sexual abuse and its relation to the ethnicity of perpetrators; the belief that, historically, authorities have 'covered up' this form of CSE out of political correctness or fear of being accused of racism; and the association between 'grooming gangs' and 'rape jihad' consciously targeting white women.

Due to constraints of space, the discussion of support for victims is not reported here beyond noting that Adam's activism focused on raising awareness of 'grooming gangs' in a town with a well-documented history of historic cases and where, during the fieldwork period (April 2018), the council approved the commissioning of an independent inquiry into cases (final report still pending). Adam was active in a wider coalition of groups that campaigned on a range of issues related to the care of children including abuse of children in homes and involuntary adoption. One of the key messages put out by those campaigning specifically on this issue, and related to the criticism that victims are not treated with respect or support, was the insistence on calling the crimes committed against them 'rape'; as one placard at a DFLA action dedicated to raising awareness and calling for an independent inquiry into cases in the town, read "You call it grooming. We call it rape" (Field diary, DFLA action, 30.03.2018). Tommy Robinson's European Parliament election flyer also states that, if elected, he will 'donate 100% of my salary to victims of child sexual grooming' (Tommy Robinson campaign flyer, European Parliament elections, 2019).

Respondents in this study are well aware of accusations that they 'weaponise' cases of CSE to attack particular ethnic communities. Many respondents thus make a point of saying that they fully recognise that most paedophilia and rape is perpetrated by single predators, usually white men. However, they are equally adamant that so-called 'grooming gangs' are a specific form of child sexual exploitation (CSE), which takes an 'organised' form, is highly profitable and whose perpetrators come disproportionately from particular ethnic minority communities. Adam cites a Quilliam Foundation report, which, he says, indicates that 85% of gang grooming is perpetrated by a 3% minority population (South Asian) in the UK²⁹. Talking about the issue in his home town, he says:

You've got like two streets in [names town] - [names street] is one and then there's one opposite and [names street], you can just walk down there and it's all Pakistani, Asian men. Obviously, they're not all bad, but when they're all living in the same streets together, you can see how easy it is to operate, because they're next door to each other, so they're, they're operating together, they're in the same area, they've, they've got, at the moment, three, four, five houses in [names town] that they're operating in. They're all obviously, in a predominantly Asian, South Asian street, just like one in [names another district of town] at the moment, where they're taking kids there. (Adam)

The apparent visibility of activities is also cited as evidence that the issue is covered up either because of the organised nature of the crime or for reasons of political correctness. A DFLA flyer from the Telford action says West Mercia police first denied any problem with CSE in the town, then said there had been 56 arrests since 2016, but no prosecutions (Field diary, 30.03.2018) (see Plate 2).

²⁹ For criticism of the evidence provided in this report, see: Cockbain, 2019; and Colley, 2019.

Plate 2: DFLA Action leaflet

No More Silence



**West Mercia Police had denied there was a problem,
they now tell us there have been 56 arrests since 2016
for Child Sexual Exploitation but significantly there have
been no prosecutions!**

Paolo, a DFLA activist, says that for him, what he refers to as 'grooming houses' is a bigger issue than Islamic terrorism; the issue cannot be left 'unsaid' or you will have 'loads of kids abused'. Another DFLA activist, however, says when he looked into a particular local case, he found that the ethnic composition of groups involved was more complex than it first appeared:

And I think the reason why Pakistani Muslims came under such fire at the time was because they only make up three percent of the population, and yet nearly all, half of these crimes are committed by... So there's obviously something culturally or something that's presumably making them do this. And shortly after that came out, there was a big problem in [names town in local region], and quite a few members of this ethnic background got arrested. We looked into it in a bit more detail, and one of the people... and I'll go into a bit more detail about the activities. One of the people that we work with, his daughter was a victim of this. And it was quite interesting, actually. It wasn't, it wasn't just the Pakistani community that were involved. It was also the local white English population were either involved in unfortunately abusing these people, and sometimes acting as a go-between, as like, I suppose like a bit of a link between the communities, you know. The girls obviously felt more comfortable talking to them than people of a different culture. And unfortunately, they almost potentially human-trafficked them. You know, they passed them around the groups. And it was quite horrifying. So I think it opened our eyes, into that it wasn't just one ethnic group that were doing this. (Mikey)

Mikey goes on to claim however that Pakistani Muslim 'grooming gangs' are deliberately targeting white girls and thus they are not only committing sexual assault, but also hate crime 'because they're targeting a race'. Thus, for a minority of respondents, this type of CSE is perceived to be part of a concerted attack by Muslims on non-Muslims, which is sometimes referred to as 'rape jihad'. This is the position, in particular, of Paul who argues that white girls are victims of grooming gangs because within Islam non-Muslims are seen as 'lesser people':

So non-Muslims are seen almost as lesser people, lesser human beings within the Islamic community. That's why, when you have crimes like the grooming scandal in Rotherham and

Telford, you see Muslim men using white girls in a way that they wouldn't use their own. So you wouldn't have a Muslim man abusing a Muslim girl. You wouldn't have gangs going out to the mosque... these grooming gangs don't go and choose girls from the mosque, they choose girls from local dance class or girls walking the street late at night, sitting by bus stops. White girls, they specifically chose white girls because they knew that white girls weren't going to be Muslims. Then they drugged, abused and raped them and committed horrific acts. But the issue here isn't just the individuals involved, it's the wider community. And what do I mean by that? Well when criminality takes place on such a level, there is knowledge of that within the community. Community leaders knew, the wider community. Often the wives of the women who were doing it knew. In fact, wives have actually testified, claiming the girls, the actual victims, deserved what they got because they were sort of, in their words, they were 'filthy non-believers'. So the wives saw the girls being abused almost like, 'Oh well it's a bit of sexual outlet for my husband. And it's like, it's not him cheating on me. (Paul)

That this is a more widely held view is evident from demonstrations. A rape jihad motif was observed on a placard at a Support Tommy Robinson demo asking 'How many raped white girls will it take to wake us up? We are at war' (Field diary, Support Tommy Robinson demo, Leeds, 01.06.2018) while a Generation Identity banner photographed at another Free Tommy Robinson demonstration in London also implied such targeting of white women without making it explicit (see Plate 3).

Plate 3: Generation Identity banner at Free Tommy Robinson demo, 14.07.2018



While a number of these themes recur in the discussion of Islam and Muslims as racialised others, it is important to recognise the prominence of this issue in and of itself as it informs interpretation of narratives of victimisation, injustice and cultural difference central to the ideological frameworks discussed in Section 4.3.2.4.

4.3.2.2 Islam and Muslims

When discussing Islam, the single most frequently raised issue is 'Islamisation', understood as the (territorial) imposition of Islam in non-Islamic countries or the (cultural) transfer of values, traditions and practices related to Islam to wider culture through their increasing accommodation. Territorial Islamisation is mentioned in literal terms by Billy who says the whole idea of Islam is 'to expand Islam and

to take over lands and stuff. And they'll do it by any means [...]'. More usually it is referenced by pointing to the rising proportion of the population in cities in the UK and Europe who are Muslim. James Goddard, speaking at a DFLA demonstration, says this means the country will become an Islamic state in the next 20-30 years (Field diary, DFLA demonstration, 02.06.2018). The perceived threat of this population change is visualised on the Patriotic Alternative website, which features a clock counting down to 2066 when, it states, the White British are forecast to become a minority of the UK population. Paul attributes conscious intent to this population change:

I'll be very clear about this, if you think the Islamic population is a problem when they are this small a number, well you're gonna have a real eye-opener when they double, triple, quadruple that number, or even a majority. And they are what I would call aggressive expansionists. (Paul)

Paul says that the Muslim population is growing 'at a much faster rate than any other ethnic group in the country' and, as noted above, he believes Islamisation will happen 'door by door and street by street' rather than through a cataclysmic war. This sentiment is made concrete by Cara who believes that there is gradual 'colonisation' in process:

We have to understand that a lot of the Muslim population are colonising; they're not integrating with the rest of us. You know, they are pushing people out of their homes. I've actually had three different calls [...] where their Muslim neighbours have just been absolutely ridiculous in what they've been doing: throwing dirty nappies over the wall into one of the gardens. Phoning the police every time they hear music, because it's against their culture for music. Phoning the police, so the police come and tell them that they're causing offence - they need to turn their music off. Absolute ridiculous stuff. And I believe that that is to try and push that neighbour out of that house, in order to have a Muslim family move in. (Cara)

Respondents refer to their own experience of 'Islamisation' through reference to their own or their children's attendance at schools with a predominantly Muslim population (Jacob, Lee), the existence of areas of cities in the UK that are perceived to be governed by Islamic law (Johnny), that have been 'taken over' by Muslims (Robbie) or have seen rapid demographic change (Will, Alice, Billy). Paul claims some areas of nearby cities and towns, in which he has worked, are already completely 'transformed' by Islam and Muslim communities are accused of not integrating and consciously isolating themselves from non-Muslims:

When you go into a Muslim area, you know it's a Muslim area. The signs in the shops are a different language. The people in the shops are speaking a different language. Every woman is dressed from head to toe in black with a little line of children like ducklings following them around. These places are completely transformed. And what's more, not only have they been transformed, but they have imported their culture to the complete exclusion of our culture. These places, other than the buildings and the fact it's raining so you know you're in England, they are not English or British in any way anymore. And what's more, when you go into these communities, the youngsters are being taught, not English as a first language, but other languages. And I've spoken to women in places like [names city], who've gone to get jobs in schools and have been turned down for not being able to speak the language of the kids at the school. Now this creates a huge problem, because you're not seeing integration. (Paul)

Presaging the discussion of how these experiential dimensions are ideologically framed, Will suggests that the issue is that Islam cannot just 'be' in society alongside a range of other cultural and religious entities but has implications for the whole of society and national culture:

[...] we've focussed more again on... issues related to Islam – how that changes our society. So, we did one where we burqa'd many statues, including one of Millicent Fawcett, in the Parliament Square. Because [...] if we were an Islamic society, as you know a few reports suggest that we will gradually become more and more so, a lot of our key figures in our history wouldn't have been there. You know, someone like Elizabeth Fry, that wouldn't have been possible, that wouldn't have happened. So, there's a clear deadening of the whole culture because I don't think you can just say, 'Oh they've got their separate thing, we've got our separate thing, they're just here'. You know, it's ... the whole national culture is shaped by it. And we focussed on that by trying to do these kind of stunts, based around that. (Will)

Similar concerns are raised about halal food by three respondents. Dan, who works as a chef, says 95% of the food he has cooked is halal; even bottled water gets certified as halal, which he believes is a way to make money to fund extremist causes (Field diary, 14.12.2017). For Cara, it was the building of new mosques that was an issue. She had been suspended from the council (as an elected representative) after complaining about an application for a new mosque/community centre, which she said had been submitted as if it was to replace the current Islamic Centre but in fact was intended to be an additional mosque. She had not objected to the original planning application, she said, but felt that establishing a second mosque would repeat 'the pattern which we have seen in places like Luton, in Birmingham, in places where we have seen a complete change in the face of British towns. That they now look and feel more like a foreign country than they do like an English town' (Cara).

This is indicative of the way Islam is exceptionalised, that is, it is seen as not just another element in a twenty-first century societal mix but uniquely incompatible with others in that mix. This is expressed most frequently through claims that it is not Muslims but *Islam* that is the problem. Some of this emphasis on talking about Islam not Muslims can be attributed to an awareness among respondents of claims by opponents that their stance against Islam is little more than a cover for anti-Muslim attitudes and, as such, just another form of racism. However, the number of references to Islam (145), overall, in this data set is just under 50% higher than the number of references to Muslims (103) (where around a quarter of the latter are expressions of positive connections or empathy with Muslim communities).

Islam is envisaged to be 'the problem' because it is perceived not as a religion but an oppressive ideology:

Muslims are people. Islam is an idea. You know, you can't put the two... [...] hating people is bad. Hating an idea... things are there for scrutiny - they are there for criticism. [...] People that say, 'We've just got to get the Muslims out.' You think, 'Uneducated idiot. That's got nothing to do with it.' There are millions upon millions of peaceful, law-abiding, hard-working Muslims in this country, that deserve as much respect as anyone else. (DT)

However, Islamic scripture is seen to be problematic and this trope is particularly strong amongst those respondents who say they have read the Qur'an and/or hadith themselves:

[...] my issue with Islam is not down to Muslims as people; it's down to the ideology and what's in those texts, what's in the hadith, what's in the Qur'an, the life of Muhammed, and so on and so forth. So it's separating, you know, why Muslims behave in a certain way, and why I think they behave in that way, from the people themselves. Because if you're, if you're taught that something... And another thing is, because, because of my experience with Christianity, I can understand a radical Muslim. Because at the end of the day, if he looks at those, those scriptures and says, 'I'm gonna do this, this and this because I believe God's telling me to do it,' well, I totally get that. (Cara)

Three other frequent tropes in the narratives follow from this. Firstly that as an 'ideology', Islam 'brainwashes' people:

Muslims who follow the Qur'an down to a T, they know no different, know what I mean. If their Qur'an is telling them to kill non-believers over a hundred times, they're gonna do it. So in a way, I don't blame the Muslims, because they're getting it brainwashed into them. They're getting it installed into them from a very young age. And that's what I think... that's where I think it's all going wrong. I think it's that book, me, meself. (Dan)

At another point in our communication, Dan expands on what he means by 'brainwashing'. He feels that the level of devotion required by Islam - praying five times a day, the loyalty to the prophet Muhammed - means that Muslims 'take it a step too far' and they are unable to be critical of their own religion.

The second trope relates to expressions of hostility towards non-Muslims:

During my sort of journey to faith and obviously my own research, seemed, I've studied quite a few aspects of the Qur'an and other Islamic scriptures such as the hadith, the life and times of the prophet Mohammed and some of his followers. And even though there were peaceful things in there, there was also some very violent things in there. And in particular the attitude towards anyone that wasn't Muslim. And even though I believe we're very fortunate in this country in that the vast majority of Muslims never would sort of act upon some of the scripture that we've, that's currently in there, unfortunately, there are some in this country and obviously, especially in the Middle East, that are actively active upon what, what's written in scripture and that actually disturbed me. (Mikey)

Dan's rejection is more visceral:

People say it's, you take it [the Qur'an] out of context – you don't. It's just the things they say about even blacks. In the Islamic scriptures as well refers to black people as apes. It refers to Jews as pigs and apes. Christians as pigs and apes. Tells them... like that, I don't know how anyone can say this is... that's just one verse, a peaceful verse. 'I shall cast terror into the heart of those who disbelieve. Strike at their necks and take off every fingertip.' (Dan)

Paolo blames religious leaders such as Anjem Choudary for exploiting these elements of the scripture to call for the rape and slaughter of the non-believers although he also says that he had witnessed first-hand in prison how a Muslim inmate had been beaten badly by other Muslims 'just because he said hello to somebody who wasn't the same religion' (a Sikh prisoner). Connecting this narrative with that around grooming gangs (see above), Paul claims that non-Muslims are simply seen as 'second class citizens' and this explains why the child sexual exploitation cases uncovered a pattern in which Muslim men abuse white girls but not Muslim girls:

What makes Muslims incompatible is their views on many things. And the fact that a lot of those people view non-Muslims as a kind of second class citizen, as somebody who has less rights to them under Islamic law. It's a very complex system, but it can be boiled down to quite a simple rule – if you're a Muslim, you have more rights and you have more protections than if you're a non-Muslim. So non-Muslims are seen almost as lesser people, lesser human beings within the Islamic community. That's why, when you have crimes like the grooming scandal in Rotherham and Telford, you see Muslim men using white girls in a way that they wouldn't use their own. (Paul)

At a more everyday level, respondents also talk about what they see as the Muslim community expecting and preparing for conflict with non-Muslims. The most elaborate of these claims is by DT who recounts that radical Muslims he had met at Speakers' Corner told him of a communications system established to alert all Muslims when the call to jihad comes:

I'm privy to information that the mosques are implementing boxes into homes of Muslim families which is a prayer box, it's the call to prayer box. They are interlinked through the

internet, so that then if the call to prayer comes on a Friday, it comes through the box. But we have been told, from people inside the mosque that have told people, non-Muslims, that these are being used as a message strategy when the call for jihad comes. So that every house in every city, when the call comes from Allah to take arms for jihad, everyone finds out at exactly the same time. And that's something we as a British public don't have. They all come together in their mosques, they all know each other, they all live together, they all live in the same areas. And it's been made... I say this, because it's been made clear to me by Muslims I row with at Speakers' Corner, that if you start, we'll finish it. [...] And they're brainwashing the young generation into believing what they are. And that's why Muslim youth stick together. (DT)

The third trope that follows is the extension of all of these understandings of the 'uniqueness' of Islam to explain the link of Islam with contemporary terrorism. As noted above, terrorist acts are often the initial impulse for respondents to read Islamic scripture and engage in anti-Islamist movements. As Mikey puts it:

The reason I'm particularly critical, as opposed to others that say, 'Oh, it's all Muslims, they're all terrorists and this,' well, actually no they're not, you know, they're not all terrorists. The reason I'm critical of what they believe is, is simply because of what I've studied. And my conclusion is, is that it's not a particularly peaceful religion and that that's why I'm critical of it. (Mikey)

Mikey appears to position himself, in this way, on the 'non-extremist' side of the distinction made by Berger (2018: 45) that 'it is not extremist to disapprove of a religion based on its tenets. But it is extremist to demand that all adherents of a religion be arrested or deported.'

There is also anger at what is perceived as the failure of Muslim community leaders to condemn terrorism and the attempt by the 'establishment' to deny any connection between Islam and terrorism:

[...] when you look at the news, if we go back a few years now, not so much now, but we get told, 'It's nothing to do with Islam. This is nothing to do with Islam.' And then on the TV comes up with, 'Islamic terrorism. An Islamic extremist. An Islamic State.' The first four letters of that word is what? Islam. So how can you not put a connection...? When you're clearly putting it on the mainstream media – 'Islamic terrorist blows himself up. Islamic terrorist walks into a concert and blows children... Islamic terrorist drives a car... Islamic terrorist...' And then to stand there to British public and say, 'It's got nothing to do with Islam.' (DT)

Islam is seen as unique also in its failure to 'modernise' itself as a religion. The discussion here focuses on the need for the Qur'an, and especially verses related to violence towards non-Muslims, to be revised in order to reflect contemporary society in a way they believe other religions have been:

[...] it [the Qur'an] tells you to cut people's heads off and things. I just don't think it's right. I think it all needs changing. Islam needs modifying and changing like Christianity has been changed and modernised. Judaism has been changed and modernised. Islam hasn't. And that's the problem. (Dan)

In a wider reflection on Islam as ideology discussed below, Will believes Islam to be an 'anti-modern' ideology that will, in the end, restrict the potential of Islamic societies:

I think Islam is going to screw over the countries that remain Islamic to some extent. You know, I think the world is – whatever your opinion is on what's happened since colonialism – you know, modernity let's call it, it's the way we're all going, you know it is happening – and Islam is, as I said earlier, it's anti-modern. It's like a cage around, in a narrow way, the potential of what they can do – and I'm sure their response would be, 'I don't want to be like

you, I want to maintain my traditions and my way of life that I've always had'. But it is... what happened in China in the last twenty years was not possible in an Islamic country. It's a restrictive force, and that doesn't mean it's always bad, but it's a force that kind of cages growth and change. (Will)

Alongside these general calls for 'modernisation', a series of specific criticisms are made with regard to what are seen to be practices sanctioned in Islam but inappropriate in the modern day, per se, or at least in European countries. The most frequently mentioned of these - because it is mobilised in relation to the 'grooming gang' issue discussed above - is the claim that Islam sanctions child rape. This is seen, by some, to be encouraged by verses from the hadith:

So as we've seen in some of the predominantly Muslim areas of the country, I think they're basically using that and some verses from the Hadith for that purpose. To, to the extent where it's even been said that it's acceptable to sleep with a nine year old girl because Mohammed did it. Well, I don't care what country you're from or what your, your religious belief is, that's not acceptable, so I am critical of that. (Mikey)

Another practice mentioned is that of Sharia law where both particular practices especially in relation to homosexuality (Johnny) and the treatment of women in Middle Eastern countries is mentioned (see Section 4.6) as well as fears that 'many Muslims' in the UK would like to see it implemented in the UK (Cara).

Finally a recurring grievance relates to the environment in which these concerns are discussed, which is defined as a climate in which 'Islam – can't be criticised':

And if you look at the, what happens when somebody speaks out against Islam, not against Muslims, but just against the religion, straight away, you just have, you just have an avalanche of pain coming against you, as Tommy's found out, right. So, you know, once you mention the I-word, everybody's, everybody's against you. That's Sharia, that's basically Sharia law. Because you should be able to... in our society, you should be able to criticise Christianity, atheism; you know, any belief system should be, should be able to be scrutinised. Now, all of them are, except Islam. It's, to me, it seems that you cannot scrutinise and look at Islam without being... So, so that's got to be, we've got to be able to talk about Islam. (Craig)

As is evident from Craig's statement above, the complaint is that Islam is treated as an exception – while other religions can be criticised, Islam cannot. This sentiment is echoed by Mikey:

Other faiths have started to be targeted as well, but for whatever reason, anyone that criticises Islam tends to be in trouble with the law. And we're thinking, 'Actually, what's the difference, you know?' It's, it's basically a religious belief which is being criticised, yet it's okay for everyone else even being ridiculed, that's absolutely fine, but if you target this and raise a concern as I've just mentioned there about acting on aggressive texts, you're branded a racist and everything. I think, 'Well, actually no, I'm just criticising a belief system and raising a security concern. That's not a racist comment.' (Mikey)

This reflects a wider fear that the Muslim community is gaining in influence. DT, talking about the accommodation of halal food, complains that 'the voices of the Muslim communities are much louder than anyone else'. When asked why he thinks they have more influence and power than other communities, he says it is because they are 'the most feared'. Others explain it by the power of 'block voting' by Muslim communities, which makes politicians keen to win their vote (Adam; Field diary, pro-Brexit demonstration, 03.11.2018).

When Muslim communities, rather than Islam, are discussed, they are perceived to be more cohesive than other communities. As noted in Section 4.3.2, this can be seen as facilitating organised CSE (Adam). It is also said to make it difficult for internal dissenters, rendering Muslims the ‘victims of their own religion’ (DT) and community norms. Muslims who want to step away from Islam are said to be frightened to do so.

There is also discussion of the prevalence of ‘radical’ or ‘extremist’ views among Muslim communities in the UK. On the basis of incidents recounted to her by her constituents, Cara concludes that ‘this extreme view is more popular than people want us to believe.’ However, this is less of an issue for respondents than the feeling that Muslim communities fail to denounce both grooming gangs and terrorists and for not ensuring that members of the community are properly educated about Islamic scripture. Thus Cara calls on Muslim leaders to recognise there are problems in the community:

I think it is up to the head of the Muslim church, the leaders within the Islamic population in the UK to stand up and speak out against this. But they just, they just don't want to do that. They don't seem to want to stand up and say, 'Do you know what? We know we have problems.' That's what I want from Muslim leaders, is to stand up beside me and say, 'Do you know what? We do have problems. We need to integrate. We need to look at our scriptures. (Cara)

Cara goes on to say she wants the Muslim population to engage with criticisms of Islamic scripture including verses about beheading non-Muslims and those saying it is okay to tell lies as long as it is for the good of Islam; it is not good enough to say others are taking these verses out of context. Off the record, DT says, Muslim activists tell him that they recognise the problem of overseas radical imams teaching British teenagers. CL says Muslim communities need to stop ‘turning a blind eye’ to extremist individuals within and cites a survey which had shown a ‘very low number’ within Muslim communities would report someone if they thought they were involved in terrorism. Paul suggests that ‘vast numbers’ knew about grooming gang activity and that means community leaders knew also: ‘There were so many men involved, so many girls involved, keeping something like that covered up – there was far too many people would have known’ (Paul). A placard at an EDL demonstration similarly places responsibility for grooming gangs onto Muslim communities, stating ‘it is up to Muslims to prevent the rape jihad – not to police and social workers to pick up the pieces’ (Field diary, EDL demonstration, 12.05.2018) (see Plate 4).

Plate 4: ‘Rape jihad’: Placing responsibility on Muslim communities



Alongside these criticisms are expressions of respect for Muslims who do come out and denounce CSE (Dan). Moreover, around half of the respondents directly express connection with, or empathy for, Muslim communities either by recounting positive experiences (friendships, good relationships) with

Muslims or by recognising that Muslim communities have been 'stigmatised' or 'demonised'. Robbie, for example, explains that, for him, racism includes generalising behaviour to a whole group:

Well no, not just the skin colour. It's, if you're calling all Muslims terrorists, that's... that's a big no for me, because they're not. Everybody knows that that's not the case. But some people choose to believe it because they don't like them. That's what I was trying to get at. If someone's being full on anti-Muslim because they don't like them, I'm going to call it out and say that's not it, that's not the thing to push. If someone says, you know, talking about ISIS and getting rid of ISIS, or whoever, another terrorist group, IRA. We'll say IRA. If they're calling them out for what they've done, then that's fair to me. Because people need to be aware of what's going on and why it's happened. But if they're just saying, you know, 'He's brown, so he's going to blow people up.' (Robbie)

Only one respondent – Dan – expresses feelings of 'hatred' towards Muslims. Directly after the murder of Lee Rigby, he says, he had 'hated' Muslims. However, since he has spoken, and debated, with more people he now realises that 'I don't hate them all. I don't.'. This openness to, and engagement in, dialogue and its potential for countering hate and prejudice were discussed above in Section 4.1.3.1.

4.3.2.3 Immigrants and refugees

In addition to the specific references to Muslim communities and, occasionally, to particular ethnic communities, respondents also talked about 'immigrants' and expressed both positive and negative attitudes to immigration. When 'immigration' is talked about as a political issue, a key narrative is that immigration can work and can be positive, but it has to be controlled:

There's too many people coming in for... we need to slow down. Let 'em in, yes, but slow down, because we can't afford this many. We need controlled immigration. And this points based system, I think would do that quite well. (Jason)

Mikey mixes this discourse of controlling numbers with limiting the 'type' of immigration:

I think there is a lot of uncontrolled immigration, which is causing problems. And I think that's mainly because the, the immigrants that are coming in are effectively people from cultural backgrounds where things are done so differently, it almost clashes with the European culture that they've come into. (Mikey)

As discussed in the following sub-section, the perceived (non)compatibility of some immigrants is central to ideological frameworks in which immigration features. Immigration is seen as workable on a larger scale only if people are culturally close:

[...] immigration on a small scale doesn't have to be disruptive to a nation. Especially if those immigrants agree to abide by local laws, adopt local cultures and fit in. And it also can happen on a slightly larger scale, if the people who are coming to the host country are very similar to the indigenous people of that host country. For example, if you've got a family of Europeans, a Swedish family. Swedish Christian... White, Swedish, Christian family move to another white European Christian country, it's not that difficult. All you've got is really a language barrier and a few sort of local customs. And in a couple of generations, you would look at the children and you see them running around the school and you'd be like, 'They're all the same.' You wouldn't be able to tell the difference. Because they are similar so they can integrate much easier. But we are bringing people here in huge numbers who have vast differences. Vast differences racially, vast differences culturally and vast differences in the way they see the world and the way they behave. And it's not working. That's why we are seeing all the problems and the increase in conflict that we are seeing today. (Paul)

As indicated in Paul's claim that immigration is leading to an 'increase in conflict', these perceived cultural differences are seen to have negative impacts on communities. These relate, first, to specific associations made between immigration and a rise in violence, crime and conflict. As Jason puts it, 'When you have the higher amounts of immigration, the crime does go up'. Will stresses that it is not that immigrants are all 'awful' but that some forms of crime and violence e.g. knife crime, acid attacks and honour killings have been 'imported' with immigrants:

I think some of the gang crime we're seeing is imported. I think organised crime changed after some of the periods of Caribbean immigration and so on, it became more violent. There were other factors as well, you know, there was the rise of the drugs trade and so on, but the ...I don't think in the Britain of the forties or fifties you would have people stabbing each other over what postcode they live in - I don't think that's a mentality. And of course there's you know ...we commit crime as well, we commit it all the time, but I think that mentality is imported. And so what you're having is this ...you have this demographic change, which has some good aspects and some bad aspects, but there are specific things and the effect of Islam is one of them as well. I mean acid attacks. Acid attacks are unheard of. Honour killings, that was ...even when you go back to a time of complete social unrest and you know grinding poverty and say the beginning of the twentieth century, I don't think honour killings happened. You know, I don't think that you had that kind of culture at all. So, we've imported a cultural issue through our immigration policy and the numbers involved. (Will)

Terrorism is also associated with immigration. Jason links Angela Merkel's decision to allow refugees fleeing Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan into Germany in 2015 to an increase in terror attacks in Europe while Cara says immigrants from Syria should be checked before they are let in and monitored while they are here:

And who can justify the likes of Manchester arena, who can justify the Lee Rigby killing. And there's a lot of Muslims who will try and justify it. When I went to the Islamic Centre, they tried to actually justify it. They said that it was a result of America and the UK going in and bombing Syria and Iraq. Which is just horrific, you know. That is no excuse to go and kill innocent people. And if that is the case, then we should stop Syrian immigrants coming to our country. Because the way I see it, Hilary, is that would you allow in the first or second world war, for Germans to come in here as refugees, without vetting them, without checking on them, without you know, monitoring them while they're here? Would you allow that to happen? Would you allow Germans to come in in rowing boats into our beaches, and then fill in the paperwork and be here legally? (Cara)

It is worth noting here that – as in Cara's statement above – the terms 'immigrant' and 'refugee' are often used interchangeably. When a distinction is made, it is between refugees, who should be helped, on the one hand, and both economic migrants or would be terrorists, on the other, who are feigning refugee status and who should be turned away. Cara, again, sums this distinction up:

[...] if a boat of women and children turn up on a beach, I'm going to help them. If a boat full of men of fighting age turn up on a beach, it's invasion. It's not, they're not seeking refuge – they are trying to invade. And I genuinely believe that that is exactly what these so-called Syrian refugees are doing. (Cara)

Secondly, at a more general level, a small number of respondents lament that differences in culture and behaviour of immigrants has ruined communities. This is a particularly developed narrative in a conversation between Dan and Gareth, who had grown up together in the same part of the city. They agree that the city is 'going worse and worse and worse'. This is explained by the arrival of 'low skilled economic migrants' which is 'killing this city' because they are being housed in already poor areas and turning them into ghettos.

[...] it was literally like driving down a street in Egypt, except there was no sand. It was poor. It wasn't just like oh it's generational poverty, which we always had. It was, this is a new type of poverty where like these streets look like dirt, like these streets are horrible, do you know what I mean? Like everything about them - rubbish bins [...] all over the streets. No care at all. Like we killed it off, we absolutely killed the communities off. [...] I walked through [names another district of city of residence] the other day, literally seen not one white person. Literally seen rubbish all over the streets. Literally seen a full street with not a habitant in it. [...] It was empty. Was dead, was empty, it was dirty. It didn't look like [names city of residence]. Didn't resemble what we used to see. And that's scary to me. (Gareth)

When prompted to clarify what community they are referring to when they say it has been 'killed off', Dan says that they are talking about 'An English community. A white English community'.

Finally immigration is discussed in terms of a societal blessing or burden. Mikey says that immigration 'is needed [...] if you've got a shortage in a particular skills gap'. Immigration is also seen as acceptable, if immigrants 'contribute'. Adam says he talks to lots of people from Eastern Europe who work hard and respect where they live while Jason mentions a second generation Pakistani lad, who he has known since primary school, whose dad 'contributes'. To be considered 'worthy' of the entitlements of being a citizen or resident, it is also important that their needs are not seen to be being prioritised over those existing residents. Cara thinks this is not always the case:

And that's really frustrating, especially as we then look at the mental health situation in the UK, all around the UK, especially for our ex-soldiers, who are coming from war locations, who really need complex mental health facilities. And our government are telling us they don't have enough money. Then start controlling immigration, stop giving our healthcare to the people who haven't paid into the system, and start only giving it to the people who are paying into the system. (Cara)

Thus, there are also many references to the burden of immigrants on public services, the education and health systems and employment. The greatest concern is about pressure on the National Health Service (NHS). Billy says '[...] and hospitals - try getting an appointment with a doctor even, and you're waiting weeks. And you go down and the waiting rooms are actually full of immigrants'. Dan sees capacity to be exhausted not only in terms of healthcare but also police and government: 'we're not just letting them in, we're letting them pour in. And our police can't cope, our hospitals can't cope, our government can't cope. And that's what I do blame a lot of it on - immigration' (Dan).

Moreover, Britain is seen to be deliberately targeted as a destination because 'we have the best fucking benefits' (Jermaine). Paolo suggests that if you contribute for 5 years you should be entitled to the same as anyone else but those 'just coming for a free ride' should not be entitled to government 'handouts'. Billy recounts the experience of a family member who has been made homeless with two children and had to move in with parents while Syrian refugees are being prioritised for housing without having contributed anything. Paul claims this is indicative that 'they're first class citizens; they're put to the front of the queue, because of the way our housing and benefits system works' (Paul).

4.3.2.4 Ideological frameworks: nation, state, culture and ethnicity

In this section, we draw on the insights from respondent narratives presented above to map the ideological frames drawn on by individuals across the milieu. This needs prefacing with a number of caveats. First there is a strong negativity about 'ideology' among respondents; as indicated in the pejorative understanding of Islam as 'ideology' not religion discussed above. Thus, with rare exceptions, respondents would not identify with particular ideologies and would refer to their outlooks as, on the contrary, rejecting ideological ways of thinking in favour of 'telling it like it is'. However, within their narratives, there are tropes familiar from a range of current extreme right and populist radical right

ideological frameworks and thus, in this section, respondents' own positions are mapped against these, whether or not the respondents consciously position themselves in this way. This mapping is not an end itself, however; the aim is not to determine which individuals or movements should be seen as 'ethnonationalist', 'ethnopluralist', 'Islamophobic' or 'anti-Semitic'. As throughout this report the aim is, first and foremost, to elicit how respondents see the world. In this section in particular, however, we seek to establish how far those visions conform to the pursuit of a homogeneous society and subjugation of minorities that Schmid (2013) associates with the extremist mind-set.

Secondly, treading this fine line between how respondents see themselves and how their views might be interpreted, it should be noted that ideological positions are discussed as respondents refer to them rather than how they might be categorised in academic discourse. For example, the term 'anti-Semitism' was used widely by respondents themselves to position their views (usually in opposition to it) and thus is used to describe their positions. However, the term Islamophobia was used only rarely by respondents and always to criticise the integrity of the concept. For this reason it is not used to describe their positions; 'anti-Muslim', 'anti-Islam' or 'anti-Islamist' are employed instead.

Thirdly, while recognising that there are many overlapping tropes between them, the discussion of ideological frameworks is divided into three to reflect those related to: nation, state, culture and ethnicity; race and white supremacy; and anti-Semitism. While these are far from discrete ideologies, the distinctions help delineate differences between participants in the milieu and the societies they seek to forge and to highlight where those distinctions become blurred.

Islamophobia

Since the most frequently mentioned 'others' discussed above are 'Islam' and 'Muslims', we might anticipate respondents' views to be characterised by Islamophobia³⁰, understood as a 'shorthand way of referring to dread or hatred of Islam – and, therefore, to fear or dislike of all or most Muslims' (Allen, 2010: 15). The origins, and critique, of this understanding of anti-Muslim and anti-Islam sentiments are explored extensively by Allen (2010) and are beyond the scope of this report. However, it is important to note that the term Islamophobic is not used at all by respondents - indeed it is seen as part of the problem. Their criticism of the application of this term is two-fold. Firstly, they argue the term 'phobia' suggests an 'irrational fear' of Islam, when they consider Islam to pose a genuine (rationally conceived) threat. As James Goddard, speaking at a DFLA demonstration put it, 'it is not irrational to fear an ideology that advocates your death' (Field diary, DFLA demonstration, 02.06.2018). Secondly, the 'closed view' on Islam that is ascribed to Islamophobes, they suggest, is in fact a property of Islam, not those who criticise it. This is related to the feeling discussed above that Islam is privileged in being exempt from criticism and that this is institutionalised through the notion of Islamophobia, which is employed as a mechanism for shutting down debate since it is used to ensure any criticism of Islam is treated as racism:

I can criticise a Catholic – no problem. A Christian – no problem. As soon as I start to criticise a Muslim, I get called a racist. Criticise a Buddhist or Shintoist even, it's fine. But if I criticise a Muslim, I get called racist and that. It's absolutely... that's the thing, it's a religion. We all have our rights to criticise religion, race, gender. We should all... we have the rights to our view. (Jason)

The problematic equation of the features of 'closed' views in general and the features of Islamophobia in particular is a core critique of the notion elaborated by Allen (ibid.: 69). This association of psychological traits of 'closedmindedness' with the substance of extreme right views and how it might obscure potential openness to difference, disagreement and dialogue was addressed extensively above (see Section 4.1.3).

³⁰ Islamophobia became widely recognised as a distinct and contemporary form of prejudice following the publication of the influential report by the Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia (CBMI) for the Runnymede Trust (1997) *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All*.

However, my primary concern about the application of the notion of Islamophobia to understand views expressed within this milieu aligns with that of Garner and Selod (2015: 13), namely that the term ‘phobia’ (denoting an individual pathology) risks presenting anti-Islam or anti-Muslim sentiments as individual and psychological rather than social, structural or systemic (see also Pilkington, 2016: 5, 125-153).

Whether or not this ideological position is referred to as Islamophobia or not, it is clear from the discussion in Section 4.3.2.2 that within this milieu, Islam and Muslim communities are viewed as, uniquely, problematic in terms of posing a threat to, rather than integrating into, British society. Thus, the milieu is not a solely anti-Islamist milieu. Dan reflects that it was this determinedly single-issue focus that he had liked about the EDL. As he put it ‘they didn’t beat around the bush. Didn’t say to anyone, “Look, we’re against everything.” They said, “Look, we’re against Islamic extremism.” And that’s what they were [...] started up to do.’ However, for Lee, while one of the reasons he became active with the EDL was ‘the Islam side of it’, he also wanted to talk about immigration, the militant left and Irish Republicanism.³¹ He thus left the EDL to set up his own movement. For others, like Cara and Craig, moreover, issues of radical Islam could no longer be separated from immigration.

This shift was evident within the EDL also. Speeches at the first EDL demonstration attended as part of this study, in April 2017, made clear that the initial distinction between ‘radical’ Islam and mainstream Islam had been replaced by the identification of Islam per se as ‘the problem’, reflecting an established direction of travel since the revision of the EDL’s mission statement in 2016 when this distinction was dropped (Pilkington, 2016: 152). Speakers stated explicitly that ‘they all read the same book’ and ‘even those who claim to be moderates are just waiting for the moment of acceptance and then will become militant’ (Field diary, EDL demonstration, 08.04.2017).

The mantle of countering only Islamic extremism has been adopted rather by the DFLA whose members criticise the EDL and other organisations for failing to discriminate between ‘radical’ and ‘moderate’ Islam. Thus Mikey describes the EDL and Britain First as ‘more controversial’ because ‘they’re basically just anti-Islam, not just radical Islam, but Islam in general’. Jermaine reflects that he felt his ‘hatred towards Islam’ grew as he became more invested in activism in the EDL while Alice says:

[...] when I started the EDL stuff, I felt like I was walking around... every single time I saw a hijab, I started getting really annoyed. And every time I saw any semblance of anything Muslim anywhere, I started to think, ‘Oh, fucking hell, they’re coming. You know, they’re here.’ And I’m like, ‘God, this is like...’ Afterwards, I just now look at it and think, ‘That was, I was wound up.’ (Alice)

However, a number of respondents remain concerned that the movements in which they participate do not drift into being ‘anti-Muslim’. Adam, for example, says that his anti-‘grooming gangs’ campaign is not against any religion or race but for the protection of children:

And, and it’s important that that is what we’re, we’re only fighting the... we’re not fighting religion, we’re not fighting race, that’s important because I’ve had Asian friends, I’ve had friends from different nationalities, backgrounds, whatever. ‘Cause that’s not the issue, that’s why we’re here today. We’re not fighting race, colour or creed - we’re fighting, we’re fighting for the children of this country because [...] they’re just standing by and letting this happen and we’re not gonna stand there and let this happen. We’re fighting for the children of this country and we’re not gonna stand by and let this happen anymore. (Adam)

³¹ While it is outside the scope of this report, the importance of earlier terrorism and ongoing conflict and tension in Northern Ireland is evident in this study. As Macklin (2020: 22) notes, the conflict had significant symbolic value both for the far right, who championed the Loyalist cause, and for a section of the left-wing that was broadly supportive of Irish Republicanism, if not its methods. In this study a number of respondents had strong Loyalist sentiments and connections.

For this reason, he says, he supports the fight EDL and Britain First are conducting but he would not go as far as them by 'shouting race, shouting religion'. Robbie is also critical of speeches and chants at a demonstration he attended because 'They were quite derogatory of Muslims'. This had not been a DFLA event and he goes on to say he likes the DFLA because it is not just against ISIS or Muslims, but a broad spectrum of things and distinguishes between being anti-ISIS and anti-Muslim:

[...] that's why the DFLA is for me as well, because it's not just against ISIS and Muslims. It's not against Muslims. With the Justice for the 21 and things, we've got a large spectrum of things that we do, you know. (Robbie).

As respondents in this milieu articulate their views and seek to position themselves in a space in which they feel comfortable - a space where they can draw a distinction between what they believe and being 'racist' - it seems that movements in this milieu have sought to broaden their 'causes'. This appears to be rooted in a recognition that, however much they seek to distinguish their anti-Islam stance, in the world in which they act, the connection between racism and Islamophobia is established. As Garner and Selod (2015: 11) put it, that connection is already 'definitively made' such that Islamophobia can be understood as 'a set of ideas and practices that amalgamate all Muslims into one group and the characteristics associated with Muslims (violence, misogyny, political allegiance/disloyalty, incompatibility with Western values, etc.) are treated as if they are innate' (ibid.: 13). Thus Islamophobia constitutes a form of racialisation (Vakil, 2010: 276; Klug, 2012: 675) and has become *the* most powerful new form of racism or even 'a kind of "accepted racism"' (Hafez, 2014: 479). While respondents would disagree strongly with this, they sought to broaden their activism to mitigate against it, and to provide a more positive cause to rally 'for' rather than only 'against'. In the case of the DFLA, this has been through the objective to challenge 'all extremisms'. For others it has meant taking up a range of social justice causes such as child sexual exploitation, child abuse and involuntary adoption, homelessness and the support for military veterans. However, this drift away from a single issue focus - alongside the increasing reach of ideas associated with identitarianism in continental Europe and the 'alt-right' in North America - means that highly racialised ideological tropes are more in evidence in the milieu now than they were five years ago. This is explored below as the place of ideas associated with ethnopluralism and identitarianism in the milieu is considered.

Patriotism

The most common positioning of respondents is as patriots, where patriotism is associated with 'love for your country' or 'standing up for your country'. When respondents elaborate on what it is that they love about the country, they mention its beauty (both old towns and landscapes) (Alice, Dan) as well as their pride in its history and traditions including its longstanding cultural diversity (Craig, Gareth, Mikey). They feel compelled to protect this culture from being allowed to 'go down the toilet' (Robbie) or be more proactively destroyed (Dan). Some feel that any expression of pride in the country's history and heritage and the celebration of its culture, heritage and tradition is being denied to the majority (white British) population (Paul).

'Patriotism' remains used rather self-consciously, however. Alice, when describing how she had suddenly rediscovered a love for her country and started to feel sort of 'patriotic', indicates she is using the term in inverted commas. When I ask her why, she responds:

'Cause I don't really know quite what it means, either. I just know that I wasn't really that bothered about my country or Britain in that sense. I kind of... yeah, I didn't really, like, connect to it, if you know what I mean. Whereas now I'm very much like: 'Yeah, I'm British. Yeah, I'm very proud to be British.' And like now, when I go up and down and I kind of look at old towns and stuff, I think, 'Oh, it's a great... isn't it a lovely country?' Whereas when I was younger, I perhaps took it for granted. But it kind of reinvigorated that, and feeling this need to protect something and feeling part of something. And then when the terror attacks would

happen, you felt really wounded by it, because you thought, 'God, this is happening on our soil, you know, to our people,' whatever. (Alice)

Mikey aligns being 'patriotic' with the 'right wing' but laments the fact that 'unfortunately, patriotism's got mixed in with racism. It shouldn't do, but unfortunately, for whatever reason, it has, so anyone that's patriotic is seen as racist'.

I'm not too sure what the rationale behind it is, but more often than not, if you show feelings of patriotism, through either your, your ethnic origin, for instance, or the country you're from, most countries and cultures will be quite proud of where they come from, and quite rightly so; it's a fantastic thing. Whereas what tends to happen, for whatever reason, in this country, if you embrace being English, Scottish, Welsh, Northern Irish, Republic of Ireland or British, whatever you associate yourself with, when you express that outwardly, people seem to get uncomfortable. They think, 'Oh, is he racist?' (Mikey)

However, he posits this sensitivity about displays of pride in traditions and culture as top-down. He thinks that the authorities 'think it offends non-British people in some way. But when you talk to non-British people, they're more often than not more enthusiastic about that culture than most British people' (Mikey). This leads to a fear of loss of identity especially when talked about in relation to demographic change (see Section 4.3.2.5).

The lone dissenter in the respondent set on patriotism is an activist in Generation Identity, which describes itself as 'a European patriotic youth movement' (Generation Identity leaflet, received at Birmingham DFLA demo, 24.03.2018). Whilst acknowledging the use of the term 'patriot' by GI, Will says that personally he dislikes it; he sees it as populist and as falsely implying that only people with the same political views as you love their country.

Nationalism

Only three respondents in the milieu - Billy, Paul and Jacob - described themselves as 'nationalist' or supporting nationalist values. Billy sees nationalism as 'about protecting the family, protecting the country' and describes himself as wanting a strong nation with strong family values. The hesitancy about nationalism for others relates to the baggage it brings with it. For Mikey this lies in the implication of nationalism with an isolationist mentality while for Robbie it is its association with racism:

I'm on the right-wing, yeah. I'm not... it's... you know, I vote UKIP. I've, you know, I suppose I'm a nationalist. Not a... nationalist sort of the same as being a racist to some people, isn't it? But I'm not, I've just got pride in my country and I want to see it not go down the toilet. (Robbie)

This concern about the link between nationalism and racism is not misplaced. For those on the ethnonationalist end of the spectrum, there is what Paul calls 'a racial aspect' to nationalism. Paul uses the terms nationalist, patriot and traditionalist interchangeably and says nationalism includes 'a racial aspect, 'love for the natural world' and a central role of the family. The only respondent to describe himself as ethnonationalist is Jacob, who uses the term when talking about his own attempts to create a new movement because 'there's nothing out there on the ethnonationalist end, or ethnopluralist, whatever you want to call it, or on the genuine far right'. Jacob also declares an interest in 'ethnocentrism' or rather in the ethnocentric models of development employed by groups - he cites here Judaism and National Socialism - that might be emulated as a 'protective strategy' to protect English ethnicity. Such views are denounced as incompatible with patriotism by Craig, the older respondent in the study, in the context of a strong critique of the 'Patriotic Alternative' movement, which he sees as attempting to draw people from the 'patriotic movement' towards a more ethnonationalist position (Field diary, 13.04.2020).

Ethnopluralism and identitarianism

As noted above, Jacob declares himself to be, ideologically, an 'ethnopluralist'. Ethnopluralism is the European new right theory counterposing multiculturalism. As the architects of the French new right put it, 'The true wealth of the world is first and foremost the diversity of its cultures and peoples' (de Benoist and Champetier, 2102: 28). It promotes the recognition of the rights and equality of all ethnic groups but also their difference and thus the desirability of their separate territorial existence. As stated by Willinger (2013: 72), in his treatise on identitarian ideology, 'Just as every person requires his own private place, every culture requires its own space in which to develop and structure everyday life according to its own manner'. This worldview underpins the use of the term ethno-cultural identity in the literature of the Generation Identity movement:

We are a European patriotic youth movement concerned with the preservation of the ethno-cultural identity which has characterised our island home and Europe for thousands of years. (Generation Identity leaflet, received at Birmingham DFLA demo, 24.03.2018)

Will explains 'ethno-cultural' identity as consisting of multiple - regional, national and civilisational - layers of identity. It follows that for respondents linked to GI, including here Jacob who says he only did not join the movement because of its upper age limit, 'civilisational' identity means European identity. Europe is understood as 'a cultural region': 'You know, Europe becomes Asia where it becomes Islamic. You know, that's the boundary of Europe' (Will). Will argues that this civilisational level of identity means immigrants from non-European countries find it more difficult to integrate because they lack this European identity. Moreover, although GI uses the term 'ethno-cultural' because integration is based on culture and behaviour, he acknowledges that for him there is a 'massive overlap between your racial group and your cultural group' (Will). While racial ideologies are dealt with in Section 4.3.2.5, it is important to note this slippage in ethnoculturalist ideology between culture and race:

Ethnocultural like it's, to my view, what matters is your cultural background and how you behave and that's, you know, there are integrated people from different races who belong to the same culture as us [...] However, it's ethnocultural because [...] most people pick up their habits from their parents and their parents and their parents and so on. So if you took it on a pure cultural alone platform you often end up in a world where you go like London's going to be fine because we're teaching everyone British values and they'll integrate eventually. That's not true - people do integrate but they only integrate when they're a small minority and they have to join in. It's hard to say where the exact point where someone becomes something else is but it is, yeah, I view if you're European or not by how you express yourself culturally not by your skin tone but at the same time I'm not going to deny there is a massive overlap between your racial group and your cultural group. (Will)

Billy, who was also active in GI, understands the pan-European (as opposed to nationalist) ideology of the movement as recognising Europe as consisting of different cultures but sharing 'the same blood lines'. Other milieu members, who are not GI members but who, for example, do not object to the presence of GI at their own demonstrations, also recognise the racial dimension of ethnoculturalism. As Mikey puts it:

I think Generation Identity effectively do the same, simply because they identify themselves as white Europeans and they don't feel that there's anything wrong with identifying themselves as that, which there isn't really. So I think that's effectively what they're about, so obviously if they wanna accompany us on things, then they're welcome to do so. The only time obviously we have a problem with, with people saying they're proud of this and proud of that, is if they're doing it in such a way as to demonise others. (Mikey)

Finally, it is important to note that European civilisation is not only seen as distinct but also superior. Will says that he believes European civilisation is superior to others and its religious tradition is better than

that of Islam, which he sees as ‘defining itself in a kind of clash of civilisations narrative against the decadent West.’. In this sense, he says, ‘I’m a European supremacist’ (Will). However, he puts this in the context that ‘Everyone should believe their own is superior’ and what he calls his own ‘pro-Islam’ position by which he means that he feels no resentment towards Islam and no compulsion ‘to go and convert them’. This rejection of the demonisation of either Islam or Muslims alongside the belief that ‘the presence of millions of Muslims in Europe represents a continuing threat to the peace of our continent’ (Willinger, 2013: 66) reflects the wider Identitarian view that Muslims have equal rights to identity and should not be asked to convert to ‘Western values’ because this does not lead to reform but radicalisation of Islam (ibid.: 65).

Identitarian ideology is rooted in the ideas of the French new right that support distinct and strong identities in the face of ‘the unprecedented menace of homogenisation’ (de Benoist and Champetier, 2012: 32). This homogenisation, de Benoist and Champetier (ibid.: 28) argue, is a result of globalisation and a universalism wrongly imposed by the West through religious crusades, colonialism, economic and social development models and moral principles rooted in human rights. ‘Homogenising universalism’, they suggest, ‘is only the projection and the mask of an ethnocentrism extended over the whole planet’ (ibid.: 29). Will was attracted to GI because of its roots in the French new right and in particular to the notion of a metapolitical approach, rooted in the belief that ideas play a fundamental role in collective consciousness and human history (ibid.: 9). However, he had found few in the movement interested in those founding ideas; the majority were more attracted by right-wing populism (Will). Thus identitarianism itself is not widely supported, even by those active in the movement. Will is particularly dismissive of Markus Willinger’s (2013) book *Generation Identity* cited above. He believes identitarianism to be already on the back foot and unable to offer a radical project that can halt and turn around the deterritorialisation that globalisation has already brought:

[...] this is why I think identitarianism hits a brick wall, and that there’s no real path [...] the capital thing - that isn’t going to go away its going to continue spreading round the world its going deterritorialise, it’s going to break down everything [...] identitarianism really, I think, its best hope is to try and say what can we safeguard and what barriers can we put up so it’s not complete destruction. (Will)

In this sense identitarianism sets itself up as an essentially defensive project, describing itself as a movement offering spaces for those young Europeans who are forgotten (that is those without a migration background) and countering the ideology of multiculturalism:

Our criticism and our political actions are not directed against immigrants and refugees as individual persons or groups. The pull factors of the migration movements to Europe are also caused by fatal incentive policies of the political and social elites who, at least indirectly, push the ideologically-driven and fraudulent multicultural experiment. (Generation Identity leaflet, received at Birmingham DFLA demo, 24.03.2018)

Thus, Will concludes, identitarianism reflects an anti-modern project which is unrealistic: ‘I don’t agree with it because it’s never going to work I think identitarianism is one of these anti-modern things it’s like ISIS’ (Will). Personally, Will describes himself not as an identitarian but a ‘right accelerationist’³².

Identitarianism has not gained ground in the same way within the UK milieu as it has in other countries in Europe. As noted above, Will feels that there is simply no traction for these view in the UK due to its failure

³² Right accelerationism is associated with the work of Nick Land and the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit at the University of Warwick. Accelerationism advocates allowing a system to develop to its extreme end point in order to achieve system change. Land’s later work became increasingly racist and has been cited as influential to the philosophy of neoreaction underpinning the ‘alt-right’ movement (Gray, 2017; Milenkovic, 2017).

to engage with the French new right. However, as Macklin's (2020b: 5) study conducted also within the framework of the DARE project, shows, in fact there was a 'new right' tradition in the UK, which emerged out of disillusionment with the National Front, established contact with the French new right including with Alain de Benoist and sought to develop a similar kind of 'meta-politics' with a focus on building a cultural base for their proposed social and political change. The failure of GI to make a significant mark on the milieu, despite a number of respondents in this study noting that many young people in the milieu had flirted with the movement, is more likely to be due to a combination of factors. These include the limited pull of the metapolitical approach but also the pan-European focus of the movement at a time when UK politics was dominated by an anti-EU sentiment on the right-wing and the subjection of GI to infiltration and exposure (Hope not Hate, 2017) together with the accompanying heavy emphasis on vetting new members. At a very basic 'marketing' level, Paul says, it would be hard for the average person to understand what an 'identitarian' is; 'it doesn't sound normal'.

Multiculturalism and the 'Great Replacement'

While 'identitarianism' might have limited appeal within this milieu, the rejection of multiculturalism, upon which it is built, is widespread. Those most hostile to it refer to multiculturalism as an ideology that 'has been forced on us' (Jacob). For Billy, it is 'Cultural Marxists' who are 'are pushing the immigration agenda in order to mix everybody up and do away with European civilisation and cultures'. Paul believes that it was the belief in multiculturalism 'like a religion' that made the social services and police cover up the activities of 'grooming gangs', which, he says was done 'to keep the lid on this multicultural project'.

The view that multiculturalism simply 'doesn't work' is more widely held. Many respondents illustrate this with reference to problems they perceive in their own cities or countries that they ascribe to the consequences of multiculturalism but others hold a more ideological view that some ethnic groups are incompatible and monocultures are preferable. In the following exchange between friends Gareth and Dan, the conversation develops from one about sharing perceived changes to a particular area of the city into the expression of a sense of existential threat to white Europeans:

GARETH: I walked through [district of city] the other day, literally seen not one white person. Literally seen rubbish all over the streets. Literally seen a full street with not a habitant in it.

DAN: It's like walking through Syria or somewhere like that.

GARETH: It was empty. Was dead, was empty, it was dirty. It didn't look like [names city]. Didn't resemble what we used to see. And that's scary to me. Like really.

DAN: Yeah. Used to be a white, a majority white area in the eighties, like I said. And now in twenty years, it's gone. [...] Can see it changing in front of us, yeah. I'm terrified for like when I have kids and they're older, I can't imagine what it's like then. I mean, if it's getting bad now, imagine what it's like in twenty years. It'll be terrible. I am, it does scare me a bit to be honest.

GARETH: I just want to know when enough's enough.

DAN: Exactly, yeah. Well that's what I mean, I think, I don't know who's doing it, but someone above us is just forcing all this on us. And people are getting angry. People are getting angry.

GARETH: At this rate, Europe won't have a home.

DAN: No.

GARETH: If we won't have a home in Europe. And I mean white people. We won't have a home in Europe - we're giving it away. And that's not me being racist or nothing, that's the truth. China will be China. India will be India. South America will still be South America and mostly Hispanic. But who will we be?

This sense of existential threat is captured in the theory of Great Replacement; stopping and reversing the Great Replacement is the core idea of Generation Identity (Will). Billy, also active in GI, views the Great Replacement as being an appropriate way of thinking about demographic changes underway as a result of planned future immigration and natural population change as the Muslim birth rate exceeds that of other parts of the population. However, the key tenets of Great Replacement theory concerning population change circulate outside GI and are referred to regularly by respondents in this study. Dan and Alice talk about similar demographic change (in different cities) but do not believe that this is part of some greater plan to replace White European populations and Tonya thinks the terminology is off-putting, sounding 'very Hitleresque'. While Paul does not adopt the terminology of Great Replacement he strongly promotes a narrative of the existential threat to 'the native White British' who are said to be a minority in many towns and cities (Leicester, Luton, Birmingham, Slough and London) in the UK already.

[...] demographics is an odd thing. And what happens today is not expressed today, but expressed in ten years' time. So in ten years' time, you will see... and they're already saying in English schools, you know, 30% [...] of children in [...] English schools, are of non-indigenous European descent. So they are another race. That's 30%. I think it's about 14, 15% of the [whole] population is non-white, somewhere like that. But double that is in the school system. So what does that mean? It means in ten, twenty years what's it going to be then in the school system? 45, 50%? And then in twenty years, that'll be forty years on from what we were just talking about. And all those old white people have died, and the demographic change will be in swing. So what's happening today... it's basically like, demographics is like growing trees. You put down plenty of seeds today, but you don't see the true effect of sowing those seeds for some time. And it would be very foolish to say, 'Well it's only time to act when the population as a whole is, you know, this percentage non-indigenous British.' That is not the time to act. The time to act is when you can see the seeds being sown, which is now. The time to act is when there is still enough of you, so that you can make a change before things get too grim and dark. (Paul)

And this concern that major demographic change is happening without any open discussion of it resonates with respondents such as Alice and Cara:

But look, if it's true, if we're, you know, if the population is going to change to such an extent that we're no longer a majority white, you know, British or like I suppose English, country. Whatever. Then yeah, it'll change. And I'm sort of like, 'Well I don't know if I want that, to be honest.' It's not like, it's not even... I don't think that's even racist. I just think that's... to me, it's normal. I don't think... you wouldn't accept it in another country. Like you wouldn't... I don't know, in like Japan or something. 'Oh hey, we're just going to come and out breed you.' But yeah, if that's true, then it should be an issue that's discussed openly and we talk about it, and deal with it if that helps. Or if it's not true, then great – the 'alt-right' don't have to bother, you know. They're out of... they can stop worrying. So that's how I think – just have it all out in the open. (Alice)

A recurrent trope in narratives is that multiculturalism works only if 'the original culture' remains dominant. Thus for Jason 'the dominant culture has to remain British here for multiculturalism to work'. This is used to justify the concern about immigration and the proportion of the population from other than white British backgrounds. The most negative views about multiculturalism are expressed by Paul who thinks that countries are better off as monocultures and some cultures – specifically Islamic cultures – are simply not compatible with European culture.

[...] if you look at it on a planetary basis, the world is multicultural. i.e. there are many cultures. However, these cultures exist separately and are separated by natural barriers like mountain ranges and seas. And also by national barriers, man-made barriers. And when you

look at these cultures, these cultures are all a product of the people who created them. And they created them in very different ways, in very different climates, very different places. And they lived in near isolation for thousands and thousands of years in many cases. And they live better today in isolation, because when you mix cultures... and I'm not just talking races, I'm talking cultures. For example, if you mix Sunni and Shiite Muslims, what do you get? Problems. Why do Pakistan and India exist? Because India had to be partitioned because the Hindus, the Sikhs and the Muslims could not live in one area. This isn't just a white and non-white thing; this is a reality of human beings. Human beings are happier, more contented, more at ease when they are around people who look like them, people who act like them, people who have shared belief systems, common goals. (Paul)

Paul's solution to the ills of multiculturalism is what he calls 'peaceful separation':

As in people who aren't conducive to living here and don't want to live here really, but just want to import their culture to the exclusion of ours and take benefits etc. they need to leave. And there needs to be peaceful separation. There needs to be a reintroduction of family values. There needs to be traditionalism. And there needs to be a way for the indigenous people of all European countries to take their destiny in their own hands, and if they wish to, to celebrate their culture, heritage and tradition without fear of oppression or interference from either the state or other hostile groups. (Paul)

Jacob also believes 'a certain amount of segregation is healthy'.

In light of discussion Section 4.3.3 (below) it is worth noting too the expression of anger towards politicians who talk about integration and diversity while themselves living in, what were described as, completely white areas that are safe not ones where you are likely to be held up with a knife (Field diary, Pro-Brexit rally, 09.12.2018). This evokes Willinger's (2013: 71) warning that those who seek to 'unite all cultures in multicultural societies doesn't do a service to peace, but lays the foundations for a future of war and hate' and is indicative of how narrative around racialised and political 'others' intersect.

4.3.2.5 Fighting for 'survival': the 'suppression' of ethnic majority identities

If you want to extend life, the meaning of life being life, well I am trying to keep my race and people alive. So in a very real way, I have been fighting for the survival of something. (Paul)

As Berger (2018: 44-48) suggests, extremisms are distinguished by the belief that an in-group's success or survival is integrally connected to the need for hostile action against an out-group. As discussed above, more or less implicitly or explicitly, discourses about immigration and demographic change invoke existential threats to the 'native' 'White', 'British' or 'European' population. In addition to the fears expressed about the impending 'minority' status of the 'white' or 'British' indigenous population that were discussed above, however, respondents also talk about perceived suppression of majority population or white identities, anti-white discrimination or oppression and white self-hatred and guilt.

Generation Identity claims that contemporary political discourse denies, discredits and criminalises 'natural affirmation of what is one's own' (Generation Identity leaflet, received at Birmingham DFLA demo, 24.03.2018). Paul claims there is a culture of abuse towards people who have traditionalist, patriotic or nationalist views and who stand up for white well-being. Based on his experience at university, he says white people are dispossessed of any self-interest or any in-group preference:

[at university] So you'll have the Afro-Caribbean Society, Jewish... Union of Jewish Students. And several others. There was Muslim groups. But there's nothing, if you... there's nothing for the English. There's nothing... and if people try to set up groups, sort of like English Students or St. George's Students Society, they're closed down. It's called racist, it's called being bigoted. So everyone else is allowed to show their pride in who they are, except for us.

And when people are told they can't show their pride, when they're repressed, it creates activism. But if that activism is denied, it creates anger. (Paul)

Paul says that people feel ostracised for wanting to be among their own white ethnic group, which is unfair when there are groups to be part of for other ethnic or religious groups (Field diary, 15.05.2019). Lee, after commenting on demographic change in his area manifest in schools with only one or two white British kids in a class, says this bothers him because it will have an impact on what is taught and how your identity is valued:

[...] it's like your identity's being written out, isn't it and your history's being written out. And even in, in schools like that now, they won't, they won't be teaching like history, history lessons like we used to have history lessons. They'll be teaching all their, all their own kind of history, won't they? (Lee)

Paul hopes to address this by setting up a movement that is 'unashamedly pro-white' that will ensure a way for the indigenous people of all European countries 'to celebrate their culture, heritage and tradition without fear of oppression or interference from either the state or other hostile groups'.

A closely linked trope is that white people are being taught self-hatred and made to feel guilt:

[...] it feels like something is happening. And I don't know if it is just the zeitgeist. It feels like we're being sort of told that we have to hate ourselves. Meanwhile I think, yeah, I don't know. It's hard for me to tell, because I think I'm just somebody who looks at footage; I'm not on the ground anywhere. But I see footage of migrant attacks and that scares the living daylights out of me. And I hear the stories coming out of places like Germany and stuff. And sometimes I think they are... they've got this narrative where, basically it's you're telling white people to hate themselves. And making them weak. And you know, apologising for existing and stuff. (Alice)

Mikey blames what he calls an increasing attitude of 'self-loathing' and 'self-hating' on 'the Left', which, he says, is only critical of their own race or country. This trope is often talked about in the context of how to deal with slavery and colonialism. Paul says slavery is used as 'an instrument of white guilt' when in fact 'everyone has been both a victim and a perpetrator at some point'. Billy also argues that slavery was not uniquely perpetrated by white people:

[...] there is a lot of hate out there for Europeans. We get blamed for slavery, whatever else, stuff that's happened three or four hundred years ago and the world just wants to take it out on us. [...] Like, the likes of slavery, we get lambasted. 'Cause especially whites in America and stuff. But when the whites went to Africa to buy slaves, it was other black tribes who they were buying the slaves off. Black tribes went and took other black tribes, killed and kept them captive and sold them on. So it wasn't just white caused it. [...] But as well, before the whites were enslaving the blacks, there was the Barbary slave trade where Africans and Arabs were raiding the coasts of Europe. And some reckon they took up to a hundred... a million white slaves. (Billy)

Alice believes this association between Englishness, colonisation and slavery lies behind people seeing Englishness as 'some sort of disease':

[...] my friend did one of those DNA tests the other day. And she said she never really thought [...] that English was an ethnicity. And she said she was quite shocked by it. And I think what worries me is the idea of people [...] having less and less actual English blood, in a way. Like having that as part of them. And almost wanting to get rid of it, like it's some sort of disease, you know. Like, 'Oh I'm not English. English is colonisation. English is slavery. English is this.' And I just think it's, that idea is sad [...] (Alice)

Alice had actually started her political activism with the Black Lives Matter movement but had become disillusioned with the group because she got ‘called something because I was white’. She was annoyed also that they insisted that everyone on the steering committee was Black; this bothered her because the racial attributes of individuals were put above the needs of the movement. In a similar vein, Dan accuses the Labour Party of acting in a racist way because they are ‘very anti-white – they specifically try to recruit black people whereas if I put out a post look for white politicians, I’d be called every racist going’.

4.3.2.6 Ideological frameworks of race and racism

Without doubt, race has become more central to the milieu than it was 5 years ago. This may be associated with the rise of the ‘alt-right’, the engagement with which, Alice says, had made her think about ‘race’ for the first time:

[...] the ‘alt-right’ basically saying this seems like a plan, seems like there's a plan. Seems like the plan is to out-breed basically native people from their like homeland or countries. And you know, I like entertain the idea quite often these days. Because I think, 'Well it doesn't help that things are the way that they are, I think. Because you're always reading white people this, white people that. White men this, white men that. And it kind of props it up.' And then yeah, this whole thing about race. Like I never really thought about race very much. And you know, like I'm aware of it now. I didn't even think of myself as white until recently. (Alice)

A number of respondents understood race as being a ‘natural’ differentiating factor between people. In contrast to Alice, Paul says he has been acutely aware of race since childhood, because of where he grew up and he sees a ‘race-based outlook’ as natural: ‘You can change your social scale, you can never change your race. Race is something that is created by nature. A race-based outlook on the world is based in the natural world.’ (Paul). He rejects the kind of class-based activism that he associates with Tommy Robinson and says he is in tune, rather, with other racially conscious groups - regardless of colour - because they have similar hopes and dreams for their own people.

However, most respondents feel uncomfortable talking about race. Alice, for example, says her ‘best friend is a black gay guy’ and although some people in the milieu are fine with that, she imagines some of them would not be and she thinks that is ‘a bit weird’:

I think the idea of having genuine people that genuinely look at a black person and think in terms of ‘alt-right’ kind of, you know, 'What are they doing in my country?' type stuff is, it's kind of unnatural at this point. (Alice)

This discomfort arises from the disjuncture between respondents’ acceptance of racial and ethnic difference as ‘natural’ and, due to demographic change, as a ‘threat’, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, their recognition of the consequences of this naturalisation of racial difference being racism, which they believe is neither natural nor acceptable. There is no doubt that respondents recognise racism exists and is pernicious. They talk about having seen racism in operation within either their own city (such as areas or the schools they attended) or within their own milieu (groups or movements that they consider racist). Lee even reflects on his former self, saying he agrees with one of the lads he fought with at school who later caught up with him and called him a ‘racist bastard’; he had been. In order to manage this disjuncture, respondents often make a distinction between ‘real’, or ‘genuine’, racism and what gets called racism. For example, Mikey defines genuine racism as being rooted in the belief that you are better than someone else because of the colour of your skin and contrasts this with political correctness based on self-loathing:

So I think for sort of people with the, the politically correct views, I think is the ones that I sort of, have an issue with. 'Cause I think well, it's almost like, I mean, with any form of racism or discrimination, it's wrong and more often than not, it's centred on the unfounded belief

that you're better than someone else because of the colour of your skin or what religion you practice or whatever. Whereas, what we're starting to see now and for whatever reason it tends to be particularly members of the left, they're very sort of self-loathing, self-hating, you know, they're, they're quite sort of complimentary about other cultures, which is great, you know, everyone, good and bad in all. But they, they don't really seem to praise or be proud of being part of this country, proud of being British, that they seem, if they're gonna criticise anyone at all, they're quite happy to criticise members of their own race or their own country, but not anyone else. (Mikey)

The implications of there being 'too many who are willing to jump on this racist bandwagon', according to Cara, is that it undermines the capacity to see 'when someone is genuinely being racist, and hates you because of your skin colour'. For Mikey the danger is that race has become such a sensitive issue that people will not even have a discussion about it because they are 'scared of offending someone else'. However, he also talks about the genuine difficulty for people - especially people who have grown up in environments where racist language was the norm - of determining 'that fine boundary of what is funny and banter, and what's just out-and-out offensive'. The line is crossed for Mikey when pride in one's own culture is expressed in a way that demonises others while Robbie sees racism as the act of generalising behaviour to a whole group.

Respondents also talk about how they have responded when they have encountered or observed racism. Robbie who is an 'admin' on his movement's Facebook page says racism is not tolerated and recounts a recent case when he threw somebody out of the group for racist attitudes. He also made an explicit statement stating that what had been posted was 'wrong'. Paolo, who refers to himself as being 'brown', recounts how he had been subjected to racist verbal abuse himself. Paolo is of mixed European heritage but says, due to his facial characteristics, he has been taken for Afro-Caribbean and Pakistani as well as Chinese over the years. He recounts how, when on a DFLA march, a counter demonstrator had racially abused him;

I was outside of a pub in Sunderland, on my own; all the lads was inside. And a group of them approached me and was like, 'You're a racist.' I was like, 'What you on about?' 'You're in there with them lot. You're a racist, ain't you?' I was like, 'Jog on. Seriously, before you end up getting hurt, move yourselves now.' 'Didn't know a Paki could be racist.' 'You fucking what?' I can't stand racism. Anyone's racist in front of me, you'll get a slap. And they'll be like... I say, 'Do you realise what, the oxymoron of what you've just said? You've literally just called me a racist slur, whilst saying I'm a racist.' And it baffled me. And it ended up with fists getting bruised, shall we say. But that was purely because they had been racist. If I heard a racist on the DFLA march, I don't care who they're with, or what firm they are, or who they are, I wouldn't stand for it. (Paolo)

He goes on to say that this goes for everyday situations too; if he heard someone in the pub being racist, he'd be the first person to stand up and tell him to 'pack that in' (Paolo).

While racial difference is a given for respondents, racial superiority is not. The exception is the statement by Jacob that if a 'supremacist' is 'just someone who wants their people to be in a position of supremacy' then he is okay with that. He thinks every group should want to be the best and inequality is natural. Jacob is the only respondent to talk about the Aryan people or Aryan spirit; as this is primarily in relation to the distinction between Aryans and Semites it is discussed in the following section. There are more explicit condemnations of white supremacism. Dan decides not to go on one demonstration after he checked out a regional Infidels group and decided they 'were a bit white pride'. Robbie distinguishes himself from a friend who was 'always into white power and white supremacy'. Mikey stresses that his organisation (DFLA) condemns all extremism including 'some kind of far right neo-Nazi ideological belief that white people are better'.

4.3.2.7 Jews

Only a small number of respondents discuss Jewish communities but it is a question that generates strong and fundamentally opposing positions. The first is a strong expression of empathy. Dan describes himself as 'very pro-Jew' and expresses incredulity towards Holocaust deniers:

I'm very pro-Jew. Very pro-Jew. Very pro-Israel as well, always have been. [...] And I hate... I don't hate them, but I just don't get them. Holocaust deniers. I mean, I don't get them. How can you deny that really? But I'd like to go to Auschwitz and see it for myself. I would. I'm very into history, very. I went to Amsterdam, the Anne Frank Museum. (Dan)

He also warns that there are a lot of anti-Jewish conspiracies that you have to be wary of:

[...] the thing you've got to watch a lot of these conspiracies, because they will rot your head if you let them. Like the Jewish ones. There's a lot of... it does my head in. There's a lot of anti-Jewish conspiracies out there. A lot. And most of my mates were believing them until I spoke to them a bit. (Dan)

Jewish communities are perceived as co-existing without infringing; they have their own areas but 'don't bother no one' (Dan). A similar sentiment is expressed by DT who implicitly contrasts Orthodox Jews to Muslims: '[...] there are a lot of Orthodox Jews around the UK, but they don't push their ideology or their thinking path onto us.'

The other position is represented by two respondents. Paul says Jews are disproportionately represented in 'anti-Western' activities and central to the 'globalism' and 'internationalism' that he sees as the enemies of western man:

I did a video, you should listen to it, it's called the Jewish question explained in four minutes. And I say very clearly not every single Jew should be blamed for what is going on in western society. But Jews are disproportionately over represented in anti-western activities. Whether that be pornography, whether that be usury. And I list a number of things. (Paul)

Jacob, on the other hand, oscillates between admiration and emulation for Jewish people and Holocaust denial. Like Paul he sees Jews as overrepresented in the top jobs but says this is due to high IQ not some conspiracy and, as noted above, he sees Judaism (which he sees as having a strong biological, ethnic component) as an ethnocentric model of society that could be emulated. He also says, in contrast to Muslims, society has benefited from Jews precisely because they are at the forefront of intellectual ideas. However, he goes on to deny the deliberate genocide of Jews by Hitler, calling him, in fact, a Zionist (see below). Jacob is the only respondent to talk about the 'Aryan' people, distinguishing them from 'Semites' and saying that, since Engels made the same distinction, this makes it 'fairly mainstream racist science' (Jacob).

4.3.2.8 Ideological frameworks of anti-Semitism and National Socialism

As outlined above, one respondent – Jacob- expresses openly anti-Semitic views. He criticises Tommy Robinson for being surrounded by people like Avi Yemini and Ezra Levant and going to Israel and seeking 'Zionist funding':

[...] there is a rumour that Tommy Robinson has Jewish family, that his wife's Jewish, which would mean that his kids are Jewish. That's... I've not got any evidence for it. That's, that could be anything, but what if it's true? What if it is true, and he has that conflict of interest? It's almost like where you've been used as attack dogs. If they're funding Tommy Robinson to criticise Muslims. (Jacob)

Jacob claims there is an overrepresentation of Jewish people in the banking system and the media and denies the systematic murder of Jews by Hitler in the Holocaust:

I don't know how many he's accused of gassing, but I wouldn't be surprised if the vast majority of deaths were through starvation and of the concentration camp in... the system in general. I don't believe in concentration camps, I don't believe in forced deportations. I have heard that he was a Zionist and he was trying to help build Israel. And because maybe I'm naïve, empathise with people too much. Like I say, I don't believe there are many malevolent people out there. I think he did what he did out of love for his own people. And that bred the hate of the Jewish people as well. Because he saw them as, he saw them as the biggest threat to his people. But if he'd had chance to... if we hadn't of gone to war, we hadn't kicked off and he'd had time to get the Jewish people back to Israel, it would have been a whole different situation. But it's hindsight and it's... can't do anything about it. Yeah. I know it sounds so controversial and... (Jacob)

Ideologically, Jacob sees Zionism and National Socialism as similar:

[...] I kind of think National Socialism or even just the idea of an ethno state that the far right does want, it's almost like they want their own Zionism. They want their own... and they talk about religious aspects, they want their own version of Judaism, they want their own God. (Jacob)

He explains National Socialism as a rebellion against international capitalism in which race was put above all but in which there was a desire to limit the growth of economic inequality in an attempt to minimise conflict within your own people. He suggests that the Second World War could have been avoided by Britain leaning towards Mosley and his version of fascism and, it follows from that (for him), that the Holocaust could also have been avoided. Recognising his own views as 'controversial', he reflects:

[...] I don't want to end up all them goose-stepping Nazis, nationalist socialists, I don't want to end up there (...). Whether I am already there or not, I don't know. Some of the things I'm saying right now I know are so controversial that the general population would say, 'Yeah, you're a Nazi. Just admit it to yourself.' But how much of an ideology do you actually have to agree with, or a people or a movement do you have to agree with, to actually be there? (Jacob)

Other respondents stress that they hold anti-Zionist not anti-Semitic positions. Lee says he believes Zionists are controlling the banking system and - through a global 'shadow government' - are using money to influence global leaders such as Donald Trump. However, Lee acknowledges that other people in his milieu, such as those who were in Combat 18, were 'very anti-Jew and stuff like that'. Moreover, he had allowed Jack Renshaw (National Action) to do a speech at a demonstration he organised at which Renshaw had started 'ranting all this stuff' about Jews for which he was subsequently prosecuted. He recognises that National Action 'were very, very anti-Semitic, but they fitted in with our Zionism, 'cause we were against Zionism and all that as well' (Lee). Billy, who follows Paul's chat show, which criticises the influence of Zionism on the country, says he views Paul as anti-Zionist not anti-Semitic. Paul himself does not deny the Holocaust but sees it as being used as an 'instrument of white guilt' while other genocides are not talked about:

I made a video called 'The holocaust, instrument of white guilt'. Now taken down by good old YouTube. But what was that video really asking? It was asking that if six million people genuinely died at the holocaust and we take six million as a gospel truth... I didn't say it wasn't a gospel truth, I said if we do, working on that as a starting point, moving from there, why aren't we talking about the Holodomor, where eight to ten million ethnic Ukrainians were killed? Why aren't we talking about the red terror? Why aren't we talking about the Red Army purges? Why aren't we talking about the Soviet gulags? Why aren't we talking about the Great Leap Forward or the killing fields of Cambodia? Now these are never brought up by anyone. And if you said half of those things to people in public, they'd be like, 'You what?'

They'd look at you as if you'd just fallen off the moon. So communism can kill over a hundred million people, yet no-one talks about it. (Paul)

As noted above, there is also very strong opposition to anti-Semitism expressed by respondents and this is more widely represented in the respondent set than anti-Semitic positions. Alice says she just does not understand what she refers to as the 'JQ':

And I'm like, 'I get that.' And then they say, 'Well it's because the Jews... the Jews want to do this.' And you think, 'Do Jews really want to... is that something they plan, they want to do?' You just think, 'Why?' (Alice)

She also says that she doesn't buy hostility from journalists to people with right-wing views as being because they are Jewish; it is probably because they are journalists. The fact that she 'doesn't get' the 'things with the Jews', she says, has stopped her falling into following the 'alt-right'.

Dan (whose 'pro-Jew' position was set out in Section 4.3.2.4) also says that he considered Generation Identity too extreme for him because they are anti-Semitic (and 'white racist'). Mikey says he does not believe what he has read about the Kalergi Plan to allow Jewish domination by mixing all non-Jewish races to lower their IQ and keep them subservient. Tonya reports that a group of friends left a chat because they couldn't figure out how to remove one guy who was saying anti-Jewish things. While, as outlined in the previous section there are not only rejections of anti-Semitism but also sentiments of support for the Jewish people and/or the state of Israel, the strength of these feelings, and the thresholds that they have become for some respondents, is evidence that in the wider milieu anti-Semitism remains tangible.

4.3.2.9 The ideal society: back to the future

In this section of the report, a very wide range of opinions on and experiences of ethnic and cultural diversity of contemporary society are reflected in respondents' narratives. This makes it hard to formulate unequivocal conclusions as to whether the 'milieu' as a whole is characterised by the pursuit of a homogeneous society that excludes others and subjugates minorities in such a way as it might be considered 'extremist'. As set out above, such standpoints were encountered in the milieu. Jacob himself recognised that what he was saying would lead others to conclude 'you're a Nazi' while Paul declared a clear preference for a monocultural society to be achieved through 'peaceful separation' from 'hostile groups'. What the desired society would look like is less clear. In the discourse of both these respondents, while there are elements of a struggle against the decline into decadence of western civilisation, there is no evidence of any notion of the palingenetic rebirth of society associated with fascism (Griffin, 1991). Indeed both uphold a traditionalist rather than revolutionary form of nationalism.

It is worth noting in this context, the wider absence of any radical, utopian vision of a future, ideal society across the respondent set. The only recurrent 'utopia' or ideal society referred to by respondents is that of an England 'like it used to be' or 'like it should be'. That society is described as one that existed before most respondents were born and is characterised by 'community' - a community with its own rules and strong morality (Dan, Gareth), where you could walk around anywhere and say 'Hi' to anyone and everyone knew everyone's business (Imogen). This imagined society is also a more ethnically homogenous one, however. It is a society in which the English are the majority (Dan) and where families could be more traditionally organised because they could afford to live on one salary (CL, DT). This reflects an explicit or implicit belief across the respondent set that societies have a threshold for immigration and ethnocultural diversification, beyond which they become dysfunctional. This capacity is reached when the social system (public services, employment opportunities, education system) cannot support the population growth immigration entails and/or because diversity brings claims to the recognition of values that run counter to those prevailing (e.g. on gender equality, secularism, minority rights) in society. These beliefs express themselves in calls for 'controlled' immigration and for policies of 'integration' rather than 'multiculturalism'.

In this sense, underpinning the concerns of respondents, are macro-social changes including globalisation, demographic change, deindustrialisation, precarisation and responsabilisation of the working class. This reference to structural process is expressed most directly in the ideological mission of Generation Identity which is to ‘Stop and reverse the Great Replacement. Stop the Islamisation of Europe. Stop Globalisation’ (Generation Identity leaflet, received at Birmingham DFLA demo, 24.03.2018). However, the expression of these concerns across the wider respondent set is often personified, focusing on ‘agents’ or ‘actors’ who are perceived to pose a range of ‘threats’ or ‘dangers’ to ‘us’. Where these ‘others’ are bearers of perceived threats such as ‘Islamisation’, there is clearly a potential for the racialisation of ‘others’ and this is evident in the exceptionalisation of Muslim communities as uniquely ‘unwilling’ to ‘integrate’, hostile to non-Muslims and seeking cultural expansion. This is expressed alongside an almost universal rejection of racism and emphasis on a concern about Islam (as ‘ideology’) not Muslims either individually or collectively. There is also empathy with individual Muslims and Muslim communities, including the recognition of their unjust stigmatisation especially around terrorism. However, there is no sympathy for the refusal to condemn as an act of anti-racist resistance; Muslims who are welcomed within the milieu are precisely those who do condemn terrorism, extremism and CSE gangs as well as those who call for the ‘modernisation’ of Islam.

Finally, it is suggested here, the increasing prominence of European identitarianism and its American equivalent in ‘alt-right’ discourse, has led to a growth in the expression of the ‘defence’ of ‘white identity’ and ‘European civilisation’. Whether this shift merely exposes a hidden racial element of earlier discourse and potentially allows an open debate to be had, or signals a further polarisation and radicalisation of the political spectrum remains to be seen.

4.3.3 The pursuit of an anti-democratic political programme? The establishment and the Left

In this section we consider the political values and aspirations, and their ideological framing, within the right-wing milieu studied. We ask whether they suggest its members adopt an anti-democratic political programme that rejects the rule of law, suppresses all opposition and is prepared to use any means, including political violence, to achieve its aims such that they might be considered to be ‘extremist’ according to Schmid’s (2013) definition. On the right of the political spectrum ‘anti-democracy’ is a particularly important marker of extremism as it has been viewed as a key characteristic of the ‘extreme right’ in contrast to the ‘populist radical right’ (Mudde, 2007: 25) and single issue ‘anti-Islamist’ groups (Pilkington, 2016: 4). In line with the distinction between ‘extremist’ and ‘radical’ discussed in section 4.1, Mudde (2007: 31) distinguishes between movements of the ‘extreme right’, which are inherently anti-democratic, and those that might be considered as ‘populist radical right’, which uphold a core ideology combining nativism, authoritarianism and populism but are nominally democratic (although oppose some fundamental values of liberal democracy).

As noted in Section 4.3.2, a total of 25 different ‘out-groups’ were identified in the narratives of respondents and, of these the majority (14) were not racialised others but a combination of groups associated with the Left (‘Antifa’, ‘Hope not Hate’, ‘educators’, ‘snowflakes’), ideologically opposed and terrorist groups (‘Irish Republicans’, ‘IRA’, ‘Nazis’) and government and ‘establishment’ groups (‘government’, ‘politicians’, ‘police’, ‘mainstream media’, ‘Local authorities’ and ‘social services’). While, in this section, these personified threats are not discussed separately from the ideological frames in which they are found, it is important to recognise them as non-racialised ‘out-groups’ and as much, if not more, the target of anger (and potential violence) as the racialised out-groups discussed in Section 4.3.2.

4.3.3.1 Defending democracy (against ‘the establishment’)

Carter’s (2018: 157-182) suggests a ‘minimal’ definition of ‘right-wing extremism’ as an ideology that encompasses authoritarianism, anti-democracy and exclusionary and/or holistic nationalism. In this study of the milieu, it is argued in this section of the report, the criterion of ‘anti-democracy’ is not met.

Respondents see the democratic system as being the only way to achieve change. Cara states simply that, 'politics is the only peaceful way to do it' while Craig says 'in a democracy, everything's got to be done through the political process'. Dan urges people to go into politics and 'do it the right way' because 'the only way for me I can see people changing things is if we go and get ourselves elected'. A number of respondents consciously counterpose this 'ballot box' route to, what they consider less effective, strategies involving mass protest (demonstrations) or violence:

People on the streets – the EDL days, DFLA days, even now the Tommy days, the marches on the streets will never change anything. The violence on the street will never change anything. You have to fight these people from their own back yard and that is politics. Politics is the only way forward, because politics is what runs countries. If you change the political spectrum, then potentially you can change something. (DT)

Paul also has the EDL and Tommy Robinson in mind when he argues that mass protest movements and populist leaders do not bring change:

I feel those big mass protest movements are a waste of time too. [...] it allows people to blow off steam in a way that they think they're doing something. But it doesn't lead to political change. You can have two million people follow me into central - not going to happen - but if two million people followed me into central London tomorrow, with placards saying, you know, 'Stop mass immigration. Paul is the greatest.' It wouldn't make any difference. It would maybe make a story in the Daily Mail. Now if two million people voted for me tomorrow on that platform - that makes a difference. And politicians quite like groups like the EDL because the EDL allows angry people to blow off steam, but not achieve or change anything. (Paul)

During the course of fieldwork, Tommy Robinson did stand for election to the European Parliament and his message at the rally to launch the campaign was similar: we (by which he means 'the working class') are not represented in politics but that is partly our own fault because we don't vote when the only way we are going to threaten 'them' is if we take their seats (Field diary, Tommy Robinson European Parliament election rally, Wythenshawe, 25.04.2019)

Accompanying this general belief that the democratic political route is the only way to achieve change, however, is a deep distrust in the current political system. A key issue of contention here is Brexit, which has enormous symbolic significance for the right-wing milieu especially in terms of evaluating democracy. No respondent in this study voted to Remain and, at first, the referendum appeared to have an empowering effect. Campaigning for 'Leave' allowed Will, for example, to see that others cared about the same things as he did and he saw these issues suddenly 'come into mainstream discourse':

I would say virtually no public or acceptable figures criticised this stuff and that began to change around the year of the Brexit referendum. That was my first involvement in anything explicitly political. [...] I campaigned for 'Vote Leave' in [name of town]. Just low-level stuff, knocking on doors, speaking to people and so on. And this was an interesting moment because I came across a huge amount of people, in your immediate area, who completely agreed on all these things, thought they were big concerns. And I found it very strange that there was this gap between what everyone thinks [...] and what you turn on the television and then you see and I thought that was actually a bit troubling. And then I think all of this stuff started to come into the mainstream discourse over that year, particularly after Brexit and Trump. (Will)

Although the referendum had gone in favour of Leave voters, the positive fall out dissipated quickly and the process of withdrawal from the EU was cited consistently by respondents in this study as not affirming

but undermining the democratic process as the expression of the will of the people³³. The Brexit process is said to have demonstrated that that people are ‘ignored’ (Jason), ‘not listened to’ (Mikey) or had been ‘sold out’ (Gareth). Texting the researcher at a point in the Brexit cycle when parliament was voting on a proposed Brexit deal, Billy interprets the process as exposing democracy as a lie:

[...] you want to know why people become radicalised. When the masses see that democracy is a lie, that they can’t get what they desire through that lie, when MPs go against the people’s demands then they will seek other means. That’s when they will become radical... (Field diary, 11.03.2019)

Later Billy messages again:

‘the same rats of parliament will vote against a no deal Brexit and then article 50 will be extended. At the same time the scare mongering will continue i.e. blaming Brexit on [for] everything from food shortages, businesses closing to Cancer patients not being treated to brainwash the masses then another referendum will be called. We where [sic] never getting out.’ [...] Later I get a message with a picture of a haggard, witch-like woman with the caption ‘In 2069 Theresa May prepares to travel to Brussels to seek another extension to Article 50’. (Field diary, 11.03.2019)

While this lack of trust is far from specific to this milieu (see Mulhall, 2019), what is notable is an active response (rather than a withdrawal into political apathy) and the framing of distrust as a *threat to democracy* by those holding power (the establishment). This is illustrated vividly in Tommy Robinson’s election campaign leaflet which claims that the Brexit process shows ‘they’re laughing at us’:

They’re laughing at us.

All of them – Theresa May, Jeremy Corbyn, the European Union bureaucrats; 17.4 million of us voted for Brexit but they don’t care about people like us. They’ve tried to silence us and they took away our democratic rights by betraying Brexit. (Tommy Robinson campaign flyer, European Parliament elections, 2019)

As noted above, the ‘they’ for this milieu consists of multiple ‘others’ but in relation to the perceived failings of democracy, the three key players are: the government, politicians and the ‘mainstream media’.

A number of respondents mention directly the gap between those who govern and those who are governed. Tonya says she has given up protesting over issues she cares about because she knows people are not listened to. Explaining why she had not protested about new mosques being built in the town, she says, ‘I feel like we are brushed off as some little parasite that’s just irritating. They just flick them away and they’re gone.’ (Tonya). Other respondents envisage the relationship as a conscious disempowerment of ‘the people’ by government. Paolo believes ‘the government keep us on the breadline for a purpose’ and that prisons are kept full as cheap labour force for the government³⁴. DT goes further, arguing that the government is crippling the people to ensure they cannot resist:

It comes back to what the Nazis did to the Jews. I’ve been to Auschwitz; I’ve seen what the Nazis did and we read about a lot of information. What the Nazis did when they took them to the concentration camps, they stripped them of their dignity, they stripped them of their sanity, they stripped them of being able to get nutrients into their body. Because they knew if they kept them weak, they’d never be able to fight. You got to understand, when you’ve

³³ The only exception to this is Jason, who was interviewed in March 2020, and thus after the UK had left the EU. Reflecting on what the Brexit process has made him feel about how democracy works, he says ‘I believe that the people have won in the end. It has and it hasn’t happened. It’s, I’d say it’s the beginning of the process of it.’ (Jason).

³⁴ Here Paolo is reflecting on his own experience of prison, from which he had just been released on electronic tag, where prisoners worked sorting waste for recycling for which they were paid less than £1 a day.

got two hundred thousand Jews in a place, if they were strong enough to say, 'Right, a thousand of us might die when we run towards them, but we're gonna take over.' They couldn't have that. So what the governments are doing, they're crippling the people to make sure they can't stand up. If the taxes were lowered, the people had more money, they thought more openly because they had more time to think, a lot of what the government get away with wouldn't happen. So they are crippling the country to continue what they do. (DT)

The government is perceived to have failed to act on key issues of concern to people in the milieu including 'grooming gangs', radical Islam, homelessness among veterans and the delivery of Brexit. Especially in relation to Islamist extremism and the failure to bring perpetrators of CSE to justice, the government is seen as not only negligent but complicit. Billy for example sees the government as effectively 'pushing' Islam's expansion:

Well how can they [our government] not be involved or pushing it, when they're letting thousands of people in, what they know will never adjust to western civilisation? They don't come here to integrate. They come and demand that we change to suit them and their beliefs and their traditions and whatever else. And the government knows all this, so how can they not be involved, if they're letting it happen? (Billy)

The message to the government is stated starkly at a DFLA demonstration in Birmingham: 'deport all terrorists and child groomers now!!!' (see Plate 5)

Plate 5: Placard at DFLA demo, 24 March 2018



In the case of the failure to protect children from sexual exploitation ('grooming gangs'), it is local authorities and social services that are most frequently criticised for negligence and, in one case, for having put the abused girl at risk in the first place (Adam). One of the reasons local authorities or councils fail to act, respondents suggest, is because they are over-sensitive to the possibility of offending certain groups. Billy, for example, suggests that failure to prevent children in local authority care being groomed is a result of the fact that 'they put political correctness first, before defending kids'. Adam also accuses local authorities of treating victims inappropriately. Victim support groups are essential, he says, because 'if you leave them in the authorities' hands, you're just feeding them to the lions' (Adam).

Politicians are perceived almost universally in a negative light; they are the personification of the perceived failures of the democratic system. Again the expression of this as a gap or breakdown in relationship between agents of political power and ‘people’ is notable. Speaking to this sense that politicians don’t represent ‘us’, in a speech at an election rally, Tommy Robinson says that personally he had never voted because he didn’t see anyone representing him. He says 96% of MPs are middle class and, in his campaign leaflet, emphasises that his motivation for standing is to ‘represent you, the working class of England’ (Field diary, Tommy Robinson European Parliament election rally Wythenshawe, 25.04.2019). Another activist in the wider milieu, Tracy Blackwell, also stood as an Independent in the December 2018 parliamentary elections. She had taken the decision to stand, she says, because she had reached the conclusion that ‘no one truly represented us the ordinary people anymore’:

If there is one thing that I never wanted to be - it was a politician. However following what happened to my son³⁵, the subsequent cover-up, the lack of interest from any police officer or politician coupled together with becoming embroiled in a systemically corrupt law system, it eventually dawned on me that our parliament was broken and that no one truly represented us the ordinary people anymore. During this campaign, you will see and hear all the main parties make the most fantastic promises that they will never deliver how many times do we hear this accept it and put up with it? (Post by Tracy Blackwell, 16.11.2018, Field diary, 02.06.2018)

Further criticisms are made of individual politicians who had failed to keep their promises to help in particular campaigns (e.g. against the prosecution of army veterans in Northern Ireland). More generally, politicians are accused of lacking integrity, being corrupt and entering politics for personal gain. As DT puts it:

I think that the whole spectrum: government, establishment, police at the top level, not the bottom level, the top level, the whole thing is corrupt. The whole thing. There's too much money involved. These people are living high luxury lives and they are making sure that, anyone stands in their way, they can get rid of them. And that's what they're trying to do to Tommy. (DT)

DT goes on to suggest the problem is that politicians are being paid too much and acting in their own self-interest; because they earn so much, they become interested not in what the people want but ‘in keeping their seat’. This leads Tommy Robinson to talk about the existence of a ‘political class’ (Field diary, Tommy Robinson European Parliament election rally, Stockport, 08.05.2019).

Politicians are widely seen as complicit in, or responsible for, covering up issues of concern to activists. Adam blames former Labour PM Gordon Brown and Home Office Minister Jacquie Smith for initially telling police to ignore the ‘grooming gangs’ issue; subsequently politicians had to cover this up because it would put them in more trouble. This sentiment is reflected in a DFLA Action (Telford) leaflet, which carries a cartoon depicting politicians as the ‘fourth wise monkey’ who ‘admits no evil’ (see Plate 2, above). Paul says that politicians pander to the Muslim community because they are dependent on their vote; this means they have ‘no morals’.

³⁵ Tracy Blackwell is the mother of one of three teenagers killed whilst waiting at a bus stop in London in January 2018. The driver of the vehicle was convicted of causing death by dangerous driving. Tracy Blackwell co-founded the Justice for our Boys’ campaign to have the case investigated as an act of terrorism, arguing that the driver was on a known terrorism list and the police and government were covering up the true cause of the boys’ deaths.

The mainstream media - usually referred to as the MSM - is part of the establishment for respondents. The BBC, in particular, is seen as a fourth arm of the state. DT equates 'government' with media and claims there are no independent media companies in the country; they are all told what to do and what to say from the very top. At a Veterans rally this equation is tangible as demonstrators vent anger at the government by walking en masse from the demonstration venue to the BBC building and chanting 'shame on you' outside it (Field diary, Veterans' rally, 18.05.2019). The mainstream media are implicated as a driver of radicalisation in as much as they exacerbate conflict between radical Islam and the extreme right by 'drilling both sides' (Dan). Dan also says that the media's failure to expose the far left, confirms the perception that the left control the media, which fuels grievance and disempowerment and acts as a driver of radicalisation.

The most usual criticisms of the MSM are that it is biased in what it chooses to cover, what it chooses not to cover and how it covers it. For Dan this means '98% of the news you're reading now is not true'. Jacob believes the mainstream media push 'imbalanced leftist politics' (Activist Information Booklet, The [city] Collective, distributed at launch of movement, 22.09.2019). Specific complaints relate to both the failure of the media to cover issues of concern in the milieu such as 'grooming gangs' and racially motivated attacks if they are against white people (DT) and having a particular agenda on how the milieu is portrayed. Paolo, for example, complains that the media portray the DFLA as an 'over-forties, white and bald party' while never taking pictures of the 'black lads', 'mixed race lads' or 'Gurkhas' present at events. Paul also complains that the media fail to portray diversity in the milieu. Journalists are seen as untrustworthy. They are characterised as 'bitter' and said to 'harass' people who have 'right-wing views' (Alice). In the context of discussing whether he would be interested in talking to a BBC Panorama journalist interested in making a documentary about extremism, Dan declines, saying he couldn't talk to the BBC because 'they'd twist your words' (Field diary, 18.03.2018).

This position reflects, in part, past experience of respondents with the media in which they feel they have been exploited or 'set up'. The most illustrative example is that captured in what Tommy Robinson refers to as 'Panodrama'. Billed in advance as providing evidence that will 'destroy the credibility of the BBC 150%' (DT), the Panodrama documentary film³⁶ was first aired at a rally organised close to the BBC building in Media City, Salford on 23 February 2019. It documents the making of a BBC Panorama documentary about Tommy Robinson, for which he is invited to be interviewed and in which the anti-extremism campaign group Hope not Hate are involved in providing background research. In the course of making the programme, a disgruntled former activist is approached to provide inside information on him and a plan devised between Robinson and her to turn the tables on the journalist. She thus agrees to meet the journalist and secretly records the conversation with him - a conversation held over dinner accompanied by large amounts of alcohol paid for by the journalist. The recording captures a series of what are described as homophobic, racist and anti-working class remarks made by the journalist during this dinner as well as his suggestion that the activist might want to make sexual harassment accusations against Tommy Robinson (Field diary, Panodrama: BBC expose rally, 23.02.2019). There are also accusations of sexually inappropriate behaviour made against Hope not Hate researchers in relation to other activists approached in the making of the Panorama programme. The plot denouement is that Tommy Robinson turns up, as if to do the invited interview with the journalist, but, instead, shows the secretly recorded footage. The hopes of activists that the 'Panodrama' scandal would lead to 'the take down of the biggest media company/organisation in this country' (DT) and '100% get rid of Hope not Hate' (DT) were disappointed, however. The BBC Panorama programme did issue a statement apologising for 'offensive and inappropriate' remarks made by the journalist who, for ostensibly unconnected reasons, left the BBC in October 2019. The Panorama documentary itself was never aired but there was deep frustration in the

³⁶ The film is available at: <https://youtu.be/wNd2bvLvyk4>.

milieu at the lack of mainstream media coverage of the story, compounding the feeling of organised media bias:

[...] he [Tommy Robinson] can go for dinner in a pub in Manchester and a photographer... they can take a picture of him, put it in the headline news, 'Tommy Robinson's in Manchester.' But then when he takes down the BBC and releases some interviews about one of the figureheads of the BBC, Panorama, the top of the chain, lying on camera to gain information about Tom – no, there's nothing. No media, and I mean none. I mean, not even... like forget BBC, Sky News, I'm talking not one single outlet is running the story. So that means the conversations have gone from the BBC, been filtered down to all the media outlets, to go, 'Do not, do not run...' (DT)

From the discussion above of the government, local authorities, politicians and the media, it is evident that respondents do not identify one 'enemy' but that a combination of agents and institutions comprise the 'state' or 'the system', which is the root cause of current problems. There is not a single understanding of 'system' or 'state' among respondents; the terms are used rather to indicate that the 'problem' is not an issue with any particular community but with the often invisible authorities or powers that are failing to intervene or, conversely, targeting people wrongly. The organiser of an anti-grooming action attended by the researcher, for example, says the movement is not against any community but 'anti-system' as it is the 'system' that has ignored and let down the victims of grooming (Field diary, DFLA action, 30.03.2018). Imogen, who campaigns against involuntary adoption, also sees the state as amorphous, consisting of multiple agencies failing, or targeting, people in different ways; it is only when you piece it all together that you see what is going on. When prompted to say what she means by 'the state', Imogen responds:

Social services, the courts, the judges, the councillors, basically the government officials. Anyone who's got the power to do something, that refuses to do it. That even includes social services, state workers. They have the power. They have the ability to out what's going on, but they don't do it. So therefore they're part of the problem. (Imogen)

Jason also says he is not angry at any particular group of people but at 'the state for not delivering democracy [...] The system's just ignoring it, that's the problem.'

For some people within the milieu, it is the process of division, or polarisation, which is the main threat to democracy rather than specific agents or institutions. This is put most simply by DT who says 'the more and more the divide between people and government, it's gonna... I mean, the violence will come' (DT). A number of respondents describe the current political situation or country as deeply divided in a way that threatens escalation into violence. Gareth views the political situation as very volatile, especially in America; unless people come round the table, he says, the situation might get out of hand, even leading to war. Dan sees 'the whole country is just divided: left, right; Muslims, Jews'. Tonya sees this animosity to be exacerbated by a 'pack mentality', which has a negative impact on politics and alienates people from one another.

These ideas clearly draw on wider populist discourse that the main political divide is between an oppressed 'people' confronting a governing elite but they are not elaborated in any ideological framework. Moreover, such references to the establishment versus the people are made mainly by movements and 'influencers' in the milieu rather than by 'ordinary' respondents. It is also important to note that although the terms 'elites', 'politicians' and 'the establishment' are often used interchangeably, these terms vary in how they are politically inflected. For example, when the term 'the establishment' is used, it is always with the assumption that it is ideologically left-wing. However, the term 'elites' encompasses a broader political range and includes figures, such as 'bankers', invoked by left wing populists too. This is illustrated in Tommy Robinson's election flyer characterisation of the composition of, and relationship between, 'the elites' and 'the people':

THE ELITES WANT IT BUSINESS AS USUAL - the big politicians, the big banks, the big media.
The entire establishment is against Brexit. Everyone's against it but the people.

I'M WITH THE PEOPLE – the military veterans, the families who have suffered from Muslim rape gangs, the working class people who have been left behind economically. People who have been mocked by the elites, who were told they just don't count. (Tommy Robinson campaign flyer, European Parliament elections, 2019)

In separate sections of the flyer Robinson represents all politicians and EU bureaucrats as 'them', who 'don't care about people like us' and 'try to silence us' and himself as someone who has been fighting for 'the forgotten people who have no voice' against 'the elites' who 'have tried to silence my own voice'. DT sees the political world as consisting of two 'sides' (the establishment and the people) living completely different lives:

I think what's happening at the moment is the establishment are in a bubble. What they're in is a bubble where they have, they have everything on their side - they've got money on their side, they've got the buildings, as in the parliament buildings on their side. They've got all the politicians that are all in the same boat in a sense of they all think that they're representing the people. (DT)

He goes on to say that 'the establishment' are looking after number one and 'brainwashing society' and to warn that, as that divide deepens, so the likelihood of violence increases. Like Tommy Robinson he includes 'banks' as an object of criticism, arguing that that banks and the government are 'the same people'. He also emphasises that those indicted are those at the top, not bottom of any structure, saying the whole spectrum of government, establishment, police at the top level are corrupt. Less influential respondents tend to talk more about individuals or groups (politicians, bankers) and illustrate their perceived privilege in relation to concrete 'perks' that are resented rather than employing abstract notions of 'the establishment'. Johnny, for example, sees politicians as not living in the real world but a world where they get their dinners paid for them. Mikey says that 'fat cats' in 'high-ranking offices in banks' give themselves 'massive pay rise and bonuses, while the rest of the workers sort of might get a pay rise every now and again'. Finally there is anger at the perceived discrepancy between elite declarations and elite behaviour. Examples given include politicians who talk about integration and diversity when they live in completely white and safe areas (Field diary, Pro-Brexit rally, 09.12.2018) and 'elitists' who welcome refugees but don't live anywhere near them (Will).

No matter how serious the situation appears, however, no respondent advocates any other system of governance than democracy. There are some expressions of support for democratic reform such as the introduction of proportional representation, which, it is felt would be a fairer system (Jason). Will also thinks that more frequent employment of elements of direct democracy (especially referenda) would benefit the right-wing. Giving the examples of the banning of minarets in Switzerland and Brexit in the UK, he suggests that this might be the way to shift the political agenda on immigration:

I think having a direct democratic kind of voice would radically change them. If you asked people tomorrow do you want us to carry on with this policy of mass immigration I think you would see 70% plus 'no'. I mean like look at Brexit [...] (Will)

Interestingly, however, Will says he takes his practical inspiration for how to bring previously fringe views into the mainstream through political activism from successful groups on the Left. He believes that society changes incrementally by absorbing criticisms and eventually this will happen with the right-wing criticisms on immigration too. The only discussion about any radical system change was encountered when attending the launch of a new movement, when a participant (not a respondent and older than the target group of this study) talked about an immanent direct action, including military veterans, to throw out sitting MPs in a kind of coup d'état. This was dismissed by Jacob (who had organised the event) as

‘delusional’ and did not materialise.

4.3.3.2 *Defending freedom of speech and the equal right to representation*

Returning to the question of what constitutes extremism on the right of the political spectrum, a second key component is ‘authoritarianism’ (Carter, 2018: 157-182). Indeed, authoritarianism is included as a core element not only of the extreme right but also the populist radical right (Mudde, 2007: 31). In this section, we thus consider where activists in this milieu stand on the authoritarian-libertarian values spectrum in general before exploring in more depth key issues - freedom of speech and the representation of dissenting voices - that allow us to determine the relative weight individuals in the milieu place on order, discipline and authority, on the one hand, and personal freedom, on the other.

In the milieu studied here, only one respondent – Jacob - has a strongly authoritarian outlook. As discussed in Section 4.1.1, Jacob calls himself ‘proper far right’, which he associates with authoritarianism, discipline and order rather than ‘leftie hedonism’ (Field diary, Free Tommy Robinson and Melanie Shaw³⁷ demonstration, 07.09.2019) whilst bemoaning the fact that left wing activism is currently more organised and authoritarian than right wing activism:

[...] in some ways, left wing activism is more right wing - it's more orderly, it's more organised, it's more, they're more authoritarian. [...] what we refer to as Antifa, the black bloc Antifa, they're, they're authoritarian, they're militaristic and those... You see, this is why it's complicated to, when we talk to people about left and right being chaos and order. Because they'll go, 'But yeah, but it's the left that are more authoritarian.' But yeah, at the moment in this time and place. But if you take the grand scheme of politics over history, it's, now is not a good time to be saying what's left and right. You've gotta look at the big picture and yeah, they are more authoritarian at the moment and they're more disciplined and for balance, we need to do the same on the right. (Jacob)

He seeks to promote ‘eudaimonic happiness, rather than hedonism’ and to instil discipline and authority in order to ‘minimise the bottom, the growth of... the expansion of the bottom end of society, degeneracy’ (Jacob).

Mikey also attaches importance to instilling respect and discipline as a deterrent to stop people doing wrong. He sees corporal punishment of children as acceptable when other all else fails; ‘a little bit of discipline never really went amiss’ (Mikey). Gareth talks about strict discipline in the family as being the bedrock of respect, discipline and order in society more widely:

Me mum, she wouldn't let us get away with nothing. So like if we got in trouble, we'd pay the price. Mostly with a fist. So yeah, like it learned. You learn lessons quick like when you're getting a beating. So yeah. Like it was strict, but in the long run it has helped me become who I am, because it's needed, do you know what I mean? Without order, the house crumbles, and furthermore society crumbles, because everyone's crumbling. (Gareth)

However, these expressions of the need for order and discipline are balanced, indeed outweighed, in the milieu by an anti-authoritarian spirit. Indeed, as stated in Section 4.1.1, Jacob dismisses the current extreme right milieu as ‘just all anti-authoritarianism’. In this respondent set anti-authoritarian

³⁷ Melanie Shaw was a resident of Beechwood children's home as a teenager in the late 1980s and later (2010) was one of the first people to make claims of organised physical and sexual abuse taking place there. After a series of convictions for arson, assault and damage to property she was given a hospital order for confinement in a psychiatric prison facility with no fixed time limit. No charges have been brought against anyone at the Beechwood home but Melanie Shaw's treatment is viewed as part of a cover-up of abuse there by protestors (see: <https://www.nottinghampost.com/news/nottingham-news/who-is-melanie-shaw-2381898>).

dispositions were most pronounced among those who enjoyed the 'chaos' and 'disorder' of football hooliganism (Robbie, Johnny, Paolo, Jermaine) and punk (Robbie):

EDL was like, well this seems pretty cool, you know. There's people smashing up shops and things, but you know the EDL running through the streets. [...] And I was always like, 'This is like uncontrolled chaos,' and you know, not necessarily what ultras... it was kind of like a fine line between ultras and hooligans and that was something I was like really interested in. (Jermaine)

Jermaine understands this fascination through his recognition that 'I've always had a problem with authority and things like that'. Tonya talks about her dislike of people within right wing milieus who try to 'dictate' to others 'what they can believe' and says her main thing is 'people being free'. Thus, she recounts, she had stated explicitly to her church group that she would not get involved if they were 'going to be authoritarian and against somebody else's sexual preference or romantic preference.' Dan describes himself as 'pretty liberal' on some issues including being pro-legalisation of cannabis and seeing homosexuality as perfectly acceptable. Will, also says that while GI, as a movement, is rooted ideologically in the French new right, in practice 'most members are more kind of like libertarians, or Conservatives or populists on the right'.

In Section 4.3.3.1, it was shown that there was no support for anti-democratic forms of rule or action; in fact respondents saw themselves as protecting democracy from threats posed to it by a corrupt establishment and its elites. When respondents talk about what it is about democracy that they value - and see as under threat - two³⁸ key facets are discussed: freedom of speech; and equal right to representation.

Freedom of speech is seen as the 'bedrock of democracy' (Field diary, EDL demonstration, 08.04.2017) and cited more than any other political value by respondents in this milieu. Its high visibility is, in part, a reflection of shifts in the milieu over the course of fieldwork as key influencers such as Tommy Robinson increasingly positioned themselves as defenders of free speech. However, as Dan says, the large crowd of people attending Free Tommy rallies 'wasn't just there for Tommy; they were there for, you know, freedom, they were there for freedom of speech'. Defending free speech is seen as vital because it is the means by which ideas are discussed. Thus, by fighting 'for what it is acceptable to say', you are fighting 'in the end also for ideas' (Generation Identity leaflet, received at Birmingham DFLA demo, 24.03.2018). Free speech is also posited as essential to the process of democracy. For Jacob it is the mechanism society has for 'mediating between the extremes' (Activist Information Booklet, The [city] Collective, distributed at launch of movement, 22.09.2019). Craig, the older respondent in the study, illustrates this more concretely saying, freedom of speech is how we are enabled to talk about things; he would rather hear what Anjem Choudary has to say than have him locked up.

Respondents in this milieu feel core principles of freedom of speech are being eroded. At one event attended by the researcher, a demonstrator is dressed as the grim reaper with a sign declaring 'Free Speech is dead' (Field diary, Support Tommy Robinson demonstration, 01.06.2018). Mikey's concern is that the discussion of sensitive, but important, issues is being prevented by oversensitivity to causing offence:

I think freedom of speech is, is quite an important thing. Now, it's something which this country's boasted for centuries. But sort of more and more, it gets constricted in many ways. Say social, social media, for instance. I mean, the one... the three big, I think, controversial subjects which I think are the most restricted are things on the issue of race, the issue of religion, and I think the issue of sexuality. Those three topics tend to be the most sensitive, I

³⁸ Freedom of religion is also mentioned by two respondents as a core value of democracy.

think. [...] people are either scared of offending someone else, just through having a discussion about it, or more often than not, it's actually censored in some way. (Mikey)

A central complaint is that while Islam has a kind of 'protected status' that means it is not open to any form of criticism (see Section 4.3.2.2), even putting up a picture of Tommy Robinson results in a Facebook ban (Jason). The perceived misuse of 'hate speech' laws to silence conservative thinkers is often considered to blame for this. Cara feels we are living in a society where 'we're not allowed to say certain things without the threat of arrest or prison'. This is based on her own experience – of being suspended from her position as city councillor over an issue that she feels was 'blown out of proportion' – as well as other notorious cases³⁹.

The balance between rights to free speech and obligations to protect citizens from abuse is judged differently by individuals within the milieu. Craig considers himself a free speech absolutist:

I am absolutely against racism one hundred percent, right. But I think if someone's a racist, they should be allowed to say what they say, and then we should be able to call them out on it. I'm a complete supporter of Israel and the Jewish people, always have been. If somebody's anti-Semitic, they should be allowed to say it, and then we should be able to say to them, 'Why are you saying this? This is absolute nonsense. Your conspiracy theories are complete garbage. This is why.' And when you start dragging people through courts, one, you make a martyr of them and, two, you drive it underground. So I think those discussions, we need to be able to have those discussions, and not having them is what's gonna cause a potential explosion at some point, rather than... So, I mean, the thresholds are, in terms of freedom of speech, I would pretty much be a free speech absolutist, even if somebody was saying something that was really appalling. (Craig)

Gareth also thinks that 'every conversation needs to be had'. He is concerned that free speech is 'coming under threat' because 'we now think there are topics that are not allowed to be spoken of' (Gareth). Constraints on freedom of speech, he thinks, is a slippery slope to 'policing thought':

[...] stopping someone from talking is just like the start of it. Then it'll be like stopping someone from voting. Then it'll stop someone from doing this. And we'll all end up in concentration camps if they have their way. (Gareth)

Paul, who has been most directly affected by where these lines are drawn, having been engaged in significant legal battle over what constitutes language and behaviour intended to stir up racial hatred, however, is not a free speech absolutist. He argues for three restrictions on freedom of speech: incitement to a criminal act; threatening someone; or deliberately spreading a falsehood about a person. As a rule of thumb, he says, everything you put out should pass 'the mum test' i.e. 'If you wouldn't say it to your mother, don't say it in public'.

As evident from the examples above, in the milieu studied for this report, respondents feel that freedom of speech is under threat not so much by authoritarian government but a culture of the avoidance of offence. At the level of principle, Paul suggests that the *right to offend* is more crucial to a free and just society than having the *right not to be offended*. His logic is that:

Because once you have the right not to be offended, once you have the right to say, 'I don't want to hear that point of view' everyone has a right to say, 'I don't want to hear that point of view.' But sooner or later, somebody might not want to hear your point of view, which silences you. (Paul)

³⁹ She cites here the case of YouTube vlogger Mark Meechan ('Count Dankula') who was fined £800 in April 2018 for violating laws on grossly offensive material under the Communications Act after posting a video showing how he had taught his girlfriend's dog to do a Nazi salute. He claimed this was done as a joke to wind his girlfriend up.

Alice also feels the right to offend is an important principle. At a personal level, she says, within her friendship group this was the way people expressed themselves - in a friendly, playful way - and she fears the loss of that right will create a culture of fear among the younger generation. A direct example of this is provided by her friend Tonya (interviewed separately), who recounted how Alice had been criticised for using an offensive word about disabled people in a post about her own participation in a charity run for a disability charity. Tonya is a wheelchair user and says she wasn't at all offended and understood how Alice had intended the comment. The defence of the right to offend is thus strongly associated with criticism of so-called 'snowflakes'; a term used to indicate a tendency to get easily and unnecessarily offended (Paolo). It is a term used by respondents more widely to refer to those who oppose them, primarily counter protestors, to indicate both a weakness in character but also as a mechanism for closing down conversations that they feel need to be held (Field diary, DFLA action, 30.03.2018; Field diary, Tommy Robinson European Parliament election rally, Bootle, 19.05.2019),.

The second core principle of democracy that people in the milieu seek to protect is the equal right to representation. This point is made explicitly in Tommy Robinson's campaign flyer:

On 23rd May, we all count the same. Rich or poor, we each get one vote. And I'm asking you to give me your vote and send them a message they'll never forget. (Tommy Robinson campaign flyer, European Parliament elections, 2019)

In sharp contrast to earlier research with the EDL (Pilkington, 2016: 209), no respondent in this study said that they do not vote on principle or in practice. A surprisingly high number of respondents had stood for election themselves. Cara became an elected councillor at the age of 22 and was in post at the time of interview (although did not regain her seat when she stood for re-election as an independent in 2019). Paul had stood for election multiple times for the BNP (2002-10). Mikey stood for local council election for UKIP in May 2019 and was disappointed to come second while Jacob was a candidate for the Brexit party in the December 2019 elections. Dan says he had been offered the opportunity to stand for UKIP but thinks he is not ready yet. Jason, only 17 at the time of interview, plans a career in politics, first at the local level but aims to run for parliament eventually. Jason has a strong sense of the public service role of the politician and seeks to move from activism to mainstream politics because he wants to 'represent everybody'.

When talking about political representation, respondents are primarily concerned about what they perceive to be a threat to this core democratic principle. This is captured in the many references (67 in total) to the silencing of their political voice. This was strongly articulated across the milieu and felt to be enacted through: direct 'silencing' of individuals and messages; broader socialisation into a culture of 'political correctness'; and an ensuing application of 'self-censorship'. While 'silencing' has been a significant trope in populist radical right discourse (Pilkington, 2016: 203-221), it has taken on a particular prominence recently in the UK. This is related to the imprisonment of Tommy Robinson on 'contempt of court' charges, which became framed as the 'silencing' of those who speak out against 'grooming'. This is evident from Tommy Robinson's election campaign flyer which claims:

I've spent a decade fighting for Britain – especially for the forgotten people who have no voice.

The elites have tried to silence my own voice, whether it's throwing me in jail on trumped up charges of contempt of court for my journalism, or pressuring social media companies to delete my Facebook page. (Tommy Robinson campaign flyer, European Parliament elections, 2019)

This trope was also prominent at the DFLA action against 'grooming gangs' in Telford, at which a leaflet was distributed entitled 'No more Silence' (see Plate 2) and placards were carried stating 'No more silence – You wil [sic!] be heard'. Two participants at the DFLA demo in Manchester draped themselves in England

flags with 'We will not be silenced' emblazoned on them (see Plate 6) (Field diary, DFLA demo, 02.06.2018).

Plate 6: 'We will not be silenced', DFLA demo, 02.06.2018



In these narratives, the right wing is positioned as the dissenting voice, denied the right to expression. In relation to school experience, Jason says that people are just too scared to speak out while Tonya felt her 'opinions were just banned - I was not allowed to say them'.

I stood up and started saying my views. I was in year ten at that point. And then more and more people actually cheered me on. And so many people had told me privately that they agreed, but were too scared to speak out, 'cause they can't have any speech. They can't say their points, 'cause they'll get called for it. They'll get called racist and that. (Jason)

Another way to silence is to deny any kind of platform or mechanism to associate. Alice feels the Left seeks to totally remove those who 'go against the grain' from the public sphere, describing their strategy as:

'We can't let them speak. We should punch them in the face. We should put their personal addresses online. We should completely smear and slander them. They don't deserve, they don't deserve to use these websites, these services. They don't deserve anything.' Essentially, they want you, like, dead or homeless, you know. It kind of feels like they just want you gone off the face of the earth. (Alice)

Paul recounts how he had joined a group called the 'Free Speech Society' at university but it turned out that 'the only people on campus who weren't allowed to speak were those who were traditionalists, people standing up for white well-being, people who had patriotic or nationalistic views'. The establishment, Paul believes, is stoking extremism through denying the freedom of association and expression:

[...] the establishment also stokes extremism by saying to anyone that says the things that I'm saying, 'You have no right to say that. You have no right to organise. You have no right to freedom of association, freedom of speech, freedom of expression. And when we take those things away from you, if we think you still hold those beliefs, we'll hound you. We'll make it so you can't get a job, we'll make it so you're a social pariah. We'll bring in laws that make

sure you keep your mouth shut. So you can be dragged off in the middle of the night for just saying something to someone on Twitter.' (Paul)

Political institutions are also accused of denying political voice to the right. Dan says the city's mayor is 'shutting one side of the political argument up', while Cara complains that she was suspended from her position (as councillor) for defending leaflets criticising Islam. Those who are fighting social services to regain access to their children report measures applied in cases of forced adoption and long-term foster care that mean most parents are under a court order (described as a 'gagging order'), which means they cannot share images of their children and thus cannot campaign or let people know what has happened (Imogen).

Silencing is internalised and practised on the self through self-censorship. This process is articulated powerfully by Tonya, who says that she has started to avoid politics for fear of saying the wrong thing. Her experience is partially related to a clash with a teacher in college over an essay she wrote shortly after the terrorist attack at the Manchester Arena, after which she learned to 'keep my opinions away from my papers'. But she has seen how her views are not accepted elsewhere too:

I did my work experience in [names company]. And they are very naturally a leftist sort of company. And they do somehow, I don't know how, bring their politics into their products. They're very pro-refugee, pro them and everything that I'm very anti, so when I did work experience there and they were speaking about things like... I'd sit and I'd smile. Because I need to do work experience. I needed that to get through college. So yeah, that was like, it was one of those things where I was beaten into submission, like, 'Your opinion is not accepted here. Do not say a damn thing.' So I didn't. (Tonya)

Lee, who is trying to keep away from the milieu, as he is on licensed release from prison and knows that access to his children may be jeopardised if he reconnects with it, says he has developed some strategies to stop himself getting wound up by political events. If sees something on the TV that annoys him, he switches it off rather than, as previously, taking it as a starting point for reading more and seeking to do something about it. This kind of socialisation into disengagement with politics would normally be seen as undermining democracy.

The broader implications for understanding drivers of radicalisation of this perceived denial of political voice are considered in Section 4.5. In the previous section the absence of non-democratic or extremist routes to bringing about social change was noted. However, there are direct, non-institutional, responses to this perceived 'silencing' that might be considered 'radical' in as much as they employ extra-institutional means (Beck, 2015: 18-20). This is captured in numerous references to social and political activism in the milieu in terms of 'standing up', 'speaking out' and 'telling the truth'. A key figure as 'truth-teller' is that of Tommy Robinson (Adam; Jacob; Jason; Field diary, Support Tommy Robinson demonstration, 01.06.2018; Tommy Robinson European Parliament election rally, Wythenshawe, 25.04.2019). Respondents also refer to their own activism as standing up and speaking the truth. This is especially in relation to 'grooming gangs' where doing so attracts accusations of racism. Adam says his group is focusing on grooming gangs because nobody else is - because of political correctness, 'they're scared to stand up and speak about it, 'cause when you do, you get called racist':

[...] it's about telling the truth. I won't care who they are, what they are. I'm against all paedophiles. I'm against all rapists. [...] We've not done anything more than the truth and, and we never will. All we want is justice and for the truth to be out there, and what, what sane person wouldn't want that? (Adam)

Tonya also comments that it is bad that one friend, who only ever shares articles about grooming gangs, gets taken down from Facebook because although it is an uncomfortable truth, people deserve to know. It seems that activists in this milieu, as more widely, see 'truth' as the antidote to the uncertainties of a

post-truth world (Keane, 2018). While Keane is right to see the appeal to ‘fact’, ‘evidence’ or ‘reality’ as a false solution, since what counts as such varies across time and space as much as ‘truth’ itself, for activists in this study the ‘truth’ is potentially less important than the ‘telling’. For most activists in this study – the exceptions here are those who set themselves up as influencers - there is no absolute investment in the truth being told, but rather in the capacity of what is said to disrupt, dislodge or require at least evidence of authenticity of what is accepted, and protected by existing authorities and hegemonies, as truth. Many respondents, when talking about the causes in which they are engaged, recognise a degree of uncertainty, indeed impossibility, of knowing ‘the truth’ or that they have correctly identified the accurate sources amidst the avalanche of information they encounter. What makes someone a truth-teller is thus not the truthfulness of the truth they tell but having the courage to speak that truth at risk, or significant cost, to oneself and from the position of relative powerlessness (Tamboukou, 2012: 854).

Thus, it is not only the influential, professional ‘truth-tellers’ like Tommy Robinson or Donald Trump who are lauded, but everyday activists who have the courage to stand up and speak out. This was observed at a DFLA demonstration in Manchester a year on from the Manchester Arena terrorist attack. One, female speaker, who was a survivor of the attack, talks powerfully about its impact and the way authorities had responded to it. She says that she had received an email a week earlier (she does not say from whom but the implication is from someone in authority) asking her not to speak to ‘this audience’, but she had gone ahead anyway. She receives a round of applause for this. At the same event, having listened to a number of women speakers, a demonstrator was heard to say, approvingly, ‘This is what the government is scared of - women telling the truth’ (Field diary, DFLA demonstration, 02.06.2018). Alice also recounts occasions when others had praised her efforts at speaking to power; it had felt good, she said, when people wrote and said ‘You’re speaking to the establishment. You’re scaring people’ (Alice).

The milieu studied cannot be characterised as supportive of authoritarianism. While elements of, or individuals in, it call for order and discipline, not least within their own movement, the majority are concerned rather with disrupting the current order. Their main instrument for this is the freedom of speech, which they defend as the means by which their own, dissenting, voices can be protected from attempts at silencing. How far this is a pro-democratic principle rather than a self-interested strategy, depends on whether the opposition is viewed as entitled to the same rights and are not prevented from enacting them through subjection to violence or other illegal action. It is to this question that we next turn.

4.3.3.3 Defending ourselves (from hostile opposition)

In this final sub-section on democratic values, we consider whether attitudes and behaviours with regard to the rule of law and the use of political violence against opponents suggest the milieu studied is characterised by extremism. Attitudes to violence and the thresholds individuals in the milieu set for themselves were discussed in Section 4.1.2.2, where it was established that violence was not considered a legitimate or effective means to pursue political goals although violence/fighting was engaged in by a number of respondents in particular contexts and situations. Here, we consider rather attitudes and interactions with the police, as the primary law enforcement agents, for what it tells us about attitudes to the rule of law and to the police as the front-line agents of its implementation. First, we consider attitudes to, and interactions with, the primary ideological enemy for this milieu - the Left – to understand how the studied milieu perceives itself as the suppressed opposition rather than the suppressor of opposition.

An unanticipated finding of this study was that the single most referenced (ideologised enemy) was not Islam or Muslims but Antifa. Antifa is used by milieu members as an umbrella term to signal a range of direct action anti-fascist and anti-racist mobilisations hostile to their activism (see Appendix 7.1). If all movements associated with Antifa as well as the broader ‘Left’ are included, then it seems the Left feature in milieu members’ narratives as their primary opponents. In order to understand how the milieu relates to its political opposition, we need to understand, first, how they see the Left as positioned in relation to

the establishment and hegemonic ideology. This helps understand why, within the milieu, it is the Left who are seen as the aggressors and perpetrators of violence and how the milieu positions itself as responding defensively to it.

The Left is viewed as part of, or at least, protected by the ruling establishment and ideologically hegemonic. Whenever the two milieus come into direct contact, it is said, those on the Left 'always outnumber us' (Lee). This is explained variously by respondents; sometimes that right-wing demonstrators are prevented from attending by police interception, sometimes by the counter-protestors themselves. But it is also attributed to financial support; as Dan states, 'That's why the left get a lot more support. 'Cause they get funded. They're funded. Like in [city], they arrived in all coaches.'. This funding is seen as channelled through well connected campaign groups, such as Hope not Hate, who are said to 'have big donors' including Cherie Blair and Gordon Brown and to be government run and funded by George Soros (Alice; Field diary, BBC expose rally, 23.02.2019). Hope not Hate is, according to Paul, effectively an 'arm of the state':

If Hope Not Hate, who are essentially an arm of the government, because the government fund them, and they work with Special Branch and the police. So they're essentially an arm of the state. If they want to infiltrate your group, they are infiltrating it whether you like it or not. (Paul)

This ideological alignment of organisations that are seen to be directly linked to state institutions with direct action groups such as Antifa gives milieu members a sense of an uneven playing field in the battle of ideas. There is deep frustration that groups such as Hope not Hate are treated as an objective and authoritative source for media and government bodies when, to milieu participants, they have direct connections to anti-fascist activists and are ideologically aligned with the 'far left' (Dan). This bias is demonstrated, Alice says, by the fact that Hope not Hate 'don't report on extremism from the far left'.

Thus, from the perspective of milieu members, it is they who are the dissenting voices being suppressed by actions that are legitimised and left unexposed and unprosecuted. The most frequent such type of action is the 'outing' or exposing of milieu members. Dan, who has been written about a number of times by Hope not Hate, says 'I don't know where they get the shit from, honestly, honestly. So trust me. Most of it's lies, and I'm not even just saying that, 90% lies'. He is more concerned, however, about an incident when his grandmother's address (where he had previously lived) had been posted online leading to threats to her house and expensive food deliveries being sent there. Lee also says that he had stopped voting because when he had registered it had 'ended up with anti-fascists at me door and that'. Will lost his job after a Hope not Hate campaign targeted him and the story was picked up by the mainstream media: 'they... called up my work... multiple officers to say like [...] Why are you employing this guy?'.

Accusations and counter-accusations of acting as 'informers' also effectively disrupt the extreme right milieu. Both Alice and Paul mention a case in which two former close friends of Alice were exposed as informers for Hope not Hate. Paul also accuses the high profile Canadian activist Lauren Southern of 'selling people out' to Hope not Hate. Paul is sensitive to such infiltrations since, as a young BNP activist, a Hope not Hate infiltration of the movement and recording of speeches he made during an election campaign, had led to his (unsuccessful) prosecution for intent to cause race hatred. The UK branch of Generation Identity had been infiltrated from its inception too and the secretly filmed footage aired in an ITV documentary (Inside Britain's New Far Right') exposing GI alongside two other movements (For Britain and Britain First). Hope not Hate take credit for the 'expert analysis' in the documentary⁴⁰ but respondents see them as behind the infiltration too. Paradoxically, Will says the documentary film aired actually made him feel more positively about GI than he had before. Paul, however, is bitter about the fact that when

⁴⁰ See: <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/research/investigations/undercover-inside-britains-far-right/>.

attempts at entrapment into violence by infiltrators are rejected (see Section 4.2.2), this is never made public:

But Hope Not Hate isn't independent like that. Hope Not Hate shows only the negative; it doesn't show the positive. And I'm fairer than that, because I have black people on my show and say, 'This guy's a good guy. You should subscribe to him, because he talks sense.' So I'm less biased than them, yet they're getting government funding. (Paul)

Thus, underpinning attitudes towards Antifa and the wider Left in this milieu, is the perception that left-wing extremism is misrecognised as anti-racism or anti-fascism and thus legitimised, even applauded. In contrast, those in the right-wing milieu are labelled 'fascists' and 'racists' and thus made a legitimate object of abuse, threat and even violence.

This leads to the second key narrative among respondents, which relates to a sense that left-wing extremism is growing and becoming more violent. Abusive and threatening messages are considered routine. Dan says he receives threatening messages every day including threats to life:

[...] this is why I say the far left do need, they do need to look at, because I get messages every day on social media, every single day from lefties. It's not... I get some from Muslims, but the majority are all lefties. And one I read yesterday, I put it up online. But Instagram took it down for offensive. But it was only posting what I got sent, the message. And the message off a leftie, Antifa member - I looked at his profile. The message was actually, no word of a lie, 'Go and kill yourself, you fucking little dirty fag.' It said, 'You go and kill yourself you fucking little dirty fag.' That was from a leftie. And that's not even the worst. I get some telling me to die of cancer. Some of them are unbelievable, honestly. God, I had a Muslim from [name of city] telling me to... and a leftie, both from [name of city], telling me to get to [name of park] or I'm gonna get me head cut off. Beyond a joke, some of the messages I get. (Dan)

Dan goes on to say that many tweets or messages that are 'exposed' by the Left are fabricated or doctored. He had been questioned by the police over one such 'photoshopped' image that Antifa released where he appeared to call for mosques to be burned down. He was never charged, which, Dan says, confirms that the police had established that it had been doctored. Alice recounts a number of occasions when she had felt intimidated or threatened; on one occasion she had received messages saying that she had been seen on her bike close to her home and feared would be followed. Robbie reports always getting threatening messages prior to events from Antifa and that at events themselves he had had coins, bottles including 'bottles of piss' thrown at him. Tonya reports having had a gas canister thrown at her at a demonstration.

Left-wing violence is said to be 'premediated' (Alice) and 'more extreme, violent' (Dan) than the right-wing and respondents express a sense of injustice at the lack of attention to violence from the left:

[...] to me, the far left Antifa again that's who you should... we should really talk about as well. Because they shouldn't be forgotten about. Antifa, to me they're on the radical left. Where I said Nazi is the radical right, they're radical left. And they are. [...] They just want violence. And I'm not just saying that, being a biased... biased. Every time I've seen Antifa come out against us, there's been violence. In [name of city], throwing things at us and throwing glass bottles, the lot. I've been attacked by Antifa in me city, so it is. They are... I see them as terrorists, me, to be fair. (Dan)

Antifa, in particular, is characterised as 'the left's ISIS':

I think of them as the left's ISIS. I think this is the puritanical form of the left. Because they're the extreme version of everything that you'll read in the Guardian or Vice or everything. They're like the extreme version. So Vice is like the moderate, and like Antifa are the extreme.

And I see so many people justifying Antifa by saying, 'Well, they're anti-fascist, so we're all anti-fascist, so we support them.' And I'm thinking, 'No, you don't support that. You don't support hitting people. You don't support bricking...' (Alice)

Having experienced numerous situations of intimidation, threat and violence, Alice characterised Antifa as a 'section of society that thinks it's perfectly acceptable to physically attack somebody for thinking the wrong thing' is also designed to highlight what she believes to be their closer proximity to a 'Nazi' mindset than those in the right-wing movement.

A central event in this study was the prosecution of a number of individuals for violent disorder after a Generation Identity event. Fighting broke out after Antifa activists identified the venue, had the conference stopped and confronted attendees leaving the venue. Three respondents in this study were at that event, one was prosecuted, convicted and jailed for violent disorder (Billy), one appeared as a defence witness (Alice) and one had been a speaker at it (Will). Describing events that day Billy notes that Alice had been 'severely attacked' by Antifa who were 'wearing masks' and that the attack was clearly pre-meditated since they 'travelled over thirty mile to track us down there'. Another person involved in this incident, encountered at a later event, describes being attacked by anti-fascists wearing balaclavas who had travelled across London to intercept them. The use of balaclavas, masks or other face coverings by Antifa activists is mentioned as an indication of their intent on violence (and contrasted to right-wing movements). Jason says Antifa are radical left and 'very violent'; he had seen them in black masks, throwing stuff at him and others on a demo supporting Veterans. Robbie describes counter demonstrators as 'thugs' and says the fact that 'they come masked up' indicates their intent. Billy reports a violent, physical attack by Antifa on members of his group while drinking after attending a march in London:

'When it got dark one of the GI lads was standing outside the pub by himself when Antifa ran up from behind him and hit him over the head with a bike lock and then ran off into the night. They split him open'. (Message from Billy, recorded in Field diary, 11.03.2019)

Dan also reports a series of physical attacks and misses one arranged meeting because, he says, he had been attacked by Antifa and had two fingers, and his phone, broken. Explaining what had happened, he writes:

'Tbh hilary alls I was doing was walking through the city centre near [name of district] and I ws spotted before I knew it they threw a glass bottle at my head (which missed) then jumped on top of me bastards ... That's the Antifa way you see they don't care about debate they just want to attack you in numbers'. (Field diary, 18.03.2018)

It is evident from this narration of violence that milieu members position themselves as the object of confrontation and violence. While, in the case of most respondents, violence is not sought, if encountered it is also not run away from. Such confrontations generally occur with counter protestors, including Antifa, at events (usually demonstrations). In some reported incidents, counter demonstrators are portrayed as attacking or being solely responsible for clashes. Mikey sees Antifa as wholly responsible for clashes at demonstrations - they 'will quite openly and hostilely try and break through police lines to get at you'. Robbie says he infiltrates an Antifa Facebook page so he can see what they are planning in terms of attacks on demos but he says that he does not rise to it because 'they can use it against you'. In other incidents, the initiation of confrontation by their own side, or at least that they are 'up for a fight' is recognised by respondents. When Robbie receives a message saying 'it is kicking off against Antifa' whilst drinking after a demo, the group head there to see if there is any action (there isn't) but, after the event, he changes his Facebook page to an image from the day and the words 'Love football: Hate Antifa'. Robbie does not go to demos for violence - his football firm action provides enough of that kind of buzz. However, if attacked, he says, you 'can't just lay there and take it' (see Section 4.1.2.2).

The exception to the rule among respondents was Lee who says that fighting with Antifa was the main

purpose of activism and he and his group prided themselves on their tactics (which included using decoys) and on their sheer willingness to walk into a much bigger group of angry opposition and fight with them anyway. Lee also talks about consciously finding where opposition groups met and attacking their stalls in order to provoke a 'kicking off with them'.

LEE: We used to find out where they were having Socialist Worker Party meetings and that, and we'd go in and we'd run in with balaclava on and smash the tables up and that. If they were having meetings in town centres, you know where they have the stalls? [...] We'd find out where they were having them, and we'd go and tip the stalls over and crack 'em and...

INT: So why were they such an object of hate then?

LEE: 'Cause they were left wing, weren't they? They were promoting pro-immigration stance and stuff like that. We didn't like it so... but that were probably my main thing. [...] Because of the buzz I were getting out of kicking off with them. I used to love it.

Notwithstanding the animosity, not all references to the Left are negative and milieu members remain open to dialogic engagement with their ideological opponents. Alice who had started her activism in left-aligned movements says that she still speaks 'to quite a few lefties' in private message and 'they are fine'. Gareth's brother (also well known to Dan) is described as 'very left' but both Gareth and Dan get on with him. Lee has an uncle who is 'far left' and used to 'run about with Antifa'; the two actually ended up fighting each other on opposite sides of the barricades on one occasion. Robbie used to be a punk and said his punk friends were anti-fascists. The ones who were directly engaged with Antifa were not his close friends but with all of them, they talked about things and understood each other.

Other respondents said they would like to communicate or engage in dialogue with people on the Left. Alice says, based on her private messaging, she would 'love to speak to an anti-fascist. And probably we would get on'. Dan says he gets so frustrated and angry when the Left shout 'racist' and 'Nazi' at him because he is not. He goes on, 'I just wish they'd stand there and talk to you and debate'. However, no respondent thinks that any approach to engage in dialogue would be accepted. Cara actually says she had asked members of a left wing party to sit down and debate with her, but they had refused. Dan states that 'the Left, they don't want to talk' while Mikey says it is impossible to talk to them when they are hurling abuse at you at a demonstration but he would welcome the opportunity to have a sit down conversation with them:

I think if we could have like a sit down conversation like this, I'd really welcome the opportunity to firstly say, you know, why do they think we're racist. [...] You know. And just have that conversation. But the trouble is, because they're a very sort of one-minded group of people, they see anyone that's not hard left-wing socialist, that's patriotic, as some kind of horrible human being. (Mikey)

Attitudes towards, and interactions with, the police provide an indication of the observance of the rule of law. Respondents in this study are not unfamiliar with criminal milieus. Seven respondents themselves reported criminal activities in the past, mostly related to drugs possession or dealing, shoplifting and criminal damage. Four respondents had been involved in more serious crime and had served one or more prison sentences. These included convictions relating to disorderly behaviour, possession of firearms, kidnapping and domestic violence. In the course of the research one respondent was convicted for violent disorder in relation to a clash with political opponents (Antifa) following a movement event. Another respondent had been convicted three times of violent disorder relating to clashes at demonstrations. Of these only one respondent reported a long standing 'hatred for the police'. This was Billy, who had grown up in a very tense political context and had experienced 'police raiding our house and stuff'. His early convictions for disorder thus related primarily to fighting the police in his teenage years, often related to heavy intoxication (Field diary, Crown Court trial, 10.09.2019). The only other respondents to have a

longstanding, community rooted, mistrust of the police – Dan and Gareth - had not been prosecuted for any criminal act; indeed, Gareth had recently begun studying for a law degree. While some respondents come into political activism with a history of engagement with the police, therefore, their attitudes to the police are shaped substantially by both their political views and their interactions with police in the course of activism.

Alongside the government, local authorities and politicians, the police are seen often as corrupt and part of the establishment responsible for ‘covering up’ CSE cases (‘grooming gangs’) (see Plate 2). Paul claims that victims were not always vulnerable girls in care:

[...] I read reports where fathers took their daughters to the police, and the police threatened the fathers with arrest because the fathers were told what they were saying was racist. And they were told, 'If you don't keep your mouth shut, we will arrest you for spreading racism, for, you know, scaremongering.' It wasn't scaremongering. All of this was done to keep the lid on this multicultural project. (Paul)

In relation to general views on the police and their response to right wing activists, discussion is more or less evenly split between complaints that the police ‘fail to protect us’ or even ‘collude with those attacking us’ and those that suggest the opposite, i.e. that the police look after them and work with them.

Those respondents taking the latter position talk about liaising with the police prior to any demonstration ‘to make sure the demo was lawful’. In such narratives, an emphasis is placed on the good relationship the respondent or group has with the police (Dan; Mikey). In Cara’s case this reflects a conscious belief that one should always respect law and order:

I've never so much as been questioned by the police. I have a really good relationship with the local police in [names region] and I always keep myself very... I always ask advice. I'll always look to my solicitor if I think I'm going to do something that may be pushing the boundaries. I'll always keep myself right and on the right side of the law, because I do respect law and order and I believe that we have to uphold law and order, in order for our society to work. (Cara)

A number of specific references are made to incidents when the police have provided protection. Alice describes seeking protection from the police when she felt threatened by Antifa at two separate events. Lee recounts that when he, and a small group, ran into 300 Antifa in an alleyway, the police had escorted them out and back to the demonstration. Respondents also routinely express their respect for the police. The police are routinely applauded at the end of speeches at demonstrations, regardless of how tetchy the encounters have been. Robbie describes an appreciation of the police and their protective function and says the DFLA is always ‘courteous’ to the police:

We're always courteous to the police, you know. [...] we do what they tell us, because they're there to, they are there to protect us, you know. Because there is always that threat of violence from, you know, ANTIFA or Stand up to Racism. And it's good to have the police there. I'm all for the police, you know. Most people are, in the DFLA. (Robbie)

When other activists do not behave well or fail to respect the police, they are criticised (Mikey, Tonya, Field diary, Protest camp, 15.09.2019).

More negative statements about the police include expressions of disappointment that the police fail to protect milieu members’ safety and rights. There are also more hostile perceptions that the police actively facilitate the aggressive actions of those who oppose them.

Accusations of failure to protect are generally related to incidents at demonstrations. Billy, who received a 16 month prison sentence for violent disorder when violence broke out after a Generation Identity conference, puts the events down to ‘total police failure’. The refusal of the police to give GI participants

an escort to the station after they had been evicted from the event allowed Antifa to confront them as they were leaving leading to the ensuing fighting.

Once [names activist] give the location out, within about forty-five minutes maybe the owner of the venue showed up demanding we start to shut it down because Antifa had phoned and said if it's not shut down they're gonna attack the building. And then, so GI sort of... they had the speakers run the course, then waited for police to come. Then when police told them to leave, we all packed up and left. And then we asked for a police escort to the train station and stuff. Police refused to give us an escort. When we were walking down the street, we were ambushed – they were waiting in the car park. (Billy)

There are a number of complaints that the police are not protecting those demonstrating from counter demonstrators who throw, in two cases, a smoke bomb (Field diary, DFLA demonstration, 02.06.2018) and, in another, an apple with a razor in it (Dan). Incidents of alleged collusion include accusing the police of deliberately allowing Antifa into a rally so violence kicks off and the right wing can be labelled as violent thugs (DT). Violence at a Tommy Robinson election rally in Oldham is attributed to Muslim agitators who were 'escorted' by the police to the site of the rally.

But today, the police encouraged and allowed us to be attacked. They actually escorted a large group of violent Muslim agitators wearing balaclavas towards us. They travelled miles with them so that they could be near our rally. What began with extremists throwing eggs quickly escalated into hurling bricks, shattered car windows, and the evacuation of crying and terrified children from the estate. I personally witnessed women and children injured by rocks and bricks at the hands of these Muslim thugs. One of my cameramen was bleeding from his head after being hit by a stone. Again, the police didn't stop any of it. By not acting, they allowed and encouraged these violent thugs to attack us. (Tommy Robinson news, Field diary, 19.05.2019)

Paul says, on the violence at the Tommy Robinson rally in Oldham, that the police 'let it happen'.

Incidents of failure to investigate or prosecute attacks include that the police fail to investigate attacks made by Antifa activists on the right wing even if concrete evidence or CCTV is in their possession (Alice). Paul says that the police refused to come out when his car was spray painted with swastikas and he had bricks thrown through his windows

[...] another hypocrisy, I had my house attacked, I had bricks thrown through my windows, I had my car spray painted. I had graffiti outside my house, giant swastikas. Now if that happened to any other candidate, the police would have been all over it. In fact, somebody called Anna Soubry a Nazi, and police were all over it. Somebody comes and spray paints swastikas on my car - the police tell me to go down to Halford's and get some T-Cut. That is what you get. (Paul)

Most references to interactions with the police by respondents relate to demonstrations, where I was able to observe for myself situations ranging from a positive, friendly atmosphere through tense and fractious interactions and examples of direct trigger points when violence erupts. While there is no space to discuss the various factors involved in each of these scenarios, it is worth noting that, with rare exceptions, if violence breaks out, it is respondents themselves who are most disappointed. Robbie, below, sums this up describing how after a long journey to London to 'protect statues' following a spate of attacks on statues of historical figures linked to slavery and other oppressions of people of colour, he was so frustrated by the attitude and behaviour of some of the other attendees purportedly from his own movement that he turned round and headed home:

Went to London today, I went to guard the memorials. When I arrived, within 45 minutes the piss heads at the front started having it with the cops. I left straight away. That wasn't why I

went, it pissed me off. Made us all look like mugs, LITERALLY HANDING THE HEADLINES TO THE PRESS. Fuming is an understatement. (Robbie, post to Instagram, 13.06.2020)

Schmid (2013) distinguishes extremism from radicalism in as much as the former is characterised by a rejection of the rule of law, the will to suppress all opposition and willingness to use any means, including political violence, to achieve its aims. In addition to the discussion of attitudes to violence and the thresholds individuals establish in relation to what they consider acceptable or unacceptable action undertaken in Section 4.1, here we have reviewed attitudes towards and interactions with those considered by respondents to be their main ideological opposition - Antifa and the broader Left - and with the police, with whom conflict can occur especially in the course of demonstrations. While the analysis of data here reveals strong hostility towards the Left as ideological opponents, respondents position themselves as the objects of 'far left extremism', which they believe to be misrecognised by authorities and police as benign, or even positive, 'anti-fascism' and 'anti-racism'. While conflict and violence does spontaneously occur with these groups, respondents, with one exception, do not seek that conflict and as a rule see it as undermining their cause. Moreover, a number of respondents express a conscious desire to engage in dialogue with these ideological opponents. Attitudes to the police are more ambivalent. While some respondents have backgrounds that have shaped negative attitudes to the police, others see them as part of a corrupt establishment that has failed to address issues of Islamist terrorism or organised CSE. All believe that the police are an important institution and that, at the grassroots level, police officers deserve respect and compliance. Thus, there seems to be grounds on which to see respondents in this milieu as extreme on the ground that they reject the rule of law, are prepared to use political violence to achieve their aims or wish to suppress political opposition.

4.3.4 Emotions and meaning in driving and maintaining activism

As noted in Section 4.1.2.3, in the absence of other factors explaining how people or groups make the leap from non-violent to violent action while others do not, McCauley and Moskalenko (2017: 213-214) note that emotions play a role in providing an impetus to action. Existing research, they suggest, links feeling anger (for example at terrorist attacks such as 9/11) to support for aggressive responses to terrorism while emotions of fear and sadness are linked with more defensive responses. They suggest, moreover, that similar emotions may be at work in moving individuals to both legal political activism and terrorist violence (ibid.) Of course this study was not conducted in experimental conditions and thus it is hard to make direct connections between emotions and particular shifts in responses and, in Section 4.5.4, a case is made for understanding negative emotions arising from the collective experience of 'misrecognition' as providing an understanding of the impulse for social activism among respondents (Honneth, 1995: 163-164). Here, therefore, we consider rather how, at an individual level, respondents relate emotions – of anger but also of love and empathy - aroused by particular events to key moments in their trajectories into activism. We also explore how activism is experienced by respondents as providing meaning to life – 'doing something' to 'make this world a better place'. This will to act is driven by a range of different emotions – from parental love to anger at injustice – but always recounted as requiring effort and sacrifice and being oriented to the larger common good rather than personal gain. Receiving recognition for participation in that 'noble quest', however, is important and brings respect, satisfaction and purpose to respondents' lives.

Feelings of anger, related to the terrorist attack on the Manchester Arena in May 2017 leaving 23 people (including the perpetrator) dead, are recounted by two respondents as having shaped their trajectories. Tonya describes the essay she writes on Islam which sparked a conflict with her teacher as being prefaced by not being able to escape the anger she felt at school when the teacher devoted the lesson to it:

TONYA: [...] it was the day after the Manchester attack. [...] I went in, and I was like, 'It's going to get me away from the internet. I'm not going to have to look at any articles. I don't want to listen to the anger. I don't have to be angry. I can calm down for a day.' I was like quite

happy to go into college that day. But went into a classroom, and what was on the bloody whiteboard was the news. And it was like, 'Great. I came in here to escape this.' And I was, I remember looking at it, and just being really, really annoyed. I just wanted to go straight back out. So sat down, he let the news carry on for a bit. And he just spoke about...

INT: So this was the lecturer, this was the English lecturer, yeah.

TONYA: Mm. For the sake of conversation, his name was [names teacher]. And he, he went on to speak about that. And I kind of just listened and rolled my eyes at a few things. I can't remember what they were, but I do remember thinking, 'Yeah, that's putting it pretty soft.' I remember thinking that, but I don't remember what he said. And then he went on to say, 'Write a paper about something you're passionate about.' And I was like, 'Terrorism, immigration.' It probably wasn't a good time to write that. Because I was angry. But it happened. And I did try to differentiate between moderate Islam and radical Islam. I did try to specify what area of Islam I meant. And I was just talking about how out of control immigration didn't work. Most of the people who were committing terrorist attacks aren't legal anyway. And I brought up a lot of issues within it. And I've read it back now, and my opinion that I wrote on that paper has changed - a lot.

For Jermaine, it was the same attack that led to feeling a 'wave of anger' that made him deepen his involvement in EDL activism:

But yeah, after the Arena attack, that's when I really let loose. I joined loads more groups. Post loads of stuff on my own social media and things like that. Because leading up to the attack, Tommy was saying a lot, in a lot of his videos, you know, 'This is going to come to every town in England, you know, even coming to the remote ones.' And I was saying, you know, after knowing that the IRA attacked Manchester⁴¹, I said, you know, 'There is going to be an attack.' And my friends [...] were saying, you know, it'd never happen. Security's too good. It'd never happen. Police are too good. And when it happened, just this wave of anger. And it took a while for that anger to go, you know. (Jermaine)

Others reflect on feeling the anger passing between participants at demonstrations. Dan, for example, talks about attending a Support Tommy Robinson rally in June 2018 where the anger was palpable: 'it was scary to feel the anger off people, you know what I mean. And you can't blame them for being angry. 'Cause I was angry meself. I'm very angry at what's going on in this country. But it is scary, it is.' (Dan). Dan, who had been attending demonstrations for a number of years, thought the anger was greater now than ever before. However, he believes the marches themselves dissipate rather than precipitate that anger; if the marches were banned, he says, people would feel even angrier. Another activist, although not a respondent, who attends many demonstrations to film and stream also felt that activism helped him manage his own anger (he is primarily concerned with CSE); the demos helped share that anger with others and get it out in the open even if they change nothing (Field diary, [Region] Patriots demonstration, 07.07.2018).

A crucial connection made by respondents is between anger and political participation. As Mikey puts it 'you will get angry and I don't think there's anything wrong with getting angry. I think the main issue is what do you do with that anger?' While Mikey talks about 'righteous anger', Paul refers to 'justified anger'. He loved his work with the BNP, he says, because 'We gave people hope, and we gave people a sensible and positive outlook for their justified anger. And that's what it's all about – positivity. It's not about

⁴¹ This refers to the detonation of a bomb by the IRA on the edge of an indoor shopping complex in Manchester city centre in 1996 leading to more than 200 injuries but remarkably no deaths. The site is commemorated today by a plaque on a Royal Mail post-box which withstood the blast.

negativity.' (Paul). Now engaged in mentoring young men on the Right, he teaches them to use their anger positively:

I've said to so many of these young people, 'Hate doesn't have to be your enemy. Hate and anger, if you feel those things, use them as a source of something positive. So if something winds you up in the paper, and you're like oh God, I can't stand that, go to the gym and lift some extra weights. You know, if you see something on the news that riles you up, go out for a run. Put it to something positive.' (Paul)

However, activism is not only triggered by anger and hate but also by love and empathy. Jason says he is motivated by 'trying to stand up for the people that are upset, try and speak out about issues, try and make the world better for everybody'. These motivating emotions are often evident in the many events attended focusing on 'victims'. At the DFLA demonstration in Birmingham, organised in conjunction with the Justice for the 21 campaign, the demonstration was brought to a close in the laying of wreaths at the church for the 21 victims of the IRA bomb⁴² (Field diary, DFLA demonstration, 24.03.2018) and similar wreaths were brought to the DFLA demonstration in Manchester a year on from the MEN Arena attack (Field diary, DFLA demonstration, 02.06.2018) (see Plate 7)

Plate 7: Wreaths at the DFLA demonstration, 02.06.2018)



At the EDL demonstration in Birmingham a minute's silence is held for those who died in the London terror attack (Westminster, 22 March 2017) (Field diary, EDL demonstration, 08.04.2017). At a Survivors First rally, a walking tour of the town is conducted, pointing out the sites of child sexual exploitation and the proximity of the council buildings to them. When we stop outside the new council building, there is a short speech and then flowers are thrown into the river to remember survivors of abuse before the ceremonial lighting of 100 candles (Field diary, Survivors first rally, 25.08.2018). At a DFLA action against 'grooming

⁴² This refers to the IRA bombing of two pubs in Birmingham in 1974 as a result of which 21 people were killed and almost 200 injured. Six people were convicted and given life sentences for the act of terrorism but after serving 16 years in prison their convictions were quashed. The Justice for the 21 campaign was started in 2011 by the siblings of one of the victims to seek thorough re-investigation of the bombings amidst claims that the identities of the real perpetrators are known to the government but are being protected under the Good Friday Agreement and that the case was not being properly pursued due to involvement of the British security services.

gangs', organisers make demonstrators aware that 'there are victims marching with us today, so be respectful. It is about the kids.' (Field diary, DFLA action, 30.03.2018).

Many activists and groups emphasise their concern with protecting children. Paolo states, 'If you hurt a kid or woman in my eyes [you are] the lowest of the low. [...] I don't care if you're Catholic, you're Muslim, you're brown, you're white, you're purple. You hurt kids and you hurt women – you're scum. That's the bottom line of it.' (Paolo). Adam, talking about an action against a taxi firm believed to be implicated in CSE, says 'we're gonna go there and we're gonna make our stand and say that we're not standing by and letting this happen, you need to do something about this and you need to safeguard the children of this community.' A number of groups campaigning around issues of involuntary adoption, parental alienation, long-term foster care, grooming gangs and children who were victims of abuse have formed an umbrella formation around their shared concern for children. Imogen says that 'My only priority is the children'. Reflecting on whether becoming associated with Tommy Robinson (after he endorsed her campaign) might backfire if they become labelled as extreme right, she makes her judgement on the basis of that main priority:

It does, it does worry me a bit. And we've had it, to be honest we have had actually people going, 'Oh, Tommy's this and Tommy's that.' And the only answer they've got from me is, 'My only priority is the children. He's woke people up and raised awareness for the children who have been abused in the grooming gangs.' That is my priority, that's what I count on. I will stand with him and fight with him in regards to saving the children, same as I would any other person. But if they're there just to shit stir or cause problems or just insult people, I just... and just drag things down, then no, it's nothing to do with us. We are children focussed only. If they're not there for the children, they ain't there for us. (Imogen)

Imogen, who had no access to her son after he had been removed and placed with his father and had had her daughter taken in a process of involuntary adoption, was driven by love for her children and wanting to connect with them.

IMOGEN: [...] the first thing my kids are gonna say when they come back to me is, 'Well what did you do? Did you fight for me? If this was wrong, and this wasn't meant to happen, then what have you done?' This is for my kids. It gives them a chance to get to know who I am, just in case they can't.

INT: Yeah. And you can show them what you were doing.

IMOGEN: Yeah. Shows them that I fought for them. It also shows them that they're not on their own, and that it does happen. Also to teach them as well, because they're gonna be targets. Because they've been in local authority care already, as soon as they become parents, they're gonna be targets. It's to teach them as well how to protect their families. Because even though I can't protect them, their kids are still gonna be my grandkids. My job as a parent doesn't stop just because my kids don't live at home with me. It just means I've got to fight a hell of a lot harder to be a parent. And it's worth fighting for. I mean, anything's worth being a parent for.

Her activism is her way of showing parental love. This takes on additional significance because she has complex health issues and says that in some ways the campaign is designed as a legacy since 'my health is that bad, the chances are I'm actually not gonna be around for my kids to come back to me' (Imogen).

Repeatedly, respondents talk about their trajectories as driven not by a 'cause', still less an ideology, but by a will to act; they cannot stand by and 'do nothing'. DT, for example, although narrating his entrance into high profile activism as rooted in the sense of injustice at Tommy Robinson's imprisonment for contempt of court, nonetheless, he reflects 'I wouldn't say that the reason I got involved was because Tommy got arrested. I think that was the starting ground of saying, "Enough... [...] is enough. Something's

got to be done". (DT). These declarations often take quite dramatic forms. After discussing serious mental health issues he has had to deal with, Jason (still only 17 years old), says 'I need to fight, I need to be able to say I've fought and done my part to try and make this world a better place.' Dan also sets his activism in the context of suffering a near fatal stabbing when he was 17 years old, which, he says made him see 'every day as a bonus'. It made him feel that he wanted 'to do something': 'I just want to, I do, I want to make a difference, you know what I mean. I want to live for something. Even, even if people don't agree with me, you know, what I feel is right, I want to do something.' (Dan). Later, when asked directly if he would be prepared to die for the causes he is active on, he says 'Yeah, I would, definitely would, yeah. Then I can die with a smile on me face, saying, you know, "At least I tried to change and at least I tried to change something. I had a go".' (Dan). Paul also puts the cause in the context of a matter of life and death likening the current situation (with demographic change) to being thrown into the sea unaided:

When placed in a situation where you know something must be done, only a fool or a coward crosses their legs and sinks to the bottom of the sea, refusing to swim. You just swim, and you give it your best. And even if you don't win, you still go for it. Because it's something you have to do, because it's a matter of survival. That's what it's about. (Paul)

It is Alice who expresses most extensively how activism really gave meaning to her life. This passage of the interview is cited in its entirety to preserve the multi-layered nature of her life at the time:

[...] towards the end of my uni and my uni degree, I got in a relationship with someone with borderline personality disorder, which is, like, really horrifying. And I think around that time I ended up having a weird sort of mental breakdown. And then I ended up living with him for a year or so after that, and then slowly managed to get myself out of it by getting a job, like a normal job, working for [name of company]. [...] And then I broke up with him, like, kind of halfway into working there, but which was really traumatic. And I found myself really struggling this whole time, like struggling to maintain a relationship with someone that, like, spends all their money, you know, drinks too much, does drugs, cheats on you all the time, is emotionally abusive. Like, yeah, it was just, like, really, like... And all my money I would give to him, and I'd try and think of things to do to entertain him, 'cause he was always bored. And he pushed his friends away, and then my friends got pushed away. So I felt like we were in this hell hole, and I was just trying to make money to please him, if you... like, to give us the life. And eventually, I ended up... the only way I could get out of that was to cheat on him. He turned up at my work, was shouting, like, attacked the guy, shouted at me, blah, blah, blah. So then after that, after that happened, I just went to work and went home, and drank, and was having a really shit time. And I think, after a while of doing that, I think I kind of gave up on life and just thought, 'Oh, I'll just do, you know, nothing; don't care anymore.' And then finding the, I think the activism kind of did give me a kind of purpose, a meaning. 'Cause I'd given up on myself. I remember very specifically thinking, 'I don't care what happens to me anymore. Like, I would rather be dead. But if I'm gonna be alive a bit longer, I guess I should probably try and help other people.' That was kind of like my, my thought, if you know what I mean. 'Cause you know what it's like when you feel like you've lost, like, a soul-mate, and you think, 'Well, that's it now; I'm not gonna find anyone.' So, yeah, so that's kind of the state I was in when I kind of found politics. And it was definitely, like, with activism, it was looking for that family. (Alice)

Alice goes on to evoke the sense of purpose she had – feeling she was on a 'noble quest' to 'save Britain':

But to me, it was like, it was like in Mulan when she cuts her hair off, you know. It was like, 'You'll thank me later.' And, like, so you cut your hair off and you get on your horse and you ride off, and then you're like, 'Oh, I'll come back and I'll be a hero; they'll all be thanking me.' You just think you're on this, like, noble quest, and, like, they don't understand, but one day

they'll understand. And, you know, I'm making this great sacrifice, so I'll get something from it, I'll get something back.' And, yeah, I literally thought, like, together we were gonna sort of save Britain or something – I don't know why. Just it felt like that's what everyone has to do. It felt like that's what great people, who do great things, have to make great sacrifices. (Alice)

Activism creates emotion as well as being caused by it. Most frequently emotions are found at events or demonstrations. Jermaine and Dan talk about the 'buzz' of a demonstration while Alice, Imogen and DT reflect on the adrenalin, nerves but also thrill of giving speeches at those events. The buzz of demonstrations is especially significant for Lee for whom activism replaces the buzz he used to get from fighting as a kid. As he says himself, 'I weren't into political side of it; I was there for scrap and that' (Lee)

Alice talks about her activism as thrilling: 'It's like literally being pirates or something, or like being in a rock band. You know, there's so many mad but brilliant moments – moments that are, like, will stay with you forever.' (Alice). Being close a key influencer in the milieu, Alice felt it was like being with a celebrity: 'it's like being in the cool club, and people would treat you as such'. Jason also felt like a star after he had challenged a teacher's comparison of Tommy Robinson with Hitler. He describes it like this: 'I stood up and I said, so I just said, "No, he's not a racist. He's not a racist whatsoever. He's a righteous figure." And just defended my point. And just sat down, and everyone was there clapping and that, going "woah".' (Jason). Later Jason goes on to be a youth activist for UKIP and says he is now well known around town: 'in my area, a lot of people know me. I can't walk round without someone saying, 'UKIP Brexit' every time they see me. I've got people come up to me, asking for pictures of me, and even autographs on occasion, it's fun. I love it...' (Jason). He found that people would recognise him from one event to another and let him know that they appreciated his work:

They come over. It's like at the demo on Saturday, I loved it. People came up saying 'Oh, Crusader' and that, 'I remember you.' Shakes me hand, buy me a drink and all that. I had a woman come over and buy me a burger from Macca's and that. And it's just wonderful. You get some lovely people. And it is hard what I do and that, but I feel like it's worth it because... [...] when you've worked really hard for something, go through hell for it, and then you get what you want, it's like a really big sense of accomplishment, like you've done what you set out to achieve. (Jason)

This sense of achievement is experienced also by Robbie who, felt a real pride at a DFLA demonstration that rival fans were 'being with each other, and not ripping lumps out of each other'.

I think it's just a feeling of community. Everyone's there for the same reason. And it just made you sort of feel proud to be doing something. You know, that's what I like about it – it's knowing that I'm trying to make a change, rather than people sat in their armchairs, calling us racist. Not knowing what we're actually doing. (Robbie)

For Paul this sense of satisfaction comes from when people comment that he 'out-debated' the other guy on a chat show or if he can help those who contact him:

And I think, you know, if I help just a couple of people, I get somebody write to me saying like, 'You really inspired me with what you said. Thank you for doing it.' And if every time I do something good, I inspire someone else to do something positive and improve themselves, then that's a life worth living. (Paul)

Jermaine found himself 'commanding people' at his first demonstration when he was just 16 or 17 years old because his experience from football allowed him to see the best tactic to get around police lines. He attributes being noticed by a regional leader to that initiative he had taken and thinks it was then that his 'potential' had been recognised. Being able to command respect in this way was particularly important to Jermaine who felt let down by an education system that had demanded respect from pupils without giving it back:

I think respect for me is one thing that I really wanted in education like. There's certain people that, you know, respect is massively important to me like. If you respect me, I'll respect you. And there's always certain very few people that I give respect to without speaking to them before. But I feel like, in education especially high school, college level, they demand respect without giving respect back. (Jermaine)

While respondents often narrate their trajectories into activism as guided by their concerns with particular issues and motivated by rational and intellectual arguments, especially once active, it is the emotional dimensions of activism that sustain their presence in movements. Their emotional journeys are far from smooth; for some activism had proven to be an emotional roller coaster leaving them at times feeling frustrated, hurt, used or even betrayed. However, through gaining respect or appreciation from others, feeling you had helped or guided someone else, or spoken up for someone to scared to say what they thought, a sense of collective endeavour and purpose was forged and the emotional collective of the milieu sustained.

4.4 Social relationships

Social relationships play an important role in the participation of individuals in right-wing milieus. As with all social relationships they are multi-dimensional and constantly changing. These shifts occur as a result of the external environment, in this case due to the proscription of movements such as National Action or the formation of new movements responding to terrorist attacks (such as the DFLA) or wider political issues e.g. 'pro-Brexit' or 'Free Tommy Robinson' campaigns. Social relationships also change as a result of the internal dynamics of the milieu including sudden growth or decline in support, changes in leadership or organisational hierarchy, internal dissent and the sharp increase or decline in funding. Some of the most important shifts for respondents occur at the individual level as friendships are forged or broken, rivalries or disagreements played out and individuals are accepted into, or excluded, from the milieu. The ethnographic approach adopted in this study provides rich data on all these elements of relationships and the feelings of hope and excitement as well as disillusionment and betrayal with which they are inextricably entwined. Given the primary focus of this report on radicalisation processes, however, a holistic portrayal of social relationships within the milieu is not attempted. Rather in this section discussion is restricted to the narrower question of whether, and how, group relations drive or, inhibit, radicalisation on the extreme right. To this end, four dimensions of social relationships are considered: the relationship between online and offline spaces of radicalisation; the role of online 'influencers' and offline encounters with them; the significance of social relationships within offline milieus in driving or protecting against radicalisation; and the implications of this for the likely effectiveness of removing extremist content online in countering violent extremism.

4.4.1 Online and offline spaces of radicalisation

Although this study was conceived as a traditional, offline ethnographic study, all respondents were engaged also online. There were a total of 85 references to online forms of activism (including use of social media, web page, making own media, live streaming). In exactly what kinds of online activity individuals engage depends on their position in the milieu; the respondent set included influencers creating a significant volume of their own content through to young people using the internet to 'research' different movements they might be interested in. It also depends on individuals' access to particular social media platforms; as outlined in Section 4.4.4, a number of respondents had been repeatedly temporarily or permanently banned from various platforms.

Whatever the degree of engagement, this study shows that offline and online spaces co-exist and interact in the milieu. Online digital media typically serves to embellish daily offline realities while offline events are framed to meet the pressures of relentless interconnectivity and intense competition for attention in

the online space (Helm et al., 2020: 44). This is captured in Will's reflection on the first action in which he was involved with GI:

I remember the very first thing we ever did - we did a speech at Hyde Park. At the end all that happened was a cloud of kind of YouTubers filming each other, filming each other - nothing going on and just them just moving in this kind of weird orbit. (Will)

Notwithstanding Will's dismissal of the 'YouTubers', the videoers and streamers are central to the milieu; they are present at all key events and are recognised and greeted by attendees as key 'influencers' (Field diary, [Region] Patriots demonstration, 07.07.2018). Indeed at some events, the researcher identified core milieu members (active in similar movements for many years) taking responsibility for videoing; these were not people brought in to handle social media, but activists themselves taking on the video or streaming role. Moreover, even where the prime role of the individual is streaming events, they engage not just in publicising the offline activity; their presence embodies the cause in as much as they frame their activity as part of the 'telling it as it is' and challenging attacks on freedom of speech. As one streamer states while live streaming from a demonstration, we are here 'because the government don't tell us the truth, the media lies' (Field diary, [Region] Patriots demonstration, 07.07.2018).

Online presence is not designed as one-way traffic. It puts your message 'out there' but it also helps identify others who care about the same issues. Five respondents note directly that their first contact with the milieu came online. Billy, who became active in GI, said he 'liked the message they were getting out' and, based on that, had contacted and then met up with members of the movement. Adam explains how he got involved in an umbrella alliance of groups (coordinated by Imogen) campaigning around issues relating to abuse, exploitation and protection of children:

[...] when you get into following different things online that are against child abuse, against the grooming and raping of kids, prepubescent kids, when you see all that online, and you come to see the different causes then, and, and you, you look into it, and you see what they're about. And that's really how I saw Imogen on, I saw her page online somewhere, it kind of interlinked with something that we'd been doing. 'Cause there is, I think, victims amongst them, they've, they've been groomed and abused themselves. So, then you've kind of crossed paths then and then you get speaking and then [...] (Adam)

Many of the personal connections and friendships depicted in Figure 2 (see Section 2.3), thus come from forming an interest in a group or event seen online and then following up with personal contact. This is how Alice and Will became personally acquainted. Having become interested in GI through social media, Alice attended a GI conference and contacted Will after she had seen for herself that 'he seemed genuine' (Alice). Tonya says she knew Alice first through Twitter but they had struck up a friendship after she had met her while she was waiting in the queue at Tommy Robinson's book tour. This personal, physical contact is important to trajectories; many more groups or individuals are encountered online than subsequently become points of engagement or support for people. Such critical filtering works the other way around too. After being disillusioned with the offline engagement in Black Lives Matter and a feminist group working on issues of domestic violence, Alice says she started watching what she calls 'cringe videos' on these movements online and started to see them in a different light:

And I was like, 'Ah, I see now.' And then, and then I just went into this big internet hole, where I started looking at all the people who... I think it was after, after realising that I was stuck in a left-wing, social justice warrior-type bubble, in my head, and then being able to judge the group that I was involved in from the outside and change my mind about it, and think, 'Actually, if I'd have stayed in this group, I might have done something illegal or embarrassing.' (Alice)

In some cases, the online engagement with the milieu was important but that engagement had come

through an existing (offline) friend who was already engaged in it (Jermaine). While the following example of how a milieu may start virtually but become physical is specific to the city that Will is talking about, it shows the importance of both online and offline worlds and how they interconnect:

WILL: I think this whole thing [...] was originally online but it's come off... there is a noticeable social circle in [names city] of people who are broadly linked to this kind of stuff. There's links between the Tommy stuff the DFLA and GI and all these things as people know each other there's probably a few thousand people. It does have its own in jokes its own style. Yes, it does have its own subculture. It's a hard to define one because its only just emerged.

INT: Is it a physical one or a virtual one?

WILL: Both. Both, it began virtual and has become physical is the trend I think we're seeing.

INT: Okay so these people will get together at events...?

WILL: There are multiple events. I mean if you look at say [names venue] - people that were going there and so on it's the same people that pop up.

Thus, respondents see the online and offline world of activism as mutually reinforcing and interconnected. This is exemplified by Dan who is an inveterate offline activist, having attended 38 demonstrations over five years of activism. Yet he also talked about sitting all night watching 'video after video after video on YouTube. Then I'll go on all the sites, I'll look through all the posts. [...] Spend hours researching them, I do.' (Dan). He sees social media as a valuable resource for the milieu:

[...] social media is powerful, it is. I think it's the worst thing that ever happened to government, is social media, to be fair. Because you can find out anything you like. People now don't rely on the news and government, they go on social media. And you can actually find out a lot more truth on social media, to be fair. (Dan)

Johnny is also enthusiastic about the opportunities social media provide that were not available to the older generation, when 'you just voted and it was... if it happened, it happened'. In contrast, he says, now people can find out about issues and access information so that people start listening to you. However, social media still needs to be used responsibly and Dan reflects on how he ensures he is not sharing unreliable material:

Well I, if I go on the internet and research something, and I only see one thing about it and read about it and I'm not sure, I'll search... I'll go and look and see if there's a few things about it, you know what I mean and see if they're all adding up, all the same thing. Then that's how I work. But some people, what you're saying is right, yeah, some people just type it in – first thing they see, bang, yeah. (Dan)

A number of respondents express similar caution about misuse - especially by older generations who tend to 'engage' and 'argue' too much on social media (Robbie; Tonya). Whilst broadly agreeing with Dan's positive evaluation of the potential of social media for the movement, they nevertheless voice concerns about the potentially damaging social consequences of becoming a society in which 'everyone's walking round with their heads in their phones' (Imogen). In contrast, Paul sets out a strong criticism of social media, which he thinks 'has actually taken us away from real world activity' and can be deceptive in making you think you are reaching and engaging people when in fact you are 'living in an internet bubble'.

The movement used to be very people-orientated when I was in the BNP, i.e. you're out meeting people, knocking on doors - real world activity. Now social media is one of those things; it's a bit like a honey trap. You think you're going to get something really good out of it, but then you end up just stuck going nowhere. And what it is, people went on Facebook, they went on YouTube, they went on Twitter. And it gives you a huge reach, but everyone

you're reaching is atomised and anonymous. And it doesn't give you the power to build the real world communities. And it doesn't necessarily translate to any kind of real world influence. That's something I want to get away from [...] (Paul)

A similar critique was not directly voiced but echoed in Jacob's concern with establishing a physical and local presence in his own city; a project he had been working on for some time, he officially launched his city 'collective' with a core group sharing a physical location in a house he owned in September 2019 (Field diary, Movement launch, 22.09.2019). Physical proximity, he says, prevents the movement 'wasting money' on travel that 'can be invested in activism' (Jacob). By organising locally, he says, you can 'bring people together more often' and 'build communities' (Jacob).

All of the respondents in this study were engaged in the milieu both online and offline. While their mode, frequency and evaluation of online engagement varied, the study of this milieu confirms findings from the study of online milieus that online and offline milieu activity are bidirectional in influence and consistently co-enabling (Helm et al., 2020: 44).

4.4.2 Influencers

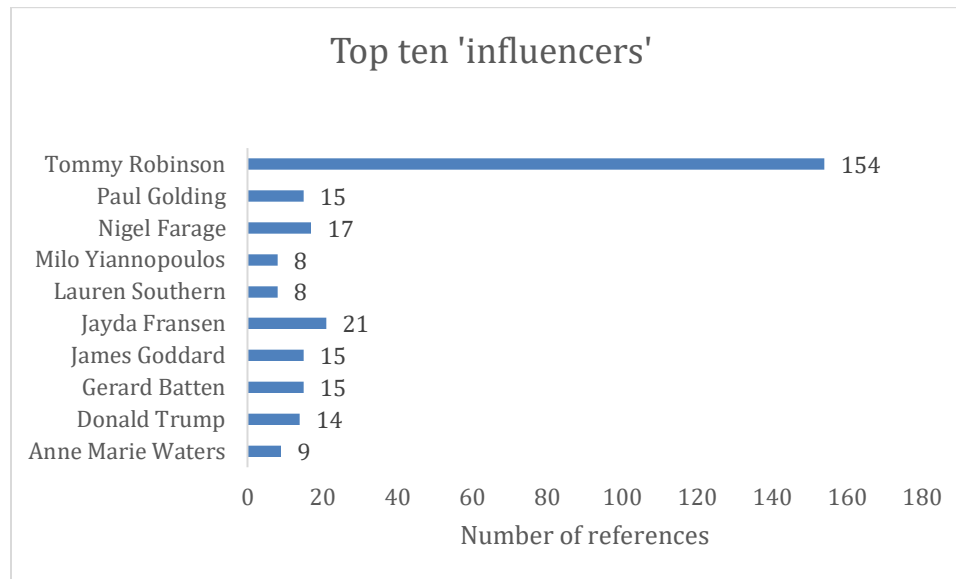
In social media research 'influencers' are often determined in terms of platform users (or accounts) with the highest visibility and reach due to their level of connectivity and direction of flow of information, i.e. their messages or posts have been most frequently commented on, shared or retweeted (Paton, 2020: 86). Having material commented upon or shared does not imply positive comment or approval; being frequently cited can be because the original message is considered to be inadequate, contentious or outrageous. Similarly in offline milieus, being an 'influencer' does not necessarily mean that the person is followed or supported. In the context of this study, what is meant by 'influencer' is somebody who has a presence – either online or offline – in the milieu and, through this presence, shapes the trajectory of individual members of the milieu. They are 'influencers' because their messages or actions shift the attitudes or actions of another individual.

The role of influencers can be illustrated by returning to Alice's story. Having become disillusioned with the left-aligned movements in which her activism had begun, she started to explore the right-wing spectrum, which she felt had been unavailable to her because of her positioning in a left-wing environment:

[...] once I realised I could sort of laugh at them, or kind of not have to be part of them, then I kind of went and started looking at all these other people that I wasn't allowed to like or not allowed to think was cool or funny or... So I started looking at people like Milo Yiannopoulos and Raheem Kassam. Tommy Robinson obviously popped up. There's loads of them. Gavin McInnes, Faith Goldy, Lauren Southern. I think Lauren was one of the first people... (Alice)

Across the whole respondent set, a total of 49 individuals were mentioned in the capacity of 'influencer', including three respondents in the study. The top ten influencers and number of references made to them across the data set are set out in Figure 10.

Figure 10: Top ten 'influencers' mentioned by respondents



As evident from Figure 10, influencers mentioned are primarily political figures on the right of the UK and international mainstream political spectrum (Nigel Farage, Gerard Batten⁴³, Donald Trump) or leaders of what are considered extreme right-wing parties or movements (Tommy Robinson, Paul Golding, Jayda Fransen, Anne Marie Waters, James Goddard). Two influencers are known to respondents mainly through their media and online presence (former Breitbart news editor Milo Yiannopoulos and Canadian YouTuber Lauren Southern). The most striking feature of Figure 10 is the dominance of a single influencer - Tommy Robinson.

In a study of right-wing extremists active on Twitter in the UK, conducted also within the framework of the DARE project, there is a similar single dominant influencer - Donald Trump (Helm et al., 2020: 47). The top three British influencers in the right-wing extremism sample in that study are Nigel Farage, Katie Hopkins and Piers Morgan. Thus, while there is some similarity between influencers in primarily online and primarily offline milieus (Nigel Farage appears in both, as does Katie Hopkins although she is not among the top 10 of influencers in the ethnographic study), there are also striking differences. The first is the more domestic (UK-focused) nature of the top influencers in the offline milieu. The second is absence in the Twitter extreme right milieu of leaders of extreme right political parties and movements who are the most prominent influencers in the offline milieu. In the case of some individuals, this may be explained by their domestic profile. Given the sheer volume of retweets influencers like Donald Trump receive in the global Twitter space, domestic influencers would simply never feature. However, in the case of the absence of internationally high profile figures like Tommy Robinson in the Twitter study, the explanation is more likely to be found in the policies of the social media platform than his actual lack of influence. Tommy Robinson was permanently banned from Twitter in March 2018, from Facebook (where he reportedly had over a million followers) and Instagram in February 2019 (Dearden, 2019a) and from YouTube in July 2019. Likewise Britain First (of which Paul Golding and Jayda Fransen are/were leader and

⁴³ Gerard Batten was UKIP leader from April 2018 and appointed Tommy Robinson as his special advisor on prisons and terrorism (November 2018), sparking Nigel Farage's resignation from the party. Batten's term as leader ended in June 2019 and he was refused the right to stand for re-election by the party's National Executive Committee.

deputy leader) was suspended from Twitter in 2017 and banned from Facebook in early 2018⁴⁴ and Milo Yiannopoulos was banned from Twitter in 2016 and Facebook in 2019. It is widely assumed that such permanent bans threaten Tommy Robinson's ability to reach large audiences and thus deprive him of the media oxygen he needs to fuel his activism (Hern and Waterson, 2019). It is evident from this study that while his ban effectively makes him invisible on Twitter, he remains by far the most influential figure in offline milieus.

The deprivation of media oxygen would be fatal, it is argued here, if it was the sole fuel supply. In practice the life-sustaining force for Tommy Robinson is to some extent his longevity itself. In a milieu characterised by rapid burn-out, there are relatively few constant figures. As such, love him or hate him - and in this study there were respondents who experienced both these emotions towards him (in some cases simultaneously) - Tommy Robinson has become a marker for others on the spectrum. Whether or not they endorse his views or actions, they are a reference point against which individuals position themselves.⁴⁵ When respondents in this study reflected on what is acceptable and unacceptable politically, or where they stand on that spectrum, half of them did so by benchmarking themselves against Tommy Robinson. As Dan puts it, when explaining what he considers 'extreme': 'anything further right than Tommy Robinson's too much for me. So, Tommy Robinson is spot on. Any, EDL, Britain First, Tommy Robinson, FLA - they're spot on.' Similarly, Johnny states that 'I think everything that he [Tommy Robinson] thinks is just exactly what my view is. That is one of the real main reasons why I followed him [...]'.

This identification with Tommy Robinson for the younger generation (many of whom would have been in their early teens or younger when the EDL was founded in 2009) often begins with engaging with his materials online. Both Adam and Jacob had watched videos of Tommy Robinson talking about issues such as 'grooming gangs' and said they had been inspired to activism by them. Johnny also says that he and fellow respondent Robbie had 'sat and listened for hours [...] Just sat and watched his interviews and unedited and behind the scene camera footage' (Johnny). This is why Johnny feels justified in refuting the claims of others that Tommy Robinson is 'far right': 'them people that call him far right don't listen to him..', he says, in all the videos watched 'I can't find one thing that'll call him a far right or extremist or a racist or anything' (Johnny). Jermaine, who narrativises his own journey very much from his current position as a 'former', presents watching videos of Tommy Robinson as central to his trajectory into the movement:

And during this time, you know, I was, I wasn't working. I was watching a lot of Tommy Robinson videos. Because at this time he definitely was in the Rebel Media. And you know, he was pumping out probably a video every day or every two days. Watching these videos straight away, watching a lot of stuff like that. From the comments on YouTube, getting you know, names of other social media groups. (Jermaine)

Jermaine says he 'always took what Tommy Robinson said or what the propaganda said for real'. When challenged, by people commenting on his posts online for example, he says 'from listening to Tommy Robinson, I thought they was just trying to hide away from the truth. Or you know, political correctness gone mad. So I really did ignore them' (Jermaine). However, for Jermaine too there was something more

⁴⁴ According to respondent Cara, this ban led to their relocation to Northern Ireland where anti-discrimination law offers protection from discrimination for political views. By basing themselves there, they were able to circumvent the Facebook ban.

⁴⁵ Two respondents in this study worked or had worked closely with Tommy Robinson and provided a great deal of insight into social relationships in that segment of the milieu. However, for different reasons, recounting those insights here (notwithstanding informed consent to do so) would be likely to render those individuals identifiable, at least to those within the milieu. For this reason their reflections are not included here although they have informed the interpretation of the material.

than 'the propaganda'. Soon after watching the videos, angry about the Manchester Arena terrorist attack by Salman Abedi, he had attended the UK Against Hate rally in Manchester (11 June 2017) where Tommy Robinson was a speaker and, he says, he 'got a picture with Tommy' there. When I question why he had felt drawn to Tommy Robinson, he replies 'He's ex-football lad [...] I researched EDL from the early days, and as I say, I thought it was kind of the line between hooligans and Ultras'. For Paolo, initial scepticism about Tommy Robinson was turned into trust following personal encounters with him, in particular a spontaneous night out on the town with him after a demonstration. Paolo described him as 'one of the nicest blokes you could meet'. Imogen says her group 'stand with' Tommy because, after meeting him at a demonstration, he had genuinely cared about the issue she was campaigning on and made a short video for her. She had voted for him in the European Parliament elections because:

[...] he was the only person who mentioned forced adoption and about kids that are being removed, social services are doing it. [...] he mentioned that side of it, it was a case of no-one else has, everyone else has denied it. So you know what, you've got our vote. You've raised awareness for it - you've got our vote. (Imogen)

Over the course of this fieldwork Tommy Robinson has clearly shifted the focus of discourse in the milieu from anti-Islam to 'the defence of free speech', linked by the claim that free speech is curtailed above all by the constraint on the right to criticise Islam (see Section 4.3.2.2). He came to embody this cause when, in May 2018, he was sentenced to 13 months in prison for contempt of court by reporting live from outside Leeds Crown Court on an ongoing trial of individuals charged (and later convicted) of organised CSE. His swift sentencing and imprisonment (on the same day as the offence) - which caused huge outcry amongst supporters - was due to the fact that he was, at the time, carrying a suspended sentence of 3 months for a similar offence in 2017. However, there were procedural errors in the process, which led to him winning an appeal against the conviction and being released after serving 2 months of the sentence. However, after fresh proceedings were brought in March 2019, he was again convicted and given a 9 month sentence (July 2019), which was reduced to 19 weeks after taking into account time already served. He was released in September 2019. This marked the point at which Tommy Robinson was no longer promoting a cause but himself became the cause; a symbol of the loss of freedom and democracy and an object to be defended. Over this extended period of conviction, appeal, reconviction and two prison sentences, numerous local and national marches and rallies were held in support of Tommy Robinson, creating an image of him as a 'political prisoner' as one respondent put it (see Plate 8).

Plate 8: Free Tommy Robinson poster, Support Tommy Robinson rally, 01.06.2018



Amidst these legal proceedings, Tommy Robinson also stood as a candidate in the European Parliament elections (May 2019) and mobilised this image of the persecuted truth-teller in his election campaign. While in an interview with Andrew Neil broadcast on the BBC in 2013 he had declared he would never go into politics (Pilkington, 2016: 208), this shift was no surprise given the preceding collaboration with UKIP under Gerard Batten's leadership and the sense of empowerment as a result of the EU referendum result and the rise of a number of populist radical right figures across Europe and beyond. As noted above, among the milieu studied here the aversion to formal politics had also shifted. A number of respondents spontaneously commented on their trust in Tommy Robinson's ability to become a representative of people like them in formal institutions. Dan thinks 'he's better than Farage and them all' while DT predicts that 'In two and a half years, Tommy will be leader of UKIP'. Johnny thinks he would 'make a good MP' because he 'defends the innocent'. What he admires, he says, is 'his passion. He doesn't have any doubts, if you know what I mean. It's like, "This is what's going on." And he just always seems to have something to back himself up with [...]' (Johnny). Even Lee, who declares a longstanding, personal dislike of Tommy Robinson says:

No matter my opinion of him personally, but I do think he's... when he's got his head screwed on, he's one of best speakers about. And he knows what he's talking about with Islam – he definitely, I don't think there's anyone better out there at minute who can give a view on radical Islam anyway. (Lee)

The mobilisation of anti-elite and anti-establishment sentiments in Robinson's European Parliament election campaign as well as his adoption of the mantle of representative of the silenced, working class majority were discussed in Section 4.3.3.2. It is worth noting here, however, that these tropes were given added weight by the concerted campaign against him, which reinforced this persona including a leafleting and messaging campaign by Hope not Hate and counter protests staged at a number of his campaign rallies. Most notoriously, on two occasions while out campaigning in the towns of Bury and Warrington, milk shakes were thrown over him. One counter-protestor attending a large and volatile counter protest to his election rally in Bootle was dressed as a milkshake signalling support for the attacks (Field diary, Tommy Robinson European Parliament election rally, Bootle, 19.05.2019) (see Plate 9).

Plate 9: Counter protest at the Tommy Robinson election campaign rally, Bootle, 19 May 2019



By far the most serious incident, however was at the election campaign rally in Oldham, when a large group of protestors from the Muslim Defence League, initially escorted to the election rally by police, became violent leading to the prosecution of 20 individuals for violent disorder (Dearden, 2020). This was described in Tommy Robinson's newsfeed as 'the latest in an ongoing wave of attacks against my supporters and team. All designed to stop my political campaign' (Field diary, 19.05.2019) and a video capturing events was screened at the campaign rally the following day in Bootle (Field diary, 20.05.2019). Even Paul, far from a fan of Tommy Robinson, is moved to post a video denouncing the police, who, he says:

[...] led a gang of Muslim men to a Tommy Robinson rally to throw bricks at him. Well, if Tommy Robinson is campaigning, he should be granted all the rights that Theresa May, Jeremy Corbyn, Vince Cable, Change UK, any of these people should be granted. If Luciana Berger gets protection, why shouldn't Tommy Robinson? Because if you can stump up the five thousand pound for the deposit, and get the signatures, you've bought in to the political system. And you've got the necessary support, so you should be afforded exactly the same rights as everyone else who's put down their deposit and got their signatures. But they're not. (Paul)

There remain those unmoved or hostile to Tommy Robinson within the milieu, however. Billy, says he 'wouldn't be a big Tommy fan myself. Just think he's making a career out of it'. Lee and Jacob are concerned that he takes funding from 'Zionist' sources. Others simply don't like what they term 'the Tommy Robinson show'. Tonya says that she went to the Day of Freedom march in London and felt annoyed:

I thought it was a welcome Trump rally, but it was a Free Tommy rally. And there's a photo of me online, where I look absolutely annoyed. And I was because I was like, 'I'm not a fan of Tommy. I don't like him. I want to go and get a beer. I don't want to be here.' (Tonya)

Alongside the concerted attempt to distance the DFLA from the EDL and Tommy Robinson in particular 'because he's tarred with that far right extremism sort of thing' (Mikey), there is also frustration with the overshadowing of events by his causes. Thus, Mikey complains that the DFLA march held a year after the Manchester Arena attack was meant to be a silent march to honour the victims but 'turned into the Tommy Robinson show'. Indeed, instructions from the organisers of the demonstration were that it was to be a 'silent' march to show respect for the victims of the attack; that meant no chanting and no alcohol to be drunk while marching. However, the anniversary of the attack and the recent imprisonment of Tommy Robinson meant emotions were high and, despite interventions by stewards, stopping people bursting into chants of 'Oh Tommy, Tommy' proved impossible (Field diary, DFLA demonstration, 02.06.2018). Following another dispute between the DFLA and Tommy Robinson at the Day of Freedom event in London, Mikey concludes, 'he's basically in it for himself. He's a bit of an ego, Tommy Robinson show thing' (Mikey).

Whether you put it down to 'foreign money', the manipulation of alternative media, the cultivation of victim status or successful transition from street movement leader to populist politician, the Tommy Robinson brand has shifted. As Will puts it:

[...] a lot of people that are interested in Tommy Robinson aren't from the EDL anymore. It's changed. It's really changed [...] Will those people stay interested in him? It depends what he does when he gets out if he gets out and leads a street movement again then no. If he gets out and goes back to what he was doing with journalism, yeah, I think it will go on. (Will)

The milieu studied here is far from all about Tommy Robinson, but despite his banning from all the main social media platforms, he remains a key influencer.

4.4.3 Movements, families and friends

In Section 4.2.2, the sites and agents via which respondents in this milieu encounter radical messages was discussed including both online encounters and those via other individuals in or around their movement. The latter were the most frequent although respondents describe these encounters only rarely as efforts at 'recruitment' to more radical causes but rather as chance encounters with people usually referred to as 'nutters', 'crazies' or 'Nazis'. Thus, while acknowledging those encounters, here the focus is rather on the potential for social relationships within the milieu to act as a protective factor against radicalisation.

Fathers feature quite strongly in respondents' socialisation into the milieu. Both Robbie and Dan had attended their first demonstration with their dads. This socialisation is not only about introducing them to the movement, however, but making them aware of the dangers and the limitations of actions, especially violent actions. Over the years, Robbie's dad had been a member of the National Front, the BNP and the EDL but during a conversation with him after the Brexit Betrayal demonstration, he tells me that he left them all because he realised violence never solves anything (Field diary, Brexit Betrayal demonstration, 29.03.2019). This same understanding, and avoidance of violence in his political activism, features strongly in Robbie's narrative. He also recognises that this position has been shaped by his dad's sharing of his experience. Robbie says he talks to his dad honestly about politics and believes that while his dad might have had more extreme views when he was younger, they now have very similar views. Most importantly, for him, he is adamant that his dad is not racist. Dan also went to his first EDL demo with his dad and he had met his partner through the EDL since her dad had also been active in the movement. Mikey says his dad is a very patriotic person and he thinks his respect for discipline and order, as well as his patriotism, has come in part at least from him.

It is important to recognise young people's agency in these relationships, however. While respondents in this study recognise that talking to parents, sometimes accompanying them to events, shapes their views, this is not a unidirectional socialisation process. Paul's parents for example, were also in the BNP but had been brought into the party by their son, rather than the other way around. Moreover, the relationship between activist parents and their activist children was one of mutual care and respect; experience was shared by parents who wanted to keep their children safe and vice versa. For example, both Robbie and Tonya talk about monitoring their dads' use of social media because – as non-digital natives – they tended to get too involved in responding to comments or to share too much. As Tonya puts it, 'some of the stuff he says, it's so... it makes him look, it does make him look a Nazi'. It is also important to consider the potentially negative impact of parents not discussing political issues with their children or even shutting those conversations down.

Indeed, where family relationships were poor, respondents often expressed low self-esteem and isolation and found a positive sense of 'family' or 'community' in activist groups. Paolo, for example, repeatedly uses the term 'family' to describe the DFLA (Field diary, 02.01.2019). He expresses this most poignantly when talking about a period of his life when he and his partner lost a baby and their relationship ended:

Yeah. I went completely off the rails. Massively off the rails; attempted suicide, I just... yeah, everything you can imagine [...] It was not the best. And then I tell you what, it was football hooligans that got me through it. Everyone can say what they want about us being this, that and the other, but they're my family. I don't speak to... I spoke to my mum maybe five or six times this year. My birth mum. I've seen her twice, both at funerals. (Paolo)

While in prison Paolo says, he also got letters and phone calls from other DFLA lads from rival clubs from the north to the south of the country: 'That's, that's heart-warming. Because you see people that usually would want to kick your head in, just wanting to know that you're all right' (Paolo). He laughs that now when it comes to football hooliganism, 'it's really weird, because people that I would have happily had a scrap with, three four years ago, and they're now family. And I think that it shows just how important the cause is, that you can bring these people together.' (Paolo). This message is also promoted at the DFLA

demonstration in Manchester where speaker Gary Harris tells people to 'look around you, at the people next to you – these are your new family, these are the people who will stand with you and support you' (Field diary, DFLA demo, 02.06.2018).

Jason, who was still living at home, felt unsupported by his parents as he dealt with mental health issues growing up and had received an intervention from social services at one point. He finds a similar sense of family in his UKIP community as Paolo does in the DFLA:

[...] it's like a family. UKIP, for example, it's like a family to me. It's like my chairman, she's like, she's like that really wild, stubborn member of the family, I'd say. And then you've got another member, another youth member there, he is, he's like the brother type of guy. Where he's there, showing you all these funny things on his phone – memes, all that stuff. You have family like that, and then you got [name of UKIP colleague] is like that really proud parent, and he's over in [name of second nearby town] chairman, and he's like that real proud parent, 'This is Jason and all that, look what he's done' and all that. He's that type of thing. (Jason)

Imogen, whose family relationships are also very strained, says, when working with her umbrella organisation, they try to 'treat each other more like a family than we do team or management'.

Jacob's nascent 'collective' - which he refers to as a 'microcosmic commune' - seems a somewhat dysfunctional family. The collective is housed in a property on which Jacob pays the mortgage but in which members of the collective live; on the evening of the movement launch, it is full of equipment and merchandise and has the feel of place people come and go from rather than a permanent home (Field diary, Movement launch, 22.09.2019). Jacob lives separately, with his wife and children, but nearby. He puts the teething problems with the collective down to the group's members being 'not as responsible for their behaviours as much, so they need help'. His aim, as noted above, is to create a proper far right movement, through coaching and self-development. The collective provides a space to do that but brings its own challenges. One of the first people to join him in the collective had shown worrying signs of radicalisation leading Jacob to start to institute boundaries for his remaining in the group. When the coaching wasn't working, he said, he 'managed him out' of the group.

Paul also engages in mentoring young people with low-esteem and who feel isolated:

PAUL: I've had young lads ring me up, and, 'Look, I've got low self-esteem. I find it difficult to talk to people. I feel a bit isolated.' Because people feel isolated, because the establishment isolates people with different viewpoints. So that isolation breeds anger and frustration. And I pull people out of that isolated bubble and integrate them in the real world. I say to these people, 'Look, come to the gym. Come for a...'

INT: So these are local to you? These are all...

PAUL: No, no, all over the country. I arrange camps, I arrange events. We do 10K assault courses. We have Christmas socials. And I do my best to pull anyone away from any thoughts or ideas of stupidity. And if anyone voices... I mean, you can see on the forums that I run and things, all the rules are 'No racial slurs. No impoliteness. No endorsement of violence and/or terrorism.' You know, this is a positive, outward looking community group.

As an experienced activist, (he is in his late thirties), Paul feels particularly driven by a duty to protect the young from radicalising forces. He had made a video warning against joining National Action: 'I made another video called, "We must protect..." I think it was, "We must protect the young." And it was about older nationalists being responsible and stopping young nationalists doing stupid things.' Paul recounted how he had consciously taken a group of young National Activists out to 'do Brexit stalls' and it turned

‘angry, nasty guys’ into guys who ‘just wanted to talk to people and express their views’. However, he goes on to outline the danger when that structure and access to voice is taken away:

[...] some of those lads have either been swiped by the police and are now in jail, or were put on these crazy deradicalisation courses. Yet when they were released into the public, and allowed to speak their mind, they spoke to people of all cultures and colours without any problems. But do you know what? They were radicalised, because after the Brexit campaign there was nothing for them to do, and they went back to that stupid group and did stupid things. (Paul)

Of course, there is a fine line here between what Paul sees as mentoring young people out of violent extremism and nurturing them into (non-violent) extremism. Another respondent reflecting on this, agrees with the principles Paul seeks to promote (not drinking, keeping fit) but finds it a ‘bit culty’ (Alice). However, she goes on, ‘I don’t think Paul’s going to like radicalise anyone. Or I hope not.’ (Alice).

A number of milieu members are adamant that their work as activists helps dissipate rather than precipitate extremism. Craig, who is an older respondent in the milieu, reflects that:

[...] to be quite honest, the problems are actually probably coming from some of the sort of little micro elements that aren’t really affiliated with anyone, that are far more dangerous. Because nobody knows, you know, who’s controlling or, you know, what they’re doing. (Craig)

As discussed in Section 4.4.2, Will feels that counter radicalisation strategies that expose and ostracise people in what are considered extremist groups are misplaced since, by leaving people without work and on the fringe you reduce what they have to lose - ‘there’s no further social cost’. Putting the argument for focusing CVE on countering behavioural rather than attitudinal extremism (or at least radicalism), he argues:

Because I get, from that mentality it’s like, ‘Oh if this becomes normal, it’s a danger.’ But actually I think, I think the problem with these things comes because they are fringe, rather than because they are, of what they’re saying. I think it’s fringe groups that become extreme. It’s not really about what they say that can predict whether there will be violence. You know, I think it’s just to do with how outside of mainstream are they. Because if something exists and it’s weird... actually I wrote a thing about this, it’s on my Twitter (...). If it exists way outside the mainstream, it can never get it. Over time, it almost makes sense for them to become violent. (Will)

Indeed, the study of radicalisation milieus historically also points to the need to study further the role of movements in putting the ‘brakes’ on radicalisation or violence (Macklin, 2020a: 24).

4.4.4 Implications for policy and practice: Do social media bans work?

Social media companies have come under increasing pressure to do more to prevent their platforms from becoming ‘safe spaces’ for extremism (Conway et al., 2019: 141). In July-December 2018, Twitter sanctioned over a quarter of a million accounts for hate conduct while, in the first quarter of 2019, Facebook actioned 4.0 million pieces of content for hateful speech (CCE, 2019: 49). The number of YouTube channels removed for being hateful or abusive has risen significantly from 1,713 in the fourth quarter of 2018 to 17,818 in the second quarter of 2019 (ibid.). This demand is rooted in the recognition of the growing role of the Internet as a key driver of ‘self-radicalisation’⁴⁶ due to its provision of a quick and easy channel to disseminate extremist material with relatively few legal or social consequences for

⁴⁶ This refers to a type of radicalisation process in which the radicalising individual is posited as the instigator of the process (Homeland Security Institute, 2009).

either producers or consumers (Rieger et al., 2013: 8; Saltman and Russell, 2014: 10). Simply in terms of the volume and reach of material that online distribution can enable, in comparison to traditional media, extremism might be expected to rise as an increasing proportion of the population encounters extremist messages online, often shared through social media platforms. The way in which digital media is now channelled to particular audiences through algorithms applied by social media platforms, moreover, means that social media users are likely to be exposed to those messages in which they have shown previous interest. This potentially creates so-called ‘echo chambers’ or ‘filter bubbles’ (Flaxman, Goel and Rao, 2016; Polonski, 2016) which have the effect of confirming prejudice and introducing individuals to more extreme messages, which can shape a trajectory of radicalisation.

However, this process does not happen in a vacuum. Online engagement is also embedded in social relationships - from simple ‘liking’ of posts or materials through sharing, and sometimes commenting on those materials, to making direct approaches to individuals whose posts they have liked and making physical contact and friendships with them (see Section 4.4.1). Thus, while in theory ‘self-radicalisation’ through solitary engagement with online materials can take place, in practice, as one respondent in this study notes, people either search for this material themselves or others direct them towards it:

[...] they can do it on their own through the internet, can't they? But there will be people that push them towards it. You know, they'll show them the websites to look at and they'll suggest watching this video and that video. (Robbie)

Thus, the Internet does not ‘radicalise’ people. It is not a one-way broadcast or propaganda medium, but a space of social interaction which resonates with ‘everyday youth online culture’ (Conway, 2017: 80-86). It acts as a communicative space and social infrastructure in which ideology is engaged with and a sense of community is formed within radical groups (Rieger et al., 2013: 18) that serves to ‘strengthen commitment to the radical ideology’ (Koehler, 2014: 122). This process is not one of ideological indoctrination but steeped in both positive and negative emotional experiences. These might be associated with excitement, satisfaction or laughter, as the ‘like-minded’ are identified and drawn into communication, but also disgust or anger at materials shared or hurt caused by hostile responses to one’s own posts. Thus, McDonald (2018: 15) sees social media’s significance in radicalisation as rooted in its ‘continuous flow of affect, a medium of “networked intimacy”’. In thinking about the potential effectiveness of ‘de-platforming’ to counter violent extremism in right-wing milieus, therefore, we need to anticipate not only the impact on the supply of extremist content but also the individual and social context of its reception. In this final subsection, we draw on respondents’ accounts of exclusion from these online spaces of ‘networked intimacy’ to consider the potential impact of such measures.

Spending time in ‘Facebook jail’ is routine in the milieu. Paul says, ‘I’ve been in Facebook jail several times for virtually nothing’ while Tonya sees that her friends are ‘gone for a few days’ and then pop back up saying, “‘Oh, out of Facebook jail.”’. The permanent bans of key influencers were discussed in Section 4.4.2 but it is important to note that any individual sharing material related to them can also be sanctioned. Adam reported being banned from Facebook for 30 days for endorsing Tommy Robinson’s European Parliament election campaign while Jason said that he had had a photo of himself with Robinson’s close collaborator Avi Yemeni removed for apparently breaking ‘hate speech’ regulations. Among this respondent set, Lee had been permanently banned from Facebook and Dan has had both his Facebook and Twitter accounts permanently disabled ‘for constantly violating community standards’. The reason cited, he says, was ‘Hate speech’. Indeed, the ethnographic research verifies this. Dan’s Facebook account disappeared a couple of days prior to the first scheduled face to face meeting with him; as the Facebook direct message facility was how we had been communicating final confirmation was not possible and Dan did not show (Field diary, 14.12.2017). Contact was only re-established after a mutual contact phoned him and Dan authorised him to pass on his mobile number to me. Dan’s social media experience is not unusual in the milieu, he says, ‘I don’t even know anyone on Facebook anymore. They’ve all been took off.’

It is impossible to generalise on the basis of the experience of a small number of participants in a right-wing milieu, but respondents' reflections on experiencing these exclusions from social media, suggest a number of responses, which either circumvent the banned platforms to allow their continued activism or fuel their grievance and potentially move them along a radicalisation trajectory.

At the most benign level, all of these respondents remain active, moving to other platforms such as Telegram, Instagram or VKontakte (VK). They use the exposure to reports, warnings and temporary bans to learn the rules of the game. Thus, Alice says that one anti-extremism campaign group had dug up a lot of her old tweets so she has now deleted anything that wasn't appropriate and is 'pretty much clean':

I just about manage to toe the line. I think in the past... when I first started on Twitter, I think I probably... I think I said something like, 'Islam has to be stopped' or something. I think it was just after a terror attack. And my mate was in a restaurant where someone got their throat slit, so I was in a bad mood. Wasn't a big fan of Islam right then. And Resisting Hate had gone in and actually dug up all of my old tweets that were bad. And great, so I've deleted them, so now I've got pretty much clean. I'm not, well I'm not racist for a start. So that's like something. But I've not been saying anything... (Alice)

She says she has been reported many times to Twitter but never been found to have broken the regulations. Paul had put much more effort into staying the right side of the regulations; he had all his materials checked first by an experienced, practising solicitor. He was furious therefore when YouTube started to remove some of his videos since he knows he has 'not broken any law or stepped over any line' (Field diary, 24.05.2019).

He [the solicitor] has said categorically that video... he said... in fact his words were, 'Not only did you not cross the line.' He said, 'You could have gone far further before you came close to crossing the line.' And he said, 'Also, by removing this video, they potentially moved towards breaking the Equality Commission ruling that people cannot be discriminated against for their philosophical views on the world. (Paul)

Paul is angry, in particular, about the lack of transparency or right to appeal. Complaining about the Facebook bans, he says they often 'won't even tell you' the reasons for the ban:

They just say, they just say, you know, 'Your account has been locked for this.' And you click on the 'this' and it's a blank page. A blank page... you're like, 'Well there's nothing there.' And there's no recourse, there's no way to file an appeal. (Paul)

Reading aloud to me the ruling on the video he has just had restricted by YouTube, Paul shows his detailed attention to playing within the rules:

'Cause what they're saying is they are... can't find the actual thing, but this is... I'm looking for the actual phrase where they say... Ah. 'Violent extremism, supremacism, civil rights and free speech'. They are saying that basically what they will be doing is 'taking a tougher stance towards videos with supremacist content, including limiting recommendations and features like comments and the ability to share video. This step drastically reduced views to these videos.' So they're deciding what can be watched. 'Today we're taking another step in our hate speech policy by specifically prohibiting videos alleging that a group is superior to another, in order to justify discrimination.' I didn't do that. 'Segregation or exclusion based on qualities like age, gender, race, caste, religion, sexual status or veteran status.' I didn't do that. 'This would include, for example, videos that promote or glorify Nazi ideology.' Didn't do that. 'Finally, remove videos that will deny well-documented violent facts like the holocaust or Sandy Hook shooting.' I didn't do that. Now nothing that's been said is that. But then they're saying, 'In addition to removing videos that violate our policies, we also want to reduce the spread of content that comes right up to the line.' So basically what they're saying

is, 'We're making this very grey line. But even if somehow you manage to stay within the line, we'll still get your videos taken down.' So that's not... so that's like saying... so they've said... and my specific thing was that [...] I 'incited and/or glorified violence' in my video. Now if you listen to that video, there isn't a moment in that where I incite or glorify violence at all, okay. And the reason being is if I thought there was anything that got close to that, I'd never publish it. Because it would be illegal. So that video didn't cross the line. But they're removing it because it... I know why they've removed it – because it was too good. (Paul)

Dan expresses a real sense of injustice over a post that had been removed from Instagram for being offensive, when it was actually a repost of a threatening message that had been sent to him by an 'Antifa member' (see Section 4.3.3.3). Reflecting on the effect of bans on Facebook and Twitter, Dan is concerned that they are counter-productive, having the effect of 'pushing people into a corner' and driving groups underground and to become more radical (Field diary, 18. 03.2018). Lee's experience appears to confirm this. Lee's ban from Facebook came at a time when he was getting closer to the more radical, and subsequently proscribed, group National Action. As he put it: 'I were just getting involved with National Action and that. And I did, we got, all got kicked off Facebook. We moved over to that VK and I told them on VK, I said, "Right, that's it. I'm joining you." But then day after, I said, "No, I can't do it. I can't leave [names own movement] and that."' While National Action was only banned later, when Lee was already in prison, it is clear how such experiences can act as a tipping point for radicalisation. Paul also expresses a concern about what he calls the 'huge bias' shown by Twitter in its social media which can lead people to more violent solutions:

I use Twitter. I'm very careful what I say on there as well. Because Twitter has this huge bias. Again, the same bias I'm talking about. And all these biases lead to anger. They lead to the side who are being silenced thinking that there is no democratic, no peaceful and no sensible solution. And that's when you see these young people doing foolish things. And I'm desperate to stop them doing foolish things, 'cause I don't want there to have to be violent outcomes to what's going on. I don't want violence; I want peaceful solutions. (Paul)

Illustrating McDonald's (2018: 15) understanding of social media as a medium of 'networked intimacy', Paul expresses a deep emotional loss as a result of his material being removed from YouTube. He describes his current state as 'I'm dying at the moment on the inside, watching my legacy just destroyed.' (Paul). However, he imagines the response of others – potentially among the 92,000 subscribers to his channel - being more radical:

[...] 92,000 subscribers. If my channel gets lost, how do I connect with the people who want to connect with me? What does my community do then? And what happens when somebody gets their stuff banned and they've spent hundreds or thousands of hours, as I have, producing this stuff? And then they kill themselves. Are they a victim then or...? No, but they won't be, will they? (Paul)

This reaction speaks not only to the belief among respondents that the closing down of online space may be counter-productive in terms of preventing radicalisation, but also that this policy is implemented unevenly and in a way that consistently denies political voice to the right wing.

4.5 Structural factors: reconfiguring inequality

The DARE project is particularly concerned with the relationship between inequality and radicalisation since inequality is presumed to be at least an underlying condition for, even if not a direct driver at individual level of, routes into violent extremism. In Section 4.2.1, it was shown that respondents in this study when reflecting on the causes of radicalisation (in relation to the right-wing) talked about 'anger and frustration' and the lack/denial of 'political voice' as the two main drivers. Economic deprivation or

disadvantage was not mentioned although the perceived ‘privileging’ of the needs of others was a strong narrative, which confirms existing literature in the field (Linden and Klandermans, 2007; Pilkington, 2016). Drawing concrete conclusions about the relationship between inequality and radicalisation based on individual, small sample, ethnographic studies is extremely difficult. The forthcoming synthesis of the nine country based studies of extreme right milieus undertaken for DARE is designed to provide greater capacity for the inference of common patterns. Nonetheless, the findings of this study provide some rich data that illustrate an important emergent finding from the systematic review of survey data and qualitative empirical studies about the relative significance of perceived socio-political inequality (as opposed to objective economic inequality). As Bottero (2020: 10) argues, ‘inequality is never just a question of economic distribution but always entails relations of power, domination and subordination and hierarchies of respect, standing and accountability’. In this section, therefore, a very brief outline of that general picture is provided before summarising the findings from this study on the relationship between socio-economic and socio-political inequalities in this milieu.

A systematic review and meta-ethnographic synthesis of quantitative and qualitative empirical evidence on the relationship between inequality⁴⁷ and radicalisation, conducted within the framework of the DARE project, have demonstrated that the relationship between inequality and radicalisation is neither clear nor consistent across existing published studies (Franc and Pavlović, 2018; Poli and Arun, 2019). The reviews found that the relationship between measures (objective or subjective) of socio-economic inequality at both individual and social (e.g. country) level do not consistently predict radicalisation. However, these reviews did suggest that *subjective* dimensions of inequality - especially perceived injustice, perceived socio-political inequality or ‘grievance’ - play a more important role in radicalisation than objective measures (poverty, unemployment, educational level) (Franc and Pavlović, 2018; Poli and Arun, 2019). This finding on the relative importance of the subjective dimension of inequality in explaining radicalisation appears to be confirmed by other recent studies. A review of 25 empirical studies by Harpviken (2019: 17) concluded there is a clear relationship between perceived discrimination and extremism among youth while van den Bos (2020) argues that perceived unfairness is a key variable in Islamist, right-wing and left-wing radicalisation. A major secondary data analysis of seven European survey data sets (EVS 2008, 2017; WVS 2010-14; ESS 2014; Eurobarometer 2015; ISSP 2008; FP7 MYPLACE 2012-13; Young in Oslo 2015), investigating the relationship between inequality and youth radicalisation was also conducted as part of the DARE project (Storm et al., 2020). This study found no significant relationship between economic inequality (measured by the Gini coefficient) and cognitive radicalisation but did find that experienced discrimination (being personally a victim and perception that one’s ‘in-group’ is treated unfairly) was consistently associated with support for political violence and opposition to democracy (ibid.: 132).

The literature on the extreme right identifies economic insecurity as one of four main factors driving right-wing extremism. The others are: authoritarianism; lack of education; and social isolation (Klandermans and Mayer, 2006: 6). The Storm et al. (2020) study provides particularly interesting findings on this question, through its attention to what European survey data sets show on negative attitudes towards Muslims among young people. The study shows no large or consistently significant results across the data sets on individual measures of economic disadvantage (ibid.: 120). While the significant relationships are all in one direction, with more individual and household economic disadvantage being associated with more negative attitudes to Muslims, at most it allows the conclusion that low economic status and financial difficulty either marginally increase negative attitudes (all else being equal) or have no discernible effect on the anti-Muslim attitudes of young people in Europe (ibid.: 121). These mixed findings are confirmed by qualitative studies, which often reveal circumstantial evidence of the connection between

⁴⁷ The DARE project defines inequality as ‘objectively unequal, or subjectively perceived, unjust distribution of resources, power or opportunities’ (Franc and Pavlović, 2019).

high unemployment or precarious informal employment and extreme right activism (Ezekiel, 2002: 58; Pilkington, 2016) but also counter evidence that such activists are not from the poorest groups (Blee, 2002: 25; Kimmel, 2007: 207). On the relationship between socio-political disadvantage/perceived injustice and anti-Muslim attitudes, however, the Storm et al. study (ibid.: 122) does find that a feeling of powerlessness has an effect. Survey respondents who felt that their voice was not heard, and that they lacked political influence, were slightly more opposed to Muslim immigration while people who experienced a lack of control over their own lives were also slightly more likely to express social distance to Muslims (ibid.: 122).

Making any direct causal relationship between socio-economic background and radicalisation trajectory from qualitative data is impossible. In this study, in addition to the small sample and ethnographic approach, which make this already difficult, respondents are also young people (at varying stages of transition to independent living), which adds to the problem of what to consider in terms of socio-economic background (own or that of parents). Despite these caveats, basic data on educational and employment status were asked of all respondents and provide some insight into the spectrum of backgrounds among respondents. More significantly, interview narratives suggest three potentially important findings. First, we suggest that the very limited discussion of socio-economic deprivation as an important factor in respondents' own trajectories is, in part, due to the ideological frameworks through which respondents see the world; these posit inequality as 'natural' and the pursuit of 'equality' as thus unnecessary or undesirable. Thus, where inequalities are talked about in terms of class identities, these are framed almost exclusively in terms of inequalities of power, especially the lack of political voice. Second, and following from this, socio-political inequality features in respondents' narratives as an issue of grievance much more frequently than socio-economic inequality. Often these grievances are framed as 'injustices', reflecting the ideological premise that inequality is natural whereas injustice goes against the rule of law and is thus illegitimate. These injustices are experienced in a range of spheres - employment, education, the justice system - and largely attributed to the implementation of a multicultural politics that favours 'others'. Third, where inequality is talked about directly, it relates to a 'sense of inequality' (Bottero, 2020) of political voice experienced as a form of misrecognition and inequality of participation.

4.5.1 Socio-economic inequality: a significant absence?

The data on respondents' educational and employment status (see Section 3.5) show that most were employed or in full time education, three were occupied but in an unpaid capacity (volunteering, in activism or caring) and four were unemployed. In two cases this unemployment was linked to the inability to find employment since release from prison and one had health problems that had prevented employment for several years. Employment status was very fluid, however, and it should be noted that this is a snapshot at the time of first interview with the respondents. In terms of educational trajectory, respondents had very different experiences. Just over half had taken vocational routes while a quarter had completed/were completing higher education. The remaining respondents had completed general academic secondary education.

Concerning individual narratives, only three respondents refer to current material hardship. DT describes himself as 'skint'. He had given up paid employment 9 months previously to devote himself full-time to activism since becoming heavily engaged in the Free Tommy Robinson campaign and says that his family are 'on the breadline' (Field diary, 12.02.2019). The other is Billy who was in full-time employment, had three children, and had recently given up lorry driving for a better-paid factory job. However, liability for legal fees related to his conviction for violent disorder (discussed in more detail in Section 4.5.2) had led to serious financial problems: 'They're demanding £7,000 off me for legal fees. And we just haven't got the money. Like they looked at my wage and, after tax, they were looking over two-thirds of it every week for my legal fees' (Billy). Jacob (who does not work on grounds of ill health) also says he and his family are short of money. Although his wife is in full-time employment, he says they have not had a holiday in years

and they have had to cut down on material things (Field diary, 22.09.2019). Lee talks about earlier financial difficulties faced by his girlfriend and her children whilst he was in prison; this had been particularly hard to bear as he himself had set up a hardship fund for those convicted in relation to the same incident but, while he had made sure others had been helped out, his girlfriend had received little support.

Even with reference to growing up, only two respondents suggested their childhoods had been 'poor'. Moreover, in both these cases this was mentioned in the context of stories of upward mobility. Paul says his parents 'live now in a large, double garage, four bedroomed detached house, because they moved up the social scale by working hard' while Paolo contrasts the flat on a council estate in a rough area where he had grown up with the 'posh area' to which his parents had since moved. Specific constraints were mentioned by some others. Jermaine for example said there had not been money in the family for him to consistently attend football training, although he had been approached by the local football club and scouts from premiership clubs had been interested in him at one point. Gareth also notes housing constraints which meant that he shared a room with his brother until he was 18 and moved out to live with his dad. Three respondents also talk about periods of their lives where they had been homeless. For Robbie this was at a particularly low period of his life when he lost his job, split up with his girlfriend and was thrown out of the house by his dad all at the same time; he ended up sofa-surfing and living in his car for a few months. For Paolo, homelessness was experienced after release from prison the first time when he slept on the streets for four months before eventually getting into a hostel.

The range of current and recent employment reported by respondents is wide and includes: driving (lorries or fork-lift trucks), factory work, public sector administrative work, armed forces, work in the creative industries, security, catering, call centre, electrician, banking and sales and marketing. In most cases these would be considered working class jobs and, when talking about their own class position, most respondents refer to their working class background or status (Cara, Billy, Lee, Paolo). Respondents also refer to other members of the movement being 'working class'; 'the majority of this movement are working class' (DT). Only one respondent self-identified as middle class in interview although at least one other would, by objective criteria, be considered middle class.

However, a certain discomfort with declaring a class position is evident among respondents because there is a mismatch between feeling working class and the assumptions of political positioning (as 'Labour') that go with it. This is expressed by Lee:

Well, when I were growing up, Labour was still what you'd see as for the British working class, but now they're not, they're not for the British working class, they're for, I'd say they're more for the immigrant class [...] (Lee)

Thus, when working class identities are mentioned in the milieu, it is often in the context of their lack of political representation and power. This was noted also in Section 4.3.3.1 in relation to the ideological construction of the divide between 'people' and 'elite' and it is mobilised particularly in the political arena. Thus Cara, an elected councillor at the time of interview, says it is the 'working class' who see the real issues that need solving because they are the ones using public services and in need of social housing. In contrast, the political elites dismiss the issues the right wing raise because they simply don't experience the problems themselves and do not trust those who do to make political choices (Paolo). Thus the only solution is to have representatives of the working class in power; 'until we have a prime minister who can see the issues, then we aren't going to have anything fixed. We're not going to have a solution.' (Cara). This is echoed repeatedly in Tommy Robinson's European Parliament election campaign, which he launches in Wythenshawe with the question 'Why Wythenshawe?' and the answer 'because this is a working class estate where the people have been forgotten' (Field diary, Tommy Robinson EP election rally, 25 April 2019). In this way, right-wing movements are constructed as putting across the working class point of view in a space abandoned by the Labour Party. As CL puts it 'Labour were for the working class. But Labour are not Labour any more. You can see that in politics. Who represents the masses?'

Tommy Robinson's positioning of himself as the voice of the working class is far from new; back in 2013 when interviewed on BBC's *Newsnight* programme, he stated that the EDL is a movement of the *working class* whose voices need to be listened to (Pilkington, 2016: 174). What is noticeable is the increasingly frequent elision between working class and 'people'.

Economic equality and inequality figure rarely in ideological narratives too. Again the main exceptions are influencers active in the mainstream political sphere. Tommy Robinson's election campaign flyer says he is with 'the people' including 'the working class people who have been left behind economically'. He goes on to say that he admires what Nigel Farage has achieved but he is 'just another millionaire stockbroker who looks down at the working classes' (Tommy Robinson campaign flyer, European Parliament elections, 2019). DT also talks about the gap in living standards between elites and ordinary people and how those inequalities could be addressed:

What's become very clear over the last few years is that we the people are living in poverty and all that are above this threshold of elites are living in complete luxury. Now the difference between where the people are right now and where the power are is taxes. The amount of money that is flooded out of this country into the EU, into aid for different countries. Just those large amounts of money would solve some of the biggest crises that we have today in this country. (DT)

He goes on to say that the profits of major companies should be shared with people instead of being kept for shareholders so 'they can sit on big boats and have nice cars and have five houses' (DT). Both he and CL declare themselves also in favour of nationalisation (in the context of talking about the profits made by energy companies). A number of respondents also express strong support for government spending on health and mental health services and to resolve problems of homelessness (especially among veterans of the armed forces).

However, when equality and inequality are talked about at the ideological level, inequality is seen as 'natural' and inescapable. Jacob does not believe in the promotion of equality because people are naturally unequal and undeserving:

JACOB: Inequality is natural, yes, absolutely.

INT: And the passing on of inequality? So when you talk about elitism, so the passing on of advantage or inequality is also...

JACOB: Yeah. Yes, absolutely. Well it's developed - I think everything that's happened is natural. Everything that's happened is natural. That's really, when someone asks me what would your perfect world be like, and it's like, 'Well this is the perfect world.' The winners are gonna win... the best men are going to win. The losers are going to lose.

Will and Tonya also believe that inequality is natural or not all people are equal or should have the same rights. As Tonya puts it:

I feel like I'm going to sound like Jordan Peterson⁴⁸, just less articulate. I do think there's a natural inequality between people in general - there just is. It's, life is survival of the fittest, whether that's with education, mentally, physically. (Tonya)

Mikey explains his opposition to socialism as being because it takes money away from hard working people to 'put into the system, to try and create an equal sort of pot'. He thinks this prioritises the interests of the state over individual aspirations.

⁴⁸ Jordan Peterson is a Canadian academic psychologist at the University of Toronto whose lectures are widely viewed in the form of YouTube videos within the milieu. Among respondents in this study his views on inequality and hierarchy, the crisis of masculinity and 'order' and 'chaos' are referenced.

Thus, in looking at the potential role of socio-economic inequality as a driver of radicalisation in extreme right milieus, this study confronts not only the constraints of small sample and ethnographic approach (which captures subjective rather than objective measures of inequality) but also the influence of how respondents narrativise their experience of the world, which comes from a working class position but sits uncomfortably with traditional paradigms of oppression, inequality and discrimination. Indeed, Gareth explicitly rejects the notion of ‘oppression’; ‘I think there's classism. I don't think there is oppression no more’ (Gareth). As we will see below this is also conditioned by an aversion to what is considered to be the dominance of identity politics based on an in-built hierarchy of oppressions. In contrast, respondents see inequality as ‘natural’ and life as a competition for survival. The unwillingness to recognise how inequality is generated by society and politics is particularly striking in the narrative of Tonya, a wheelchair user, who at every turn denies that she is in anyway disadvantaged and that, in many cases, her disability is an advantage. Illustrating this she recounts:

I recently signed up to a few modelling agencies and they've... I think I've buggered it because I signed up for them and then they called me when I was down in Scotland with a friend, and I didn't want to be rude, and I didn't know how long they'd be on for. So I messaged them saying, 'Keep the slot open, I'll get back to you when I can.' And they just went, 'Nah.' And I was, 'Okay, fine.' But getting into them, and the few I've spoke to, they basically said I've got a fair chance because I'm in a wheelchair. [...] So I feel privileged in a way, because people will want me, to seem more inclusive. (Tonya)

It is difficult to understand this position fully given the particular focus of this study and the lack of a holistic picture of Tonya's life trajectory. However, Tonya's narrativisation of her disability as a ‘privilege’ should be read in the context of having been ‘conditioned to not take offence’, as she puts it, ‘because I grew up with an arsehole father who always took the Mick out of me’ and her insistence on using words such as ‘cripple’ and ‘retard’ about herself while encouraging the use of such terminology by others when talking to her as ‘a sign of respect’. As Bottero (2020: 2) notes in her elaboration of the practical experience of subjective inequality, people's responses to inequalities are often paradoxical or contradictory.

4.5.2 Perceived injustice: a system stacked against you

Research to date shows perceived inequality and injustice to be a recurrent driver of radicalisation (Franc and Pavlović, 2018). Although often dismissed as misperception and grievance fuelled by populist (social) media narratives, Bottero (2020: 2) (citing Runciman) points to the established recognition that the relationship between inequality and grievance only ‘intermittently’ corresponds with the degree of actual inequality. Moreover, perceived unfairness feels real and has real consequences (van den Bos, 2020). Indeed, empirical research with actors in extremist milieus shows that it ‘feels’ like an everyday experience, either personal or collective, of discrimination, unequal access to justice, not belonging or being denied a voice (Pilkington, 2016). Probably as a result of the naturalisation of inequality by respondents discussed above, in this study, reference to ‘injustices’ was significantly more common than to ‘inequalities’. Experiences of injustice are talked about in relation to employment, education and the justice system and as rooted in the unequal application of standards to those who have right-wing political views.

Talk about people losing their jobs unfairly, due to their political views or activism, is rife in the milieu. Those working in the public sector are seen to be particularly affected by ‘political correctness’. At a Tommy Robinson election rally, one attendee says he has just lost his job with the city council because he had been discovered to be following Tommy Robinson on his social media (Field diary, Tommy Robinson European Parliament election rally, Wythenshawe, 25.04.2019). Dan recounts how someone he knows in the milieu was sacked after 32 years working in the NHS for attending a demonstration (Field diary, 06.09.2018). Two respondents talk about their own personal experience of such injustice; both of whom

work in the private sector. Dan says he has been sacked from five jobs and is now only able to get employment with people he knows.

The last sacking I got before the job I'm in now, I got sacked for, on me day off I went to Manchester last year, UK Against Hate. It was on me day off. And I was seen. There was a picture of me on the front page of the Daily Express, the Daily Star and the Sun. And me boss seen it in work. Was me day off, like I said. Went in next day, they sacked me because I was in the paper. [...] Because of the march I was on basically, yeah. Calling me... they were calling me a racist then, in work. Sacked me. Which is wrong again, you know, you should be able to go on a march. Doesn't matter what the march is about. Shouldn't... as long as you don't bring it... I've always said that, as long as you don't bring it into work, then shouldn't be a problem. But it always follows me in work, like. [...] someone will know me face or seen me about on speeches or... And you'll always get that one, 'Oh you're a racist. You're a racist.' Go to the boss, and next minute you're sacked. I've lost count now, but I think it's five jobs I've been sacked from. (Dan)

Will was sacked from a graduate level job in the financial services industry after exposure by an anti-extremism organisation was picked up by the national media. He was first suspended and asked to resign and, when he refused, he was sacked. Will is appealing against his dismissal and in the meantime, like Dan, getting jobs through people he knows:

So in terms of employment, I can only go via people I know or abroad. If I wanted to get a job like the one I used to have, the only way I could do it is leaving England. 'Cause everyone else... you know, in the industry I was in, part of your application is an adverse media check. You type my name into Google, it's, 'Fascist, fascist, fascist, fascist.' (Will)

With regard to education, as discussed throughout the report, school, college and university was often a flashpoint of conflict over political views. Jason and Tonya talk about critical moments in their activism arising at school and college. Jermaine was referred to Prevent by his college and Paul talks about those with patriotic or nationalist views being 'hounded' and threatened with being expelled' at university. However, only Jermaine suggests that his political views had a direct, negative impact on his educational outcomes. He believes he failed his English exam because much of the work he submitted was on the EDL and the exam board rejected it.

Another key site of perceived injustice is the justice system itself. Respondents talk about injustice at the systemic level, through corruption and the stacking of the system against you, as well as collective miscarriages of justice and personal cases of being punished for something they did not do.

At the level of systemic inequality in the administration of justice, Cara views the justice system as controlled by politicians at the highest level. She illustrates this with reference to the arrest and imprisonment of leading figures on the extreme right political scene and what she sees as their deliberate exposure to life-threatening situations in prison:

[...] it terrifies me, to think of that, how politicians at the highest levels can control our justice system, so that it's not true justice. If they say, you know, whoever they are at the top says they have to go, you know, they have to go to prison. And they have to be put into such and such a prison. I mean, how many patriots are going to go to prison and be put in high population Muslim prisons? And it happened to Tommy, it happened to Jayda, it happened to Paul. And they wanted to put them all in high population Muslim prisons. And that's simply to put them in danger [...] (Cara)

Systemic corruption and complicity is perceived to be responsible for the failure to tackle organised CSE (grooming gangs) (see Section 4.3.3.1) while social media companies are accused of systematic bias against right wing users and injustice institutionalised through hate speech legislation, a lack of

transparency in decision making and the absence of an appeal process (see Section 4.4.4).

Miscarriages of justice are causes with which respondents - especially those active with the DFLA - identify and are engaged. During the fieldwork period these were primarily the Justice for the 21 campaign and rallies held together with Veterans' organisations against the historic prosecution of members, or former members of, the armed forces (see Plate 10).

Plate 10: Million Veterans rally, Salford, 18.05.2019



Activism around the latter was triggered by the case of 'Soldier F', the paratrooper whom it was announced, in March 2019 by the Northern Ireland Public Prosecution Service, would be prosecuted for the murder of two men and the attempted murder of five others during the events of Bloody Sunday (1972)⁴⁹. However as the slogan 'I stand with Soldier A-Z' adopted by demonstrators indicates, it went far beyond this specific case. The Justice for the 21 and the Soldier F support campaign are not unconnected in how respondents understand the uneven application of justice, as Robbie explains:

I go to the Justice for the 21, I like that one. Because I've had family that served in Northern Ireland and stuff like that. So obviously it was a tragedy that happened. Obviously I wasn't alive, but I've read up on it and seen what's happened. And how they've still not had any justice is disgraceful, to be honest. And when there's Northern Ireland vets getting jailed now, and they're still walking about free. It's, it's just ridiculous. (Robbie) At events attended associated with both these causes, the emphasis was placed on injustice and 'double standards'. This relates in particular to the refusal of legal aid for the victims' families, which Julie Hambleton, sister of one of the victims, describes as indicating the odds are stacked against victims and their families and the practice of a 'two tier modus operandi' by governments past and present (Field diary, DFLA demo, 23.03.2018).

At the personal level, a number of respondents recount being punished for something they did not do. Paolo, who has a long criminal record, generally accepts the punishment he has received but is bitter about one conviction that he views as totally unjust. This relates to his conviction for assault of a former girlfriend when, he says, it was she who attacked him. The trial date - in a town at the other end of the

⁴⁹ Bloody Sunday refers to the events of Sunday, 30 January 1972 when 13 people were killed and 15 wounded after members of the Parachute Regiment opened fire on civil rights demonstrators in Derry/Londonderry, Northern Ireland. 'Soldier F' is used to preserve the anonymity of the soldier against whom prosecution was brought.

country - was brought forward unexpectedly and he was unable to get to court and found guilty in his absence.

They changed my court date; I couldn't get there. They found me guilty in absence. [...] My sentence was a year and I did six months. And she wrote to me in prison, telling me I didn't do it. She came and visited me twice, asking me if we could get back together - the works. And I always protested my innocence, everything. I even showed the letters that showed I was innocent. They didn't care. [...] That's the only one I do feel bitter about. The rest of them, I've been a knob head. But that one... (Paolo)

Finally, it is worth dwelling on Imogen's experience. Personally, and through the group she has established to fight injustice⁵⁰ for people in similar situations, Imogen has been embroiled in a long battle with social services over the removal of her two children. She feels punished for something she did not do over the removal of her son into temporary foster care and 'blackmailed' into signing permission for him to be taken. Although her son was returned to her when evidence was provided that the bruising he had was consistent with his restraint whilst at nursery, he was removed again the day before his case would have been signed off completely and just before her daughter was born.

The day after, when they came to see us, they ended up taking us to the child protection medical in the hospital. We were in there the entire day. They were asking us questions left, right and centre. Also you know about my blood conditions and everything and the issues I was having obviously with my own health. Went out of the room. Come back in a couple of hours later with two police officers, two social workers, a nurse and that doctor. And I got told that I had to sign a Section 20 so he can go into temporary care. If I sign the Section 20, I get to see him again the following week, 'cause it was Friday. If I didn't sign the Section 20, they'd be taking him anyway, but I'd have to go through court to see him again. So in my mind, I was given a choice do I sign this and see him on Monday, or do I not sign this and risk never seeing him again? I didn't know at the time it was just blackmail, it's just bullshit [...] And it's happened to so many people as well. Because when it comes to a choice of see your kid next week or never see your kid again, you don't have a choice in that matter. (Imogen)

Imogen believes that the removal of her son was due to the fact that she was pregnant with her second child; this gave the social services grounds to take her daughter in a process of involuntary adoption. In a leaflet produced on behalf of her group, she lambasts 'secret family courts' and a system that encourages social workers to take children from good families (because they are easier to adopt out) and to 'falsify documents' in order to ensure children are removed. In interview, she refers to family courts as 'kangaroo courts' and complains that the testimony of three separate professionals as to her fitness to look after her children was ignored. Since 'possible future harm' is cited as the reason for removal, she explains, it is impossible to fight since you cannot demonstrate the absence of a future event. Imogen also regrets taking a legal aid solicitor because she felt he had 'gagged' her by not explaining that she did not have to agree with certain documents. The legalese, she says, shoots everyone in the foot:

You've got no chance, you know. Unless you know what you're doing and you're 100% there and take everything 100% literally, they can get around it in so many different ways, 'cause they blackmail and manipulate and twist things. And legalese is what shoots everyone in the foot, because it might look perfectly innocent, but what it actually means is something completely different. (Imogen)

The experience of injustice is thus coloured also with a loss of power and helplessness in the face of a system that is stacked against you. The feelings of grief and loss of your children are also intimately bound

⁵⁰ The name of the group is not disclosed to avoid identification of the respondent.

up with those of shame and humiliation:

[...] So I already put [names daughter] to bed when they come in. The police were telling me that it would be all right, they were just gonna take her to the hospital tomorrow, and then she'd be back with me after that. Social worker actually made me frog march her from my house through the estate, to the next estate over to put her in his car, and then walk back. My entire estate was out watching that, my entire estate. And I've been attacked at my house because of what they've done. [...] This is why I don't leave my house. This is why I don't like leaving my house, unless I've got people with me, because I'm not welcome in my own town because of something I didn't do. (Imogen)

Imogen's story illustrates all three categories of injustice experienced by respondents at the hands of the justice system. She feels punished and shamed for child abuse that she did not commit. The removal of her children is experienced as a miscarriage of justice which she sees repeated in the cases of others in her group. The practice of fighting for justice has left her convinced that what has happened to her is allowed, even encouraged, by a system of secret courts and the incentivising of social workers to remove children from decent, but powerless, working class families. While framed by the respondent as 'injustice', Imogen's experience is very much in line with what Bottero (2020: 11) understands as the 'concrete social arrangements' through which people experience 'inequality' in terms of 'subordination, unequal opportunity and uneven status, autonomy and constraint'.

4.5.3 Perceived injustice: unequal application of the law

Perceived injustice can be seen as part of a broader articulation of a backlash to the politics of multiculturalism. In right-wing milieus injustice is understood as a consequence of a system that privileges the needs of 'others' over their own, rendering them 'second-class citizens' or even victims of discrimination, violence or abuse (Pilkington, 2016). This injustice is understood to be institutionalised through a 'two-tier' justice system which privileges minorities whilst discriminating against 'us' (ibid.: 154-76). This is articulated through perceptions that, on the one hand, minorities are given preferential treatment and, on the other, 'we' are seen to be treated differently because of who we are. In both cases, these perceptions are underpinned by a sense that injustice is incurred because the law is not applied evenly to everyone. As Jason puts it, 'I believe that just one rule of law for everybody - no exceptions of race, gender, whatever. We're all the same law applies to everyone.' In practice, however, 'We're not all equal', he says, 'when others are getting special treatment' (Jason).

In sharp contrast to the statistical data that suggest minority ethnic groups are over-represented at many stages throughout the criminal justice system in comparison to the White ethnic group (Ministry of Justice, 2019: 2), respondents in this study believed that what Jason calls 'the race card' is used by ethnic minorities to avoid prosecution. There is widespread belief, for example, that organised CSE ('grooming gangs') has been allowed to go unprosecuted over decades because of the fear of what Mikey refers to as 'a public backlash against ethnic minorities' if the scale of the phenomenon was revealed (see Section 4.3.2.1). Adam describes those responsible for committing CSE in his town as 'untouchables', indicating that they are protected from prosecution. That some communities are not penalised in the same way as everyone else engenders what Mikey talks about as 'righteous anger' (see also Section 4.3.4):

I think there is such a thing as righteous anger. And when there is an injustice going on, you're totally justified in getting angry. So I think in that environment it's not as contradictory as you perhaps think. I think the reason, particularly some of the demos that I'm involved in, the reason there's particularly a hatred towards local authorities and the government, is because, rightly or wrongly, the perceived measure is that certain individuals, particularly from sort of a radical Islamic community, they aren't penalised as much as other people. Because I don't know, for whatever reason, they just seem to get sort of like lesser sentences.

There's less sort of security around trouble spots where they're renowned for sort of areas of activity and people are just wondering why. And no-one can give an answer. And everyone's... rightly or wrongly, the assumption is you're, you're scared of being accused of being racist, so you deliberately aren't doing it or you're tiptoeing round the issue instead of tackling the problems head-on. So I think that, that's why people get angry. (Mikey)

However, injustice can also mean receiving privileged treatment. Paolo says he had witnessed, first-hand, the preferential treatment afforded to Muslim prisoners; 'if you're a Muslim in prison, you get it ten times better than you do if you're Catholic. Hundred percent. [...] You get better food, you get more gym. You get less work, because you're allowed to go out and pray.' (Paolo).

On a range of social issues, also, minorities are said to be given preferential treatment. Examples range from access to housing for the homeless being given preferentially to those of Eastern European backgrounds (Mikey) to special provision being afforded to Muslims over funeral rites during the Covid-19 epidemic (Field diary, 13.04.2020). A classic expression of this injustice is the sense Billy has that people like him have to work long hours while immigrants arriving in the country have things handed to them:

Like I can work up to like seventy hours in a week. When I was doing European work, you're maybe working eighty, ninety hours a week. And you're getting your pay and it's never enough. You still are struggling to make ends meet. And then there's maybe a family being brought in from Somalia or somewhere and they're getting everything for free. Getting houses, getting grants. I've heard rumours too they get grants for, to get a car and stuff. I don't know how true it is like. But if you're from here, you've to work hard for everything. And you still don't have enough like. (Billy)

Accompanying the perception of the preferential treatment of minorities is the sense that people within the milieu are unfairly treated because of their political persuasion. As discussed in the previous section, this is said to lead to unfair dismissal from jobs but it also manifests in the denial of rights afforded to others. This is reflected in Paul's anger at what he says is the denial of white students a means of cultural expression within the university environment:

I've had people come up to me who are actually members of groups like the Afro-Caribbean Society and say, 'I want to talk to you.' And I actually had this lovely girl, came up to me, and she said to me, 'I want to talk to you. Why do you hate me?' And I said, 'I don't hate you.' I said, 'Do you want to marry a white man?' And she said, 'Of course not. Why would I want that?' She said, 'I want to marry a black man. I'm proud of who I am. I want to have children that look like me, that are brought up with my cultural values.' And I said, 'Well so do I. So why do you come up to me saying I shouldn't be allowed to do that?' And after that we became quite good friends. We used to talk a lot. But really, what's happening here is I have a shared interest with people of all different cultures and colours, who feel the same way about their people as I feel about mine. But they are allowed to express that. (Paul)

Most experiences of unfair treatment attributed to political views, however, are directly related to the police and legal system. The case observed at first hand was that of Billy, who was charged with, and subsequently convicted of, violent disorder after attending a Generation Identity conference. Although I had not attended the event, I had heard detailed accounts from a number of people, including other respondents, who were there and I attended Billy's Crown Court trial. Without going into the intricate detail of the evidence seen and heard, the facts of the case appeared to be that there was fighting between conference attendees (including those providing security on the day) and anti-fascist activists in a car park close to the original venue. The altercation occurred because the name of the venue where the conference was being held was mistakenly given out by a speaker at the conference welcoming people to it. This allowed antifascist activists to alert the venue owners to the nature of the conference and gather a group to travel to the venue to challenge the GI activists. Once alerted, the venue owners asked the GI

group to vacate the premises. As they left and made their own way, some to the pub, some to the station, the two groups encountered each other in a car park and fighting broke out. There were no injuries, no damage to property and no arrests on the day although it was reported that members of the public out shopping had been 'frightened' by the clash. CCTV footage was subsequently used by the police to determine who should be prosecuted and Billy was one of five GI activists to be later arrested. Billy was amazed at the decision to prosecute GI activists:

And I do not have one bit of doubt I am innocent like. 'Cause we went there for a conference, which we intended to do, it was legal. [...] And people travelled over thirty miles to come and attack us. Police failed to prevent it. But I think it was politically motivated too. Think they want to make an example out of everyone they class as on the right. (Billy)

While it is clear from the CCTV footage shown that Billy had briefly fought with another participant⁵¹, the scene is one akin to scuffles between rival fans or groups outside a closing pub; there is no throwing of missiles, mass brawl or running at police lines usually associated with 'violent disorder' charges. It is also clear that while they might have fought back, GI activists had not picked the fight; Billy was dressed in a suit (the conference had had a dress code) and hardly ready for combat. Thus, the fact that five GI activists but only 3 antifascist activists were prosecuted also feeds Billy's understanding of the prosecution as 'politically motivated'. Billy was adamant that the two groups would never have come into contact if the police had provided an escort to the GI group to the train station as requested. He was particularly outraged that one anti-fascist activist, who had been shouting racial abuse at one of the GI attendees (and was caught on CCTV doing so – this footage was played back at Billy's trial) was not prosecuted:

It was actually one of the black guys with Antifa, he was stand... there was one of the football lads with us, he was of mixed race. And the Antifa guy was screaming in his face, 'You're just a mixture. I'm full n*****.' And all this. 'You're just a mixture. You're nothing.' An' all. And I actually went and stood beside him and he started screaming in my face and stuff. Just like, 'Oh you sticking up for the half n***** and stuff. I'm full n*****.' And he was screaming an' all. Police came and pushed him along. This is actually on video too - him standing screaming at us. (Billy)

Two of the GI activists pleaded guilty to the charges, the other three pleaded not-guilty and were tried together. One was acquitted, the other two were found guilty. Billy was sentenced to 16 months in prison.

A similar imbalance in prosecution is noted after violence at Dover, again between Antifa and members of a range of extreme right movements. Lee, one of those prosecuted, claimed that over 100 people were 'sent down' on the far right side but only six people prosecuted on the other side. While Lee has no qualms in admitting his own involvement and the fairness of his conviction, he is still angered by the unevenness of the application of the law. Showing me a video of another event, in Liverpool, he recounts:

[...] give you an example, people were getting sent down from our side through the Liverpool thing. That video I just showed you there, there was a lad on that video, kicking a shield, right. And he were from the other side. And he didn't get jailed; he went to court, but he didn't get jailed. He's got a dodgy past and that as well, but he didn't get jailed. He got... he actually got sent down, they said in the court, you're going to get... I think he got six month. They took him down into the cells downstairs. His family and everyone kicked off upstairs, 'You can't send him to jail' and stuff like this. And then the judge adjourned it for mental health reports, and then after that, he didn't get jail. So stuff like that. (Lee)

⁵¹ Ironically, this person was also with GI but Billy did not know him and intervened because he thought he was going to attack another GI member. They later realised this, shook hands and had a drink together in the pub.

As discussed in Section 4.4.2, the rapid imprisonment of Tommy Robinson for contempt of court in May 2018 sparked a series of demonstrations both nationally and in various cities around the country to protest at an action which, as Cara sees it, was designed to ‘get Tommy off the streets, and to stop his message from going out there’:

[...] other journalists spoke about the same case as Tommy did. Tommy's now looking at another prison sentence for contempt of court, even though he has already served a prison sentence, [during] which he was practically starved, and his human rights were not met. You can see that from when he left prison, that his human rights were just simply not met while he was in prison. And he's now facing that again, for simply speaking about a paedophile ring. Again, even if it was contempt of court, and I know that Tommy has said that he would never jeopardise... and I believe him when he says that... he would never jeopardise that case, he wants to see them locked up for a long time. [...] However the law saw fit to have this man's trial over and done with within five hours. [...] And I believe that it was just simply to try and get Tommy off the streets, and to stop his message from going out there because... (Cara)

A number of respondents, and many attendees at demonstrations also complain about what they perceive as the unfair treatment of Tommy Robinson while in prison, both being put on ‘Muslim wings’ but also when he is kept in solitary confinement ‘for his own safety’ (Field diary, Free Tommy Robinson demonstration, 14.07.2018). Robinson, in his speech at the election campaign rally in Bootle, focuses mainly on events in Oldham (as discussed in Section 4.4.2) and how the police had actually brought protestors in balaclavas to the rally, when they had consciously chosen the site in order to be well away from any Muslim area of town and avoid any potential trouble. He interprets these actions as deliberate - so that he could be shown to be associated with violence. He asks people to imagine if it had happened the other way around, that is, if the EDL had been escorted to disrupt a political rally by a Muslim politician and attacked a Muslim community? (Field diary, Tommy Robinson European Parliament election rally, Bootle, 19.05.2019). Numerous other cases of decisions on prosecutions and sentences that are seen to be unfairly weighted against those on the right are cited; in all cases respondents are keen to emphasise that they are not challenging the prosecution of right wing extremists but are angered by what they consider to be their singling out for particularly harsh punishment for political reasons. In similar fashion, there are complaints about the refusal of entry to the UK for right-wing activists such as Martin Sellner, Brittany Pettibone and Lauren Southern while foreign fighters are allowed back:

We seen Lauren Southern not allowed into the country, while we are allowing people who have went to Syria and joined ISIS to come back to our country. But we won't allow someone to come over and you know, report from the United Kingdom. A journalist who wanted to come over and interview Tommy Robinson - she was denied access to the country. (Cara)

Even at the symbolic level, it is felt that there is one set of rules for one and another for the other. At a Free Tommy Robinson demonstration, there is anger in the crowd when police confiscate a small balloon with a cut-out face of Sadiq Khan on it at when protestors against Trump's visit had been allowed to fly a huge balloon over London (Field diary, Free Tommy Robinson demonstration, 14.07.2018).

4.5.4 Perceived injustice: unequal political voice

In the context of the struggle for recognition of subaltern groups, the term ‘misrecognition’ is used to refer to a form of inequality that denies full participation in society due the failure to recognise those groups as worthy of recognition (Taylor, 1994; Honneth, 1995). The politics of recognition paradigm has been used to understand the social activism of minority or subaltern groups enacted through the politics of multiculturalism; it thus might seem inappropriate in the context discussed here. However, among the milieu studied, there is a strong sense of a misrecognition of ‘us’ by ‘others’ that Taylor (1994: 64–66) considers inflicts the same degree of harm as inequality, exploitation and injustice. The feelings of being

‘misrepresented’ or ‘stigmatised’ (as ‘racist’, ‘far right’ etc.) - expressed in more than a hundred separate references in the data set⁵² – give rise to the experience of what Honneth (1995: 161) calls ‘disrespect’ albeit that these experiences are not rooted in material inequalities. The significance of this is, of course, a matter of contention between Honneth and Fraser. Fraser rejects Honneth’s contentions that political agency is inherent in ‘pre-political suffering’ and that social discontent stems from the moral expectation that one’s personal identity be adequately recognised (Fraser and Honneth, 2003: 202–203). By treating misrecognition as a free-standing cultural harm, she argues, identity politics abstracts the injustice from its institutional matrix and obscures its entwinement with economic inequality (ibid.: 83). Fraser’s criticism is important. However, as discussed below, there is evidence that social activism in the milieu studied here is more than ‘the wrong kind of discontent’ produced by rising inequality that is often ascribed to those turning to right-wing population movements (see: Bottero, 2020: 7). The impulse to social activism among respondents is formed in the realisation that others share their hurt and anger at the denial of the recognition they expect and feel entitled to (Honneth, 1995: 161–163). The notion of misrecognition may be applied to the milieu studied here, therefore, if we accept that the institutionalisation of misrecognition can be considered to take place within the political as opposed to the socio-economic structure of society.

Misrecognition is articulated by respondents when they express their hurt, and frustration, that the moral high ground is taken by counter demonstrators even though the cause they are supporting relates to the protection of women and children, the support for veterans or the denunciation of extremism (of all kinds). Jason is upset that he gets called ‘racist’ when supporting veterans at a demo and that his attendance at pro-Brexit demonstrations wrapped in a Union Jack flag draws accusations of being ‘a Nazi’. He sees this as an act of total misrecognition:

I got some video of a woman [who] went up to me when I was interviewing someone about his views on Brexit. And she went up to him and went, 'Don't listen to him. He's a Nazi, he's got a Union Jack on. Only Nazis wear Union Jacks.' That's the exact quote on video, it's on my channel that. And it was just after she said it. That's the sad things I get. I get people like that, where you get discriminated. We're being discriminated against for having different views. (Jason)

Robbie says he cannot understand why people would hold a counter protest to a demonstration in support of rape victims. This is echoed by Mikey in relation to demonstrations against extremism and for the creation of a safe and secure environment for kids:

[...] it's disappointing that we get opposition at demos, which obviously if you disagree with our message, that's fine, you can oppose it. But we want a society where everyone gets on, there's no extremism and basically our children can live in a safe and secure environment and I can't understand why anyone would wanna oppose that. I mean, you get groups like Stand up to Racism, which, you know, if that's what the message genuinely is, fantastic. But why not oppose the likes of the National Front or violent wings of Black Lives Matter or, you know, radical Islamic groups, you know, that clearly are racist? Instead, they leave those alone and target us that are basically trying to do something about it all and we can't understand that mentality [...] (Mikey)

As Adam, who organises an anti-‘grooming gangs’ campaign in alliance with groups campaigning against forced adoption and child abuse, puts, it ‘All we want is justice and for the truth to be out there, and what, what sane person wouldn’t want that?’ (Adam).

⁵² The data on stigmatisation are not reported on here due to constraints on space; discussion is confined to references that relate directly to the way in which misrecognition is linked to inequality in terms of political voice and access to participation.

The argument for the institutionalisation of this misrecognition rests on the claims, expressed by many respondents, to being systematically ‘silenced’ and denied a political voice. These references relate to the way institutions act unfairly towards them or their side of the argument. Tommy Robinson’s election flyer states that the politicians and EU bureaucrats are ‘laughing at us’ and ‘took away our democratic rights’ by betraying Brexit. He sees himself, in contrast, as someone who is fighting for ‘the forgotten people who have no voice’. At the city level, Dan feels excluded from the left-wing political culture of the city and feels strongly that there are unequal opportunities to express political views in the city for those on the right and those on the left. Talking about the city’s mayor, he says, ‘The right- wing doesn’t matter [...] just the left for him.’ Moreover, when Dan tries to hold a march in support of Brexit in the city, and despite permission and liaison with the police ahead of it, it was stopped by a large counter protest. The mayor was amongst the counter demonstrators, according to Dan:

[...] the other week I tried to hold a peaceful demonstration for Brexit because... our mayor and the socialists and Labour held a Stop Brexit march. So a week or two later, I held a Brexit march. And they surrounded us, attacked us and didn't let us march. Which is wrong, like I said. (Dan)

Mainstream media, it is claimed, organise to starve influencers such as Tommy Robinson of oxygen; ensuring, for example, that Tommy Robinson’s expose of the Panorama documentary team is covered by ‘not one single outlet’ (DT) (see Section 4.3.3.1). The ‘alternative’ social media channels previously open to activists to overcome this freezing out are increasingly following orders to shut down accounts, destroying in some cases activists’ ‘life work’ without an apparent care for the potential consequences. As Paul comments angrily, ‘Nobody would care if they killed themselves’ but, he says, ‘I can tell you now, if some pink-haired feminist topped herself 'cause YouTube had put her stuff into limited stay, there would be an outcry’ (Paul) (see Section 4.4.4). As discussed also earlier, Paul feels that his own materials are frequently deliberately misrecognised as extremist when they are consciously designed to draw vulnerable young people away from genuinely extremist movements such as National Action.

School is another site of silencing and misrecognition. Tonya, who was cited above as feeling her views were ‘banned’, says that an essay she wrote in school is misrecognised as racist even though it does not mention race. After Jason challenges a comparison a teacher makes between Tommy Robinson and Adolf Hitler, he takes on the mantle of the ‘voice of those who are too scared to speak out’:

And so many people had told me privately that they agreed, but were too scared to speak out, 'cause they can't have any speech. They can't say their points, 'cause they'll get called for it. They'll get called racist and that. [...] And I keep getting private messages saying to do things, and I keep it anonymous and I talk about these things. And I'm basically the voice of those who are too scared to speak out. (Jason)

Jason’s testimony illustrates the process identified by Honneth of how the experience of misrecognition can provide the impulse for social activism (Honneth, 1995: 163, 2007: 71) and, through it, individuals experience a sense of their own ‘moral or social worth’ (Honneth, 1995: 164) and dispel the negative emotions resulting from misrecognition (ibid.: 138). It is when Jason senses that others agree with him and that he has articulated feelings of disrespect ‘within an intersubjective framework of interpretation that they can show to be typical for an entire group’, the social causes of disrespect are laid bare (ibid.: 163-164). The silencing of people who are misrecognised as racist, in an institutional framework that denies political voice to them, is exposed. The question that remains is whether the misrecognition experienced by those in this milieu extends beyond Honneth’s understanding of it as psychological injury to meet Fraser’s requirement that it is a form of institutionalised status subordination (McNay, 2008: 127). Misrecognition, Fraser (2008: 86) argues, is not purveyed primarily through prejudice (derogatory attitudes and beliefs) but through institutions and practices that regulate social interaction according to norms that impede parity. For Fraser (ibid.: 84, emphasis in original), misrecognition should be understood

not as the depreciation of group identity but as '*social subordination* in the sense of being prevented from participating as a peer in social life as a result of institutionalized patterns of cultural value that constitute one as relatively unworthy of respect or esteem'. Fraser (2008: 84) concedes that a politics of recognition is required to redress injustice but this is not an *identity politics* but a politics to overcome subordination by 'deinstitutionalizing patterns of cultural value that impede parity of participation'. On this, respondents would agree; 'identity politics' is dismissed as 'so many factions of political correctness' and the terrain of 'people who say they're oppressed, or who say they're misrepresented' (Gareth). However, through the consistent criticism of the state, the police, the welfare system, politicians, educational institutions as acting unfairly, being 'stacked against them' and silencing their political voice, it is clear that respondents have a sense of inequality, in the form of status subordination, that is institutionalised through mechanisms of the state.

4.6 Gender

The research literature on the gendered dimensions of 'right-wing extremism' or radicalism, generally starts from a consensus that, broadly speaking, gender acts as a protective factor for radicalisation into 'extreme right' movements in the case of women and as a risk factor in the case of men (Miller-Idriss and Pilkington, 2017: 135). This would appear to be substantiated by the sustained lower propensity for women to support or become active in extreme right parties and movements (Kitschelt, 2007: 1199). However, the terrain of the extreme right is shifting, arguably even becoming mainstreamed, confirming that this question is far from closed. Two areas of debate remain particularly vibrant. The first concerns whether women are genuinely underrepresented across the extreme right spectrum as Mudde (2014: 10) suggests or whether, as Blee and Deutsch (2012: 1) argue, they are, rather, overlooked in our research on those movements. In this report, this is addressed through an analysis of observations and interview data on the presence and role of women and LGBT+ in the milieu including the growing prominence of women 'influencers'. The second area of debate concerns how gender is positioned and mobilised. This question has arisen following a shift, from the mid-1990s, towards the inclusion of women's and LGBT rights in party programmes and movement mission statements as 'core civilisational values of the West' under threat from migrant, especially Muslim, communities (de Lange and Mügge, 2015: 62). This raises the prospect of 'extreme right' movements becoming less uncomfortable spaces for women and LGBT+ actors and thus more open to them. This question is addressed in this study through an analysis of ideological statements and everyday attitudes towards gender-based rights and roles in the milieu. This is a particularly challenging question for this study given the broad spectrum of movements and attitudes encountered providing support for both the view that what we see among populist radical right and anti-Islamist movements is an instrumental adoption of 'pseudo-emancipatory gender policies' (Wodak and KhosraviNik 2013: 12, 28) and the argument that 'declarations of greater openness to women and LGBT supporters constitute more than lip-service to the top-down imposition of a strategically beneficial ideology' (Pilkington, 2017b: 254). The broad spectrum of attitudes and ideologies captured in this study, moreover, suggest that neither position might be right but that gender is mobilised very differently in different parts of the spectrum. For most of those in the milieu, attitudes and behaviours are diverse, ambivalent and conflicted; as such they constitute a more radical variant of mainstream population attitudes. However, for some individuals in the milieu – especially those who are trying to build their own movements - gender, sexuality and sexual morality is part of a broader ideological framework in which their activism is placed. This is explored in the final sub-section, which asks whether gender might actually be a crucial factor in differentiating within the milieu and a marker of propensity to radicalisation.

4.6.1 Women in the movement

As noted in Section 3.5, the respondent set in this study was 75% male and this broadly reflects the gender composition of the milieu. Although at some events, such as rallies in support of Tommy Robinson or

Melanie Shaw, a large number of women were observed attending, most were outside the target age range of this study. Indeed, the discussion of potential further interviewees with one respondent evoked an apology that his movement was 80-90% male and any women were ‘tokens’. The same situation was encountered with the DFLA. One respondent active in the movement when asked about female participants acknowledged that the name of the movement (‘Football Lads’) might make potential supporters feel that ‘it’s not really woman-friendly’ (Mikey). In an apparent drive to rectify the situation, a female speaker at a DFLA demonstration actively called on women to get involved in the movement and to ‘stand side by side with our men’ (Field diary, DFLA demonstration, 02.06.2018). Her message was, arguably, somewhat undermined by the fact that the (male) compere jokingly asked if she wanted ‘a stool’ as she approached the microphone. However, while the feet on the ground in the DFLA might be mainly male, Mikey notes that among the ‘leaders within the organisation, there’s actually quite a number of women now’. The movement provides active support for the Justice for Women and Children movement (organised by Sharon Binks), which runs active campaigns in support of women and girls who have been victims of rape and organised sexual exploitation. Women also featured prominently as speakers at some DFLA events. At one attended demonstration, women constituted the majority of speakers and, as noted in Section 4.3.3.2, women activists were seen as having a particular authenticity when speaking ‘truth’ to power (Field diary, DFLA demonstration, 2 June, 2018). This reflects a sense of moral authority accorded to women on matters relating to rape, abuse and the protection of children - causes around which many movements represented in the milieu were very active. This is captured in one respondent’s reflection on his own anti-‘grooming gangs’ organisation of which, he says, ‘there’s more women in our team and that speaks volumes really, ‘cause obviously it’s predominantly women that’ll suffer rape or suffer grooming’ (Adam). It also reflects an assumption that men in movements like the DFLA would not be listened to because they would not be accorded any such authority but seen as shaven headed, right wing football hooligans.

The outward image of the right-wing milieu has better reflected the presence of women recently. A total of 12 of 49 ‘influencers’ mentioned by respondents in this data set were women of which three made the top ten influencers (see Figure 10). These were Jayda Fransen (deputy leader of Britain First 2014-19) and Anne Marie Waters (For Britain), both of whom were prominent figures in the UK political sphere during the period of the study. The third was Canadian activist and YouTuber Lauren Southern (who was talked about in more ambivalent terms). Male respondents refer to Anne Marie Waters as ‘smart’ (Dan) and has having ‘stood up and spoken about this loud and proud’ (Adam) and to Jayda Fransen as having ‘bollocks’ to do the things she does and as a ‘really nice person’ (Dan). Two female respondents mentioned them as ‘a friend’, in an environment generally lacking in female solidarity.

Both interviews and diary observations confirm that women in the movement are far from simply ‘the girlfriends or wives of members’ performing ‘traditional supportive roles’ (Ezekiel, 2002: 54) or act ‘primarily as helpmates’ to male activists (Blee and Linden, 2012:107). Female respondents in this study included those who were elected representatives, part of the core support team of influential actors and organisers of their own movements. Women, including respondents, were observed giving speeches at events, stewarding and organising events. Two women (one respondent, one met during fieldwork) had been involved in physical altercations with opposition groups.

This active and apparently equal role, however, was performed in a wider culture of sexualised banter, objectification and belittling of women in the movement. One female respondent received negative comments via social media which, she felt, reduced her to her appearance and describes how she struggled to get taken seriously in the movement because ‘I am a girl’ (Alice). This is partially influenced by the presence of a ‘fan girl’ culture around some influencers, observed by the researcher at some events and mentioned by three respondents. A male respondent notes that ‘influencers’ such as himself experience ‘advances by females within the movement’, allowing them to ‘have the pick of the litter’ (Paul). While he says he does not get involved in such behaviour and believes it is a ‘very poor thing’ for

men to use their ‘ability and position to sleep with women’, the language is telling. Another respondent talked about National Action holding a ‘Miss Hitler contest’ (Lee). Whilst condemning the sexual exploitation of women at the ideological level, female respondents talk about experiencing inappropriate behaviour from men in the movement. Examples include comments on appearance, inappropriate physical contact, expectations of a relationship and inappropriate behaviour at events. As one respondent put it, ‘just little things like when he went to leave, he put his hand round my waist. And like when he walked past, he sort of squeezed my waist.’ (Alice). Such behaviours are not mentioned by male respondents. The latter do talk about reports of convictions for, or charge of, sexual assault or rape among men in the movement, however. In some cases this engendered outrage or disgust that people in the movement - who themselves had campaigned against grooming gangs - had been convicted of sexual assault. In two cases however, doubt was cast on the veracity of the claims and one respondent expressed the view that women accusing Donald Trump of sexual assault had been paid by Hillary Clinton’s campaign (Paolo). Paolo posted highly sexualised banter on his Facebook page, which not only I, but other respondents, found disrespectful towards women and described how, after attending a demonstration in another city, he had gone on a night out with one of the organisers and ‘ended up pulling some birds’.

Amidst this culture, female respondents found it difficult to find people ‘like me’ in the movement although, as noted above, two women influencers were described by respondents as ‘friends’ and people who they had been supportive of and had been supportive to them. Other spontaneous moments of female solidarity were mentioned but alongside explicit moments when other women had ‘been a bitch to me’ (Alice); this respondent had been particularly annoyed that the woman in question had ‘mocked me’ in front of others, which undermines your self-respect. Tonya struggles to recall any positive relationship with women; she finds them ‘spiteful’, ‘catty’ and ‘petty’. The only positive relationships she recalls are with one other female respondent in this study and a transgender man (identifying as male) who she dated for a while.

While there is not space to reflect on this further here, it is possible that the difficulty of establishing positive strong female role models in the movement is partly due to the wider discourse within the movement which talks about women primarily as ‘victims’ - of rape, ‘grooming’, domestic violence and psychological abuse in coercive relationships.

4.6.2 Attitudes to gender and sexuality

Attitudes within the milieu towards gender, women’s and men’s roles, LGBT+ rights and the wider gender regime among activists are diverse, ambivalent and conflicted. Generally speaking, expressions of, or identifications with, gender attitudes that were conservative or ‘traditional’ outnumbered those that were ‘progressive’ by around two to one. However, both exist very much side by side and the former are open to challenge within the milieu.

Gender attitudes are described by respondents usually as ‘traditional’ but also as ‘socially conservative’. Cara describes herself as having ‘traditional views’ and benchmarks these by saying that they are views that would make Tommy Robinson look ‘very liberal’ in comparison. Craig, in turn, characterises his views as more socially conservative than UKIP, which he finds ‘too libertarian’. At the heart of this outlook is a commitment to strong family values. A nostalgia is also expressed for the days when families could afford for one parent to stay at home to look after children (CL, DT). Billy links this ‘strong family’ to nationhood, stating that you ‘need strong family values to have a strong nation’ and expresses his admiration for the Muslim community’s emphasis on family values:

I wish we could emulate what the Muslim values [are], with the emphasis they put on family values and stuff. I wish our people would do the same. ‘Cause I believe that our nation should be that strong. I believe that you need strong family values to have a strong nation. Now

people are just living selfish lifestyles, where it's just all about them. They just want to go out and do whatever they want to do. To pot with everyone else; to pot with society. (Billy)

Billy is also angry at those wishing to liberalise access to abortion.⁵³ He has three children himself and says he knows from the experience of his wife's scans that pro-choice activists' claims that a foetus 'is not a living thing' are wrong. However his views are more ideologically than religiously motivated. He raises the issue of abortion in the context of the need to prioritise a strong family over selfish lifestyles and, at a later point, says that this is an issue of 'demographics' since 'natives' may be having four to five abortions while 'Islamists would be coming in, maybe having ten kids'. Paul, describes himself as 'traditionalist' and seeks to reintroduce family values and traditionalism that, he says, would have been mainstream 20-30 years ago but are now branded 'extreme' (see Section 4.1.1.4).

Four respondents directly express progressive gender attitudes or challenge conservative attitudes. Two female respondents talk about challenging traditional gender role assumptions or images especially through their personal style (Imogen) or through humour (Alice). At the same time, Alice also challenges traditional 'feminist' positions. She feels patronised by language that talks about 'strong women' - seeing it often as being falsely applied to women who are rude to someone for saying 'hi' to them in the street rather than for things that are genuinely strong, i.e. women being 'strong in themselves'. One male respondent says it is impossible to go back to traditional roles from where we are now and ridicules conservative views about sexual ethics among part of the right, calling them 'fantastical' (Will). Discussing where the right is in relation to gender politics, he also comments that the extreme right milieu at the moment is 'very progressive' and believes that this is not just a strategic stance (see Section 4.6.3).

Only one person in the respondent set declared any sexual identity other than heterosexual identity - this was a bisexual identity - and I was not aware of any respondents being, at the time of interview, in any other than a heterosexual relationship. For this reason, all references to LGBT+ issues are considered as 'attitudes' since they almost always reflect respondents' perceptions, even if they relate to LGBT+ people in the milieu or in their close friendship group.

Radical and extreme right-wing movements have been traditionally seen as inhospitable places for LGBT+ people. However, since the mid-1990s there has been a shift towards the inclusion of women's and LGBT+ rights in extreme right and populist radical right party programmes, framing gender equality and LGBT+ rights as under threat from the growing influence of Islam and Muslim communities (Spierings and Zaslove, 2015: 142-3). Moreover, along with the rest of the population, people in extreme right milieus are changing. Indeed, Will expresses his admiration for the LGBT+ rights movement, which has achieved a massive change in attitudes towards homosexuality. He believes that, historically, it is the criminalisation of homosexuality, not homosexuality itself, which was abnormal. The active presence of an LGBT division as part of the English Defence League was more than a smokescreen to differentiate the movement from the classic 'far right'; gay and lesbian activists in the moment felt treated 'with open arms' and the rainbow flag of the division was present at most demonstrations from 2010-2013 (Pilkington, 2017b: 247) before focus shifted to the Gays against Sharia movement (founded by the former EDL LGBT division leader known as Tommy English). At demonstrations attended during this fieldwork, the rainbow flags were gone and there was no evidence of an active LGBT division at EDL demonstrations although small Gays against Sharia marches were ongoing through to 2019.

The milieu studied reflects a wide range of attitudes and reported attitudes. Alice, who moves in the same social circle as Will (see above), talks about the milieu as a 'subculture' of cool people, including a gay couple with whom she was close friends as well as a 'tranny', hanging out together and talking politics (Alice). Outside of this circle, Dan says he has nothing against being gay and that he has met some 'good

⁵³ This was in the context of discussion of changes to legislation on abortion in Northern Ireland. The prohibition on abortion in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy was lifted in Northern Ireland in October 2019.

gay lads' in the movement. He is conscious of the association between the 'far right' and homophobia and rejects that. At the same time, he is against notions of gender fluidity:

[...] someone wants to be gay, what's the problem, you know what I mean? The only thing I am against, and this is not me being homophobic, I'm against all these hundred genders and all this crap. It's gone beyond a joke, and gender neutral and... beyond a joke, to be fair. There's only two genders – a man and a woman. Doesn't matter if you're gay or you want to be transsexual, but you're a man or you're a woman. (Dan)

This is echoed by Jason who says he has friends who are bisexual or lesbian and he has nothing against that but believes that 'there's only two genders'. The wider prominence of debate on transgender during the period of the study meant there were quite strong feelings expressed about what was widely felt to be the 'pushing' of transgender rights. There is a very clear coalescence of attitudes, which are pro-choice but hostile to a perceived 'left-wing' agenda to consciously promote gender fluidity and a heavy investment in a binary gender regime. This is expressed in attitudes that suggest there is nothing wrong with people making 'an informed decision' when they are mature enough to do so but there is something very wrong with families 'raising children as gender neutral from an early age' (Mikey). However, even where views more or less coalesce there is a clear spectrum. At one end, is talk of 'transgenderism' as 'extreme': 'I think that teaching young children to accept transgenderism and cut their penises off and things like that, I think that's an extreme idea' (Paul). At the other, is the claim that there is a significant presence and prominence of transgender people on the 'broader far right' at the moment and that you never see malice directed at those people (Will). The most interesting discussion on transgender issues is between two female respondents on their feelings about whether they are comfortable with transgender women using women's changing rooms and how to balance the rights of those who are 'genuinely just trying to live their lives as happy as they can be' (Tonya) and those who 'abuse the identity of being trans, just to get their way with women or whatever' (Tonya). Tonya said she had dated a 'trans guy' herself, but before she was even aware of debates about transgender.

When respondents report on the wider milieu, however, there is more reference to negative attitudes to LGBT+. Lee says, for him personally, 'it's neither here nor there' but that he was aware that others in the movement did have a problem and there 'were lads who were constantly attacking EDL LGBT division and all that'. One respondent criticises a friend in the movement who, she says, imagines gay men as 'a man with penis out, waving it around in front of young boys at a pride parade'. The most negative statements from within the respondent set are expressed by Billy, who accepts that being gay is okay, as long as it is kept 'behind closed doors' but not displayed publicly or promoted. He is against 'trying to indoctrinate kids in schools with it' (Billy). Billy is also critical of what he calls 'alt-lite' positions within the milieu, which he thinks are driven not by a proper nationalism (which is about protecting the family and the country) but by fears associated with Islam 'coming in and stopping all this LGBT' and 'living their degenerate lifestyles'.

Thus the instrumentalisation of LGBT+ rights in the milieu appears to be experiencing something of a backlash. In addition to the respondent above, another also criticises parts of the Right for using the issue of LGBT+ rights to criticise Islam, seeing this as a left-wing not right-wing position. However, many more criticisms are expressed that the Left is hypocritical because it fails to criticise Islam for its attitude to LGBT+ when it claims to support LGBT+ rights (see below). Thus, reflecting on the movement as a whole, Will concludes that it is split on gay rights but that the divide is basically one between Christians and seculars (Will). This leads people, he says, just not to mention when you have gay figures on the Right, to avoid division.

4.6.3 Gender as ideology

A key argument used to demonstrate that the 'extreme right' uses gender equality and LGBT+ rights purely instrumentally is that they do not promote gender equality and LGBT+ rights in and of themselves but they are referred to only as something to be 'defended' against a perceived threat from 'Islamic culture'. This would seem to be confirmed by the attention in respondent narratives to the treatment of women and LGBT people in Islam. There are two main sets of sentiments expressed. The first relates to what are seen as 'barbaric' practices such as 'sexual slavery', genital mutilation and honour killings in countries in the Middle East. As Robbie puts it 'what they do to the gays in those countries is brutal'. Moreover, it is feared that such practices are being increasingly brought to the UK:

It petrifies me that they're bringing it to England and that some parts of England have actually got Sharia law, parts of it. [...] there's a Scottish couple that come up, there's an area in Scotland as well which is fully under Sharia law now as well. And police aren't allowed to police it. And they were telling me yesterday there was a young lass who was set on fire there, and the police weren't allowed to do anything about it, because apparently her brother had done it and it was their law or something. (Imogen)

The second relates to the position accorded to women in Islam. Women are said to be 'subjugated' and treated as 'lesser' than a man (Cara). Cara recounts a story about an interaction she had with a mother and child when they were involved in a car accident outside a shop where she was working. She had witnessed what had happened and realised that the mother would have been distressed, not least because she had her small daughter in the car, and went out to comfort and help them. In the course of the conversation, she had complimented the little girl on how beautiful she looked. Later she had received a message from the mother, which said:

'Cara, I thought you were some kind of monster when I heard your name [*Cara is an elected representative with a reputation for having extreme right-wing views*]. I would have been afraid to approach you in the street. But you came to me today and you spoke to my daughter, who's mixed race, and you said she was beautiful. And yet, you know, you... I'm bringing her up as a Muslim, and you know, you want to take her rights away.' And I said, 'Whoa, hold on a minute. I certainly don't want to take your daughter's rights away. If anything, I want to give... ensure that your daughter has the rights that she has as a British citizen. And the freedom that she has. Because she was born in the United Kingdom, that she should have the same freedom as all of us, without having Islamic scripture put on her, such as Sharia, which makes her lesser than a man. Because she's a British citizen, she's equal to a man and that's simple, you know, that's how it is.' (Cara)

Cara is pleased to have challenged the woman's perceptions of her, but horrified at what she views as a discursive inversion of the understanding of equality and rights; as far as she was concerned she was defending the rights of the woman's daughter from Islam, not taking away her rights to be Muslim. In this discourse in which Muslim women are envisaged as victims of Islam, it is imagined that if they were simply not too scared to do so, they would leave Islam:

I guarantee you that if, if the women were protected and said, 'You will not be attacked and not be verbally attacked and verbally abused or anything if you take the headscarf off and straighten your hair like you really want to' I think they would. [...] because I've spoken to women that have told me, away from the scenes, 'If I took this off now, those Muslims out there would tell my family. I'd be beaten. Beaten for taking it off.' (DT)

Thus, as respondents in this study see it, it is not they who are 'weaponising' women's and LGBT rights but Islam which imposes gender subjugation as part of its ideology:

[...] that's the way Islam's making these men feel. It's, it gives them the authority over women. Know what I mean. It says the man is a much better person than the woman. So that's what they believe, you know what I mean. So I think it's, again I think it's coming back to that. I think that's, I do think it's an ideology thing, yeah. (Dan)

Moreover, respondents see the Left also as acting ideologically; picking and choosing their 'causes' according to a hierarchy of oppressions. DT reflects on this in relation to a recent contestation by some Muslim parents over the inclusion of LGBT+ parent families into the curriculum for relationships education:

[...] they pick and choose where they want to voice their concerns. I mean, if you look at Islam as a whole, two days ago there was a demonstration outside of a school in Birmingham I think it was, because they were openly supporting homosexuality. Because the Muslim children have gone home and told them, told their parents, there was 250 and fifty parents outside the school. Yet no-one picked up on it; no-one was saying, 'How dare these parents go in and stand outside school just because the kids are being taught that if a boy says he's gay, that's fine?' (DT)

Another respondent reports a gay right-wing activist having 'gone under the radar' because of a 'series of attacks on him by Antifa – one even called him "queer", which is ridiculous when they are supposed to be anti-homophobia' (Dan).

While the majority of respondents in this milieu may position women and LGBT+ as 'victims' in need of protection against alien ideology, there are also individuals for whom gender is more central to their own world outlook. Two respondents in particular elaborated strongly gendered ideologies. Jacob has a particular world outlook in which the balance between the masculine and feminine is crucial to political order. This view, he says, on 'the left/right, yin/yang divide', which he has taken from 'Jordan Peterson's maps of meaning course'. These binaries are also gendered whereby the left/hedonistic pleasure/chaos side represents the feminine and the right/eudaimonic pleasure/order side of the binary represents the masculine. An original paganist/polytheist (Hindu) balance between the two, he thinks, was disrupted by the imposition of monotheism focused on a masculine God, which led to a backlash and the balance shifting towards the feminine. This has led to the development of what he calls the problem of 'toxic femininity', which is presented as a mixture of general dominance of the feminine in left-wing hegemony and the control women have in the education system. It is also said to have led to gender stereotypes suggesting women are better parents than men, which have resulted in 'massive discrimination against fathers in the assignment of parental access in child custody cases'. In a leaflet produced for the launch of Jacob's new movement, it is claimed that 'toxic femininity' is displayed in emotional outbursts and irrational behaviour (of both men and women) and also leads to domestic violence. He believes that this means society must rebalance in favour of the masculine and order side and he seeks to promote what he calls 'mature masculinity' based on self-development:

The [city] Collective believes in promoting a politically balanced society, yet more and more we see our society becoming imbalanced toward the feminine end of the political spectrum, particularly in comparison to the rest of the world. (Activist Information Booklet, The [city] Collective, distributed at launch of movement, 22.09.2019)

Some of these claims to the need to uphold men's rights are supported by other respondents. Dan complains that women are believed when they make claims against men, even if they are false, because they 'cry'. Tonya feels the feminist movement 'has gone too far' and sees custody and divorce law as favouring women. Imogen also thinks boys need male figures in their lives when growing up and criticises her sister for refusing her son's father access.

Paul, who is in his late thirties but has been active politically on the 'far right' from his early twenties, also sets as his priority the 'mentoring' of younger men in the movement. He is driven, in part, by his own experience of feeling unsupported by older people in the movement. He is particularly concerned about what he sees as the 'taboo' around talking about men's issues such as body image, which has led to steroids abuse by men that affects them as much as anorexia affects women. He is also concerned about the over-use of pornography and the inability to conduct relationships with 'real' women and the development of addiction to computer games. Paul organises tough physical events for young men, helps them with training and tries to give them a positive way to channel anger and hate; these activities, he believes, provide a good role model for them as well as allowing them to bond with others. When challenged that these events could appear like some kind of far right training camp, he responds that they are not that at all.

Central to Paul's gendered ideology is a battle against what he sees as the promotion of sexual immorality especially through popular culture (he cites the videos of two female singers - Lady Gaga and Katy Perry⁵⁴ - as examples). Paul talks at length about the 'destructive' nature of chasing relationships based on sexual attraction and that intimate relationships should be decided on rational not emotional grounds - that is, 'who will make the better mum'. Paul views men's excessive viewing of pornography as destructive for marriage or conducting any healthy sexual relationships with 'real' women:

I had this guy write to me, and he wrote to me on three different social networks to make sure I'd get the message. And him and his wife were at an all-time low - they were going to break up, the family was gone. And he watched my video on pornography. And he said he'd never heard anything like it. And he said he totally changed his habit. He deleted all his pornography, got rid of it all. And him and his wife are fine now. The family's staying together. Because he got to the point where he'd been sucked in to this hedonistic world of just watching pornography and masturbating; he couldn't find his wife attractive any more. But that's the norm. And do you think he's the only young person I've spoken to about that? I've known multiple young men who've been addicted to pornography. But no-one's talking about it, because it's a man's issue. And it's a scary man's issue. Because no-one wants to talk about it, because of the people who are behind it. (Paul)

No respondent mentions the Incel phenomenon but one respondent talks about his own experience of 'disastrous' relationships, which have left him feeling lonely and bitter (Jason). Paul's concerns with young men's difficulties in developing proper relationships also hover around questions about the relationship between sexual frustration, or a sense of sexual failure, and 'people's route into the right'. As Will puts it:

I think it's extremely relevant to where we're going, it's a lot of people's route into the right. [...] As in not many people google, 'how can I join far right organisations', but a lot of people google, 'how do I get a girlfriend'. And everyone says that right. And, from there, you very quickly lead down to a thing that says, 'hey, actually it's the immigrants as well... blah blah blah'. And I think a lot of people you speak to have those kinds of opinions. (Will)

Feminism appears as a help to neither men nor women in this – it is posited as an ideological enemy rather than a tool of empowerment. Tonya talks about feeling that her views - specifically 'not necessarily needing feminism or wanting to identify as a feminist' - were 'banned' in school and talks about feminism as having 'gone too far' and become 'warped'. She considers the male and female sexes as different and complementary and imagines feminists as man-haters. Within the milieu, although not a respondent, another female activist works with a group called Justice for Men and Boys and is described by Alice as 'very anti-feminist' while a speech by a woman at the FLA part of demo in Birmingham attacks the 'Me

⁵⁴ Both Lady Gaga and Katy Perry have been suggested to be part of new world order conspiracies or the illuminati by 'alt-right' commentators.

too' movement as diverting attention away from real victims, who are not, she says, women who regret having sex with old white men but real victims of rape by immigrants.

This study confirms the consistent evidence that women are less likely to take visible positions within what are widely considered extreme right movements. However, when they are active, they tend to share similar views and positions as men. Those views themselves, however span a very broad spectrum from very 'traditionalist' to 'progressive'. That spectrum also shifts broadly in tune with wider societal shifts such that there is a genuine openness to LGBT+ although also a tendency to instrumentalise the defence of women's and LGBT+ rights as an anti-Islam stance. Attitudes towards transgender people are more ambivalent and the milieu is characterised by strong hostility towards notions of gender fluidity. In this study those respondents with the most extreme (anti-Semitic and/or national socialist) views are also those with the most pronounced gender dimension to their worldviews and the keenest interest in mentoring, especially young men, into more healthy ways of life and developing what Jacob calls 'mature masculinity'. This may be a coincidence, but it may also suggest that gendered ideologies are a factor in differentiating within the milieu and a marker of propensity to radicalisation.

5. Conclusions

Two decades ago, a review of the academic literature on right-wing extremism identified 26 different definitions of the phenomenon including 58 characteristics, of which only five were mentioned by at least half the authors by (Mudde, 2000: 11). While Mudde, and others, have since sought taxonomic clarification and systematisation, especially in relation to electoral studies, the conceptual stretching around the 'extreme right' has continued apace. This has been driven in part by policy and practice agendas, which have been increasingly concerned with 'right-wing extremism' and whose focus on prevention tends to expand rather than narrow the characteristics of the target group. The concern of this ethnographic study has been less the consistency with which the notion of 'right-wing extremism' is applied than with its validity. By this is meant, how accurately does the concept correspond to the real-life properties of the social phenomenon it seeks to describe? To answer this question, and drawing on ethnographic research over three years with young people active in a range of movements and parties routinely referred to in public and academic discourse as extreme right or far right, this report sets out what such an 'extreme right' milieu looks and feels like to those moving in it. The findings of the study have been detailed in relation to six dimensions of the milieu: understandings of extremism, radicalism and radicalisation; encounters with, and responses, to radicalisation messages; the respective roles of ideas and emotions as drivers to action; social relationships, online and offline; the role of inequality and injustice, objective and subjective, in driving radicalisation; and the gendered dimensions of ideology and activism.

Based on these findings, the study concludes that the notion of 'right-wing extremism' has limited validity. This is, firstly, because those whom it seeks to describe do not recognise themselves in the description. The rejection of pejorative labels by those to whom they are ascribed is natural and, some would argue, necessary for the implementation of effective condemnation strategies to counter 'right wing extremism'. However, from other fields of sociology and social policy concerned with phenomena that carry both individual and social harm, we know that conceptual shifts - for example from notions of drug addiction to drug use or from prostitution to sex work - can be important in devising effective policy and practice since they allow people to identify with interventions designed to engage them. Secondly, the popularisation of notions of 'extreme right' or 'far right' mean these terms have themselves become such a focus of reflection and contestation that the object of study is distorted. The resulting blanket rejection or ironic or demonstrative self-appropriation of these terms by those they are used to describe, as well refusal to engage with researchers using such terminology, frustrate the process of understanding how extremism on the right wing looks in real life. Thirdly, the concept of 'right-wing extremism' fails to

distinguish clearly enough between attitudinal and behavioural extremism, between violent extremism and non-violent extremism (both attitudinal and behavioural) and whether extremism relates to the ideas supported, or the methods employed, to realise political or societal aims. In practice, the vast majority of those referred to by the notion of 'right-wing extremism' themselves have very clear thresholds in relation to the (non-)legitimacy of the use of violence and more nuanced but nonetheless conscious markers of ideas and behaviours that are acceptable or, on the contrary, are 'too extreme' for them. Failure to distinguish conceptually between these undermines the validity of the notion of 'right-wing extremism' and thus its legitimacy in the eyes of those to whom it is applied. All of these validity issues, it is argued, have significant consequences for the policy and practice of countering extremism since they may lead to the false identification of threat, or nature of the threat, posed by movements or individuals while failing to recognise, and mobilise, the agency of those who, in many cases, see themselves also in the business of countering extremism.

This study explored, first, whether the situated knowledge of respondents in the milieu corresponded to academic understandings of 'extremism' and related concepts. It found that, when talking about what constitutes extremism, respondents generally disapprove of what they see as a conceptual stretching of the term to encompass an increasing range of the political spectrum and to include attitudes, beliefs or even 'thoughts'. When talking about extremism, there was a basic consensus among respondents that extremism should refer to behaviours, or consequences of words and actions, not ideas or views alone. This supports the separation of opinions and actions as proposed in McCauley and Moskalenko's (2017) 'two pyramids' model although, arguably, renders the 'opinions' pyramid (bar its apex stage) redundant in an actively democratic society. This separation of beliefs and actions is the basis for respondents' understanding of themselves as 'non-extremist' and for describing what they consider to be genuine extremism. Respondents view extremism, in theory, as not tied to any particular ideological content; it can apply across the political spectrum. However, in practice, they complain that the descriptor 'extreme' is almost 'automatically' inserted before 'right wing' such that you cannot be 'just right' (you are always 'far right' or 'extreme right'). With one exception, respondents do not distinguish between 'extremism' and 'radicalism', suggesting the non-confirmation of Schmid's (2013: 9-10) demarcation between 'radicals' (as open-minded, accepting of diversity and believing in the power of reason rather than dogma) and 'extremists' (as closed-minded and seeking to create a homogeneous society based on rigid ideological tenets, suppressing all opposition and subjugating minorities). However, investigating respondents' openness and closedness in relation to dialogue, disagreement, difference and contradictions, ambivalences or challenges to their views, there was a much greater tendency to openness than closedness. One could argue that this confirms Schmid's distinction whilst suggesting respondents in this milieu are, in fact, 'radicals' rather than 'extremists'. However, the conclusion is drawn, rather, that this distinction should be subject to reconsideration conceptually given that 'need for closure' is not a fixed personality trait or type but subject to situational influences and external cultural factors (Kruglanski and Webster, 1996: 266; Onraet et al., 2011: 194). Moreover, the identification of a much greater degree of openness - especially high openness to 'dialogue' with out-groups (including radical Islamists and left-wing activists) - than might be anticipated among individuals associated with an 'extreme right' milieu has significant implications for CVE interventions.

In deciding for themselves what constitutes extremism, respondents associate it, above all, with the use of violence. However, this does not refer to violence per se. As outlined in the report, a number of respondents engage, even enjoy, violence outside the political or activist context. Thus, extremism for most respondents in this study might be summarised as the use, threat or provocation of violence to impose ideas. This conforms to the separation of ideas and actions noted above, since opinions on their own are not considered to constitute extremism, only when they are implemented through force. This does not mean that all ideas are acceptable; racism and anti-Semitism, for example, are seen by almost all respondents as unacceptable. However, respondents believe such views - as well as radical Islamist views - should not be prohibited but articulated such that they can be challenged and critiqued.

Respondents in this study feel violence is justified rarely; for most the only circumstance in which the use of violence would be acceptable was in order to protect oneself, one's family or those weak and in need of protection. The disjuncture between declarations of non-support for violence and the engagement in violence by a section of the respondents gives grounds for reflection. While McCauley and Moskalenko (2017) suggest the role of emotions as an explanatory factor in why individuals move either 'up' one pyramid or from the 'opinion' to the 'action' pyramid, the exploration of the cases of three respondents in this study point rather to the importance of the contexts and dynamics of situations for explaining those cases where respondents do engage in violence. These findings suggest that, rather than changing status from non-violent to violent, individuals may simultaneously take positions of both non-violence and violence, depending on the situation, the interactions that play out there and the relationship of these to their political opinions. Moreover, violence may not emanate from a political repertoire of action at all but be linked to the performance of other dimensions of identity especially masculinity.

This has important implications for the study of how individual 'trajectories' of respondents are shaped by their encounters and responses to radical messages and radicalisation processes. None of the respondents in this study had crossed the threshold of passage into behavioural violent extremism; as noted above they held clear positions on the non-acceptability of violence and applied it to decisions and strategies they adopted in navigating the milieu. Even in relation to shifts towards more extreme attitudinal positions, respondents were found to be reflexive and to monitor their own pathways, marking red lines that they would not cross and, when necessary, sticking to those. These findings, it is suggested provide valuable insight into trajectories of non-radicalisation, that help to understand why, in the presence of similar environmental factors, some people radicalise but the majority do not. Moreover, it reveals young people to be not pathological extremists or 'brainwashed' victims but active agents, reflecting on their journeys and employing everyday strategies to resist, and challenge, extremism they encounter in the milieu and prevent radicalisation. It is important to note here that the single most frequently mentioned response to radical messages among the respondents in this study is a call for dialogue. Since such dialogue requires sensitive, external mediation, it is not an everyday strategy of countering extremism at their disposal. It is, however, a potential area for development of CVE tools. As an off-shoot of the DARE project, an experimental mediated dialogue intervention was enacted with respondents from this study and the parallel UK study of an 'Islamist' milieu, with positive results (see: Hussain et al., 2019).

The multitude and diversity of ideas and the relatively rare, explicit ideological framing of them, make it difficult to provide a coherent summary of the ideological dimension of the milieu studied. Indeed to do so would be to falsely homogenise and generalise that landscape. The findings are thus better employed for what they tell us about whether respondents in this milieu express views or behaviours which conform to the two main characteristics ascribed to extremism: the desire to create a homogeneous society based on dogmatic ideological tenets, which suppresses all opposition and subjugates minorities; and the pursuit of an anti-democratic political programme that rejects the rule of law and is prepared to use political violence against opponents to achieve these aims (see: Schmid, 2013: 9-10).

The pursuit of an anti-democratic political agenda is a particularly important marker of extremism on the right of the political spectrum as it has been viewed as a key characteristic distinguishing the 'extreme right' from the 'populist radical right' (Mudde, 2007: 25) whereby the 'extreme right' is understood as inherently anti-democratic while the 'populist radical right' is characterised, like the 'extreme right' as being authoritarianist but, nonetheless, nominally democratic. On the basis of the findings of this study the criterion of 'anti-democracy' is not met in the milieu. Respondents see the democratic system as being the only way to achieve change and over the recent period have moved towards, rather than away from, mainstream politics notwithstanding (or perhaps because of) a deep disillusionment with the current political system and a turn to populist discourse of 'establishment' versus 'people' (at least amongst influencers in the milieu). No matter how profound that disappointment with the current state of

democracy, no respondent advocates any other system of governance than democracy. Nor can the milieu studied be characterised as pro-authoritarianism. While elements of, or individuals in, the milieu call for order and discipline, not least within their own movement, the majority are concerned with disrupting the current order. Their main instrument for this is freedom of speech, which they defend as the means by which their own, dissenting, voices can be protected from attempts at silencing. Moreover, in relation to opposing, radical views – such as the views of radical Islamists – they believe all, not only their own radical views should be aired and open to critique and challenge. In this sense they share the radical democratic stance that welcomes the expression of ‘an ensemble of voices’ that reflect rather than erase social division and thus constitute the essence of politics (Mouffe, 2005: 120).

On the question of the desire to suppress opposition, this study did identify high levels of hostility towards the main ideological opposition, identified in respondent narratives as Antifa and the broader Left. Conflict and violence do spontaneously occur with these groups although respondents, with one exception, say they do not seek that conflict as it is viewed as undermining their cause. Respondents position themselves, rather, as the objects of ‘far left extremism’, which they believe to be misrecognised by both the authorities and police as benign, or even as positive forces of ‘anti-fascism’ and ‘anti-racism’. They thus call for, on the one hand, the recognition and equal treatment of ‘left-wing extremism’ while, on the other, the opportunity to engage in dialogue with these ideological opponents. In relation to the rejection of the rule of law, some respondents have backgrounds that have shaped negative attitudes to the police, while others see the police as part of a corrupt establishment that has failed to address issues of Islamist terrorism or organised CSE. However, all believe that the police are an important institution and that, at the grassroots level, police officers deserve respect and compliance. Thus, taken together with the rejection of violence noted above, there seems to be little evidence that the milieu studied is ‘extremist’ on the grounds that they reject the rule of law, are prepared to use political violence to achieve their aims or wish to suppress political opposition.

On the desire to create a homogeneous society that subjugates minorities, the landscape is more complex. Respondents tend to understand the world in terms of ‘agents’ or ‘actors’ rather than structural factors shaping it. Thus, when talking about political and societal issues and concerns, these are framed often in terms of a series of ‘threats’ or ‘dangers’ posed to ‘us’. Even where these threats are identified as ‘processes’ (such as demographic change, globalisation or ‘Islamisation’), they are understood to be driven by personified hostile forces (institutions, agencies or groups). In this sense the political or ideological frameworks used by respondents to understand the world and inform their activism cannot be separated from their perception of the in-group (the ‘we’ who is threatened) and the out-group (or ‘they’ who threatens). The existential insecurity of that in-group is palpable, notwithstanding that, in objective terms, respondents represent majority communities (in ethnic/religious terms) and have secure citizenship and residency rights. No positive visions of the future are articulated by respondents, for example, and more than half of them believe ‘civil war’ or other catastrophic conflict to be immanent. This seems to confirm the link between a sense of the uncertainty in the future and potential in-group decline and the rise of extremism as a defence mechanism (Moghaddam and Love, 2012: 249). Even respondents who dismiss the idea that civil war will occur believe that serious in-group decline is immanent as a result of demographic change (due to globalisation and immigration). This defensive articulation of worldview is consistent across the milieu. Thus, while it is difficult to conclude that respondents desire a homogeneous society in which minorities are subjugated, they do express a clear disapproval of its opposite - a multicultural society in which, as they see it, minorities are given preferential treatment. For a small number of respondents, heterogeneity per se is problematic and a monocultural society is preferred and to be pursued through a process of ‘peaceful separation’. For most, heterogeneity is an accepted status quo but further diversification through uncontrolled immigration should be halted. For some this must be done before the White British population becomes a minority; multiculturalism, in this view, works but only if the indigenous population remains the majority. More difficult to pin down is the ethnopluralist or identitarian position, which recognises the rights and equality of all ethnic groups

but also insists on their cultural (and racial) difference and thus the desirability of their separate territorial existence. Given the scale of deterritorialisation that has already taken place, even respondents in identitarian movements were sceptical about identitarian ideology since it could offer only a defensive position (to 'save' what is left of a distinctive European civilisation as they would see it).

Thus for respondents in this study, the desire to create a homogenous society is rarely expressed. More articulated are perceived threats, specifically of Islamisation, by which is meant the territorial spread and cultural imposition of Islamic culture, including through a growing Muslim population. Views on immigration were more mixed with the scale of immigration and speed of cultural change being the issue rather than immigration per se. For a number of respondents the perceived threat of cultural change is accompanied by the sense of the suppression of the in-group (variously denoted as 'Europeans', 'White British' or 'White English') or even the endangerment of its survival. Without doubt, however, race is becoming increasingly central to the milieu. This is, at least partially, as a result of the influence of ideas from the 'alt-right' and European identitarianism. Some respondents see race as a 'natural' differentiating characteristic although, with one exception, racial superiority or supremacism is rejected. For many 'race' remains a subject of significant discomfort. On the one hand, there is a growth in the sense of 'threat' to white identities due to demographic change, while on the other, an acute awareness that the naturalisation of racial difference leads to racism, which they believe is neither natural nor acceptable. An uneasy course is thus tracked between calls for the expression of pride in one's own culture and the practice of this in a way that does not demonise others. Two respondents express anti-Semitic views, others articulate anti-Zionist positions. These are outnumbered, however, by rejections of anti-Semitism as well as strong sentiments of support for the Jewish people and/or the state of Israel. The fact that this issue divides the milieu, the strength of the feelings expressed and the thresholds that they have become for some respondents, however, is evidence that in the wider milieu anti-Semitism remains tangible.

While respondents often narrate their trajectories into activism as guided by their concerns with particular issues and motivated by rational and intellectual arguments, especially once active, it is the emotional dimensions of activism that sustain their presence in movements. Their emotional journeys are far from smooth; for some activism had proven to be an emotional roller coaster leaving them at times feeling frustrated, hurt, used or even betrayed. However, through gaining respect or appreciation from others, feeling they had helped or guided someone else, or spoken up for someone too scared to say what they thought, a sense of collective endeavour and purpose was forged and the emotional collective of the milieu sustained. Social relationships in the milieu can work to both expose individuals to extremism and protect them from it. On the one hand, it is within the movement or wider milieu (encountered at demonstrations or online for example) that respondents are most likely to report having encountered extreme or radical messages or actors, who promote ideas they themselves consider too extreme or even seek to recruit them to more radical movements. At the same time, social relationships within the milieu can act as a protective factor against radicalisation, providing a 'family' or supportive environment that generates self-worth and self-esteem, where that is in short supply for respondents (especially those with troubled family lives). Movements and particular actions such as demonstrations are described by respondents as playing a positive role in allowing a space to vent frustration, share views and feel less angry. Older or more experienced respondents also see themselves or their movements as playing a role in steering more vulnerable members away from the most radical groups.

This study confirmed that we cannot talk of online and offline right-wing milieus as existing and acting separately. While individual respondents differed in their mode, frequency and evaluation of online engagement, all were engaged both online and offline. The growth and importance of the online milieu is evident from the number of 'influencers' mentioned and the importance of those influencers especially in people's journeys into the milieu and in bench-marking their views and demarcating thresholds of the acceptable and unacceptable. This is particularly evident in the way in which respondents positioned themselves in relation to Tommy Robinson, who was, by a considerable margin, the most influential figure

in this milieu. This influentality is demonstrated despite Robinson's banning from all main social media platforms. Indeed, while it is impossible to generalise on the basis of the experience of a small number of milieu participants, respondents' reflections on experiencing such exclusions from social media themselves, or witnessing its impact on the wider milieu, suggest that the outcome of such bans are either the circumvention of the banned platforms to allow continued activism or the fuelling of grievance. Thus a number of respondents expressed the view not only that the policy is implemented unevenly and in a way that consistently denies political voice to the right wing, but that the closing down of online space may be counter-productive in terms of preventing radicalisation.

The findings on the relationship between inequality and radicalisation in this study appear to illustrate empirically a key finding from the systematic review of survey data and qualitative empirical studies on the relationship between inequality and radicalisation conducted as part of the DARE project, namely the relative significance of perceived socio-political inequality (as opposed to objective economic inequality) (Franc and Pavlović, 2018; Poli and Arun, 2019). When reflecting on the causes of radicalisation (in relation to the right wing), respondents rarely mentioned material deprivation or disadvantage - indeed inequality was seen as 'natural' by some. In contrast, 'anger and frustration' and the lack, or denial, of 'political voice' were understood as the two main drivers of pathways to violent extremism. Inequalities in the socio-political sphere were expressed largely as injustices, probably for the ideological reasons noted above, and were experienced in the spheres of employment, education and, most often, in relation to the justice system itself. This is articulated through perceptions that, on the one hand, minorities are given preferential treatment and, on the other, 'we' are treated differently because of who we are. In both cases, these perceptions are underpinned by a sense that injustice is incurred because the law is not applied evenly to everyone. In relation to the perceived denial of political voice, it is suggested that there may be a case for considering the right-wing milieu through the framework of the politics of recognition, or rather misrecognition (Taylor, 1994; Honneth, 1995). While the politics of recognition paradigm has been largely used to understand the social activism of minority or subaltern groups enacted through the politics of multiculturalism, it has been applied to the study of young Muslim activists mobilising against the framing of Muslims as 'suspect communities' not least through counter-terrorism legislation and CVE programmes (see: Pilkington and Acik, 2020). There is evidence of a strong sense of misrecognition of 'us' by 'others' in the data set, giving rise to the experience of what Honneth (1995: 161) calls 'disrespect'. The findings of this study also confirm that when this is seen to be an intersubjective experience it generates an impulse for social activism, which mitigates the negative emotions associated with the denial of recognition to which respondents feel entitled. The question remains as to whether misrecognition can be constituted as a free-standing cultural harm or whether to constitute misrecognition, the injustice must be at least entwined with, if not rooted in, economic inequality (Fraser and Honneth, 2003: 202–203, 83).

In relation to the gendered dimension of 'right-wing extremism', the study confirms the consistent evidence that women are less likely to take visible positions within what are widely considered extreme right movements. However, when they are active, they tend to share similar views and positions as men. Those views themselves, however, span a very broad spectrum from highly 'traditionalist' to 'progressive'. That spectrum also shifts broadly in tune with wider societal shifts such that there is a genuine openness to LGBT+ although also a tendency to instrumentalise the defence of women's and LGBT+ rights as an anti-Islam stance. Attitudes towards transgender people, moreover, are more ambivalent and the milieu is characterised by a strong hostility towards notions of gender fluidity. In this study those respondents with the most extreme (anti-Semitic and/or national socialist) views are also those with the most pronounced gender dimension to their worldviews and who have the keenest interest in mentoring, especially young men, into what they see as more healthy ways of life and developing 'mature masculinity'. This may be a coincidence, but it may also suggest that gendered ideologies are a factor in differentiating within the milieu and a marker of propensity to radicalisation.

In this report it has been argued that if we want to counter 'right-wing extremism' it is essential that our conceptual understanding of it fits the phenomenon we are targeting. This study has provided some insight into the dissonance of that conceptual descriptor with the views and behaviours of individuals and movements routinely described as such. At least two of the core components of 'right-wing extremism' - anti-democracy and pro-authoritarianism - are rarely found within the milieu. Moreover, while violence (or fighting) does occur and sometimes in political contexts, engagement in violence is situationally and interactionally determined and the use of violence is seen as acceptable in very limited circumstances. While the views held by individuals in the milieu vary widely, most respondents have clear markers or red lines in terms of what is acceptable (and not 'extreme') and frame their views in terms of protection of self or in-group from a perceived out-group threat. There are, clearly, social harms generated by the racialisation of out-groups. This is recognised by some, although not all, respondents. Out-groups, however, are multiple and although racialised 'others' remain highly represented (especially 'Islam', 'Muslims' and 'immigrants') they include, increasingly, political or ideological 'others' such as state and political institutions and actors ('government', 'politicians', local authorities', 'Antifa', 'the Left'). Moreover, when respondents themselves talk about what drives radicalisation, they identify not individual socio-demographic characteristics nor macro socio-economic structural factors but events and actions of 'others', including of the state. They see, on the one hand, a government that is, through its policies (not tackling the root causes of radicalisation, responding ineffectively to terrorist attacks, covering up the scale of organised CSE), pushing people to the edge whilst, on the other, exacerbating the situation by denying political voice to speak out against it. Meanwhile, they organise themselves 'against all extremisms' and respond to radicalising messages, first and foremost, with calls to engagement in dialogue. While state institutions and actors in the field of CVE will profoundly disagree with much of the interpretation by milieu members of what is wrong with the world and how to address it, perhaps there is scope for dialogue to start on finding what might reinstate meaning to the notion of 'right-wing extremism'.

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7. Appendices

Appendix 7.1 Movements and parties⁵⁵

‘Extreme-right’ milieu

‘Alt-right’ (‘alternative-right’) is a term used to describe individuals, platforms and alternative medias promoting a wide range of white nationalist views. It is most closely associated with Richard Spencer’s Alternative Right online blog and a number of widely shared memes such as Pepe the frog. Its central tenet is that ‘white identity’ is threatened by multiculturalism and left-wing political correctness, egalitarianism and universalism. In this sense it reflects an American form of European identitarianism.

Brexit Party was founded by Nigel Farage in January 2019 after he resigned from UKIP in protest at Gerard Batten’s appointment of Tommy Robinson as his special advisor on prisons and terrorism. It won the highest proportion of votes of any party in the UK in the European Parliament elections held in May 2019.

Britain First was founded in May 2011 by a number of former BNP activists including Jim Dowson and current leader, Paul Golding. Both Golding and deputy leader Jayda Fransen (who left the party in 2019) have faced a series of prosecutions and convictions for public order offences and religiously aggravated harassment.

British National Party (BNP) was formed in 1982 by John Tyndall, formerly leader of the National Front. In the 1990s it became the UK’s main extreme right party and, from 1994, sought to move away from street militancy to focus on electoral success using a community politics approach. Its success in local elections in the 2000s translated into the winning of two seats in the 2009 European Parliament elections but the party imploded in the aftermath of the 2010 general election.

Combat 18 (C18) was initially founded by the BNP as a ‘stewards group’ to protect its activities but became an entity in its own right and the most violent of groups on the far right. It was publicly disavowed by the BNP in 1995.

English Defence League (EDL) was founded in 2009 as a response to Islamist activists (linked to al-Muhajiroun) in Luton who protested the homecoming parade of the Royal Anglian Regiment. Drawing on the football hooligan network, over the period 2009-2013, it mustered 2-3000 regularly at demonstrations across the country. A key slogan was ‘Not racist, not violent, just no longer silent’. The resignation of its leaders, Tommy Robinson and Kevin Carroll, in October 2013 dealt a serious blow with demonstrations subsequently mobilising crowds in the hundreds not thousands. It continued to hold small demonstrations organised by regional activists throughout the fieldwork period of this study.

Democratic Football Lads Alliance (DFLA) took on the mantle of the Football Lads Alliance (FLA) from April 2018 after a split with the leader of the FLA, John Meighan, over alleged misappropriation of funds and his dictatorial leadership of the movement. In the interregnum period a demonstration planned for Birmingham (24 March 2018) saw two parallel demonstrations in different locations in the city. Its slogan is ‘Against all Extremisms’.

Football Lads Alliance (FLA) was founded in response to a series of Islamist terrorist attacks between March and June 2017. Mobilising a coalition of football firms, it shot to prominence after its first march (London, 24 June 2017) mustered around 10,000 people and a subsequent one on 7 October 2017 gathered 30,000. Following the split noted above (see DFLA), its leader stood down in April 2018 and it was dissolved in early 2019.

⁵⁵ Information included in this Appendix comes from interviews with respondents as well as: Macklin 2020a; Macklin 2020b; Pilkington, 2016; Allen, 2019; Bray, 2017; and the Southern Poverty Law Centre.

For Britain was founded by Anne Marie Waters in 2017 following a failed bid to become leader of UKIP. Waters also heads up Sharia Watch and was a co-founder of the failed UK branch of Pegida. She is a long term ally of Tommy Robinson and supported his European Parliament election campaign in 2019.

Generation Identity (GI) (also known as the Identitarian movement) describes itself as ‘a European patriotic youth movement’, which emerged first in France and is rooted in the French *nouvelle droite* intellectual tradition (especially the work of Alain de Benoist and Guillaume Faye). It now has its organisational base in Austria under Martin Sellner. The UK branch was established in 2017 but immediately infiltrated and exposed in a TV documentary aired in November 2017. It was ‘rebooted’ guided by Norwegian activist Tore Rasmussen. Rasmussen was subsequently exposed in the media for earlier membership of a neo-Nazi group in Norway and participation in (although not conviction for) a violent racist attack, causing another internal rupture in the UK movement in August 2018.

National Action was formed by Alex Davies (formerly a member of the Young British National Party) and Ben Raymond in 2013 as a new nationalist youth movement distinguished by following a traditional nationalist programme, seeking to establish Britain as a ‘white homeland’. It placed itself in a lineage that traces back to the British Union of Fascists and the National Front and distanced itself from movements dominating the milieu at the time such as the EDL. In 2016, it became the first ever extreme right organisation to be proscribed as a terrorist organisation.

National Front (NF) was formed in December 1966 from an amalgam of smaller far right groupuscules. It had two peaks of electoral support during the 1970s as a result of agitation surrounding the arrival of the Ugandan Asians in 1974 and the Malawi Asians in 1976. Its poor showing in the 1979 general election led to splits in the movement and decline in efficacy.

New British Union (NBU) is an openly fascist organisation founded in 2013 in the tradition of Oswald Moseley’s British Union of Fascists. It is led by Gary Raikes who was previously a member of the BNP.

United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) is an anti-EU party active since 1993 and led by Nigel Farage from 2006-2009 and 2010-2016. Gerard Batten became leader of UKIP in April 2018 but his appointment of Tommy Robinson as his special advisor on prisons and terrorism (November 2018), led Nigel Farage to resign from the party in protest and to form the Brexit Party in January 2019. Batten’s term as leader ended in June 2019 and he was refused the right to stand for re-election by the party’s National Executive Committee.

Yellow Vests UK emerged in the wake of the *gilets jaunes* movement in France but gained no similar momentum. Two figures leading the UK yellow vests, James Goddard and Tracy Blackwell, were among the ‘influencers’ mentioned in the milieu studied in this report.

Anti-fascist milieu

Antifa is an umbrella term for a multitude of organisations named variously in different countries, comprising, together, a movement that combines a specific aim to fight the far right through direct action with a broader radical socialist politics.

Anti-fascist Action (AFA) was founded in 1985 to counter the National Front and BNP following the dissolution of the ANL in 1982. It engaged in direct confrontation with far right groups as well as political work, taking a more militant direction from 1989.

Anti-Fascist Network (AFN) was founded in 2011 as a network of independent groups mobilising against racism and fascism.

Anti-Nazi League (ANL) was founded in November 1977 on the basis of the ‘squads’ formed by Socialist Workers Party (SWP) activists to protect their own activities and confront far right activists especially

during the Greater London Council (GLC) election campaign in 1977. The ANL attempted to build a broad based popular front against the NF but was dissolved by the SWP in 1982.

Socialist Workers Party (SWP) formed out of the Trotskyite International Socialists primarily to oppose the NF.

Unite Against Fascism (UAF) is a SWP-backed group founded in 2003 in response to electoral successes of the BNP and later organising opposition to EDL marches. Since 2013, it has mainly operated through the closely linked organisation **Stand Up To Racism (SUTR)**.

Appendix 7.2 Socio-demographic data of respondents

Name ⁵⁶	Age	Country of Birth	Education	Employment	Ethnicity	Family status	Gender	Religion	Religiosity	Residential status	No. in household
Adam	28	UK	Completed VSE ⁵⁷	In FTE ⁵⁸	White British	Single	Male	No religion	Agnostic	LWF ⁵⁹	3
Alice	28	UK	Completed HE ⁶⁰	In PTE ⁶¹	White British	Single	Female	Christian - other	Believer not practising	LWP ⁶²	3
Billy	26	UK	Completed GASE ⁶³	In FTE	White Northern Irish	M/LWP ⁶⁴	Male	Pagan	Other – ‘interested’	LP/C ⁶⁵	4
Cara	27	UK	Completed GASE	In PTE	White British	M/LWP	Female	Protestant	Believer and practising	LP/C	4
CL	n/a ⁶⁶	n/a	Currently in HE	In FTE	White British	M/LWP	Female	No religion	Agnostic	Lives at home with other relatives	5
Craig	51	UK	Completed GASE	In FTE	British/English/Northern Irish ⁶⁷	M/LWP	Male	Protestant	Believer and Protestant	LP/C	3

⁵⁶ All names are pseudonyms

⁵⁷ VSE – vocational secondary education

⁵⁸ FTE – full time employment

⁵⁹ LWF – lives independently with friends

⁶⁰ HE – higher education (university)

⁶¹ PTE – part time employment

⁶² LWP - lives at home with parents/step parents

⁶³ GASE - general academic secondary education

⁶⁴ M/LWP – married or living with partner

⁶⁵ LP/C – lives independently with own partner/children

⁶⁶ n/a here and after means data not available

⁶⁷ This respondent selects three categories. In addition he says he does not like describing himself as ‘White’, would never choose to do so himself.

Dan	24	UK	Completed VSE	In PTE	White English	NLT ⁶⁸	Male	No religion	Agnostic	LSP ⁶⁹	2
DT	30	UK	Completed PSVT ⁷⁰	UE ⁷¹	White British	Single	Male	Roman Catholic	Believer and practising	LP/C	5
Gareth	24	UK	Completed PSVT	In FTE	White British	Single	Male	Roman Catholic	Believer not practising	LSP	2
Imogen	24	UK	Completed PSVT	UE	White British	Single	Female	Roman Catholic	Agnostic	LA ⁷²	1
Jacob	38	UK	Completed HE	In UPW ⁷³	White English	M/LWP	Male	Christian - other	Believer not practising	LP/C	4
Jason	17	UK	Currently in VSE	In full time education	White English	Single	Male	No religion	Agnostic	LWP	5
Jermaine	19	UK	Completed VSE	In FTE	White British	Single	Male	Protestant	Other - believer but no particular religion	LWP	2
Johnny	21	UK	Completed VSE	In FTE	White British	Single	Male	Protestant	Believer not practising	LWP	3
Lee	38	UK	Completed GASE	In UPW	White British	M/LWP	Male	No religion	Atheist	LP/C	6
Mikey	33	UK	Completed VSE	In FTE	White English	Single	Male	Christian	Believer and practising	LWP	3
Paolo	26	UK	Completed VSE	UE	White - Mixed European	Single	Male	Roman Catholic	Believer and practising	LP/C	3

⁶⁸ NLT – has girlfriend or boyfriend but not living together

⁶⁹ LSP - lives at home with single parent

⁷⁰ PSVT - post-secondary vocational training

⁷¹ UE - unemployed

⁷² LA - lives independently alone

⁷³ UPW - not in paid employment but occupied as carer or unpaid work

Paul	38	UK	Completed HE	In FTE	White English	NLT	Male	Protestant	Believer not practising	LP/C	2
Robbie	22	UK	Completed VSE	In FTE	White English	Single	Male	Protestant	Believer not practising	LSP	2
Tonya	21	UK	Completed GASE	In UPW	White British	NLT	Female	Christian - other	Believer not practising	LSP	2
Will	23	UK	Completed HE	UE	White - mixed European	NLT	Male	Roman Catholic	Believer not practising	LA	1