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Symbiotic radicalisation: The interplay between far-right and far-left activism in Victoria

Literature Review

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Introduction[1]

This review of academic literature forms part of the research project, *Symbiotic radicalisation: contemporary far-right and far-left movements*, conducted by Victoria University (VU) in partnership with the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD). It is divided into three parts:

1. Contemporary far-right movements[2] in Australia
2. Contemporary far-left movements in Western democracies
3. Cumulative extremism: the interplay between far-left and far-right movements

The academic scholarship on each theme is examined to situate the research project within the contemporary scholarly evidence base. The scope of the literature review of these three themes differs. While concentrating on the recent academic publications on far-right movements specifically within the *Australian* context (for a broader systematic review, see Peucker et al. 2017; Grossman et al. 2016), the review cast its net wider in its analysis of the scholarship on contemporary far-left movements and processes of cumulative extremism covering these phenomena from a contemporary perspective in Western democratic contexts in *and* beyond Australia. Given the thematic breadth, the literature review does not claim to systematically and exhaustively include every relevant publication across the three topics but seeks to give a general overview on the state of the scholarship.

1. Contemporary far-right movements in Australia

In 2015, a systematic literature review on social cohesion, community resilience and violent extremism, including far-right extremism in Australia, was conducted within the Victorian-focussed *Stocktake Research Project* (Grossman et al. 2016). The Stocktake Review, which covered the years 2011 to 2015, concluded that 'the institutionalisation and expression of racist, anti-Muslim and nationalist-exclusivist attitudes by right-wing extremist political parties and movements … have remained markedly under-researched in the Australian context' (Grossman et al. 2016: 27). A 2017 update of the Stocktake review (Peucker et al. 2017), with a specific focus on the far-right, concluded that the electoral success of Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party in 2016 and the 10th anniversary of the 2005 Cronulla race riots (arguably, together with the rise of new far-right groups in the mid-2010s) have played a role in the 'notable increase in academic attention paid to domestic far-right movements' in Australia between 2015 and 2017. The 2017 update review, however, also noted that 'more empirical groundwork' was necessary 'to explore Australia's highly fragmented far-right' (Peucker et al. 2017: 4). Similarly, Peucker and Smith (2019a: 5) posit in the introduction to their edited volume, *The Far-Right in Contemporary Australia* (Peucker and Smith 2019b), that the continuously expanding scholarship on racism, racist violence, and nationalism in Australia 'has largely ignored more institutionalised expression of racist or other exclusionary nationalist attitudes within social

[1] I would like to thank my Victoria University colleagues Rámon Spaaij, Debra Smith and Muhammed Iqbal for their support in preparing this literature review.

[2] In this literature review the term social movement is conceptualised, using Goodwin and Jasper's (2003) definition, as 'a collective, organized, sustained, and noninstutional challenge to authorities, powerholders, or cultural beliefs and practices'.

movements or groups' (Peucker and Smith 2019a: 5). Up until 2018, only a handful of academic articles have shed empirical light on the various manifestations of the far-right in Australia.[3]

This present literature review indicates that the scholarship on far-right movements in Australia has continued to grow, reaching new heights in 2020. However, despite this significant expansion, it remains thematically scattered and conceptually under-developed, and it still lags behind the vibrant and well-established right-wing extremism research landscape in Europe and North America.

An increasing number of Australian academics have recently published historical and empirical analyses of Australia's far-right. The year 2019, for example, saw the release of the first edited book on 'the far-right in contemporary Australia' (Peucker and Smith 2019b), and the Special Issue of the Journal of *Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism*, dedicated to the topic 'After Christchurch: Global Perspectives on Far Right Terrorism', contains several articles on the far-right in Australia. The following section outlines the main approaches and key findings of this newly emerging area of research, which seems to have gained further momentum in the aftermaths of the Christchurch massacre on 15 March 2019, perpetrated by an Australian born and raised White supremacist from New South Wales.

Far-right online mobilisation

The majority of recent empirical research into Australia's far-right explores online spaces (primarily social media such as Facebook); far-right offline mobilisation and the interplay between offline and online activism have received less scholarly attention to date (see below). Peucker and Smith (2019c: 224) argue in the conclusion of their edited volume on the *Far-Right in Contemporary Australia* that 'the online environment provides a rich and accessible space for researchers that has led to the development of methodologies that generate insights … into far-right movements'.

The first, and at the time ground-breaking, study on far-right groups in Australia was published by the criminologist Geoff Dean and his colleagues at Griffith University in early 2016. Drawing on established European scholarship and applying it to Australia, Dean et al. (2016: 123) differentiate between the old-school extreme right with their 'traditional neo-Nazi, fascist ideologies' and the New Radical Right, which mobilise more around 'nationalism, anti-immigration, and the protection

[3] It is worth noting that in 2017 there have been several academic publications that made references to certain far-right groups as part of an analysis of broader issues such as the cyber racism (Jakubowicz et al. 2017) or social media affordances (Johns 2017). The 2017 *Journal of Intercultural Studies* special issue 'After Cronulla', for example, brought together a number of original articles that address 'the construction of race, processes of radicalisation and manifestations of racism', 'meanings of nationalism' and everyday intercultural relations' ten years after the Cronulla riots (Johns et al. 2017: 252). Although some of these articles discuss selected far-right groups, none of them attempts a systematic analysis of far-right issues as such. Johns's (2017: 350) article, for instance, uses the two groups Reclaim Australia and the Australian Defence League as case studies to show how the 'performance of white nationalism in the Cronulla riots has not disappeared but has migrated online, with "virtual shires" providing new spaces for the mobilisation of radical movements to "reclaim" white Australia from Muslim Others'. Johns (2017: 358) further argues that social media affordances have facilitate the mainstreaming of radical White supremacy views and extending their reach from previously 'small, geographic spaces […] to the connected and multiple publics online that amplify and normalise these voices'. These are all significant scholarly contributions but they are only of marginal relevance for the specific scholarship on the nature and operation of contemporary far-right movements.

of Western values'.[4] Their social media analysis (mainly Facebook) examines the 'ideological space' of selected far-right groups from both types, using what Dean et al. (2016: 123-124) consider six core themes (identified based on an review of pertinent literature from Europe) to capture right-wing extremism: (1) anti-immigration (including Islamophobic narratives), (2) anti-establishment and anti-elitism, (3) protection of Western valuers and culture, (4) commitment to democratic reform, (5) return to 'traditional values', and (6) strong state and law-and-order. The study offered for the first time an empirically grounded deductive overview of some of the core narratives of selected far-right groups, identifying a broad 'ideological spectrum' and great heterogeneity of the far-right milieu in Australia (Dean et al. 2016: 139). Peucker and Smith (2019c: 9) argue that 'emphasising this diversity and complexity was possibly the most significant contributions of this study to the scholarship on the Australian far-right landscape'.

Peucker and Smith's edited book (2019b) contains three chapters that confirm this heterogeneity by presenting the findings of recent social media research on far-right groups on Facebook. Davis (2019) analysed the content (11 May – 8 June 2018) on the Facebook accounts of eight far-right groups, including Reclaim Australia Rally, Cook's Convicts, Nationalist Uprising, Make Australia Grouse Again, and the political micro-party Australian Liberty Alliance. He uses the concept of 'anti-publics' to describe how these groups 'position themselves in counter-hegemonic opposition to democratic conventions and processes' (Davis 2019: 129). His qualitative content analysis leads to three key findings: First, despite some locally specific narratives and themes, these far-right groups and their Facebook messaging are 'highly transnational in their outlook and use of communication style based mostly on images and short videos', borrowing concepts in particular from the alt-right in the US (Davis 2019: 143). Second, 'it is no longer possible to think simply in terms of a race-oriented far-right' (ibid.), as these groups have broadened their narrative agenda to include gender, science and other issues, often 'under the banner of unifying concepts such as freedom of speech"'(ibid.). Third, the discourses on these online sites tend to be highly 'antagonistic' (p. 144), not seeking to engage in the critical democratic deliberation of ideas but rather to disrupt public debates. 'Politics, here, is understood as a form of ideological "warfare", as a "battle to be won" by any available rhetorical means rather than as an iterative democratic process' (ibid.).

Peucker, Smith and Iqbal's (2019) contribution to the edited volume draws on a large research study conducted in 2017 and 2018.[5] In their chapter, based on the mix-method analysis of almost 42,000 posts and over 870,000 comments on 12 far-right Facebook accounts (data collection from inception of account to 31 December 2017), the authors develop a far-right group typology for the Australian context. They differentiate between three ideal-types of far-right groups: (1) anti-Islam groups, which define themselves primarily by their

[4] This two-fold typology bears some resemblance with the differentiation proposed by Voogt (2017: 40) from a practitioner's perspective between White supremacist, neo-Nazi forms of the far-right' and 'anti-Muslim groups'. Voogt (2017: 41) stresses, however, the personal and ideological overlaps between both types of far-right groups.

[5] The research report, *Mapping Networks and Narratives of Far-Right Movements in Victoria* (Peucker et al. 2018), has not been publicly released yet and is therefore not included in this literature review. It is worth nothing, however, that the research also included an offline (ethnographic) component and explored the interplay between online and offline mobilisation of far-right groups in Victoria.

anti-Islam messaging focus; (2) cultural superiority groups, which have 'a stronger focus on promoting ethnic nationalism and an exclusivist form of Australian patriotism, …claiming cultural superiority' (Peucker et al. 2019: 81); and (3) racial superiority groups, which are 'typically extreme right-wing [and] fascist,….and propagate a racially exclusive from of nationalism' (ibid.). The authors argue that, while their heuristic typology resembles in some ways Dean et al.'s (2016) two-fold distinction between the New Radical Right and the 'old' extreme right, it constitutes the 'first typology of the far-right in contemporary Australia that is based on an inductive analysis of empirical data' (Peucker et al. 2019: 97). Confirming Davis's (2019) conclusion that the Australia far-right cannot be accurately describe merely as 'race-oriented', Peucker et al. (2019) identified several core themes in their online data analysis, including sexuality and gender issues, crime violence and law-and-order, and Islam. They further demonstrate how the prevalence of these themes differ between far-right group types (e.g. anti-Islam much less salient in racial superiority groups) and fluctuate over time in these groups' online messaging. They identify long-term thematic shifts in most of these groups' online messaging, including a significant drop in the prevalence of anti-Islamic mobilisation and an increase in messaging around gender identity and crime and violence. A more detailed analysis demonstrates how far-right groups have responded to and utilised specific discursive opportunities afforded to them by certain public debates and events, such as, for instance, the Same-Sex Marriage debate in late 2017, which has led to an enormous increase in gender and sexuality related themes pushed by most of the analysed far-right groups on their Facebook accounts.

The third social media study (Nilan 2019) published in Peucker and Smith's (2019b) edited volume examines two specific (and rivalry) far-right groups active in Victoria, the True Blue Crew and the Soldiers of Odin Australia (SOOA). Nilan pursues a critical discourse analysis to examine a purposive sample of the two groups' Facebook account (collected between June and September 2017), applying Bourdieu's theoretical concept of doxa as 'taken-for-granted script of praxis' that set group-internal 'discursive boundaries around what can be thought or said' (Nilan 2019: 102). The analysis unveiled similarities as well as divergences between the key agenda and doxas of both far-right groups. SOOA messaging contained 'frequent references to the compelling identity of a sacred Norse warrior defending the nation, a direct call to arms' (p. 119) against the 'invaders'. In contrast, TBC doxa was profane and 'secular, with little use of visual symbolism beyond the Australian flag' (p. 120). Both groups' membership is primarily White male, and their doxa is rife with aggressive masculinity, but also 'strongly imply a class distinction'(p. 110), claiming working class representation and rejection the cultural or economic elite. Nilan also found that both groups use in their social media messaging on Facebook 'inclusive plural pronouns (we, our, us) to bind supporters into the collective project of stopping Muslim immigration, criticising the left and bringing the government to heel' (p. 120).

Similar to Nilan, Richards (2019) also draws on Bourdieu's theoretical concepts of doxa (as well as habitus and field). In her qualitative critical discourse and documentary analysis she examines how the Australian far-right group United Patriots Front (UPF) and key leaders of this groups, have articulated their radical agenda on social media. The analysis focuses on the 'dialectic relationship' between the UPF's online messaging and national international development (see also Davis 2019), including the political success of right-wing political leader in Europe and the US as well as terrorist attack inspired or perpetrated by radical Islamist and more specifically Islamic State (IS) ideologies.

Richards (2019: 61) demonstrates how the UPF 'express its habitus of far-right politics, through their stated solidarity with domestic and international groups within a field of right-trending politics, predicated on xenophobia, nationalism, and militarism'. Moreover, UPF reinforces its Islamophobic doxa by 'reflexively exploit[ing] IS-related attacks' and 'broad-based conflation of anti-Islamic sentiments' (Richards 2019: 58).[6]

Bliuc and colleagues (2019) conducted a multi-method longitudinal online study of the Australian sub-forum of the infamous global White supremacy platform Stormfront (*Stormfront Downunder)*, exploring how 'collective identities' online have been 'affected by offline intergroup conflicts', namely the 2005 Cronulla race riots. The research team around Bliuc analysed the language used in almost 76,000 posts on *Stormfront Downunder* between 2001 and 2015. Applying a Natural Language Processing (NLP) method, they found evidence for 'significant transformation in the collective identity of the online community following local race riots' (Bliuc et al. 2019: 1781): The events in Cronulla had a major impact on the online communication on *Stormfront Downunder* as it moved from a more generic global White supremacy agenda 'to a more crystallised focus on (local) specific ethnic and religious out-groups' (p. 1781), such as 'Muslims' and 'Lebs', and a greater focus on Islamophobia. A thematic analysis of the 100 most quoted posts found that, prior to the Cronulla riots, the online communication was more concerned with establishing 'group boundaries' to decide who are their 'allies' and who can be part of their 'Anglo-Saxon nationalist group' (p. 1778). This shifted after the 2005 riots as the content 'reflected a more specific positioning not in relation to allies, but to out-groups which are generally viewed as enemies of the group' (p. 1780), especially Australian Muslims. Moreover, a Linguistic Inquiry Word Count analysis of the entire dataset showed, first, a slight decrease in expression of disagreement between online users (which may be an indicator for stronger intra-group cohesions) and, second, that that collective emotions of anger increased significantly after the riots. Bliuc et al. (2019: 1782) argue that 'anger is often associated with a sense of injustice' and may under certain circumstances be regarded as a 'precursor of collective action mobilisation', which may be part of the explanation for the increase in far-right activities in Australia since the mid-2010s.

There is little doubt about the importance of social media for political mobilisation of far-right groups in Australia, and academics have developed a range of original methods to harvest and analyse social media data in recent years. Some of the key findings include: (a) the significant influence of offline events (both domestic and overseas) and public discourses on online messaging (Peucker et al 2019; Bliuc et al 2019); (b) prevalence of references to far-right online communication (e.g. themes and memes) internationally, especially the alt-right in the US (Davis 2019; Richards 2019); and (c) the heterogeneity of the Australian far-right environment, both in terms of groups-specific divergences (Nilan 2019) and the expansion of mobilisation themes beyond race (Davis 2019; Peucker et al. 2019). While social media analysis has played a vital role in the emerging scholarship on the far-right in Australia, the online space has not been the only area of research.

Historical continuities of the far-right milieu

Some recently published academic studies apply a historical lens to the analysis of Australia's far-right,

[6] This kind of strategic conflation resembles elements of the political messaging of Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party (Miller 2017), as outlined below.

but extend their analysis to cover contemporary actions and groups, highlighting aspects of continuity with Australia's ever-changing far-right milieu.

The analysis of (primarily) historical sources is at the centre of Campion's (2019a) article on right-wing extremist (RWE) ideology in Australia between the 1930s and 2019. Campion examines nine (broadly defined) 'manifestos' written by Australian right-wing extremists, including the 2019 Christchurch manifesto, but also online blogs of the openly neo-Nazi Antipodean Resistance, and social media (gab) posts by Blair Cottrell, a central figure of Australia's far-right. She identifies two key discourses within Australia's RWE ideology across these nine primary sources: First, ethnocentric discourses 'elevate an imagined white identity that is believed to be authentic and nativist to the Australian historical landscape' (Campion 2019a: 222-223). This White identity (together with traditional sexual and gender concepts) is portrayed as being under threat by 'miscegenation, immigration and multiculturalism … supposedly orchestrated by racial and conspiratorial threats, including Jews and left-wing actors' (p. 223), which allegedly pushes society into crisis and decay. Second, Campion (2019a: 223) identifies structural discourses that 'depict contemporary political and economic systems as dysfunctional and oppressive, and often at the mercy of out-groups to the detriment of in-groups'. The interaction between both discourses (on White identity and systemic ills) reinforce a collective identity based on the notion of Australia as being a white nation under threat and in urgent need to be fought for. 'The premise for action is created by combining identity and threat narratives: the former giving a premise for violence, and the latter providing the target of violence' (p. 223).

In another article, Campion (2019b) draws on a comprehensive examination of historical sources to explore the 'Persistence of Right Wing Extremism in Australia', as her 2019 journal articles in *Perspectives on Terrorism* is titled. She discusses how, since the 1930s until today, different extreme right-wing groups have emerged, in some cases gained some influence, and then 'subsided into sub-cultural networks' (Campion 2019b: 2). 'While these groups occasionally attempt to engage in the political process, they met with limited success and ultimately only succeeded in keeping the ideas and networks alive' (p. 14). She further points to the international connectedness of extreme right-wing groups in Australia (see also Davis 2019), both historically and in the contemporary context (e.g. Christchurch attacker), highlighting that 'Australia's biggest RWE export may well have been the Odinism of Mills, which, despite having limited impact domestically, achieved significance internationally' (Campion 2019b: 14).

Campion's (2019b) assessment with regard to Odinism is confirmed by Pete Lentini's (2019) analysis. In his book chapter, *The Australian Far-Right: An International Comparison of Fringe and Conventional Politics*, Lentini (2019: 30) argues the Australian Alexander Rud Mills has been widely recognised as 'the prime mover of Ásutrú and Odinism' and that 'it has been in Mill's legacy that Australia has substantial influence within Odinist circles, including the global radical and extreme right'. In addition to a comprehensive analysis of the origins and current influences of Odinism within Australia's far-right (e.g. Soldiers of Odin Australia; Women for Aryan Unity Australia) and beyond, Lentini also analyses the electoral performance of far-right political parties (more on the electoral performance, see section below) as well as right-wing extremist terrorism. Applying a political opportunity structure framework, he concludes that far-right parties have remained rather marginal, compared to many European countries, and that the level of right-wing terrorism is

relatively low in Australia, compared to, for example, the US. Lentini (2019: 40-41) argues that this may be due to, among other factors, Australia's strict gun regulations and the fact that Australian far-right actors are afforded a range of political opportunities to 'channel their grievances into other formats' of political action.

The electoral space: The appeal and agenda of Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party

The first electoral success of Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party in 1996 triggered some academic interest in far-right politics the mid-1990s (e.g. Jackman 1998; Gibson et al 2002), but as her party 'failed to maintain political momentum, so did the Australian scholarship on the far-right' (Peucker and Smith 2019a: 5). The second time Hanson's One Nation (ON) won seats in federal and state elections in 2016 and 2017, the academic interest returned with several political scientists conducting empirical studies to examine ON's political agenda and relative electoral success. Mols and Jetten (2018), for example, analysed ON's political success at the 2017 Queensland State elections, arguing that, contrary to the common 'loser of globalisation' assumption, the electoral success was not primarily due to the votes from those who were struggling financially. They found that income is a 'poor predictor of One Nation support' (Mols and Jetten 2018: 27). This conclusion echoes international research that has previously challenged the economic deprivation hypothesis as the main explanation for the inclination to sympathise with far-right groups or to vote for far-right parties (Goodwin et al. 2016; see also Peucker et al. 2017: 7).

Miller (2017) analysed ON's current political strategy, heavily focussed on an anti-Islam agenda as opposed to the anti-Asian agenda of her 1996 campaign, by examining the content of the official ON Facebook page (in addition to the Facebook page of the single-issue Boycott Halal group). His analysis sheds light on ON's populist anti-establishment, anti-immigration and anti-Islam agenda. Anti-Muslim sentiments are typically encouraged by emphasising 'the security threat from Muslim terrorism and the alleged threat to Australia democracy from Sharia law (Miller 2017: 397), not dissimilar to what Richards (2019) with the online mobilisation of the far-right United Patriots Front. This agenda appears aimed at fostering 'anger at the political elite' and a rejection of alleged political correctness, which is presented as shutting down criticism towards Islam (Miller 2017: 398).

Miller's (2017) conclusion about ON's anti-establishment, anti-immigration agenda resonates with Andrew Markus's (2019) empirical study results. Markus (2019) drew mainly on representative data from the 2017 Scanlon Foundation survey to analyse the attitudes of people whose voting preference was for Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party. Markus found that, while ON voters show some attitudinal commonalities with other mainstream parties (e.g. regarding national identification, where they resemble Liberal/National party voters), they significantly differ from the voters of all other major parties in, among others, their high level of criticism towards the system of government and lack of trust towards politicians, their pessimism about their personal future and in their negative attitudes towards diversity and immigration (and their support for discriminatory immigration regulations). Markus (2019: 53) concludes that ON voters tend to express the 'desire to turn back time to an imagined Australia of national unity ("One Nation"), politicians acting for the common good, economic prosperity, and racial and cultural homogeneity'. Moreover, he argues that Pauline Hanson's political populism 'appeals to those who fear – and others who experience – loss of status

and livelihood to well-educated elites in the trans-national knowledge economy of the post-industrial age'.

Offline non-electoral manifestations of Australia's far-right

The notion of nostalgia is not only prevalent among ON voters but appears to be part of the ideological mindset among others in the far-right milieu. This is a key argument in Julie Rudner's (2019) analysis of the local mosque conflict in Bendigo, which has been 'a crucial crystallisation and mobilisation point for far-right groups' in Australia (Peucker and Smith 2019a: 7). Rudner (2019) examines the local mosque conflict through the lens of urban placemaking. She elaborates how nostalgic and idealised urban imaginary within the anti-mosque groups (and their attempt to 'reclaim the city') clashed with the realities of urban transformation, (diverse) religious placemaking, and, by extension, with the bureaucratic planning processes. 'While nationalist groups and objectors [to the mosque] could territorialise and re-territorialise physical and online space in form of street rallies, council protests, and online mobilisation, their activities lacked the political force to change planning policy' (Rudner 2019: 192). As the planning and legal procedures recognises Muslims' right to a place of worship (as these procedures look at 'land use rather than land users' [Rudner 2019: 192]), Islamophobia driven anti-mosque objections were rejected. This resulted in a sense of victimhood, disenfranchisement and a 'deep sense of social injustice' among far-right objectors and 'reinforced their perceptions of being persecuted and silenced' (ibid.).

The highly sceptical attitudes towards Australia's system of government (see also Markus 2019; Campion 2019a) and bureaucratic process (Rudner 2019) – but not the focus on race, Islam and national identity – play a defining role in sovereign citizen movements (SCM), in the US but also in Australia, as Baldino and Lucas (2019) argue. Although not firmly based on empirical research and drawing mainly from media reports, their article offers original insights into a movement on the fringes of the far-right. After discussing SCM in the US, the authors direct their focus to Australia, referring to a leaked NSW police report which claims that there are 300 sovereign citizens in NSW alone. Often describing themselves as 'freemen of the land', some have hit the radar of police and even the court system as a result of their engagement 'in harassment and intimidation tactics and non-violent acts such as the establishment of alternative citizenship' (Baldino and Lucas 2019: 251). Others have run as candidates in the 2019 federal elections (e.g. for the Great Australian Party, founded by a former One Nation senator) running on an agenda of 'communal frustration with, or open hostility towards, modern bureaucracy as well as an instinct for historical or legal arguments to rationalise how the government is illegitimate' (ibid.). Baldino and Lucas (2019: 258) posit that the anti-government ideologies within 'malleable SCM… remain part of a highly toxic ecosystem that has shown the ability to meld with more militant and "patriot" platforms'. Moreover, they emphasise the specific challenges for P/CVE (preventing and countering violent extremism) approach in response to SCM.

The abovementioned studies all offer some important insights into different offline facets of the contemporary – and highly volatile – far-right in Australia. The thematic breadth illustrates, however, the scattered nature of an only slowly emerging body of research where many questions remain unexplored. This also applies to the empirical scholarship on Australia's far-right online spaces, which, while somewhat more advanced, appears to be still in its infancy. Peucker and Smith (2019c) argue that the current research focus on

far-right online messaging, ideology and mobilisation has come at the expense of paying attention to micro and meso level factors, such as sociality both offline and online (see De Koster and Houtman 2008), face-to-face interactions and actions, and 'individuals' desire to experience a sense of social connectedness, personal recognition and respect' (Peucker and Smith 2019c: 225). Such social and psychological dimensions are considered important factors in the complex processes of radicalisation to violence within far-right spaces, but have remained severely under-examined in the Australian context, also because researching these issues appears in some ways 'methodologically more challenging than social media research "from the distance"' (Peucker and Smith 2019c: 225).

Overall, the scholarship on the far-right in Australia is slowly developing, with the number of researchers working on the far-right continuously growing, but it does not appear to have become an established area of inquiry yet. While the history of far-right movements has been relatively well explored (thanks to scholars such as Campion), research on contemporary far-right groups and their actions is, despite some significant progress, still thematically scattered and conceptually under-developed. Emerging empirical work, especially in the online spaces, has delivered some promising first results but continue to face challenges of a constantly and rapidly shifting and highly volatile far-right milieu.[7] However, notwithstanding the many gaps in the empirical research work on the contemporary far-right in Australia, this research field is clearly more advanced than the almost entirely absent scholarship on radical and extreme left-wing movements in contemporary Australia, as the next section of this review shows.

2. Contemporary far-left movements in Western democracies

A fundamental challenge for this literature review is that *the far-left* does not exist as a coherent movement or ideology – possibly even less than the far-right. As Carson (2017: 310) emphasises, 'the very definition of "left wing" has no uniform conceptualization. This is mostly due to the malleable nature of what a leftist ideology was, what it came to be, and what it is considered today'.

What is far-left?

The term is used here as a pragmatic umbrella to capture a complex field of different yet interconnected political movements, actions and ideologies around the world. If exclusivist nationalism is the trademark of the far-right, the common denominator of the far-left can be described as a radical version of anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist egalitarianism (March and Mudde 205; Visser et al. 2014). These core principles of the far-left usually draw on certain ideologies, including and most significantly, Socialism, Marxism-Leninism, Trotskyism, Communism, Maoism or anarchism, the latter standing in some contrast to the former ones. Such a working definition resonates with McCoy, Jones and Hastings's (2019: 74) use of the term left-wing extremism in the Canadian context:

> Left Wing Extremism is used to categorize a wide variety of groups who coalesce around political ideologies and philosophies related to socialism, anarchism, Maoism, and Marxist-Leninist ideas. Historically [and until today], left-wing groups have mobilized in opposition to what

[7] The far-right groups Soldiers of Odin, True Blue Crew and United Patriot Front, subject to several empirical case studies (Nilan 2019; Richards 2019) have all ceased to exist (or at least stop operating) at the time of the publication of these respective studies.

> they perceived as fascist, racist and oppressive tendencies in contemporary society and politics. They have drawn upon principles opposing colonial and capitalist beliefs.

There is an abundance of (mainly historical) scholarship on each of the various political ideologies and philosophies, including a range of academic handbooks and even specifically dedicated journals (e.g. Anarchist Studies; Journal of the Socialist History Society). However, instead of exploring the vast academic literature on these underlying ideological systems, this review is more concerned with *contemporary manifestations of far-left movements and actions in Western countries*, including Australia.

Given the focus of this research project on socio-political *movements*, this review does not include the prolific (and also often historical) scholarship on political *parties* at the far-left of the political spectrum, such as Communist or Socialist parties (March and Mudde 2005; Fagerholm 2017; March 2012; Bell 1993; Bull and Heywood 1994). Around 15 years ago, many scholars have argued that the far-left has undergone a significant transformation since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, characterised by a decline of Communist political parties in Europe and 'the emergence of a New Radical Left, employing "new" ideological approaches … and modern forms of trans-national cooperation' (March and Mudde 2005: 23). Mostly operating as social movements or subcultures, the New Radical Left is highly diverse and fragmented, and constitutes 'a ragbag of groups and individuals, such as the "eco-warriors" …, animal right activists …, gay and lesbian activists …, anti-fascists …, Autonomen …, and anti-globalists' (March and Mudde 2005: 39).[8]

Carson (2017) uses a similarly broad definition of the far-left in her historical analysis of left-wing *terrorism* in the United States. She begins her analysis with primarily anti-Imperialist and anti-Capitalist groups active between 1960s and the mid-1980s, which were responsible for high numbers of terrorist attacks in the US at the time. The second facet of far-left terrorism are radical single-issues movements such as environmental and animal rights movement since the 1970s, which have received intense research interest over the years until today. Carson then identifies the most recent trend in left-wing terrorism in the US, which indicates an ideological overlap between anarchism and environmental and animal protection movements. Citing Ackerman (2003: 147), Carson (2017: 317) writes that 'the anarchist influence has the capacity to convert those initially concerned primarily for the environment into social revolutionaries acting outside the legal system.'

Single-issue movements such as the global environmentalist, animal rights movements and 'eco-terrorism' (Hirsch-Hoefler and Mudde 2014; Carson 2017; Liddick 2006; Amster 2006) have received significant attention in academia since the late 1980s (for some early examples, see Dunlap and Mertig 1991; Scarce 1990). The same holds true to various anti-globalist movements, especially in the 2010s, such as the *Indignados* in Spain (e.g. Fregonese and Taibo 2013; Castañeda 2012; Gerbaudo 2012) or, most significantly, the global Occupy protest movements (e.g. Langman 2013; Gamson and Sifry 2016; Halvorsen 2012; Gibson

[8] March and Mudde's broad conceptualisation of far-left movements resonates with the breadth of left-wing social movements more general, as discussed in detail in the two volumes on *Contemporary Left-Wing Activism*, edited by Roberts and Ibrahim (2018, volume 1) and Ibrahim and Roberts (2018, volume 2). What makes a left-wing movement 'far-left' or 'radical' remains unclear; the boundaries (if any) appear very blurry.

2013), which has attracted enormous academic interest from, among others, social movements scholars. More often than not, these political single-issue movements appear dominated and driven by individuals and groups who position themselves on the (far) left of the political spectrum, but without necessarily subscribing to the abovementioned socio-political ideologies such as Marxism, Socialism or anarchism. As Gibson (2013: 335) argues in his analysis of the Occupy movement, these anti-globalist and anti-neoliberalist protests were 'not ideologically anarchist' although their 'praxis [was] anarchical'.

Applying our conceptualisation of the far-left as being located within specific ideologies, this literature review does not further explore the myriad of research on these ideologically more ambiguous single-issue movements (although we acknowledge the personal and thematic overlap with the more ideologically rooted far-left movements). Instead, the following sections focus on far-left groups, movement and actions most relevant for the specific topic of this project, which revolves around the interplay between far-left and far-right movements.

Historical scholarships

One key finding of this review is that most academic work on the far-left is historical, while empirical scholarship on contemporary movements since the 2010s is less developed. Numerous studies (e.g. Sommier 2010) focus on left-wing extremist groups and terrorism ('Red terrorism') active mainly during the heydays of the far-left between the late 1960s and 1980s, which David Rapoport (2001) referred to as the 'third wave' of terrorism. These historical studies examine the agendas and strategies, and the rise and demise of initially highly active (and often violent) extreme left-wing political groups such as the Red Brigades in Italy (e.g. Maede 1990: Sundquist 2010), the Red Army Faction in Germany (Wright 1990; Moghadam 2012) or the Weather Underground in the US (e.g. Jacob 1997; Carson 2017). Some of these historical analyses of far-left movements go back further to the interwar era, exploring the origin and early manifestations of far-left anti-fascist movements in Europe (García 2016; Copsey and Olechnowicz 2010). In the Australian context, Gianfranco Cresciani's (1980) book, *Fascism, Antifascism and Italians in Australia: 1922-1945*, is an example for this historical scholarship, examining, among others, how the rise of Mussolini's fascism and anti-fascist opposition in the Italian motherland played out in the Italian migrant communities in Australia.

An important contribution to the more recent historical scholarship on the far-left in Australia is Vasthi Jane Fox's (2019) article, *"Never Again": Fascism and Anti-Fascism in Melbourne in the 1990s*. Drawing on interviews with leading far-left figures, who were politically active in the 1990s, Fox (2019: 2016) presents an 'historical account of the contentious interaction of these movements as it played out in Melbourne in the 1990s'. Fox's article explores 'campaign tactics and mobilising tropes' of these oppositional movements and to 'identify the Australian and overseas political traditions from which these fascists and anti-fascists drew, and to show what was resurrected, adapted and transformed.' For Fox (2019: 216), this analysis also has the purpose of building a 'basis for further serious scholarly investigations of the movements of today', which she briefly refers to when she writes:

> While the first decade of the 2000s saw a marked decline in such extreme political polarisation, fascist and anti-fascist action re-emerged, forcefully, in 2015 when far-right formation Reclaim Australia held national mobilisations of thousands. Anti-fascist actions soon followed. In

> the subsequent years, the extreme Right has grown in numbers, stature and political influence. (ibid.)

The volume, *The Far Left in Australia since 1945*, edited by Jon Piccini, Evan Smith and Matthew Worley (2018), offers the thus far most comprehensive historical account of the various manifestations, actions and developments of the far-left in Australia. The book applies a rather broad understanding of far-left groups, movements and actions (similar to March and Mudde [2005]), which covers, among others, the Communist Party of Australia, as well as various social movements including the Aboriginal Rights, anti-nuclear power, anti-racism, women's and gay liberation and Australia's student movements.

These historical accounts of the diverse far-left movements and actions in Australia and overseas provide important insights that help contextualise the current situation of these political movements at the far-left fringes of the political spectrum, which have attracted a great deal of public attention in the past few years, especially in a post-BREXIT referendum UK and President Donald Trump's America. Given the focus of this review on these *contemporary* manifestations, what does the academic literature tell us about the far-left in the 21st century and especially its manifestations since the 2010s?

Contemporary far-left movements

The conceptual and definitional blurriness of the far-left is one of the reasons for the lack of coherent empirical scholarship on contemporary far-left movements and actions. The emerging literature is thematically scattered and comprises studies that define their subject of inquiry in different ways, which makes it difficult to gain a more systematic overview of far-left movements and actions. Even when we exclude (as mentioned above) far-left (populist) political parties such as Podemos in Spain or SYRIZA in Greece (Katsambekis and Kioupkiolis 2019), scholars in this area conceptualise the far-left and define their research focus differently. While some studies, for instance, examine individual level and contextual factors that influence 'support for radical left ideologies' (Visser et al. 2014) or radical left voters (Ramiro 2016), others focus on left-wing terrorism (Carson 2017), left-wing extremism or the 'sectarian far left' (Allington et al. 2019).

The following example illustrates how these divergences hamper conclusive insights into some key questions. Visser and colleagues (2014), analysing several rounds of a large pan-European survey between 2002 and 2010, found that people who are unemployed and have a lower income are more prone to self-position themselves on the far-left of the political spectrum. This contrasts with Carson's (2017: 312) analysis of left-wing terrorism in the US, where she argues that members of these groups and movements were (compared to their right-wing counterparts) 'more likely to be college educated and employed in white-collar professions'. Obviously, both studies cannot be compared, given, among other reasons, their different thematic focus on either left-wing terrorism or a personal self-positioning on the political spectrum. What Allington and colleagues (2019) found in their UK study on the sectarian far-left (see next paragraph) also contrasts with Visser et al.'s (2014) cross-European findings on the typical demographic profile and aligns more with Carson's findings: people in the UK who identify as 'very left-wing' were on average 'substantially younger [and] more highly educated' (Allington et al. 2019: 18).

Attitudinal patterns within far-left milieus: from violence to authoritarianism

The latter empirical study is particularly insightful and deserves greater attention here. Allington et al.

(2019) not only compare those who identify as 'very left-wing' with a general random sample representative of the wider British population, they also distinguish between those who self-identify as 'very left-wing' and those who belong to the 'sectarian far left' groups. While this label may not be very common in the literature, Allington and his colleagues use it to capture more radical or extreme segments of the far-left, which they define as 'small, ideologically homogeneous organisations, each of which rejects parliamentary politics as a route to socialism and instead aspires to become the "vanguard party" of Leninist revolutionary theory' (Allington et al. 2019: 1). Based on a systematic content analysis of articles published on three online platforms associated with the sectarian far left, they identify 15 statements that reflect core political views, including attitudes around anti-fascism, the need of revolutionary changes, far-right threats to democracy and opposition to capitalism, government and parliamentary politics. Overall, most of these 15 statements also receive a high level of support from those who may not be members of the sectarian far-left, but identify as 'very left-wing'. Notwithstanding this substantial attitudinal overlap, statistical analysis shows that what sets the sectarian far-left most clearly apart from those 'very left-wingers' are the strong support for 'the need for a proletarian revolt against the capitalist order…("I would like to see workers rise up against their bosses") and …("Capitalism is essentially bad and must be destroyed")' (Allington et al. 2019: 13).

A central question Allington and his colleagues seek to answer revolves around people's inclination to accept the use of political violence. To explore this, they deployed a specific inventory that encompassed six items, and respondents were asked if they sympathise with or condemn these forms of political violence. These items range from 'Street violence against anti-democratic groups' or 'Violence as part of political protests' to 'Using bombs to fight injustice' and 'Committing terrorist acts'. They found that, overall, only a minority of respondents sympathise with any political violence. However, 'very left-wing' respondents were significantly more likely to do so than the national average: almost one quarter of them sympathised with 'street violence against anti-democratic groups' (compared to 6 per cent in the national sample) and 18 per cent sympathised with 'violence as part of political protests' (compared to 3 per cent in the national sample) (Allington et al 2019: 23)[9]. Moreover, the researchers concluded that subscribing to sectarian far-left views constitute 'a strong and highly statistically significant indicator of the likelihood that he or she sympathises with one or more forms of violent extremism' (i.e. at least one of the items of political violence) (ibid.: 28). Allington et al. (2019) also confirm that anti-imperialist attitudes, a typical feature of sectarian far-left ideologies, are much more widespread among those who identify as 'very left-wing' than in the national average (measured on the basis of a question around what countries, from the US, Israel or the UK to Russia, China, North Korea or Iran, pose the 'greatest threat to world peace'). An anti-imperial geopolitical outlook was also positively associated with sympathy for political violence: 'those who see the US and the UK (and, among the "very leftwing", also Israel) as a greater threat to world peace than NATO strategic adversaries such as North Korea tend to be more sympathetic to violent extremism than those who do not' (Allington et al. 2019: 1). Overall, Allington et al. (2019: 8) conclude that 'rather than directly promoting violence, British sectarian far-left groups

[9] Other items more directly related to terrorist violence received sympathy from 4 to 6 per cent of the 'very left-wing sample' and from 1 to 3 per cent in the national sample.

instead promote ideologies that can potentially provide a viewpoint from which certain forms of violent extremism may appear justified'.

A very small set of studies in the field of political psychology have examined the existence or prevalence of left-wing authoritarianism (LWA) among members of far-left groups or organisations. This has been a contested area of inquiry. While some scholars in the 1950 and '60s tried to introduce the concept of LWA (seemingly also for political, i.e. anti-Communist, reasons), researchers such as Altemeyer (1996), van Hiel et al. (2006) and Conway et al. (2018) have made more robust empirical efforts to operationalise LWA and developed scales to detect and measure this phenomenon. Altemeyer's (1996) influential definition encompasses three factors (see also van Hiel et al. 2014; Benjamin 2014):

- *authoritarian submission* to an 'authority' committed to overthrowing the established system
- *authoritarian aggression* directed at the established authorities
- *conventionalism* in the sense of subscribing to the norms of behaviour advocated for by the 'revolutionary authority'.

Using an (internally reliable) scale in a survey among over 2,544 Canadians in the 1990s, Altemeyer (1996) could not identify a single person who would have score sufficiently high on this LWA scale to consider them left-wing authoritarian. In 1998, Altemeyer pointedly sums up his research on this issue: 'I have yet to find a single "socialist/Communist type" who scores highly (in absolute terms) on the [left-wing authoritarianism] Scale...the "authoritarian on the left" has been as scarce as hens' teeth in my samples" (Altemeyer 1998: 71, cited in Conway et al. 2018).

Two subsequent research studies have, however, challenged Altemeyer's conclusion. Deploying a modified LWA scale (e.g. omitting the *conventionalism* dimension), van Hiel and colleagues (2006) conducted a small-scale survey in Belgium and found that, while in their general population sample they could not detect clear signs of LWA (similar to Altemeyer), the LWA label does apply to a minority of people in their second sample comprising of political activists. They concluded that 'extreme left-wing activists obtained high scores on both left-wing authoritarianism facets, whereas anarchists obtained high scores on the aggression facet scale only' (van Hiel et al. 2006: 788). Hence, the study suggests that submission to a revolutionary authority and 'authoritarian aggression' against the established system are present within far-left circles, especially among members of a Communist-Stalinist group (which was dominant in the sample), while far-left anarchists are, not surprisingly, anti-authoritarian more broadly (regardless of whether this is a revolutionary authority or an existing one) and aggressively anti-establishment.

More recently, Conway and his colleagues (2018) conducted two surveys in the US to examine both right-wing and left-wing authoritarianism and to test what they call the 'authoritarianism symmetry hypothesis'. Using several scales measuring RWA and LWA as well as prejudice, dogmatism, and attitude strength, they found that LWA significantly and positively correlates with these three traits to a similar degree as RWA does (Conway et al. 2018: 1063). In other words, those who score high on the authoritarian scale, regardless of whether it is on the far-right (e.g. submission to conservative authority) or the far-left (e.g. submission to 'liberal' authoritarian leaders on the left), tend to be more

prejudiced and dogmatic and to have very rigid attitudes towards certain groups and themes. [10]

Such studies on right-wing and left-wing authoritarianism and the alleged 'symmetry' between both enter sensitive terrain; and their findings may be inappropriately used to conflate or over-emphasise similarities between far-left and far-right extremism or radicalism.[11] It is therefore important to stress that these studies do not equate both types of extremism, but only examine the prevalence of authoritarian views, not the severity of their manifestations and political actions.

Operational dimensions of far-left movements: social media and interaction with the state

While a number of studies on anti-capitalist protest movements such as the *Indignados* in Spain or the global Occupy movements have explored the role of social media and online communication (e.g. Gerbaudo 2012), this digital facet of contemporary far-left movements and actions has otherwise received only little research attention. One of the few exceptions[12] is Andersson's (2016; 2018) work on the online activities of radical left groups in Sweden that 'explicitly promoted or in other ways presented the use of violence as a legitimate means of political pressure' (Andersson 2018: 386). Andersson (2018) argues that the radical left ('autonomous') groups under analysis do not make much use of digital online communication. The far-left online sites could not be describe as alternative news sites: 'Ideological news reporting and re-contextualization of news do not exist to any considerable extent in the autonomist scene online' (p. 391) and online interaction with the audience (e.g. via comment function) was very limited. Moreover, the content on the analyses online platforms demonstrated a striking 'absence of utopianism … [or] a "grand narrative"', with 'little to no information about what kind of world, or society, that these groups are propagating and what they struggle for' (ibid. 392). Instead, most content related to the present or the near future (e.g. mobilising for an upcoming demonstration). Andersson (2018: 392) concludes: 'For those who turn to the autonomist groups for visionary tales of a utopian future, there is not much to find here'. Lastly, and contrary to what was expected, the study showed that these far-left militant groups did not use their online presence to actively recruit members to their movement by presenting group membership as something desirable; 'nothing in the material seems to communicate any sense of community. In fact, more often, these groups explicitly discourage people from joining them' (Andersson 2018: 393). This resonates with previous studies that have pointed to the secretive nature of some sections of Sweden's far-left (Jacobsson and Sörbom 2015), where communication, and potentially also recruitment, is more based on physical personal interaction (see Leach and Haunss 2009). In an earlier article, drawing on the same study, Andersson (2016: 53)

[10] Obviously, the specific nature of their prejudice (ethnic minorities for right-wingers; certain Christian groups for left-wingers), dogmatism (towards religion for right-wingers; towards environmental issues for left-wingers) and attitude strength (related to the statement 'Christianity is absolutely true for right-wingers; 'Global warming is occurring and is human cause' for left-wingers) differed between those on the far-left and those on the far-right.

[11] Phillips and Yi (2018) go one step further in their methodologically poor analysis of the '"Liberalizing" Alt-Right' and the "Authoritarian" Left' in the aftermaths of the deadly confrontations in Charlottesville in 2017, discussing far-left struggles against alt-right actions as an authoritarian infringement of free speech and a refusal of dialogue.

[12] Another study exploring digital dimensions of the interplay between far-right and antifascist groups is presented later in this literature review under the sub-heading of antifascist movements (Klein 2019).

suggests that these groups' 'active non-participation' in the digital space may be related to their 'political ambition to claim autonomy'.

Another recent Swedish study (Merrill and Pries 2019) examined the interplay between social media activism and street protest. More specifically, they analysed how local antifascist groups used social media to mobilise support after a violent clash with far-right groups on 8 March 2014 that left one antifascist activist severely wounded. In response to this tragic incident, a hashtag with the victim's name (#KämpaShowan) gained rapid and widespread prominence on social media, primarily beyond anti-fascist circles. Many local antifascists were sceptical and disagreed with this hashtag's implied focus on an individual victim as it was seen to distract from broader systemic problems and the antifascist agenda. Although they sought to adapt the hashtag to (#KämpaMalmö), they also accepted the enormous mobilisation power of the initial ad hoc hashtag, which attracted 'a broader public and break the isolation often caused by more confrontational street politics' (Merrill and Pries 2019: 248). This resulted in the largest demonstration in the history of the city of Malmö, with between 10,000 and 15,000 participants (p. 249). Merrill and Pries (2019: 266) conclude that, as antifascist groups have no control over the broader social media response, they 'need to negotiate intricate and potentially conflicting situations in order to inspire, make use of, and politically shape support at both a local and translocal level'.

Neumayer's (2015) study also examined social media activities in response a far-right offline event. She conducted a social media and online analysis of Twitter, Facebook, YouTube as well as several blogs and websites of both far-right and far-left groups in the context of a rally, organised by far-right groups in Dresden, Germany, in 2011. Neumayer's findings indicate that far-left (antifascist) and far-right (nationalist) groups both use social media tactics for the creation of online 'counterpublics', where they identify themselves as 'oppositional and marginalised' (Neumayer 2015: 305; see also Davis's [2019] work on what he refers to as far-right 'anti-publics'). The online activities of far-left supporters of the counter-protest, which included both mainstream and more radical far-left antifascist groups, used their social media posting to channel their opposition to the far-right, express solidarity with the antifascist protestors and to share information about their own activities and the actions of oppositional far-right in the context of the upcoming far-right rally in Dresden (e.g. publicly identifying far-right individuals who have engaged in violence). The far-left also express their opposition to state authorities (similar to far-right groups) and especially to the police, which some (especially those who gravitate towards the use of violence) regard as an 'ally of the opponents' (see also Klein's [2019] study on antifascist groups in the US, presented below). Calls for anti-authoritarian civil disobedience are common in certain segments of the far-left. Moreover, far-left groups use social media as a corrective to mainstream media by publicising alternative and allegedly more accurate news stories about the protests (e.g. showing police violence or violence initiated by far-right protestors).

A small number of studies have examined the way in which far-left groups and movements pursue their goals not only through confrontational 'direct action' (Moorse and Shepard 2013), which is a trademark especially of militant antifascism (Vysotsky 2015; see section below), but also through targeted and more conventional interactions with state institutions and authorities. The findings of these studies are inconclusive and suggest that country (and possibly locally and historically) specific and group specific conditions may play an important role in the particular choice of mobilisation tools. While William and Lee (2012:

561) in their primarily historical analysis of anarchist movements in six countries (including UK, Czech Republic and Greece) posit that these groups 'do not utilize political rights in a conventional activist fashion by lobbying the government or electing favourable candidates', Piotrowski and Wennerhag's (2015) recent study of 'radical left-libertarian activists' comes to a more nuanced conclusion. Their research is based on qualitative interviews with 29 'activists from anarchist, autonomist and anarcho-syndicalist groups whose political orientations include both libertarian Marxist and anarchist perspectives' (Piotrowski and Wennerhag 2015: 846) in Poland and Sweden. In line with previous scholarship, their study confirms that the groups under analysis generally prefer, for ideological *and* efficacy reasons, direct actions, i.e. 'actions that allow them to accomplish direct – real and immediate – social changes at the grassroots level without political intermediation' (p. 865). Scepticism towards general elections and especially towards collaboration with political parties prevails among activists in Poland and Sweden, and this is often based on concrete experiences rather than ideological principles (p. 867). However, the study also found examples of conventional political actions, such as cooperation with political parties and attempts to influence politicians and civil servants, especially on the local level (e.g. co-staging protests). In some cases, they even ran their own candidates in local elections. Here, the far-left activists tend to be pragmatically motivated by efficacy rather than paralysed by ideological scepticism towards the current state system. In contrast to the Polish participants, who were overall more pessimistic and sceptical about their interaction with institutionalised politics, the Swedish participants considered their mobilisation successful at times[13].

> Overall they see their campaigns as broader vehicle for putting pressure specifically on the parliamentarian left in Sweden, and they view themselves as the 'radical flank' of a broader left that works for shifting the political 'hegemony' and for introducing new ideas in politics. (Piotrowski and Wennerhag 2015: 868)

Antifascist movements and antifa

There is one specific segment within contemporary far-left movements that has received slightly more attention in recent years in the media and political debates as well as in academia: antifascist movements, and more specifically, antifa. While this emerging body of work has not reached a sufficient level of coherence yet and remains inconclusive on some key issues, it is particularly relevant for this study on the interplay between far-left and far-right political movements.

Opposition to racism and fascism is a central ideological marker of most, if not all, far-left groups and movements, as operationalised for this study ('radical egalitarianism', see above). Thus, all far-left groups would be antiracist and anti-fascist. This section of the literature review, however, deals with a more specific, typically militant, manifestation of antifascism. Antifascist action or antifa here is used as a 'label that autonomous antifascist groups chose to apply to themselves. As a self-designation it is not just short for a militant antifascist, it also refers to a transnational movement of radical, decentralized, autonomous

[13] Piotrowski and Wennerhag (2015: 869) explain some of the differences between their Polish and Swedish activists by pointing to country-specific political opportunity structures.

antifascist groups' (Copsey 2018: 244; see also LaFree 2018: 249).

What is antifa?

Highlighting country-specific differences and shifts over time, Bray defines this movement more broadly (and deliberately ambiguously) than Copsey: 'antifa can variously be described as a kind of ideology, an identity , a tendency or milieu, or an activity of self-defence' (Bray 2017), usually rooted in specific left-wing ideologies such as Socialism or anarchism. This is also reflected in antifa's iconography, a red-black flag, where black symbolises anarchism and red stands for socialism or communism (Bray 2017: 54). Bray emphasises that antifa generally pursues, notwithstanding its obvious focus on opposing fascism, a broader 'revolutionary socialist politics (broadly construed)'. He argues, it 'should not be understood as a single-issue movement' (Brady 2017: 11), whereas LaFree (2018: 249) writes that 'the current form of antifa resembles other broad political phenomena like the anti-abortion or animal rights movements' (LaFree 2018: 249). Despite these divergent attempts to define antifa, a broad consensus prevails that the level of organisational or hierarchical structure of antifa is very low, clear leadership is absent, and that confrontational, direct action is the primary strategy. This includes the option of using violence in opposing the extreme right (Arlow 2019). Antifascism is not only in opposition to fascism but it is 'an illiberal politics of social revolutionism, applied to fighting the Far Right, not only fascism' (Bray 2017: 10).

The literature on contemporary actions and manifestations of antifa has expanded in recent years, mainly in response to the rising tensions and violent clashes between various far-right (or alt-right) groups and antifa, especially in the US after Trump's election victory in 2016, most violently and tragically at the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, in August 2017. The analysis of this emerging literature identifies three characteristics: first, its predominately historical focus (Arlow 2019), second, its often politically charged nature, with 'neutral', non-partisan analyses being sparse; and third, a dominance of essayistic elaborations without a solid empirical basis.

One of the most renowned experts on anti-fascism in Britain is Nigel Copsey. Copsey (2018: 243) begins his recent article in *Society* with the following words: 'First let me confess that I am not a social scientist, let alone a criminologist. My alternative reading is one of a historian of antifascism, based in the United Kingdom'. As an historian, Copsey has published prolifically. This includes his updated second edition, *Anti-fascism in Britain* (Copsey 2016), his co-authored book, *Varieties of Anti-fascism: Britain in the Inter-war Period* (Copsey and Olechnowicz 2010) and the above cited article in *Society* (Copsey 2018). He also co-edited the book, *Antifascism in the Nordic Countries: New Perspectives, Comparisons and Transnational Connections* (Braskén et al. 2019), which comprise a range of historical examinations of antifascism in Scandinavia, Iceland and Denmark. Other scholars have also examined the historical roots and evolution of antifa, antifascist action and antifascism or focussed on specific time periods or groups (e.g. Birchall 2010; Renton 2006; Testa 2015). In 2018, the historian Bray (2017) published the book, *Antifa: The antifascist handbook*, which is commonly considered to be the currently most comprehensive transnational analysis of the movement. Bray's historical analysis, which draws on a number of interviews with far-left activists, stresses the continuity of the movement from the fight against fascism in the 1930s until today. He writes in the introduction of this book: 'Anti-fascism is many things, but perhaps most fundamentally it

is an argument about the historical continuity between different eras of far-right violence and the many forms of collective self-defence that it has necessitated across the globe over the past century' (Bray 2017: 12). As this view suggests, Bray offers a rather sympathetic portrayal of antifa in his book.

This points to the second overall characteristic of this emerging literature on antifascism: Many contributions to this subject appear to be more or less explicitly partisan (Arlow 2019) and, hence, often seem to lack analytical distance. Bray, a previous Occupy Wall Street organiser with personal connections in the far-left milieu (which certainly facilitated his access to many of the activists he interviewed), is open about this, for example, when he states that his book is 'intended to promote organizing against fascism, white supremacy, and all forms of domination.' This puts his book somewhere between academic scholarship and advocacy. Other books on anti-fascism, such as Hann and Tilzey's (2003) *No Retreat: The secret war between Britain's anti-fascists and the far right*, Testa's (2015) *Militant Anti-fascism: A hundred years of resistance*, or O'Reilly's (2012) *Undertones: Anti-fascism and the far-right in Ireland 1945–2012*, authored by self-declared antifa members, are even more partisan, and it is very questionable as to whether these publications (as insightful as they may be) can be considered academic literature.

This partisan nature of most the literature on antifa is sometimes reflected in a rather essayist type of writing, which often does not draw on academic research but rather on – insider or outsider – observations. A lot has been written about antifa in (also well-respected) newspapers, magazine and on other non-academic platforms (e.g. Beinart 2017; Busch 2017; Pyrooz and Densley 2017), but there are also a number of essayistic articles published in peer-reviewed journals. Most of these articles take sides, one way or another, arguing, for example, in support of antifa's grassroots, 'direct-action' style opposition to the rise of the far-right or condemning antifa's violence-prone tactics or alleged trolling of political opponents. One example of academic sympathy towards and endorsement of antifascism, is Fekete's (2014) peer reviewed article, 'Anti-fascism and Anti-extremism', published in *Race and Class*. Liz Fekete, a renowned Critical Race expert from the UK, critically discusses how the prevalent discourse around extremisms and cumulative extremism has led to equating the perceived threat from the left and the right. In this context, Fekete (2014: 34) writes, 'the idea is taking hold that fascism and hate … can only be controlled by relying on the state as policeman and protector'. Thus, anti-fascists movements, and resistance to fascism more broadly, 'face criminalisation as police target them as extremist' (p. 35) at a time when it is most need, especially on the local grassroots level.

This viewpoint stands in stark contrast to the way in which Phillip and Yi (2018) discuss the far-left opposition to the alt-right in the US, referring to the former as authoritarian anti-free speech warriors:

> The opposing 'Left' … also includes a highly visible movement seeking to exclude opponents (radical and, sometimes, mainstream-Right) from the public sphere, characteristics associated with authoritarianism. This authoritarian constituency has influenced institutions historically committed to free speech, assembly, and dialogue, notably universities and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). (Phillip and Yi 2018: 221)

Very few academic articles on contemporary forms of militant antifascist approach the topic in a more empirical and less judgmental or partisan way. One of them is Vysotsky's (2015) ethnographic study of

antifascist movements in the US, which defines antifascism as a 'subculturally oriented movement' (p. 246) and a 'form of anarchist policing practice' (p. 236). Direct action may be 'directly democratic' (p. 250) in the antifascists' view, but it also denies, true to its anarchist ideological principles, the legitimacy of the state and its actions, which would include the state monopoly of policing and use of violence. Vysotsky (2015: 238) argues:

> By taking ''direct action'' in relation to their lives, anarchists simultaneously reject the power of the state and other structures of power. Direct action becomes a form of praxis by applying anarchist principles in the here-and-now rather than engaging in slow processes of reform which may or may not bring about the change that they desire. Anarchists have, therefore, been involved in social movements that are countercultural in their orientation or place a strong emphasis on prefigurative politics.

Vysotsky's ethnographic study draws on years of participant observations (2001-2005, 2007-2010), including many informal interviews, and 14 formal interviews with key figures from the militant antifascist movement in the US. He argues that, while the direct street clashes between antifascists and the far-right are at the centre of the public perception, the 'everyday struggle between the two movements [usually] occurs in prefigurative spaces … unseen by individuals outside of the subculture' (Vysotsky 2015: 247). Militant antifascists typically use preventative and confrontational tactics (and sometimes violence) to 'protect pre-figurative subcultural spaces from the political and physical threats posed by fascists' (ibid.). A common type of action revolves around antifascists' attempts to confront and disrupt 'fascist' events with the goal to minimise the chances of the political opponents to mobilise (new) members and intimidate others. This sometimes also include vigilante style street patrols in the greater vicinity of far-right events to prevent more people from attending. Another typical action is to provide physical protection to others within their subculture milieu who face threats from far-right individuals or groups. Overall, Vysotsky (2015: 248) argues that clashes between the opposing groups 'generally have a much more spontaneous quality to them'. Confrontational and violent tactics are, however, central to anarchist militant antifascist movements, although they are seen as a form of defence:

> They are deployed against individuals who, by virtue of their ideology, represent a threat to the subculture as a whole, and the individual participants within it, and who do not respond positively or affirmatively to nonconfrontational tactics or attempts at de-escalation. (Vysotsky 2015: 249)

In an earlier article, drawing on the same ethnographic work, Vysotsky (2013) elaborates further on how anti-fascist activists' perceptions of physical, political and spatial threat affect their choice of militant tactics in opposition to far-right, White supremacy movements and groups. Such confrontational and violent tactics 'are chosen because of their effectiveness as a response to supremacist use of violence that seeks to intimidate targeted groups into submission and political opponents into demobilization' (Vysotsky 2013: 287). Anti-fascists' violent response, according to Vysotsky's findings, succeed in reducing the threat as White supremacist are forced to retreat from subcultural spaces. 'Ultimately' … antifascist activists can demobilize as successful mobilization reduces threats' (p. 288).

Arlow's (2019) study on the Irish antifascist movement, based on seven in-depth interviews with key antifa figures with 'organisational responsibility within the movement', argues against the widely held view that antifascism is by definition a, as Copsey (2016: 158) posits, 'quintessentially reactive phenomenon'. Presenting Ireland as a deviant case study, Arlow shows that such a reactionary portrayal of antifa 'ignores other key causal factors that lead to the growth of militant anti-fascism' (p. 1). Against the backdrop of a comparatively weak presence of far-right movements in Ireland, Arlow examines the actions and strategies of the Irish antifa, and his findings highlights how crucial it is to pay close attention to the country-specific manifestations of the globally connected anti-fascist movement (see also Piotrowski and Wennerhag 2015; Williams and Lee 2012). Arlow (2019) identified a broad consensus within Antifascist Action Ireland (in contrast, for example, to their British counterpart) that the struggle against the far-right needs to encompass both rather mainstream, leftist 'non-violent actions campaigning against racist views' as well as more confrontational direct action, which in Ireland is seen as a rarely used tactic of 'last resort against the extreme right' (Arlow 2019: 9). Arlow's analysis shows that the Irish (mainly Dublin-based) antifa 'acts as a site of left convergence' in a national context where the political far-left is very fragmented. Antifa offers an 'area of unity that transcends the usual ideological division' (p. 1) on the far-left spectrum. Moreover, he argues that, due to the weakness of the organised far-right, antifa pursues a more preventative agenda of 'prophylactic action' aimed at 'deny[ing] political space to extreme right micro groups before they become a popular force or a more serious political threat' (p.1). Overall, the Irish antifascist movement appear less marginal and closer to the politically left-wing mainstream, not least due to the fact that Ireland's longstanding history of 'violent resistance to perceived oppression' (p. 15).

Related to the issue of the use of violence within antifascists movements, some scholars have published articles that approach the subject from a more conceptual angle, examining the nature of antifa as a (criminal) gang, a social movement or possibly even a terrorist group. This discussion is ongoing in academia and beyond, and scholars have come to divergent conclusions.

Following their 2017 op-ed article in *The Wall Street Journal*, 'To deal with Antifa, designate it a street gang' (Pyrooz and Densley 2017), Pyrooz and Densley (2018) were invited to publish a more elaborate article in the journal *Society*, entitled 'On Public Protest, Violence, and Street Gangs'. Applying the well-established Eurogang definition, they argue that 'factions within antifa were indeed durable across time, street-oriented, and youthful groups, and, importantly, intentional in their illegal behaviour and such behavior was central to collective identity: hence, gangs' (Pyrooz and Densley 2018: 230; see also Short and Hughes 2018 in the same issue of *Society*). Pyrooz and Densley (2018: 233) suggest a distinction between 'peaceful protesters [at far-left rallies] from the agent provocateurs, the armchair anarchists from the bellicose Black Bloc', arguing the latter being 'inherently violent'.

This assessment is a contested one. Acknowledging historical links between gangs and militant antifascism, Copsey (2018) argued in his article, published in the same issue of *Society*, that the designation of antifa as a gang is 'excessively reductionist' and does not do justice to central ideological drivers behind their militant actions. He writes: 'Let us not lose sight of the fact that antifa are first and foremost militant antifascists; ideological analysis is central to understanding the

reasons why antifa do what they do' (Copsey 2018: 243).

Antifa and Black Bloc

The Black Bloc, singled out by Pyrooz and Densley (2018: 233) as the violent, obstructive "bad apples" within far-left, antifascist movements and rallies, is worth a closer look. There is little disagreement that the use of political-ideological violence as a form of direct action plays a central role in the tactics of the Black Bloc. The Black Bloc is a militant sub-group or element with the antifascist movements, defined as 'an easily identifiable collective action carried out by individuals wearing black clothes and masks and forming a contingent – a black block – within a rally' (Dupuis-Déri 2010: 46). While there are some non-academic (partisan) publications that address the Black Bloc typically in the broader context of anti-globalisation protests and the militant tactics in the typically anarchism-rooted rise again oppression (Thompson 2010; van Deusen 2002), robust academic work on the Black Bloc is very scarce. In what ways does the existing scholarship examine the far-left Black Bloc beyond the outsider observation of Pyrooz and Densley (2018: 233), who write: 'Black Bloc strategy utilizes militant and often illegal tactics, from arson to vandalism. It also includes attacks on police, government, and political institutions, along with any other symbols of the capitalist system or displays of fascism'?

One of the few academic experts on the Black Bloc is the Canadian political scientist Francis Dupuis-Déri, author of the 2014 book, *Who's Afraid of the Black Blocs?: Anarchy in Action around the World*. Dupuis-Déri's work (2014; 2010) not only offers an in-depth historical analysis of the historical origin of the Black Bloc in the 1980s in Germany (and influenced by the communist *Autonomina* movement in Italy's 1960s and 1970s) and its evolution and actions in the 1990s and 2000s, it also provides empirically based insights into the Black Bloc tactics, drivers and goals. Drawing on over 50 interviews with anarchist activists (including some who have used political violence), extensive participant observations (e.g. street rallies, activist meetings) and textual analysis, his analysis highlights the ideological rationale and motivational-emotional drivers behind the use of Black Bloc violence in the context of street protest and beyond. He argues that the use of political force, which is usually 'limited to wrecking public and private property, tearing down security fences, and battling against the police', is 'embedded in the language of revolutionary, or at least insurrectional, combativeness and especially of intense anger against a nonegalitarian, unjust, murderous system' (p. 54). This is not 'random vandalism' (p. 62), but 'primarily symbolic and concerned with political communication (p. 56). This echoes the conclusion of Juris's (2005) analysis of the anti-capitalist protests in Genoa in 2001. He argues that the 'Black Bloc militancy generally has a specific communicative logic: destruction of the symbols of corporate capitalism and the state. … Black Bloc performative violence tends to be neither random nor senseless' (Juris 2005: 420) but communicates 'a radical anti-system critique' (p. 427). Juris (2005: 428) concludes that performative violence, enacted especially by the Black Bloc at the Genoa protests, constitutes a 'double-edge sword': While it energises segments of the protest and increases public 'visibility', it also contributes to 'official efforts to criminalize dissent' and divide the anti-capitalist protest.

The Black Bloc's use of violence is typically the result of individuals' strategic choice and the assessment that non-violent forms of political actions are insufficient or ineffective (Dupuis-Déri 2010: 73). However, Dupuis-Déri (2010: 55) further argues that rationality and reason are only one part of the decision to resort to force; the other is

emotions, more specifically anger and 'rage in the face of injustice (poverty, racism, police brutality and the like)'. For Black Bloc participants, this emotional state justifies the use of violence as a form of defence or response to what they regard as much more lethal and worse *structural* violence linked to imperialism, racism and capitalism. 'Taking militant action or, indeed, militant force is thus perceived by some as a legitimate way to express anger against an infuriating system' – or in the words of one of Dupuis-Déri's Black Bloc interlocutors: 'Capitalism kills… It is right to respond to overwhelming injustice with anger' (Dupuis-Déri 2010: 55).[14]

According to Dupuis-Déri's (2010: 68-72) findings, the use of Black Bloc political violence as a form of what Herbert Marcuse referred to as 'uncivil disobedience' (Paris 2003) remains highly contested and criticised by mainstream social justice and anti-capitalist movements within which the Black Bloc operates. Violence as a political tactic is often rejected by the (self-proclaimed) leadership of these broader movements, not only from a moral standpoint, but also because it is seen as ultimately harming the broader movement's efficacy and chances of success. Dupuis-Déri's (2010: 71) identifies a 'clash between two visions of democracy': While the broader (far-left) movement seeks to 'assert that it is a homogeneous political entity that speaks with one voice' with a clear representation and leadership, for the Black Bloc anarchist parts 'it is not a matter of representing the movement'. They advocate a 'diversity of tactics' (p. 63), which may include the use of force and violent disruption, and see their political actions as an 'unmediated exercise of political sovereignty' (Breaugh, cited in Dupuis-Déri 2010: 71) by the individual (or a small 'affinity group') in 'an insurrectional moment fuelled by a strong desire … for freedom that fractures the social and political order of domination' (Dupuis-Déri 2010: 71; see also Paris 2003).

The use of violence is also a matter of internal discussion within Black Bloc activists, as Dupuis-Déri (2010: 68) found. 'Some Black Bloc participants deploy a hollow political and moral discourse to account for what they derive from the use of force: a feeling of elation, a rather macho sensation of power'; and the use of violence sometimes becomes 'synonymous with political or moral distinctions'. Such attitudes have been criticised internally, rejecting it as 'dogmatic violence' which is as bad as 'dogmatic pacifism' as one of the interview partners stated.

Dupuis-Déri (2010: 73) concludes that those who engage in Black Bloc tactics and, at times, in political force tend to consider the use of violence as 'qualitatively superior, in political and moral terms, to the violence of their enemies', for three reasons: first, their violence is 'far less destructive', compared to 'state and capitalist violence'; second, they 'target symbols of capitalist and state injustice' (p.73); and third, they themselves decide about the use of violence 'through a participatory, deliberative decision-making process whereby those who make the decision are also the ones who execute them' (p. 74).

Antifa online mobilisation

Very few empirical studies on contemporary antifascist movements have examined digital facets of their rhetoric and actions, especially on social media. The above described study by Neumayer (2015) falls under this rubric, although her analysis targets not only antifa but examined the social

[14] In addition to this symbolic defence against structural violence, Black Bloc tactics have sometimes also been described in a more pragmatic way as a form of effective defence against the actions of (riot) police in the escalation of street protests (Dupuis-Déri 2010: 57).

media use also of more mainstream left-wing protestors against a far-right rally in Germany. Klein's (2019) US study of the 'Twitter rivalry of two groups of the alt-Right and antifascist movement' during the six weeks before the Charlottesville alt-right protests in 2017 defines its subject of interest more narrowly. Klein analysed the Twitter activities of two alt-right (Proud Boys and Oath Keepers) and two antifa groups (Antifa NYC and Antifa Berkley) between 1 July and 15 August 2017, a time period that saw an escalating rhetorical battle in the lead-up to the deadly clashes in Charlottesville. Overall, 847 tweets were collected and analysed in terms of content as well as their 'intended appeal to the larger community' (Klein 2019: 303). The analysis confirms the oppositional nature of the groups' messaging and actions: While alt-right tweets primarily focussed on 'Antifa as their chief opposition, along with U.S. institutions such as the mainstream media, the liberal electorate, and so-called deep state conspirators in the federal government' (p. 304), the Antifa groups targeted primarily alt-right groups, followed by 'other movements it deems fascist, including White supremacists, the pro-Trump electorate, Fox News, and law enforcement' (p. 305). Accusations of racism is a key factor in their tweets. This is applied to alt-right but also other traditional hate groups (e.g. White Supremacy), the police and state agencies, right wing media (Fox News) and the American Right more broadly; the latter being portrayed as complicit in racism and hate. The police are typically described as, at best, sympathetic to the alt-right, while Antifa 'often portrays itself as "victims of the police" and as "martyrs"' (p. 308) and at the same time as a resistance army that stands up to hate. Klein also found that antifa emphasised its solidarity with and 'commitment to protecting minority communities' (p. 311) and commonly raised alarm, both in defensive and explicitly confrontational ways ("Whenever we see them, they need to be confronted and opposed. At the bars, on the street, at their rallies, wherever"). Another typical feature in antifa's tweets revolves around the attempt to expose the identities of its 'enemies' on the far-right spectrum ('doxxing'), a practice much less common in the alt-right tweets in this study. Applying Bandura's moral disengagement theory, Klein (2019: 315) concludes that the two alt-right as well as the two antifa groups seek 'to justify the "rightness of their actions"': While the alt-right groups considers it their call to duty to protect America from alleged domestic threats, antifa cast themselves as 'civil rights agents with a moral duty to protect' and stand up against their racist opponents. Klein's observation of this violence-as-defence argument among antifa confirms other research findings on Black Bloc tactics (Dupuis-Déri 2010) and anarchist policing (Vysotsky 2015).

Studies on antifascist movements, actions and tactics all acknowledge that antifascism is, at least to some extent, a response to fascism or, to the rise of far-right or alt-right movements more broadly (Bray 2017). That does not necessarily mean that antifa is a 'quintessentially reactive phenomenon' (Copsey 2016: 158). Arlow's (2019) study on the Irish antifa empirically challenges such a reductionist depiction, and Vysotsky's (2015) and Bray's (2017) analysis of antifa groups support Arlow's claim by highlighting the deeper ideological mindsets and goals behind most antifascist movements. Nevertheless, no one would deny that antifa's actions are shaped, at least in some ways, by the actions of far-right movements – and that far-right groups' mobilisation often targets their far-left political opponents (Klein 2019). This multifaceted dynamic interplay is at the centre of this study. The following section of this literature review focuses on conceptual and empirical scholarship around what has been commonly

tagged as 'cumulative extremism' (Eatwell 2006) in recent years.

3. Cumulative extremism: the interplay between far-left and far-right movements

Research on the far-left, and especially on antifascist movements and actions, has consistently addressed the interplay between far-left ('antifascist') and far-right ('fascist') groups. This has been at the core of many analyses, both historical (e.g. Fox 2019) and contemporary (e.g. Klein 2019; Neumayer 2015). Against this backdrop, it may be surprising that the concepts to describe the dynamic interactions between opposing radical groups (such as 'cumulative extremism') were introduced into the scholarly (and political) debate only in the mid-2000s and in the context of the clashes between far-right and radical *Islamist* groups in the UK. Initially these concepts have not been applied to the much more longstanding interplay between far-left and far-right movements, which reaches back to the very origins of antifascism in the 1930s (recent exception are Macklin and Busher [2015] and Carter [2020]). This is not to say that scholars had previously been unaware of the fact that opposing radical movements have adapted strategies and actions in response to their respective opponents. Academics such as Macklin and Busher (2015) and Carter (2020: 10-14) remind us of several social movement scholars, such as McAdam (1983) or Zald and Useem (1987), who have – decades earlier – observed dynamic 'cycles of innovation and adaptations involving opposing movements' (Macklin and Busher 2015: 54). However, these dynamics have not received much attention outside social movement scholarship until the 2000s, when they gained wider prominence in academia and political debates (mainly in Britain) in the context of clashes between far-right nationalist and radical Islamist groups.

The following sections examine how these interactions between opposing radical groups have been conceptualised and discussed in the contemporary academic literature, and how scantly they have been applied in empirical research to date.

Various terms have been proposed to capture the interplay between different forms of opposing radical or extremist political groups. Apart from Eatwell's (2006) 'cumulative extremism', a variety of synonymous or closely related terms have been used to refer to 'the way in which one form of extremism can feed off and magnify other forms' (Eatwell 2006: 205). Douglas Pratt (2015: 3), for example, introduced the concept of 'reactive co-radicalisation' to describe how 'Islamic extremism provokes a reactionary extremism from parts, at least, of the non-Muslim world', while 'Muslim extremism appears often in response to the perception of an aggressive and impositional colonising non-Muslim world'. In a 2016 book chapter, Pratt links reactive co-radicalisation to widespread 'anxiety about Islam' and Islamophobia, when he writes:

> …this ignorance-based perception [of Islam] aids and abets the phenomenon identified as reactive co-radicalisation. The reaction to the perception of Islam leads to a form of extremism in its own right, such as evidenced by the Swiss ban on the building of minarets, and the Norwegian massacre carried out by Anders Behring Breivik. This paradoxically fuels the Islamist rhetoric that stokes the fires of Islamist extremism. (Pratt 2016: 31)

Others have used terms such as 'reciprocal radicalization' (Knott, Lee and Copeland 2018; Ebner 2017: Holbrook and Taylor 2013),

'cumulative radicalisation' (Bartlett and Birdwell 2013) or 'tit-for-tat' radicalisation (Jackson 2011) to describe similar dynamics between the action and rhetoric of anti-Muslims groups on the far-right fringe of the political spectrum and radical Islamist groups. Ebner's (2017) book, *The Rage: The Vicious Circle of Islamist and Far-Right Extremism*, for example, draws on several years of undercover (online and offline) investigations to analyse the convergences and symbiotic relationship between far-right (e.g. EDL) and Islamist groups (e.g. *Hizb ut-Tahrir*) (see also Abbas 2017), emphasising its 'spiralling violence effect' (p. 159), driven by mutual retaliation acts.[15]

Eatwell's (2006) 'cumulative extremism', however, has become the most commonly used concept in academia, and it has also entered into policymakers' and practitioners' debates on extremism, at least in the UK (Busher and Macklin 2015: 884-885). Eatwell's (2006: 212) analysis of the threats to community cohesion in the UK in the first half of the 2000s raises the question of 'how different forms of extremism are constructed in discourse by other extremists and how they relate in the more concrete world'. He discusses the example of the British National Party (BNP) and National Front (NF) and their strategy to increasingly target 'Islam as Public Enemy No. 1' since the early 2000s by focussing on radical or extreme elements within the Muslim communities, such as the radical Finsbury Park preacher Hamsa or the radical Islamist group Al-Muhajiroun (Eatwell 2006: 213-214).[16]

Subsequently, scholars have used the term cumulative extremism primarily in the context of potentially escalating dynamics and mutually reinforcing interplays between anti-Muslim, far-right groups (often euphemistically referred to as counterjihad movement) and radical or extremist Islamist groups and actions (Bartlett and Birdwell 2013; Littler and Feldman 2015; Feldman 2012; Goodwin 2013; Eatwell and Goodwin 2010; Ebner 2017). Carter (2020: 5) broadly differentiates between studies that focus more on the *rhetorical* escalation and the 'feeding-off-each-other' between opposing groups, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, those more concerned with the potential *tactical* (violent) escalation (see also Busher and Graham 2015: 887-888). What most studies in either of these two categories have in common is that they not only point to the responsive nature of opposing movements but, more specifically, tend to suggest the potential (or likelihood) of rhetorical or tactical *escalation* between far-right and radical Islamist groups, implying that violence on both sides may 'cumulate' into a spiral of 'tit-for-tat' retaliation actions on both sides. Goodwin (2013: 5), for example, posits:

> … It [the far-right English Defence League] emerged in response to protests by radical Islamists at a homecoming parade for the Royal Anglican Regiment (which was returning from Iraq). Its formation, therefore, is an example of what Roger Eatwell (2006) describes as 'cumulative extremism', whereby the

[15] Hutchinson (2017) published a short essay related to this interplay where he calls for great attention to the interplay of factors and narratives involved in the radicalisation of Islamists and certain elements of the Australian far right.

[16] Although Eatwell's elaborations focus mainly on the interplay between far-right and radical Islamist groups, he briefly mentioned (without further discussing) how anti-fascist groups were confronting the street actions of the far-right National Front in Bradford in 2001, seeking to 'encourage Muslim resistance' and 'to attack extreme right activist and the police' (Eatwell 2006: 213).

> activities of one extremist group trigger the formation of another manifestation, and possibly thereafter a spiral of counter-mobilization or even conflict.

In 2010, Eatwell and Goodwin paint a dramatic picture of these processes of allegedly magnifying manifestations of political violence. In the conclusion of their 2010 edited volume, *The New Extremism in 21st Century Britain*, they warn these processes of cumulative extremism may be 'more threatening to the liberal democratic order than attacks from lone wolf extreme Right-Wingers or even *al-Qaida*-inspired spectacular bombings' (Eatwell and Goodwin 2010: 243).

Despite the increasing popular use of the term cumulative extremism in and beyond academia, it has often remained poorly conceptualised and applied without much rigor; this assessment also holds true for related terms such as reciprocal radicalisation. Busher and Macklin (2015: 885) generally welcome the attention paid to the dynamics between different radical movements (not least because it helped to encourage a 'welcome adjustment to the overwhelming focus on Islamist terrorism'), but they argue

> that more work is needed on this concept and in some cases greater care is required in its application – if it is to provide a *useful* addition to the vocabulary of scholarly and policy debates about extremism, radicalisation, and political violence. (Busher and Macklin 2015: 885; emphasis in the original)

In another article, Macklin and Busher (2015: 54) also call for more 'detailed empirical work' to 'tease out the complexities and contingencies' the term seeks to describe. To make a contribution to fill this empirical gap, the two scholars analyse 'four waves of movement-countermovements in post-war Britain': (1) the British fascist movement around Oswald Mosley and their opposing antifascist '43 Group' in the 1940s; (2) the National Front and the Socialist Workers Party ('Battle of Lewisham') in the 1970s; (3) the Anti-Fascist Action and the extreme right in the mid-1980s and early 1990s; and (4) the English Defence League and (militant) radical Islamists like Al-Muhajiroun since the 2009. Their conclude that, while 'opposing movements may be responsive to one another, it is far less evident that these interactions will always, or are even likely, to produce substantial and sustained spirals of violence' (Macklin and Busher 2015: 65). Drawing on their analysis of these four (mostly historical) case studies, they make four observations:

(a) 'Most of the time patterns of violence were fairly stable' (p. 58).
(b) Violence of one group 'did not beget greater or even further violence' (ibid.) by the opposing groups.
(c) When 'interactive escalation' occurred, they manifested themselves in temporary spike rather than spiralling violence (p. 59).
(d) It remained unclear to what extent the most violent actions were carried out in response to the oppositional movement's actions (p. 60-61).

Similar to Mackling and Busher (2015), Carter (2017) also posits that not much empirical work has been done on these dynamic (and possibly escalating) interactions of opposing political movements. To address this gap, Carter (2016: 37) offers an historical-empirical analysis of the 'Troubles in Northern Ireland' from the 1960s and early 1970s focussing on the cumulative escalation of the conflict between Irish Unionist and Republicans. Four years after this article was published, Carter (2020) released the currently most thorough empirical-historical examination of

processes of cumulative extremism. Based on a qualitative analysis of primary and secondary sources, he delivers a comparative historical analysis of the interplay of fascists and anti-fascist movements during distinct time periods (1920-1940; 1970s-1980s; and 1990s), the conflict in Ireland (1960-1976) and, most recently, the clashes between 'Islamist and counter-jihad in Britain' (2009-2018). This book makes a crucial contribution to the scholarship on these dynamic movement-countermovement processes and has received appraisal from leading academics in the field, including Joel Busher and Roger Eatwell. Some of Carter's key findings are presented here in greater detail, also because Carter's (2020), together with Busher and Macklin's (2015) conceptual work on cumulative extremism (CE) constitutes the theoretical framework of our own study on the dynamic interplay between far-left and far-right groups in Australia.

The aim of Carter's (2020: 7) comparative analysis of (mostly) historical movement-countermovement dynamics is to identify 'factors … central to the development of CE and to then construct a theoretical framework through which to assess the likelihood of cumulative extremism emerging between two or more antagonistic groups'. In the conclusion of his book, he syntheses the findings and distils some key factors that help build such a theoretical framework around CE.

First, Carter (2020: 200) highlights the importance of whether the 'cleavage' between the opposing groups run along 'ascriptive (e.g. ethnicity, race, nationality) or non-ascriptive (e.g. ideology, class) lines', as this affects a key question: What is the social support base they are seeking to mobilise? He argues that the potential for violent escalation is much higher where the cleavage is of an ascriptive nature as the opposing movements compete for support from very different social bases (e.g. Northern Ireland conflict). Acts of 'vicarious retribution' are then more likely, in particular in cases where there is a 'large visible support base to attack' (p. 204). The cleavage between fascist and antifascist movements, on the other hand, are more non-ascriptive (i.e. along ideological lines), and hence less likely to escalate as they both seek support from a similar social base (e.g. working class): 'It would have been astoundingly stupid for the British National Party or the Red Action to have bombed a white working class area', Carter (2020: 200) posits; these opposing groups 'are more likely to adopt a "hearts and minds" approach to achieve hegemonic dominance in a given constituency'. Other movement-specific factors that affect the risk of tactical escalation are, for example, electoral ambitions of the movements and the level of group-internal coherence and agreement on ideologies, aims and strategies (p.201).

Second, according to Carter (2020: 202), the risk of escalating CE also depends on the 'nature of the interactions between the social movements and social movement organisations themselves'. One key factor here revolves around the question as to how closely the opposing movements are 'coupled' (symmetric or asymmetric coupling): the more closely two opposing movement are coupled (e.g. conflict between loyalists and republicans in Northern Ireland), the higher are the risk of direct confrontation and escalation. Moreover, the mobilisation 'arenas' may play an important role. Referring to other social movement scholars such as Zald and Useem (1987), Carter (2020: 203), for example, argues that 'radicalisation is more likely to occur when the two movements encounter each other face-to-face "on the streets" at demonstrations'. The interaction of tightly (i.e. symmetrically) coupled movements may, however, also lead to a de-escalation, when, for example, one group changes its tactics (e.g. from confrontational street rallies to electoral ambitions), which urges

the opposing groups to also de-escalate their actions too.

Third, apart from movement-internal factors and interaction between movements, Carter (2020) highlights the strong influence of political opportunities structures (see also Busher and Macklin 2015; Lentini 2019; Piotrowski and Wennerhag 2015). 'On the whole, if institutional channels of redress (such as lobbying politicians…) are closed, to movements, they will likely start to employ tactics of direct action and civil disobedience' (Carter 2020: 205). These opportunities structures not only refer to political claim-making avenues but are also affected by 'the social setting and cultural environment of a society (e.g. rise of anti-immigration sentiments in late 1960s in the UK)' (p. 205-206) as well as 'global currents and the intersection of domestic and international political development' (p. 206). Moreover, the positioning and response of various state actors (e.g. legislator, police) influence the risk of cumulative extremism to gain momentum. State repression and harsh policing of radical movements may increase the likelihood of political violence, especially when it is seen to disproportionately target only one of two antagonist movements; or police interventions can severely limit radical social movements' ability to navigate and hence reduce the risk of violent escalations (p. 207).

Carter's (2020) and Macklin and Busher's (2015) (mostly historical) analysis of manifestations of cumulative extremism have added empirical depth to the concept, and helped sharpen the concept itself. One key argument has been that the usefulness of the term cumulative extremism relies on the acknowledgement that there are complex processes at play that reach beyond simplistic tit-for-tat retaliation actions between opposing (radical) groups (Macklin and Busher 2015: 65). With the goal to further enhance 'conceptual clarity' and ensure 'explanatory value' (Busher and Macklin 2015: 884) of cumulative extremism or related concepts, Busher and Macklin (2015) developed six proposals, which are worth being outlined in more detail here.

First, drawing on McCauley and Moskalenko's (2008) conceptualisation of narrative pyramid and action pyramid, Busher and Macklin (2015) suggest making a clear analytical differentiation between ideological radicalisation and escalation towards more violent actions (see also Carter 2020: 5) – in other words, between 'processes of affirmation and validation of opposing world views in the face of their political opponents, and … mutual escalation of protest tactics towards violent action' (Busher and Macklin 2015: 887). Factors to consider here are, among others, whether incidents are taking place online or offline, whether they include abuse or threats directed at specific individuals (or being rather general in nature), whether they express direct threats of violence; or (in the offline space) if they involve attacks and if so, verbal or physical.

Second, Busher and Macklin (2015) posit that cumulative extremism is sometimes used more narrowly to only refer to processes within radical or extreme movements, while in other contexts it additionally seeks to capture broader issues of (potentially deteriorating) community cohesion. Busher and Macklin (2015: 889) suggest distinguishing two processes: first, the 'intensification and escalation of the contest between the opposing movements' and, second, 'processes through which these movement-countermovement contests play upon and emphasise extant social and political divisions'. They argue for a broad conceptualisation that encompasses both interconnected processes, which then raises questions about (a) the relationship between both, (b) effects on the recruitment of new members into the respective movements (or sustaining existing membership), and (c) determining 'whose actions represent the

core process of CE' (e.g. solo actors, breakaway group) (p. 890).

Third, questioning the generally escalating nature of political violence and intergroup hostility, Busher and Macklin (2015: 890) propose paying more attention to the 'ebb and flow of interactions between the opposing "extremist" groups', as they may peak around certain key events (e.g. in the aftermaths of a terrorist attack) or specific encounters between the opposing groups (e.g. during a street protest). Often the escalation is short-lived and is followed by an activity drop to the level before the event. Here, the two scholars refer to the 'different wavelengths of CE' (p. 891): Movement-countermovement interactions are influenced by a range of long-term factors, such as 'formation of in-group and out-group boundaries', 'the nurturing of resentments, grievances, and hatred' or strategic deliberations, but also by 'shorter-wave processes' especially in the context of specific clashes (e.g. escalation when an important symbol , like the national flag or the Koran, are desecrated). Importantly, an analysis of cumulative extremism should explore the 'relationship between shorter-wave social and psychological processes … and the longer-wave construction of oppositional identities' (p. 892).

Fourth, Busher and Macklin (2015: 892) draw on social movement scholarship to argue for greater attention to be paid to the 'wide spectrum of interactional effects and pathways between opposing movements'. This may include *direct* effects, where, for example, one group strategically adopts some of the mobilisation strategies or symbols of their opponent (e.g. far-right groups imitating the antifascist 'Black Bloc' style; see Pisoiu and Lang 2015), or *indirect* effects, where, for example, one group's actions lead to changes in the legal or political environment (e.g. enhanced police powers or more restrictive public protest laws), which then also affect the oppositional movement and require tactical adaptations. In this context, Busher and Macklin (2015: 893) propose 'shift[ing] away from treating CE as a binary process involving two (or perhaps three) extremist groups, and instead conceiv[ing] of CE as a broader process of "coevolution" involving multiple actors', including other social movement groups, various state actors (e.g. government, police), media and social media actors, and 'individuals and groups who hold special symbolic value for the activist group' (p. 894) or enjoy a high level of recognition within the respective group (e.g. family of a victim of a terror attack; members of the armed forces).

Fifth, and related to the previous argument about multiple pathways and influencers, Busher and Macklin (2015) call on scholars working on cumulative extremism phenomena to include the 'wider cultural, and political environment' into their analysis (see also Carter 2020). The legislative environment and policing response to collective actions, for example, may affect process of cumulative extremism: repressive policing, for example, may shut down public actions of radical groups, but it may also increase the risk of further contraction and increased militancy (Busher and Macklin 2015: 896). Busher and Macklin (2015: 895) also argue that in cases where narratives of radical movements resonate with popular views in the media or wider society, it would be 'more likely that the movement-countermovement contest translates into a wider process of community polarization'. Moreover, the dynamics between opposing movements is affected by 'the extent and nature of the opportunities for contact between opposing activists and whether these contacts are more or less conducive to context escalation or de-escalation' (p. 895).

The sixth and final proposal to sharpen the explanatory value of CE is to examine how opposing radical movements are more or less tightly or loosely 'coupled' (se also Carter 2020: 202-203).

Busher and Macklin (2015) observe potential asymmetries in the coupling of opposing movements, where within a given relationship between movement and counter-movement, 'one movement is in effect more tightly coupled to its opponent than vice versa' (p. 897) (e.g. counter-jihad groups more tightly coupled with radical Islamist movements than the other way around). Moreover, the two scholars argue that it is 'quite conceivable' that opposing movements are tightly coupled with regards to their rhetoric and narratives but more loosely coupled in terms of their actions and tactics. These divergences may be due to differences in the political opportunity structures and 'economic, social, and human capital' (p. 898) available to the respective movements as well as different constraints and, consequently, different action repertoires, which may also be affected by the specific position of the groups within its own 'organizational life cycle' (e.g. greater risk of behavioural, tactical radicalisation during stages of organisational decline) (p. 898).

Busher and Macklin's six proposals to sharpen the conceptual clarity of cumulative extremism are 'intended to provide a more solid platform for future research on processes of CE' (Busher and Macklin 2015: 899). Arguing against simplistic tit-for-tat scenarios of 'spirals of violence', they serve as a reminder to take into account the complexities and non-linear nature of these dynamic interaction between opposing radical movements, influenced by a range of external and internal actors and circumstances. As Macklin and Busher (2015: 54) highlight, such a more nuanced approach to cumulative extremism may also help avoid 'a more general tendency towards risk inflation' in the political debate about radicalisation, which 'is likely to encourage overreaching of security apparatus'.

Against the backdrop of the conceptual advancements, Carter's (2020: 6) definition of cumulative extremism appears to be the most comprehensive and nuanced to date:

> the dynamic of escalation that can develop between competing social movement organisations and their (prospective) social bases as they interact with each other, the state, and third party groups. The escalation involves the adoption of increasingly radical and violent repertoires of contention as well as the mobilisation of larger numbers of activists; both of which can provoke, and in turn be fuelled by, communal polarisation.

Despite the emerging empirical (although primarily historical) examination of the dynamics between opposing political movements, the contemporary (rhetorical and physical) clashes between far-right and far-left movements do not appear to have attracted any significant research attention – not in North America, the UK or continental Europe and also not in Australia. This is where our empirical study seeks to make an original contribution.

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