



DIFFERENTIAL PARTICIPATION IN SIEGE CULTURE

LARPocalypse: Part Two

FULL REPORT
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FULL REPORT

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This report is part two of a three part series analysing the role of subcultural theory and the constraints and protections against violence that may be at work within extreme-right subcultures. You can read the other two reports and all other outputs from this project at: www.crestresearch.ac.uk/projects/constraining-violence/

ABOUT CREST

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OVERVIEW

- This report is part two of a three part series analysing the role of subcultural theory and the constraints and protections against violence that may be at work within extreme-right subcultures.
- By looking at a specific right-wing subculture – Siege Culture – described more fully in the previous report, this report develops the concept of differential participation: the idea that participation in extremist subcultures is not uniform and provides opportunities to engage in a variety of roles.

DIFFERENTIAL PARTICIPATION

- A key observation of this report is that participation in extreme-right subcultures takes many forms.
- Terrorism studies has paid less attention to the different roles offered by terrorist groups. Where it has, the focus of much research has been behavioural, primarily concerned with what individuals do.
- In contrast, the subcultural literature places greater emphasis on the social dimension and how individual roles mesh with the wider social environment created by subcultures.
- The subcultural literature has also added a temporal aspect, recognising that roles vary over time, with transitions sometimes accompanied by elaborate rituals and rules.
- There have also been several examples of differential participation set out explicitly within Siege Culture or adjacent spaces with different groups outlining their own roles and responsibilities.

- Combining these perspectives gives an overarching framework for analysis that considers participation as roles defined by both behaviours and the social relationships that characterise them overtime.

DIFFERENTIAL PARTICIPATION IN SIEGE CULTURE

- This report seeks to identify empirical evidence of the different roles on offer within Siege Culture.
- The three key research questions that orient the analysis are:
 - What behaviours can be observed in the subcultural data?
 - What status do these roles attract?
 - How do these roles evolve over time?
- The analysis identified four sets of roles available within the subcultural data primarily grouped by behaviour: organiser, ideologue, offender, and technician. These roles were further divided in some cases into sub-roles. The roles of women and girls is considered separately due to significantly different dynamics and the low number of cases available for analysis.
- Where possible some judgement was made on the relative status of the individual undertaking the role and how this may have changed over time.
- Despite the scattered evidence, roles within Siege Culture appear to be fluid and opportunistic. In some cases, individuals take on multiple roles as required.
- There was also evidence of status changing over time. In some cases this was inferred from the behaviours of participants, in other cases there were clear examples of participants receiving

compliments, or (more often) criticism and insults.

- Both an individual's role and an individual's status were found to change over time.
- Given the limited data the findings should be treated as a proof of concept rather than a comprehensive typology of roles within Siege Culture.

CONCLUSIONS

- Despite the limitations of the data, in particular the absence of internal perspectives from those directly engaged in Siege Culture, there is enough to strongly suggest that participation is differentiated in ways similar to other extreme and non-extreme subcultures.
- Both research and practice within extremism will benefit from recognising that binary distinctions of extreme and non-extreme mask a wide range of behaviours, status, and trajectory, and that extremist participation reflects different levels of participation across a variety of roles.
- This has several broader implications for understanding risk and when designing interventions:
 - If specific roles are linked to meeting individual needs, or providing individuals with specific benefits then this may limit the potential for violence because they may reward ongoing engagement in non-violent roles. Transitioning to offending roles, particularly terroristic ones, may have limited appeal for those who are well established within an extremist subculture and are satisfied with what they gain from this involvement.
 - Where trajectories are altered through external action, the threat of action, or internal changes, then offending roles and potentially serious violence may become more appealing. Those tasked with policing extremist

subcultures will benefit from recognising the unintended second order effects of changes in individual trajectories.

- For those tasked with working with individuals, either to pre-empt offending or to rehabilitate those who have offended, a granular understanding of subcultural participation and the meaning attached to it can be a potential indicator of the behaviours and needs a specific individual finds meaningful and necessary to their own version of a "good life".
- The final report examines these implications in greater depth through the lens of the Good Lives Model which is used to understand the potential constraints and protections that may be associated with engagement in extremist subcultures as a function of the 'goods' or needs and benefits they afford.

OVERVIEW

This report is part two of a three part series analysing the role of subcultural theory and the constraints and protections against violence that may be at work within extreme-right subcultures. Running throughout the series is the argument that various forms of right-wing extremism can be analysed as a series of overlapping subcultures. Extreme-right subcultures propagate and normalise deviant beliefs and values which include the hatred of outgroups and the acceptability or celebration of violence. However, participation in subcultures is differentiated, not uniform. Violent roles, including terrorist roles, account for a minority of actors; for most participants, most of the time, participation is non-violent.

Specific roles may grant participants significant benefits or goods they find unobtainable within the bounds of mainstream culture or other pro-social subcultures. Goods may include opportunities to use creative skills, form social bonds, and obtain recognition and status from a peer group. Violent roles, including terrorist roles, come with high potential costs. Moving from a non-violent role to a violent one risks destabilising or cutting off other roles (through death or incarceration) within a subculture which would inhibit access to goods that have come to matter to them. In effect terrorist actors cash in their goods, trading any current role for a single and temporary opportunity to play a terrorist role.

In some subcultures such actors are celebrated, often as “saints” or “martyrs”, but the near certainty of death or incarceration as the result of becoming a known terrorist actor means that any further participation in the subculture, and therefore access to further goods, is curtailed. This mechanic may help to explain the seeming inertia of much of the extreme-right. Many of those embedded in subcultures, particularly tightly knit ones such as Siege Culture (the featured case study), can be understood to be generally satisfied with

their lot and less likely to ‘cash in’. This interpretation highlights the risks that come with instability within extreme subcultures. Where individuals lose access to roles and goods, for example through legal action or internal dissent, then judgements around the benefits and costs of cashing in may change.

This report analyses a specific right-wing subculture – Siege Culture – described more fully in the previous report. Beginning with an analysis of current research and literature which identifies different roles within subcultures more generally, and extremist subcultures specifically, this report develops the concept of differential participation as the main analytical framework.

Differential participation acknowledges that engagement in extremist subcultures, or subcultures of any kind, is not uniform. While there is no definitive framework for analysing subcultural participation, three dimensions are taken as the basis for the analysis of Siege Culture. These are specific behaviours associated with participation (e.g., creating propaganda, leadership), the relative status of an individual (i.e., how others within the subculture regard them), and trajectory (i.e., how behaviour and status may change over time).

The data available to support this analysis was limited. This is attributed to the overall clandestine nature of Siege Culture (especially from 2017 onwards, see previous report), the limited amount of reporting generally, and in some cases the highly partisan accounts which seek to either cast participants in a bad light or humiliate them, or in some cases celebrate and champion their actions. In addition there was little to no information about how participants saw either their own involvement or their opinion of others participating in the subculture. As a result the conclusions reached in this report are tentative and

will benefit from further research which, ideally, draws on the accounts of those with first-hand experience of this, or other, extremist subcultures.

The report outlines a range of behaviours within the Siege Culture subculture and where possible adds additional detail on status and change over time associated with specific roles. Roles were not mutually exclusive or clearly delineated, individuals held multiple roles, for example, in several cases leadership figures were also key propagandists and ideologues. The status attached to specific roles was often difficult to determine but there were examples of higher status individuals as well as incidents of individuals losing status as a result of internal dynamics. Overall, roles were dynamic, with participation changing according to opportunity and need, in some cases as a result of external events, in others because of internal developments within the subculture.

Despite the limitations of the data, in particular the absence of internal perspectives, there is enough to strongly suggest that participation in Siege Culture is differentiated in ways similar to other extreme and non-extreme subcultures. This has implications for approaches to understanding extremist participation, suggesting a need for more granular approaches

to participation that consider specific roles. The framework of behaviour, status, and trajectory, provides one possible way to capture differential participation beyond some of the more rigid typologies that are commonly used in research on terrorist groups.

Beyond a generalised understanding of extremist participation, differential participation has relevance for efforts to prevent or counter violent extremism (P/CVE), including risk assessments, suggesting the need to consider not just involvement in extreme subcultures but specific behaviours and how they may change over time. In particular, through the framework of strength-based approaches that runs throughout this report, it suggests that changes in access to extremist subcultures and related goods may be important in understanding how risk may fluctuate over time and why some events, including internal ones may trigger changes in behaviours. While participation in extremist subcultures is always likely to carry negative connotations, researchers and practitioners will benefit from recognising that some forms of participation may be rewarding enough that they limit the motivation to graduate to more violent roles and may therefore perform some sort of protective function.

DIFFERENTIAL PARTICIPATION

“A movement is pioneered by men of words, materialized by fanatics and consolidated by men of action”

(Hoffer 1952: 182)

This report’s precursor considered the development of Siege Culture and its position as a subculture, suggesting the need for a greater focus on the internal dynamics of extremist subcultures that offer protagonists experiences and meanings unavailable elsewhere. The following discussion develops this perspective further and considers internal dynamics of extremist subcultures, specifically the different types of roles (differential participation) that may be available to protagonists within extremist subcultures.

The analysis draws on three sources of literature: terrorism studies, wider subcultural theory, and explicit examples from within Siege Culture and related spaces. It demonstrates that the idea of differential participation is embedded in subcultural studies and to a much lesser extent terrorism studies. The overall finding is that Siege Culture, and other extremist subcultures, are unlikely to simply be production lines for terrorists and revolutionaries. Instead, participation in these spaces is likely to be wide ranging with participants fulfilling many different roles of which only a few are likely to include violence.

DIFFERENTIAL PARTICIPATION IN TERRORISM STUDIES

With only a few exceptions, terrorism studies has not engaged in-depth with the different roles offered by terrorism groups (Altier et al 2022: 755). Altier et al (2022: 755) argue that terrorism studies tends to approach terrorists as being homogenous and ignores “key differences in individual who become involved in terrorism”. This extends beyond individual

characteristics to encompass the experiences of participants who enter terrorist organisations which provides opportunities to learn and adopt differing roles (Ross 1996: 136).

One approach to terrorist roles has been to focus on the technical aspects of terrorist participation. For example, Perliger et al (2016) differentiated between non-violent, skilled and unskilled participants in a range of terrorist networks. Another analysis focused on identifying relationships between the types of roles engaged in while a member of a group and desisting from the group. It identified 15 roles grouped under three broad headings across a range of terrorist groups based on autobiographical accounts (Altier et al 2022: 760).

Leadership	Violent	Support/Logistical
Executive leader	Violent operator	Publicity officer
Low-level leader	Bomb-maker	Intelligence officer
	Operational planner	Security officer
		Political officer
		Trainer
		Financier
		Transporter/courier
		Materials acquisition/storage
		Recruiter
		General member

Table 1: Roles in Terrorist Groups (Altier et al 2022: 760)

Gill and Horgan’s (2013) overview of the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) noted five categories of violent activity: gunman, bomber, criminal activities (e.g., bank robbery), bomb-maker, and gun-runner. They went on to note that roles within PIRA were not mutually exclusive and that individuals within their dataset could hold multiple roles at any one time or shift between roles over time.

Studies of digital networks, albeit relatively easily accessible ones, have helped to expand understanding of roles beyond the technical, adding in more nuanced roles based on different properties and behaviours of actors. De Bruyn’s (2021) analysis of jihadist forums identified a range of behavioural profiles by dividing users into local groups and monitoring the balance

of communications between them. This resulted in a range of profiles ranging from the ultraperipheral to the global and encompassing “connector” roles which facilitated communication between groups (DeBruyn 2021: 304).

Huey et al’s (2019) study of the role of female supporters of Islamic State (IS) argued that rather than being restricted to supportive roles as commonly assumed, female IS supporters online undertook a wide range of roles including supportive and non-traditional roles. Via a thematic analysis of pro-IS Twitter accounts Huey et al (2019: 450) developed a typology of eight roles played by women within the digital network (see Table 2).

Fan-Girls	An extremely enthusiastic IS fan who supports IS because she believes it to be cool. The least ideologically committed role with a tendency to post the greatest amount of personal information.
Baqiya Members	Women who viewed themselves as part of a community and referred to the Baqiya family. Baqiya members offered emotional support to other women and expressed solidarity with other Baqiya accounts.
Propagandists	Women who share pro-IS propaganda and doctrine. Rarely posted private information.
Recruiters	Provided emotional, information and logistic support to women interested in travelling to IS territory.
The Muhajirah/ Muhijrat	Women who publicly announced migrating to IS territory. Often talked about their new lives in positive terms and how they contributed by marrying fighters and raising the next generation.
Widows	Women who migrated and married a since deceased fighter. Often posted about how proud they were.
Terrorists	Those convicted of terrorism offences.
Leavers	Those who publicly announced their departure from pro-IS networks.

Table 2: Typology of female IS supporter online roles

The role of women in extreme-right groups has also produced some useful distinctions. Blee’s analysis of the roles of women inside US-based “organised racism” identified three roles for women in racist groups: familial, social, and operative. These roles were unevenly distributed, with Christian Identity and Klan groups placing women in more

familial roles associated with the creation of “nurturing racist family” (Blee 2003: 123). The familial role identified by Blee overlaps heavily with the ‘tradwife’ archetype present in much of the contemporary extreme and radical right (see: Mattheis 2018). Social roles are focused on forming relationships and strengthening bonds within groups,

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generating situations in which members spend their free time with other members (Blee 2003: 130). Finally, operative roles were more common in the skinhead scene specifically. Blee emphasises that although women were rarely in open leadership positions, they often exerted informal leadership by providing group cohesion, mediating conflict, and nurturing collective identity (Blee 2003: 134).

The slender engagement with differential participation within terrorism studies contrasts the much greater emphasis in the subcultural literature. In part this may be explained by the heavy focus within terrorism studies on entry to organised groups and changes in individual belief (i.e., radicalisation) which leaves it less well placed to interpret the chaotic and overlapping complexity of contemporary extreme-right subcultures. In other words, research is more concerned with how individuals enter a subculture as opposed to what they do when they get there. In addition, the primary focus of much research has been behavioural, concerned with what individuals do, overlooking the social aspects of roles. While behaviours are important, the subcultural literature gives greater emphasis to the social dimension and how individual roles mesh in the wider social environment created by subcultures.

DIFFERENTIAL PARTICIPATION IN SUBCULTURES

Examples of differential participation are common throughout the variegated literature on subcultures. Whereas the terrorism studies literature has focused largely on behaviours and function in identifying roles (e.g., “bomber”), the subcultural literature is typically less proscriptive and more focused on less tangible, social ideas such as status, respect, creativity, and masculinity. To this the subcultural literature has added a temporal aspect, recognising that roles vary overtime, with transitions sometimes accompanied by elaborate rituals and rules.

Possibly closest to some of the work on terrorist roles is work exploring the differing roles on offer within criminal and prison subcultures. Mitchell et al’s (2017) comparison of four offender-based subcultures (prison gangs, street gangs, those who adhere to the code of the street, and those who abide by prison codes) noted that hierarchy and social roles were present within all four. They argued that individuals could work their way up a “ladder” based on the internal values of the subculture such as respect and commitment (Mitchell et al 2017: 1205). The notable exception was in respect of the “code of the street” which was conceptualised as less hierarchical and lacking in distinctive social roles. Instead, it was based more on the power and respect conveyed to those who follow it (Mitchell et al 2017: 1205).

The presence of the code of the street outside more formal or institutional settings, such as a gang, meant that followers were often forced to code switch, changing their behavioural norms to meet the situation they found themselves in, for example, following strict family or school rules while adhering to different rules on the street with friends (Mitchell et al 2017: 1206). Other subcultures had more strongly identifiable roles based around specific behaviours as opposed to the more ephemeral currency of respect. These included the leaders of prison gangs who were responsible for organising meetings, issuing punishment, and maintaining markets (Mitchell et al 2017: 1206). Among those who only followed the prison code, social roles were conceptualised as sitting on a continuum from the powerless to those at the centres of prison power. This was filtered through the lens of prison occupations. Mitchell et al (2017) summarise prison roles as follows.

Right-guys	The leaders who hold controlling power and influence
Square Johns	Prisoners who renounce other inmate activities and may isolate themselves entirely from other prisoners
Politicians/shot-callers	Those in key positions (e.g., prison administration) and who are able to hand out favours
Merchants/peddlers	Those seeking to control the distribution of goods and services
Fish	Newcomers lacking in understanding
Punks	Those engaging in homosexual activity or potentially someone who deviates from the prison code
Rats/squealers/snitches	Untrustworthy inmates who pass information to the administration. The least respected role.

Table 3: Summary of prison roles (Mitchell et al 2017)

Kaminski (2003) offers an account of the differing roles within Polish political prisons during the 1980s Cold War era, when he was himself an inmate. He subsequently wrote about his experiences, interpreting them through the lens of game theory. In this instance the prison code was encapsulated under the title of Grypsing, a set of norms that dictated everyday life in the Polish prisons and gulags. Four levels were identified: rookies and newbies; high-caste Grypsmen who comprised the bulk of the prison; a smaller group of suckers who were preyed upon and performed various services for the Grypsmen and are considered to be potential informers; and finally, a 1-2% group of 'fags': homosexual prostitutes or potentially rape victims. A Grypsman is allowed to assume only the active role in homosexual intercourse (Kaminski 2003: 193). Kaminski's account demonstrated that moving between castes is controlled with ceremony and initiation rites; caste membership is portable and newly arrived inmates from other prisons (newbies) are able to bring established status with them which needs to be subsequently confirmed; and rookies – those who are in prison from the first time - are admissible to the caste of Grypsmen so long as they are not "child molester, communist party member, former prison guard, policeman, prosecutor, etc." (Kaminski 2003: 193).

Moving away from offender-based subcultures and towards more taste-based ones, Howard Becker studied (among many other things) Chicago jazz musicians. He framed their culture as an example of a deviant occupation, i.e., an occupation that was legal, but sufficiently bizarre that to outsiders it would appear to be deviant (Becker 1963: 79). At the time jazz musicianship was a service and musicians performed in the main in front of live audiences. Becker noted the tension that existed between the musicians and their audiences, often described as "squares" (Becker 1963: 85), in particular the contest between a musician's own desire to play pure jazz and the audience's interest in commercial and mainstream music; one offering artistic satisfaction, the other financial. "Going commercial" was seen as selling out and would cause a musician to lose credibility in the eyes of fellow musicians and in terms of the musician's own self-respect (Becker 1963: 82). This led to a stratification of jazz musicians that Becker presented as a continuum:

"Musicians classify themselves according to the degree to which they give in to outsiders; the continuum ranges from the extreme "jazz" musician to the "commercial" musician."

(Becker 1963: 82)

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The ignominy of selling out was underpinned by a musician's own sense of specialness, informed by a self-understanding that they were "gifted" with artistic talent, which set them apart from and made them superior to, the audiences they played for (Becker 1963: 86). As a result, behaviours that violated social norms and increased the distance between true musicians and squares were widely endorsed within the subculture (Becker 1963: 87). Becker describes this need to deviate as being: "more than idiosyncrasy; it is the primary occupational value..." (Becker 1963:87).

Sarah Thornton's 1995 study of UK club cultures was heavily critical of previous work on subcultures that she saw as being overly focused on dichotomous distinctions between subculture and mainstream and as a result often too politically ambitious on behalf of their informants (Thornton 1995:3). Thornton argued that subcultures were more expressive than political and that that expression was riven with subjective "alternative hierarchy" (Thornton 1995:105). She identified three main hierarchical distinctions: the authentic and the phoney, the hip and the mainstream, and the underground and the media (Thornton 1995: 3). Underpinning these hierarchical distinctions was the idea of subcultural capital.

"Dichotomies like mainstream/subculture and commercial/alternative do not relate to the way dance crowds are objectively organised as much as to the means by which many youth cultures imagine their social world, measure their cultural worth and claim their subcultural capital."

(Thornton 1995: 96)

The complex and fluid club land did not lend itself to easy classification, yet Thornton's informants carried around in their heads complex mental maps that allowed them to navigate and categorise the space, primarily defining themselves negatively i.e., as not part of other scenes and above all not mainstream (Thornton 1995: 99). Those who failed to measure

up to this edgy outsider image were often relegated to lower rungs on the social ladder by the clubbers. Most famously "Sharon and Tracy", hypothetical provincial figures who appeared in the clubs and danced around their handbags, were immediately identified by other clubbers as being amateurs with no taste, interested in sexual opportunities over the music (Thornton 1995: 99).

"There was no fun in going to a legal rave when Sharons and Traceys know where it is as soon as you buy a ticket."

(Thornton 1995: 100)

Another examination of a music-based subculture (Muggleton 2000) found similar distinctions between authentic and inauthentic forms of participation in subcultures. Writing about punk subcultures in the 1990s, Muggleton identified several junctures where his informants made distinctions between authentic and inauthentic forms of participation. Much of this was through the frame of media labelling which is often an important juncture in the development of subcultures. Being named and defined by an external media cements the existence of subcultures which may have previously gone unacknowledged i.e., giving it a name. Those arriving after these events are sometimes deemed to be followers and fashion chasers as opposed to being authentic participants within the subculture (Muggleton 2000: 133).

One example of this tendency was an informant in Muggleton's (2000) study pointing out that early audiences for subculture's defining group The Sex Pistols all had long hair and did not resemble the cookie cutter punks that came to be synonymous with the scene. At other points personal style is held up to be a sign of commitment to the subculture, with informants deriding as "part-timers" those who wore the subcultural outfit only at specific times and at specific events (Muggleton 2000: 84). This idea develops further with other informants making the case that individual clothing is less relevant than

internal values and feeling and that even conventional clothes can be repurposed to express subcultural values (bricolage) or worn with subcultural “attitude”. As a result, those who lack this inner attitude or swagger associated with the subculture can never be deemed authentic, no matter what they wear (Muggleton 2000: 90).

The wider subcultural literature adds important social and temporal dimensions to the consideration of specific roles. In these accounts behaviours were often still important, but were augmented by additional social considerations. In the prison hierarchies, politics and sexuality were important filters with “punks” “rats” and “fags” at the bottom of the social totem. In the taste-based literature, informants were typically keen to distance themselves from others who they saw as being improperly committed or motivated such as “part-timers” or those who were considered to lack the knowledge and style (subcultural capital) required to be cool. There was also a greater sense of progression and evolution with participants able to move up (or down) hierarchies according to fortune and trends.

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There have been several examples of differential participation set out within Siege Culture or adjacent spaces. Probably the clearest example was published in the book *The Awakening of a National Socialist*. The book is undated and only credited as ‘An ironmarch.org publication’. The cover design is consistent with pre-2017 as it closely resembles work by Dark Foreigner which was in vogue until that time (Macklin & Lee, forthcoming). The content of the book is written in the first person and concerns three “idealized archetypes” of fascism: the scholar, the warrior, and the adventurer. The three archetypes are considered to overlap; each individual fascist is expected to recognise something of them in themselves but may align more with one or two perspectives than all three.

“The figures of the Scholar, the Warrior and the Adventurer represent the fundamental aspects of every Fascist and National Socialist, they stand as idealized archetypes in which one can recognize themselves, identifying with one or two of the spirits more than the remaining, yet always being a mixture of all three.”

(Ironmarch.org, n.d. p16)

The three archetypes align loosely with social roles within a fascist movement. The scholar is something akin to an ideological researcher and custodian, providing the impetus and direction for awakening, while at the same time being concerned with the “Purity of our Worldview”. The warrior is presented as a “Force Against Time” and most concerned with “Hard opposition”. The Adventurer is focused on finding “joy in the struggle” and the protection of material things deemed worthy of protection. Each has their own image and symbol, and they are presented as existing in a sequence with the scholar presented as “first spirit”, warrior second, and adventurer third.

Another example comes from the National Socialist Order of the Nine Angles (NSO9A), a spin off or re-brand of the National Socialist Order (NSO), a group which attempted to take over the mantle of Atomwaffen Division following its dissolution. Whereas the NSO seemingly tried to follow on from Atomwaffen, at some point the group broke decisively towards left hand path satanism and embedded the Order of the Nine Angles which had for a long time been a background feature of Atomwaffen. This re-brand prompted some internal dissention with premier Siege Culture website American Futurist publishing an article announcing their intention to break all ties with the NSO9A as: “...bad actors have taken over the organization and are now using it to promote The Order of the Nine Angles’ Satanism and Child Rape.” (Texas Pete 2022a). The NSO9A website promises readers “Accelerationism, National Socialism, Satanism” and features a collection of propaganda posters advocating satanism and

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extreme misogyny. A section of the website dedicated to “Salty Tears” catalogues statements made against the group, presumably for supporters to revel in their infamy amongst the wider national socialist movement.

A separate article outlines a membership structure for the NSO9A which includes three categories of membership. Membership is not seen as organised but disorganised and based on a “hierarchy of brotherhood”. Three levels of associates (purposefully not members) are identified: apprentice, acolyte and hard line. Apprentices are described as learning and having no hostility towards the NSO9A. Acolytes are “thoroughly poisoned” and have been recognised by the NSO9A. The hard line are described as having never wavered and assisting “with our infernal work”. Roles in this context contrast with the earlier example from *The Awakening of a National Socialist* in that they are based on commitment to the cause and proximity to “infernal work” rather than representing distinctive behaviours. Progression is more explicit with a participant presented as moving from the fringes to the centre as learning and commitment increases.

The third and final example drawn from within Siege adjacent spaces comes from *Militant Accelerationism*. Published on Telegram in 2021 *Militant Accelerationism* is a deliberate attempt to rebrand the wider Siege Culture audience as something more explicitly accelerationist and without the ideological baggage that had accumulated around Siege (see previous report). Where NSO9A promises accelerationism, national socialism, and satanism, *Militant Accelerationism* is almost entirely focused on promoting its brand of fascist accelerationism with little regard for the ideological reasons why or wider debates around satanism and spirituality that derailed Siege Culture (Macklin & Lee, forthcoming).

A single page within *Militant Accelerationism* – Victory From All Angles – deals with broader strategy. It identifies three distinct roles: the movementarian,

the infiltrator, and the man of direct action. The movementarian role includes members of various far and extreme-right groups and the pages include symbols associated with groups such as the Three Percenters, Proud Boys and Atomwaffen Division. It also includes a New York Police Department shield, potentially a reference to the (likely) mistaken belief that the extreme-right enjoys a broad level of silent support amongst the police and armed forces.

The inclusion of movementarians is a distinct break with past strategy in Siege Culture spaces, which have previously argued against compromising or toning down beliefs in an effort to create a mass movement.¹ In this instance however movementarians are seen as a screening stage for involvement in other roles driven by suffering the “thrashes of the dying system”. This is conceptualised as a unique role not possible for others. Infiltrators are a more concrete rendering of the idea that fascist accelerationism has a wide degree of support inside established institutions. Infiltrators within the government and other agencies of the system are envisaged as leaking examples of system hypocrisy and “directing the eyes of the system where he wants them to be”. Lastly, the men of direct action strike violently at the system. The envisaged end point is of all three roles contributing to revolution but in a “non-dogmatic way”. This example stands out as being more practical than those above. Roles are based on actual revolutionary functions rather than their mindset or level of commitment.

Each of these examples have an element of fantasy about them, the roles offered are almost entirely speculative. There is little documented evidence of the specific mindsets of Siege Culture protagonists, the levels of commitment amongst the NSO9A, and the effectiveness of fascist accelerationists in drafting support from larger and more coherent organisations or government insiders. However, these specific examples demonstrate clearly the idea of differential participation that exists within Siege Culture and

¹ The inclusion of movementarians in this section is also at odds with other chapters and authors within *Militant Accelerationism* itself which includes a short story in which a lone actor terrorist attacks multiple targets including a MAGA rally.

related settings. It also shows the extent to which roles (outside of the more ideologically neutral *Militant Accelerationism*) are not just defined by behaviour, but also reflect degrees of commitment, and specific ideological mindsets.

SUMMARY: BEHAVIOUR AND STATUS IN SIEGE CULTURE

The preceding sections offer three distinctive perspectives on differential participation in extremist subcultures: one from terrorism studies more broadly, one from subcultural studies, and one from Siege Culture adjacent spaces. All three concur that participation with subcultural spaces is not uniform; subcultures offer different opportunities to different people. In some cases (such as prisons) participation may be involuntary, trapped by the social system of the subculture against their will. In other cases, participants actively seek out and engage with different subcultures voluntarily.

Where these differing perspectives diverge is in how diverse subcultural roles are defined. There are two broad trends: behaviour and status. Behavioural differences are common to terrorism studies and reflect specific tasks and functions, such as Altier et al's (2022) political officers and different leadership levels. These distinctions make sense in relatively rigid and well-ordered groups. This was also present in the material covering prison cultures (e.g., Mitchell et al, (2017)).

Analysis of less organised spaces such as pro-IS Twitter (Huey et al 2019) start to reflect an additional social dimension which sits alongside the behavioural. This is termed status and encompasses concepts like Thornton's (2005) subcultural capital, Muggleton's (2000) references to authenticity and commitment, the heteronormativity and masculinity in Kaminiski's (2003) account, and the various degrees of commitment encapsulated in the framework of the NSO9A.

In short, in a subculture you are more than just your job. The level of regard your co-subculturalists have for you, and your feelings about them and yourself, all matter. Neither status nor behaviour are fixed, instead they likely evolve over time. The subcultural literature in some cases emphasised that roles can change, and that status can be lost as a result of reversals and challenges, driving participants back down social hierarchies.

DIFFERENTIAL PARTICIPATION IN SIEGE CULTURE

This section seeks to identify empirical evidence of the different roles on offer within Siege Culture. The previous section set out a range of dimensions on which participation within a subculture may be differentiated: behaviour, status, and trajectory. These three dimensions form the basis for an exploratory analysis of subcultural data related to Siege Culture.

This analysis identified four sets of roles, primarily grouped by behaviour: organiser, ideological, offender, technical. An additional section considered gender but this was defined primarily by identity rather than behaviour, and participant behaviours were diverse.

The amount of data varied for each set of roles, some, such as organisational roles were less well documented than others. This was often because they were more clandestine and less public facing. The most information was available on roles where participants were either creative which involved leaving behind cultural products, or where they interacted with the legal system. Each role had several sub-roles e.g., financial and leadership roles were both grouped under organiser roles.

Within individual roles and sub-roles there was considerable variation in status and trajectory. In some cases, individuals performed similar roles in both high and low status ways. For example, data from Fascist Forge shows several participants trying out creative ideological roles by producing propaganda with mixed success. Some participants received critical feedback, others more favourable engagement. Above the aspirational tier of would-be ideological creators is a tier of high-status creatives which includes known individuals such as Dark Foreigner and Hyperborean Art.

This analysis should not be taken as a comprehensive inventory of roles in Siege Culture, the limitations of the data preclude this. However, this analysis does illustrate the variety of roles on offer within Siege Culture and the benefits of considering individual behaviour, status, and trajectory fully.

SUBCULTURAL DATA AND ANALYSIS

Research on subcultures is heavily influenced by interpretive sociology and focuses on the experiences and voices of participants as opposed to objective external measurement (Muggleton 2000). While some have critiqued these approaches as being overly descriptive, research has also been able to analyse subcultures according to theoretically supported frameworks (Hebdige 1979). Subcultural data is typically messy and unstructured. As a consequence, previous analysis of subcultures has often favoured ethnographic methods which include some form of participation. Researchers have previously mixed with their subjects, sharing their culture, meanings, and experiences. In some cases this has extended to criminal activity such as illegal drug-taking (Thornton 1995). Participant observations has extended to work focused on the extreme-right (e.g., Blee 2003) and radical right (e.g., Pilkington 2016). Ethical considerations aside, this kind of analysis is more difficult in the context of Siege Culture which features an in-built ideological hostility to academia and government (the publicly acknowledged funders of this research).

Gaining any sort of insider perspective is difficult. Following the proscription of National Action in December 2016 and the movement of the wider subculture underground, gaining insider accounts became near impossible. Only a single account

of life inside National Action has come from an insider and this was in the context of the informant’s defection to an anti-fascist campaign group (Collins 2019). Without access to traditional approaches to subcultural research, the approach taken in this analysis is necessarily vicarious, piecing together aspects of the subculture based on a variety of data sources listed below.

<p><i>Nazi Terrorist: The Story of National Action</i></p>	<p>An account of the extreme-right group National Action written by Matthew Collins (Hope not Hate) on the basis of information provided by their investigations and National Action defector Robbie Mullen. This is one of the most detailed accounts of the internal workings of National Action. Despite Mullen’s involvement, the influence of Hope not Hate adds a substantive etic dimension to the text, blending insider and outsider perspectives. Nevertheless, the account is filtered through the lens of Hope not Hate, a campaigning organisation which has historically sought to expose and humiliate the extreme-right (see next report). This account likely represents a very critical take on the internal mechanics of National Action.</p>
<p>Fascist Forge</p>	<p>A transnational web forum intended to replace Iron March. Alongside public discussions, the site includes many introductory posts in which new members would attempt to prove their knowledge and credentials as well as talk about their aims in joining the site. Archived versions of these introductions were initially analysed in a paper on learning in extremist settings (Lee & Knott 2021). An archived copy of Fascist Forge remains publicly accessible via Internet Archive.</p>
<p>Kiwifarms</p>	<p>A onetime online forum dedicated to harassment and extracting humour from online drama, in particular from highly affected figures considered to be “lolcows” (i.e., could be milked for lols). The site included an ongoing thread dedicated to “John Cameron Denton & Atomwaffen Division / Siegeculture – Satanic Vampire Neo-Nazis, autistic Strasserists, Helter Skelter cult”, begun in January 2018. The thread provides some insight into the ongoing controversy and dramas within Siege Culture (including in the UK). The thread appears to be written by a mixture of those within Siege Culture and those outside it, providing an unclear mix of perspectives. Despite obvious questions over its credibility, the thread provides details that are not published elsewhere, notably around relationships within the subculture.</p>
<p>4Plebs</p>	<p>A website dedicating to archiving posts made on 4chan. This includes the /pol board. Although not as extreme as some chan sites, notably 8chan and Endchan, 4chan, and /pol specifically is a well-known gathering place for the extreme-right. Ideologically 4chan is most closely related to identitarian and ‘conventional’ neo-Nazism and has something of an antagonistic relationship with Siege Culture. However, Siege Culture figures and topics are often discussed on the site. As with Kiwifarms, the credibility of this information is often questionable.</p>
<p>Academic accounts</p>	<p>Several academic accounts provide some key insights into aspects of Siege Culture in the UK. Most notable are Macklin’s (2018) analysis of the proscription of National Action which covers some of the post-ban activity including the formation of System Resistance Network, the first UK groupuscule notably influences by <i>Siege</i>, and Keatinge et al’s (2019) work on extreme-right financing in the UK.</p>
<p>External reporting</p>	<p>A range of journalistic and campaign organisations have covered Siege Culture in some form. This has included some notable exposes and leaks (e.g., Winnipeg Free Press 2019; Schiano et al 2020).</p>
<p>Internal documents</p>	<p>This comprises web posts, publications, archived websites, and other content posted within Siege Culture. Most notably this includes material published by National Action on their website and subsequently archived via Iron March after the group’s website went down, as well as various key texts that circulated within Siege Culture such as material published via Iron March and <i>Siege</i> itself.</p>

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Given the unstructured data, analysis was mostly thematic (Clarke & Braun 2017) and was strongly informed by the previous analysis of differential participation and on identifying roles and where possible assessing status and trajectory. The three key research questions were:

- What behaviours could be observed in the subcultural data?
- What status did these roles attract?
- How did these roles evolve over time?

The analysis identified four sets of roles available within the subcultural data primarily defined by behaviour: organiser, ideological, offender, and technical. These roles were further divided in some cases into sub-roles. Where possible some judgement was made on the relative status of the individual undertaking the role and how this may have changed over time. An additional section considered the role of women within Siege Culture.

ORGANISER ROLES

Organiser roles encompassed behaviours related to maintaining the organisational connections within the subculture. This included leadership roles, but also other sub-roles that formed the connective tissue of the subculture, such as financial and networking roles. The internal organisation of Siege Culture has been one of its most opaque features and little is known about the prime movers, and even less about those lower down the social structure of the subculture. The best data comes from accounts of the internal politics of National Action (e.g., Macklin 2018; Collins 2019). Other data can be inferred from analysis of financing (e.g., Keatinge et al 2019) or the structure of subcultural spaces such as Iron March and Fascist Forge.

LEADERSHIP

Although prominent leaders are identified in several accounts of Siege Culture, less is known about the structures they supposedly led, and in several cases

their positions may have been only nominal. This precariousness was likely further exacerbated by the relative autonomy of actors within these spaces. Accounts of National Action for example suggest that a 2016 conference near Liverpool was the first point at which the leadership had ever been in the same room together (Collins 2019: 165). Other formations such as Feuerkrieg Division were so small and online-centric that it is not clear if members ever actually met, or how much authority or status the position of leader enjoyed (e.g., Schiano 2020). Where activities were limited to online only settings such as web forums, leadership roles were often synonymous with technical roles, with forum administrators such as Fascist Forge's Mathias often appearing in near total control.

Leadership roles very often overlapped with other roles, and notional leaders were typically also engaged in creative roles and ideological roles. Macklin (2018) describes the co-founders of National Action as undertaking a relatively complex range of behaviours. Rather than simply emerging as the leaders of a fully rounded group, Benjamin Raymond and Alex Davies developed National Action over a period of time, both contributing to the ideas underpinning it. In the case of Raymond, he also had organisational roles as an administrator on Iron March, and creative roles making propaganda for the (tiny) Integralist Party (Macklin 2018: 105). He went on to continue these roles in National Action (Collins 2019). The early influences of Raymond and Davies also fed into the wider aesthetics that came to be associated with National Action, borrowing heavily from the (itself borrowed) Black Bloc attire favoured by the German Autonomous Nationalists (Macklin 2018: 106).

Despite their founder status, the leadership positions of Raymond and Davies were challenged by others involved in the group, most notably Christopher Lythgoe, National Action's North-West organiser. Hope not Hate's account paints Lythgoe as the main leader within National Action in the run up to proscription, with Raymond and Davies relegated to the background (Collins 2019). Describing a 2016 leadership

conference in Crosby near Liverpool, Collins' account describes first Davies and then Raymond floundering as they failed to get their ideas across: Davies seeking to engage in more persuasive street-based activism, and Raymond retreating further into ideological navel gazing. Lythgoe in contrast was arguing for more secrecy and more provocation (Collins 2019: 164-5).

Both Raymond and Davies experienced events that put their status within the subculture on a downward trajectory, Raymond appearing to lose a fight with a female anti-Fascist, and Davies going viral online being verbally attacked by a mixed-race woman in Bath (Collins 2019: 165-6; Robertson 2016). In the aftermath of the 2016 rally in Darlington, which provided the content that formed the basis for some of National Action's most striking video propaganda (edited together by Raymond), Raymond's weakness in the organisation and distance from the rest of the membership became clear as other members harangued him for his perceived aloofness. Collins' account has Raymond in tears on the floor by the end, yet still strangely grateful when Lythgoe later allowed him to remain involved. Collins' (2019) opinion is that Lythgoe kept Raymond around just in case he needed someone to take the blame.

Proscription was a key point of fragmentation for National Action and seemed to alter the trajectories of different leaders and their relative power bases as they took charge of their own parts of the organisation. Lythgoe encouraged others to carry on with the group, emailing other members:

“Make sure you maintain contact with ALL your members. Reassure them that they will be personally ok as long as they don't promote NA from Friday on. Make sure that they understand that the SUBSTANCE of NA is the people, our talents, the bonds between us, our ideas, and our sustained force of will. All of that will continue in the future. We're just shedding one skin for another.

All genuinely revolutionary movements in the past have needed to exist partly underground. These are exiting times.”

(Lythgoe, quoted in Macklin 2019: 108)

In the Midlands Alex Deakin created a new chat group under the heading of Triple K Mafia. Raymond, inspired by the apparent ease with which Islamist group Al Muhajiroun were able to rebrand after proscription emailed several contacts including Lythgoe and Deakin about “new projects” (Macklin 2018: 110). Additional projects emerged under the headings of Scottish Dawn and NS131 (Macklin 2018: 110). Davies was rumoured to be involved in the short-lived Vanguard Britannia which ultimately morphed into the System Resistance Network, something Davies later denied in a podcast (Macklin 2018: 113). System Resistance Network marked the first group in the UK openly influenced by Siege Culture in both style and rhetoric. If Davies was involved this would put him in a key organising and ideological roles for Siege Culture as a whole in the UK.

Following proscription, leadership figures in Siege Culture grow more opaque and harder to identify. Andrew Dymock was known to have been a member of System Resistance Network before splitting off to create Sonnenkrieg Division which seemed to take the commitment to *Siege* and in particular O9A Satanism further (BBC 2021). The other major Siege Culture group active in the UK was Feuerkrieg Division, identified as being led by a 13 year-old Estonian known online as Commander. Online conversations between Commander and Roman, likely to be Rinaldo Nazarro, the founder of US Siege Culture group The Base, reveal that at least one of Commander's main concerns was encouraging the rest of the group to “become active”, with Roman advocating for throwing out members that did not attend meetings, leaving only a “hardcore nucleus”. At a different point in the leaked chats Commander referred to FKD as a “a half joke organization where most members don't do anything.” (Schiano et al 2020).

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NETWORKING

Networking roles serve to build and bond different parts of Siege Culture to one another. On a most basic level networking was a role undertaken by almost all protagonists within Siege Culture. The very act of reaching out to participate in Siege Culture spaces contributed to the continuation of the culture and its ideas. Meeting and talking to like-minded people were common goals of those joining Fascist Forge (Lee & Knott 2021). In keeping with the idea of a subculture as a space of shared values and meaning, Fascist Forge was seen as a venue for participants to engage with others who felt and thought the same way. Various introductory posts discussing why they registered stated:

“[to] Communicate with fellow minded individuals, getting away from mundanes.”

“Make connections with like-minded individuals and get access to more NS ideas.”

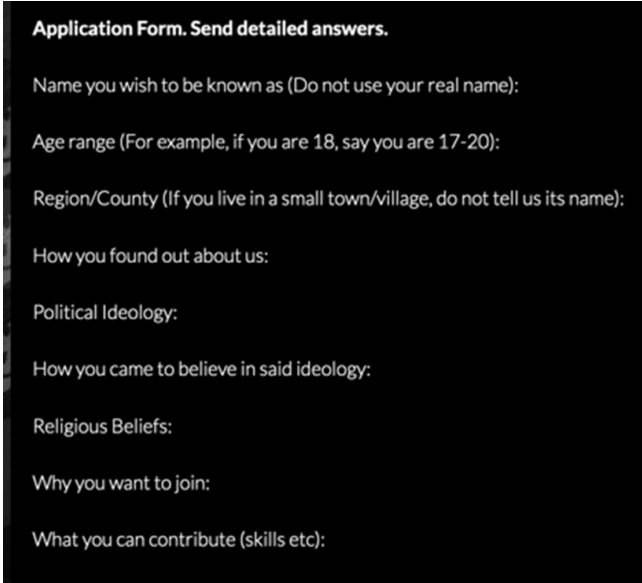
“To meet more like minded people who aren't full of bs [bull shit] and can have informative discussions in ways to elevate eachothers [sic] knowledge”

Another aspect of networking roles was developing connections between different elements of the subculture and other related subcultures. An early development in the evolution of Siege Culture was US based Brandon Russell's trip to the United Kingdom to meet with UK-based activists in either 2015 or 2016 (Dearden 2021). Russell was likely already in contact with UK activists via the forum Iron March. On his return to the US, Russell went on to found Atomwaffen Division which would eventually become the subculture's most notorious groupuscule and provide the pattern for subsequent Siege Culture groupuscules active in the UK.

This was not the only example of international networking. At some point in 2016 three members of

National Action, including co-founder Alex Davies, travelled to Germany for the purposes of networking with the German “Anti-Kapitalist Kollektive (AKK) (Collins 2019: 162). This was described in part as an opportunity to socialise given that Davies was supposedly popular with the AKK. It was also an opportunity to exchange knowledge with the AKK which formed part of the German Autonomous Nationalist scene that had initially inspired National Action.

Another common networking behaviour was recruitment of others to join various parts of the subculture. This took different forms. In Fascist Forge this often involved inviting others along to the forum and advertising its existence, a common mode of introduction being via the application Discord (Lee & Knott 2021). Within National Action and subsequent groupuscules, recruitment was handled in a more formal way. One video from System Resistance Network encouraged prospective members to email applications via encrypted email services. Leaked recordings from the US-based group The Base revealed a complex vetting process which overlapped heavily with leadership activities. One undercover reporter from the Winnipeg Free Press described a multi-tiered vetting process that included online exchanges, a voice call with founder Nazarro, and an in-person meeting with a local activist (Winnipeg Free Press 2019).



Application Form. Send detailed answers.

Name you wish to be known as (Do not use your real name):

Age range (For example, if you are 18, say you are 17-20):

Region/County (If you live in a small town/village, do not tell us its name):

How you found out about us:

Political Ideology:

How you came to believe in said ideology:

Religious Beliefs:

Why you want to join:

What you can contribute (skills etc):

SRN application questions

FINANCIAL ROLES

Limited information is available about the financing of Siege Culture. Keatinge et al's (2019: 19) analysis suggests that National Action's most likely source of funding was donations from ideological backers but suggests that there is not much evidence of any "prolific wealthy backers". They also report some speculation that National Action was funded at least partially via an inheritance (Keatinge et al 2019: 16). This account contrasts slightly with Collins' (2019) account of National Action which makes numerous references to a Pay Pal account under control of the group with considerable sums of money in it. There were few specifics on how the account was funded aside from references to donors in the US (Collins 2019:216). Davies is identified as controlling the purse strings although this was relaxed at some point in 2016 with several members being able to access the account (Collins 2019).

Post proscription, Collins describes the North-West 'gym' as being rented under a false name and subsidised with donations from members (Collins 2019). At one point Larry Nunn, a veteran of the UK far-right scene is described as meeting with Lythgoe and offers of funding are made, including a salary for Lythgoe. This apparently received a cold reception as Lythgoe and others interpreted Nunn's overtures as being an attempt to capture and merge the North-West cell with another organisation (Collins 2019).

Elsewhere the funding details of Siege Culture are similarly opaque. Website American Futurist both accept donations through crypto currency as well as physical donations through money orders and paper currency. The site also maintains a store which has in the past sold clothing but currently only offers paper copies of Siege which can be bought in cash or crypto currency. These processes necessitate several organisational roles, most notably someone has to control the accounts money is paid into and the final destination of these funds.

SUMMARY

Organiser roles are difficult to track within Siege Culture. They attract less attention and have a less obvious footprint than other roles. Despite this, they are likely the most widespread roles within Siege Culture. Every participant bore some responsibility for the organisation of the subculture: just by showing up they were contributing to the network of relationships and connections that kept the culture going. This contributed to the overall development of the subculture as a meeting space for the "like-minded". As a result, this type of organising role was relatively low status, it was something that everyone had done and was expected to do.

Some participants went further, bringing new people into the culture. This took a variety of forms, from casual introductions to web forums, to more formalised processes that tended to be intermingled with wider organisational roles. The structure of the recruitment for groups such as System Resistance Network, and in the US The Base, suggested that time and energy were expended on determining who should be let in and who should ultimately be allowed to stay. This vetting function seemed to overlap at several points with leadership roles, with those identified from the outside of having some level of formal authority within the culture heavily involved at some points.

This overlapping set of responsibilities seemed typical of leadership roles in Siege Culture. Given the loose structure, small size, overall inertia, and in some cases the seeming paranoid mindset of leaders such as Lythgoe, delegation was not a common feature. Those identified as leaders tended to take on multiple organisational responsibilities, chivvying others along, seeking and administering donations, building relationships with others in and adjacent to the subculture, and trying to make sure that some level of vetting and security was maintained. Some took a hand in producing and editing ideological material. Leader/organisers in Siege Culture tended to be jacks of all trades.

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Leadership was also the role in which status and trajectory were most apparent to an outside observer. The changing fortunes of different leaders went beyond arrests and the foundation of different groups. To take Alex Davies as an example, his status as a co-founder of National Action was seemingly high, but diminished overtime due to a number of factors. Collins' (2019) account describes an awkward speaking voice and ideas about turning National Action into a legitimate political party. This put him badly at odds with the more violent and paranoid mindset that came with Lythgoe's ascendancy. As a result, Davies was seemingly relegated to other organisational tasks such as controlling money and networking with others. Davies star was on the wane but following proscription Davies (reported but denied) founding of System Resistance network again places him as a key organiser and leadership figure, although this again was to be short-lived.

OFFENDER ROLES

Offending-based roles were generally easier to identify and more common than organisational roles. They included a range of sub-roles termed here direct actors, prisoners of war (POWs) and violent capacity. Offending-based roles were easier to track than organisational roles as they were often embedded in ideological texts and in reporting on websites. The celebration of violence was a key ideological feature of Siege Culture. There was less discussion of POWs but these were a feature of online campaigns and discussions within the subculture. Lastly, there was less explicit data on those with violent capacity.

DIRECT ACTORS

Celebrating violent actors has long been embedded in Siege Culture. This has not been limited to extreme-right actors. Possibly the best example of this fascination with violent actors is Mason's own championing of cult-leader Charles Manson as being an "instructive visionary" for national socialists. This support, and the disagreement it wrought with others

inside the neo-Nazi movement, reportedly led to Mason leaving the National Socialist Liberation Front (NSLF) (keeping control of the *Siege* newsletter) and founding the Universal Order (Mason 2003: 18).

References to Manson populate *Siege* (and Mason's far less widely read writings) as if he was a latter-day Hitler. The racial elements of Manson's philosophy are interpreted in a similar line to Hitler's and the NSDAP, reflecting a kind of inherent natural order in the universe (Mason 2003: 143). Acceptance of Manson was presented as a test of holding a true revolutionary mindset, with those unwilling to embrace Manson's actions presented as fakers still invested in the system:

"Manson represents the great divide between those persons who imagine there still are choices to be made casually on the basis of Establishment mores and those who have a profound, individual sense of "no going back". I believe it is this– and not the abstract idea of "realism"– that is the great sustainer and inner-flame of all true revolutionaries."

(Mason 2003: 238)

The tradition of lionising counter-cultural figures has persisted in *Siege Culture* and adjacent spaces. UK group National Action developed the concept of 'White Jihad' as a way to convey their passion, attempting to put their campaign on the same footing of the Jihadists who they seemed to admire to some degree (Collins 2019). National Action training camps included the viewing of Jihadist atrocity videos, and would-be terrorist Jack Renshaw was infamously pictured making a finger gesture (finger of Tawhid) often associated with Islamist beliefs. Outwardly this ideological overlap appeared incongruous but commitment and passion of the Jihadists in their defiant, and partially successful campaign to form a Caliphate, was held up as something to be admired. Similarly, American Futurist, also included articles praising Hamas and the Taliban.

“If it wasn’t known prior, The American Futurist is an ardent support of the Palestinian Group known as Hamas and to us their government in the Gaza Strip is the only legitimate government in the region of Palestine. Both Israel and the Palestinian Authority are both illegitimate. With all of this established prior, it must be explained why Hamas is a model for us to follow for our own liberation of North America.”

(American Futurist 2021)

Finally, it was National Action’s celebration of Thomas Mair, the reclusive neo-Nazi who killed Labour MP Jo Cox in 2016, that seemed at least partially to contribute to the decision to proscribe the group in December of that year. A Twitter account linked to the NE branch of National Action glorified Mair, stating “only 649 [MPs] to go” and “don’t let this man’s sacrifice go in vain” (Macklin 2018: 108). National Action subsequently adopted Mair’s only public quote following his arrest “Death to traitors, freedom for Britain” as a slogan (Macklin 2018: 108).

The role of direct actor is complex within Siege Culture. Mason’s description of Manson as an ideological test is likely the defining perspective. Direct actors, even those who engage in violence for different, or even opposed causes, are celebrated as they signify moving beyond the norms of mainstream society. Figures such as Manson were considered important because their actions were shocking and they were widely hated in mainstream culture. Manson is all the more valuable precisely because of the outsized cultural influence he holds. To embrace and celebrate these figures is to show that you have truly broken with the mainstream and are wholly committed to the ideals of Siege subculture.

A second meaning is the role of direct actors as inspirational and worthy of celebration. To be a direct actor is to be a hero of the movement and an

example for others to follow. This meaning has been firmly established with the chain of direct actors which demonstrate clear inspirational links to one another and refer all the way back (despite tactical differences) to Breivik as an influence: Tarrant being the prime example (Macklin 2022; Macklin & Bjørge 2022). Siege, with its choice between total attack and dropout was circumspect about its violence, while the celebration of saints as examples to follow and the emergence of fascist accelerationism is more explicit (Macklin & Lee forthcoming). The explicit terminology of ‘saints’ was more the concern of chan-based activism and may have become more meaningful for the Siege Culture space as they have leaned into accelerationism as a shared concept.

Even within the stricter bounds of Siege Culture violence was celebrated long before the chans or fascist accelerationism developed. The saint, or hero, is a distinctive social role within Siege Culture. Notably however, few if any of those considered saints in this space have any ties to Siege Culture or related groups. In many cases Siege Culture participants reached across not so much ideological divides but chasms to find people to emulate (e.g., Hamas, Islamic State). Even those within the bounds of the extreme-right such as Thomas Mair were often firmly outside of Siege Culture, Mair being so disconnected from Siege Culture that he did not even own a computer and received his literature through mail order. National Action’s praise was an attempt to claim Mair’s attack for their own ends, where in reality little or no connection existed outside of the ideological overlap.

In stark contrast, those who have participated in Siege Culture and gone on to engage in lethal or near lethal violence seem to have a relatively muted ongoing status within Siege Culture. In the UK Zack Davies’ attack on a Sikh in a Mold supermarket was not celebrated in the same way as Mair despite Davies being far closer to Siege Culture and National Action. Davies maintained a presence on Iron March, was pictured posing with a National Action flag, and seemingly aspired to be a member of the group. While there was a semi-serious

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online campaign to “free Rockerz” (A reference to Davies screenname on Iron March) he did not seem to attain any heroic status within the subculture.

Likewise, lethal violence in the US related to Siege Culture groups has also not produced any recognisable “saints”. Sam Woodward who killed Blaze Bernstein was listed on American Futurists POW list (see below) and the site has defended Woodward previously. Nicholas Giampa, a Siege Culture participant who killed his girlfriend’s parents in 2017 is not listed as a POW. Neither is, Devon Arthurs, a former Atomwaffen Division member who killed two roommates, both still members of Atomwaffen, in 2017. Arthur’s actions sparked the chain of events that led to the first arrest and incarceration of then Atomwaffen leader Brandon Russell. Support for mass casualty attackers within Siege Culture then, is strangely divided. Ideologically the subculture approves of fascist-inspired attacks, but only where these are sufficiently distant to not result in greater scrutiny (and jeopardy) of their own groups and networks. Those from within Siege Culture who engage in lethal violence are not celebrated in the same way.

PRISONERS OF WAR

While the majority of attention is focused on violent actors or ‘saints’, Siege Culture also has a clear role for those who have been imprisoned as a result of their involvement but have not undertaken violent attacks and so are not canonised in the same way.

Website American Futurist maintains a POW support page which lists the prison addresses of Kaleb James Cole, John Cameron Denton, and Samuel Woodward, all three of whom were members of the Siege-inspired group Atomwaffen Division. There is some evidence of similar activity in the UK. A 2018 archived thread from the /pol board of 4chan includes as its main image an Instagram post calling for the release of Hyperborean Art and his wife² but there are few further details or any practical steps audiences are asked to undertake. This refers to the arrest and subsequent imprisonment

of Mark Jones and Alice Cutter on charges of being members of a proscribed organisation. Jones was ultimately imprisoned for five and half years, Cutter for three (BBC 2020). The image matches Hyperborean Art/Jones’s style.



There is a distinctive POW role within Siege Culture. Those imprisoned as a result of their activities within the subculture are noted and at least some effort is made to support them in prison (in the case of the Atomwaffen prisoners) or at least acknowledge their sacrifice (Jones and Cutter). The actual scale of prison support is not possible to determine given the closed nature of prison systems. It is unlikely that POW roles are assumed voluntarily and the reality of these roles is that other roles within the subculture, such as Jones’ position as an artist and propagandist are denied (see below).

In some cases however, POWs - possibly more directly than ‘saints’ - are able to continue their connection to the wider subculture in some limited fashion, in particular where they are able to establish contact with fellow travellers. The founder of Atomwaffen Division, Brandon Russell was able to release a recorded message six months into a five-year sentence on explosives charges (Reitman 2018).

2 The subsequent BBC article refers to Jones as being Cutter’s ex-partner so the details of their relationship are unclear.

A 2021 post on American Futurist entitled “The Prison Essays” includes short writings purporting to be from Russell in which, amongst other things, he discussed his imprisonment. The tone of the statement contrasts heavily with the subdued police interview he gave following the discovery of two bodies in his condo in May 2017. Russell presents himself as a “true revolutionary” potentially drawing on the 1869 text *The Revolutionary Catechism* which was popular in the subculture. He suggests that he accepted his fate as a “true revolutionary” and that his main concern was that his imprisonment would result in the wider revolution may be stopped, thereby rendering other people’s sacrifice as being in vain.

“When, during that fateful weekend back in late May 2017, it was absolutely clear that I was going to be captured and imprisoned by The System, imprisonment did not worry or scare me much for I knew as a true revolutionary that prison or death is inevitable. What scared me was the frightful possibility that things might fall apart and allow for our fallen comrades deaths to have been in vain — for all we had worked towards for years to come to naught.”

(Brandon Russell, dated 2020)

Subsequent coverage by the website American Futurist referred to Russell as one of the “greatest National Socialists alive today” (but he was not included in the list of POWs).

SOLDIERS/VIOLENT CAPACITY

This role describes those who have cultivated a reputation or demonstrated a capacity for interpersonal violence. This is not the same as direct actors who channel their activity into planned attacks, but instead includes those who engage or claim to have skills in lower-level violence. In the UK this role is most closely associated with the period when National Action was a legal group and engaged in street protest. Even at this

point National Action never developed a reputation as a capable street fighting group and tended to be eclipsed by more physically focused groups such as the National Front and Infidel street movements (Collins 2019). Following proscription and the transition to clandestine organising, the value of street-based violence diminished as activities focused even more on online propaganda. Despite this, physical capacity for violence was a significant feature of National Action and remains an important goal for many in the extreme-right.

Probably the most explicit attempt to increase physical capacity in the UK manifestation of Siege Culture stemmed from 2014 when National Action organised outdoor training under the supervision of the Sigurd Legion which included physical fitness trainer Craig Fraser and Denis Nitkin of White Rex. Fraser wrote:

“Violence is the key to manhood, a man who cannot do violence, either to himself, his comrades or his enemies is a dead man. Practice violence then, harm yourself, experience pain, practice the traditions of the day, learn to hunt, to kill, to maim and to dominate in battle. If the laws of the land forbid it, learn what you can within the confines of the law, fight your brothers in the streets of your native lands, become hard, Nietzsche says again become hard in all ways. Worship of hardness in any form, emotional, physical, spiritual.”

(Quoted in Macklin, 2018, p. 108)

Key figures inside National Action were also notable for their physical capacity. Mikko Vehvilainen, originally from Finland, was a British army veteran who had served in Afghanistan. Vehvilainen was described in one article as a recruiter seeking to expand membership of National Action inside the armed forces. There was some evidence of success in that another soldier, Mark Barrett, was also charged with being a member of a proscribed organisation (Hudson

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2017). Vehvilainen was ultimately sentenced to 8 years in prison (Siddique 2018).

Physical fitness continued to be important in the post-National Action space in the UK. Spin off group the System Resistance Network (that would ultimately spawn Sonnenkrieg) released a video seeking recruits in which they described themselves as:

“...revolutionary National Socialists united by struggle; the struggle against the System. We are building a family of loyal and dedicated men & women who will not sit back while the storm clouds build.”

The video went on to list a series of requirements for membership which included being “physically fit, or willing to become so.”

More recently, and outside the timeline of Siege Culture, but drawing some lineage to it, the trend for fascist fitness channels on Telegram has attracted some interest, with coverage from UK-based campaign group Hope not Hate and the Guardian newspaper. Reporting linked these groups to Patriotic Alternative which is careful to maintain a public face that is less extreme than Siege Culture.

The emphasis in media coverage is on fitness groups as a tool for recruitment, but a response posted by one user on Telegram presents fitness as having a deeper ideological meaning for subcultural participants. Invoking the idea of the inversion of long held values and a disregard for tradition, the poster argues that stripped of meaning in their everyday lives, the act of training itself, as an expression of will, has meaning for those engaging in it.

“He can find meaning in the act itself. The act is to do a pushup. The act is to do that pullup. The act is to do an act of Will. You laughed at God so an act of Will, the practice of will, gives meaning

to life without a need for an appeal to metaphysics.”

(Lt. Col Evola’s[The Colonel’s Imperium], Telegram, 9/3/22)

SUMMARY

Offending roles within Siege Culture exhibit a mixture of statuses and trajectories. Direct actor roles are some of the most ideologically significant roles within Siege Culture, but for the most part has not produced any direct actors wholly of its own. This results in the need to adopt violent actors from other ideological traditions outside of Siege Culture, most notably Manson.

There is some evidence that POWs enjoy some level of status within Siege Culture with those still at liberty trying to drum up support for their cause. Where POWs have been able to maintain connections to the wider subculture (e.g., Brandon Russell) their pronouncements have been treated as significant.

Beneath POWs sit those who have some claim to physical capacity. The instrumental need for physical prowess in Siege Culture has largely diminished. In the UK proscription and move underground of the subculture has made physical confrontation less likely. Despite this the projection of physical capacity remained an important component of the subculture. This was partially ideological, the idea of participants as warriors imbued with spiritual purpose espoused by terms like white jihad emphasised the inseparability of physical prowess and the ideological basis of Siege Culture. As a result, those either with claims to physical capacity for violence are likely to enjoy high status within the subculture.

For both direct actors and POWs, trajectories within the subculture are likely short. Except where they can contact other protagonists, their involvement with the subculture becomes largely passive until they are released. In the case of ‘saints’ who have committed acts of mass casualty violence, or those convicted of serious offences, they may remain in prison for

decades. In the case of those incarcerated for minor offences, it is so far unclear what if any roles they take on their return.³ For those with physical capacity who do not go to prison there is little evidence of any changes in role or status but there is good reason to think that significant physical defeats or humiliations may affect status over time.

IDEOLOGUE ROLES

While Siege Culture exhibits many of the features of a taste-based subculture, including a preoccupation with conspicuous style, disdain for the mainstream, and a nebulous and uncertain organisation based on internal values and norms it is also undeniably ideological. Ideology is a component of everything that protagonists in Siege Culture do; it is the filter through which they see the world. However, in many cases, most notably in Fascist Forge, to discuss ideology explicitly in this space is to reveal a lack of knowledge. Ideology is deemed an artificial political construct whereas fascism is an uncontested truth. Despite this, there are plenty of roles within Siege Culture connected to ideology divided here into three sub-roles, idealogues, propagandists, and policing.

IDEALOGUES

Probably the most overt feature of Siege Culture has been its idealogues. These have ranged from the relatively well-known such as James Mason and Alexander Slavros, to less well-known figures such as Timothy Turtle and Texas Pete, both contributors at American Futurist.

James Mason is probably the most clearcut example of an ideologue in contemporary Siege Culture, known primarily for his ideological contribution in the form of Siege and subsequent work intended to set the ideological tone for the subculture on sites like Siege Culture and American Futurist. Such was the significance of Mason that members of Atomwaffen

deliberately sought him out and interviewed him, publishing the interview in the fascist journal Noose. Mason took on the role of an ideological mascot for Atomwaffen while at the same time denying any explicit organisational role (Mason has previously been heavily involved in organiser roles in The American Nazi Party and National Socialist Liberation Front (see: SPLC n.d.)).

Mason's status has varied over time. Prior to his involvement in Atomwaffen, Mason comes across as something of a joke, often playing the crank in various speaking engagements including addressing rather bemused faculty at the University of Phoenix.⁴ Mason has experienced legal troubles in the past including time in prison for assault and weapons charges, and arrests for child pornography and sexual exploitation of a minor (Prendergast 1995; SPLC n.d.) Being adopted by the (then) cutting edge Atomwaffen as the ideological forefather seemed to mark a turn in Mason's fortunes in the eyes of others.

This was not to last however. Most recently, Mason has been at the centre of a major falling out within the remnants of Siege Culture. The American Futurist, Mason's home online initially announced that they would be branching out and covering more than simply Mason's world view (Tim Turtle 2022). A follow up article made clear that there had been a full break with Mason with the authors accusing Mason of dishonouring Atomwaffen prisoners, having an affair with the wife of another neo-Nazi, and collaborating with a paedophile (Texas Pete 2022b).

Other idealogues are seemingly held in less esteem in the Siege Culture space. Collins' (2019) account of National Action notes that co-founder Raymond was a frequent writer of ideological screeds and frequently published material on the group's website. The original website is no longer accessible, but an archived version preserved on Iron March in advance of the December 2016 proscription seems to confirm

3 Following his release Brandon Russell was arrested for plotting to attack infrastructure targets (Department of Justice 2023)

4 see: <https://odysee.com/@TheHourofDecision:8/James-Mason-Talk--University-of-Phoenix-:c>

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this tendency. Although the articles are anonymous they fit with the proto-Siege Culture ideology of National Action and are likely to be at least some of the articles Collins is referring to. Published in September 2013 National Action - Here and Now! rails against the deceptive “system” and councils against compromise advocating for an “Olympian struggle that total victory should be”. Raymond, according to Collins’ account did not assemble anything like the status of James Mason. While he had a stronger claim to being the group’s ideological progenitor than anyone else he was ultimately bypassed by Christopher Lythgoe who presented a stronger and more muscular appeal to members than Raymond’s (slightly pompous) theorising (Collins 2019).

Siege Culture is also replete with any number of less established have-a-go ideologues. The American Futurist includes nearly 30 contributors which are a mix of frequent contributors and some who post only once. This includes anonymous authors. Further emphasising that the site is open to all, a link at the bottom encourages others to contribute “media” to the site (American Futurist, n.d.).

PROPAGANDISTS

While ideologues develop ideas, propagandist roles serve to disseminate them. Text based material like Siege, and Raymond’s articles are types of propaganda, but a great deal of Siege Culture is based around encapsulating or repackaging the “worldview” espoused by figures like Mason in forms that are easily disseminated.

The standout example of propaganda is the creation and sharing of digital images which reflect Siege Culture. The overall aesthetic of Siege Culture has become one of its defining traits. Although Siege Culture has been through several aesthetic changes over time, the work of Dark Foreigner has come to define the space. In 2021 Dark Foreigner was identified as Patrick McDonald, a graphic designer living with his parents in suburban Ottawa (Makuch & Lamoureux 2021). In his time McDonald was seemingly highly sought after

with Sonnenkrieg rumoured to outsource their design work to him (consistent with their style). According to outside reporting McDonald exited the scene after he was stopped by UK authorities during a visit to the UK in 2019, returning to Canada shortly afterwards where he has continued to work as a graphic designer (Makuch & Lamoureux 2021).

While Dark Foreigner seemed to dominate Siege Culture, the space included ample opportunities for other aspiring propagandists. Fascist Forge included a “Resource Center” which worked as a repository for some of the visual and audio content created by supporters. Some of this space was taken up by images, texts and video produced by branded groups and other websites such as Atomwaffen Division and materials that emerged from Iron March. However it was also a space for would-be propagandists to share material. One poster uploaded two images to the board and openly sought advice from others:

“Any opinions or advice? These are the first two pieces I made, on [sic] for myself, and one for a friend.”

The response was relatively critical from site founder Mathias who criticised the design. Another poster is more assertive about their work, stating instead:

“I can make propaganda for any of my fellow comrades.”

In this case the response was far more favourable, with other members replying positively, “awesome stuff man”. One user asked about the software used to create the images (photoshop) again reinforcing the status of the creator. Not only were the images well received, others were seeking advice on how to replicate them. Another user edited an image to create an animated version with a ‘glitch’ characteristic of images in Siege Culture spaces:

“These look amazing. I made an edit to the Hither [sic] one, I hope you don't mind.”

Again, the relative humbleness of the response further reinforces the status of the original creator. In an environment of almost unrelenting hostility other users have accepted his creative output and even seem to care about his response to an edit. Other introductory posts made frequent mention of creative skills and intentions:

“Know my way around the electric guitar and bass, learning how to make darkwave.”

“...video editing (in after effects & premiere, also got baisc [sic] experience in graphic design/ps [photoshop].”

While image-based creations are the most easily recognisable, Siege Culture features a range of creative propaganda and propagandists. Collins’ (2019) account of National Action singles out Scottish activist Nicholas Waugh as a well-regarded speaker. Waugh’s 2016 speech at National Action’s Darlington demonstration was identified as being particularly noteworthy; described in the account as a “killer speech” (Collins 2019: 214). The speech was edited together (by Raymond on Lythogoe’s instruction) into what Collins describes as a highly effective propaganda video (2019: 215).

POLICING ROLES

Reflecting the seriousness that Siege Culture attempted to project, one key low level ideological role was that of ideological policing. This was less about creation and focused on critiquing others. Fascist Forge is an excellent example of how newcomers to Siege-inspired spaces were policed and critiqued. Newcomers were encouraged to create introductory posts in which they discussed their political development, aspirations, and reasons for joining. Established members would then critique these posts, often pulling up would be forum members on minor points of doctrine.

Examples include:

[In response to a would-be member who used the term NatSoc] “Drop that ridiculous acronym. No one takes anyone who says "we're not nazis, we're natsocs" seriously.”

[in response to an attempted defence of “white civic nationalism”] “Because there's no intrinsic value to being white that makes you a superior being. We want Aryans, not whites. Almost all of white nationalists and their related movements are out of shape, intellectually retarded man children.”

The status of those in policing roles seemed to vary heavily on Fascist Forge. On the basis of the forum’s own internal ranking system (see Lee & Knott 2021) some appeared to be relatively senior members. Occasionally however newer and lower status members would chime in with critiques which could provoke a reaction from more established members.

The overall meaning of policing roles is likely intertwined with the ideological foundations of Siege Culture as well as a more performative layer. The immutability of the fascist worldview, the unwillingness to compromise on core values (the truth of fascism), and the self-perception of being an ideological elite over and above the common ranks of the extreme-right all contribute to a sense of specialness and ideological exclusivity. Ideological policing allows protagonists the opportunity to demonstrate their own ideological purity and knowledge to others while at the same time working to defend the exclusive space they have created.

For high capital protagonists this bullying and haranguing of newbies is a low effort tool for ensuring that the subculture stays pure and that others know how seriously they take their commitment to the worldview. For lower status protagonists, participating in policing may be a way to develop their credibility, similarly showing off their ideological purity and knowledge

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to others. However it also comes with risks, as higher status protagonists could easily question their beliefs or commitment as a result.

SUMMARY

Ideology is a core aspect of Siege Culture, far more so than direct action. While the overall ideological tone was set by a relatively small collection of ideologues, and basic beliefs were zealously enforced in some places, this masks a relatively large variation in behaviours and status associated with ideological roles. The multiplatform nature of Siege Culture made possible extensive opportunities to contribute to the ideological development of the subculture. In particular, there were numerous opportunities for creative propaganda in the form of images, music, and video. Contributing in this way could be risky as participants were opening themselves up to potentially harsh criticism. For some however their contributions were rewarded with compliments and in at least one case (Dark Foreigner) notoriety from within the subculture.

While those undertaking ideological and particularly creative roles in Siege Culture were limited by ideological constraints, within this envelope there were opportunities for creativity. As in other roles, there was a tendency for Siege Culture to turn on those in ideological roles, with the recent apparent rejection of James Mason by some a noteworthy example, although one likely linked to internal disputes. Trajectories could also be curtailed by outside interventions with Dark Foreigner's brush with the authorities potentially ending what seemed to be a very successful career in the extreme-right (at least in terms of status). The key difference being that Dark Foreigner was seemingly able to get out with more of his credibility inside the subculture intact.

TECHNICIAN ROLES

Technical roles were the least evident in the data, with little to go off about how those with technical roles saw themselves or were regarded by others. Less data still was available on the trajectory of those in technical roles. Despite this, the widespread reliance within Siege Culture on digital platforms makes some level of technical skill a necessity for the space.

COMPUTING ROLES

Of the technical roles, most evidence exists for computing-based roles. These roles represent those who are tasked, or choose to task themselves, with ensuring the smooth running of a particular space or group's digital assets. Given the focus on online organising this is often quite technical and requires well-developed knowledge of computing.

In some cases, computing roles seem to have overlapped with leadership and/or ideological roles. Key movers such as Slavros and Raymond seemed to have some responsibility for running their own sites and it was unclear who, if anyone, contributed to the running of sites other than the founders. Known extreme-right "hacker" Weev speculated that Slavros ran Iron March from his family's home in Russia (Hayden 2019). In the case of Iron March at least one other user seems to have had access to the site's data, posting the data publicly on Fascist Forge. This was likely the data that went on to form the Iron March leak which was responsible for exposing a large number of Iron March users (Cimpanu 2019; see also: Shepherd, 2021).

In December 2021 the website American Futurist was forced offline reportedly after the registrar was contacted by the UN Counter Terrorism Executive Directorate. The response from the site was defiant as the site was launched on a new domain but acknowledged the technical issues that still needed to be fixed. The language suggests that multiple people had some role in the technical side of the site:

“As you might notice. The site still being reworked and under construction at this time though it is now open for usage as we fix issues. So please be patient with us as we fix these issues at this time. Obvious issues such as the weird white header at the top among some other issues. We expect these to be done very soon. So please be patient while we work these issues out. Please email us also if you wrote an article for us between last September-October but it’s not on the site anymore. We didn’t remove it, for some reason our archive fucked up and didn’t have 100% of all articles from that period.”

(Source Removed)

Raymond played some technical role within National Action. Computer hardware was readily thrown away to be replaced using reportedly ample National Action funds. Davies described the room he shared with Raymond as “like a junk shop...” (Collins 2018: 163). Raymond also published regularly to the group’s website suggesting his role encompassed technical as well as ideological aspects (Collins 2019: 176).

SECURITY ROLES

Closely related to computing sub-roles are security focused roles. While computing roles were focused on the general running of the digital aspects of the subculture, security was a specific focus within this. Security roles also extended offline to include a broader range of behaviours designed to encourage participants to avoid incriminating themselves or others.

One of National Action’s early publications focused on online security, explaining to members how to send encrypted material through asymmetric key cryptography (Introduction to PGP). There is no information on who wrote this guide, and it is unclear if members of National Action took the (laborious) precautions described in the guide when

communicating with one another. The relative ease with which National Action members were exposed following proscription suggests that they did not.

Technical knowledge about security was further supplemented by material that focused on softer skills. E-Sec by Way of Common Sense was published via Iron March in 2016. The introduction referenced National Action’s earlier efforts but emphasised the “common sense” aspect of security which every reader was supposed to be aware of. The manual was prompted by increased media attention and a conscious effort to present a harder target for opponents seeking to take the site offline (Iron March 2016: 2).

Readers are advised to put the minimum amount of information about themselves online and keep ideological and other accounts entirely separate (Iron March 2016: 4). A later section suggests that readers consider their own specific legal jurisdiction and pitch what they say online to fall short of any local thresholds for criminality (Iron March 2016: 6). Readers are also warned to watch out for strangers seeking to join groups or new contacts that appear “overly friendly” (Iron March 2016: 8). Somewhat ironically for Iron March (which was subsequently leaked and several members exposed) the guide concludes with:

“Remember: you alone are foremost responsible for your own security and anonymity on-line - if you do not release some information somewhere at some point yourself then there is nowhere else for that information to come from.”

(Iron March 2016:10)

On Fascist Forge the membership was relatively aware of how easily accessible the forum was and that ideological opponents and others were regularly monitoring the site. Security often came up in one form or another in posts, reminding members of the forum to be cautious. This was linked to increased media coverage, most notably a Vice article published in 2019 which included the site’s name and screenshots

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as well as details of threads concerning violent activity (Lamoureux & Makuch 2019a). According to one user this resulted in an “uptick in BS [bull-shit] members joining the forum”. The publicity was assumed to be positive, advertising the existence of the forum, but it was also a “double-edged sword” revealing the existence of the forum to enemies. Members were reminded to be alert and keep their “opsec [operational security] top notch”. Shortly after the original article was published in January 2019, Fascist Forge went temporarily offline (Lamoureux & Makuch 2019b).

Security roles were interesting in that at the most basic level the advice was that individual participants all bear responsibility towards security. The overlaps with decentralised approaches to cyber security common in other spaces are striking (Ashenden 2016). However, there is little in the data to tell us much about those writing these guides or how they viewed themselves or were viewed by others. Presumably their ability to develop and publish the guides grants them some status within the broader subculture, and suggests that at least some of the wider subculture wanted to understand how to protect themselves.

Given the all-pervasive sense of persecution and threat common in the extreme-right, roles based on security knowledge should be relatively highly prized, but this status needs to be balanced against the fact that operational security within Siege Culture often proved to be wanting. In the UK at least, Siege Culture has proven vulnerable to police accessing communications data as well as infiltration. The leak of Iron March in 2020 was particularly damning as it was effectively left openly accessible by a likely well-meaning Fascist Forge user. Subsequent analysis revealed that many of those posting on the site had included personally identifiable information, contrary to the best practice suggested in E-Sec. Likewise, much of the National Action Network in the UK was ultimately compromised when West Midlands leader Alex Deakin was arrested as the result of a stickering campaign. The seizure

of his phone ultimately led to police accessing the National Action chat group (Macklin 2018: 111).

MISCELLANEOUS TECHNICAL SKILLS

The last technical role identified, focused on participants in the subculture who had, or claimed to offer, specific technical skills and knowledge relevant to the subculture and its values, most often around various aspects of attack planning but also including advice on survivalism and other skills considered important.

The most common expression of attack planning roles was the frequent dissemination of bomb-making and other sets of technical instructions by participants in the Siege Culture space. In some cases, individuals went beyond sharing manuals by offering more personalised advice. Dillon Hopper was an American previously involved in Vanguard America but was active in chats with Feuerkrieg Division. In his 30s, Hopper offered advice to the younger members of Feuerkrieg Division including around security:

“Do you guys know what OpSec stands for and how you actually practice it?”

(Schiano et al 2020)

His involvement extended beyond offering security advice however and included targets and modes of attack. He engaged with one user about the possibility of an attack on a ‘Furry’⁵ convention, advocating for the use of fire which he felt would maximise the destructiveness of the attack. Hopper cited his military credentials as a source of authority in this case:

“Dude I was in the military for 12 years and I had above secret clearances.”

(Schiano et al 2020)

The possibility of 3D printed firearms is perhaps the

5 Furrries are an online and real-world subculture based on interest and in some cases sexual attraction to anthropomorphised animals.

technical development of most interest within the Siege Culture space. Although many of those involved in 3D printed firearms hold different ideological motivations, Siege Culture has seemingly provided a willing audience for their content. A 2022 article published on the American Futurist reveals a similar interest in 3D printed firearms. The author, identified only as Otto, provides an overview of the 3D printed firearms space, links to designs and advice for would be gun manufacturers (Otto 2022). In the UK Matthew Cronjager, then 17 and a member of the Telegram group The British Hand, provided plans for two 3D printed firearms to others online. Of these firearms one (the FGC-9) was determined as viable by an expert, while another (the Cheetah) was deemed to be missing significant information. Unknown to Cronjager the Telegram group contained an undercover police officer (Recorder of London, 2021).

Technical roles also extended beyond details immediately useful to someone planning violence. The survivalist ethic built into Siege Culture and the position of protagonists able to take the reigns after the envisioned collapse of society results in a premium being placed on survival skills. A series of articles posted on American Futurist emphasise the survivalist tendency within Siege and the need for participants to develop the skills to survive the coming collapse. In the words of one article:

“...rather than just discussing or encouraging the inevitable collapse; we will discuss how you can ensure you survive and excel in such a scenario.”

(Shackleford & Racoon 2022)

At least two series of articles cover survivalism topics: Preparedness Worldview written by Rusty Shackleford and (partially) Racoon; and Pragnat written by Evolved Dolphin. Jointly they cover details around the importance of skills and mindset, how to grow a garden, equipment, water purification and vehicle maintenance. There is little within the data to explain

how these articles were received. Likewise, there is little by which to assess the quality of the articles, as society has not collapsed the advice given has not been truly tested. Their tone is very different to more traditional content but ideologically they are firmly aligned with Siege Culture’s broader apocalyptic mindset and the editors of American Futurist viewed these skills as important enough to run at least two series on them. This suggests that those with knowledge of survival skills, albeit unproven, have at least some standing within the subculture.

SUMMARY

Technical roles are uncelebrated within Siege Culture, but their existence can be inferred from the use of online platforms and the need to keep them up and running, often in the face of hostile registrars and attempts at external intervention. In several cases this has taken the form of security advice being issued by particularly conscientious members, although security in the space has generally been lacking. Technical roles also encompass various forms of advice on attack planning and other skills deemed important ideologically. In some cases, this is the simple transfer of knowledge through bomb-making manuals or plans for 3D printed firearms. However, some participants presented themselves as having special knowledge on technical matters and therefore attempted to claim some kind of authority. As these conversations were very often clandestine or one-sided - in the case of sharing technical information - no determination can be made about the relative social standing of these participants.

‘FEMALE’ ROLES

There is little understanding of the gender dynamics at work within Siege Culture. The general impression from the extreme misogyny on display in the subculture is that few women are attracted to this space. Female roles are not comparable with the other roles discussed in this analysis as they are defined by identity characteristics rather than behaviours. The few

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women identified within Siege Culture have displayed different behaviours, suggesting that there is no single ‘female role’ within Siege Culture.

Without question, Siege Culture is violently misogynistic. Fascist Forge for example includes an extensive thread discussing rape as a weapon of war. One prominent ideological platform went by the name ‘Rapecast’ (a discord server). One screen name of John Cameron Denton, a one-time leader of Atomwaffen was also Rape. Internal reports from within National Action suggest a general fixation on rape and sexual abuse amongst participants (Collins 2019). Despite all this, there is evidence of women being involved with Siege Culture at different points, and in the UK context there have been a small number of women identified publicly as active in the subculture.

Probably most infamous has been Alice Cutter, a young woman who posted an online selfie as part of a ‘Miss Hitler’ pageant which successfully generated press attention for National Action (Collins 2019). Cutter and her partner Mark Jones were imprisoned for their continued membership of National Action following its proscription. Reporting around the trial suggests that Cutter was an active member of National Action and once talked about using a “Jew’s severed head” as a football (PA News Agency 2019; BBC 2020). Despite her involvement with Jones, a relatively high-status member, Cutter’s public profile has made her a target for other parts of the extreme-right.

Women, like Cutter, who have engaged in Siege Culture have often been fetishised and in some cases have experienced harm through their involvement, including through the circulation of sexualised images. This reflects both the violent misogyny of the subculture and the position of women within it, where both the language and behaviour they are subject to illustrate their lower status within the subculture.

In something of a contrast, Claudia Patatas met and married Adam Thomas when he was twenty and she was nearly double his age. The pair moved in together

and started a family. Patatas is described as being assertive and dominating the conversations of the Midlands group of National Action, often seeming to encourage violence. Patatas did not go over well with other members as she had a darker skin tone (she was originally from Portugal) and dressed in strange 1930’s style clothes (Collins 2019: 227).

Siege Culture is undoubtedly a hypermasculine space but it is one in which some women have been able to carve out roles for themselves. As in other extreme-right subcultures, interpersonal relationships seemed to be an avenue for women to enter the space, but in contrast to more structured racist milieus, female protagonists were rare and seldom seemed to be the targets of concerted recruitment activity (Blee 2003 :149). There was little evidence, of the types of informal leadership and operative roles described by Blee in the subcultural data, with a possible exception of Patatas portrayal as being more assertive. Despite this, female protagonists were not entirely without agency in these spaces, in some cases appearing to select further partners from within the space or remaining in an extended relationship with them. As with other roles, these positions were precarious, and the wider subculture was apt to turn on women for perceived transgressions. In some cases this extended to criminal levels of harassment. At the very least the wider subculture likely became a profoundly unwelcoming place for women.

CONCLUSIONS

The previous report provided an overview of Siege Culture from a UK perspective and set out the case for considering it as a subculture. This report has built on these foundations to emphasise the need for a granular understanding of how extremist subcultures operate and how participation can differ between actors even within the same subculture. Drawing on previous research on both extremist and terrorist groups and non-extreme subcultures, the report developed a three-part framework based on behaviours, status and trajectory. It went on to apply this to Siege Culture, identifying a range of potential

roles for participants to adopt.

The analysis was fruitful but could not be considered comprehensive for two reasons:

- The available data is limited and highly partisan. Unlike a traditional subcultural ethnographic researcher, participation in Siege Culture was almost impossible as it is both clandestine and extremely hostile to outsiders, especially researchers with government funding. At the time of writing there are few known former participants in Siege Culture and other emic (internal) perspectives are limited. The bulk of material is either propagandistic literature, leaks, or etic (external) accounts written often by hostile outsiders. From a subcultural studies perspective this is sub-optimal.
- In the context of Siege Culture much of the data comes from National Action which was a forerunner of the fully developed Siege Culture. This is explained by the notoriety of the group and extensive documentation it attracted. There was comparatively little on the internal dynamics of other groups or spaces.

Despite the scattered evidence, roles within Siege Culture were often fluid and opportunistic. In some cases individuals took on multiple roles as required. This was most clearly demonstrated by the leadership of National Action which at times included various technical, leadership, ideological and propagandistic behaviours as needs and opportunities arose. Nevertheless, there were a clear panoply of behaviours for participants to engage in.

There was also clear evidence of status being relevant. In some cases, this was inferred from the behaviours of participants, for example, individuals trying to become physically fitter suggests that physical fitness is generally seen as laudable. In other cases, there were clear examples of participants receiving compliments, or more often criticism and insults, from others indicating behaviour that attracted less

subcultural capital.

Lastly, reflecting the potential for trajectories to develop as people move between different roles, there were cases of changes in role and status over time. This was most clearly expressed in the declining fortunes of the leadership of National Action as the original founders were overshadowed by the reportedly more militant tendencies of Christopher Lythgoe.

The limited data means that the findings should be treated more as a proof of concept rather than a comprehensive typology of roles within Siege Culture. In the absence of insider perspective or more detailed external data such a typology is challenging to develop or verify. Despite these limitations there are several important lessons to be drawn.

Transitioning to offending roles, particularly terroristic ones, may have limited appeal for those who are well established within an extremist subculture and are satisfied with what they gain from this involvement.

Research on extremism will benefit from recognising that binary distinctions of extreme and non-extreme mask a wide range of behaviours, status, and trajectory, and that extremist participation reflects different levels of participation across a variety of roles. Simply being 'into' a specific subculture is less relevant to understanding participation than specifics about what exactly an individual did, how important it was to them and how they and others felt about it. This is also important for practitioners to understand.

A more granular understanding of extremist participation is also likely to be instructive for practitioners when understanding risk. Specific behaviours and status within extremist subcultures are potentially linked to specific goods (discussed further in the next report) that individuals extract from participation. This has three consequences:

- First, and foremost, if specific roles are linked to meeting individual needs, or providing individuals with specific benefits then this may

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limit the potential for violence because they may reward ongoing engagement in non-violent roles. Transitioning to offending roles, particularly terroristic ones, may have limited appeal for those who are well established within an extremist subculture. For example, a well-regarded ideologue may potentially lose access to the goods that accompany that role where they to engage in serious offending.

- Secondly, where trajectories are altered through external action, the threat of action, or internal changes, then offending roles and potentially serious violence may become more appealing. If a participant is being forced out anyway why not go down swinging, or at least plan to? Direct actor and POW roles in some cases may be worthy consolation prizes for those forced out of their chosen role or roles. Those tasked with policing extremist subcultures should be mindful of the unintended second order effects of changes in individual trajectories and how such changes may make serious violence more or less appealing.
- Thirdly, for those tasked with working with individuals, either to pre-empt offending or rehabilitate those who have offended, a granular understanding of subcultural participation and the meaning attached to it can be a potential indicator of the behaviours and goods a specific individual finds meaningful and necessary to their own version of a “good life” (see next report).

Extremist subcultures, particularly in the extreme-right, are easy to dismiss as being something so far beyond the pale of acceptable behaviour that they can only be condemned and universally opposed. They are constructed and run in a way deliberately calculated to separate participants and alienate mainstream and opposed subcultures, including progressive and enlightenment values considered inviable by many researchers. They are designed to shock and offend and therein lies the appeal. Nevertheless they are subcultures and have meaning for their participants that those tasked with dealing with extremist

subcultures need to take seriously and understand in a granular way. This report has developed one possible framework for doing so and applied it to a very particular extreme-right subculture. Different analyses with more comprehensive or different data may have produced different results. Despite this, the findings strongly suggest that participation in Siege Culture was differentiated rather than monolithic, and that there are patterns in the behaviour and status and patterns associated with involvement.

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