

Hate and Identity

A social philosophical attempt to understand extremism

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Abstract:

In the analyses of extremism, the focus has mostly been on ideology and sociological – or so-called vulnerability – factors. While these factors are important the relevance and weight of emotions in the extremisation processes have not received the attention, they deserve. This article is an attempted to filling this gap. The paper explores the importance of emotions, especially strong emotions like hate and 'ressentiment', in establishing and reproducing the extremist identity. Methodologically this contribution emphasises a hermeneutic approach and draws on the philosophy of emotions, especially the approach of Robert C. Solomon. Empirically the article draws upon established international research and the author's research on Islamist extremism in Norway.

Introduction

On September 30th, 2005 the cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad were published in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*. Over the next six months this developed into a conflict with world-wide protests by Muslims. Between 150 and 200 people may have been killed in protests and incidents related to the controversy, mainly in Muslim majority countries.¹ It is obvious that strong *emotions* were at play. It also seems fair to say that two of the strongest emotions in these events were *anger* and *hate*.

In 2012, we had a new controversy related to an irreverent characterisation of the Prophet Muhammad. With the YouTube publication of the trailer for the film *Innocence of Muslims*, new protests erupted around the world, if not nearly on the same scale as in 2005–2006. In Norway a new group called "Profetens Ummah" – the Prophet's Ummah – called for a protest rally outside the American Embassy on the 21st of September. Approximately 100 people attended the rally. They assembled under the banner associated with al-Qaida. The spokesperson for the group gave a passionate speech where he vented anger and called for *revenge* against the enemies of Islam and Muslims.²

These two episodes demonstrate short-term protest mobilisation, but we can also talk of a long-term and continuously simmering conflict between "Islam", or rather a number of Muslims, on the one side and "the West", or some westerners, on the other. These and other protests against blasphemous presentations of the Prophet can be seen as the less violent expressions of the same animosity that underlies so-called radicalisation processes and has driven contemporary Islamist extremists into joining the so-called Islamic State in Syria and Iraq as foreign fighters, and some Islamists even into terrorism in other parts of the world, including the West. Therefore, we need to understand the strong emotions we see in large parts of the Muslim world and among many Muslims in Western countries. We need to understand the role of the anger and hate expressed in the cartoon controversy and in other protests, in the brutality of Islamist violence in Syria and Iraq, in the willingness of Muslim youth to join the Islamic State in its fights against the enemies of God, and to carry out terrorist acts.

A central (but perhaps not the only) approach in research on terrorism and so-called radicalisation processes has been a rational choice framework (McCauley & Moskalenko 2017), i.e., the assumption that the actors are sensibly optimising their options given their goals and circumstances by choosing means of achieving goals where benefits outweighs costs. This is not a wrong approach, but it should be further supplemented or amended with analyses considering the importance of emotions because there is still room for a better understanding of the passions or emotions involved in the contemporary phenomenon of violent Islamist extremism, or other forms of violent extremism for that matter. There are emotional aspects to many social and political movements, even if they do not trigger the same mass mobilisation as the cartoon controversy.

This article will attempt to explore the role and importance of emotions in the process of so-called radicalisation (see the paragraph on concepts and definitions for the use of an alternative term) within a wider framework of understanding relevant elements in these processes. The thesis is that emotions are judgements about the world and that they play a rational role in establishing behaviour and identity.

¹ "International reactions to the *Jyllands-Posten* Muhammad cartoons controversy". Wikipedia. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_reactions_to_the_JyllandsPosten_Muhammad_cartoons_controversy#Violent_protests (accessed 7 October 2018). These figures seem reasonable but might not be fully accurate, as some protests could have had other and additional motives than the cartoons.

² Personal observations; see also "6000 demonstrerte mot Muhammed-filmen på Youngstorget", *Aftenposten.no*, 21. September 2012; <https://www.aftenposten.no/osloby/i/kJBJk/6000-demonstrerte-mot-Muhammed-filmen-pa-Youngstorget> (accessed 2 September 2018).

Analytical framework

No *explanation* or *causal theory* with predictive powers has been established enabling us to describe the “mechanisms” and processes leading into violent extreme positions. As many more than those who actually become violent extremists are subject to the various so-called vulnerability factors, we still need the individual approach – or individual biographies – in order to *understand* the trajectory of the extremists. It seems that a *hermeneutic* approach is better suited than attempts to explain these processes in causal terms. This also follows from the fact that we are discussing human motivations.

A hermeneutic approach does not rule out *generalisations*, i.e., attempts to identify common factors or elements in similar processes. Thus, I will present some general thoughts on some of the fundamental driving “forces” operating in all humans, especially the panoply of human *emotions* (for brief introductions to theories and philosophies of emotion, see Johnson 2018; Scarantino & de Sousa 2018). Especially because emotions also are important in shaping and maintaining identities, an element highly relevant in understanding the group dynamics or social psychological processes reinforcing extremist positions.

The importance of emotions seems to have been underestimated in our understanding of fundamentalism and Islamist extremism. The emphasis in much popular discourse on Islamist violence has been on ideology or theology – (extreme interpretations of) Islam – as a motivating factor. However, when discussing right-wing extremist violence, e.g., the terrorism of Anders Behring Breivik, and mass shootings in the USA, a more systematic focus has been on individual psychology and motivations, including attempts to understand anger and hate (see Borchgrevink 2012/2013; Kimmel 2017).

Concepts and definitions

An ‘emotion’ “is a distinct feeling or quality of consciousness, such as joy or sadness, that reflects the personal significance of an emotion-arousing event” (Britannica 1997, vol. 18:248). An emotion is a complex condition that can involve bodily changes and mental states of excitement or perturbation and usually marked by strong feeling. This overall organic and mental state can also involve an impulse toward a definite form of behaviour. Thus, an emotion is directed and *intentional*. Emotions are both subjective and objective; subjective as an individual experience in a given circumstance, but objective as an expression of recognisable and shared experiences. Emotions can be causal factors or influences in thoughts, actions, personalities, and social relationships (see also de Sousa 1994).

A ‘feeling’ can sometimes be used as a synonym for an emotion, especially when used as a general term for the affective aspect of experience. More precisely a feeling is limited to the sensory part of an experience, e.g., touch.

‘Passion’ is in older usage a synonym for emotion in general but currently reserved for stronger or “violent” emotional outbreaks (de Sousa 1994:270). However, the late philosopher Robert C. Solomon uses the term “passion” as a synonym for emotions (Solomon 1993). He developed a cognitivist theory of the emotions, according to which emotions, like beliefs, are susceptible to rational appraisal and revision. Thus, for Solomon emotions were more than mere ‘sensations’, like burns or tickles. He saw them as “judgments”. This means that emotions are intentional phenomena akin to or even consisting of beliefs, and hence cognitive. I will utilise what I see as Solomon’s fruitful approach in discussing the importance of emotions in so-called radicalisation processes.

‘Extreme’ is a relational concept. What is extreme is always extreme in relation to the non-extreme, a centre or something seen as “normal” or “usual”. Accordingly, we need to define the non-extreme or centre before we can define the extreme. This metaphorical centre should, however, be something more significant than what is perceived as “normal” or “usual”. Otherwise an understanding of the assumed centre or non-extreme becomes highly subjective

or socio-culturally relative. In the realm of norms – i.e., morality, ethics, law and politics – we need to focus on those norms that have a solid foundation both argumentatively and in a widest possible consensus established in competent institutions (Gule 2012, 2018; see also Berger 2018).

Then we can present the following definitions: *Normative extreme* positions are positions that differ strongly from well-founded and broadly agreed moral, ethical, legal and political norms, while *normative extremism* is a more or less systematically conceived and sustained, theoretical and/or ideological-philosophical rooted position that differs strongly from our well-founded and globally agreed moral, ethical, legal and political norms.

These well-founded and globally agreed norms are *human rights and democracy*. Although well-founded, these norms are not unproblematic or uncontroversial, but they do have solid foundations and justifications in philosophy, theology, political science and law. There is also a consensus about them established in globally legitimate institutions like the UN general assembly, national parliaments and regional organisations, e.g., the Council of Europe and the Organization of American States. We find these norms in constitutions, declarations and ratified conventions. But this formal consensus does not mean that the norms are globally respected. There is a difference between formal agreement and actual respect. However, in spite of academic (and sometimes political) controversies about the validity and universality of human rights and democratic principle, we can pragmatically ascertain that these norms are the best we have to protect human dignity. While they are not carved in stone and undergo dynamic interpretation, they represent values that are not subjective, limited to a given socio-economic group or otherwise parochial.³

Based on the above definition of normative extremism and in view of the etymology and the history of the concepts, 'radical' and 'radical reform' lies in general within the non-extreme part of the normative spectrum (Britannica 1997, vol. 9:886; Gule 2018). The extreme lies outside and represents strong or clear deviations from human rights and democratic principles. Historically radicalisation was understood as the process from a non- or less radical position into a radical one, most often within the non-extreme part of the normative or political spectrum. This means that the current understanding of radicalisation as increased willingness to use violence as a means to achieve political or ideological goals, represents a new interpretation of the process. We therefore have two distinct meanings of the term "radicalisation":

1. The historically established common understanding of a movement from right to left within the non-extreme part of the political right-left axis, or from a non-radical to a radical position
2. An increased willingness to use violence in order to achieve political or ideological goals

Radicalisation in meaning 2 represents an obfuscation – a de-clarification – in using an established term for a new and different concept. For this reason, it would be better to find a new, clear and unambiguous term for the process of moving into an extreme position (whether this comprises accepting violence or not). My suggestion for such an unambiguous term is the self-explanatory neologism "*extremisation*", simply denoting the process or movement into an extreme position or extremist ideology.

This choice of terminology does not say much about the factors or "mechanisms" at play in the processes. That discussion remains open.

³ The literature on human rights and democracy is vast. This is not the place to discuss more substantively the arguments for the validity and universality of these norms but see Gule 2003 for an approach and further references.

A framework for understanding

In the absence of an explanatory or causal theory of extremisation we can, inspired by Quintan Wiktorowicz (2003; 2005) and based on my own research, still recognise some general factors or “elements” involved in most extremisation processes. Wiktorowicz (2003:1) presents four

key processes that enhance the likelihood that a potential joiner will be drawn to a radical Islamic group and eventually persuaded to participate: 1) cognitive opening—an individual becomes receptive to the possibility of new ideas and worldviews; 2) religious seeking—the individual seeks meaning through a religious idiom; 3) frame alignment—the public representation proffered by the radical group “makes sense” to the seeker and attracts his or her initial interest; 4) socialization—the individual experiences religious lessons and activities that facilitate indoctrination, identity-construction, and value changes.

I do not fully agree with this approach and have simplified the processes into three factors by “splitting” the frame alignment between ideology and the arena of socialisation, and I think these factors are relevant in most extremisation processes, not only those relating to extremist Islamists. These factors are:

- A cognitive opening
- An ideology (including theological positions)
- A community or arena of socialisation – social or virtual

Contrary to Wiktorowicz and others (see Christmann 2012 and McCauley & Moskalenko 2017 for summaries), these factors do not imply a chronology or represent (necessary) stages in my understanding. The relevance, importance and order of influence of these factors will vary from person to person and group to group. They are factors or elements that can help us understand the process of extremisation, and they are also related to emotions.

A cognitive opening is a mental – cognitive – situation where an individual becomes receptive to the possibility of new ideas and world views. It can be understood as an event or a series of events, unfolding quickly or over time, that will make the individual reassess his/her situation and world view. The cognitive opening might have existential dimensions. A cognitive opening could follow the death of someone close or one’s own serious illness, making the individual ask, “what’s the meaning of it all?”, thus resulting in attempts at changing his/her situation. Such a cognitive opening will usually comprise a range of emotions, e.g., anger, frustration, depending on the more specific events determining the cognitive opening.

An important cognitive opener, one that is central in extremisation processes, is *perceived* injustice. “Perceived” because the injustice can be real or imagined, but the emotional response will be real for the individual. This will often lead to a drastic reorientation of one’s own situation, not least because injustice mobilises strong emotions – like anger or even rage and calls for retribution or revenge. It is also interesting that the injustice or humiliation suffered by others seems to elicit stronger emotions than the injustice oneself experiences (Atran 2011:358).

An ideology/theology makes the situation comprehensible to the one whose cognitive opening requires answers to questions of *why*. Or rather, the meaningfulness of the answers is what makes the ideology relevant and attractive. Where an individual’s identity is in part tied to religion, the sought ideological explanation may lead to “religious seeking” (Wiktorowicz 2003:8f), and it seems reasonable to argue that the greater the role of Islam in an individual’s identity, the greater the likelihood that the person will respond to the opening through religious seeking, something a community (a group, movement or organisation) can utilise to

attract recruits. Thus, members in a group can foster "guided" religious or ideology seeking, especially where the cognitive opening is prompted by group or movement outreach. This will also transform the individual's emotion into a socially accepted form, albeit perhaps within a small group.

In this context the difference between an ideology and a social science explanation or social philosophical understanding of a situation – e.g., perceived injustice – is that the ideology also gives guidance on how to act. One could say that this is true of all ideologies but when we are concerned with extremism, we are also seeing ideologies that legitimate extreme acts – for example dehumanisation and/or (illegitimate) violence.

This also points to the connection between an ideology – or ideologically influenced understanding of the world – and emotions. First, a change of beliefs or ideological position entails a change of emotions. Second, the ideology's emotional aspects can comprise its appeal to satisfaction and a feeling of being powerful or empowered through insights. In addition, the extreme acts legitimised by a given ideology can also appeal to feelings of entitlement and superiority.

A *community* is an important factor in many cases of extremisation because the sharing of experiences, ideas/ideology and emotions seems to be necessary for the movement along the extremisation axis (Berger 2017).

Socialisation into a group, movement or organisation can take many forms. One can be an outsider seeking belonging to or "membership" in an extreme group or organisation, or one can be part of a (smaller) group, e.g., a group of friends, that socialises *together* in an extreme direction. Both socialisation processes are possible. While Wiktorowicz studied how individuals joined an existing extremist group – al-Mohajiroun – from the outside, my own research on foreign fighters from Norway joining the Islamic State in Syria show that many of them already belong to friendship groups that became more extreme together and then decided to travel to Syria (also see Arntsen 2016). Accordingly, the social psychological dynamic of the "community" or group becomes important.

Socialisation takes place both in the interaction between friends and when individuals learn about the ideology of the broader movement or more specifically an organisation. Group dynamics also plays an important role, especially in smaller groups (e.g., terrorist cells or a group of friends) where a natural leader or entrepreneur might strongly influence the others (see Nesser 2015). In these processes the values of individuals might be altered so that their self-interest is defined in accordance with the goals and beliefs of the group's or movement's ideology (Wiktorowicz 2003:10). In addition, such groups establish (or reconstruct) identity. They also encourage and reinforce social bonds that facilitate joining the group or movement by creating a new – or reinforcing an established – social network and solidarity in order to (or having the function to) encourage individuals to stay the course in the extremisation process. This will create and reinforce group identity.

These factors are not presented here as stages or a chronology; their effect is on the individual – and the effect on the individual can vary. For example, for some the community with others are more important than the cognitive opening, or rather their own "opening" is the result of someone else's narrative and influence. In some cases, the search for an ideology or theology may directly incorporate the individual into the movement's activities and socialisation in the group. In other instances, a movement member may help a "seeker" or potential joiner to "shop around" and sample different ideological or religious positions while subtly guiding him or her toward the conclusion that the movement's ideology or theological position is the most reasonable and appealing choice. "The latter strategy is typically more effective, since individuals feel empowered in making informed decisions based upon comparisons, all the while subtly influenced so that joining becomes more likely" (Wiktorowicz 2003:9). The ideology or theological position can become more important over time, as the need to justify extreme positions and one's participation in extreme acts grows.

The community or group is important in shaping and maintaining *identity*, again individually as well as collectively, not least because it functions as a template for emotional processing and motivation for action. The identity of extreme groups establishes strong bonds between the group members. In the following I will explore how extremism and extremisation is related to identity and strong emotions, like hate and more specifically *ressentiment*.

Emotions

A common understanding of emotions is that they are irrational, something outside and even in opposition to our rational faculties (see e.g., Elster 2010). This is a view I disagree with, together with a growing number of philosophers and psychologists. With Solomon, I will see emotions as *judgements*. Judgements are rulings and decisions about something in the world. A judgement is something we do. It is therefore a way of relating to the world. Consequently, we also constitute our world through judgements. "An emotion is a basic judgement about our Selves and our place in our world, the projection of values and ideals, structures and mythologies, according to which we live and through which we experience our lives" (Solomon 1993:126). This is why our emotions are dependent on our opinions and beliefs and why a change of beliefs or ideology entails a change of emotions.

Some emotions involve *moral* judgements. We have moral feelings (see, e.g., Vetlesen & Nordtvedt 1996) and the first expression of (real or perceived) injustice is emotional, for example agitation, anger and/or vengefulness. It is tempting to connect these immediate responses, as presented by Solomon and others, to one of the two systems in Daniel Kahneman's work *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (2011). Then the emotional response is part of the fast "thinking" system 1 where we make judgements about the world through heuristic shortcuts. While Kahneman is not emphasising emotions in his discussion of system 1, it seems to fit with Solomon's approach where emotions are an immediate response to events in our surroundings. However, this is not the place to explore the possible combination of Solomon's and Kahneman's approaches into a coherent theory.

Anger is the strong emotion felt when someone thinks that someone else has behaved in an unfair, cruel, or unacceptable way. Thus, anger registers our displeasure with how the world fails to obey our expectations. Anger also displays our desire to punish those who would not obey our demands (Solomon 1993:228). Emotions are ways of communicating, and anger could be seen as one of the densest forms of communication (Duhigg 2019).

According to Solomon anger is usually directed outward; its object is always a responsible agent who can be judged and blamed; the evaluation will therefore always be negative as the reason for the anger is perceived as an offence. Anger will include a desire to punish but the power to do so will vary. The strategy of anger – or of the angry person – is to project one's values on the world and define the world in one's own terms. "Whoever disagrees with those values or fails to act in accordance with them is justly condemned. Thus, anger always has a tinge of self-righteousness ... *except* in those cases in which the anger is directed at oneself" (Solomon 1993:229).

Anger can deepen into moral indignation and further develop into a desire for revenge (see below). Thus, a connection between anger and *hate* is established, and hate is another strong emotion, a passion, usually viewed as negative. Dictionary definitions of hate can comprise wordings like intense hostility and aversion usually deriving from fear, anger, or sense of injury, and extreme dislike or antipathy. According to Solomon hate has a bipolar direction, i.e., hate can be both directed outward and inward; its object is a person; the evaluation consists in dislike of the person over-all, mixed with respect for his or her various skills, abilities, manners, personality. Hate implies the desire to hurt or demolish, or to win; it is an emotion of strength in the person who hates, and it is "seeing" the hated person as an equal. The strategy of hate – or of the hating person – is to further expand the self through confrontation with the most powerful and most evil opponents possible.

Accordingly, it is natural in hatred to cast the world in black-and-white terms, casting another person, no matter how seemingly similar to oneself, in strictly devilish terms, thus making oneself appear as pure virtue by contrast. And nothing can be more successful toward this end than hatred, particularly when combined with consuming love as well (Solomon 1993:267).

Hate is an emotion but not irrational for that reason. It represents a judgement or an evaluation of someone or something, and a negative evaluation that includes an inclination to destroy the hated object. Thus, it *is* intentional.

To say that an emotion is intentional raises a host of logical and philosophical problems, much debated in modern philosophy. We shall not enter into this debate because it suffices here to establish that hate is a directed emotion. Hate is always hating something or someone, even when it is self-hatred. Hate can also be understood as an intention to destroy – something or someone. As with anger, hate is a way of relating to our surroundings, to the world and other people. What we hate could even be abstract, an idea for example. As well as instances or manifestations of the idea. We could hate blacks – as in racism. Then it is difficult – if not impossible – to differentiate between hating “black-ness” (in humans) and all blacks. The hatred will be directed toward all instances of blackness, that is, all black individuals and not an abstract idea.

But perhaps we also can hate abstract ideas, the injustice, tyranny, dictatorship, or torture itself. Many of us feel anger when we hear of these phenomena, and we want to destroy them or win over the injustice etc. Are not these strong emotions identifiable with hatred? And would not most agree that it is morally right to hate injustice, tyranny, torture, dictatorship etc.? Perhaps it is not abstractions we actually hate but always the specific instance of injustice or tyranny. Nevertheless, we see that there can be positive twist to the judgement that hate represents. In this sense, hate is a paradoxical emotion.

These reflections make it necessary to distinguish between justified and unjustified – or legitimate and illegitimate – anger and hate. Put briefly, justified strong moral emotions are directed against – as indictments – what is morally wrong. On the one hand, we have our feelings telling us what is wrong, and on the other, we have explicated moral norms. In assessing the legitimacy of anger, we need both to know the facts of a situation and the relevant moral (or legal) norms. If a person expresses anger and hate toward an institution, person or situation because of an injustice, this is understandable and if there was real injustice the anger and hatred can be justified or seen as legitimate (see Duhigg 2019 for interesting examples). However, the angry person could be wrong, and the injustice did not occur even though the person perceived an injustice. We can then understand the feeling but will have to correct the perception. With a corrected perception of the situation and therefore a better understanding, the angry person should change his emotion. Thus, anger towards and hatred of a person or institution that does not represent injustice according to modern moral norms – as expressed in human rights and democratic principles – are not morally legitimate. The emotions in racism and sexism are examples of anger and hate towards people because of whom they are and represents morally illegitimate anger and hatred.

This is important because it is possible to have a different ideological foundation, for example a religious belief that makes one’s anger and hatred of others rational from the standpoint of that particular ideological position. In view of our introductory remarks about the Mohammad cartoon crisis, we can understand the anger and hate expressed by many Muslims against the cartoons, the cartoonists and *Jyllands-Posten*. The publication was a violation of a taboo through the desecration of a revered prophet. Nevertheless, the publication was within modern norms of freedom of expression and religion. Maintaining an identity based on values, for example religious or traditional, that are opposed to blasphemy, in opposition to modern values – including the right to blaspheme – is also a recipe for mobilising anger and hate. These emotions will in turn reinforce one’s own identity as they maintain or reproduce the

boundaries between oneself and others, or "us" and "them" (see below about identity), often through feelings of victimisation.

Victimhood implies that an individual or a group who perceives themselves as victims are owed some form of compensation from someone, an individual or a group, seen as an offender. However, in Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy the victimhood of the weak – the "slaves" – becomes the source of transformation of all values, devaluing that which the master values and the slave does not have (Nietzsche 2007).⁴ As master morality originates in the strong, slave morality originates in the weak. Because slave morality is a reaction to oppression, it vilifies its oppressors. Slave morality is the inverse of master morality. As such, it is characterised by pessimism and cynicism, but it is also a source of anger and hate.

In the grand scale of things, the sought-after compensation is not only economic or other (perhaps more intangible) forms of redress, but the revolutionary transformation of power relations. While for Nietzsche the "compensation" was the transformation of values, thus making the slaves equal to the masters by making the masters into slaves, by stealth and subversion, a more relevant understanding of victimhood in our context is the expressed will to power through *revenge*. One way of doing this is attempting to seize the moral high ground with respect to the other, the oppressor. From the moral high ground, you get to command and condemn the behaviour of others. The "commanding heights of victimhood" represent a powerful position from where to attempt to seek *vengeance*.

According to Solomon vengeance is "an essential ingredient in our sense of justice..." (Solomon 2007:111), even though he is reluctant to call it an emotion "as such". But it is an emotional phenomenon (ibid.), and it is the original passion for justice. Thus, vengeance can be defined as the punishment, or desire to punish someone, for a (perceived) wrong to yourself or someone close and important to you (see Elshout et al. 2014). It is always directed at some offence and therefore has its reasons.

In many theories of justice vengeance or retribution represents the reestablishment of balance when someone has been injured. It therefore represents the essence of justice, even when meted out by the state and not the injured party him/her self. Nevertheless, the emotional phenomenon would seem to be individual and in an interesting study by Elshout et al. (2014), the emphasis is on individual reactions to injustice. At first sight vengeance and anger might appear to be the same response to a transgression, or it might seem that anger is a result of a desire for revenge. This study shows that anger and vengeance can be distinguished not only analytically but empirically as well. Elshout et al. argue that anger-driven responses to an offence can be seen as *interpersonal*, i.e., as responses that will prevent the offender from repeating the negative behaviour in the future (cf. Solomon's view of anger above, as "outward directed"), while vengeful responses can be seen as *intrapersonal*, e.g., regaining self-esteem, feeling better, restoring honour, regaining power, etc. (i.e., also "inward directed"). Vengeance implies a focus on restoring damaged aspects of oneself or identity, as well as punishing an offender. This would also indicate that a main characteristic of vengeance is that it is "personal". Thus, vengeance is more than an expression of anger. It can be seen as the personal reaction of a victim as victim. In this there is a connection to *ressentiment* because offences causing vengeance appears to revolve around a self-threat and an attack on one's sense of value and identity (Elshout et al. 2014). Thus, vengeance must be seen as both outwardly and inwardly directed.

The *ressentiment* I am presenting here is not identical with the concept developed by Nietzsche. He saw *ressentiment* as the motive for the development of the Judeo-Christian tradition in its objection against the strong and noble, the masters, and in pricing the weak, the victims. People who suffered from oppression at the hands of the noble, excellent, and

⁴ Nietzsche is introduced here mainly to credit him with the "theory" and concept of *ressentiment*, see below, not because his philosophy more generally is relevant to this discussion. The wider reflections in this article do not aspire to be consistent with his thinking.

strong, and who were denied any effective recourse against these masters by relative powerlessness, developed a persistent, corrosive emotional pattern of resentful hatred against their enemies. This is what Nietzsche called *ressentiment*. "That emotion motivated the development of the new moral concept <evil>, purpose-designed for the moralistic condemnation of those enemies" (Anderson 2017). In this sense *ressentiment* implies gaining the moral high ground.

Furthermore, *ressentiment* is a sense of hostility directed at that which one identifies as the cause of one's frustration, an assignment of blame or indictment of one's frustration. It is an emotion connected with victimhood. The sense of weakness or inferiority and perhaps jealousy in the face of the alleged "cause" of one's own unsuccessfulness generates a rejecting or alternative justifying value system, or morality, which attacks or denies the perceived source of one's loss. The ego creates an enemy in order to insulate itself from culpability. In this sense *ressentiment* is a reassignment onto an external scapegoat of the pain or frustration that accompanies a sense of inferiority or failings. The ego creates the illusion of an enemy, a cause that can be "blamed" for one's own inferiority or failure. Thus, the individual or even group sees him-/her-/itself as thwarted not by a failure in oneself, but rather by an external "evil," an enemy to hate.

Accordingly, the way I will understand the concept of 'ressentiment' is related to Nietzsche's ideas, but I see it as a more specific compound of emotion, or a syndrome, consisting of the above presented emotions hate, victimhood and vengefulness. Nevertheless, my understanding of *ressentiment* agrees with Nietzsche in seeing it as a *collective* emotional syndrome fuelling actions, including acts of an extreme nature. *Ressentiment* therefore strongly influences both individual and collective identities.

Solomon describes resentment (not using the word *ressentiment*) as outer-directed (1993:291), but I think the intrapersonal aspect discussed by Elshout et al. is important. Some of this aspect can be said to be implicit in Solomon's further analysis of resentment (1993:290-296) and his emphasis on this emotion as defensive, "constantly building fortifications and plotting plots of vengeance" (1993:293). This attitude can be constructed and manipulated ideologically on a collective level. *Ressentiment* springs from reactivity: the "weaker" someone is or the more the person – or group – sees him-/her-/itself as a victim, the less their capability to suppress the emotional reaction. *Ressentiment* will accordingly justify the (expressed) anger, hate and vengeance, including the violent actions, that are directed at the perceived enemy. This emotion (or bundle or syndrome of emotions) can therefore be important in maintaining an oppositional identity. *Ressentiment* can also function as a platform for *catharsis*, as when violent acts are carried out. Violence can have a *cathartic* effect both for the perpetrators and those who observe it. This could explain the seemingly morbid fascination for even the worst kinds of violence – for example lynchings, terrorism, suicide terrorism and beheadings.

Identity

Identity is a complex topic. In this article a starting point is that identity is something that remains or appears constant or the same over time. This is relevant for both personal identity and group identity. Personal identity can be connected to a person's physical existence, his or her body – including gender, skin colour etc. – but even more relevant are the identity criteria relating to our mental states. This includes our consciousness. In a weak sense identity then mean nothing more than a certain *consistency* (uniformity) in the person's behaviour, opinions, desires and passions over time (Elster 1979). At any given time, a person has ties to his or her past, through memory and acknowledgment of past actions as well as opinions, desires and emotions, and his or her future, through planning. A person is the same as a year ago, because there is a memory correlation between now and then. Our emotions play a role here because many of them are not fleeting and transient but more consistent personality traits.

We can therefore mobilise our emotions in order to maintain identity consistency. Then we also move to a stronger sense of personal identity. In this stronger sense, we understand personal identity as an ability to act independently, as opposed to those who restlessly disappear in a network of relationships with other people (ibid.). We become someone when we distinguish ourselves from others, and when we are distinguished by others in this sense (see also Barker 2004:180-181). In this way, emotions play an important role in establishing and maintaining our personal identities because emotions are ways of relating to our surroundings, especially other people.

These reflections are also relevant for collective identities because they are also connected to sameness or continuity over time. The sameness will often relate to the commonalities of the individuals constituting the collective or group. Thus, there is a "dialectic" between individual or personal identity and collective identities. Some of these commonalities are emphasised by the members of the group themselves. We go through processes of categorising, identifying and comparing; we label people by placing them in categories; we associate with certain groups – our in-group – and can gain self-esteem by doing so; we contrast our groups with other groups – out-groups – usually with a favourable bias toward our own group (Myers 2002:346). These evaluative processes involve emotions, e.g., including feeling good in finding pride in our identification with our in-group (ibid.).

For example, the very broad "group" – or rather community – of Muslims will identify with – or perhaps recognise? – each other in their common belief in the central tenets of Islam, and often feel pride in belonging to the religion of the final revelation. But this is an example of a "group" so large that the common bonds become impersonal. Smaller groups are often more important for the individual as well as collective identity, like a particular sect, tribal or family bonds, a political movement etc. Such groups will also be ascribed characteristics by others. Accordingly, others have their own perception of the identity of any given community or group. Also, these ascribed characteristics can become part of the identity of a group. We then see the importance of the "us" and "them" – or in-group vs. out-group – dichotomy, especially when there is a conflict between groups (see also Berger 2017).

The global Muslim community is very large, maybe 1.5 billion people. Being a Muslim in the middle of the Muslim world might then be less relevant than other identities, e.g., profession, family or clan. However, when the Muslim meets non-Muslims, the Muslim identity becomes more important. In the same way, the identity of the larger Muslim denominations – Sunni and Shia – has become very important because of the conflict between Sunni dominated Saudi Arabia and Shia dominated Iran. In such conflicts we also see the importance of emotions in constituting the individual *and* collective or social identities.

These identities as well as the Western identity – or rather identities – are influenced by varying degrees of secularisation. Superficial and West-centric approaches to secularisation, sometimes based on a power imbalance, can perceive the religious Muslims as emotional in the irrational sense, while the secular Westerners are rational. This represents a shallow understanding of religion as irrational. While religion contains elements that can enhance emotions, it also represents ways of controlling and directing emotions, both as judgements about the world and in a functionalist sense of creating meaning, belonging and identity (but see Norris and Inglehart 2011 for an interesting empirical study of secularisation). Nevertheless, secularisation could be seen as a factor in the polarisation between the "Muslim world" (and Muslims in the West) and "the West", provoking strong emotions on both sides, manifested in both anti-Western Islamist fundamentalisms and in Islamophobia. But this perspective on the role of secularisation cannot be pursued in this article.

"Social identity theory", worked out by Henri Tajfel and John C. Turner in the late 1970s, says that to belong to a group with which values one identifies strongly with, can lead to the creation of a "we-feeling" in the individual, a sort of "collective self" (Hillestad 2013:125). The strength of the "we-feeling" would be a function of the strength in the identification of the values and norms of the group. Thus, the consciousness of belonging to a group – or

organisation/movement – is important in constituting individual identities but also in creating and maintaining the group or social identity as such. Group consciousness will often be ideological – religious or political. Such ideological consciousness will shape our perceptions of the world, as discussed above. Ideological perceptions interact with our emotions, can trigger emotions, and determine how some emotions become judgements of specific acts or events, i.e., the ideological position that the West is at war with Islam will generate anger at “the West”. Thus, emotions can be manipulated and controlled by ideologues and leaders (see Duhigg 2019 for some examples). This also means that anger and more specifically hate, especially if following from severe, even violent, conflicts, can be built into our identity through ideological positions. In short, we often learn to hate. Accordingly, hate as well as the broader emotion of *ressentiment* can be part of a collective identity.

Understanding – a discussion

Based on the previous insights and reflections we can discuss the role of emotions in the alleged conflict(s) between the Muslim world and the West as well as the role of emotions in extremisation processes. The discussion can also be of relevance in understanding other conflicts.

The West vs. the Muslim World

Looking at the cartoon controversies of 2005–2006 and 2012 we observed mass mobilisations based on strong emotions. *Anger* was one of the important emotions in these processes. The anger was directed at the perceived blasphemy and alleged blasphemers. These alleged blasphemers became objects of anger because of their attack on what most Muslims hold sacred. Undoubtedly, this anger was felt by many because they held that the blasphemers and those who supported them, behaved in an unfair, even cruel and absolutely unacceptable way. This anger expressed the strong disapproval of many Muslims because the “Western” world did not obey their expectations of a respectful attitude towards a historic person deserving the highest degree of admiration and reverence. The anger represented an indictment and accusation and was a judgement of an offense. This severe judgement was both justified and legitimate based on the traditional Islamic norms that elevates and sanctifies the prophet’s standing and therefore prohibits irreverent and insulting presentations of him. In this sense these protests represented definite ideas in the minds of the angry Muslims. Accordingly, their responses can be seen as an intentional anger-driven demand for change in the “other’s” behaviour so that the transgression will not repeat itself and the relationship between the Muslim world and the West can be continued in a fruitful way.

For some Muslims this would not be enough, and vengeance became part of their emotional response. This would further merge with a sense of victimhood, or even an identity as victims, as a result of past and present Western colonisation and interventions in the Muslim world. This real and perceived oppression has also created hate as a strong and directed emotion. Thus, the relevant emotions that merges into the emotional syndrome of *ressentiment* are present and operational in a number of Muslims. The step from anger via victimhood, hate and vengeance to *ressentiment* cannot be long.

This analysis of the anger and its development in a significant number of Muslims displayed in the cartoon controversies can help us understand why and how the conflicts could become so severe. This perspective on the cartoon controversy makes it possible to see the common anger, and perceptions of victimhood, as identity enhancing functions amongst many Muslims.

Were these protests extreme, and did they represent extremisation processes? In view of the definition of normative extreme positions and normative extremism presented above, the answer could be yes, but not necessarily in all instances.

Protests that criticised the publication as unwanted and/or unwise were not extreme but well within the parameters of freedom of expression. The cartoons in *Jyllands-Posten* did not represent racist or otherwise unacceptable expressions and cannot be objected to on these grounds. Nonetheless, it is acceptable to protest against the cartoons, expressing a wish that they had not been published. That is in itself just as legitimate a use of freedom of expression as the publication of the cartoons were.

However, many of the protesters did not accept the freedom of expression of non-believers and the right to critique religions. They demanded both a ban on the cartoons and punishment of the cartoonists and publishers. Those demands represented an unacceptable limitation of the human rights – the freedom of expression – of others. This is what was extreme in the protests. Nevertheless, these demands in themselves were not violent. So, these protests against the cartoons illustrate that not all forms of normative extremism are violent. But in practice it would be difficult to differentiate between nonextreme and extreme, as well as nonviolent and violent, protesters because many demonstrations comprised nonextreme and extreme demands and nonviolent and violent activists.

The previous physical attacks on the publishers of Salman Rushdie's perceived blasphemous book *Satanic Verses* in the 1990s and the later attacks in 2015 on the employees at Charlie Hebdo magazine, that had published irreverent cartoons of the prophet, are clear examples of violent extremist protests. Even though many Muslims get angry at what they see as blasphemous representation of their prophet, a very small minority would get involved in violent attacks against the perceived blasphemers. The sadly great number of victims in the protests against the cartoons in 2005–2006 were the result of clashes with security forces in various Muslim majority countries where the protests were harshly suppressed; thus, the majority of victims were protesters, not blasphemers or their supporters.

Nevertheless, the anger vented in the cartoon controversies could easily be increased (in some people) to the level of hatred and vengefulness, developing into *ressentiment*. Still, this would not by causal necessity lead to extremisation into violent extremist positions, but for some the publication of blasphemous cartoons could be the tipping point, functioning as a cognitive opening. When this was the case the cartoon controversies could have been the start of dangerous extremisation processes, at least for some individuals. In this sense the cartoon controversies can be said to have played a role in the extremisation of some young Muslims.

Extremisation of young Muslims

We have seen many such dangerous processes into violent extremist positions over the years, even though the number of extremised Muslims has been limited. Nevertheless, the sympathy with and support for al-Qa'ida has grown (and waned) since the early 1990s, and after 2004 the Islamic State in Iraq, then the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria and finally the Islamic State from 2013, this organisation has also attracted many sympathisers, supporters and members. What are the reasons behind this?

Again, it is not possible to pinpoint one or a small set of reasons or factors that can explain these developments. The framework for understanding the processes presented above seems relevant: a cognitive opening, an ideology or theology, a community. The discussed emotions would also seem to be highly important in a more detailed analysis of the individual and collective processes. A feeling of victimisation, and the emotions of anger, hate and vengefulness, even the *cathartic* function of violence, are all relevant in our understanding of the progression into extremism. Furthermore, age in itself would also seem to be a relevant "risk" factor. Young people, not least young men, are prone to be less careful and more impudent in choosing means to achieve objectives. This has to do with human mental and intellectual developments where the breaks on impulsiveness might not be developed properly until in the mid- to late twenties. This assessment is strengthened by the fact that

most violent crime is carried out by young people. And we have seen the same demographic profile for a very large number of foreign fighters traveling to Syria and Iraq (as well as other theatres of war) (see Bakker & de Bonte 2016 and PST 2016 for presentations of this demographic profile).

According to my own observations (and the analysis of PST 2016), most of those belonging to the extremist environment in Norway after 2010 became extremist following the outbreak of the civil war in Syria, a conflict that got a lot of attention in the media, including uncensored images in social media. This suggests that the event represented a cognitive opening to a number of young Muslims in Norway – and in other countries –, causing them to reassess their values in search of an explanation for the atrocious deeds in Syria. For many it became obvious that these events were part of a wider war against (Sunni) Muslims. This understanding, combined with the various risk factors (deprivation, lack of employment, uncertain future etc.), could easily trigger strong emotions, varying from instances of anger and hate to more complete *ressentiment* toward those seen as responsible for their own particular situation and the situation of Muslims in general.

The future of extremism

In brief we can sketch two positions on the future of Muslim extremism in Europe, as presented by Thomas Hegghammer in his “The Future of Jihadism in Europe: A Pessimistic View” (2016) and Olivier Roy in his *Jihad and Death: The Global Appeal of Islamic State* (2017).

According to Hegghammer’s pessimistic view we will see continued Muslim extremist violence in the next 15 to 20 years. There are four factors contributing to a continued stream of extremist young Muslims: 1) A growing pool of disaffected Muslim youth as a result of growth of the Muslim population in Europe, also because of immigration, and this group’s lack of education and work opportunities; 2) returning foreign fighters from Syria/Iraq and releases of convicted Islamists from prisons, as these persons can function as nuclei for new extremist groups and terrorist cells; 3) continued turmoil, and Western interventions, in the Middle East and the Muslim world; 4) technological developments that will increase possibilities for encrypted communication on the Internet, thus allowing the planning and execution of terrorist acts without detection.

Roy sees the matter differently and is more optimistic, believing that the trend of Islamist extremist suicide violence will abate over the next few years (Tollgerdt 2018). He understands the current Islamist jihadism as a *nihilistic* youth rebellion, a protest movement without hope and utopias (Roy 2017). It is apocalyptic in its world view with adherents seeking death, but there will never be too many who are willing to die for a cause where the reward is in the afterlife. Suicide terrorism has been employed by al-Qa’ida and “perfected” and increased by the Islamic state. According to Roy, other and more “conventional” forms of Islamist terrorism exist, and will not disappear completely, but these forms do not have the same appeal as that of the suicide terrorism of the Islamic State. In this appeal to the extreme we could also see the influence of an intense “we-feeling” explained by social identity theory, as (young) Muslims identify with the values and norms of the extremist group. Thus, with the decline of the appeal of the Islamic State we will also see a decline in nihilistic terrorism; in short, the potential for recruiting death-seekers have culminated.

It remains to be seen who is best at predicting, Hegghammer or Roy, but in both predictions, emotions play an important implicit role. The factors Hegghammer points to can have a function in maintaining *ressentiment*, while Roy perspective implies that *ressentiment* is waning. However, it should be added that the response of the European majorities – and especially the authorities – will impact these processes strongly. The identity of Muslims – or Muslim groups – will develop in the dialectic between self-identity and ascribed identity. If the ascribed identity is determined by notions of “radicalisation” and extremism, it should not

come as a surprise that this will enhance anger, hate, notions of victimhood and revenge, i.e., *ressentiment*. These emotions can in themselves lead people, especially young men, into extremisation processes. Thus such emotions can also be manipulated for the purpose of recruiting people to extremist movements and organisations, including terrorist groups.

Extremisation processes in general

The focus on emotions within the framework for understanding extremism and extremisation processes presented in this article can be generalised beyond the analysis of Islamist extremism and the extremisation of some young Muslims. It is not difficult to see how the same framework, many of the so-called risk factors and not least the importance of strong emotions, are highly relevant in other extremisation processes, both right-wing and left-wing.

Some of the factors and emotions were present in the extremisation of Anders Behring Breivik. From his compendium and testimony in court it was clear that he was motivated by a strong anger against social changes he saw as a result of feminism and multiculturalism, threatening his individual and Norway's collective identity. His anger and hate were directed both at the Muslims, whom he saw as taking over and "Islamising" Norway, and against the multicultural-socialist traitors whom he thought responsible for the feminisation of society and working as a fifth column, laying the country open to the invading Muslim hordes, making himself and the Norwegian majority victims. Accordingly, his acts of terrorism were a cry of protest and justified vengeance. The same ideological positions and emotional reactions can also be observed in less violent groups and networks – e.g., British Defence League and other right-wing groups hostile to immigration in general and Muslim immigration in particular.

Furthermore, the extremist positions are found amongst many with no intention of committing violence but who constantly uses the Internet, especially social media, to spread hatred, racism and other extreme utterances. The number of people harbouring extremist ideas is far greater than those committed to violent acts. Thus, further research might focus on why there is this clear distinction between the large number of people with extremist opinions and attitudes on the one hand, and the relative marginal number of people – whether right-wing, Islamist or other – who will follow up their extreme attitudes with violent acts. We should also investigate what the roles of emotions are in *limiting* or even *preventing* violence.

Conclusions

The proposition in this article is that emotions are judgements about the world and that emotions play a rational role in initiating behaviour and creating identity. I have pointed to the role and importance of emotions in the processes of extremisation. Even if emotions always imply a subjective element, emotional experiences are also generalisable, and within a hermeneutic framework of understanding emotions are important "drivers" or "semi-causal"⁵ factors in both the individual and collective processes into extremist positions. On a generalised level the suggested analysis can be applied to many ideologically justified forms of extremisation, e.g., leftist, rightist as well as Islamist.

Can we draw some further conclusions from this discussion? I think so. First, we need to understand better the importance of emotions in our analysis and explanation of identities, opposition and protests.

Secondly, we need to understand even better the appeal of traditional values and/or religion as the basis for emotional responses to the influence of social change and modern values. We have to recognise that there will be anger and hate, and *ressentiment*, in the process of change and adaptation. And we need to understand that these emotions will shape and

⁵ With this term I mean that emotions have a causal impact on some elements in an overall process best understood within a hermeneutic – non-causal – framework.

maintain identities – on both sides of the conflict lines. Furthermore, these processes of change will not be without backlashes. The recent success of the contemporary extreme and violent Islamist movement(s) represents such a backlash. It is important to recognise that the success breeds success as the emotional appeal of such movement grows – because the movement channels the anger and hate into an identity of seemingly successful opposition.

Thirdly, and more challenging, the *ressentiment* among Muslim youth in Europe has been a growing problem, even if it remains to be seen how the future of this growth will turn out. The *ressentiment* is related to real and perceived victimisation and victimhood. It shapes identities – individual as well as collective – and will justify and inspire a youth rebellion with serious extremist consequences as it channels energies and activities into support for the contemporary extreme Islamist movements. We also need to look closer at the interplay between global developments – including Western interventions in the Muslim world – and the “vulnerability factors” that leads to marginalisation in Europe, in order to understand the development of strong emotions among young Muslims.

Thus, finally, more research is needed to explore further the role of emotions – and the significance of *ressentiment* – in the development of extremisms of all sorts.

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