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Exploring the Whitejihad Digital Ecosystem

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Abstract

A new generation of extremist is raising and it's becoming able to establish self-created communities combining Salafi-Jihadism and extreme right. Such community originally hinged on a few influencers and self-named Islamogram has grown and contaminated within various platforms. Using a set of metaphors and visual motifs typical of the alt-right and far-right, they accuse a loss of tradition and a corrupt view of life. The community build networks, drive narratives across several platforms and spread violent propaganda. One way to study how this type of extremist develops and branches out within social platforms through the covert observation of their interactions. Reconstruct the morphology of the network in which these interactions occur. This article attempts to contribute to an advance of the literature on terrorism studies, through a combination of content analysis and ethnographic observation.

Una nuova generazione di estremisti sta crescendo e sta diventando in grado di stabilire comunità auto-create che combinano salafismo-jihadismo ed estrema destra. Tale comunità, originariamente imperniata su alcuni influencer e autodefinitasi Islamogram, è cresciuta e si è contaminata all'interno di varie piattaforme. Utilizzando una serie di metafore e motivi visivi tipici dell'alt-right e dell'estrema destra, accusano la perdita della tradizione e una visione corrotta della vita. La comunità costruisce reti, guida narrazioni su diverse piattaforme e

diffonde propaganda violenta. Un modo per studiare come questo tipo di estremisti si sviluppa e si ramifica all'interno delle piattaforme sociali è l'osservazione occulta delle loro interazioni. Ricostruire la morfologia della rete in cui avvengono queste interazioni. Questo articolo cerca di contribuire a un avanzamento della letteratura sugli studi sul terrorismo, attraverso una combinazione di analisi dei contenuti e osservazione etnografica.

Keywords

Islamogram, Whitejihad, alt-right, propaganda, content

1. Introduction

The Digital World has been home to various extremist groups. Among them, two digital ecosystems have become particularly known in the past years: the jihadist and the far-right ones. The two ecosystems always had some degree of connection: some communities of the far-right ecosystem shared jihadist videos due to their fascination for violence, others were simply attracted by the success and recognition that IS and al-Qa'ida had obtained. Recently, a new digital ecosystem connected to both the jihadist and the extreme right networks has become more prominent: the Islamogram. In this paper we argue that this ecosystem is part of a wider one, for which is proposed the definition of Whitejihad. This definition is proposed to include every form of contamination between the right extreme wing networks and the jihadist ecosystems, including the Islamogram, in order to understand how they are connected, how does the ecosystem work and why this contamination has born in the first place. Starting from the concept of Islamogram and *Islamogram: Salafism and Alt-Right Online Subcultures* by Moustafa Ayadi, through scientific and grey literature and based on the observation of the ecosystem on Telegram, it is proposed a definition of Whitejihad digital ecosystem.

It is then defined the type of actors present in the digital environment and the material they produce. This is done through a process of observation of channels and chats connected to the ecosystem.

1.1 Islamogram

Moustafa Ayad in *Islamogram: Salafism and Alt-Right Online Subcultures*¹, analysed a community that emerged in 2016 and self-defined as Isla-

¹ Ayad M., *Islamogram: Salafism and Alt-Right Online Subcultures*, Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 16 November 2021, <https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Islamogram.pdf>

mogram. The name they've chosen for themselves stems from the platform where the community was born: Instagram.

Ideologically heterogenous, Islamogram is a network of young Salafi propagators who use the Instagram platform but draw heavily on the visual and linguistic culture of 4Chan, Reddit and Discord.²

The Islamogram, is mainly composed by Gen Z³ Salafis, that, by using chan⁴ and gaming language, imagery and memes, are actively spreading various type of propaganda. Said propaganda can range from pro-Islam to radical Islam content and even to pro-jihad material.

The usage of meme and gaming languages typical of the chan led to the creation of content easy to spread, easy to understand for a wider audience and more easily defendable due to its ironic nature. The choice of using memes led to a form of contamination with another group that already co-opted their language as their own in order to spread extremist ideas: the alt-right.

Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



² *Ibid.*, p. 12

³ Gen Z are people born from 1997 to 2012. Gen Z and Gen Y, people born from 1987 to 1996, are considered to be true digital natives.

Missier A. C., *Fundamentalism and the search for meaning in digital media among Gen Y and Gen Z*, *Journal for Deradicalization*, Issue No. 33 (Winter 2022/23), p. 258, <https://journals.sfu.ca/jd/index.php/jd/article/view/679/397>

⁴ “Chan” is short for “channel” and is an alternative way of calling imageboards. «Imageboards, such as 4chan [...], are online discussion forums where anyone can post anonymously and which have developed their own peculiar subcultures. They are online spaces of cultural consumption and production, and birthplaces of various memes and discourses, which sometimes cross over to the mainstream».

Ylä-Anttila T., Eranti V. Hardwick S., *Going Overboard: How Ironic Group Style Becomes Political on an Anonymous Imageboard*, *Social Media + Society* 6, no. 4 (October 2020), p. 3, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120969912>

In figure 1 and 2 it is shown the adaption of the chad⁵ meme in order to fit the Islamogram community: instead of a white man with blonde hair, the chad is depicted as an Arab. The idea behind the meme remains the same: a reply to an attempted mockery for an idea or an opinion, but the appearance of the alpha male proud of his ideas is adapted in order to fit different communities. Another important effect is the mingling between both worlds: in figure 3 there is an example of that. Despite their differences, both the alt-right and the Islamogram have enemies in common: one of them is the LGBTQ+ community. In figure 3⁶ there is an example of that: both chads are aware of their differences, but unite to confront a member of the LGBTQ+ community, represented as a variant of the soyjack⁷. Despite being native of Instagram, the Islamogram⁸

⁵ The “Chad” meme, also known as “Yes Chad” or “Nordic Gamer”, represents a man with blonde hair and blue eyes. There are numerous variants of the meme, but usually it also has a beard.

Yes Chad, Know Your Meme, <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/yes-chad>

«‘Chad’ is a term used in toxic masculinity movements [...] to describe an alpha male [...] that is sexually attractive and socially successful. [...] he is cool and self-confident and brushes off complex whiny ethical and societal dilemmas with a strong and simple ‘yes’, ‘no’ or ‘so what’». De Smedt T., Cauberghe O., Jaki S., Voué P., *Handbook of hate memes*, European Observatory of Online Hate, June 2022, p. 86

⁶ In figure 3 it is represented a meme format known as Soyjack vs Chad. The first gets disappointed by something, the second either laughs about the soyjack, about the topic of their discussion or simply accepts any drawbacks of the latter. Soyjacks vs. Chads, Know Your Meme, <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/soyjaks-vs-chads>

It is part of a broader format known as Wojack comics. It generates from the Wojack meme, also known as Feels Guy, generally used to represent melancholy, regret or loneliness. By combining variants of the wojack memes with elements of comics the Wojack comics meme was born.

Wojack, Know Your Meme, <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/wojak>

Wojack Comics, Know Your Meme, <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/subcultures/wojak-comics>

⁷ The Soyjack or Soyboy Face refers to a facial expression showing surprise or excitement with their mouth agape. It is associated with men described as nu-male, men who do not conform to traditional masculine gender role, or Soy-Boys, a term used in right-wing online communities to describe men lacking masculine characteristics.

Soy Boy Face / Soyjak, Know Your Meme, <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/soy-boy-face-soyjak>

Nu-Male, Know Your Meme, <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/nu-male>

Soy-Boy, Know Your Meme, <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/soy-boy>

⁸ On Instagram, between 2020 and 2021, Ayad found 60 Salafi Influencers.

Ayad M., *Islamogram: Salafism and Alt-Right Online Subcultures*, Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 16 November 2021, p. 12, <https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Islamogram.pdf>

has rooted itself in many other social media platforms: among them, Reddit⁹, Facebook¹⁰, Discord¹¹ and Telegram¹².

After a wave of ban on Instagram and Facebook, the Islamogammers reach on those two social media was reduced. Along with the “retirement” of some important figures in the community like Abu Anon¹³, this effectively triggered a migration of the community towards the home of the Digital Caliphate¹⁴. Telegram may have been chosen for numerous reasons. The first one could be its functions: it is very user-friendly, messages are encrypted and can self-destruct, it can be synchronised on multiple devices, it has no limits on media and chat size, it has an open API and open-source code and groups can have up to 200,000 members¹⁵. Telegram has been perceived for a long time as the most secure messaging service, that also has the ability of hosting channels: according to Telegram FAQs,

Channels are a tool for broadcasting public messages to large audiences. In fact, channels can have an unlimited number of subscribers. When you post in a channel, the message is signed with the channel’s name and not yours. You can appoint additional administrators to help you manage the channel. New subscribers can see the entire message history in a channel once they join.¹⁶

⁹ On Reddit, between 2020 and 2021, there were 3 main threads with 7203 subscribers.

Idem

¹⁰ On Facebook, between 2020 and 2021, there were 21 central pages and groups with 88596 followers.

Idem

¹¹ On Discord, between 2020 and 2021, there were 6 dedicated servers.

Idem

¹² On Telegram, between 2020 and 2021, there were 22 channels with 24709 subscribers.

Ibid p. 13

¹³ Abu Anon was a Salafi Islamogammers that had 36200 followers on Instagram, 6949 on Twitter and 3749 on his Discord server.

Ibid. p. 24

The 20th of November 2021 he announced his retirement through an Instagram post. abu.anony, *Goodbye*, 20 November 2021 <https://www.instagram.com/p/CWg4qe7v5So/?hl=it>
¹⁴ ‘Digital Caliphate’ is used to refer to the digital ecosystem built by IS. «Salafi-Jihadi groups adopted The Telegram messaging platform around 2016. Since then, it has been a mainstay of the Salafi-Jihadi information ecosystem for groups such as al-Dawlat al-Islamiyya (IS) and al-Qaeda (AQ) and other foreign terrorist organisations (FTO)».

Prucha N., Fisher A., “*Working and Waiting*”: *The Salafi-Jihadi movement on Telegram in 2021*, Sicurezza, Terrorismo e Società, Vol. 15, Issue No. 1 (2022), p. 150, <https://www.sicurezza-terrorismo-societa.it/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/SicTerSoc-15-I-2022-Fisher-Prucha.pdf>

¹⁵ Telegram, <https://telegram.org/>

¹⁶ Telegram FAQ, https://telegram.org/faq_channels/it?setln=en

Telegram basically allows to build and administrate a community, while also giving the ability to create groups where users can chat.

The second reason could be the presence on the platform of numerous Salafi channels, spreading content vital to Islamogram communities, and of jihadist content.

According to our monitoring on Telegram, started in November 2022, the number of channels and chat related to the Islamogram has increased compared to the data presented by Ayad: as of now, more than 50 relevant channels or groups, with even more gone inactive or banned due to Telegram's TOS violations. While observing the Islamogram ecosystem on Telegram, we encountered numerous channel and groups that, despite being linked to it, did not correspond to the definition of Islamogram, nor they defined themselves as part of that community.

It is therefore argued that the Islamogram on Telegram is part of a wider digital ecosystem, for which in this paper is proposed a new definition: Whitejihad digital ecosystem.

2. Whitejihadism

The Whitejihad digital ecosystem is an environment composed by the Islamogram and its contamination with the jihadist digital ecosystem and the extreme right terrorist networks. The jihadist ecosystem is present in all its form, including the official propaganda apparatuses and the spontaneous media houses. The extreme right terrorist network both influences and is influenced by the Whitejihad digital ecosystem, with members of both environments sharing groups and materials.

The presence of members coming from both extremist ecosystems in the same digital space can also be attributed to some features that they both share: they both believe that any means is legitimate in order to achieve their own goals, they identify as enemies those that are not part of the group ideology, a transition from revolutionary stances to conservative ones after their ideologies gain momentum and the sanctification of heroes¹⁷. In the case of the Whitejihad ecosystem, the second element is particularly important, because the common enemy is the key element that allows them to coexist.

The name proposed to define this phenomenon tries to include the two main aspects of the ecosystem. White refers to one of the main topics of

¹⁷ Brzuszkiewicz S., *Jihadism and Far-Right Extremism: Shared Attributes With Regard to Violence Spectacularisation*. European View, Vol. 19, Issue No. 1 (April 2020), pp. 71-72, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1781685820915972>

propaganda spread by the extreme right networks: white suprematism. Jihad refers to the extremist Islamic networks being part of the environment.

Despite the focus of this work on Telegram, the Whitejihad digital ecosystem is present on many other social media: TikTok, Instagram, Discord, Reddit, Twitter and Facebook. The communities, channels and groups produce different types materials. Every community has its specific characteristics and some are more influenced by a high presence of extreme right members¹⁸. The more a channel or a group is connected to the extreme right digital networks, the higher the chances that pure extreme right material is spread. In certain cases, there have been also evidence of material produced by an accelerationist collective¹⁹ forwarded by Whitejihad channels, proving how deep the connection with the extreme right-wing network can be.

Another key element is the potential support of terrorism: not every community supports jihadism, and if they do, it does not mean they are in favour every branch of it. Some groups and channel will only support one between Islamic State (IS) and al-Qa'ida (AQ), some will support both. Generally speaking, IS is more popular inside the ecosystem. This is probably due to the young age of the average member of the community, which makes them more familiar with the self-proclaimed caliphate propaganda and attacks.

Certain communities will produce material that glorifies the Taliban, others will condemn them. This is a particularly complex topic for the Whitejihad ecosystem, since the majority of the communities expected the formation of a sort of caliphate after the Taliban gained control of Kabul in 2021.

The link between Islamogram and jihadism is granted by Haramposters and Akh-right communities. The first produces material attacking perceived enemies of Islam, like the West, the US, the LGBTQ+ community and liberal Muslims. The latter, whose name is a wordplay merging akh²⁰ and alt-right, are almost always directly supporting the glocal jihad. They tend to produce memes where the jihadists are portrayed as based²¹, brave and extremely ma-

¹⁸ Extreme Right is a definition used to include the more extremist and violent members of the far-right digital ecosystems: among those there are neo-Nazis that incite to violence and accelerationists.

¹⁹ Accelerationism «is a fringe philosophy that promotes mass violence to fuel society's collapse». Accelerationist collectives indoctrinate right wing individuals with fringe political ideas, usually a Nazi, in order to fuel a "us against them" mentality, inciting them to commit attacks.

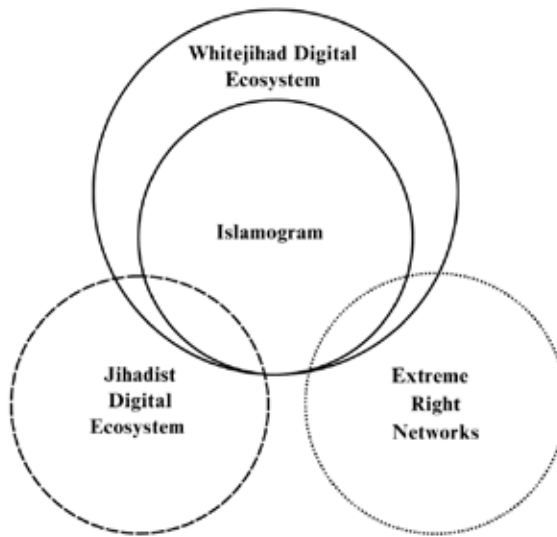
Antwi-Boasiako K. B., Hill C. G., *Terrorism and Right-Wing Extremism: History and Comparative Definitions*, Political Preference, Vol. 26 (2020), p. 87, <https://doi.org/10.31261/polpre.2020.26.77-94>

²⁰ Akh in Arabic means 'brother'

²¹ Based is a term with different meanings depending on the context. Based typically means something that is «agreeable» and «cool,» but it can also be used to mean something is con-

sculine. Inside the chat and groups of the Whitejihad digital ecosystem, there are also some official and unofficial members of IS. They forward material produced by official and spontaneous media houses and actively participate in the life of the community, contributing to the creation of propaganda. In certain cases, chats that started as a Islamogram communities were completely cannibalized by the jihadist propaganda, becoming just echo-chamber for IS materials.

Figure 4



In figure 4 it is proposed a graphical exemplification of the structure of the Whitejihad digital ecosystem. Starting from the Islamogram community, which is an endonym and easily recognizable, we can determine other sub-categories influenced by the overlapping of different extremist entities. The alt-right influence manifests itself in a frequent use of their typical language and slang, in particular memetic warfare²². The main topics overlapping

sidered anti-woke.

Based, Know Your Meme, <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/based>

²² «Throughout different definitions, there is a clear sense in which memetic ‘warfare’ involves elements which are beyond the mere usage or virality of memes, but rather consists of a defined objective (military, political, economic, psychological, and/or disruptive), a concerted effort involving or aiming to involve one or more organised groups in executing it (albeit the form of organisation can vary), and that this is conducted in opposition to an ‘opponent’,

between those digital ecosystems are conservative narrative, misogyny and antisemitism.

The Islamogram produces mainly two categories of content, defining also the community which created them: Halalposting and Haramposting, which are endonyms as well²³. Halalposting consists of memes used for proselytising and jokes about Muslims' conditions and the West²⁴. The great majority of the Islamogram production is characterized by the absence of open support for jihadist groups. Channels dedicated to the Halalposting will frequently forward post and links from purely theological channels, contributing to the spread of the Salafi ideology.

Haramposting involves more direct attacks towards the perceived enemies of Islam, taking political stances and frequently exalting the use of violence. Most of the production still consists of memes, but sometimes official and spontaneous propaganda material will be posted in groups and channels. Haramposters also are apparently aware of being observed and pay attention to publications and articles related to them.

Despite being easy to differentiate between them conceptually, in practice the two types of posting can overlap, especially on key issues as LGBTQ+ rights²⁵. The overlapping between Halal and Haramposting frequently occurs in case of social bombing²⁶, raid²⁷ and public shitposting²⁸ with the purpose

whether the opponent is an individual, organisation, political force, set of values/policies, or a nation state». Memes become the means of the attack, not its focal point.

Peacock, T.N., "Son – you'll be a soldier one day": reconceptualising YouTube discourses on participation in memetic warfare, *Digital War*, Vol. 3, Issue No. 1 (2022), p. 85, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s42984-022-00051-8>

²³ Ayad M., *Islamogram: Salafism and Alt-Right Online Subcultures*, Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 16 November 2021, p. 20, <https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Islamogram.pdf>

²⁴ *Idem*

²⁵ *Idem*

²⁶ Social-Bombing consists in the attempt by users or communities to force a new association of terms on a person or organisation. This is often done in a harmful way, trying to associate someone to a pejorative.

²⁷ Raiding is an 'invasion' of another community space online. This is often done with disruptive intent, with the invading force shitposting for as long as they can. The objective can range from simply being annoying to force a ban on a public community.

²⁸ Shitposting is a term used to describe a range of user misbehaviours and rhetoric on forums and message boards that are intended to derail a conversation off-topic. This can be done with a malicious intent or for no apparent reason.

Shitposting, Know Your Meme, <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/shitposting>

Shitposting has also taken other meanings: in 2016 it was frequently considered as form of misinformation spreading or as a subcategory of trolling, a behaviour intentionally done to anger or frustrate another user.

of being disruptive against specific targets and communities. The Akh-right²⁹ is an sub-group of the Haramposting focusing on glocal jihad battlefields, combining white suprematism with Salafism. This group adds an element of ethnicism to Islam, glorifying the jihad in the Balkans and supporting what they define as “White-sharia”³⁰. Their content is characterized by a strong influence from fashwave³¹ edits and is focused almost exclusively on white Muslims. Members of the Akh-right are frequently mocked by members of the wider Islamogram community for their stances. The Influenced-accelerated is a group of media actors contaminated by pro-jihad and accelerationist propaganda, but entirely focused on memetic warfare and forwarding of materials. Those actors are the link between the terrorist communities and the rest of the ecosystem.

The last type of actors present in the Whitejihad digital ecosystem is the terrorist one, composed by actors spreading terroristic propaganda. The most diffused type of content is the pro-jihad propaganda, but often they spread also accelerationist one and their own original materials. The latter usually have features determined by different influences, such as glowing laser eyes and skull mask, taken from the extreme right networks, applied on jihadist figures such as Bin Laden.

Cavanaugh D. A., “User not found” *Shitposting and the labour of visibility on Instagram*, The IJournal: Student Journal of the Toronto’s Faculty of Information, Vol. 7, Issue No. 1 (December 2021), p. 1, <https://doi.org/10.33137/ijournal.v7i1.37895>

Troll / Trolling, Know Your Meme, <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/trolling-troll>

29Ayad M., *Islamogram: Salafism and Alt-Right Online Subcultures*, Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 16 November 2021, p. 20, <https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Islamogram.pdf>

³⁰ “White sharia” began as a white nationalist and anti-feminist meme in late 2016. White sharia quickly became a way for a part of the far-right to express a misogynistic vision in which women should be stripped of all rights and only stay at home. The creator of the meme, wanted «an extreme tribal patriarchy in the ethnostate».

Kelley B. J., “White Sharia” *And Militant White Nationalism*, Southern Poverty Law Center, 27 November 2017, <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2017/11/27/white-sharia-and-militant-white-nationalism>

In the Akh-right case, white-sharia has nothing to do with the original context of the meme. They instead re-appropriated the term in order to show their support to the jihadists fighting in the Balkans, exalting their white “identity”.

Ayad M., *Islamogram: Salafism and Alt-Right Online Subcultures*, Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 16 November 2021, p. 21, <https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Islamogram.pdf>

³¹Tuters M., *Fashwave and the False Paradox of Ironic Nazism*, *Krisis: Journal for contemporary philosophy*, Vol. 1, Issue No. 1 (2021), p. 175, <https://doi.org/10.21827/krisis.41.1.37162>

Figure 5

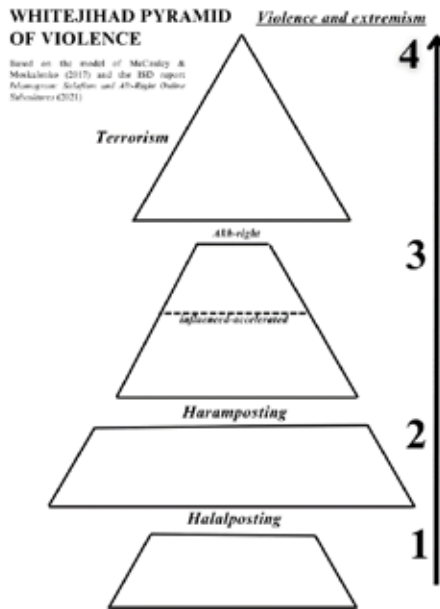
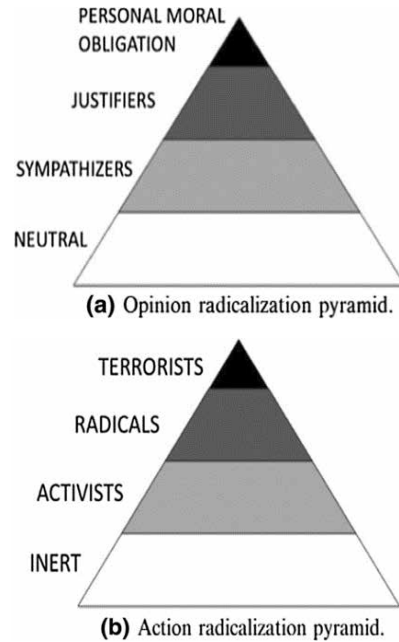


Figure 6



In figure 6, based on the model of McCauley and Moskaleiko³² and on the work of Ayad, it is presented a graphical representation of the content produced in the Whitejihad digital ecosystem. The higher the level of the pyramid, the more violent and extremist is the content.

3. Content

The content produced in the Whitejihad digital ecosystem is widely differentiated: memes are the main focus, but there are also channel doing video edits, posting historical materials, *nasheeds*, news or theological materials. Channels spreading historical content, *nasheeds* and news are common and their function is mostly to create a bond in the chats. For example, channels dedicated to news regarding Islamic persecution are very common since this news get more reactions in the chats.

³² C. R. McCauley, S. Moskaleiko, *Understanding political radicalization: The two-pyramids model*, *American Psychologist*, Vol. 72, Issue 3 (2017), pp. 205-216, <http://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000062>

Nasheeds and historical content are greatly diffused as well: this kind of material contributes to create nostalgia for the golden age of the Islam³³ and for the period when the *Dar al-Islam*³⁴ was in the hands of Islamic rulers. This nostalgia is used as fuel for the spread of Salafi ideas and has the side effect of radicalization towards those deemed responsible for the current state of thing in the Islamic world. Theological channels are extremely important in the ecosystem because Salafism and jihadism are based on theology³⁵.

Theological channels simply post extracts from the *Quran*, hadiths and interpretation of scholars: this material is extremely important in the process of radicalization of an individual, and due to its religious nature is generally safe from any kind of ban. Users will always be able to find theological materials and Whitejihad channels will always be able to spread this type of content.

Ali Fisher and Nico Prucha in *Working and Waiting: The Salafi-Jihadi movement on Telegram in 2021*, point out a similar behaviour inside the jihadist's ecosystems: analysing the network, they note that³⁶.

As said earlier, the great majority of the content produced in the Whitejihad digital ecosystem are memes. Rather than categorising their material based only on the concepts of Halal and Haramposting, in this work it is argued that what characterize the material produced for memetic warfare is its target. Memes are a powerful tool of propaganda to spread ideas, but also a weapon that can be used to attack someone perceived as an enemy.

Based on the observation of the ecosystem, there are two categories towards which the content created is directed: targets of hate and targets of radicalization. The first ones are the enemies of the ecosystem, and as such they are attacked and mocked. The second ones are those representing a potential pool of supporters for Whitejihadism. The categories identified as

³³ This golden age has to be interpreted through the lenses of Salafism. Since «Salafism is [...] a philosophical outlook which seeks to revive the practices of the first three generations of Islam, who are collectively known as the al-salaf al-salih, or “pious predecessors”», this is what the usually refers to.

Maher S., *Salafi-Jihadism: The History of an Idea*, Oxford University Press, 2016, p. 7

³⁴ The *Dar al-Islam*, or house of Islam, historically, corresponded almost identically to the territory where the Muslims lived and where an Islamic State ruled.

During the colonial period, the principle to define *Dar al-Islam*, the faith of the regime ruling the state, loses of validity: Dar al-Islam begins to indicate a territory in which there is Muslims witnesses, despite the form of government or the faith of the governors.

Amoretti B. S., *Il Mondo Musulmano*, Carocci Editore, Roma, 2014, pp. 29-30

³⁵ Prucha N., Fisher A., “*Working and Waiting*”: *The Salafi-Jihadi movement on Telegram in 2021*, Sicurezza, Terrorismo e Società, Vol. 15, Issue No. 1 (2022), pp. 158-159, <https://www.sicurezzaeterrorismosocieta.it/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/SicTerSoc-15-I-2022-Fisher-Prucha.pdf>

³⁶ *Ibid.* P. 155

targets were determined after analysing all the materials posted by channels deemed part of the Whitejihad digital ecosystem during the process of monitoring. Every category will be presented alongside a meme posted or forwarded by Whitejihad channels, in order to clarify the type of content directed towards it.

The first target of hate is the LGBTQ+ community, considered *haram* due to the nature of homosexuality³⁷. It is also accused of corrupting, along with feminists, the Islamic communities in the West, destroying the purity of the Ummah. The LGBTQ+ community is perceived as a puppet of the big corporations in the West, often believed to be controlled by Jews, and a result of the corruption that plagues modern society.

In figure 7 there is a meme depicting the contrast between the chad Muslim and the soyjack part of the LGBTQ+ community. On the back there are various logos of social media platforms, magazines, tv channels and political ideologies. The soyjack accuses the chad of indoctrinating people through the use of the Quran, not acknowledging the fact that he has been indoctrinated by all the organizations on the background.

Feminists and liberal leftists are frequently targeted because they promote women rights, heavily criticizing Islamic countries about the lack of them. They are also seen as part of the corruption process of the Islamic communities in the West. In particular, they see them as a key part in giving birth to the “Liberal Muslims”: not only they are corrupting women, but they are weakening the men at the same time, leading them to a sinful life.

Another common topic in this confrontation is the Sharia, particularly the aspects concerning violations of human rights. An exemplification of this can be seen in figure 8, where a crying soyjack argues that the Hijab does not protect from sexual assault, implying that the need of it is victim blaming and a violation of the freedom of women. The chad Muslim then simply replies

³⁷ «Many Muslims view homosexuality as a choice, and perceive gay men and. Therefore, same-gender relationships are considered deviant and viewed as haram, or forbidden, in the eyes of Allah».

Yeck A. T., Anderson V. N., *Homosexuality as Haram: Relations among Gender, Contact, Religiosity, and Sexual Prejudice in Muslim Individuals*, Sex Roles, Vol. 81 (2019), p. 194, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-018-0989-2>

According to the fatwas website Islamic Question & Answers, which is supervised by a Salafi scholar, «they (gays and lesbians) both go against the natural disposition (fitrah) which Allah has created in mankind – and also in animals – whereby the male is inclined towards the female, and vice versa».

Why Does Islam Forbid Lesbianism and Homosexuality?, Islamic Question & Answers, 04 April 2009, <https://islamqa.info/en/answers/10050/why-does-islam-forbid-lesbianism-and-homosexuality>

that, to protect women from rapists, the latter are punished with stoning leading to the soyjack being “triggered”³⁸ from an application of death penalty.

As mentioned earlier, feminists and liberal leftists are considered to be directly creating the liberal Muslims. Liberal Muslims are considered apostates, corrupted by the life style and ways of the Kuffars, the unbelievers. They are identified as those who align with feminist ideals and support the LGBTQ+ communities, but in general with those believing that Islam should be influenced by the western ideas, laws and states. This is perceived as treason due to Salafism being a cornerstone of the Whitejihad digital ecosystem.

In figure 9, it is used a different style of meme from the previous ones: while in figure 7 and 8 the images were part of an established meme format, this one is a n illustration. The author depicts a Muslim man working hard to be able to afford an apartment, marry and, as subtext, live like a good Muslim should. In the second panel it is shown a Muslim woman affected by the western style of life, taking away all the hard earned money of the man for futile items. These are compared to what the man desired, something noble towards which most of the Whitejihad community strives, in order to make them appear even less important.

Another target of hate are the atheists. They are despised, considered worse than almost every other category because they do not believe in the existence of God, which is a cardinal sin.

In figure 10, there are depicted a liberal man, discrediting the idea of homosexuality being wrong, and a Muslim man. Asked to quote something different from the Bible to prove his point, the Muslim man replies that also the Quran condemns homosexuality.

This meme is not only an attack to non-believers and homosexuality, but also a form of support towards another religious source. In the extreme right networks, there are many members that identify themselves as Christians: this meme could be posted by a member of the Whitejihad ecosystem just as likely as being posted by an alt-right supporter. The common enemy identifiable in the LGBTQ+ is the link between the communities.

The West is perceived as harmful, invading Islamic countries and forcing them to adapt to its liberal ideology. It is frequently depicted as a hypocrite, concerned with human rights and peace only in regards to other regions and religions. In particular, the main targets are the US and the NATO, who are considered the main force of invasion in the *Dar al-Islam*.

³⁸ Triggered is a term used to indicate someone that gets upset or offended by someone saying something trivial or innocuous.

Triggered Comics, Know Your Meme, <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/triggered-comics>

In figure 11 the “united we stand” slogan under the World Trade Center covered in an US flag is mocked with the phrase “Unlike the Twin Towers”. This is the first example of Haramposting in this work: there is a reference to the terrorist attack of the 11 September 2001, used to mock the US using an event that traumatised and influenced them since it happened.

Israel and the Jews are considered enemies of Islam and of the Arab countries in the Middle East. They are also considered to be one of the main forces behind the West Attacks on the *Dar al-Islam*. Memes frequently occurs in correlation to Palestinian news, but content related to Jews stereotype are also very common: the greediness, the idea of them being behind most of the powerful corporation in the world and the accusation of being attracted by children.

In figure 12 it is depicted Roman Reigns, a WWE wrestler that has been previously associated with the gigachad meme³⁹, accusing paedophiles of being fan of Israel. This stems from the Oral Suction⁴⁰ used by certain Rabbis to clean the wound after circumcision. This practice is one of the reasons why Jews are associated with paedophilia from members of the extreme right networks, along with a great numbers of conspiracies theories regarding children. Shia Muslims are not considered Muslims, and as such they are targets of attack. Frequently they are associated with Iran, seen as the main spreader of the Shiism in the Middle East and in the world.

In figure 13 there is a simple top text-bottom text meme in which Shias are described as “not humans”. The concept is considered to be so important that it has to be taught to children, suggesting at the same time that Shias should be treated like animals or not even as a living being. This is a concept strongly pushed by almost every Telegram Whitejihad channel, with some being dedicated only to belittling Shiism.

The first and most important target of radicalization of the Whitejihad digital ecosystem is its main demographics: Gen Z Muslims, especially Salafis. The Islamogram, which represents a sizeable portion of the ecosystem, was created by Gen Z Salafis and uses the language of meme and chan culture in order to be as catchy as possible. Through the use of irony, they spread radical messages of various nature, exploiting the self-irony of young Muslims

³⁹ The gigachad is a meme used to define the internet archetype of the most masculine and sexually attractive male possible.

GigaChad, Know Your Meme, <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/gigachad>

⁴⁰ «When a baby is circumcised, some ritual Jewish circumcisers (mohelim) do a practice called metzitzah b'peh. Metzitzah b'peh is when the mohel uses their mouth to suck blood away from the baby's circumcision wound as part of the circumcision ritual».

Metzitzah B'peh (Direct Oral Suctioning), NYC Health, <https://www.nyc.gov/site/doh/health/health-topics/safe-bris.page>

that joke about stereotypes directed towards them. In figure 14 it is shown such an example: the meme is supposed to simulate a discussion between a Muslim and a random interlocutor, most likely a white western man. When questioned about any family members being a religious extremist online, he identifies himself in the description.

This is a case of a meme that could reach almost anyone on any social, even someone that is not in contact with the Whitejihad digital ecosystem, due to the common format and the ironic nature of it. Another common target of radicalization is the alt-right. They share most their enemies with the Whitejihad digital ecosystem, which lead them to perceive each other as the last conservative opposers to the degeneracy of the liberal society, and thus as natural allies. This feeling is not necessarily true for every alt-righter, especially for those that believe that the Muslims are invading Europe and the US. Nevertheless, there are communities in which the common hatred for the Jews, the LGBTQ+ communities and other targets is strong enough to make them bond.

In figure 15 there are a crusader and an Arab soldier, mortal enemies during the crusades, standing shoulder to shoulder against the degeneracy of the modern world: this meme also highlight the religious nature of both men. All the degeneracies of the modern world, which include the LGBTQ+ communities, the request for equalities, mainstream movement such as the Black Lives Matter and political ideologies like anarchism and communism. They are backed up by a giant spider with a men face and a Star of David over his head, representing the Jews.

Another potential target of radicalization are incels⁴¹, redpilled⁴², and misogynists. In their belief, modern women are believed to exploit their new-found freedom and rights to choose only men that are handsome, rich or have a higher social status. Insnyc incels believe to be too ugly to have a sexual intercourse, and many of them accuse the modern world and women for their own status.

⁴¹ Incels, which stands for Involuntary Celibates, believe that the society is a hierarchy in which beauty determines your role and that women are responsible for said hierarchy: in such a society the incels believe that they will not find a woman because they are too ugly. In their worldview the chads, the most attractive men, attract the Stacys, the most beautiful women. The normies, everyone else, are left with unattractive women and the incels remain alone.

Hoffman B., Ware J., Shapiro E., *Assessing the Threat of Incel Violence*, Studies in Conflict and Terrorism, Vol. 43, Issue 7 (2020), p. 567, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2020.1751459>

⁴² Redpillers are those that claim to be the only aware of the feminists' conspiracies that run society. Often, they coincide with incels.

The name of the community is taken from the duality of red pill-blue pill from the Matrix films. *Male Supremacy*, Southern Poverty Law Center, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/male-supremacy>

The anti-LGBTQ+ and anti-feminist ideologies of the Whitejihad digital ecosystem are welcomed by the incel and redpill communities. They believe that in the Islamic culture women are kept in their place by men. Some also believe that in an Islamic society they could find a woman and marry, something not possible in a modern western society.

In figure 16 there is a picture of Andrew Tate holding a Quran: Tate is an influencer that has attracted numerous attentions for its misogynist ideas and who recently converted to Islam. The use of his image by Whitejihadist channels, the generic attraction that some incels and redpilled have towards a salafism and the fame of Tate are all elements that make this picture potentially viral in certain communities.

The last target of radicalization are the Islamic communities at large. In a world where almost anyone uses or sees memes as a form of communication, many Muslims could simply search memes or material on Islam. As said earlier, the Halalposters produce mostly proselytism, apparently innocent materials that is easily spreadable by any Muslims, independently by how much he is radicalized. In figure 17, it is shown a classic format adapted to an Islamic context: on the left we have a doomer girl⁴³, wearing a niqab, and on the right a chad. The chad, the epitome of the masculine man, when asked if he would commit to two jobs just to keep his wife home so she can be with their children full time simply replies “Yes”. This meme both promotes Salafi ideas, with a woman fully covered a niqab, and exalts the Muslim man, who is ready to commit to a much heavier workload to provide for his family and to be a good Muslim.

Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9



⁴³ Doomer girl or Doomerette is a female wojack created as a counterpart the wojack character Doomer. She is usually a love interest or a girlfriend for the latter. The Doomer represents a man in his early 20s who is depressed and has a bleak outlook on the world, in contrast to the boomers.

Doomer Girl, Know Your Meme, <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/doomer-girl>

Doomer, Know Your Meme, <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/doomer>

Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12



Figure 13



Figure 14



Figure 15



Figure 16



Figure 17



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