A Pacifist Perspective on Countering Extremism

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Abstract:

How should a pacifist approach the phenomena of extremism and counter-extremism? Through exploring the breadth of the term extremism alongside pacifist scholarship, the paper argues that pacifism itself appears to be 'extreme', allowing extremism to be critically examined from an extreme perspective. From here, the paper asks whether counter-extremism engenders peace. The paper isolates three components of dominant definitions of counter-extremism: a promotion of nonviolence, of liberal democratic values, and of tolerance. While such aspects of counter-extremism appear to engender peace, the paper exposes the ways in which countering extremism promotes different forms of violence: a 'nonviolence' which legitimises state violence; an ethnocentric homogenisation of liberal democratic values which alienates ethnic minorities, and a narrow sphere of tolerated pluralism which transforms values that challenge hegemony into threats. The paper argues that in order to engender a peaceful future, pacifists need to contribute to the reconceptualisation of extremism. The paper suggests that instead of depicting challenges to hegemonic values as 'antagonisms' that threaten, agonistic spaces are required such that 'extremism' need not be *countered* but *encountered.*

Introduction

In his commentary on the first decade of Critical Terrorism Studies (CTS), Jackson (2017a) notes how little attention has been afforded to the question of non-violent responses to terrorism by critical terrorism scholars. Recognising Lindahl (2017) as one exception, Jackson argues CTS has not 'adequately expounded any real alternatives to current counterterrorism approaches and models' (2017a, p. 357). This paper acknowledges this need to develop alternatives within the field of terrorism studies that begin from founding principles that champion non-violence. As such, this paper offers a contribution by asking how pacifists should respond specifically to the phenomena of 'extremism' and 'counter-extremism'.

Jackson (2017a) focusses his attention on the predominance of violent responses to immediate threats of terror - drone strikes, armed police responses, invasion of foreign countries and so on. Yet, over the past fifteen years, counter-terrorism strategies have widened their remits. Counter-terrorism strategies do not focus purely on violent acts of terror, but on the 'extremist

ideologies' that motivate and catalyse this militancy. 'Extremism', a loosely defined term referring to non-hegemonic or fundamentalist forms of particular views or beliefs, is depicted as an ideological catalyst of 'radicalisation' processes that facilitates the legitimisation of political violence (Ford, 2017a). Contemporary counter-terrorism strategies thus argue that the best way to counter terrorism is to work 'upstream' and counter extremism (Sewall, 2017). This paper takes on Jackson's (2017a) call for pacifist approaches to terrorism one step further, and begins to examine the question of pacifist approaches to the problem of extremism.

The paper argues that extremism and counter-extremism are issues of profound importance for pacifists to tackle. Some extremists cause enormous amounts of violence and suffering - be they white supremacists marching through university campuses shouting anti-semitic and racist abuse, driving into crowds of demonstrators, or religious fanatics letting off explosives in public squares. Yet, efforts to counter extremist 'ideology' can also inflict violence, suffering and harm. In the contemporary climate counter-extremist strategies in the UK, for example, have profoundly impacted Islamic communities and ethnic minorities (Breen-Smyth, 2014). Alternatively, reports have documented how school pupils have been interviewed by police when school staff have mistaken certain actions as potential evidence of extremism (Open Society Justice Initiative, 2016). Moreover, the term 'extremism' itself grows dangerously broad, encapsulating many ideologies and values that challenge the hegemonic - including pacifism.

The term 'extreme' appears to be deployed to describe any value or ideology that strays too far from the permitted boundaries afforded by liberal democratic 'moderation'. Through exploring the enormous breadth of ideologies and values that can be labelled as 'extreme' within current conceptualisations, the paper argues pacifism itself falls within the conceptual remit of extremism. Pacifism, as opposed to nonviolence more broadly, is described as an 'ideology' or 'doctrine'. Pacifism is subjugated (Jackson, 2017b), dismissed and marginalised, is described as being absolutist (and therefore morally questionable), and lastly painted as threatening. This paper thus offers a unique perspective, *examining extremism from an 'extreme' perspective*. The paper presents pacifists with a challenge: how to respond to extremism, and engender peace, in the face of both extremist and counter-extremist violence, while defending itself from dismissal as an 'extreme' response?

It begins by asking the question, what kind of peace does counter-extremism engender? The paper isolates three core components of definitions of extremism - a stress on the threat of violence, an emphasis on non-hegemonic or abnormal views, and a focus on absolutism or fundamentalism. The violence of extremism thus appears indisputable. Yet, the paper then notes the three matching components of dominant definitions of counter-extremism: a promotion of non-violence, liberal democratic values, and of tolerance. While such aspects of counter-extremism appear to engender peace - and thus could, or indeed *should*, be favoured by a pacifist approach - the paper offers a critical perspective, analysing the ways in which each component of countering extremism promotes forms of violence. While promoting 'non-violence', counter-extremism in fact cements notions of legitimate physical violence and thus perpetuates a world system dominated by state militaries and the threat of violent destruction. Promoting a narrow set of shared values, counter-extremism reduces the realm of legitimate values, promoting an ethnocentric homogenisation of liberal democratic values which are in danger of alienating ethnic minorities, and of delegitimizing political dissent. Through promoting tolerance, counter-extremism builds an imbalanced power relationship between the tolerator and tolerated, placing demands, supported by violent threats, that liberal democracy be tolerated by others.

The paper concludes by suggesting avenues for the development of this pacifist perspective. It does so through examining how the foundational assumptions regarding the 'Other' that guide dominant conceptions of a 'post-extremist peace', need to be challenged. The approach must begin by re-shaping the image of the peace towards which counter-extremism is attempting to strive: one which assumes that it is through the removal of dissent and diversity that peace will emerge. Instead, the paper points towards the notion of 'agonistic peace' to offer a suggestion as to how pacifism can help re-orientate a post-extremist future in which plural understandings of peace can flourish.

Developing 'a pacifist perspective'

Jackson (2017a) and Lindahl (2017) both examine the justifications for exploring nonviolent approaches to countering terrorism. In particular, Jackson notes the failure of violent methods in countering terror and the evidential success of nonviolent strategies in resistance movements. Lindahl notes how nonviolent strategies ensure 'the means we use to counter terrorism [are] consistent with the changes we wish to bring about' (Lindahl, 2017, pp. 6-7). As such, it is not

necessary to, at length, explore here the reasons *why* a pacifist perspective on extremism would prove useful. Instead, it is necessary to examine *what* that pacifist perspective might entail.

Yet, delimiting the boundaries of what constitutes pacifism is not as easy as it sounds. Jackson (2017b) highlights a spectrum of positions regarding nonviolence and anti-militarism that fall within the catchment area of pacifism. Some theorists isolate pacifism to solely the question of interstate conflict or war (e.g. Alexandra, 2003; Ryan, 2015). Others, this paper included, suggest pacifism relates not only to the question of war, but violence more broadly, incorporating both interpersonal and indirect violence as well. Fiala calls this 'creative pacifism': 'Pacifists can also be advocates of creative methods of conflict resolution, mediation, and what is often called "positive peace". Creative pacifists, in this sense, envision the construction of a new form of social life that rejects the constant preparation for war' (Fiala, 2014, p. 468). Moreover, Lindahl argues that to 'move from a narrow conception of counterterrorism as negative peace' is key to sustainable peace: 'it is only through respecting the means/end principle, and providing security robustly for each other, that we can prevent future terrorism by creative positively defined conditions for individuals and communities around the world' (2017, p. 8). Arguing that pacifism is concerned with the elimination of all violence, pacifism, this paper argues, should be understood as a commitment to engendering positive peace.

Johan Galtung's (1969) bifurcation of negative and positive peace remains the dominant conceptual framework through which to evaluate notions of peace in peace studies today. Galtung delineates two forms of violence: direct and structural. The former refers to a form of violence where an actor harms another individual. The latter refers to an actorless violence, where nevertheless an individual is harmed - Galtung offers starvation as one example, and suggests: 'We shall sometimes refer to the condition of structural violence as *social injustice* (Galtung, 1969, p. 171, original emphasis). Later, Galtung adds a third form of violence - cultural violence - 'those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence… that can be used to justify or legitimise direct or structural violence' (1990, p. 291).

Peace, Galtung suggests, is the absence of violence; negative peace being the absence of direct violence, positive peace the absence of structural and cultural violence (Galtung, 1969). One challenge, as Cremin (2016) notes, is that the achievement of negative peace can cement forms of structural or cultural violence, making a positive peace harder to reach. A second is

that, while negative peace is easy to imagine (if complex to actualise in practice), what positive peace entails remains unclear. Where Galtung does offer an explanation, the term remains vague and diffuse, described only as 'egalitarian distribution of power and resources' (Galtung, 1969, p. 183).

Positive peace thus appears hard to define outside of negation, as the absence of multiple forms of violence. Yet, perhaps this is not something that taints the terminological value. Peace scholars warn that peace must not become a blueprint to impose on others. Shinko implores we 'resist the trap wherein peace emerges as just another tactic for reinscribing hegemonic structures of domination, exclusion, and marginalisation' (Shinko, 2008, p. 488). Peace holds the capacity to oppress and dominate, if it imposes and demands a particular form of 'peace' onto others (Cremin, 2016). Rather than a pre-ordained notion, positive peace should rather be understood as a dialogic space for many peaces; a form of peace that goes beyond negative peace, and does not engender further violence in order to be achieved.

It is the contention of this article that in its commitment to peace, pacifism should strive towards to an actualisation of a positive peace. The potential for violence that persists within attempts to gain negative peace provides sufficient evidence that a pacifist approach must go beyond the cessation of war, and must instead be orientated to the cessation of all violence and the manifestation of positive peace. It is this understanding of pacifism then, with which one can be equipped to explore the challenges of the concept of 'extremism'.

Defining Extremism

While the threat of extremism is often mentioned by scholars and policy-makers alike, definitions of extremism are much harder to locate. The UK Government argues, for instance, that 'the overriding purpose of this [counter-extremism] strategy is to protect people from the harm caused by extremism' (HM Gov., 2015, p. 17). The then Prime Minister, David Cameron, wrote in the foreword to this same document of a desire of 'defeating' extremism (ibid., p. 6). Another UK Government document speaks of 'dealing with extremism' (Balls, 2008, p. 3). Yet, despite such a commitment to counter extremism, there is no one simple definition of extremism, with plural iterations present across academic and policy literatures. As Harris-Hogan et al. argue: 'many CVE [countering violent extremism] approaches cannot define the specifics of what they are preventing, let alone how or whether they have prevented it' (2016, p. 6). In order to clarify

the field of extremism definitions, this section will argue that it is possible to delineate three broad groups of definitions - one that focuses on violence, one that focusses on non-hegemonic values, and one that focusses on fundamentalism (Ford, 2017a).

Extremism and Violence

The first explanation of extremism appears to synonymise extremism with violence. Oftentimes the terms 'violent extremism' and 'countering violent extremism' are used in academic and policy discourse alike (Harris-Hogan et al., 2016; Sewall, 2017); the terms extremism and terrorism can appear akin to synonyms. Extremists hold onto an 'ideology', this perspective argues, and this ideology is inherently violent. Violence is seen by extremists to be an end in itself, rather than a political strategy (see Gregg, 2016). Proponents of this theory argue even were extremists' political grievances addressed, the violent ideology would continue to pose a threat (Cameron, 2015).

Assuming counter-extremism attempts to counteract the various components of extremism, in this iteration, where extremism is associated with violence, counter-extremism would appear to entail the promotion of non-violence. The UK's Prevent strategy aims 'to challenge the ideology behind violent extremism and support mainstream voices' (HM Gov., 2009, p. 6). Furthermore, the strategy encourages the promotion of democratic modes of political participation to empower non-violent strategies to have one's voice heard (Department of Education, 2015). However, to what extent is this promotion of non-violence within counter-extremist narratives *peaceful*?

Through delegitimizing certain forms of violence, the discourse of counter-extremism concurrently produces a realm of what appears to be non-violence, but is in fact a realm of legitimated violence. In ways similar to Jackson's (2007) examination of the ways in which terrorism discourses legitimise state violence, counter-extremism also delineates the realm of permissible violence. As I have argued elsewhere, discourses of extremism mask:

> the violence of a state military, of misogynistic cultural attitudes, of global inequality. Through highlighting the terror and horror of certain forms of violence: the beheading of the kidnapped, the bloodied victims of a bomb in a public space, the dust from the iconic building reduced to rubble, there is subsequently no space for the terror and horror of

the drone strike, the victim of domestic violence, or the increasing reliance on food banks. The boundaries of liberal democracy's tolerance are perhaps most clearly felt here, with pre-set rules concerning permitted violence, and the deplorable (Ford, 2017a, p. 148).

The promotion of so-called non-violence in the face of the immanently violent extremism is undermined by the discourse surrounding extremism providing the culturally violent framework to legitimise violence, both direct and structural. This initial aspect of counter-extremism thus appears to concurrently and contradictorily promote both nonviolence and violence. It allows current hegemonic practices of violence, be they direct or indirect, to perpetuate, while simultaneously offering a narrow window of legitimate nonviolent political participation through which to air grievances. Such a promotion of 'nonviolence' thus appears at a great distance from a notion of positive peace.

Pacifists should be concerned with the evident violence at the heart of both violent extremism and violent counter-extremism practices. Yet, while extremism and violence are linked within the discourse, perhaps of even more concern is where extremism and violence become decoupled. Pacifists should be cautious of the 'mission creep' of the label 'extremism' that has occurred within counter-terrorism practices. Extremism in contemporary discourse entails more than the belief in the legitimacy of certain forms of violence deemed illegitimate by democratic states. One can be 'extreme' without being violent. This is perhaps most clearly explored through the distinction made in the literature between nonviolent and violent extremism - a delineation made between those extremists who seek to engage in violence themselves and those who do not, but who arguably play a supporting role in the violence of others.

Contestation emerges in the debated role so-called non-violent extremists play in inciting others to engage in acts of violence. While some argue that extremists that do not engage in violence may not be a threat (Bartlett & Miller, 2010), or perhaps even play the role of 'firewall', disincentivizing potential extremists from joining violent groups (Schmid, 2014, p. 2), this argument is dismissed in other academic literature (Lowe, 2017) alongside current UK counter-extremism policy (HM Gov., 2011). The 2011 review of the Prevent strategy argues that 'some terrorist ideologies draw on and make use of extremist ideas which are espoused by apparently non-violent organisations very often operating within the law' (HM Gov., 2011, p. 50).

This distinction between violent and nonviolent extremism has led to some conceptual confusion, with Schmid (2014) noting that if non-violent extremists promote violence, their label of non-violent appears misplaced.

As shall be explored below, this removal of violence as a necessary condition of extremism has widened the remit of what or who might be considered extreme. When pacifists thus explore these further iterations of extremism, the threat of extremism appears not only to be a threat to peace, but in fact also a threat to the position of pacifism, and indeed all political doctrines or values that run counter to the hegemonic liberal democratic state.

Extremism: Fringe Ideologies and Doctrines

The second definition of extremism focuses on values, attitudes and ideologies. Oftentimes, the image of a bell curve is presented, with moderates holding the majority centre-ground, and extremists occupying the fringes. Lake deploys such an analogy, describing how 'extremists hold political preferences that, in any distribution of opinion, lie in one of the "tails"' (2002, p. 18; see also Bartlett & Miller, 2010). Backes examines how 'the idea of the political extreme is rooted in the ancient Greek ethics of moderation' (2010 p. 175). As I have written elsewhere, 'Such an understanding of extremism cements hegemonic liberal attitudes at the centre of understanding of what constitutes legitimate attitudes' (Ford, 2017b, p. 128). Such an approach has raised concern that this definition of extremism is so broad as to incorporate any political vision outside of liberal democracy (Lowe, 2017).

One way in which this definition of extremism has materialised is within the UK's Prevent strategy and the definition of extremism offered there. In 2011, the UK Government reviewed this strategy, and defined extremism as 'vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs' (HM Gov., 2011, p. 107). In so doing, this definition (the first of its kind) sets out the 'moderate' centre - located within a British understanding of liberal democracy - and thus produces extremism in its negation.

Within this iteration of extremism, counter-extremism entails the promotion of those 'moderate' and hegemonic liberal democratic values - to increase the population in the bell of the curve, and to decrease the popularity of the fringes, drawing individuals closer to the centre;

homogenising attitudes, setting specific parameters on permissible pluralism (Ford, 2017a). The dangers (and indeed, the violence) of such a process are two-fold, as demonstrated below. First it places a problematic burden on ethnic minorities to demonstrate assimilation to the majority. Second, this conception of extremism severely limits the realm of legitimate opinion, painting any attitude that strays too far from the hegemonic centre as being threatening.

Despite being a claim widely challenged within academic literature (Kundnani, 2007), a lack of shared values is often blamed for increasing the risk of radicalisation or terrorism. After riots in May of 2001 in which predominantly British Asian men clashed with police, the attacks of September 2001 in Washington and New York, and the bombings on the London transport network in July 2005, it was multiculturalism and integration that was placed under the spotlight, and shared values were offered as their cure (Young, Nov., 6, 2001; Blunkett cited in Kundnani, 2002). As Meer and Modood argued, it was the 'coupling of diversity and anti-terrorism agendas that has implicated contemporary British multiculturalism as the culprit of Britain's security woes' (2009, p. 481). In order to counter extremism, multiculturalism appears to be being supplanted by an assimilation to a set of chosen 'fundamental British values'.

One arena in which this approach to counter-extremism has manifested is in a school context, where the promotion of 'fundamental British values' as a core strategy to counter extremism has become mandatory for schools to implement (Department of Education, 2015). Arthur (2015), Lander (2016), and Maylor (2016) all criticise the emphasis that the present fundamental British values discourse places on ethnic minorities, and Keddie (2014) argues that such values are clearly 'white'. This imbalance creates a 'hierarchy of belonging' where 'those at the top of the hierarchy of belonging have the power to grant or withhold tolerance from those at the bottom' (Wemyss, 2006, p. 235). Researchers who have explored the impact of these values being taught in the classroom have concluded that such education tends to induce children to focus on what makes people different rather than to search for commonalities (Maylor, 2016). Some teachers have even described the teaching of such values as 'propaganda-like messages' (Jerome & Clemitshaw, 2012, p. 38). This problematic burden on minorities is engendered by a form of education that places different demands on the white majority and ethnic minorities to assimilate into ethnocentric and hegemonic values systems. This burden should be understood as a particular type of violence - epistemic violence.

Ilan Gur-Ze'ev offers what he refers to as a 'postmodern' critique of peace, contributing 'epistemic violence' to the growing typology of violence within peace studies. Gur-Ze'ev challenges the ethnocentrism of peace studies that fails to encounter 'the violence that produces their yardsticks and conceptions of knowledge, values, aims and imagination, as well as their own identity' (Gur-Ze'ev, 2001, p. 316). Exploring these epistemological foundations, Gur-Ze'ev argues peace has become synonymous with homogeneity: once everyone agrees there will be peace. Peace education is a key tool in this homogenisation process of 'epistemic violence':

> Epistemic violence is realised in the formation of conceptual apparatuses, knowledge, consciousness, ideological orientations, and consensus or self-evidence; it is the aim of normalising education, in the sense of the self-evident and hegemonic order of things (Gur-Ze'ev, 2001, p. 311).

'Modern' concepts of peace, including positive peace, as Cremin notes, 'promote suffocating homogeneity, security, assimilation, false ideals and limited horizons' (Cremin, 2016, p. 3). The ethnocentricity of dominant conceptualisations of peace rely upon the notion of consensual agreement, and dismisses diversity, promoting instead shared values, to the extent that for peace to be achieved, a process of epistemic violence is necessary. Promoting these fundamental British values appears to be a form of education emphasising 'homogeneity and ethnocentric-oriented cohesion' (Gur-Ze'ev, 2011, p. 104). As Cremin argues, 'when peace is grounded in hegemonic practices and a lack of concern for diversity, it becomes the very opposite of itself' (2016, p. 3). A 'peace' that denotes a lacking out-group assimilate to the values of the in-group, as in the case of the fundamental British values, encapsulates a negative peace that engenders violence in its wake.

Moreover, not only does this conceptualisation of extremism place profound burden on ethnic minorities, it places all non-hegemonic political ideologies in the realm of the extreme. Ideas are extreme if they sit on the margins of popular belief. It is an irony that according to this definition of extremism, pacifism can be seen to be an 'extreme' ideology. Such an idea is in fact conceded in literature on pacifism. Ceadel (1989) defines pacifism as extreme by drawing a contrast between pacifism and militarism - two absolutist claims on the issue of war and peace that sit at opposite ends of the spectrum. Ceadel thus paints a form of conditional justification for

war as a 'moderate' approach. Hutchings does similar: 'Pacifism is located as the evil twin of militarism, one of the extremes through which just war theory threads its sane and moderate path' (Hutchings, 2017 p. 2).

This inclusion of pacifism within the cohort of 'extreme' beliefs is not merely an academic or intellectual concern. Jackson's (2017b) analysis of pacifism in international relations is testament to this - a form of knowledge he describes as subjugated. Jackson discusses the fascinating case of Jeremy Corbyn, leader of the UK Labour party, and the pejorative use of the label 'pacifist' to describe Corbyn in the media. What is most fascinating about these examples is how Corbyn's pacifism is a *threat*, encapsulated within this headline: 'Jeremy Corbyn is no pacifist - he wants to see Britain defeated' (Tugendhat, Jan. 18, 2016), inferring that pacifism is thus, in fact, a threat to peace. Alexandra summarises this argument that 'If pacifism were broadly accepted, war and its consequent evils would become more, not less, likely' (Alexandra, 2003, p. 589). Moreover, examples of what might otherwise be considered to be legitimate political dissent appear to be increasingly enveloped within the extremism label. The author's ongoing research into how extremism and terrorism are taught in schools has uncovered the plural examples of 'extremism' that are offered to school pupils. Pupils are being taught that everything from genocide to anti-capitalism, criminal damage and unpopular political or religious views are 'extreme' (Ford, Jul., 24, 2017). The inclusion of 'the rule of law' as a fundamental British value within the definition of extremism has brought the question of civil disobedience into the spotlight. Caroline Lucas, a UK Green party MP, was cited as an example of an extremist by a police officer giving training to secondary school teachers, due to her decision to take part in nonviolent direct action on the issue of fracking (Bloom, Sept. 4, 2015). The lines between activism and extremism are evidently blurred (Lowe, 2017).

Depicting counter-extremism as a process of re-populating those at the fringes of political belief within a more 'moderate' and hegemonic centre is a violent process; a process that supplants and dominates one overriding understanding of 'peace' onto a population, profoundly narrowing the realm of legitimate political belief. Not only is this form of counter-extremism evidently a violent process, it is one that places the legitimacy of pacifism itself in unsettling danger.

Extremism, absolutism, and pacifism

The third dominant explanation of extremism focuses not on values, but on one's cognitive relationship to those values - emphasising notions of fundamentalism or absolutism. Archbishop Desmond Tutu for instance argued 'extremism is when I think you do not allow for a different point of view, and when you hold your view as being quite exclusive, when you don't allow for the possibility of difference' (Tutu, 2006, cited in Davies, 2008, p. 4). Robert Kennedy wrote similarly: 'what is objectionable, what is dangerous about extremists is not that they are extreme, but that they are intolerant. The evil is not what they say about their cause, but what they say about their opponents' (Kennedy, 1965, pp. 68-9). In a key text on education and extremism, Davies equates extremism with 'an uncritical acceptance of single truths' (Davies, 2008, p. 2). Such arguments are mirrored in the counter-extremism practitioner community. The head of MI5, the UK's intelligence service argued, 'the ideology underlying Al Qaida and other violent groups is extreme. It does not accept the legitimacy of other viewpoints. It is intolerant, and it believes in a form of government which is explicitly anti-democratic' (Evans, 2007).

This third iteration of extremism thus points towards an idea of counter-extremism that emphasises pluralism and the acceptance of differing opinions: tolerance and mutual respect are fundamental British values. Initially, this definition of counter-extremism appears to counter the criticism made above: that counter-extremism, in fact, promotes pluralism rather than a narrowing of the spectrum of legitimate values. One can examine this, for instance, in an educational context where British schools are encouraged to provide learning opportunities 'which explore controversial issues in a way which promotes critical analysis and pro-social values' (DCSF, 2008, p. 9). Yet, to what extent does Britain demonstrate this tolerance and pluralism it claims to cherish?

Pluralism may exist within the moderate framework, but once an idea strays across the boundary into the extreme, that view is no longer tolerated, but attacked. Moderate values are placed in a defensive mode, as then UK Prime Minister Tony Blair argued: 'Moderates are not moderate through weakness but through strength. Now is the time to show it in defence of our common values' (BBC News, 2005). Such a defence of values was cemented in the 2011 review of the Prevent strategy when extremism was defined as opposition to 'fundamental British values' (HM Gov., 2011). It is the very fundamentalism attached to these values that appears their undoing. While moderation is expressed in terms of accepting the opinions of others, this shields the underlying reality of what occurs through expressing extremism in terms

of absolutism and intolerance. Counter-extremism narratives cannot escape the reality of their *intolerance* of extremism.

Tolerance is not expressed as a virtue to be shared by all, but instead tolerance is demanded *of* liberal democracy *from* others. The power dynamic and direction of the tolerance-giving is plainly one-sided and imbalanced. The 'moderate' only tolerates those that tolerate them. Counter-extremism, rather than seeking to promote pluralism and homogeneity, instead carefully curates a narrow space of permissible diversity, a space which demands an expression of the legitimacy of liberal democratic values from the Other. Liberal democracy is evidently intolerant when communities stray too far from the realm of permissible diversity, as Žižek makes clear: 'Liberalist multiculturalism preaches tolerance between cultures while making it clear that true tolerance is fully possible only in individualist Western culture and thus legitimating even military interventions as an extreme mode of fighting the other's intolerance' (Žižek, 2008, p. 662). Whether in terms of extra-judicial killings by drones, or in terms of police interviews in the school classroom, the 'moderate' response to someone straying across the boundary of permitted diversity into 'extremism' is one of intervention and violence.

Counter-extremism processes are thus geared towards a process in which the included 'moderates' and the excluded 'extremists' are clearly delineated. Processes are put in place to (violently) tether populations within the moderate realm through promoting certain values, while others are violently excluded. The inability of liberal democracy to cope with certain hegemonic notions being challenged is fascinating to examine. Another example might be when the hegemony of state violence is challenged by pacifism. Pacifism offers another interesting example of absolutism. Interestingly, pacifism's unconditional rejection of war and violence is a dominant justification for its rejection as being an unreasonable political doctrine. This leads to an ironic expression of permissible diversity: you can be a 'pacifist' as long as you concede the legitimacy of violence.

An interesting debate persists within pacifism between contingent pacifists and general pacifists (May, 2012), or those Fiala refers to as 'absolute pacifists' (2014, p. 463). May (2012) defines the contingent pacifist as someone who, using some measure such as Just War theory, would examine the virtues of a particular war on a case-by-case basis but based on current international politics and systems of warfare would argue that wars would appear to be unjust

for the foreseeable future (see also Atak, 2001; Ceadel, 1989; Rawls, 1971). The general or absolute pacifist argues that all war is wrong (May, 2012; see also Fiala, 2014). Indeed, as Ceadel notes (1989, p. 135) absolute pacifism was until the 1930s referred to as 'extreme pacifism'.

Hutchings advocates an absolute pacifism and writes in frustration how absolute pacifism is often dismissed as 'an ideology detached from reality and uninterested in facts about the world… the absolute pacifist is represented as keeping his or her conscience clean at the expense of others, unable to listen to reason' (Hutchings, 2017, p. 3). Ryan lays out the challenge of this: 'This unconditional opposition reeks of *dogmatism,* a refusal to look at things case by case. Radical views are always subject to such charges' (Ryan, 2015, p. 28).

It is the absolutism of pacifism that some criticise, as Atack explains:

> The moral objection concerns pacifism's conventional interpretation as an absolute moral position, involving an unqualified or unconditional prohibition against participation in war or preparations for war. Such absolutism, whether applied to war or any other moral problem, seems unsustainable in our world of ethical complexity and competing moral claims (Atack, 2001, p. 177).

Such criticism typically argues that in certain circumstances, violence is necessary. Atack, for instance, cites the need to use violence to defend human rights. Such arguments rely on an assumption that (a) violence is constitutive of peace, rather than further violence, and (b) that non-violent methods of defending human rights are useless in such circumstances - that violence is the only option. WIthin such assumed parameters, John Rawls, for instance, argues for the legitimacy of conscientious objection in *certain* circumstances. Arguing that such a thing as a just war can exist, and that defensive violence can be a tool towards peace, Rawls argues that 'A person may conscientiously refuse to comply with his duty to enter the armed forces during a particular war on the grounds that the aims of the conflict are unjust… so understood a form of contingent pacifism may be a perfectly reasonable position: the possibility of a just war is conceded but not under present circumstances' (Rawls, 1971, pp. 381-2). However, Rawls then adds: 'The refusal to take part in all war under any conditions is an unworldly view bound to remain a sectarian doctrine' (Rawls, 1971, p. 382). Ceadel also dismisses this 'extreme

pacifism' by suggesting that an 'ability to opt out of war can encourage mere escapism rather than efforts to prevent war' (1989, p. 136), perhaps contributing to the argument that pacifists are not just irrational, but also cowards.

The apparent blinkered and closed-minded attitude of pacifism is often depicted within a pejorative deployment of the term 'ideology' - equally attached to extremism above. Pacifism often has its origins in religious belief or the political ideologies of anarchism and socialism (Ceadel, 1989). Galtung describes pacifism as a 'doctrine' (1959 p. 67). Pacifism appears to sit as an ideology or doctrine - and an unpopular or fringe one at that - squarely within the realm of the extreme. As explored above, this pacifism, if expressed by political leaders is profoundly threatening. Pacifism challenges a core tenet of liberal democracy - the legitimacy of state monopoly on violence. Pacifism can be welcomed into the reaches of moderation, but only if it concedes the legitimacy of violence.

This section has challenged the emphasis counter-extremism places on tolerance and pluralism. It has argued that pluralism does exist within 'moderate' liberal democracy, but that this pluralism has carefully curated boundaries. Tolerance not only includes those it tolerates, it excludes those that present too profound a challenge. This mode of counter-extremism is then doubly violent. It violently *includes* through the deployment of epistemically violent modes of assimilation practices. It violently *excludes* through modes of direct violence that transform the excluded into an existential threat. Such a process manifests itself in many ways: through drone strikes, through police interviews, through activists being arrested under counter-terrorism legislation. But it also excludes legitimate modes of thought that threaten the hegemonic. These 'ideologies' and 'doctrines', such as pacifism, also threaten the 'moderate' and must be purged. This final section will begin to explore how such 'extreme' ideas could be approached outside of such exclusionary mechanisms.

Building the pacifist alternative through *encountering* extremism

This paper began by arguing that the challenge of extremism and counter-extremism needed to be approached from non-violent and pacifist perspectives. The paper built an understanding of what that pacifist approach should entail - one that is committed to the cessation of violence and

the proliferation of positive peace. As such it should strive to eliminate all forms of violence - direct, structural, cultural and epistemic.

It has been argued that there are three components to dominant models of counter-extremism - the promotion of non-violence, of hegemonic values, and of tolerance. Yet, this tripartite understanding of counter-extremism faces a number of challenges - not least, that it appears contradictory: that by promoting hegemony, both through promoting liberal democratic values and through securitising the borders of legitimate opinion through the discursive linkage between divergent opinion and threat, it endangers the very same liberal democratic values of pluralism and heterogeneity. Through this examination, the violence of counter-extremism can be exposed: an epistemic violence of the promotion of homogeneous liberal democratic values under the guise of pluralistic tolerance, which manifests in a cultural violence which alienates ethnic minorities and transforms diversity into threat, permitting direct violence against those deemed threatening.

One of the questions that framed the introduction was: what *kind of peace* does counter-extremism attempt to create? It is argued that this peace is an evidently violent one. Extremism is painted as a problem to be solved. Political voices, as noted at the beginning of the paper, implore extremism to be challenged, tackled, solved or defeated. Developing a pacifist perspective has uncovered a much more complex challenge - that merely 'solving' extremism (by taking a 'negative peace' approach) in fact embeds further violence, and thus does not bring society any closer to the realm of positive peace that pacifism so desires.

Current counter-extremism strategies paint a picture of a narrow, moderate centre threatened by a wide range of 'extreme' threats. While this extremism might entail a violent threat from some extremists, the paper argues that pacifism itself falls within the broad remit of extremism as currently conceived. Such a conceptualisation of counter-extremism therefore conceives of a 'post-extremist peace' where the entire population is brought within the parameters of the moderate. This peace encapsulates a need for *consensus,* but this path to consensus is a violent one. In making his criticism, Gur-Ze'ev cites St. Augustine who wrote 'it covets an earthly peace, one that it seeks to attain by warfare; for if it is victorious and no one remains to resist it, there will be peace' (Saint Augstine, 1957 cited in Gur-Ze'ev, 2001, p. 326). As such, the paper argues that to begin to conceive of a non-violent approach to countering extremism, it is to the

concept of extremism itself that pacifist approaches must focus their attention if a more peaceful world is to materialise. As such, and as a form of conclusion, this paper will argue that extremism is not something that need be countered but instead be *encountered.*

One way of framing a mode in which extremism can be encountered rather than countered is through building an understanding of an 'agonistic peace'. Extremism, conceptually, appears to be built upon a wider ontological perspective that can be understood as the 'post-political'. This multifarious term denotes a condition of contemporary political realms in which the inherent antagonisms of political life are supplanted by bureaucratic and institutional mechanisms that enforce consensus as the ideal to which democratic life should aspire. Mouffe makes a distinction between 'politics' and 'the political': 'by "the political" I mean the dimension of antagonism which I take to be constitutive of human societies, while by 'politics' I mean the set of practices and institutions through which an order is created' (2005, p. 9). Wilson and Swyngedouw describe how in the 'post-political', the antagonism within the political 'is increasingly colonised by politics' (2014, p. 6). 'Their aim', as Mouffe argues, 'is the establishment of a world "beyond left and right", "beyond hegemony", "beyond sovereignty" and "beyond antagonism"' (2005, p. 2). Is is this denial of antagonism that is such a violent process. 'Extremism' is conceived as a problem that democracy must 'solve', an antagonism to be removed. It is here where one can see that extremism is in fact a *product* of that very particular conceptualisation of the political sphere. Through re-shaping the political sphere, 'extremism' itself will re-mould. Counter-extremism must entail a re-shaping of politics itself. But how then might this world of antagonism be transformed into a world of 'agonism'?

Mouffe argues that 'the task for democratic theorists and politicians should be to envisage the creation of a vibrant "agonistic" public sphere of contestation where different hegemonic political projects can be confronted' (2005, p. 3). Shinko argues 'we should strive to re-envision peace as a cacophonic and cluttered terrain of political struggle, denoted by multilayered and discontinuous sites of emergence' (2008, p. 490). It is impossible to say what this world might look like precisely - after all imposing one vision of that world would undermine the very principles on which it seeks to be based - yet certain parameters can be set.

Mouffe argues that agonism entails 'acknowledging the ineradicability of the conflictual dimension in social life' as 'the necessary condition for grasping the challenge to which

democratic politics is confronted' (2005, p. 4). If the omnipresence of conflict is acknowledged, what might be conceived presently as a distinction between a friend (the moderate) and an enemy (the extremist) 'can be overridden and reframed as an encounter between adversaries' (Shinko, 2008, p. 478). It is not to render the us/them distinction untenable but to found political mechanisms that allow the 'us' and the 'them' to meet politically: 'This is the real meaning of liberal democratic tolerance, which does not entail condoning ideas that we oppose or being indifferent to standpoints that we disagree with, but treating those who defend them as legitimate opponents' (Mouffe, 2000, p. 15). It is in this sense that through encountering rather than countering extremism, this *antagonism* can be transformed into *agonism: 'Antagonism* is struggle between enemies, while *agonism* is struggle between adversaries' (Mouffe, 2000, p. 16).

If instead of painting any challenge to hegemonic notions of contemporary liberal democracy as a threat to be excluded, these alternative values and ideologies are contested, then perhaps a more positive peace can be conceived:

> out of this struggle emerges a begrudging recognition, a begrudging acceptance, the begrudging admission of a nod towards recognition and the acknowledgement of a respect earned in a struggle borne out of the refusal to submit. If we are to look for the trace of peace perhaps this moment, this flash of recognition indicates the opening where peace is practice (Shinko, 2008, p. 489).

Current discourses surrounding extremism evidently threaten those who do not subscribe to the narrow parameters of contemporary liberal democracy, including pacifists. A new peace is needed. One that does not impose a peace upon a population, but one that engenders the conditions for multiple forms of peace to emerge.

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