

PRIDE, SHAME & PARADOX: MAPPING THE CONFLICTING AESTHETICS OF RADICAL RIGHT WAR IMAGERY

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HISTORICAL CONFLICT PROVIDES THE RADICAL RIGHT WITH A USABLE PAST

The radical right **does not simply remember history**; It **selectively reconstructs the past** into a **usable ideological resource**.

Far-right media use cultural and historical material to construct a “mythic past” that can be contrasted with a supposedly repressed or degraded present (Atton, 2006).

Symbols such as **flags** and **uniforms** allow supporters to **experience or realise a past** without necessarily consciously **remembering a specific historical event** (Wodak, 2015).

Extreme right social media imagery makes **explicit use of history** through **visuals of the Third Reich** (Forchtner and Kolvraa, 2017).

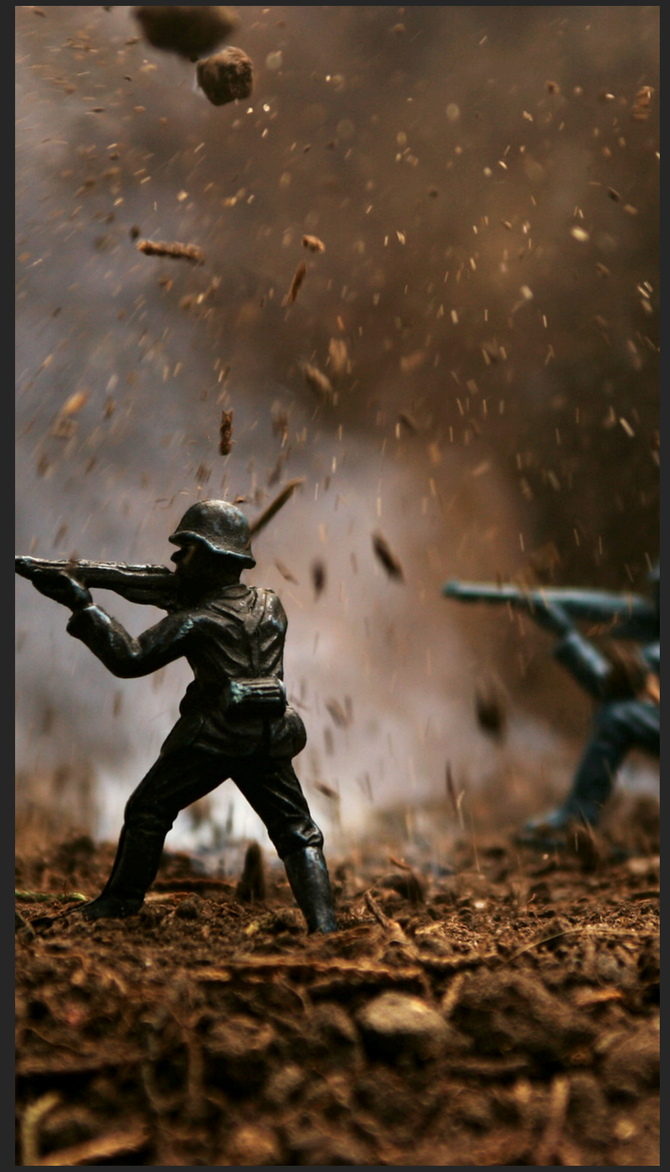


COMMUNICATION CAN BE USED AS A FORM OF WARFARE

Extremist visual culture **does not reproduce historical meaning faithfully** (Hendry and Lemieux, 2021).

Histrocial symbols are **detached from their original contexts** for **contemporary ideological work** (Hendry and Lemieux, 2021).

Placing Nazi symbols into **decontextualised environments sanitised them**, enabling **new meaning** to become attached to them (Hendry and Lemieux, 2021).



WAR IMAGERY CAN SHAPE EMOTIONAL AND POLITICAL RESPONSES

Pictures are more readily remembered than words with strong effects on conceptual prcoessing and conscious memory (Stenberg, 2006).





Terrorism operates partly through **symbolic intimidation** and **contemporary media** makes **political violence immediately and repeatedly visible** (Der Derian, 2005).

Der Derian (2005) describes this as a form of **mytho-terrorism.**

The **content of images** can **affect participants' emotional and political responses** (Iyer, Webster, Hornsey and Vanman, 2014).

- Images of victims → **sympathy**, which increased participants' **willingness to help**.
- Images of terrorists → **fear and anger**, which increased support for **aggressive counter-terrorism/negotiation**.

THE DATA



Radical Right Group	Ideology	Time Period	Tweets	Words	Images
The English Defence League (EDL)	Far-right	8 months	3,229	50,670	681
Siege Culture	Extreme right	8 months	407	4,812	6
Generation Identity UK	Identitarian	10 months	1,332	25,716	87

SELF-PRAISE

Self-praise examines how “**announcements of accomplishments** as well as **explicit positive evaluations** of some aspect of self” are **linguistically constructed** online (Dayter, 2014: 92, emphasis added).

The framework helps to examine how “**emblematic features** that make up a **desired identity**” are **foregrounded** within **a particular community** (Dayter, 2014: 92, emphasis added).

Self-praise is “a **highly strategic** and **selective activity** in CMC [Computer-Mediated Communication]” (Matley, 2018: 31, emphasis added).

It, therefore, requires **a sophisticated repertoire of semiotic strategies** to successfully enact it (Dayter, 2014).



BLAME ATTRIBUTION

Blame attribution examines three features:

- The **blameworthy event** (A negative event that has taken place).
- The **blame-maker** (The individual/group affected by it).
- The **blame-taker** (The individual/group responsible).

Blame attribution can “have **broader political functions**” in that it can **challenge/protect societal structures** (Hansson, 2018: 229, emphasis added).

It can also help to “**persuade an audience** [...] that **someone in question**, such as a government or a concrete office-holder, either **should or should not be blamed**” (Hansson, 2018: 231, emphasis added).



CONCLUSION & IMPLICATIONS

There are **divergent visual tactics** used to represent war across the radical right, each of which draw on **specific emotional and moral obligations**.



For the **far-right and Identitarian groups**, war-time imagery is weaponised to **romanticise conflict** as an **idyllic sacrifice** that **binds the audience to traditional values**.

For the **extreme right**, **historical transgressions** are co-opted to **foster guilt** and **justify the dismantling of Western society**.

The **ideological power of war imagery** lies not in whether it encourages the audience to remember the past with pride or shame but in its capacity to **transform historical memory** into **moral obligation in the present**.

In this way, **emotion becomes a mechanism connecting memory to mobilisation.**

THANK YOU



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