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The Revolution of Information and Communication Technologies and Extremist Tactics and Discourse: The Movement's Strategy

Far Right, Social Media, Artificial Intelligence, Ethics, and Transnational Influence

Resumen

En este trabajo se explora el uso de las Tecnologías de la Información y la Comunicación (TIC) como las redes sociales, los algoritmos y la Inteligencia Artificial (IA) por The Movement y sus grupos relacionados. Se investiga cómo la interacción de sus discursos y estas tecnologías pueden influir social y políticamente en la consecución de sus objetivos. El estudio analiza los mecanismos específicos utilizados, examina el discurso y narrativas del movimiento y asociados, y también los posibles impactos de estas prácticas. A través de un repaso jurídico, y un análisis ético, se busca plantear algunos de los desafíos éticos presentes y proponer posibles respuestas institucionales, a la vez que abrir nuevas líneas de estudio para abordar las problemáticas identificadas.

Palabras Clave: Algoritmos y política, The Movement, nacional populismo, ética tecnológica, narrativas políticas, regulación de la Inteligencia Artificial, extrema derecha, neurociencia.

Abstract

This paper explores the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) such as social networks, algorithms and Artificial Intelligence (AI) by The Movement and its related groups. It investigates how the interaction of their discourses and these technologies can socially and politically influence the achievement of their purposes. The study analyzes the specific mechanisms used, examines the discourse and narratives of the movement and associates, and also the possible impacts of these practices. Through a legal review and an ethical analysis, it seeks to highlight some of the ethical challenges present and propose possible institutional responses, as well as to open new lines of study to address the problems identified.

Keywords: Algorithms and politics, The Movement, national populism, technological ethics, political narratives, Artificial Intelligence regulation, far-right, neuroscience.

"The policies that I represent are the policies represented by Trump and Putin."

Marine Le Pen

2017, BBC



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Propaganda is to a democracy what the bludgeon is to a totalitarian state'

Noam Chomsky

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1. Introduction.

International Relations (IR) is an inter and transdisciplinary discipline. This field of study analyzes the global architecture and the processes that occur within it at different levels (systemic, state and individual). Some approaches focus more on interstate relations (realism), while others cover issues such as international regimes (liberalism), and others focus on other aspects such as power structures or identity (critical theories, constructivism).

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, a liberal optimism was generated that was disturbed by the conflicts in the Balkans in the 1990s, in which

human rights were systematically violated. Globalization and its effects have generated legal and moral dilemmas on various issues such as state sovereignty¹. Since then, events such as the Great Recession of 2008 and its social and political consequences, the Coronavirus pandemic, the Ukraine War, the escalation of the Israel-Palestine conflict by the end of 2023, the rise of populism and extremism, and the rapid advancement of new technologies continue to redraw the global landscape and world order, creating constant ethical and political challenges.

The research question of this paper is the following: **What use do national populist extreme right-wing actors (studying the case of The Movement and related parties in Europe) make of new ICTs to achieve their ends?**

This is a descriptive approach question that seeks to identify and detail methods and strategies that these actors use making use of technologies such as social networks, algorithms, or AI; that is, what they use and how they do it. It will try to describe how their message is disseminated, or their reach. At the same time, the question will also be explanatory, addressing questions such as why they use these technologies or what for. The explanatory part is more related to their purposes, and in order to address it, a relevant secondary question must be asked: **what are their purposes?** This secondary question has a more explanatory orientation: to understand their goals and aims, to ask why they do it: to decipher what are the underlying motivations. In order to analyze their aims, we must first identify - as far as possible - their actions and discourses, which can also be said to have a certain descriptive component.

Throughout the paper, in order to answer this question, the phenomenon of far-right national populism will be analyzed by choosing the

¹ HERRON, Patrick. *History of international relations*. Barcelona: Editorial UOC. 2019. Pp. 37-40.

specific case of The Movement (hereafter TM), and five national cases as a starting point to then analyze the relationship between these non-state actors, their key differences and their ideological configuration, in order to follow the trail. It continues with an investigation of the use of ICTs such as AI, social networks (from now on RRSS) and algorithms; the interaction of these tools with the studied actors and the possible impacts.

At the end of the paper we describe the latest legislative developments in the EU on digital issues focused on social media, algorithms and AI, but which also (regulations) address other aspects such as disinformation. The last part focuses on a discussion through the analysis and elucidation of different intricate dilemmas; as well as the development of some relevant ethical approaches and resolute proposals from applied ethics.

This analysis transcends the formal existence of TM, as it focuses on studying the tactical and dialectical mechanisms that it has fostered transnationally in combination with other existing narratives; mechanisms that can be adopted and optimized by other actors -even *non-extremist ones*- of various kinds. Similarly, it not only focuses on the use of the new ICTs *per se*, but also examines some of the consequences and dangers of their use, as well as imaginatively probing possible future uses of them with the aim of prevention.

2. Objectives.

I. The first objective of my paper is to **conduct a historical and relational analysis of TM**. This research will include the identification of individuals and other key entities behind the movement, as well as the adoption to a greater or lesser extent of its strategies. In parallel, an **analysis of the movement's discourse and its modus operandi** will be conducted, **adopting a philosophical and neuropolitical perspective**. This implies studying the psychosocial aspects

used by TM to induce certain situations, resulting in specific political reactions.

II. **The second objective will focus on comparing how this movement (and its ideology) has manifested itself in different national contexts**. Cases will be studied such as those of countries like France (with the Rassemblement National party), Spain (Vox), Italy (with La Lega and Fratelli d'Italia), *among others*. This comparative analysis will seek not only to understand the similarities and differences between them but also to evaluate their possible linkage, whether direct or indirect, with TM.

III. **The third objective is to elaborate an ethical evaluation and a possible proposal of applicable solutions**, approaching the actions of the movement from an integrative point of view. The consequences derived from its practices both in the political arena and in society in general will be analyzed. An essential part of this objective is to propose ethical solutions for the regulation of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), especially AI and algorithms. Studying possible formulas to prevent these technologies from being used for purposes contrary to the general interest.

3. Contribution.

The study aims to be relevant academically and to the IR discipline because of the passion put into the whole process and the **innovation** it seeks to bring by applying an interdisciplinary look to address several interconnected issues. That this can contribute new data to improve the holistic understanding of how social media, AI and algorithms are being used in political contexts, an area of growing interest in multiple disciplines. In addition, it attempts to locate uses or speculate on possible future uses of AI by the actors studied. Moreover, both for what is conclusive and for those issues that cannot be controlled or captured, the intention is to bring

together information that can be useful for other research and/or disciplines, as well as to draw conclusions and open - and facilitate, as far as possible - new lines of research and academic dialogue.

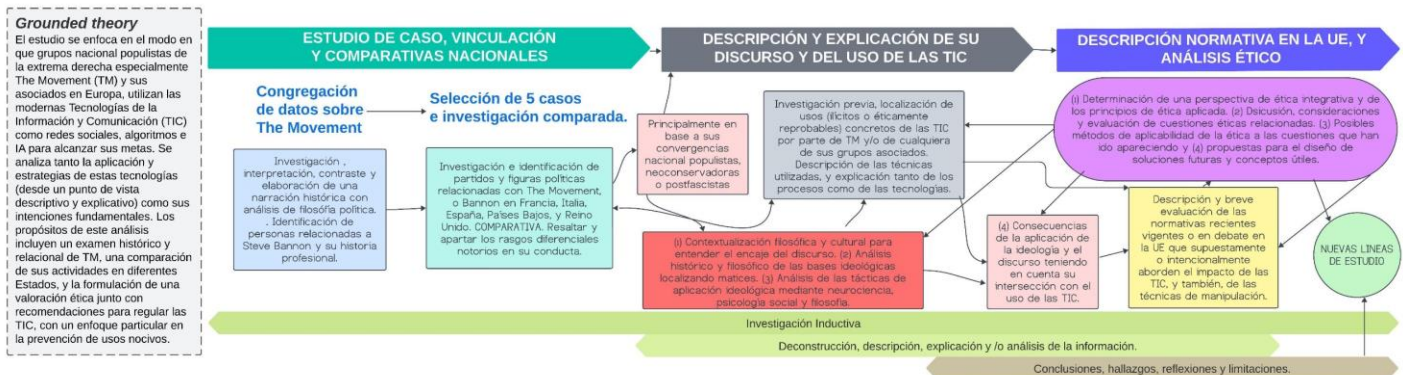
Socially and politically, the study aims to be relevant as it addresses the growing concern about how ICTs can be manipulated/used to influence public opinion and political processes. Furthermore, the paper attempts to deconstruct the narrative and discourse by analyzing in an interdisciplinary way the communicative and political strategies of these types of movements. By better understanding the tactics used by movements such as *TM*, one can contribute to the formulation of more effective strategies to combat disinformation and strengthen the resilience of societies in the face of digital manipulations. At the same time, it helps to

regulations, or, at least, to offer a holistic view with some concrete cases that, at best, can be improved and extrapolated.

Therefore, it is intended to transcend the academic field, and tries to give as complete and practical a view as possible on certain general concerns.

4. Theoretical framework.²

The beginning of ICTs is difficult to establish, but it could be said to begin with the telegraph in the middle of the first half of the 19th century. All the tools that have emerged since then have progressively facilitated connectivity and the flow of information. With the emergence of the internet, then the RRSS, *smartphones*, algorithms and AI; the speed, times, and interconnectivity has not stopped increasing.



isolate the problem in order to be able to suggest solutions or perhaps to provide other research with information and conclusions to elaborate solutions.

It seeks to offer - in a simplified form - practical perspectives for political figures, legislators and other societal actors seeking information to respond to these challenges. By exploring ethical issues and proposing courses of action, the paper seeks to position itself as a possible resource to guide the formulation of policies and

Following the framework of Manuel Castells' Network Society Theory, this paper will take into account the central role of information networks created by ICT and how in this new network society, the flow and exchange of information play a fundamental role in socio-political processes. This paper will not take into account the role of the traditional media (newspapers, television, radio), focusing more on the more current technologies, but not overlooking the important role and impact they continue to have.

² The diagram can be found in slightly larger size in the annexes.

This work is carried out from different IR prisms, although mainly under **a reflectivist approach**. First, the **constructivist paradigm** is used to understand the construction of political norms and identities (ideology, discourse...), in this case those directly related to TM, but also all those residual, already existing, or more or less directly generated *ex consequentia*. Constructivism serves to understand how this ideology interacts with the structures (institutional, social, foreign or migratory policy configuration...) of each country. Trying to understand transcending a solely materialistic vision (studying elements such as values, discourses, perceptions...) in order to be able to approach to see what meanings have or can be attributed to the actions of a non-state actor/agent -and of transnational character- such as TM and its "connections". **Critical theory**, the legacy of the Frankfurt School is also considered relevant to this research, can serve to provide an interesting prism. It can be applied to (e.g.) power networks (what interests are served and what is perpetuated), thus transcending the dominant nation-state view, and understanding reality also as a political community (*polity*), and an international community; underlining the importance of ideology and how in the case of the ideological configuration promoted by TM and its associates or sympathizers, they challenge power structures (or reinforce them, depending on each case). And, above all, doing IR work that does not study international relations only in a "mathematical" way, as I believe that to understand certain international phenomena it is necessary to incorporate other disciplines and different perspectives that can help to understand factors, causes and relationships (*inter alia*) and that this can be used so that scientific knowledge can serve to intervene in "reality"³.

The work will also have a post-structuralist perspective, especially in the sections devoted to deconstructing discourse, looking at narratives, and the impact of these elements at all levels (individual, state and systemic⁴). An analysis of the construction of identity (in the *culture war*, in the "us" versus "them"...) and the role that ICT can play in reinforcing these elements, and their possible effect on socio-political perception and behaviors, will be carried out. In other words and in Foucauldian terms: to examine how this "productive power" emerges, creates narratives and how these interact with ICTs and affect the world. In addition, the process of *mediatization* of social unrest (indignation, hatred, rage) will be taken into account using a perspective based on the *Agenda Setting* theory of Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw taking into account the influence of the propagation of political propaganda through the media (in the case of this work, applied to new ICT) and how this influences public opinion and people's perspective. This work will also try to take into account the commitments set by the SDGs and the research will try to contribute to their implementation. A gender perspective will be adopted to provide a more comprehensive and equitable analysis, to identify and address gender disparities and biases that may be present in the issues studied, and to ensure that the findings and recommendations of the study are inclusive and representative of all gender identities.

The paper will analyze some ethical issues -as far as possible- from a prism of integrated ethics, using both teleological/sequentialist ethics (of Aristotelian and utilitarian origin) with deontologism (Kantian ethics, focused on norms, universality and intentions) and also broadening the perspective by incorporating more innovative approaches such as *care ethics*, conceived as

³ DE LA TORRE, Verónica. *Transnacionalismo, actores y movimientos sociales históricos en las relaciones internacionales*. Editorial uoc. 2019. Pp. 30-34.

SANZ GÓMEZ, Marta. *Los nuevos enfoques de la disciplina: más allá del cuarto debate*. Barcelona: Ed uoc. 2019. Pp. 10-25.

⁴ LÓPEZ I VIDAL, Lluç. *El papel de la teoría en las Relaciones Internacionales*. Barcelona: Ed uoc. 2019. Pp. 25-31.

those that emphasize the importance of care, interpersonal responsibility and emotional relationships in the study and application of ethics.

The "discussion" has not been concentrated in a specific section, but has been present throughout the work and the topics addressed, especially in the ethical analysis.

State of the art:

This section presents different resources that have been used both to learn about the current situation in the different topics addressed throughout the work and to take into account relevant conclusions and perspectives.

The first section (Historical Context and Case Study) is a mostly historical exposition explaining the origins of TM, as well as some of Steve Bannon's previous career. No academic articles *per se* have been used, but rather the history has been built up using documentaries such as *Steve Bannon, the great manipulator* by RYOT Films directed by Alison Klayman in 2019, of which the facts have been "pulled from the thread" for the search of accurate information; and together with other documentaries, news, articles, etc. the facts have been exposed. The following section (Cases *sui generis*: idiosyncratic manifestations) has been an investigation to establish connections between TM and the national populist parties of the European extreme right; and mostly journalistic resources (news, articles) have been used in order to follow the trajectories, relationships and positions of all the actors. The following academic articles (in order of the structure of the work) have been used to know the state of the question and to develop the following sections of the work.

Dr. Beatriz Acha Ugarte in her article *Political Parties of the Extreme Right in Europe*⁵ analyzes the emergence of extreme right-wing parties, and tries to establish a theoretical model. He indicates both the importance of social factors (changes in *cleavages*, the shift from structural to identity and cultural issues), as well as institutional factors (such as electoral systems), and political factors (such as the interaction with traditional parties [e.g., the impact they have on their agendas by, for example, normalizing harsh migration policies]). The article does not focus on the cooperation/interaction these far-right parties have at the transnational level nor does it focus on their use of ICTs. Because of its date (2015), of course, it does not yet study the impact of TM.

The article *Populism, the media and the mainstreaming of the far right: The Guardian's coverage of populism as a case study* (2020) by Katy Brown and Aurelien Mondon of the University of Bath focuses on the phenomenon of the normalization of the far right in Europe by the media due (among other factors such as the use of euphemisms) to the amplification of its messages. Although the article studies the case of The Guardian, it could be extrapolated to other media. It refers to Bannon's project precisely because of the coverage given to his speech and the normalizing effect that the authors suggest this had throughout Europe.

Another article, from 2019, *A Movement for European Renewal*, by liberal politician Guy Verhofstadt warns of the rise of illiberal, and national populist tendencies and the alleged aim of "dismantling" EU institutions and political integration. The politician identifies Steve Bannon as a danger, and suggests that he is connected to the pro-Russian wing. He also mentions Matteo Salvini, Marine Le Pen and Nigel Farage (among others) and warns of a coalition⁶. It should be remembered that this is not an

⁵ UGARTE, B.A., 1997. Extreme right-wing political parties in Europe. Towards a theoretical framework for the analysis of new parties. *Deusto Studies*, vol. 45, no. 2, ISSN 2386-9062. DOI 10.18543/ed-45(2)-1997pp11-43.

⁶ VERHOFSTADT, G., 2019. *A movement for European renewal*. Brussels: Dods Parliamentary Communications Limited.

academic article and may, of course, have partisan interests (and consequently, subjectivity). The article speculated about possible unions (which in a way materialized with TM), but some of its speculations such as the Bannon-Russia relationship are not conclusive. Just as he suggests connection between Bannon and Russia, and shows concern about it, it is striking that he makes no reference to Bannon's ties to the United States.

Regarding the national populist discourse and narratives used by TM, associated actors or the alternative right, there are several articles that offer an interesting look, already in 2017 Matthew N. Lyons in his *article Ctrl-Alt-Delete: The origins and ideology of the Alternative Right*⁷ traces the origin of the ideological discursive configuration of these groups, identifying elements such as white nationalism, opposition to globalization, the patriarchal vision of male tribalism (rejection towards feminism, and everything non-heteronormative), as well as the inclusion of right-wing anarchist and "neo-reactionary" elements, (NRx) highly critical of democratic systems.

Pietro Castelli and Andrea Pirro's *The Far Right as a social movement* (2018) provides an innovative analysis **of the far right in which it is understood beyond a political movement, but as a multidimensional phenomenon** (for example, noting its ability to interact with, or its incursions within, social movements)⁸, a view that breaks with the traditional perception of the far right as solely political groupings.

Eva Anduiza and Guillem Rico of the Autonomous University of Barcelona published in 2022 *Sexism and the Far-Right Vote: The Individual Dynamics of Gender Backlash*⁹ in which they establish a causality between the rise

of votes for far-right parties with sexist discourse, in their study they focus on the vote towards the political party Vox and establish that the rise of sexism can feed this type of formations, giving a gender approach to the issue to broaden the understanding of the contemporary political situation and the discourses in which it is sustained.

Steven Forti in his article *Post-truth, fake news and the far right against democracy* highlights the increasing reach of post-truth, and the use of discourses that generate distrust "towards anything that smacks of the establishment" as something that the far right sees as profitable. He points to the term "disinformation" as more comprehensive than "fake news" (which may not capture the entirety of the phenomenon). The author also stresses the importance of combining old means (such as propaganda or ridiculing the adversary) with new ones (such as hoax dissemination, *shitposting*, personalization of propaganda and disinformation). All this could be linked to phenomena such as cognitive dissonance, highly visceral emotional impacts and increased confirmation bias. Another key point he makes is the denial of science (commonly known as "denialism"). He also highlights the importance of the advancement of AI in creating fake accounts and increasingly realistic *bots*, as well as the - by now increasingly - well-known role of algorithms. This article, then, seems to suggest that these parties play a double game: on the one hand, they contest elections and play the "democratic game" and on the other hand, they try to undermine all liberal institutions and bodies using digital means.¹⁰

*The ethics of algorithms: key problems and solutions*¹¹ is a joint article published in 2022 by

⁷ LYONS, M.N., 2017. Ctrl-Alt-Delete: The origins and ideology of the Alternative Right. *Political Research Associates* [online], [accessed: 3 January 2024]. Available from: <https://politicalresearch.org/2017/01/20/ctrl-alt-delete-report-on-the-alternative-right>.

⁸ CASTELLI GATTINARA, P. and PIRRO, A.L.P., 2019. The far right as social movement. *European Societies*, vol. 21, no. 4, ISSN 1461-6696. DOI 10.1080/14616696.2018.1494301.

⁹ ANDUIZA, E. and RICO, G., [undated]. Sexism and the Far-Right Vote: The Individual Dynamics of Gender Backlash. *American Journal of Political Science* [online], vol. n/a, no. n/a, [accessed: 8 January 2024]. ISSN 1540-5907. DOI

10.1111/ajps.12759. Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/ajps.12759>.

¹⁰ FORTI, S., 2022. Posverdad, fake news y extrema derecha contra la democracia. *Nueva sociedad*, no. 298, pp. 75-91. ISSN 0251-3552.

¹¹ TSAMADOS, A., AGGARWAL, N., COWLS, J., MORLEY, J., ROBERTS, H., TADDEO, M. and FLORIDI, L., 2020. *The Ethics of Algorithms: Key Problems and Solutions* [online]. SSRN Scholarly Paper. 28 July 2020. Rochester, NY:

Andreas Tsamados, Nikita Aggarwal, Josh Cows, Jessica Morley, Huw Roberts, Mariarosaria Taddeo and Luciano Floridi that examines in an interdisciplinary way the issue of ethics as applied to algorithms. The article recognizes the growing importance of algorithms in our society and identifies six ethical concerns especially in machine learning-based algorithms: (1) inconclusive evidence, very succinctly would mean that algorithms can generate non-causal correlations, which can have negative impacts in all fields in which they are used; (2) inscrutable evidence, closely related to the opacity of algorithmic processes and lack of transparency; (3) erroneous evidence, refers to problems related to biases and distortions that can occur during their development and implementation; (4) unfair results and discrimination refers to discriminatory decisions due to biases in the training data *input*; (5) transformative effects, referring to the impact that these can have on society and individuals (behavioral changes, influence to make decisions); and finally (6) traceability refers to the ability to identify and trace the origin of the impact that an algorithmic decision can have, a particularly difficult point to manage precisely because of inscrutable evidence. This article offers an innovative and organized reading of the ethical concerns related to algorithms, but seems to offer no practical solutions.

In *Democracy, Epistemic Agency, and AI: Political Epistemology in Times of Artificial Intelligence*, a 2023 article, Marc Coeckelbergh focuses his analysis on the interaction of AI with fake news and epistemic bubbles (among others). That is, how AI being used to misinform (generating hoaxes, for example) can be a danger to democracy. Likewise, just like algorithms, it can contribute to the filter bubble, and the author goes one step further: he suggests that AI can favor the creation of epistemic

bubbles, a speculation that would be interesting to study precisely to prevent the assumption. Moreover, the author presents an innovative approach, advocating for more education and technology policy and not just limiting himself to the usual call for increased legal and ethical scope.

Description of Key Concepts:

Algorithm: in the words of Ferran Plana Rius, it can be defined as a step-by-step procedure or a collection of rules specifically designed to solve a particular problem or a specific task. It is like a recipe that guides a computer in the execution of a series of well-defined instructions to perform calculations, data processing or problem solving.

AI: in the words of Ferran Plana Rius, are those computer systems designed to solve tasks that commonly require human intelligence. It includes methods and algorithms that enable the machine to learn from data, recognize patterns, make decisions and solve problems.

Alt-Right/alternative right: ultra-conservative movement that opposes immigration, feminism, the LGTBI collective (and in general the whole *Woke* movement). And that makes a strong use of ICT. As Marcos Reguera Mateo explains in a paper¹² of the University of the Basque Country; it is a heterogeneous movement of the American extreme right; very popular especially among young people after Trump's victory, and which is distinguished by a refinement and intellectual renewal of the political thought of the extreme right.

s.n. [accessed: 8 January 2024]. 3662302. Available at: <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=3662302>.

¹² The ideology of the Alt Right: Thinker origins and ideas of the new. [online], [undated]. [accessed: 8 January 2024]. Available at: <https://aecpa.es>.

Fake news: in Spanish "bulo", false news propagated for some purpose.¹³

Post-fascism: according to Enzo Traverso¹⁴, it is a contemporary form that takes up certain characteristics of historical fascism, but adapts them to the post-Cold War era. According to Traverso, *postfascism* is not a classical totalitarian system, but an amalgam that mixes democratic and authoritarian elements, often manifesting itself through right-wing populist parties that use fascist tactics of mobilization and rhetoric.

Far right: according to Cas Mudde¹⁵ the contemporary far right is a movement characterized by its nativist populism (belief that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group) and authoritarianism. This political current is defined by its division of the world into "the pure people" and "the corrupt elite", and advocates a state inhabited exclusively by the native group, showing hostility towards immigrants and promoting a strong anti-immigration policy. Unlike traditional right-wingers, the extreme right challenges democratic and liberal values, favoring an authoritarian and hierarchical government, and placing particular emphasis on the preservation of national and cultural identity. This translates into a rejection of multiculturalism, any form of non-normative diversity and the promotion of traditional native group values.

Social network: "Service of the information society that offers users a communication platform through the Internet so that they can generate a profile with their personal data, facilitating the creation of communities based on

common criteria and allowing the communication of its users, so that they can interact through messages, share information, images or videos, allowing these publications to be immediately accessible by all the users of their group".¹⁶

Common good: following Aristotle in his work *Nicomachean Ethics*, Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa Theologica*, and John Rawls in *Theory of Justice*, it could be defined as the goal of achieving a state of collective well-being and virtue, where morality, peace, security and equal justice are fundamental. This concept encompasses the idea of a welfare that benefits all members of the community, with a special emphasis on the least favored people, within a framework of equal opportunity and social ethics.

General interest: based on the theories of Rousseau and John Rawls, it is the achievement of collective welfare through social structures that ensure equal opportunities and equal justice. It is characterized by prioritizing the needs and welfare of the community over individual interests, **seeking a balance** between the common will and individual rights and freedoms, within a framework of equality and social cooperation.

Post-truth: "Deliberate distortion of a reality, which manipulates beliefs and emotions in order to influence public opinion and social attitudes."¹⁷

Populism: Populism, according to Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, is defined as an ideology that goes beyond the simple division between "pure people" and "corrupt elite," focusing on popular sovereignty. It differs from liberalism and fascism in its pragmatic and limited nature, which allows

¹³ ASALE, R.- and RAE, [undated]. bulo | Diccionario de la lengua española. "Diccionario de la lengua española" - Tercentenary Edition [online]. [accessed: 4 January 2024]. Available at: <https://dle.rae.es/bulo>.

¹⁴ TRAVERSO, Enzo. *The New Faces of Fascism*. London: Verso, 2019. ISBN 978-1788730460.

¹⁵ WEISSKIRCHER, M., 2021. Cas Mudde, "The Far Right Today": Polity, Cambridge, 2019, €18.90, ISBN: 978-1-5095-3683-2. *Acta Politica*, vol. 56, no. 3, pp. 587-589. ISSN 0001-6810. DOI 10.1057/s41269-020-00157-5.

¹⁶ RAE, [undated]. Definition of social network - Pan-Hispanic Dictionary of Legal Spanish - RAE. *Pan-Hispanic dictionary of legal Spanish - Royal Spanish Academy* [online]. [accessed: 4 January 2024]. Available at: <https://dpej.rae.es/lema/red-social>.

¹⁷ ASALE, R.- and RAE, [undated]. posverdad | Diccionario de la lengua española. "Diccionario de la lengua española" - Tercentenary Edition [online]. [accessed: 4 January 2024]. Available at: <https://dle.rae.es/posverdad>.

it to align itself with other ideological elements to appeal to a wider audience. Its relationship to democracy is ambivalent, criticizing elites as fraudulent and promoting a minimalist democracy based on the sovereignty of the people and the majority. In addition, populism can manifest itself in leaders, political parties, social movements and the media, presenting a challenge to political liberalism, minority rights and the separation of powers.¹⁸

National-populism, influenced by figures such as Steve Bannon and TM, combines elements of populism with a strong emphasis on nationalism. This ideology focuses on national sovereignty, border protection and cultural identity in the face of outside influences, such as globalization. It promotes the idea that the "authentic" people are threatened by corrupt elites and globalizing forces, advocating policies that prioritize national and identity interests and values over international or cosmopolitan ones. Matthew Goodwin and Roger Eatwell argue that this rise is driven by four "Ds": Distrust, Destruction, Deprivation and De-alignment with traditional political systems¹⁹.

4. Methodology.

This research follows the structure of a *Grounded Theory*²⁰, i.e. an induction process of *discovering through inquiry* in which theory has been generated from the data and their subsequent interpretation. The approach is inductive and is not deduced from a previous theory or hypothesis. The focus of the study has been changing and the data have been integrated as new findings appeared. A "theoretical sampling" has been used with the concepts (and conclusions) that have been appearing. Certain "concepts" of various kinds (national populism,

algorithms, indignation, ethics...) have been identified and then an axial coding has been carried out (a relationship between these concepts) and after an iterative analysis (progressive and flexible revision, refinement and deepening) a reflective analysis has been carried out in which the main findings, conclusions, and the - no less important - limitations of the study and new lines of research are collected.

The nature of the sources in this study is different. On the one hand, we have primary sources such as the speeches of political actors, the interviews I have conducted (and I will specify below) or the journalistic interviews used for this work, to all of which I have tried to apply an internal criticism in order to assess their veracity or reliability (for example, contrasting them with other sources to avoid -as far as possible- any bias). On the other hand, there are the secondary sources: academic and journalistic articles, documentaries, scientific books, and news from the media.²¹

Some sources such as those that provide historical information about the events (news, documentaries, journalistic interviews) have been selected to build the story and the facts over time: in particular to describe historically the TM case and the facts carried out by the actors associated with it in the different territories; but also to provide sources to later analyze their statements, speeches and certain actions using ICTs.

Sources that provide information that has already been interpreted or analyzed (such as interviews, scientific books, academic articles, etc.) are relevant because they help to understand the events previously reported and to interpret them in order to reach conclusions or to be able to formulate further questions.

The process of selection and access to sources has been very diverse. Access to news,

¹⁸ RAJMIL BONET, Daniel. *Migraciones y nuevos retos*. Barcelona: Editorial UOC, 2021. Págs 18 y 19.

¹⁹ GOODWIN, M., 2018. *The national populist moment*. London: New Statesman Ltd.

²⁰ URQUHART, C., 2013. *Grounded theory for qualitative research : a practical guide / Cathy Urquhart*. Los Angeles, Calif.; London: SAGE. ISBN 9781526402196.

²¹ BORGE, Rosa. *Types of research in International Studies*. FUOC: Barcelona. 2021. Pág. 32 y 33.

documentaries and most of the academic articles has been carried out by means of my own search in search engines such as Google, or in the search engine of the library of the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya; while other articles have been recommended by professors, fellow specialists in the specific fields of each section or provided by the experts I have interviewed. The interviews I have conducted are with (1) Raquel Herrezuelo Sáez, graduate in psychology from the Universitat de les Illes Balears, specialized in Social Intervention, integration and mediation and Master in Equality Policies and Prevention of gender violence. Herrezuelo has carried out several scientific publications on equality and gender violence and more than 2000 hours of teaching on the subject. She has made important contributions in the public and social sphere with projects aimed at education, awareness and prevention of violence. Dr. Ferran Plana Rius, Industrial Engineering degree specialized in Electronics from the Universitat Rovira i Virgili, Master in Automation and Robotics from the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya, and PhD from the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya in AI with the thesis *Shedding Light on Sewer Pipes: Deep Learning Perception Approaches for Autonomous Sewer Robots*.

And the writer and philosopher Ramón Alcoberro Pericay, who holds a degree in Philosophy and Educational Sciences from the University of Barcelona (UB), a diploma in theology from the Institut de Teologia de Barcelona and a doctorate in philosophy from the UB.

The analysis and coding of the content has been different for each section and mixed throughout. While the sections that (especially the case study, but also to some extent the national cases) focus mainly on a "linear" construction of historical facts, and comparison to establish differences and similarities (small N). The rest of the sections are mostly qualitative and analytical (with the exception of section 10, which is descriptive) with an interdisciplinary approach

(using disciplines such as social psychology or neuroscience) and trying to provide a reflective look from philosophy.

In the following section I will proceed with the general historical context and the case study focused on the actor under study in which a historical narrative and an interpretation of his political philosophy is carried out.

6. Historical context and case study.

It is not easy to establish a clear "beginning", nor a specific situation as the sole cause of the rise of nationalist populisms around the West. To avoid possible reductionism, I have considered that a good way to explain this situation is to do it in an intersectional way in which the consequences of the Great Recession of 2008 (especially after the collapse of the US bank Lehman Brothers) are probably the most relevant event. Of course, other aspects such as the post 9/11 securitization, industrial relocation, the discovery of many cases of corruption (and with it an increase in corruption perception indexes) and the response of institutions to the crisis - especially austerity policies - created an ideal climate for anti-establishment narratives (of various kinds) to emerge and spread in multiple ways.

Although during the decade of the 10's of the 21ST CENTURY several transnational movements of great relevance were born, not all of them were "politicized" in the same way, nor did they all bring the same results. Among these movements we can highlight the Indignados movement that began in Spain, Occupy Wall Street, or the Arab Spring that began in Tunisia and spread throughout the Arab world. They all brought different results, but they all had something in common: **a popular indignation that sought change after a collapse of the system and a response that a good part of the population considered insufficient** (among other characteristics, of course).

Citizen disaffection and distrust in institutions and the political class have historically been an ideal situation for **all kinds of populisms of different political tendencies** to appear in the political arena. In this case, I begin this study by focusing on far-right national populism; specifically, starting from a person who has a major impact on Donald Trump's 2016 campaign: Steve Bannon. Subsequently, he founds **TM**: the case I will study in this section, a movement that, unlike *grassroots*, we could say that -in a certain way- it is a *top-down movement* that manages to take advantage of a social climate, and shape it using different resources that I will analyze in the following sections.

Before focusing on the TM case, I will focus on its co-founder, Stephen Kevin Bannon (commonly known as Steve Bannon), born in Norfolk in 1953. He was a banker (at Goldman Sachs), military man, president of Breitbart News (the representative platform of *the Alt-Right*²²), vice president of the company Cambridge Analytica (CA from now on), was a member of the Tea Party Movement and director of Donald Trump's presidential campaign, as well as later Advisor to President Trump, *inter alia*.

Once formally *ended* his stage with Donald Trump, and after his departure from the White House in 2017; Bannon, who played a crucial role in developing the *America First* slogan, starts a transnational project with the idea of exporting his "doctrine" to Europe (and other parts of the world)²³. Bannon's project is born in London in July 2018, under the name of The Movement and with the main idea of unifying, supporting, and giving support to all those national populist parties in the Old Continent (but also in other

territories); focusing mainly on the 2019 European Parliament (EP) elections.

There are clear indications that certain political forces or personalities participated in meetings, maintained contact or expressed sympathy at certain stages, however, it is not at all easy to establish clear, stable and long-lasting relationships between TMs and political groups or the leaders of such groups.

Providing an accurate description of "what" is a TM is not an easy task and can be viewed from multiple perspectives. One can -from a sociological perspective- state that it is an interest group that aggregates common interests, in this case ideological and/or moral; and that carries out activities to carry out its ends (it is articulated), such as promoting a specific agenda. At the same time, it is a group of influence, since it tries to promote, defend, oppose, etc. and thereby unify and strengthen the populist political groups of the European right trying to create an impact on public opinion to achieve an electoral gain²⁴. Unify to combat the "globalist forces of the liberal elites". It is worth mentioning that on several occasions both Bannon and the rest of his team (Mischaël Modrikamen, Rahem Kassam, among others) held various meetings²⁵ and provided assistance in the form of data provision, or advice to certain associated groups (with whom a number of political values are shared) that I will mention below. This might suggest that the definition of *Think Tank*, or epistemic community, is quite accurate and would fit some of their activities, although it may not be entirely accurate.

TM's philosophy has a number of characteristics, many of them self-described: it is an anti-globalist grouping with strong reminiscences of early 20th

²² CAGLIUSO, D., 2021. Age of the Alt-Right: New-Age Media and White Nationalism in Trump's America. *International Social Science Review (Online)*, vol. 97, no. 2, pp. 1-30, 1A-1B ProQuest Central.

LYONS, M.N., 2017. Ctrl-Alt-Delete: The origins and ideology of the Alternative Right. *Political Research Associates* [online], [accessed: 3 January 2024]. Available from: <https://politicalresearch.org/2017/01/20/ctrl-alt-delete-report-on-the-alternative-right>.

²³ REDAZIONE, 2018. The Movement: How Steve Bannon is spreading populist Trump-style politics across Europe. *Babilon Magazine* [online], [accessed: 5 January 2024]. Available from: <https://www.babilonmagazine.it/the-movement-how-steve-bannon-is-spreading-populist-trump-style-politics-across-europe/>.

²⁴ Xifra Triadú, Jordi. Influence groups. 2020. Editorial UOC. Págs. 22-47.

²⁵ Klayman, Alison. 2019. Steve Bannon, the great manipulator. United States: RYOT Films, Magnolia Pictures.

century *realpolitik* and with the stated mission of creating a "unified populist agenda"²⁶. In Donald Trump's words "a globalist is a person who wants the world to work well without worrying about our country [...] I am a nationalist", could be interpreted as a call for selfishness in international relations. In this sense TM, in the line of Donald Trump stands as a remedy to globalism, rescuing certain interventionist forms - which could resonate to planned economies like socialism - such as tariffs and some protectionist policies imposed by Trump²⁷. But at the same time he attacks the "political caste", the elites, and the State as enemies. It manifests its intention to reduce the role to supranational entities such as the European Union or the Central Bank²⁸. In other words, national interest is prioritized over global cooperation. Thus, its economic philosophy attacks liberal structures head-on (from an IR perspective) but promulgates economic neoliberalism, being a kind of *selective globalism*, or, in other words, TM would be, in theory, sovereignist (as opposed to globalism, similar to the cleavage already given in the 1930s). And I say in theory, since it remains to be seen whether in practice the discourse of "satisfying the general interest" is actually fulfilled or whether it is rather a *transfer of keys* among elites, as some of the fiscal policies promoted by ²⁹ might suggest. At one point Bannon asserted that the old political divide between left and right has become obsolete. According to him, the central conflict of our times is at the global level, pitting nationalists and populists against globalists. The "globalist" category, according to

Bannon, includes not only French President Macron, but also other prominent figures in world politics and economics, such as leaders of large multinational corporations and high-profile politicians who advocate global economic and political integration. In their vision, these globalists represent an elite that seeks to overcome national borders and cultural traditions in favor of a more interconnected and homogeneous world ³⁰. It is therefore a movement that is sovereigntist on the one hand, but whose organization is global (transnational) on the other.

TM's political philosophy cannot only be summarized as an anti-globalist, populist, and nationalist philosophy. TM, as I will develop later in analyzing the discourses and narratives, has a complicated philosophical combination to bring together and describe. First, some positions that Bannon has advocated such as economic nationalism resemble socialism, yet in some countries he has advocated neoliberal forces that contain reminiscences of anarcho-capitalism. This apparent contradiction could be due to a certain strategic *chameleonism* that adapts to different contexts, and to a combination of ideologies that do not fit perfectly into a single category; an ad hoc production for each of the cases and even moments: strategic and -to a certain extent- ideological plasticity. What does seem quite clear, however, is that their political philosophy is based on neoconservatism, an ideological substratum that, unlike previous conservatism, "does not look back with nostalgia"

²⁶ This is how Steve Bannon tried to convert the European right to his "Movement". *El Confidencial* [online], 2022. [accessed: 28 December 2023]. Available at: https://www.elconfidencial.com/multimedia/video/mundo/2022-09-30/steve-bannon-y-georgia-meloni_3499426/.

²⁷ GÓMEZ, M.V. and FEMMINE, L.D., 2019. Trump's trade attack on EU hits Spanish oil, wine and cheese with tariffs. *El País* [online]. Madrid, 3 October 2019. [accessed: 4 January 2024]. ISSN 1134-6582. Disponible en: https://elpais.com/economia/2019/10/03/actualidad/1570083373_647581.html.

²⁸ Opinion: Bannon attacks Europe from the far right - DW - 07/24/2018. *dw.com* [online], [undated]. [accessed: 4 January 2024]. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/es/opini%C3%B3n-bannon-ataca-a-europa-desde-la-extrema-derecha/a-44812637>.

Steve Bannon, the man in the shadow of "America first." *www.elsaltodiario.com* [online], [undated]. [accessed: 4 January 2024]. Available at: <https://www.elsaltodiario.com/estados-unidos/steve-bannon-el-hombre-a-la-sombra-del-america-first>.

Steve Bannon: Nationalism is the cause of Europe's greatness. *euronews* [online], 2018. [accessed: 4 January 2024]. Available at: <https://es.euronews.com/2018/05/25/steve-bannon-el-nacionalismo-es-la-causa-de-la-grandeza-de-europa>.

²⁹ SMITH, D., 2019. Steve Bannon, Trump's fallen guru: "We've turned the US Republicans into a working class party." *elDiario.es* [online]. [accessed: 4 January 2024]. Available at: https://www.eldiario.es/internacional/theguardian/steve-bannon-convertido-republicanos-partido_128_1181895.html.

³⁰ BASSETS, M. and VERDÚ, D., 2018. Bannon, the ideologue of Trumpism, lands in Europe: "History is on our side". *El País* [online]. Madrid, 10 March 2018. [accessed: 4 January 2024]. ISSN 1134-6582. Available at: https://elpais.com/internacional/2018/03/10/actualidad/1520705132_629341.html.

but is hopeful and more energetic and joyful (similar to how Irving Kristol, one of their "godfathers", described it). *Neocoons* have a number of characteristics, such as advocating tax cuts to stimulate economic growth, diminishing the role of the state, see liberalism as a threat to cultural fundamentals, and advocate a strong international policy based on patriotism. So TM promotes an *Alt Right* that attempts to scrutinize and disaggregate public opinion from the *grassroots level* by producing discourse and content tailored to the concerns of each location. At the same time it tries to malleable public opinion as a *top-down movement*, using various techniques and narratives that evolve and adapt to events. This dynamism and flexibility present certain recurring patterns that I will discuss below. However, they also include contradictory or changing aspects, which adds a layer of complexity and ambiguity when trying to precisely define his political thinking.

Regarding the mechanisms used by TM, I consider it important to go back in Bannon's trajectory and point to CA, a company funded by Republican investor and billionaire Robert Mercer, and strategically led-and co-financed-by Steve Bannon with the objective of applying **big data and RRSS** to military information operations, with a focus on the US electorate. From that company a plan was devised to create sophisticated political and psychological profiles for the classification of users, then ad hoc ads were targeted based on the profiles of each user. The scandal about illegitimate data acquisition

(later acknowledged by Facebook) came to light in 2018 and it is noted that more than 50 million Facebook profiles were "harvested" between June and August 2014. As Christopher Wylie revealed in 2018. The company had links to the Brexit campaign in the UK and the Trump team in the US presidential election. The company was subsequently included in Robert Mueller's investigation into possible Russian collusion in the US election, although no direct link was found between Russian collusion and CA, but allegedly from the Internet Research Agency (IRA)³¹³².

The mechanism is known as programmatic *targeting*: a technique that uses algorithms to segment users based on various criteria such as online behavior, interests, location, *inter alia*, thus allowing to customize ads for each individual user, either to mobilize for a cause or to demobilize (for example, getting them not to vote)³³; carrying a subsequent analysis of all these data obtained in order to develop different strategies. This mechanism has served both to spread the propaganda of its associated parties, disinformation (hoaxes, etc.) and to increase socio-political polarization by creating a "them" against "us". Similar to fascism, TM uses populist and nationalist messages that often have a certain nostalgia for a supposed glorious past, (such as the *Make America Great Again* that was used during Trump's campaign) and that seek to recover "national identity" and "collective memory"³⁴. Another mechanism recurrently used by Bannon and associated parties are conspiracy theories³⁵ in this regard, it is important to highlight

³¹ RUSSIAN INTERFERENCE IN 2016 U.S. ELECTIONS. *Federal Bureau of Investigation* [online], [undated]. [accessed: 5 January 2024]. Available from: <https://www.fbi.gov/wanted/cyber/russian-interference-in-2016-u-s-elections>.

³² CADWALLADR, C., 2018. 'I made Steve Bannon's psychological warfare tool': meet the data war whistleblower. *The Guardian* [online], 18 March 2018. [accessed: 5 January 2024]. ISSN 0261-3077. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/mar/17/data-war-whistleblower-christopher-wylie-faceook-nix-bannon-trump>.

³³ Cambridge Analytica whistleblower: Bannon ordered Putin messaging tests. *POLITICO* [online], 2018. [accessed: 5 January 2024]. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/christopher-wylie-to-us-lawmakers-steve-bannon-ordered-vladimir-putin-messaging-tests-russia-cambridge-analytica/>.

³⁴ SOFFER, D., 2022. The use of collective memory in the populist messaging of Marine Le Pen. *Journal of European Studies*, vol. 52, no. 1, ISSN 0047-2441. DOI 10.1177/00472441211072619.

SOLARES, C.C., 2019. Vox: how to understand the peculiarities of Spain's hard-right movement. *The Conversation* [online]. [accessed: 6 January 2024]. Available from: <http://theconversation.com/vox-how-to-understand-the-peculiarities-of-spains-hard-right-movement-115525>.

³⁵ This is how Vox defends that behind the 2030 Agenda there are dark forces: "They are ideological prejudices that work for them." [online], 2023. [accessed: 6 January 2024]. Available at: https://www.lasexta.com/programas/sexta-columna/asi-defiende-vox-que-agenda-2030-hay-fuerzas-oscuras-son-prejuicios-ideologicos-que-les-funcionan_20230922650df9d398383a000195b982.html.

Conspiracy epidemic, born in US, spreads in Europe. *France 24* [online], 2021. [accessed: 6 January 2024]. Available at: <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20210517-conspiracy-epidemic-born-in-us-spreads-in-europe>.

CORN, D., [undated]. Steve Bannon and Alex Jones have a bizarre conspiracy theory about the Israel-Hamas war. *Mother Jones* [online]. [accessed: 6 January 2024]. Available from: <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2023/10/steve-bannon-and-alex-jones-have-a-bizarre-conspiracy-theory-about-the-israel-hamas-war/>.

the work of Guo Wengui (also known as Miles Kwok, among other names), a Chinese exile who helped Bannon financially, and who was one of his strategists when it came to creating and spreading some of these theories³⁶. Another issue widely used and which I will analyze in more detail is that of the **culture war**³⁷, a divisive rhetorical strategy to promote conservative and traditional values against "progressive elites"; translated into IR, it could be interpreted as a positioning towards the most radical realism and opposition to all other paradigms. Another of the strategies of the parties associated with TM has been the alliance with similar parties (extreme right-wing, conservative like the Popular Party in Spain, or even those more ambiguous populist groups like the Movimento 5 Stelle in Italy).

Another recurrent resource they use (similar to other political forces) is mobilization for demonstrations or rallies to show their strength and unity. A more common political technique.

Although all of Bannon's plans to unify the far right with TM did not seem to go as planned (the very Dignitatis Humanae Institute in which he was heavily involved suffered a series of unfavorable situations). Moreover, Bannon failed to weave a single ultra group into the EP³⁸. After the dissolution of Mischaël Modrikamen's *Partie Populaire*, there seems to be no clear evidence that TM is still formally functioning, and the evidence suggests that his goal of "conquering"

the EP with a unified group has failed, however, neither the influence nor the legacy left by TM should be obviated or belittled.

In the following section I will take a look at the different parties or political leaders that have had more or less assiduous relations, their points of convergence, and also some of their divergences.

7. SUI GENERIS CASES: IDIOSYNCRATIC MANIFESTATIONS.

This section tracks TM's connections. This section has a potential shortcoming from the beginning, and that is that it is very complicated to measure the links or *ties* of Bannon's group with the political actors to be explained in each country. Although there is evidence (such as public statements, interviews or news) that proves that there were meetings, events or expressions of intent to cooperate, it is evident that it is very difficult to know the whole reality beyond what is visible. This section will avoid as much as possible speculating on direct relationships beyond what can be demonstrated, but it will differentiate the behavior of these actors in each country beyond the duration and depth of the relationship with the group, in other words, both in this section and in the following ones, the influence that this group may have had at different levels will be taken into account.

LAVELLE, M., 2016. Steve Bannon's Trip From Climate Conspiracy Theorist to Trump's White House. *Inside Climate News* [online]. [accessed: 6 January 2024]. Available from: <https://insideclimatenews.org/news/16112016/steve-bannon-trump-white-house-climate-conspiracy/>.

Steve Bannon: Five Things to Know | ADL. [online]. [undated]. [accessed: 6 January 2024]. Available from: <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounders/steve-bannon-five-things-know>.

³⁶ FRIEDMAN, D., [undated]. A fugitive Chinese tycoon met Steve Bannon. Misinformation mayhem ensued. *Mother Jones* [online]. [accessed: 6 January 2024]. Available from: <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2022/02/guo-wengui-miles-guo-gettr-steve-bannon/>.

PARADIS, C., 2021. Disinformation Network Uncovered Involving Chinese Businessman, Steve Bannon. *International Business Times* [online]. [accessed: 6 January 2024]. Available at: <https://www.ibtimes.com/steve-bannon-chinese-businessman-center-sprawling-qanon-disinformation-network-3201005>.

³⁷ Abascal promises a "cultural revolution" to university students to avoid the "death of Spain". *El Español* [online], 2022. [accessed: 6 January 2024]. Available at:

https://www.elespanol.com/espana/politica/20220920/abascal-promete-revolucion-cultural-universitarios-muerte-espana/704679810_0.html.

CATHELL, M., [undated]. WATCH: Steve Bannon discusses tactics of the culture war with Jack Posobiec. *The Post Millennial* [online]. [accessed: 6 January 2024]. Available at: <https://thepostmillennial.com/watch-steve-bannon-discusses-tactics-of-the-culture-war-with-jack-posobiec>.

SOFFER, D., 2022. The use of collective memory in the populist messaging of Marine Le Pen. *Journal of European Studies*, vol. 52, no. 1, ISSN 0047-2441. DOI 10.1177/00472441211072619.

The Purge: Meloni clears critics out of Italian culture. *POLITICO* [online], 2023. [accessed: 6 January 2024]. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/italy-culture-wars-style-giorgia-meloni/>.

³⁸ GIL, A., 2019. Steve Bannon: the Mister Marshall who failed to unify the European extreme right and who may end up ousted from Italy. *elDiario.es* [online]. [accessed: 6 January 2024]. Available at: https://www.eldiario.es/internacional/steve-bannon-mr-marshall-extrema_1_1507500.html.

The five countries chosen share many characteristics, among which: they are liberal democracies, members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and, with the exception of the United Kingdom, members of the EU and the Schengen area. Their political systems are parliamentary monarchies in the Netherlands and Spain; constitutional monarchy in the UK; parliamentary republic in Italy; and in the case of France, semi-presidentialism.

According to Jeremy Lee³⁹ in a John Hopkins study he concluded that the rise of the far right in the second decade of the 21st century in Europe (although his study is especially focused on France, Italy and Sweden) has a series of determining factors: (1) the migratory crisis (starting in 2014), (2) the debt crisis (consequence of the great recession), and (3) Euroscepticism (the only factor that is perhaps not equally extrapolable to all the cases I analyze). The migration crisis is a recurring theme and present in all the parties that maintained ties with Bannon (and in general of all the parties of the European extreme right). Something similar happens with the discontent over the failure of the social welfare systems that collapsed after the austerity policies of the Troika⁴⁰ (EU, International Monetary Fund [IMF], and European Central Bank [ECB]), which seems to be a common factor in the rise of these parties, which knew how to capitalize on the discontent resulting from these policies.

Euroscepticism should be treated with more caution, as it is in part closely related to the first two factors, and was on the rise in all countries⁴¹ (culminating in the UK's exit from the EU), but it

is a phenomenon that (1) is not equal in all countries: for example: France, Italy and the UK have much higher levels than in Spain where it is much lower. However, despite the fact that the current situation of Euroscepticism in 2024 is somewhat more uncertain, it seems that Brexit has transformed Eurosceptic dynamics (which used to advocate leaving the EU) into reformist "soft Euroscepticism" dynamics (which advocate reforming its institutions, its values and paralyzing political integration in favor of nationalism)⁴². Other factors such as the loss of cultural identity are key and exacerbated by these parties and their discourses, an issue that all of them share and that we will see below.

The case of Italy, a country with a lot of political instability (which led to many technocratic governments), has as protagonists two extreme right-wing parties: Lega per Salvini Premier (LSP) with Matteo Salvini, current Vice President of the Council of Ministers and Fratelli d'Italia with Giorgia Meloni (the most voted party) as current Prime Minister of Italy. Italy is currently governed by a coalition (capturing almost 44% of the vote) between these two parties and the conservative Forza Italia party. Both Salvini and Meloni had contacts with Bannon, the former more explicitly joined their coalition.

In the case of France, the Rassemblement national (RN) party, was until 2018 the Front National (founded by Jean-Marie Le Pen), is a far-right party⁴³ that has steadily raised its electoral results (in the second round of 2022 it reached about 41.5%, a historic result for this formation). Marine Le Pen, leader of RN, also had contacts with Bannon, even if she later distanced

³⁹ LEE, J., [undated]. THE RECENT RISE OF THE FAR-RIGHT IN EUROPE: CAN IT BE ATTRIBUTED TO THE MIGRANT CRISIS, THE EUROPEAN DEBT CRISIS, EUROSCEPTICISM, OR SOMETHING ELSE ENTIRELY? ,

⁴⁰ ARMINGEON, K. and CEKA, B., 2014. The loss of trust in the European Union during the great recession since 2007: The role of heuristics from the national political system. *European Union politics*, vol. 15, no. 1, pp. 82-107. ISSN 1465-1165. DOI 10.1177/1465116513495595.

⁴¹ This is how Euroscepticism has gained ground in each of the EU countries. *La Vanguardia* [online], 2018. [accessed: 9 January 2024]. Available at: <https://www.lavanguardia.com/internacional/20180429/443054697567/euroescepticismo-union-europea.html>.

A new survey reveals a pessimistic Europe. *Real Instituto Elcano* [online], [undated]. [accessed: 9 January 2024]. Available at:

<https://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/notas-de-prensa/una-nueva-encuesta-revela-una-europa-pesimista/>.

⁴² Euroscepticism grows and becomes a major challenge for the survival of the EU. [online], 2022. [accessed: 9 January 2024]. Available at: <https://www.publico.es/internacional/euroescepticismo-crece-convierte-gran-reto-supervivencia-ue.html>.

⁴³ FROIO, C., 2022. The Rassemblement National and COVID-19: How Nativism, Authoritarianism and Expert Populism Did Not Pay Off during the Pandemic. *Government and opposition (London)*, pp. 1-21. ISSN 0017-257X. DOI 10.1017/gov.2022.12.

BRUNET, R., 2022. Après la dédramatisation, le Rassemblement national ouvre la page de la normalisation. *France 24*. French ed. Paris, 2022. ISSN 2491-1569.

herself from him.⁴⁴ It is worth mentioning Éric Zemmour and his far-right Reconquête party, which, despite not having reaped the expected results, is a new relevant actor in French politics. This could suggest that the French right is undergoing a process of extremist radicalization, and although there is insufficient evidence on the extent to which Bannon played a relevant role in his campaign, there is evidence that Bannon also expressed sympathy for him and his ideas⁴⁵.

In the case of the United Kingdom, the UK Independence Party (UKIP), a representative party on the far right of the country maintained strong ties with Bannon especially during the leadership of Nigel Farage⁴⁶. UKIP was a key force behind the movement for a hard Brexit, and Bannon publicly expressed his support for this movement. Nigel Farage left the formation in 2018 and founded the Brexit Party (now Reform UK). Although there are suspicions of UKIP's use of data collected by CA, no study is conclusive, although speculation still continues⁴⁷ about the links between Bannon-Leave.EU-Farage-CA-Arron Banks. As is apparent, Euroskepticism in the UK in 2016 was high enough that it is currently no longer a member of the EU. Regarding the Tories, despite always denying any relationship, there is evidence that there were contacts.⁴⁸ A notorious fact is how recent

policies since Boris Johnson and especially with the agenda of Rishi Sunak have veered towards a harder line of conservatism with more strident speeches towards certain groups (such as LGBTI) or in relation to immigration policies.

The case of the Netherlands has as its current protagonist the Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV), led by Geert Wilders, who won the most seats in a recent national election last 2023. Wilders showed willingness to cooperate with Bannon, and there was contact between them⁴⁹.

In the case of Spain, the extreme right is represented by Vox, party of Santiago Abascal (who also had a relationship with Bannon⁵⁰) which obtained an unprecedented result being third force in 2019. Its seats are significantly reduced in July 2023. It should be noted, that although Vox's result has decreased, that of the Popular Party (PP) has increased significantly, and Ciudadanos (a self-described liberal party) has disappeared from the electoral map. Moreover, the discourse of the Popular Party has changed significantly since the appearance of Vox⁵¹, moving away from moderation and adopting certain discursive elements of the extreme right in order to take advantage of the political polarization⁵². Similar to what seems to

⁴⁴ France's far-right says ready to work with former Trump aide Bannon. *Reuters* [online], 2018. 12 October 2018. [accessed: 9 January 2024]. Available from: <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKCN1MM1QW/>.

GIUFFRIDA, A., 2018. Marine Le Pen: Steve Bannon has no part to play in "saving Europe". *The Guardian* [online], 8 October 2018. [accessed: 9 January 2024]. ISSN 0261-3077. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/08/marine-le-pen-steve-bannon-has-no-part-to-play-in-saving-europe>.

⁴⁵ Zemmour is "an interesting phenomenon," says Steve Bannon. *Le Figaro* [online], 2021. [accessed: 9 January 2024]. Available at: <https://www.lefigaro.fr/politique/eric-zemmour-est-un-phenomene-interestant-estime-steve-bannon-20211113>.

KAZOLIAS, 2021. Steve Bannon has Plans for French Elections & Eric Zemmour. *KazoDaily* [online]. [accessed: 9 January 2024]. Available at: <https://kazolias.com/2021/11/16/steve-bannon-has-plans-for-french-elections-eric-zemmour/>.

⁴⁶ GLANCY, I. by J., 2024. The Magazine Interview: the former White House chief strategist Steve Bannon on Nigel Farage, populism in Europe and Trump's visit to London. [online], 9 January 2024. [accessed: 9 January 2024]. ISSN 0140-0460. Available at: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/the-magazine-interview-the-former-white-house-chief-strategist-steve-bannon-on-nigel-farage-populism-in-europe-and-trumps-visit-to-london-h6vbzc5g3>.

⁴⁷ ELSOM, J., 2020. Steve Bannon's links to Brexit. *Mail Online* [online]. [accessed: 9 January 2024]. Available at: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8647523/Steve-Bannons-links-Brexit-Indicted-Trump-aide-ally-Nigel-Farage.html>.

⁴⁸ Boris Johnson's ties with Bannon exposed - DW - 06/23/2019. [online], [undated]. [accessed: 9 January 2024]. Available from: <https://www.dw.com/en/boris-johnsons-ties-with-steve-bannon-exposed/a-49316785>.

⁴⁹ Geert Wilders' American connections. *POLITICO* [online], 2017. [accessed: 9 January 2024]. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/geert-wilders-american-allies-far-right-netherlands-dutch-election-freedom-party-pvv/>.

ROME, P.L., 2018. Steve Bannon's plan for the European far right is weakened by election laws. *eDiario.es* [online]. [accessed: 9 January 2024]. Available at: https://www.eldiario.es/internacional/theguardian/operacion-steve-bannon-limitada-electorales_1_1826701.html.

⁵⁰ When Bannon came to Spain to advise Vox, what does Abascal have to say about his arrest? *El Plural* [online], 2020. [accessed: 9 January 2024]. Available at: https://www.elplural.com/politica/cuando-bannon-vino-espana-asesorador-voxe-abascal-detencion_246540102.

⁵¹ RAMA, J., CORDERO, G. and ZAGÓRSKI, P., 2021. Three Is a Crowd? Podemos, Ciudadanos, and Vox: The End of Bipartisanship in Spain. *Frontiers in Political Science* [online], vol. 3, [accessed: 9 January 2024]. ISSN 2673-3145. Available at: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpos.2021.688130>.

⁵² BOURNE, A.K., 2023. Moderation and Radicalization of Populist Party Ideological Positions. In: A.K. BOURNE (ed.), *Responding to Populist Parties in Europe: The "Other People" vs the "Populist People"* [online]. S.I.: Oxford University Press, pp. 0. [accessed: 9 January 2024]. ISBN 978-0-19-889258-8. Disponible en: <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198892588.005.0002>.

be happening these years in the UK with the Tories.

In conclusion, even if TM was a "formal failure", it does not seem that Bannon's passage through Europe did not leave a mark. It is true that certain national legislations (such as electoral laws) would have limited Bannon's possibilities to formally cooperate with the political formations I have described above. In countries such as France and Spain, paid professional services offered by foreign sources are prohibited⁵³. Quantifying the influence that Bannon and his TM project have had on these formations, when one does not even have full access to know to what extent there were contacts between them, is practically impossible. What is certain, however, is that - even if a clear causality cannot be established - there seems to be a correlation between the appearance of Bannon, with an adoption adapted to the idiosyncrasies of each country of the *Alt-Right*. It is also striking that certain behaviors such as the evolution of pretending to leave the EU towards an ultra-nationalist reformism occur at the same time that the actors disavow Bannon or distance themselves from him. What seems clear is that it can be said that there was an influence, even if this did not materialize in a pan-European coalition. There are differences among the far-right parties that have been linked to Bannon. For example, the federalist regionalism of La Lega and its defense of certain autonomies such as Alto Adige/Südtirol, contrasts with the exacerbated and homogenizing centralism (understood as its rejection of minority languages and "cultural identities" such as Catalan or Basque) of Vox and RN. Other differences could be considered, such as a supposedly favorable (but ambiguous) stance of Partij voor de Vrijheid towards the LGTBI collective (accused of *pinkwashing*, or instrumental use of LGTBI rights to attack Muslim communities). Others are

similarly ambiguous, such as the Tories, the PP or RN; while practically all the other forces share their patriarchal heteronormative vision and even openly show their homophobia.

The rest of the discourse and narrative -with these nuances removed- is replicated in an almost identical manner from one party to the other. Although a whole book could be devoted to each of these topics, the following section will attempt to synthetically address the construction and discursive bases of these movements (understanding it as a phenomenon that transcends the partisan organization) in an interdisciplinary manner to better identify their philosophical and behavioral dynamics.

8. Discourses and narratives: ideological construction.

1) ***Substratum Culturale: cultural context.***

As mentioned above, disaffection as a result of the Great Recession, as well as structural readjustment policies, rising inequalities in the West and the erosion of the middle class, are some of the key factors. To these are added other relevant elements: the consequences of the Coronavirus pandemic crisis, the war in Ukraine, securitization after 9/11, conflicts in the Middle East (such as Israel-Hamas), the implications of the Anthropocene, global socio-economic interdependence, rapid technological advances and the omnipresence of ICTs, demographic changes, and increasing socio-political polarization.

It is very difficult to capture all the elements of the contemporary world, or what is sometimes referred to as *postmodernity*. It is difficult to do so in our societies of the Global North, but it is even more difficult to try to do so on a worldwide level and even more difficult to determine the weight of

⁵³ LEWIS, P. and RANKIN, J., 2018. Steve Bannon's far-right Europe operation undermined by election laws. *The Guardian* [online]. 21 November 2018. [accessed: 9 January 2024]. ISSN 0261-3077. Available at:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/nov/21/steve-bannons-rightwing-europe-operation-undermined-by-election-laws>.

each factor. What seems certain is that in *postmodernity* a sense of precariousness prevails, a - in Bauman's terms - liquid, ephemeral and constantly changing reality. Ideas such as that of an eventual collapse are very present, and uncertainty and *burnout* -in the words of Byung Chul Han- darken the perception of many individuals. Currently, there is a proliferation of dystopian cultural productions and journalistic narratives with a markedly fatalistic tone. The *Zeitgeist* of our era also seems to show a certain disdain for the philosophical and the humanities in general (for being supposedly useless for the production market, nothing seems to have value if it does not produce consumption); a short-term, economistic vision prevails, with an important pessimistic tinge.

Authors such as Ilja Leonard Pfeijffer in her work *Grand Hotel Europa* defines Europe as a continent in decline, with a crisis in its spiritual and humanistic values, such as freedom, justice, and compassion. In his words "Selfishness is a basic skill in our entrepreneurial society, because an altruistic entrepreneur is a bad entrepreneur". Our society is overly focused on consumption, which seems to be the *raison d'être* of the vast majority of the population. According to Pfeijffer, U.S. propaganda during the Cold War (and this was categorically stated by Francis Fukuyama, when he suggested that liberal democracy was most likely the end point of sociocultural evolution and governance) educated the population to think that liberal democracy was "the final stage" (and also unalterable and indestructible. The collective subconscious seems to have taken it for granted in the past decades that freedoms and rights are unbreakable (some may not even have considered it). However, regimes are not permanent (nothing, in fact, is). Growing authoritarianism and illiberalism can be seen with Vladimir Putin in Russia (with the banning of the LGBTI movement⁵⁴ in the classification as an

"extremist movement" issued by the Russian Supreme Court on 11/30/2023 at the request of the Ministry of Justice (and the amendments to Article 282 of the Russian Criminal Code and Article 20.3) or his 2020 constitutional amendment to perpetuate himself in power). Other examples illustrate this; such as the growing authoritarianism of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Turkey, the policies of Viktor Orbán in Hungary, or the reformist intentions in 2023 by Benjamin Netanyahu to limit the capacity of the judiciary and limit the decisions of the Knesset (which put the rule of law in check); are examples of the **fragility of our systems**.

Authors from across the political spectrum such as Naomi Klein in *The Shock Doctrine*, economist Joseph Stiglitz in *Globalization and its Discontents*, David Harvey in *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, some contributions by philosopher and linguist Noam Chomsky, economist Thomas Piketty in *Capital in the 21st Century*, Wendy Brown in *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*; and other veteran philosophers and sociologists such as Nancy Fraser, Pierre Bourdieu or Slavoj Žižek, **point to economic neoliberalism**, (and the austerity policies resulting from it) **as the crack through which illiberalism has paradoxically infiltrated**.

Neoliberalism, a long-standing idea that has been built up since Social Darwinism and the theories of Herbert Spencer and formalized with the theories of Friedrich Hayek, Milton Friedman and the Chicago Boys, began to be applied with Augusto Pinochet, Ronald Reagan, and Margaret Thatcher. It was later "institutionalized" with the Washington Consensus of 1989. This theory has promoted ultra-commercialization, privatization and the reduction of social services and, in general, the role of the state. This, according to many critics, has led in recent decades to an

⁵⁴ Russia: Supreme Court Bans "LGBT Movement" as "Extremist" | Human Rights Watch. [online], [undated]. [accessed: 10 January 2024]. Available from:

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/11/30/russia-supreme-court-bans-lgbt-movement-extremist>.

increase in inequality and the erosion of states and democratic institutions. This could translate into an increase in the power of financial elites over political decisions.

This would be a summary explanation that tries to capture the essential aspects of the vulnerability of our system, which has opened the door for populist discourses to capitalize on the discontent brought about by these deficits.

The populist national narrative thus seeks to capitalize on sociopolitical discontent. This is often framed in a discourse that stresses the importance of protecting national interests, in the face of perceived threats such as globalization, immigration, and cultural transformation (what they call *cultural warfare*). In addition, another recurrent rhetoric is the delegitimization of democratic institutions, for example, (in its most strident expression) with accusations of electoral fraud to justify assaults, as happened in the U.S. or in Brazil⁵⁵.

II) ***Ideological structure: ideological foundations.***

Studying it from the perspective of IR, the ideological system of most of these parties is opposed to liberalism and its institutions of international cooperation. They are even more opposed to global agendas such as Agenda 2030, political integration, or any system of global governance. Therefore, they are clearly framed within the realist paradigm. However, this does not exclude the possibility of cooperation with actors or states that share their ideology.

Although in a more subtle way, they also show a certain skepticism towards democratic institutions, which they consider corrupt, illegitimate (as they do not represent the "real people"). Their discourse constantly stresses the importance of national sovereignty, and border reinforcement to protect security, which can

sometimes be used to justify authoritarian measures.

Paradoxically, in spite of showing themselves as anti-establishment, and declaring themselves profoundly nationalist, in economic matters, the neoliberal and individualistic vision prevails. However, in the social sphere, it presents itself in a different way. It is difficult to locate exactly its position towards individual freedoms. In certain matters and in certain circumstances (for example, the annulment of individual liberties to justify security) his discourse seems to place the nation above individuals, a conception similar to that of Giovanni Gentile's Fascist State. But in other matters the individual is placed above the common good, but not just any individual, but his ideological conception of the ideal individual. This philosophical amalgam of fascist thought combined with new democratic or anti-system elements is defined as *post-fascism*.

Applying the gender perspective, it is, in the words of Raquel Herrezuelo "a patriarchal, heteronormative, white, androcentric discourse..." and this can be perceived in the emphasis these formations place on preserving "traditional values" such as "the family"; that is to say: the social construction of the hegemonic idea of *family*. A heterosexual family, -of course, monogamous and with exclusivity- with male dominance. In order to maintain the *status quo* of heteronormative and patriarchal relations of power and domination, they frequently oppose the supposed "indoctrination" that they consider sex or gender education in schools to be, since they consider it a negative influence to explain to children and adolescents that non-heterosexual humans exist; and for them these practices pose a threat to the survival of the *ideal individual*, who loses privileges if traditionally subjected groups acquire rights and greater capacity for agency. Women's independence (feminism) destabilizes

⁵⁵ Bannon on Brazil riots: 'I'm not backing off 1 inch'. *POLITICO* [online], 2023. [accessed: 6 January 2024]. Available at: <https://www.politico.com/news/2023/01/09/bannon-brazil-riots-trump-00077155>.

the most conservative idea of capitalism by questioning the functional construct of patriarchy and capitalism itself. From the historical unpaid care of women also derives the obsession to preserve the traditional heteronormative family with patriarchal gender mandates and the rejection of everything that questions or deviates from that norm (be it sexual orientation, egalitarian marriage, relational anarchy, etc.).

In a way, the universal claims about human nature, as well as the set of rights and duties (essentially human rights) that contemporary cosmopolitanism represents represent for post-fascist thought the greatest threat to identity, tradition and the social hierarchical system.

Nationalism and "cultural protectionism" are a constant idea in their narrative, but not understood as the *humanist nationalism* of Giuseppe Mazzini that advocates a "community" centered on commitment, civic duty and love for the nation. The nationalist vision of national populism of these far-right groups is more influenced by the *Nouvelle Droite* of Alain de Benoist, the warlike and hierarchical communitarian thought of Ernst Jünger's *Der Arbeiter*, the ethnocentrism of Jean-Marie Le Pen, the ultranationalism of Jörg Haider or even the *archeofuturism* of Guillaume Faye, among other intellectuals and politicians. The new ultranationalism defends an exclusionary and often xenophobic model, centered on ethnic and cultural identity: "I am Giorgia! I am a woman. I am a mother. I am Italian. I am a Christian. You will not take it away from me!" said Meloni in October 2022. In the nationalist vision of national populism there is a strong opposition to immigration, and especially to immigration coming from the Arab world or from cultures considered as "incompatible", underlining the dangerousness and the rejection towards Islam. I consider it pertinent to introduce here the notion of imagined communities, in which nationality, when religion is in decline gives certain people something to believe in and sacrifice. "Nationality

or nationhood, like nationalism, are cultural artifacts" as Benedict Anderson put it.

The idea of "cultural protectionism" is the attitude towards what this ideology considers "tradition". One of these expressions is their opposition to globalization (except in international trade, on which there are different positions), and especially to what they call the "liberal elites" (known as their anti-establishment stance) who promote gender equality and sexual diversity, and who, according to them, impose models that attack "ordinary citizens" or "good people". Although some elements of their thinking and strategy in Europe may be adoptions of the *Alt-Right*, Alcoberro explains in the interview that **the root of neoconservative thinking is much earlier**, and points to the Second Vatican Council as a key to understanding their reaction: some of these new introductions such as the one concerning ecumenism (collaboration between different Christian denominations), the promotion of respect and dialogue with other religions, a new look at secular issues, or the promotion of religious freedom; were seen as the "prostitution of Christianity", and aroused suspicion in the most conservative and orthodox sectors such as *Opus Dei*. This suspicion seems to have been reactivated with the reform processes of Pope Francis. Alcoberro also points to **Israel as the point of union of an alliance between the European and American extreme right**. One way of explaining this union suggested by Alcoberro is that the ideological system is shared (nationalism, high securitization, aggressive defense policies) and that, in turn, they share the vision of an exclusive nation-state for ethnic and religious groups; in addition to other mutual interests in geopolitics.

Therefore, I consider that in order to deconstruct their discourse it is important to understand the foundation of their narratives. **The discourse works in a hierarchical way where the normal and the abnormal** (binary thinking) **are established**, everything that has traditionally

predominated and even subordinated to "the other" is understood as normal, e.g. heterosexuality over the *non-heterosexual*, man over woman, or the conventionally conforming person over *the* subaltern. Underlying this system of morality are relations of power and domination, and all types of violence (established by Galtung⁵⁶) towards the abnormal: cultural, structural and direct violence. Furthermore, it is central to pay attention to the construction of normative identity (established by the discourse of the extreme right) and how this identity is based - in Derrida's terms - on the interdependence of its opposites: the black as the opposite of white, or the "progre" or "them" as the opposite of "us".

III) *Technicae*: strategies and techniques.⁵⁷

It is a great challenge to identify the techniques and strategies used without falling into simplifications or reductionism. All these techniques are interrelated and it is very difficult to establish clear and categorical boundaries. As Raquel Herrezuelo explains in the interview she gave me "I think they use **narratives that are very much based on the emotional part**, through emotions [...] **the use of fear and the use of disgust, of rejection** [...]", these emotions generate an aggressive response for "survival" in the face of the existence of a threat. From a neuropolitical perspective, the use of emotions to shape popular behavior can be dangerously useful: messages that provoke emotions such as fear or anger reduce the capacity of the prefrontal cortex (decision-making and reasoning) by stimulating the activity of the amygdala (and the increase of the hormones cortisol and adrenaline). Exposure to these speeches could have several neurological effects: (1) continuous exposure, a desensitization by becoming accustomed to

these stimuli, **which could be an explanatory factor in their normalization**. (2) Another possibility (more hypothetical) is that "amygdalar sequestration" (hyperstimulation of the amygdala and interruption of communication with other channels, starting with the thalamus) occurs chronically due to continuous exposure to stress, which could cause a greater activation of the sympathetic system (alertness, reactivity), and less in the parasympathetic system (release of acetylcholine and "return" to the "normal" state); the neuroplasticity (changes in neural pathways) of this steady state could reduce the capacity of the prefrontal cortex, **which hypothetically could explain the increased polarization and extremism**.

Such explanations would be along similar lines to those proposed by geo-strategist and neuroscientist Nayef Al-Rodhan (the dominance or influence of emotions in international politics) in *Emotional Amoral Egoism: A Neurophilosophical Theory of Human Nature and its Universal Security Implications*.

The emotionalization of political discourse is nothing new. Focusing messages on certain so-called "negative" emotions could serve as a strategy to mobilize potential voters. Christopher Weber in *Emotions, Campaigns, and Political Participation* investigated the use of emotions in electoral campaigns and one of his most important findings was that emotions -especially anger- mobilize the electorate and increase political and electoral participation. In this sense, it would be interesting in the coming years to quantify the role of the media, algorithms -and eventually AI- in the intensification of these relationships.

It divides and polarizes using different strategies to create a "them" that is a threat (therefore, emotions are activated). This "them" can be

⁵⁶ FORTINI, Catia C. *Galtung, Violence, and Gender: The Case for a Peace Studies/Feminism Alliance*. Peace & Change. 2006.

⁵⁷ The information related to neuroscience has been elaborated from the training given by Dr. Nazareth Castellanos at the Jardín de Epicuro, as well as other resources such as *En*

busca de Spinoza: Neurobiología de la emoción y los sentimientos, or *Y el cerebro creó al hombre* by Antonio Damasio, among other documents, articles and notes.

immigrants, progressives, elites, collectives such as LGBTBI and/or movements such as feminism; who simply challenge their ideology. Blaming or demonizing these groups can be a strong point in the strategy, pointing to same-sex marriages as an attack on the traditional family, feminism as a siege on men, or immigration as the "theft" of jobs and cultural invasion. In doing so, a sense of victimization is achieved, especially in the heterosexual white male, or the self-perceived normal (the normative); which again provokes reactive emotions.

To achieve this end, they make use of various tactics, including the use of biased information or intentional fallacies (sophistry). An everyday example could be the incorporation of some truths in a message that incorporates fallacies so that the falsehoods are more difficult to identify, and thus have greater credibility.

Other practices could be: reporting by decontextualizing statements or information from opponents, the use of ICT, *cherry picking* (fallacy of incomplete evidence), the simple use of *whataboutism* (accusing the opponent that "he is or does more"), or techniques of ridiculing the opponent (as Herrezuelo points out with the use of the concept of "goodism" as a mockery of political ideas that appeal to solidarity).

Another strategy is to **confuse or create an atmosphere of uncertainty** by launching contradictory messages, saturating with information, spreading disinformation and hoaxes or provoking controversy, thus creating a *policy of stupefaction* through information overload.

Related to the above, conspiracy theories (and their explosive interaction with algorithms) is a whole other topic on which more and more theorizing is possible. Theories such as Pizzagate, alleged *chemtrail* attacks; "the

Replacement Theory"; Qanon theories; the presentation of Agenda 2030 for the extermination of humanity, to implement communism, or to legalize pederasty; the presentation of gender ideology and homosexuality as a global plan for extinction; the "Kalergi Plan"; even partial or total scientific denialism. The dissemination of these theories forms the conspiratorial ammunition that is increasingly used by their messages to provoke an epistemic crisis. In *New Age Spiritualism, Mysticism, and Far-Right Conspiracy*⁵⁸ (2023), Michael A. Peters explains the history of the *New Age* movement (the influence of Meister Eckhart's mysticism, Jungian psychoanalysis, Eastern philosophies and practices, humanist pscologies, astrology...) and how since the early 2000s the far-right has been penetrating and appropriating certain elements of the movement; which could explain why many people who had traditionally been closer to green thinking and its parties - or to abstention - have progressively joined the far-right. Another article⁵⁹, *Far-Right conspiracy groups on fringe platforms: a longitudinal analysis of radicalization dynamics on Telegram* (2022) by several authors identify social crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic as fertile ground (due to uncertainty or fear; again: emotions) for radicalization of the population. The article suggests that extremists use these situations to offer alternative narratives that challenge the establishment (and often call into question democracy and current institutions. This increases uncertainty, confusion and distrust, all especially on platforms such as Telegram (attractive for its anonymity, it increases radicalization by providing a space for extremist content, leading to the homogenization of ideas and attitudes. In this type of platforms, "echo

⁵⁸ PETERS, M.A., 2022. New age spiritualism, mysticism, and far-right conspiracy. *Educational philosophy and theory*, vol. ahead-of-print, no. ahead-of-print, pp. 1-9. ISSN 0013-1857. DOI 10.1080/00131857.2022.2061948.

⁵⁹ SCHULZE, H., HOHNER, J., GREIPL, S., GIRGNHUBER, M., DESTA, I. and RIEGER, D., 2022. Far-right conspiracy groups on fringe platforms: a longitudinal analysis of

radicalization dynamics on Telegram. *Convergence (London, England)*, vol. 28, no. 4, pp. 1103-1126. ISSN 1354-8565. DOI 10.1177/13548565221104977.

chambers" occur, reinforcing radical and extreme attitudes that often remain uncontradicted).

All these techniques and strategies can serve to mobilize the electorate, but they can also be used to demobilize the opposition electorate. Both disinformation, conspiracy theories, encouraging internal division or delegitimization of their political adversaries can motivate the inaction of the opposition electorate; a key would be to achieve a kind of resignation or feeling that "they are all the same" or that "it is of no use", and to achieve a philosophically cynical attitude, as Žižek would conceive it.

IV) *Consequentiæ: consequences.*

The effects of these discourses seem to have different consequences. Briefly, they can lead to (1) the curtailment of the rights of their adversaries (either because they achieve power or because other parties in power adopt their dynamics to maintain it). (2) An increase in some types of violence (including verbal violence) against *target* collectives, to give an example: according to the Spanish Ministry of Interior, in the country homophobic aggressions increased by almost 70% in 2022⁶⁰ and showed an upward trend since 2014; as did the increase in violence by 8.3% the same year⁶¹: this could suggest a positive correlation between hate speech and these types of violence; although its causality should be studied exhaustively. (3) Increased social and political polarization: as several authors conclude in the *Oxford* article *Populism and Social Polarization in European Democracies*⁶², polarization has a positive correlation with the increase of populist speeches (I point out that it should not necessarily point only to extreme right-wing populism). Moreover, the aggressiveness of the speeches has also

increased intra-institutionally. (4) In the face of bewilderment, confusion and tension: an increase in resignation, and cynical attitude (which sometimes translates, for example, in Italy in 2022, into higher abstention). (6) The psychobiological consequences (described above) predictable in the face of an atmosphere of tension, such as increased stress. (7) Moral panic, in reference to Stanley Cohen's concept, i.e.: fear, concern or indignation in response to an issue or groups that are perceived in public opinion as a threat to collective identity or interests (e.g. by presenting LGTBI rights or gender equality as a threat to the family, or even linking homosexuality to pederasty; these issues can be perceived as a danger to values). And (8) as a hypothesis, what I will call the *mirror effect*: the reactivity (out of fear, anger...) of the groups targeted by the discourse, when they feel threatened. *E.g.* radicalization in certain feminist sectors or panic among the LGTBI collective due to their exposure and instrumentalization.

The use of ICT as an amplifier and enhancer of these messages and tactics will be discussed in the next section, paying special attention to algorithms, social media and AI.

9. Use of AI, algorithms and social networks by actors related to the sphere of The Movement.

It is quite a challenge to gather the most important aspects of the use of these technologies by these national populist actors in a short section. From the outset, it is clear that we will by no means cover the entire reality, nor is this the intention. It is therefore a question of reviewing some of the techniques used, some of their impacts and their interaction with public opinion.

DOLZ, P.O., 2022. Interior records an increase of almost 70% in crimes against sexual orientation in Spain. *El País* [online]. [accessed: 11 January 2024]. Available at: <https://elpais.com/espana/2022-10-03/interior-registra-un-aumento-de-casi-un-70-en-los-delitos-contra-la-orientacion-sexual-investigados-en-espana.html>.

⁶¹ The number of victims of gender violence increased by 8.3% in 2022 | Society | EL PAÍS. [online], [undated]. [accessed: 16 January 2024]. Available at:

<https://elpais.com/sociedad/2023-05-31/el-numero-de-victimas-de-violencia-de-genero-aumento-un-83-en-2022.html>.

⁶² GINSBURGH, V., PERELMAN, S. and PESTIEAU, P., 2021. Populism and Social Polarization in European Democracies. *CESifo Economic Studies*, vol. 67, no. 4, ISSN 1610-241X. DOI [10.1093/cesifo/ifab006](https://doi.org/10.1093/cesifo/ifab006).

ICTs are a revolution: information, its varieties, rhythms, modalities, formats and scope have been transformed at an uncontrollable speed since the emergence of the Internet. However, in November 2023, ChatGPT, the most popular AI tool, had in just one year some 100 million weekly active users, a reach that not even the Internet could achieve in such a short time.

The lack of concern that institutions and part of the population have had about the impact of ICTs in the world has been burned away by the confusion they are currently causing. The transcendence of the ICT phenomenon has been much faster than the institutional response, exceeding expectations and making certain futuristic narratives of the early twentieth century seem somewhat *naïve* today. Although some authors⁶³ identify some ICTs as - in the words of Joseph Nye - *soft power* (ideological or cultural influence...), I consider it more appropriate that, taking into account their possibilities as *hard power* (cyber-attacks, espionage such as e.g. the Pegasus software used by the Kremlin against its dissidents⁶⁴), the possibility of their being understood as *smart power*, i.e. the strategic use of both, by state and non-state actors, should be contemplated.

The use of RRSS, algorithms (those that do not use AI such as *decision trees*) and AI by TM-related actors is difficult to identify and isolate.

First of all, it is worth mentioning a series of fairly obvious evidences: (1) these actors have used conventional communication methods (such as the classic press) to get their messages across, and (2) they have had a presence in social media

(as have many other political actors), but here we will also focus on what is less *common*.

Some techniques such as *stalking*, *trolling* and *doxing* have been used in social media⁶⁵. *Stalking* is basically harassment or stalking: using RRSS accounts to harass and monitor other people, for example: activists. *Trolling* or trolling is the practice of posting provocative, inflammatory or offensive comments using highly polarized language, for example: in the comments of a digital newspaper story on Instagram. *Doxing* is the investigation and disclosure of personal information without the person's consent.

Often these practices have been carried out by what are known as *troll farms*: which are organizations or groups of individuals (whether for-profit or not-for-profit entities) that engage in creating multiple accounts to carry out the above activities - especially *trolling* - in order to influence public opinion. There is evidence that TM associates have made use of *trolls* directly, on behalf of their parties, such as RN and Vox; and suspicions remain that they have also done so indirectly, through foreign interference, such as the IRA, which from St. Petersburg carried out interference in the US elections, in the Brexit⁶⁶, in the 2016 Dutch referendum, or in the 2017 German elections. It should be pointed out that the coordination between indirect interferences such as those of the IRA and TM or its associates is not conclusive.

Troll farms are thus organized groups that aim to influence specific targets by creating fake accounts and flooding social media with specific messages in order to manipulate public opinion (e.g. before the 2019 European elections⁶⁷).

⁶³ SANTINI, R.M., AGOSTINI, L., BARROS, C.E., CARVALHO, D., REZENDE, R.C. de, SALLES, D.G., SETO, K., TERRA, C. and TUCCI, G., 2018. Software power as soft power: a literature review on computational propaganda effects in public opinion and political process. *Partecipazione e conflitto*, vol. 11, no. 2, ISSN 2035-6609.

⁶⁴ Hacking Meduza: Pegasus spyware used to target Putin's critic. *Access Now* [online], [undated]. [accessed: 11 January 2024]. Available from: <https://www.accessnow.org/publication/hacking-meduza-pegasus-spyware-used-to-target-putins-critic/>.

⁶⁵ PAUWELS, A., [undated]. Contemporary manifestations of violent right-wing extremism in the EU: An overview of P/CVE practices. ,

⁶⁶ BOOTH, R., WEAVER, M., HERN, A., SMITH, S. and WALKER, S., 2017. Russia used hundreds of fake accounts to tweet about Brexit, data shows. *The Guardian* [online]. 14 November 2017. [accessed: 17 January 2024]. ISSN 0261-3077. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/nov/14/how-400-russia-run-fake-accounts-posted-bogus-brexit-tweets>.

⁶⁷ Russian troll farms and far right 'meddling in EU elections'. *The Independent* [online], 2019. [accessed: 17 January 2024]. Available from:

These groups often operate from different territories⁶⁸ because it is easier to evade legislation and make detection and tracking more difficult; for simple *offshoring purposes* (and to reduce costs); or because their targets transcend national borders. A fairly recent example is the use of *troll farms* (along with spying tools; and other methods) promoted by Russian ultra-Orthodox actors and American evangelists⁶⁹ to attack the LGBTBI movement (e.g., sabotaging marches such as Georgia's gay pride), and thus trying to influence public opinion regarding women's rights and LGBTBI rights; with the probable aim of creating ideological tensions in the countries in the process of EU accession in the Balkans. On the other hand, there are reports such as the one by Karen Hao⁷⁰ on September 16, 2021 that criticizes Facebook's policies and algorithms that enable this phenomenon and suggests changes to protect the integrity of the platform. *Troll farms* have had a significant impact on several political processes, as an example of great impact, there is the Lakhta Project, orchestrated and financed by Yevgeniy Prigozhin (the Russian oligarch ex-leader of the Wagner Group and founder of the IRA).

Another issue is *bots*. It is difficult to establish when a *bot* is an AI or not. Depending on the definition of AI that is operationalized, the conclusions may be different, however, in this paper I will follow the definition proposed by Dr. Plana Rius. Therefore, there are simpler *bots* that work with algorithms (for example, programmed to post on Twitter or Instagram at certain times),

and others that make use of AI, such as those that use *Natural Language Processing* (perform tasks that would normally require human intelligence). In this work it has been located that, for example, in *Disinformation and Social Bot Operations in the Run Up to the 2017 French Presidential Election* by Emilio Ferrara evidence is presented that both types of *bots* are operating in the political landscape, for this work some evidence has been obtained of the use of *bots* by some parties (Vox, or with less conclusive evidence by RN with the alleged support of Russia)⁷¹.

Regarding the use of algorithms, the case of CA is the most notorious example of their use for political purposes. Well, *Open Source Intelligence* (OSINT) is a method of collecting and analyzing information from public or other open (publicly available) sources, which can be used by security experts, national intelligence agencies, researchers, but also cybercriminals. CA applied OSINT techniques in 2016 to collect data from Facebook users (which, according to evidence, also gave away private data⁷²), to carry out *programmatic targeting*, mentioned above. That is, the use of algorithms to direct advertising to a specific audience based on a series of criteria (online behavior, location...); and microtargeting, a similar technique, but with a higher level of precision, personalization and segmentation of profiles. These uses, coinciding with Evan Oddleifson's conclusion⁷³ in the cases of the US and Trinidad and Tobago elections, have a significant effect and undermine individual

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/eu-elections-latest-russia-far-right-interference-fake-news-meddling-a8910311.html>.

⁶⁸ HERN, A. and HARDING, L., 2020. Russian-led troll network based in west Africa uncovered. *The Guardian* [online]. 13 March 2020. [accessed: 17 January 2024]. ISSN 0261-3077. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2020/mar/13/facebook-uncovered-russian-led-troll-network-based-in-west-africa>.

⁶⁹ How US & Russian conservatives help fuel anti-LGBTQ+ agenda in Europe. *euronews* [online], 2023. [accessed: 16 January 2024]. Available at: <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2023/07/24/how-us-evangelicals-and-the-russian-orthodox-church-have-helped-fuel-anti-lgbtq-agenda-in->

⁷⁰ Troll farms reached 140 million Americans a month on Facebook before 2020 election, internal report shows. *MIT Technology Review* [online], [undated]. [accessed: 17 January 2024]. Available from: <https://www.technologyreview.com/2021/09/16/1035851/facebook-troll-farms-report-us-2020-election/>.

⁷¹ TOOR, A., 2017. Pro-Trump Twitter bots were also used to target Macron, research shows. *The Verge* [online]. [accessed: 15 January 2024]. Available from:

<https://www.theverge.com/2017/7/7/15933146/trump-twitter-bots-macron-lepen-election-study>.

Twitter bots are being weaponized to spread information on the French presidential campaign hack - Vox. [online], [undated]. [accessed: 15 January 2024]. Available from: <https://www.vox.com/2017/5/6/15568582/twitter-bots-macron-french-presidential-candidates-hacked-emails>.

Vox, the party that used the most "bots" in the 10-N elections to spread its messages. *El Español* [online], 2019. [accessed: 15 January 2024]. Available from: https://www.elespanol.com/espana/politica/20191219/vox-partido-bots-utilizo-elecciones-difundir-mensajes/453205562_0.html.

⁷² UR REHMAN, I., 2019. Facebook-Cambridge Analytica data harvesting: What you need to know. *Library philosophy and practice*, pp. 1-11. ISSN 1522-0222.

⁷³ ODDLEIFSON, E., 2020. The Effects of Modern Data Analytics in Electoral Politics: Cambridge Analytica's Suppression of Voter Agency and the Implications for Global Politics. *Political Science Undergraduate Review*, vol. 5, no. 1, ISSN 2562-1289. DOI 10.29173/psur130.

agency and rational choice, as well as posing a danger to the functioning of democracies.

Beyond the intentional misuses or illegalities that can be committed with algorithms and AI, as pointed out by Floridi et al in the article *The Ethics Of Algorithms[...]* cited at the beginning of this paper, the 6 problems that he identifies can be applied to network algorithms; and as a consequence, cause a filter bubble: the algorithm only suggests content that it considers will be attractive to the user, leading to limit its exposure to diversity and isolate in an information bubble, something that as Raquel Herrezuelo explains "apart from biased information, it produces a dissociation from reality". Bubble filters are added to the phenomenon of the echo chamber, which, briefly, would be the fact of being informed only in environments/channels/media that confirm our own beliefs (often chosen by an unconscious process due to *confirmation bias*), a very polarizing phenomenon. When the algorithmic process is added to this, the combination can be explosive. Recalling what I have commented in the section on discourse and narratives, it can be assumed that a brain addicted and constantly exposed to messages of tension, fear, anger... can result in a growing radicalization of the population. As Herrezuelo explains, "this hatred is lucrative for the RRSS, and is reinforced because it produces (economic) benefits". A possible explanation for his statement would be the concern or worry that a user has after the bombardment of information on a topic that may affect him or her, or simply impact him or her emotionally.

The RRSS, as pointed out in the study *Does the platform matter? Social media and COVID-19 conspiracy beliefs in 17 countries*⁷⁴ published in 2021, disinformation (in this case, the article

focuses on conspiracy theories related to the Coronavirus) does not spread equally on all platforms. It seems, that some (such as Facebook or WhatsApp) have become hotbeds of unfounded information and spreading misperceptions, and they claim (in the article) that the relationship is positive. Taking into account the results of this study, and the role that algorithms can have in generating this effect, it must be added that sometimes some conspiracy theories have been intentional and even promoted by the parties I have analyzed above, as in the case of Vox⁷⁵. It should be noted that the segmentation caused by the techniques mentioned above can create personalized political messages on the one hand (by predicting user behaviors or classifying them), but on the other hand it can also promote the flow of certain information (not necessarily partisan) that have a more subway influence in politics. The use of *big data* is thus a political tool with a strong potential to influence various dimensions (emotional, social...).

The use of AI by these actors could not be proven in this study. However, on a speculative basis, it is possible that - despite legislation regulating or prohibiting it - these groups may make use of technologies beyond *deep fake* in the future. Using unauthorized technologies, or developing their own technologies; for example, replacing decision trees with more sophisticated AI algorithms to improve data acquisition and explore new ways to spread their messages.

Although concern about the creation of problematic content is growing, for the time being it seems that the results of some research conducted by experts suggest that some content created for disinformative or propagandistic purposes is difficult to distinguish from *the real*

⁷⁴ Does the platform matter? Social media and COVID-19 conspiracy theory beliefs in 17 countries - Yannis Theocharis, Ana Cardenal, Soyeon Jin, Toril Aalberg, David Nicolas Hopmann, Jesper Strömbäck, Laia Castro, Frank Esser, Peter Van Aelst, Claes de Vreese, Nicoleta Corbu, Karolina Koc-Michalska, Joerg Matthes, Christian Schemer, Tamir Sheafer, Sergio Splendore, James Stanyer, Agnieszka Stępińska, Václav Štětka, 2023. [online], [undated]. [accessed: 2 January 2024]. Disponible en: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/14614448211045666>

⁷⁵ CASTILLO, C. del, 2023. Vox unleashed a digital dirty war with conspiracies as "the great replacement" before the start of the campaign. *elDiario.es* [online]. [accessed: 15 January 2024]. Available at: https://www.eldiario.es/tecnologia/vox-desato-guerra-sucia-digital-comienzo-campana_1_10365443.html.

thing.⁷⁶ A popular 2018 report entitled *The Malicious Use of Artificial Intelligence: Forecasting, Prevention, and Mitigation* produced by the University of Cambridge, OpenAI, the University of Oxford and the Future of Humanity Institute, *inter alia*, warned of possible future malicious uses such as automated cyberattacks, content creation (such as even more precise targeted propaganda) or invasion of privacy.

On the other hand, *The Hindu*⁷⁷ published on January 3, 2024 an article warning about the ease -also economic- of creating false content and with the fear that *deepfakes* created by companies such as *The Indian Deepfaker* could affect the electoral processes in India, Indonesia and Bangladesh. These concerns were heightened following the publication in November 2023 of Freedom House's annual report⁷⁸ (FH) in which it noted that generative AI is a threat to disinformation on the web, that these tools are developing at great speed and that they are becoming increasingly accessible and easy to use; leading to an *improvement* in disinformation tactics. It is noted that in at least 16 countries they have been used to influence public opinion. AI has enabled some governments to enhance their censorship tools. In addition, legal frameworks in at least 21 countries promote or force digital platforms to activate machine learning for the suppression of certain disfavored political, social and religious speech. This FH report captures a part (we don't know how big) of the danger that AI can pose. Thus, speculating that AI is also being used by non-state actors without yet being detected may serve to alert and empower

research, and regulation; the latter will be the topic of the next section.

10. Regulatory context.

In this section, a brief exposition and regulatory discussion on the legal mechanisms of ICTs (especially those that have been analyzed in the previous sections) will be carried out. Although this section could analyze the legislative issues of the 5 countries, in accordance with the previous sections, I will focus on the countries studied, but addressing the situation exclusively in the EUⁱⁱ. I have considered it relevant to examine the most recent mechanisms -only those- that deal both with regulating ICT and improving user privacy conditions.

In 2022 the EU adopts the *Digital Services Act* [DSA]⁷⁹ (*Digital Services Act*) (Regulation [EU] 2022/2065) together with the *Digital Markets Act* [DMA] (Regulation [EU] 2022/1925) and adds to its comprehensive personal data privacy legal construct. These are regulations (with direct applicability and scope, primacy over national law, and mandatory) that focus (among other issues) on a single market for digital services. Among its features are: improving the protection of fundamental rights, unifying and harmonizing EU rules, increasing legal certainty, protecting consumers and society from certain risks such as the dissemination of certain illegal content (child pornography, hate speech). Another feature is that they seek to tackle disinformation (and its civic, democratic, public health and individual [physical and mental] effects). They also aim to create a fairer environment for companies using

⁷⁶ ALLCHORN, D.W., 2023. Far-Right Extremist Exploitation of AI and Alt-Tech: The Need for P/CVE Responses to an Emerging Technological Trend. *GNET* [online]. [accessed: 11 January 2024]. Available at: <https://gnet-research.org/2023/10/09/far-right-extremist-exploitation-of-ai-and-alt-tech-the-need-for-p-cve-responses-to-an-emerging-technological-trend/>.

Artificial Intelligence and Extremism: The Threat of Language Models for Propaganda Purposes. [online], [undated]. [accessed: 11 January 2024]. Available from: <https://crestresearch.ac.uk/resources/artificial-intelligence-and-extremism-the-threat-of-language-models/>.

⁷⁷ REUTERS, 2024. Deepfakes deceive voters from India to Indonesia before elections. *The Hindu* [online]. 3 January 2024. [accessed: 11 January 2024]. ISSN 0971-751X. Available at: <https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/technology/deepfakes-deceive-voters-from-india-to-indonesia-before-elections/article67700785.ece>.

⁷⁸ The Repressive Power of Artificial Intelligence. *Freedom House* [online], [undated]. [accessed: 11 January 2024]. Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2023/repressive-power-artificial-intelligence>.

⁷⁹ What is the Digital Services Law? This is how the EU regulation that regulates the big tech companies works and that they have to comply with since August 25 - Maldita.es - Periodismo para que no te la cuelen. *Maldita.es - Periodismo para que no te la cuelen* [online], 2023. [accessed: 13 January 2024]. Available at: <https://maldita.es/malditatecnologia/20231220/dsa-ley-union-europea-regular-empresas-tecnologicas/>.

FERNANDEZ, S., 2023. Digital markets law: everything you need to know - Letslaw. [online]. [accessed: 13 January 2024]. Available at: <https://letslaw.es/ley-de-mercados-digitales-claves/>.

platforms, a more open and direct access for consumers, as well as an encouragement for entrepreneurs and technology companies.

They include: obligation of annual transparency reports by online platforms, information obligation and requirement for service architecture (in order to avoid misleading patterns for the user), prohibition of targeted advertising, transparency and possibility of deactivation of algorithms (they have to offer their data and algorithms at the request of European authorities, *inter alia*), prohibition of targeted advertising based on certain characteristics (minority of age, religion, sexual or political orientation...), content moderation and processing - and collection - of personal data (not based on profiling from personal information). They affect intermediary services (providers), data hosting (companies offering services "in the cloud"), search engines, platforms and major search engines such as Facebook, Pornhub, Google...

The mechanisms establish that the platforms must give access to their public data to accredited whistleblowers to carry out compliance reviews. The consequences of non-compliance include sanctions and prohibitions, among others.

It is important to note that, up to this point, only Directive 2000/31/EC of 2000 set some standards to follow in this area, and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) of 2018 were measures with a significant impact to protect users and their data.

The other relevant measure is the interim agreement reached by the EP, the EU Council and the Member States on December 9, 2023 on AI; which would be the world's first comprehensive law for AI. Although some provisions will already enter into force earlier, it is expected to come into force by the end of 2026,

therefore, for some parties, the implementation will be gradual. With this agreement, a first regulation would be established, it would be obliged to follow guidelines for the use of AI, ensuring both safety and respect for fundamental rights and European values. In addition, the law will be *adaptive and flexible, taking into account* the fact that functions and technologies evolve at great speed.

The law will include different aspects such as: (1) the limitation of biometric surveillance, which will be subject to limitations and judicial authorizations (to search for criminals, suspicious persons...), among other regulations related to real-time and "ex post" surveillance. Some biometric systems will be strictly prohibited: religious categorization (political, sexual orientation...), political, or the creation of facial databases, labor and educational emotional recognition, or social scores based on behavior or others. (2) the regulation of general AI Models, applied to generative systems so that they must respect copyrights and specify whether or not a product (text, song...) has been generated by AI, and transparency mechanisms for these technologies. Other specific prohibitions include: AI that manipulates human behavior to circumvent free will; AI for use of human vulnerabilities. The law also provides for the creation of an independent AI Office linked to the European Commission (EC), advised by society, and a scientific panel.⁸⁰

The law would be the first comprehensive regulation of AI in the world, in addition to being supranational (EU) in nature, according to experts, the law is intended to allow for further innovation, but without jeopardizing individual and collective rights. However, the law is still awaiting formal ratification by the Member States and the EP.

⁸⁰ Artificial Intelligence Act: deal on comprehensive rules for trustworthy AI [News | News | European Parliament. [online], 2023. [accessed: 13 January 2024]. Available at: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20231206IPR15699/artificial-intelligence-act-deal-on-comprehensive-rules-for-trustworthy-ai>.

AYUSO, S., 2023. EU approves world's first artificial intelligence law. *El País* [online]. [accessed: 13 January 2024]. Available at: <https://elpais.com/tecnologia/2023-12-08/la-ue-aprueba-la-primera-ley-de-inteligencia-artificial-del-mundo.html>.

Among the virtues that these laws may have are their scope, which is no longer solely national, and - in the case of the AI law - their flexibility, understanding that reality is so liquid that the legal system must also begin to increase its plasticity and adaptability. The law can be successful if it manages to properly address the issue of transparency, accountability and ethics in the use of AI, issues discussed in the next section. It may mean an improvement in relation to data security (especially of those located on servers within the EU territory), although not exempt from cyber-attacks.

Its limitations (some) I consider to be its arrival *post factum*. As in many other issues (climate, security, pandemics), the arrival or emergence of phenomena has already been alerted, however, it seems that the reactions and the creation of a legal framework does not appear until the situation starts to get out of control. There is a risk that its interpretation may differ from one State to another. Another, which is at the same time an advantage, is its scope; it has a supranational scope, so there is no guarantee that everything that is prevented within the EU will happen in other territories, or even that it may affect the EU itself.

11. Analysis, debate and ethical considerations.

In this last section, prior to the conclusions, an attempt will be made to address an analytical debate and possible solutions from the point of view of applied ethics. First of all, this section will try to have an "integrated" normative ethics approach. That is to say, it will try - as far as possible - to analyze the issues, and the design of the solutions both from the teleological/sequentialist ethics (assessing the consequences to determine what is or is not

desirable), and from the deontological ethics (that which focuses on the fulfillment of duty, or what is or is not correct, regardless of the results). The four principles of applied ethics mentioned by Dr. Ramón Alcoberro will be taken into account: (1) autonomy, (2) beneficence, (3) non-maleficence and (4) justice.

The ethical challenges and impacts brought by both the extremist discourses (not only those of the extreme right) studied in this paper and ICTs are multifaceted.

SSRs bring several challenges. In an interview conducted by Soledad Ayala to Esteban Magnani⁸¹ in 2021, he focuses on the impact of technology in politics, giving as an example the RRSS and the misuse of personal data to influence the population⁸²; which is a great threat towards the principle of personal autonomy. On the other hand; as I have already explained in previous sections, by personalizing content, bubble filters and echo chambers can be created, a process that can reinforce one's own ideas. The amplifying effect of social media can be positive in many cases, but in the face of misinformation or hoaxes it could cause major problems such as the epistemic bubbles pointed out by Marc Coeckelberg. Among other possible issues, the use by extremist groups of social media for the dissemination of propaganda or hate speech in social media could pose a problem for public opinion and security, raising the question of the limit of freedom of expression.

Algorithms and AI can perpetuate or even increase biases and discriminations in the data on which they are trained; Catherine Stinson in *Algorithms are not neutral: Bias and collaborative filtering*⁸³ concludes in her study on collaborative filtering algorithms used for recommendations and searches that, despite an apparent neutrality, they can contend biases, and these, have an

⁸¹ AYALA, S., 2021. Interview with Esteban Magnani: Data and digital technology. Social control disguised as innocence and neutrality. *Inmediaciones de la Comunicación*, vol. 16, no. 2, ISSN 1688-8626. DOI 10.18861/ic.2021.16.2.3158.

⁸³ Algorithms are not neutral | AI and Ethics. [online], [undated]. [accessed: 14 January 2024]. Disponible en: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s43681-022-00136-w>.

important social impact. As Floridi et al. mention in the article cited above, among the six ethical concerns they point out, lack of transparency is a major challenge.

Dilemmas: In the face of these challenges, important dilemmas arise. For example, in the face of extremist speech, the principle of non-maleficence could be used, but this could easily bring the classic censorship-freedom of expression dilemma if clear parameters are not established (e.g., based on human rights). Similar is the dilemma that could arise with regulation seeking to police the ethical responsibility of technology corporations on the part of the government: that could clash with the privacy of users. Other more complex dilemmas would be those cases in which certain actions or measures would be justifiable from a deontological perspective (key ethical principles such as freedom of expression, justice or privacy) but problematic from a teleological perspective (for example, in cases where freedom of expression may be harming the general interest or social cohesion). It can be said that the goal of applied ethics is to find the middle ground without the need to exclude either ethical perspective.

It should be noted that moral rules are not necessarily in tune with institutions and tradition, but they are universally impartial and logically coherent. Current applied ethics are fundamentally incompatible with the paternalism that any religious, community, etc. authority may have.⁸⁴

Applied ethics: The issue that I consider most important when applying ethics to ICTs is - redundancy aside - precisely its applicability. As Luciano Floridi et al. explain in *Operationalising*

*AI ethics: barrier, enablers, and next steps*⁸⁵ of 2023, one of the problems of ethics in these aspects is the difficulty of operationalizing it, and the need for a more practical approach, for example: providing detailed examples of good practice in professional ethical design, encouraging legislation, or making ethical principles mandatory in education and more understandable to the public. The article adds an interesting and practical fifth principle to applied ethics: (5) explainability.

Taking these issues into account, it could be applied to the ethics of RRSS, algorithms, etc. by developing more specific codes of conduct -for example- from universities, and establishing panels or councils of independent professionals (related to the subject), who can carry out accountability methods through binding evaluation such as e.g. independent audits (in the case of algorithms to evaluate their transparency, impact on privacy, biases...), and/or the elaboration of binding public reports. Other possible options would be the incorporation of ethical principles through the VSD methodological approach⁸⁶ (*Value Sensitive Design*), i.e. the inclusion of ethical principles from the early stages of development of a product or technological system (RRSS, for example). Similarly, the innovative *Ethical User Stories* approach⁸⁷ of 2024 would be another approach (perhaps complementary to the previous one) that would serve to implement specific ethical concerns linked to a specific ethical framework and incorporate them into software development.

Care ethics that focus on the importance of relationships and interpersonal responsibility, taking into account empathy or concepts that go

⁸⁴ ALCOBERRO PERICAY, Ramón. *Ética aplicada*. Barcelona: Editorial UOC, 2020. Pág.15.

⁸⁵ MORLEY, J., KINSEY, L., ELHALAL, A., GARCIA, F., ZIOSI, M. and FLORIDI, L., 2023. Operationalising AI ethics: barriers, enablers and next steps. *AI & SOCIETY*, vol. 38, no. 1, ISSN 1435-5655. DOI 10.1007/s00146-021-01308-8.

⁸⁶ CENCI, A. and CAWTHORNE, D., 2020. Refining Value Sensitive Design: A (Capability-Based) Procedural Ethics Approach to Technological Design for Well-Being.

Science and engineering ethics, vol. 26, no. 5, pp. 2629-2662. ISSN 1353-3452. DOI 10.1007/s11948-020-00223-3.

⁸⁷ HALME, E., JANTUNEN, M., VAKKURI, V., KEMELL, K.-K. and ABRAHAMSSON, P., 2024. Making ethics practical: User stories as a way of implementing ethical consideration in Software Engineering. *Information and software technology*, vol. 167, pp. 107379-. ISSN 0950-5849. DOI 10.1016/j.infsof.2023.107379.

beyond that, such as *sympathy* (in this case, I would opt for David Hume's version). Add this perspective when applying ethics to -for example- mitigate the effects of hate speech through awareness campaigns to promote community resilience, solidarity and mutual support. Or, also through *focus groups* with the aim of promoting understanding of people's different perceptions and interpretations. This could be an approach to deepen and thus counteract the possible neurological and emotional effects discussed in section 8 of this paper from the application of ethics.

Neuroethics (basing a universal ethics on the brain basis of our moral behavior) can be -as suggested by Adela Cortina- a way of using the contributions of neuroscience to ethics. Applied, I suggest that it could be useful when designing tools that could mitigate the negative impacts on the brain, and enhance those that improve well-being; this could be applied in the design of algorithms or AI that would be more responsible with the human brain and, therefore -especially from a consequentialist perspective- more ethical. This, - by way of example - together with legislation that would penalize the promotion of behaviors with negative neurological impact, **could serve as a starting point for the operationalization of ethics.** In an article⁸⁸ from January 2024, Wilma Arellano Toledo already refers to *neuro-rights*, which is a concept that I consider very applicable for the design of legal solutions with applied ethics based on protecting aspects (studied from neuroscience and ethics) such as mental privacy, free will or protection against biases from algorithms or AI. Therefore, these approaches focus on solving the misuse of *big data by protecting* the brain health of both users and, consequently, of society as a whole.

Solutions: As these are multifaceted challenges, their solutions must have a complex approach. I consider it important to avoid falling into positions -which could also be interpreted as extremist- in the face of the challenges that the issues discussed throughout this paper seem to pose. Therefore, it is important, with respect to technological issues, to try to transcend technophobia (an approach based on fear of technological advances), and technophilia (excessive optimism and enthusiasm towards these advances), trying to adopt a prism closer to techno-realism: assessing both the positive and negative effects. Critically evaluate the situation without losing sight of the implications of the technology, promoting an ethical and responsible use. In *The Ethics of AI Ethics: An Evaluation of Guidelines* by Thilo Hagendorff in 2020; the author draws a number of conclusions that I consider relevant when designing new guidelines; on the one hand, he points out the "blindness" produced by the competition for the "AI race" and concludes that current ethical guidelines are often ineffective and insufficient; he also stresses the need for more sophisticated and binding approaches to AI governance.

One possible tool could be to establish random checks on digital companies to monitor both RRSS, AI, algorithms, and other platforms and applications using AI itself. By doing so, incorrect implementation of regulations or ethical principles could be detected, as well as detecting possible bias or discrimination. In the interview provided to me by Dr. Plana Rius he states that "it is easier to detect whether or not it is an AI by using an AI to analyze it, than through humans", which would mean that they could try to create *ad hoc* artificial intelligences to make controls in digital "traffic" to detect both ethical and legal breaches, as well as to detect new more subtle systems such as *bots* in the future, images generated by *stable*

⁸⁸ ARELLANO, W., 2024. Neurorights and their regulation. *Artificial Intelligence*, vol. 27, no. 73, pp. 4-13. ISSN 1137-3601. DOI 10.4114/intartif.vol27iss73pp4-13.

broadcasting, or a voice. This tool could also be implemented in the form of mandatory comprehensive periodic reviews by independent expert bodies in collaboration with the authorities. That could help detect fairness manipulation of algorithms identified in 2024 by Kristof Meding et al.⁸⁹ through practices known as *fairness hacking*: both *intra-metric fairness hacking* and *inter-metric fairness hacking*.

After analyzing the concentration of power in the hands of Internet giants (Google, Microsoft, Meta...) and the effects it has on markets and democracy, Paul Nemitz in *Constitutional Democracy and Technology in the Age of Artificial Intelligence*⁹⁰ stresses the need for a legal framework for AI to serve the common good and the general interest. To his article we could add the importance of such measures being harmonized through global governance.

Finally, this section has tried to take a brief ethical look at the issues addressed, with some of the most up-to-date questions on the subject, trying to locate possible dilemmas, solutions, and incorporate new approaches to these contemporary realities. In a way, to give more weight to both the general interest and the common good (from teleological ethics), as well as to principles and duties (from deontological ethics). The incorporation of *care ethics* has been pointed out, which could be useful to promote a non-anthropocentric and non-androcentric ethics, which takes into account all living systems, and which focuses on group cohesion (not to be confused with homogenization). But other concepts could be useful, such as John Rawls' *veil of ignorance*, which would be useful to ensure equity in the design of legislation and

public policies, or Hans Jonas' ethics of responsibility, which, although it is true that it is based on fear, fits quite well into the theoretical framework of applied ethics by pointing out the importance of responsibility for the possible destruction that could be caused by mismanagement of technology, or to assess the long-term destructive consequences of extremist discourse. The ethics of information⁹¹, a theory by Luciano Floridi also assumes -as *care ethics* or bioethics do- a useful theoretical framework by introducing new views (the *infosphere* as an information ecosystem) that transcend the classical anthropocentric ethical conceptions and address crucial issues of our time, such as equity in the access and management of information, and respect for all entities within the *infosphere*, recognizing their intrinsic value in an interconnected and computerized world.

Thus, the exposition of this inductive research ends, and we move on to infer what can be extracted from the data obtained, processed, and the multiple disciplinary viewpoints applied to them in the following section of conclusions.

12. Conclusions, prospective and new lines of study.

I) Main results:

Regarding the research question "**What use do national populist extreme right-wing actors (studying the case of The Movement and related parties in Europe) make of new ICTs to achieve their goals?**" I believe that the study has managed to describe and explain in a fairly complete way some of the uses that TM and its associates make of new ICTs: the use of social media, algorithms and AI can be of various kinds.

⁸⁹ MEDING, K. and HAGENDORFF, T., 2024. Fairness Hacking: The Malicious Practice of Shrouding Unfairness in Algorithms. *Philosophy & technology*, vol. 37, no. 1. ISSN 2210-5433. DOI 10.1007/s13347-023-00679-8.

⁹⁰ NEMITZ, P., 2018. Constitutional democracy and technology in the age of artificial intelligence. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A: Mathematical, Physical and Engineering Sciences*, vol. 376, no. 2133, ISSN 1364-503X, 1471-2962. DOI 10.1098/rsta.2018.0089.

⁹¹ FLORIDI, L., 2008. Information ethics : a reappraisal: Luciano Floridi's Philosophy of Information and Information Ethics: Critical Reflections and the State of the Art. *Ethics and information technology*, vol. 10, no. 2-3, pp. 189-204. ISSN 1388-1957.

The study, taking into account the purposes, has focused on those strategic and tactical uses such as all the practices that in some way have helped them to achieve their supposed objectives. Of course, the study has not succeeded in capturing all the uses, nor was that the pretension. As explained at the beginning of the paper, it was intended to contribute to gathering information on the use/manipulation of ICTs to influence political processes and combat digital manipulation. Therefore, it is important to underline that the use of ICTs that I know has been attempted to describe and explain by these actors is not so much their truthful and honest use (a use that it is not refuted that the actors investigated have been able to carry out). The research has focused on the misleading, biased or surreptitious uses of these technologies, those illicit uses. In this sense, different localized uses have been described, such as *troll farms*, *bots*, the use of algorithms, or the creation of content for disinformative purposes, among others. At an explanatory level, the use of these technologies has been somewhat answered, but probably with limitations (specified below) such as the impossibility of demonstrating the use of AI. The motivation for using these technologies suggests their reach, their potential socio-political impact, or their instrumental use to provoke emotions or spread both their ideology and to confuse and neutralize their perceived opponents.

To better understand the result of the first question, the relevance of the secondary question "**what are its purposes?**" This secondary question has been answered - to the extent possible - by conducting an analysis of its discourse from multiple disciplines (neuroscience, social psychology, philosophy), a historical review of the specific case of MHPs, as well as a study of the different ideological manifestations (discourses, narrative resources, and other descriptive elements) that have occurred in different territories. With all this we have tried to capture its ideology and purposes,

ranging from opposition to new expressions of identity, globalization, the postulates of feminism or the rights of sexual minorities such as the LGBTBI collective, liberal institutions or universal values. However, to claim to have all the underlying motivations of such complex phenomena as ideological movements (and even more so their different expressions in different countries and cultures) would be deeply pretentious.

Another answer to the research question is normative. Following various interdisciplinary analyses and, in particular, with the analysis and discussion of applied ethics, perspectives and solutions have been proposed in previous sections to unravel and address the challenges posed by both the purposes (claims) that have been unraveled and the consequences of the uses described and thus try to contribute to the prevention of illicit uses of ICTs by any actor.

The first objective has generally been achieved by collecting historical data on TM and establishing (more or less direct) connections. Key individuals and entities behind the movement have been identified. Evidence has been found of the adoption of strategies by the associated parties, such as the use of other mechanisms like the propagation of conspiracy theories, disinformation, among some of them. As mentioned above, a contextualization, discursive and tactical analysis has been carried out using different disciplines (adopting a neuropolitical and philosophical perspective) to understand the psychological aspects that TM has used to propitiate particular situations, as well as achieving to some extent an understanding of its *modus operandi*.

The second objective was applied to five countries. Similarities and differences have been found, as well as linkages, although these are difficult to quantify. However, there seems to be a correlation between Bannon's presence in

Europe, and some changes in the strategies and discourses of the European far-right, for example: something that happened with Euroscepticism. The adoption of certain elements (such as those of the *Alt-Right*) also seems to suggest that there has been an influence on the parties studied, and that similar patterns are followed. So the objective, to a large extent, would have been met.

The third objective has been addressed by carrying out an assessment of the latest ethical issues (especially in relation to ICTs that have been analyzed in the paper), as well as the consequences resulting from their use by these actors on society and politics. The proposal of some solutions, or at least, lines to carry out the design of these, have been carried out. Thus, the objective would have been achieved.

II) **Other study results: implications and/or findings.**

Certain aspects (such as economic, territorial, linguistic...) of the TM discourse and related actors are dynamic and even chameleon-like depending on the context.

-The study shows that European restrictions such as those in Italy or France might have limited the cooperation (at least the visible one) between TM and most European parties, as well as being an important explanatory factor in their "formal" failure, however, again, this need not have had such a clear effect on the degree of influence exerted on these and some processes (such as Brexit) by Bannon, as well as the success in importing discursive elements of the *Alt-Right*.

The rise of far-right national populism in Europe is caused by factors such as the migration crisis (especially after the Arab Spring), the debt crisis

and dissatisfaction with EU institutions, among other causes.

-The *culture war* narrative (pointing to conspiracy theories such as the Great Replacement Theory, LGBTI rights or gender equality...) and its propagation thanks to ICTs works as a cohesive and mobilizing element of neoconservative thinking helping to create transnational networks in "defense of cultural and national identity".

-The use of emotions together with ICTs seems to have effects on mental health, polarization, political participation and violent attitudes directed towards specific groups.

-The rise of *Alt-Right* discourses and in general of national populism focused on nationalism and cultural protectionism; added to their rejection of cooperation, and the increase of authoritarian tendencies show the weakening of liberalism and the reinforcement of the realist paradigm in IR.

-Some tools such as *troll farms* have been shown to have a polarizing effect on public opinion, but in addition to that, they suggest that, just as the Kremlin - through Prigozhin - interfered with the 2016 US elections, the IRA also manipulated public opinion during the Brexit process and the Ukrainian war. During the French presidential campaign there was also a large influx of *trolls*, and connections between Le Pen with Konstantin Rykov were demonstrated⁹². This finding suggests that although formal coordination between the Kremlin and TM and their associated actors is inconclusive, there is a coincidence in their goals.

-Different actors coming from Evangelical sectors in the US, Orthodox in Russia and from the EU itself are mobilizing funding to carry out lobbying in EU institutions (the Council of Europe or the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) and tools on social platforms to influence legislation and public opinion, in particular to

⁹² Russia "bought" Marine Le Pen's support over Crimea. *The Telegraph* [online], 2015. [accessed: 16 January 2024]. Available from: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/france/11515835/Russia-bought-Marine-Le-Pens-support-over-Crimea.html>.

influence sexual and reproductive rights⁹³ in view of the next EP elections in 2024.

-The agreement of AI law by the EU is a milestone at the international level as a first step to put limitations (with a supposedly ethical view). It is expected to have *flexibility*, an unusual feature in the legal field; the latter, given the speed of the evolution of technology -with a good approach- could mean a revolution in the field of law.

-The applicability of ethics does not seem to depend solely on its "moral" enforceability but its understanding (by improving its intelligibility, for example, by adding explainability as the fifth principle of applied ethics), or the inclusion of ethical principles in education, legislation and professional design can significantly improve its applicability.

-Neuroscience applied to ethics (as neuroethics) can (1) be a starting point for operationalizing ethics by assessing actions in terms of the neurological consequences they have on individuals and thus establishing (2) neuro-rights as normative systems to materialize this protection in the legal sphere.

-An integrated approach that takes into account the consequences of acts as well as certain ethical principles (justice, equity, autonomy...) can help to have a more holistic approach during ethical and legal design.

-The lack of legislation and ethical application to ICTs poses multifaceted problems such as increased social polarization, hatred towards certain groups, or loss of personal autonomy. All these facts are interrelated and intersect (the whole is greater than the sum of its parts).

-AI and algorithms can both perpetuate and be a mechanism to combat hate speech. Putting neuroscience in relation to ethics and law, and

applying and introducing it into the programming of these tools, so that they work for the well-being of both the population and the ecosystem. Therefore, further developing the use of these technologies with this approach could have a positive impact on both human security and planetary health.

III) **Personal Reflections, Limitations and Future Research Directions. The reflections I have had during the inductive process and at the end of this work are several**

Reflections:

It is interesting that an ultra-nationalist individual such as Bannon shows interest in the welfare of foreign nations or in the reform of entities such as the EU and it is somewhat complicated to fit with the realistic vision of IR that precisely national populism seems to have. Especially, having promoted breakaway attitudes such as the campaigns to leave the EU in the UK, a pertinent reflection on the classic principle of "divide and rule" arises. Both Bannon's home nation and Russia seem to practice this strategy by interfering in the internal affairs of EU countries, both through technology and by influencing certain political parties. These powers seem to influence the internal politics of EU countries, which could point to an attempt to destabilize this bloc, which is both a US ally and a competitor of both. It should be questioned whether internal destabilization, such as that which brought about the fall of the Ottoman Empire, is still an effective geopolitical strategy.

⁹³ Who's financing the 'anti-gender' movement in Europe? *aidsmap.com* [online], 2021. [accessed: 16 January 2024]. Available at: <https://www.aidsmap.com/news/may-2021/whos-financing-anti-gender-movement-europe>

Furthermore, and alluding to the *culture war*, the cosmopolitanism represented by European values (such as human rights, gender equality, or the protection of sexual minorities) seems to be the real target to be dynamited in this culture war to which some refer: **this culture war, in reality, seems to be a struggle for ideological, cultural and moral dominance, representing a form of contemporary counter-reformism**⁹⁴. It directly confronts the values of cosmopolitanism, which promote the emancipation of historically marginalized collectives, and challenges the loss of certain privileges. These privileges, which have historically allowed dominant collectives to exploit, abuse or discriminate, are now challenged and endangered.

Their purposes give much food for thought and speculation. So do their discourses and their interaction with ICTs. Postmodernity seems to be in a more despondent mood than modernity, at least as described by philosophers such as Alain Finkielkraut. The pace of the contemporary is far greater, information flows have exploded, we are more interconnected than ever, but paradoxically, this has given way to greater individualism and often to disinformation. This scenario seems to favor the emergence of a kind of disoriented deconstructivist nihilism, where structures such as (imperfect) liberal institutions are criticized, grand narratives are questioned (such as scientific ones like the explanation of climate change), and in some sectors universal values, including human rights, are rejected. Could not an excess of relativism lead us to an epistemic and existential drift, where the lack of solid foundations in our beliefs and knowledge as a

society leaves us disoriented and vulnerable to manipulation?

Disaffection generates cynicism towards democracy and constitutes a victory for those who seek to dismantle it from within or for those who aspire to power (achieving the abstention of the resigned). The Hobbesian view of the human desire for power and dominance may be too pessimistic, especially in light of what has been learned about human behavior through social psychology, biology or neuroscience. In IR, it seems undeniable that power is exercised relationally and does not only rest with governments or elites. **Narrative control and discourse design are also forms of power and domination.**

To address contemporary challenges, I believe **it is vital to revalue ethics and integrate it into all disciplines and aspects of life.** Although it may seem a utopian goal, dialogue between ethics and various disciplines, as well as interdisciplinary dialogue, could be the key to achieving social cohesion and effectively addressing challenges such as climate change, humanitarian crises, divisive discourses and the challenges - posed by the significant risks - of *uniqueness*⁹⁵.

Limitations of this work:

-Although it may have been possible to establish links between political parties with the actor in my case study, due to lack of access or lack of evidence (e.g. correspondence, calls, undocumented meetings...) the reality has not been fully captured, which may affect the interpretation of the facts or the drawing of decisive conclusions.

-Due to the fact that social media and algorithms are not transparent, this also affects the

⁹⁴ I use the Counter-Reformation of the 16th century as an example to illustrate the resistance to protect the *status quo* in the face of the risk of change (in that case religious) and the aggressive reactions of those fearful of losing power and privilege.

⁹⁵ Theoretical concept that refers to the point in human history where AI advances so far that it surpasses human intelligence. This hypothesis marks a turning point where

machines would be able to improve and replicate themselves without human intervention, leading to exponential growth in technology and possibly to incomprehensible or unpredictable changes and consequences in society.

investigation of what happens in them, and beyond some hypothetical correlations, it is difficult to establish clear causalities.

-Although an attempt has been made to capture the essence of the ideology -and with it, their motivations-, the actors studied are multifaceted, there are many nuances that have probably not been detected, and dimensions of their thinking that have not been fully covered.

-Although this work has conducted a qualitative analysis of the possible consequences of ICTs, the discourses used and the interaction of both, the work fails to quantify or prove a concrete, or even approximate, scope of this reality.

-The design of standards of ethical applicability is rudimentary, and due to lack of knowledge in the area, time and resources, the solutions offered may not be sufficiently specific. An attempt has been made to analyze elements that may be useful in proposing solutions to ensure that ICTs do not run counter to the general interest and the common good.

New lines of research:

-Investigate questions such as: To what extent can algorithms and AI foster epistemic crisis and confuse society? What are the concrete consequences?

-Research systems to quantify the effect of the interaction of the emotional impact of extremist discourses (of any ideology) and their interaction with ICTs, as well as their impact on the population (e.g., on polarization).

-Study the design of legislation to regulate aggressive propaganda and hate speech while safeguarding freedom of expression. Neuroscience could be useful to identify which speeches are detrimental to people's health and how they affect public safety.

-Study what legal mechanisms can be designed to ensure that ethics are already applied in the

design of algorithms, RRSS and AI from the outset.

-I consider it relevant to evaluate the impact of overinformation and misinformation together with the development of neuroethics and neuro-rights in order to create new guidelines and protocols to improve the digital health of the general population.

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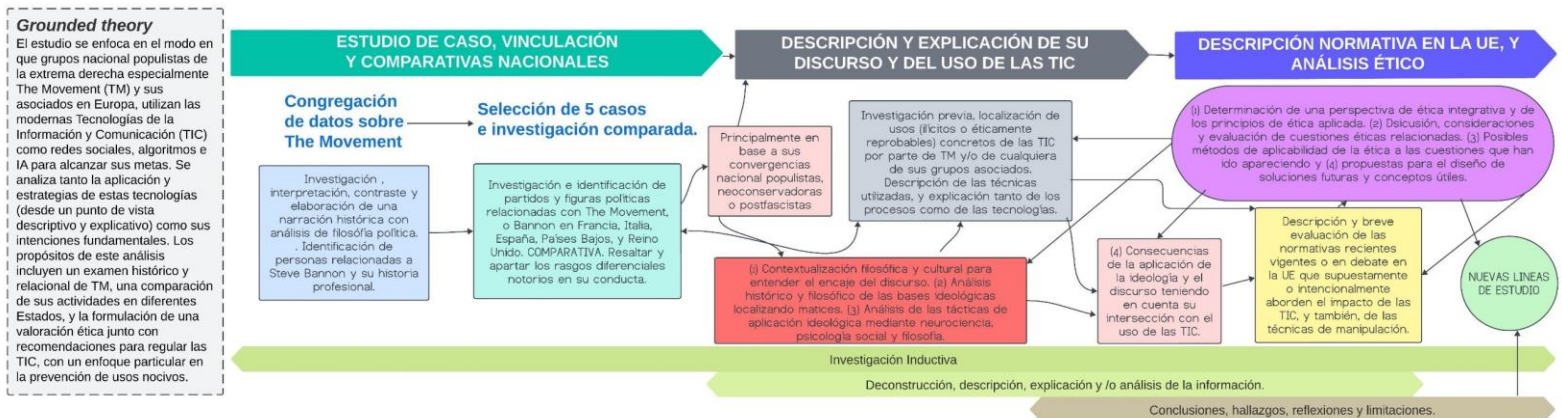
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Annexes

The three interviews are available at this link with a duration of just over 2 hours (Spanish):

https://soundcloud.com/justi-soriano-caldentey/anexos-tfg-justi-soriano-caldentey-universitat-oberta-de-catalunya?si=27e8899fb90a4860a5c012ba36a27110&utm_source=clipboard&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=social_sharing

Diagram:



ⁱ This concept encompasses more than just fashion or cultural trends; it is the "essence" or "spirit". It refers to the prevailing intellectual attitude, ethics and culture of a society or a particular era.

ⁱⁱ Due to its length and complexity, the legal analysis has focused only on the EU, excluding the United Kingdom,

even though it was one of the countries analyzed in the previous sections.