

Foregrounding Affectivity in the Pathways to Extremism

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ABSTRACT

Literature increasingly indicates that affectivity plays a major role in violent extremism. Nevertheless, much of the work on affectivity in the context of violent extremism has so far remained a fragmented background issue. The purpose of this paper is to bring affect to the foreground through philosophical accounts of situated affectivity, while remaining compatible with contributions on emotions and affect from different disciplines in the context of extremism. The situated account explains how environmental structures affect individual affectivity and vice versa. With the help of this framework, we are able to analyze an individual's affective dynamics simultaneously with multiple elements. By using different analytical vantage points, we can examine how the affectivity of individuals is shaped and regulated by other individuals, materials, spaces, discourses, and behaviors in extremist settings. The approach provides a broader and richer perspective on the complexities and dynamics of affect in extremism. Affect-centric counter- and preventive policies relating to violent extremism can benefit from this approach.

Keywords: Extremism, Emotions, Situated Affectivity, Affective Arrangements, Radicalization

INTRODUCTION

Extremism in its various forms is a significant challenge that various societies face these days. The manifestations of extremism can include extreme ideas, beliefs, emotions, and behaviors, including violence. The term "extremism" encompasses acts or beliefs that transcend conventional norms or exist outside the mainstream. Extremism is often associated with groups or individuals that are seen as a threat to the social order. Violent extremism is a subset of extremism characterized by the use or threatened use of force or violence, to achieve political, ideological, religious, or social goals. So, while all extremists may believe in something to an extreme degree, not all extremists are violent. The process by which individuals adopt extremist ideologies, develop extremist viewpoints, and commit acts of violence perceived as legitimate means of attaining the objectives of extremist ideology is also referred to as radicalization (e.g., Borum, 2011; Kruglanski et al., 2014; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008).

The study of extremism is an interdisciplinary topic with multiple dimensions, such as ideological, political, and sociological (e.g., Schmid, 2014; Wibisono et al., 2019). Many researchers conjoin theoretical perspectives and empirical studies to contribute to the understanding of this complex phenomenon. As reported in different studies, in the path

towards violent extremism, there is usually precedence of multiple factors (Kruglanski & Fishman, 2009; Sageman, 2008; Wiktorowicz, 2005) that lead to a vulnerable phase (Hogg & Adelman, 2013; Kruglanski et al., 2014; Shafieoun & Haq, 2023; Wiktorowicz, 2005). There are formations of ties with like-minded individuals (Kruglanski et al., 2019; Sageman, 2008) online and offline, and engagement with an appealing ideology (Kruglanski, 2006; Leader Maynard & Benesch, 2016) related to the identity and purpose of the group and/or individual. Once the engagement of an individual begins, more complexities come up related to the radicalization of ideas and radicalization of actions (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017). Political, psychological, and social theories have remained in the foreground to explain the pathways to extremism. However, when it comes specifically to taking account of affectivity, the literature in violent extremism has remained limited, fragmented, and in the background.

Affect studies have remained limited because of the complexities related to accessing individuals and data associated with extremism. Academics and security officials have different intentions, motivations and methodologies based on access to data related to extremism¹. This holds especially for studying affect. Security officials need to gather information related to security needs and measures. For academics, it is about understanding the processes and other important factors which may lead an individual towards extremism. Even with access to data and 'extremists', it is difficult to study emotions because of limited interaction time, corroboration of the information reported in such interaction, confidentiality, and non-disclosure issues.

Emotions in extremism have been studied in the fields of criminology (e.g., Agnew, 2010; Rice & Agnew, 2013), sociology (e.g., Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2008; Van Ness & Summers-Effler, 2018), psychology (e.g., Baele, 2017; Cottee & Hayward, 2011; Kruglanski et al., 2013; van Stekelenburg, 2017), and political sciences (e.g., Clément, 2021; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008; Wright-Neville & Smith, 2009). Criminological studies of emotions provide us with valuable insights, such as risk assessment before and after extremist acts. Theories from sociology, such as social movement theories, provide us with the understanding of the formation and mobilization of social movements, and emotions of protest, which may also lead to extremism. These theories also provide us with functions of emotions in mobilizing movements and groups. Studies from psychology provide us with an understanding of the emotional processes of individuals and of how group emotional processes influence individual and group behaviors. Political sciences provide us with an understanding of how international political relations impact a whole society, including the fueling of movements related to extremism.

Despite their importance and relevance, these studies remain fragmented due to field-specific interests and foci. Contributions from these disciplines have also not yet fully elaborated on the relational/interactional affect of an individual and group on various elements in an environment leading to extremism. For instance, how multiple factors contribute simultaneously to an individual's development of extreme thoughts, emotions, and actions. Moreover, many studies have emphasized negative emotions, whereas positive emotions have not been adequately addressed. However, when we observe and dissect extreme cases, we can

¹ As Marc Sageman (2014, p.576) points out: "We have a system of terrorism research in which intelligence analysts know everything but understand nothing, while academics understand everything but know nothing."

see that there is a complicated net of both negative and positive emotions. Multiple affective processes are involved in creating an affective bond with various elements in an environment.

Individuals who engage in extremism are not solely motivated by hatred, anger, or disgust. Therefore, extreme ideas and actions should not be associated only with negative emotions. Researchers need to bring attention to the positive emotions involved in the pathways to extremism. Positive emotions and feelings, such as pride, love, excitement, interest, and hope, play vital roles. A sense of belonging and purpose that comes with being part of an extremist group can be very appealing, providing individuals with a much-needed sense of identity and meaning in their lives. We can look at suicide bombers as an example. Suicide bombers may be motivated by their belief that their actions serve a greater good and purpose. This motivation may include the defense of their group, their rights, and the pursuit of their political goals. The sacrifice of life is not based only on hatred or anger. It can also be based on positive emotional experiences and hope when understood through the ideology and mindset of the bomber. The act of vengeance can also serve as an illustration of the complexity of extremism and affect, whether on a personal, group, or state level. Vengeance in extreme forms could be perceived as driven by negative emotions. However, there may also be positive emotions associated with the object lost or injured for the person, group, or state seeking vengeance. This can be observed in the case of Brenton Tarrant who carried out mass shootings at two mosques on 15th March 2019, in Christchurch. According to him, one reason for carrying out the shooting was to stand up for the defense of the 'white' race, and another was to avenge the death of a Swedish child, Ebba Åkerlund, who was killed in a terrorist attack in Stockholm in 2017.

Depending on the environment in which an individual lives, it may even be the case that the individual does not display any intense or dominant emotions at all at the beginning, but that such emotions develop as the individual interacts with a variety of elements and individuals. It is possible for some emotions to remain dormant for a long period, and then become extreme and volatile at other times. It is, therefore, crucial to explore the whole spectrum of emotions and affective processes which may influence an individual and drive their interaction with multiple elements, and in multiple engaging environments (Haq et al., 2020). We need to dissect such interactions, emotions, and explain existing affective processes, how they evolve on the pathways to extremism, what functions these affective processes play, and how environmental structures and tools facilitate an individual to delve deeper into extremism.

Designing and applying frameworks that only focus on "terrorist" behavior is not sufficient. It is essential to understand in depth the transition from non-extremism to extremism and on to violent extremism. Consequently, one can understand why some ordinary people sympathize, follow, endorse, act or become engulfed in extremist views. It can also help explain why some individuals are hesitant about endorsing extremist viewpoints initially and end up accepting extremist viewpoints later. Our research aims to apply a framework that is able to address both the transition towards extremism and the complexity of affect.

To emphasize this desired richness and depth, and bring affect to the foreground, we employ the framework of Situated Affectivity in analyzing extreme cases. The situated affectivity framework helps us in dissecting the affective bond between an individual and their interaction with elements in their environment. This demarcates the situatedness of affect and helps to broaden the focus to encompass the environmental elements that contribute to an individual's

decision to adopt extremist thought and action. Using the situated affectivity framework, this paper brings affect into the foreground while maintaining compatibility with contributions on emotions and affect from different disciplines.

In what follows, we first provide an explanation of affectivity and the situatedness of affect. The latter section of the paper then elaborates with the help of two different examples on how affectivity can be analyzed from different vantage points, and how affective interaction exists in arrangements that facilitate individuals to adopt extremist views.

AFFECTIVITY AND SITUATEDNESS

Affect is complex and cannot be reduced to one emotion, feeling, or mood. Therefore, it is essential that in the context of extremism, affect should also not be limited to a single experience or to negative emotions. We take affect as an inclusive term, referring to multiple feelings, emotions, and moods that an individual has. In this paper, we explore affect in the context of elements, entities, and factors such as agents, materials, space, and time, as opposed to just being a brain-based phenomenon. In a multitude of instances, affect is intertwined with the various elements that are present within an environment. Individuals are both impacted by and have an impact on actors and other participating elements concurrently (Slaby & Mühlhoff, 2019, p. 31). The affect is mutual, but not necessarily proportionate. Thus, an individual does not exist in a vacuum; instead, they are part of a larger system where their actions impact the environment, which in turn impacts that individual.

A person's decision to adopt extreme thoughts and actions is determined by several push and pull factors. Therefore, it becomes problematic to assume that extremism can only result from negative emotions. Positive and negative emotions both influence an individual's overall affective state. Multiple emotions are responsible for either driving them to engage in extremism or causing them to withdraw from it. The affect can be explored from the standpoint of the individual by considering their vulnerabilities and dispositions (e.g., Kruglanski et al., 2009, 2014, 2019; Webber & Kruglanski, 2017). Every individual has a unique 'affective' biography that is built upon their socio-cultural and historical practices and lifestyles, as well as their socio-economic and cultural backgrounds (von Maur, 2021). Combined with an individual's affective biography, dispositions contribute to the formation of further affective interactions with elements of their environments. This socio-cultural and historical background and the dispositions that individuals possess influence their affective experiences and how they interact with the environment. As a result, not only does this influence the individual's affective biography but also the manner in which he or she perceives and interacts with the world, which influences their response on the pathway to or away from extremism.

It is here that we come to the concept of the 'situatedness' of affect. The central thesis and emphasis of situated affectivity is that affective processing is not simply an individual's internal state, feeling, or emotion. An individual's environment can play an important role in supporting or facilitating the processing of affect (Krueger & Szanto, 2016; Stephan et al., 2014; Stephan & Walter, 2020). An element in the environment that facilitates or regulates affect has also been called a scaffold (e.g., Coninx & Stephan, 2021; Stephan & Walter, 2020; Sterelny, 2010; Valentini, 2022). Situated affect in this context is the relational dynamics between an individual and elements in their environment (Slaby & Mühlhoff, 2019). Often, these environmental elements also contribute to our affective lives without our full awareness or intention (Coninx

& Stephan, 2021; Slaby, 2016). An individual's agentic abilities may be enhanced or diminished by these elements both in the short- and long-term (Slaby & Mühlhoff, 2019). The most general examples of situatedness are using a mobile phone to call your loved ones, listening to a song, or watching a favorite video clip to regulate your feelings. The mobile phone is; hence, the element used as a scaffold to generate or regulate an affective experience. The use of a mobile phone before bedtime, however, may unintentionally disrupt the quality and hygiene of our sleep.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the affective relationship, or simply the affective bond between an individual and different environmental element. It is this complex affective bond that, when explored and elaborated, foregrounds affectivity in cases related to extremism as well. These affective bonds can be unidirectional or bidirectional and can also be categorized as user-resource interaction bonds, or as mind-shaping bonds (e.g., Coninx & Stephan, 2021; Haq et al., 2020; Stephan & Walter, 2020).

An example of a unidirectional interaction would be listening to music without a reciprocal effect on what kind of music is played next. The listener has no direct control over the music that will be played next on the radio, for instance. However, the affective bond becomes bidirectional if there is a reciprocal effect on what music one chooses next, and this in turn helps one to become more deeply engaged in an affective experience. Essentially, a choice of music enables and deepens an affective experience, which influences the choice of music that follows (Colombetti & Roberts, 2015). For instance, listening to music on a streaming platform, such as Spotify, where either the listener has selected a particular playlist or the streaming platform's algorithm determines based on the listener's choices and likes.

An example of a user-resource interaction is the individual *reaching out* to interact with an environmental element. A simple example of this is heading to the library to study. This results in an individual being able to limit distractions and enhance their ability to study by using the library's space, available relevant educational materials, and quietness.

Conversely, mind-shaping (or specifically affect shaping) is an affective phenomenon in which the effects of the environmental elements reach inwards to affect the individual. There are several ways in which this mind-shaping influence may affect us, both within and outside of our awareness (Slaby, 2016). Military academies and camps, for example, use rituals and structures to train soldiers in specific ways. The training that recruits undergo during their training is designed to prepare them for specific tasks and missions, bringing about skills such as leadership, discipline, and teamwork. A recruit, in this scenario, is aware that the military camp is exerting an intentional influence on her. Recruits are, however, often unaware that their training has also had other effects on them. This is because they are exposed to strict routines, violence and aggression (e.g., Haq et al., 2020). It is important to note that organizations or institutes can deliberately design environmental structures to gradually transform the attitudes and the emotional responses of a target group. Educational institutes are also an example of this. In order to enhance or support the learning of students, teachers use teaching aids, study aids, room settings, and other study-related tools. The content of education as well as the manner in which it is delivered have a significant impact on what and how students learn. On the negative and extreme spectrum, one can observe how recruits from extremist groups, or individuals with a vulnerability to extremism, will seek extreme settings with relevant

individuals, materials, spaces, and ideologies. Another instance of mind-shaping can be that some governments or agencies use their political power over the media to limit the amount of information they disseminate to people or frame it in a certain way to reinforce a particular narrative.

If the content taught to individuals or consumed by them is extreme, then they are at a heightened risk of developing extremist thinking and committing extremist acts. An unfortunate example is that of school children being exposed to extreme content and ideas through textbooks. During the growing Russian influence, at the end of the 1970s, educational content glorifying communist ideology in the Afghan cultural context was published and disseminated. As a counter-measure against communist influence and to build support for the fight against the Russian invasion, educational textbooks were published in Peshawar, Pakistan, glorifying jihad and anti-Russian sentiment. These books were sanctioned and financed by American grants at the time, and were disseminated in regions of Pakistan and Afghanistan. However, even in the 2000s, almost 20 years after the Russian withdrawal, textbooks with extremism-related material remained in stores unrevised, and sold as freshly printed copies (Davis, 2002). These textbooks glorify martyrdom, celebrate jihad, and speak of the execution of “the enemy”. Consider the following mathematical problem as stated in a textbook for fourth-grade students.

“The speed of a Kalashnikov bullet is 800 meters per-second. If a Russian is at a distance of 3,200 meters from a mujahid, and that mujahid aims at the Russian’s head, calculate how many seconds it will take for the bullet to strike the Russian in the forehead.”

This mathematical problem glorifies killing and promotes extremism by shaping how a fourth grader may think about such cases. Extreme and disturbing as it is, if we take a closer look, there is one missing word here that generalizes extremism further. The missing word is “soldier”. It does not say how a mujahid should aim at a Russian soldier, but only says “Russian”. While it glorifies killing, it also generalizes what a fourth grader should think like.² This is a clear example of mind-shaping or affect-shaping towards extremism. Even though individuals may not join an extremist group, their exposure to extreme content may lead them to sympathize with the values and beliefs of the group. Consequently, they may support the group’s actions or engage in behavior consistent with its ideology, which can be just as dangerous as joining the group. This emphasizes the need to understand the consequences of mind-shaping toward extremist ideas, actions, and how such exposure can foster support for extremist groups.

AFFECTIVE ARRANGEMENTS

An individual on the pathway of extremism is surrounded by multiple and overlapping elements in offline as well as online environments which may influence affect (e.g., Valentini et al., 2020). As such, within the framework of Situated Affectivity, we draw upon the concept of

² A recent example of this is the ‘North Rhine-Westphalia Coloring Book’ giveaways in Krefeld, for which the political party AfD (“Alternative for Germany”) was accused of sponsoring (Silk, 2020). The coloring book showed people with guns and holding Turkish flags. This was highly criticized by other political parties in Germany.

Affective Arrangements (Slaby et al., 2019)³. Essentially, what we are referring to is the assembly of several elements in an 'arrangement' or constellation, which act as scaffolding and impact an individual's affect. Affect exists in unique arrangements in our daily lives, and involves individuals, materials, spaces, discourses, and behaviors coming together into a coordinated formation of mutual affecting and being affected. By focusing on the local elements in an arrangement, the concept assists in analyzing the affective relationality. Within an arrangement and in the relationality, there are multiple types of processes that generate and intensify affect. Additionally, each of its affective agents has a history that influences and supports the arrangement. The affectivity of an arrangement is also supported by multiple organizational and technical elements. These elements include the people, tools, and resources that are available to the affective agents, the context and environment of the arrangement, and the underlying structures and processes that shape the arrangement. All of these elements work together to support the affectivity. The concept of Affective Arrangement allows for the consideration of the diverse composition of elements within an individual's environment, as well as the individual's biography (von Maur, 2021), involvement, and disposition (Slaby et al., 2019).

Slaby, Mühlhoff, and Wüschner (2019) discuss how a workplace team is supported cognitively and emotionally by other employees, technological devices, space, and tools. This work arrangement entails the collaboration of multiple affective agents and environmental resources to accomplish specific goals. Moreover, there exists a sense of interconnectedness among the team members. Through these connections, the team may encounter both negative and positive emotions in different scenarios, such as through emotional contagion processes.

We apply the arrangement model by exploring affect in extremism. Multiple online and offline environmental factors are analyzed in different cases to understand how they influence an individual's affectivity. A case in point is Hoda Muthana (Speckhard, 2019), a Yemeni-American girl who joined the so-called Islamic State (ISIS) and became an extremist. Initially, she was not driven by negative emotions toward others to embark on a path of extremism. Among the factors that contributed to her joining ISIS were her anxiety regarding the future, her religious beliefs in hellfire and heaven, and her difficult relationship with her mother. Ultimately, it was her interactions with ISIS, as well as her time spent with them, that led to her extreme beliefs. In Muthana's case, she used a smart phone, specifically Twitter, as an initial point of contact with 'religious' people, in order to feel belonging. During this time period, the ISIS group was at its peak in its exploitation of mainstream social media platforms. As she describes it, she initially joined the group of people in the 'Twittersphere' who were, as she states, 'just being ourselves.' Some members of the group then became more serious about their religious practices and invited others to join them. She reports it was on Twitter where she first heard about the then-newly created 'caliphate' and felt 'obligated' to go in accordance with her beliefs. The fact that she found an option to choose her own future, rather than being guided by her family, also appealed to her. After living for some time in ISIS, she started her Twitter handle and started inciting violent extremism. In one of her tweets, she encouraged lone-style attacks on American citizens (Speckhard, 2019).

³ Affective Milieus (Schuetze, 2021) is another work extending the scope of Affective Arrangement by bringing into focus the everyday and common affective engagements of individuals with elements in their environment. In order to maintain clarity, we adhere to the original term arrangement.

Considering Muthana's case, we are able to sketch out her affective arrangement, before her joining the ISIS, i.e., the beginning of the transition to extremism. By observing each interaction between Muthana and an element in her arrangement, we gain a rich description of affect, allowing us to analyze it. Her decision to join a caliphate appealed to her vulnerability, allowing her to choose for herself rather than having to succumb to the decisions of her family. Considering this vulnerability, she consciously engages with the various elements present in her environment. There are a number of factors that influence her, including individuals (i.e., recruiters/inciters and other people with similar ideas as hers), the spaces (i.e., Twittersphere, where she seeks validation of her beliefs), and narratives (i.e., living in a caliphate, and her beliefs regarding the afterlife). The use of her mobile phone for this purpose served as scaffolding for her affectivity. She started to be affected in the Twittersphere, because she found a niche that resonated with the anxiety in her beliefs and ideas. Social media algorithms promoted more relevant posts and members in the Twittersphere to her. If observed through the property of 'mutual affect' of an affective arrangement, this is an instance of Muthana's *being affected*. In the *affecting* direction, the online presence of ISIS was acquiring momentum and getting more widespread. One of the biggest gains for ISIS was the influx of foreigners, their endorsement, and sympathies. There was an influx of fighters, job seekers, and opportunity seekers joining ISIS. However, some were just inspired by the notion of a caliphate and joined for this reason alone. In terms of social media, it was 'trending', as was the exploitation of ISIS recruiters.

This is just one case elaborating the affective arrangement of an individual. Other elements like the involvement of family or friends with an extremist ideology, the media content available, the space a person is living in (e.g., a war-torn area), no job or security, witnessing the deaths of loved ones, etc., all these elements, events and many more factors can be involved in an arrangement which contributes into shaping the affect of a person.

We recognize that each case of extremism is unique and has its own complexities and peculiarities. Furthermore, affective arrangements may be culturally influenced, asymmetrical, overlapping, and temporally convoluted. Sketching the affective arrangement of each and every case may be impractical. Therefore, our focus is less on individual dispositions and the factors that drive an individual to extremism. Our concern is rather with affective bonds and processes, which are applicable not only to cases of extremism but also to our daily lives. Using the framework of situated affectivity, we can dissect the affective bonds between an individual and different element of the environment. It is also possible to observe these dynamics of affect from different perspectives or vantage points, which are discussed in the following section. We are able to analyze the features and processes of affect that are generated or modulated (perpetuated, intensified, exploited, etc.). Specifically, we are referring to how certain affect-centric features (such as emotional contagion, significance, etc.) can serve as a basis for an individual's experience of affect. It is possible, for example, that the interaction with an element *generates* other emotions, *intensifies* or *perpetuates* existing emotions. This framework can ultimately be integrated with insights on emotions from other disciplines, such as political science, psychology, sociology, and criminology. This will provide a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of affect. Particularly, the focus of affect will contribute to the improvement of policies and programs related to preventing and countering extremism.

Vantage Points

With the help of concepts such as affective arrangements and the framework of situated affectivity, we are able to examine affect from a variety of perspectives or vantage points. These vantage points enable us to examine emotions from multiple perspectives, encompassing individual and societal dimensions, temporal aspects, spatial contexts, and various physical and linguistic elements. Hence, this methodology offers a comprehensive grasp of the intricate nature of affect. As a result of these vantage points, affect can be analyzed in terms of i) single element interactions, ii) personal arrangements, iii) group arrangements, and iv) societal arrangements. When we analyze affect from these vantage points, and at various points in time, we are also able to observe affect changing over time. Additionally, the first and second vantage points highlight the importance of the user-resource affective bond in an individual's affective experience. For instance, a person may have a positive affective experience with a particular resource, leading to an increase in the person's motivation and engagement with that resource. This may then lead to further engagement with that resource. For instance, in Muthana's case, we see that engagement on Twitter. The third and fourth vantage points emphasize the importance of mind-shaping affective bonds. For example, organizations can shape the affective experience of individuals by designing user experiences that foster positive affective bonds between users and other resources. This too can be seen in the case of Muthana on Twitter, where recruiters and Twitter 'scholars' are able to persuade her to join ISIS (Speckhard, 2019).

We can begin with a detailed analysis of the affective bond of an individual at the level of *single element interaction*. From this vantage point, we can observe how a single element can regulate affect when it is interacted with. A common example would be how we use our mobile phone as a scaffold to influence our affect. In the case of Muthana, we can observe her interaction on Twitter. Twitter is the medium (the online space) through which she communicates with other people who share similar interests. This contributes to her strengthening and shaping her beliefs about the caliphate, heaven, and hellfire, which leads to further interactions with the online ISIS recruiters and community. As reported in Muthana's interview, she explains that prior to committing herself to extreme and ISIS-prescribed interpretations, she felt she had people who understood her on Twitter (Speckhard, 2019). We can observe in detail how interactions on Twitter shaped her affect at the beginning, and then later once she was in ISIS territory.

We can examine how one or more elements can impact the affectivity of an individual, and vice versa. The simultaneous interplay of affectivity between an individual and elements in their online and offline environments can be understood when we observe their personal arrangements. This vantage point helps us examine the affectivity of lone-acting extremists as well as those of members of an extremist group. A general example is how students are influenced by their teachers, peers, textbooks, online and offline educational spaces, and study-related behaviors during different timelines, such as at the beginning and end of the semester. In a specific example related to Muthana's case, it was her belief in the caliphate, heaven and hellfire, her online Twitter space, news related media, her interactions with other individuals on Twitter, and her following ISIS invitations. All these elements had their role in influencing the affectivity and decisions of Muthana. Once she enters ISIS territory, the arrangement alters and so does her affectivity.

From a group arrangement vantage point, we can see how affect is built up and shaped in organizations, groups, and movements. Organizations, for example, operate as arrangements to shape employee behaviors and affectivity. Among these factors may be dress codes, types of offices, technological devices, best practices, etc. A company's employees enrich its overall effectiveness, for example, through their educational backgrounds, skill sets, and diversity. In Muthana's case, we see how ISIS penetrated her life, initially through Twitter. During this period, ISIS's lure and seduction on social media was at its peak. Once Muthana entered ISIS territory, she was expected to follow the dictates of the group. For instance, the only way she could get out of a madhafa (guesthouse) was to marry an ISIS fighter, either foreign or local. After some time, she too started inciting ISIS followers on Twitter⁴. We can further dissect ISIS as an organization to see that it had multiple councils. The councils played specific roles in the organization's management, and each affected the group's operations. Some of these councils were the media council, the financial council, the military council, and the foreign fighters' council (e.g., Milton, 2021). Perhaps the most effective council during recruitment was their media council, which made the creation of the so-called caliphate, and migration to an Islamic state, "glamorous" and "trending". The media council handled the creation of videos, blogs, and other forms of propaganda that glorified the caliphate. The videos made it seem like an ideal place for people to live and practice their faith. It gave potential members the impression that joining ISIS was the only way to live a true Islamic life and be part of a utopian society. The propaganda circulated attracted numerous sympathizers and followers to ISIS. As more and more members joined ISIS, its popularity and resources increased. In the online communities of the far-right and in the movements of white supremacy, we can observe similar patterns. These far-right and white supremacist organizations rely on a shared set of values and beliefs that unite members and guide their behavior. They also rely on organizational structures, such as hierarchies and codes of conduct, to ensure that members follow the same set of rules. In addition to this, they often use physical symbols (flags, logos, etc.) to identify themselves and distinguish themselves from other groups. One example is the Reichsbürger movement. The Reichsbürger movement is a far-right, anti-government movement in Germany that rejects the legitimacy of the modern German state. They use the black-red-gold flag of the German Empire and the imperial eagle as their symbols. These symbols represent a sense of nostalgia and pride among these far-right groups. These symbols also serve to differentiate them from the current state of Germany and its government.

In terms of *societal arrangements*, we can analyze the impact on communities and states. Consider, for example, how Putin's invasion of Ukraine is creating an arrangement of affect in states and society in general, including Russia. Similarly, we can observe how state policies shape societies, and vice versa. As for ISIS, we can see how political instability in the Iraq and Syrian regions contributed to the conditions for ISIS to rise to power. This shows how geopolitical and social factors interact to create a certain environment that may give support to extremism. ISIS, for example, was able to take advantage of the power vacuum, and exploited religious ideology to acquire support and strength.

Affective bonds are discussed in more detail in the next section, which focuses on single element interaction and personal affective arrangements. Our discussion is illustrated by two different

⁴ However, Muthana claims that it was her husband at that time who tweeted from her Twitter handle (Speckhard, 2019).

examples that illustrate features of affectivity and processes involved in extremism. In the first case, a multitude of factors are simultaneously at work, exerting influence on the individual, and we have highlighted this using the vantage point of *single-element interactions*. In the second example, we showcase the influence of multiple simultaneous factors on an individual's affectivity, highlighting it with the *personal arrangement* vantage point. The insights gained from these affective processes can also apply to the vantage points of groups and society in general. This is where studies from other disciplines can be integrated into the explanation of these affective processes in order to provide a more comprehensive view of affect.

THE CASE OF BRENTON TARRANT

We first examine affectivity through the case of Brenton Tarrant, a white supremacist from Australia. He killed 51 people and injured many others in attacks on two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, in March 2019 (Macklin, 2019). Tarrant was 28 years old at the time of the terrorist act. He had ties to identitarian individuals and groups, in Australia, France, and Austria, but denied having any membership in any group. He took inspiration from many far-right extremists. A notable influence was Anders Breivik, a terrorist from Norway who killed 69 people in Oslo in July 2011. Tarrant traveled to many countries, including some in Europe. In particular, he was active in the online forum '8chan' community, which was widely associated with white supremacy, neo-Nazism, and racism. Before committing the terrorist act, Tarrant wrote an 87-page manifesto entitled 'The Great Replacement' detailing his rationale and motivations. In his manifesto and online posts, he exhibited a right-wing extremist narrative and lingo. It was clear to Tarrant that the online space was a useful tool for spreading his message. Using a GoPro camera, he live-streamed his attack on Facebook. The attack in the video resembled a first-person shooting video game. Tarrant, according to one of his relatives, had a 'severe addiction' to gaming. That was visible in his attack style and choreography. According to Tarrant himself, "Fortnite trained me to be a killer, ... and floss on the corpses of my enemies."

As a result of the changing demographics in Europe, particularly in France, he developed grievances against migrants, whom he refers to as 'invaders'. In his manifesto, he asserted that the French have become a minority in their own country. As a result of his travels, his views on identitarianism were strengthened. In his manifesto, he describes how he broke down emotionally near a cemetery in France:

"In front of those endless crosses, in front of those dead soldiers lost in forgotten wars, [m]y despair turned to shame, my shame to guilt, my guilt to anger and my anger to rage ... The spell broke, why don't I do something?"

Arrangement and Scaffolds

A complex arrangement of affect is present in Tarrant's case. There is an arrangement that includes scaffolds such as white supremacist ideology, the writing of his manifesto, the use of 8chan forum, weapons, travel to other countries, and even video gaming, to name a few. The arrangement is complex because it is multifaceted, interconnected, and nonlinear temporally. Through his manifesto, we can observe connections between the various scaffolds, such as ideology, online postings on 8chan, and travel. However, we emphasize the interaction of Tarrant with a single element in order to illustrate the richness of affectivity. His weaponry was perhaps the most interesting affective scaffold. He customized his weaponry in a way that

demonstrated his affectivity, and indicated a strong connection to it, which could be seen as a form of affective bond. Tarrant's affective bond with the weaponry can be categorized as an example of user-resource interaction⁵, i.e., he personalized his guns and the guns also had an influence on his affectivity, as we explain in the next section.

Affective Processes

Tarrant possessed five firearms. He prominently marked four of his weapons in accordance with his grievances (Daily Sabah, 2019). His weaponry was thus personalized in a sense. Here, personalization can be viewed as an important feature of the affective process. While he wrote about his intentions and grievances in his manifesto and shared them with others, it is reasonable to speculate that the markings on these weapons were his means of self-regulating his own affect. He labeled the guns with the terms 'Turk-eater', 'refugees welcome to hell', and 'kebab remover'. He also referenced the famous '14 words'⁶ slogan of David Lane, usually referenced in white supremacist movements. His guns were marked with the years and events in which Crusade forces achieved victories over the Ottomans. Additionally, he used the names of prominent individuals who had played a significant role in defeating and killing the Ottomans. On one gun, he mocked the United Nations Migration Compact, which was endorsed by the United Nations in December of 2018. Through these markings, he engraved and communicated his grievances and intentions. On two of the rifles, he had written Ebba Åkkerlund's name (Associated Press, 2019). Ebba was an 11-year-old Swedish girl, killed in Stockholm in April 2017, by a terrorist from Uzbekistan.

As a result of this personalization, he added meaning to his identity and indicated his intentions. Essentially, this is the enhancement and regulation of his affect. In general, writing about one's feelings can often prove helpful in identifying the source of both positive and negative emotions. However, this does not automatically mean that an individual will be able to process emotions in a healthy way. For Tarrant, references such as 'kebab remover' are an expression of his negative emotions and intentions toward immigrants. In contrast, the references to Ottomans being defeated by European 'Crusaders' reinforce his sense of identitarianism and represent positive feelings associated with the past. By customizing the rifle, it is possible to observe how the rifle impacted him personally as well.

As part of an affective interaction with weapons, framing is another essential feature. He calls himself the 'avenging angel' for Ebba's death, and also writes her name on two of the weapons. By framing his terrorist actions as acts of vengeance, he rationalizes his hatred of immigrant 'invaders'. Similarly, with the references to Crusaders and people in the recent past who killed migrants, he frames himself as someone standing up for white lands and people against immigrants. The framing feature and associated affect can also be examined in relation to the references of ridiculing the UN Migration Compact and David Lane's 14 words.

Another feature that emerges from the affective interaction with weapons is that of *significance*⁷. By referring to instances of 'white' people killing Muslims in the past, from the

⁵ Other extremists have duplicated this style of customizing rifles and publishing manifestos online. One example is Payton Gendron, who killed ten people in Buffalo, New York, on May 14, 2022.

⁶ 14 Words: "We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children."

⁷ Related to Kruglanski's work on the Quest of Significance (see, Kruglanski et al., 2009, 2014, 2019).

time of the crusades to the recent terror attacks on immigrants, Tarrant glorifies the past and such actions. He gives significance to his identity by writing these references on the weapons. His goal is to defend the people and lands of Europe against the threat of migration. The fear of this 'white genocide' has been expressed through hatred and disgust for immigrants. Because of immigration, he calls the changing demographics in Europe and 'white' countries a 'Great Replacement'. For himself, he intensifies the glorification of the white race and its history. In contrast, he dehumanizes the enemy and thus reinforces his belief in the superiority of his race. The features of personalization, framing, and significance can be categorized as *affect-generating*, *intensifying* and *perpetuating* processes i.e., he forms strong ties to the white race by referring to his own race as superior. In addition, he forms negative ties with immigrants to repel them. The framing and significance features serve to further maintain and strengthen his white supremacy beliefs and sense of superiority.

Other interactions with elements also contribute to overall affectivity, and most of the time, it is difficult to understand the nuances of how it impacts someone's life. By utilizing the concept of Affective Arrangement, we are able to identify more clearly the affective interactions of an individual with various elements in his or her surroundings. It is important to recognize the various components that come together to create the overall affective experience. Therefore, our next example highlights affectivity in a case where multiple factors act simultaneously and influence an individual's affect.

THE CASE OF IBN-E-UMAR

This case is based on the interview of a 15-year-old defector from ISIS, named Ibn-e-Umar (Speckhard & Yayla, 2016). ISIS was at its peak when he joined, and it was receiving serious retaliation from the rest of the world. To cease the flow of foreign fighters into Syria, restrictions were placed on the Turkish border. Consequently, the Islamic State began actively recruiting children to fill the gaps in its ranks. He was at the age of 13 that Ibn-e-Umar joined ISIS. He remained with ISIS for a total of seven months. The decision to join was made on his own, without informing his parents. It took him two weeks to make the decision to join ISIS. Aside from receiving military training, he was also instructed in the Sharia law of ISIS. As part of his training, he spent time at a camp that provided training in beheadings and vehicular suicide attacks on 'infidels'. It was when Ibn-e-Umar realized that the time for committing a suicide bombing approached that he defected from ISIS and left for Turkey after applying for a 30-day leave from the organization. Based on the information from the interview, we can sketch out the important scaffolds from the affective arrangement of Ibn-e-Umar.

Arrangement and Scaffolds

According to his interview with Speckhard & Yayla (2016), he became acquainted with ISIS members while visiting their territory before joining ISIS. He would talk to them. He was presented with the narrative that they were performing jihad for Allah. They informed him that if he joined them as an ISIS member, he could have whatever he wanted and do whatever he wanted as well. Considering the power, they had in the area and how they operated, they appealed to him. At the beginning of ISIS's territorial expansion, Ibn-e-Umar observed the behavior of its members with the locals as well.

Ibn-e-Umar mentions in the interview with Speckhard & Yayla, that the military training camp had about 500 children, whom ISIS called Cubs of the Caliphate. Recruits were subjected to a

strict routine, beginning with prayers before dawn. They received military training and were instructed in ISIS-interpreted religion studies. During the night, they concluded their activities with prayers. In addition to their training, these young recruits were transported from one location to another. They were instructed in the use of heavy weapons. They would be required to carry the flags of the Islamic State and shout “Allahu Akbar” while running. In addition to seeing violence and beheadings, recruits would also be required to participate in them. In addition, he reports that during his time with ISIS, he expressed excitement and happiness when he saw fighters on the front-lines and felt that things were going well for the group. Furthermore, he states that ISIS taught young recruits how to pray, as well as how to give alms, fast, and donate to charity. According to him, ISIS prohibited blasphemy, drug and alcohol abuse, theft, and adultery.

During his time with ISIS, Ibn-e-Umar witnessed multiple executions and beheadings. In the interview with Speckhard and Yayla, he reveals that a fellow friend also took part in an execution. His friend returned from the execution feeling powerful and closer to God. The friend was also rewarded with money and additional leave for performing the execution. In response to the interviewers’ question regarding his feelings and reactions in such situations, he stated that the kids had to act happy and shout. The young recruits would be penalized if they were not happy.

In his case, the initial point is the interaction with ISIS members and forming an affective bond or interaction with them. The ISIS members, other young recruits here are *individual* scaffolds. The narrative presented is also an *ideological* scaffold. *Behaviors* and *rituals* serve as affective scaffolds, while the training camp serves as a *spatial* scaffold. Access of weaponry and reward money served as *material* scaffolds. There is also a complex arrangement in this instance, which is multifaceted, interconnected, and nonlinear in time. However, situated affectivity and the concept of affective arrangement allow us to emphasize the external scaffolds that influence Ibn-e-Umar on the path to extremism, while also allowing us to understand the simultaneous influences on Ibn-e-Umar.

Affective Processes

It was a war-torn country in which ISIS claimed parts. For Ibn-e-Umar, it was a country ravaged by war. ISIS controlled employment opportunities. The formation of his affective bond with ISIS members can be observed in his initial contact with them. Observation of this case reveals features of *allurement*, *framing process*, and *feedback spiral*. Ibn-e-Umar found the arrangement with people, including guns, cars, and specific attire, to be alluring. His opinion is framed in terms of what ISIS is doing and what he can expect from becoming a member of ISIS. An impression of significance is conveyed to him. Because of the positive feedback that he receives from these individuals, it is noticeable that his spiral into extremism begins. An initial user-resource affective bond can be seen here, which later turns into a mind-shaping affective bond. It is also possible to observe features of the affective process in this case. As can be observed, the kid was attracted to the group by their presence, and his affect was exploited at the same time by the framing used about what was being offered by the ISIS. The allurement, framing, and feedback spirals can be classified as predominantly *affect-generating* and *affect-exploiting* processes.

For Ibn-e-Umar, his time at the military training camp became a scaffold, i.e., a space where the children were getting their affects shaped, getting their military training along with religious studies. They were required to adhere to a strict schedule. This highlights a ritualization feature of affect. They were exposed to and instructed in “offensive” classes. The kids would see violence. Additionally, they would run with the ISIS flag and chant as they watched live action. They were thus desensitized to a warlike situation, making it part of their day-to-day lives. A desensitization feature of affect can be emphasized here. Additionally, their affectivity was framed according to the religious studies provided by ISIS. The purpose of this activity was to increase children’s ability to perform in a warlike environment. This was made to look like an adventure. This shows framing as a mind-shaping feature of affect. ISIS-controlled camps are therefore affect-exploiting and affect-perpetuating environments.

When the kids were shown how the mujahideen are fighting on the front-lines, they felt motivated to stay with ISIS. ISIS’ religious discourse was coupled with the excitement of these young recruits. The situation was presented in such a way that the kids felt optimistic about it: for instance, they were made to believe that ISIS is doing good for society. These can be considered the contagion and framing features of affect. Additionally, there is a feature that can be described as categorization, i.e., ‘us versus them’, which creates cohesion among ISIS members and sympathizers against all those opposed to ISIS’s objectives. These features of affect can be classified as affect-exploiting, affect-perpetuating, and affect-intensifying processes.

For the confusion of affect that Ibn-e-Umar had during times of violence and beheadings, the other kids served as scaffolds, in the sense that he should feel how they feel. Money, weapons, the military camp, the taught narrative, and practices (such as faking happiness) served as scaffolds. The processes of affect shaping in such an arrangement are observable. We can see that, where Ibn-e-Umar shows signs of being confused by beheadings, his friend who performs the execution feels happy, powerful, and even ‘closer to God’. For some, we see desensitization to violence, for others, we see fear and panic. Features of contagion and desensitization are observable in this instance. For the younger recruits, situations of violence were framed according to a religious narrative and presented as a win of good over evil. These processes can be categorized as affect-generating, affect-intensifying, and affect-perpetuating. In the minds of many young recruits, the justice of their sharia prevailed, and the society was free of evil.

CONCLUSION

By employing the framework of situated affectivity and its concept of affective arrangement, the examination of the mentioned cases in this paper brings to the forefront the affective dynamic, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of affect across individual and societal domains, temporal and spatial contexts, and physical and linguistic modalities. They emphasize the fact that our emotions are not solely individual experiences but are influenced by our interactions with others and the surroundings. This approach presents a holistic understanding of the intricate dynamics of emotions. Furthermore, it aids in our understanding of the intricate processes associated with the interaction among multiple elements of the arrangement, further elucidating the functions fulfilled by these processes.

Situated affectivity and the concept of affective arrangement may hold critical insights for current preventive and counter violent extremism (P/CVE) programs as well. As we have

analyzed and explained with examples, there is always an affective arrangement comprising multiple elements that contributes to an individual transitioning *to* extremism. Similarly, with careful considerations in P/CVE programs, affective arrangements can be designed for individuals that can assist them in transitioning *away* from extremism. Counseling and emotional support should not be the only focus of P/CVE programs. Adding scaffolds that are capable of generating, intensifying, or perpetuating affect would facilitate the transition from extremist ideas and beliefs. It is important to increase exposure of individuals to materials, including counter narratives, educational materials, and spaces, that can assist them in finding a sense of purpose, identity, and belonging. All scaffolds must include the possibility of affective engagement, i.e., individuals must be able to relate emotionally to the provided elements. Moreover, scaffolds should provide opportunities for interpersonal relationships with non-extreme individuals through empathic and compassionate communication.

To conclude, we consider that situated affectivity and concepts like affective arrangements provide us with rich analytical tools, which assist us in giving a very detailed affective map, starting from a single element analysis to multiple elements working in an arrangement. It can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of extremism by integrating existing literature from various disciplines, such as political science, psychology, sociology and criminology. By examining cases of extremism through this lens, we can foreground affect-centric features and processes. This allows us to understand not only the pathways leading to extremism but also the pathways leading out of it.

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