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The discursive construction of terrorist group identity

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ABSTRACT

The media coverage of terrorist acts has been the subject of numerous scientific studies. However, the terrorist groups' own communication perspectives have not been thoroughly researched. The following article deals with terrorist groups and their use of websites for identity building. We examine the discursive construction of terrorist group identity through critical discourse analysis (CDA). The CDA of online texts from websites of terrorist groups is based on a five macro-strategy scheme. Our sample consists of six terrorist groups, with each group of two sharing different motivations: social-revolutionary, ethno-nationalist, or religious. All the groups analyzed are listed as terrorist organizations by the European Union. The CDA of 27 terrorist websites, purposively sampled, was conducted using two coders per site. Through this analysis, the researchers draw conclusions on strategies employed by terrorist organizations in building identity and how to counter their unregulated propaganda.

KEYWORDS

Critical discourse analysis; identity building; Internet; terrorist groups

Since the attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, terrorism has been a constant topic in media and politics. Governmental and transnational institutions, like the European Union and the United Nations, have declared the fight against terrorism a high priority issue, taking different measures to combat terrorism and consequently improve citizens' security.¹ In order to counter terrorism and protect citizens from terrorist acts, it is necessary to understand "terrorism": a more or less homogeneous phenomenon sharing certain characteristics. Additionally, it is also important to understand the ideology and identity of different terrorist entities.

Terrorism is generally understood as acts of violence that aim at creating terror within populations. The European Union defines terrorism as:

intentional [act or] acts, which, given its nature or its context, may seriously damage a country or an international organisation, as defined as an offence under national law, where committed with the aim of: (i) seriously intimidating a population, or (ii) unduly compelling a government or an international organisation to perform or abstain from performing any act, or (iii) seriously destabilising or destroying the fundamental political, constitutional, economic or social structures of a country or an international organization.²

In addition to destroying various political, economic, and social structures, terrorism also serves as a tool for spreading the messages of certain groups. Many academics believe that there is a symbiotic relationship between terrorism and the media, and that terrorism *is* strategic communication.³ "For too long, terrorism has been

understood primarily in terms of (political) violence. Gradually, it has been realized that it should also be understood in terms of communication. Violence aims at behavior modification by coercion, while strategic communication aims at the same by persuasion. Terrorism is a combination of the two.”⁴ Similarly, Gupta⁵ and Post point out the importance of recognizing terrorism as communication, “for political terrorism is, at base, a particularly vicious species of psychological warfare. It is violence as communication.”⁶

Lasswell defines terrorism as “propaganda of the deed,” which he states is an act “carried out for the purpose of influencing social attitudes.”⁷ Lasswell adds that there exists a “shallowness and impersonality”⁸ in the tie between the communicator and the audience. In this situation, the general public (audience) is addressed with one-sided statements, without the ability to give feedback, an element that makes some researchers relate propaganda to advertising. However, in the case of terrorist organizations, they are selling an extremist ideology instead of a specific product.⁹

In his discussion of media portrayals of terrorism, Picard finds that “terrorism is a form of communication.”¹⁰ Furthermore, Cohen-Almagor states, “the success of a terrorist campaign depends decisively on the amount of publicity it receives.”¹¹ With the emergence of new media and the interactivity of the Web 2.0 (given its popularity, low censorship, and possibility to reach large audiences with less effort and lower costs), the communication of the terrorists is no longer exclusively dependent on reports in mass media. Terrorist organizations are now using Web 2.0 tools for the dissemination of their ideology, as strategic communication tools, and to assist in identity building.¹² They can address their messages directly and without censorship to the public. Through private websites, terrorists can present the group’s identity, find supporters, acquire funding, or influence public opinion about the organization. Understanding how terrorist entities argue and how their group identity is formed may help in developing counter-measures that prevent people from supporting terrorist goals and ideals.

Chen, who started spidering Dark Web content in 2002, believes that there are approximately 100,000 sites of extremist and terrorist content.¹³ “The largest increase since 2006–2007 is in various new Web 2.0 sites (forums, videos, blogs, virtual world, etc.) in different languages (i.e., for homegrown groups, particularly in Europe).”¹⁴ These freely accessible websites belong to the public Internet, unlike emails and password-protected forums or chats, which offer more privacy. Even though the use of social media and interactive web tools has increased in the past years, static website texts still offer a basic entrance into the ideologies of terrorism. Sites within the Dark Web would have been even more interesting to analyze, but the sites in our research are more accessible to the normal individual. The Internet can fuel and strengthen already existing extremist attitudes in predisposed individuals; therefore, this study will explore the importance of terrorist groups’ public websites in identity building. The aim of the analysis is to show which strategies the terrorist groups use in order to present their group identity online. Our research questions are as follows:

RQ1: Which strategies of discursive construction of identity can be found on terrorist groups’ websites?

RQ2: How do religious, ethno-nationalist, and social-revolutionary terrorist groups differ in their construction of identity building online?

To answer our research questions, we conducted a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of 27 web pages from six terrorist groups, between November 2013 and February 2014. By examining the online texts, this study reveals what sub-messages terrorists convey on their websites while exploring how terrorists use online media to portray a group identity. Sub-messages mean hidden meaning behind a word or phrase, or the implicit connotation that it entails.

Hülse and Spencer argue that terrorism studies should try to step back from the focus on the terrorist actor and look at terrorism as a social construction instead: “The terrorist actor is a product of discourse, and hence discourse is the logical starting point for terrorism research.”¹⁵ By analyzing these discourse strategies we are also able to give suggestions for preventative measures. The authors on the terrorist groups’ websites are (supposedly) a part of a so-called discourse community, a “concept used in genre studies to refer to a group of writers (or speakers) who share a communicative purpose and use commonly agreed texts to achieve these purposes. The term carries a core meaning of like-mindedness of membership which is widely used in research on writing to help explain discourse coherence.”¹⁶ In order to conceptualize discursive counterstrategies, it is important to be familiar with the terrorists’ discourses and narratives for persuasion. Taking this into consideration, this research, which combines approaches from various disciplines like social scientific theory, political and communication sciences, linguistics as well as critical research on human conflict, will give insight into the online communication of terrorist groups that cause security risks on an international level. The more we know about the terrorists’ use of the Internet, the less it is an unknown, sinister force.

Initially, in this article, we will review definitions of the key terms *terrorism* and *identity*. Second, we will focus on the use of the Internet specifically for the purposes of terrorism. Third, we will give a short overview of CDA and explain our adaptation of a scheme examining identity building, provided by Wodak et al.¹⁷ We will present our sample of terrorist groups and give reasons for our decision to encode our data with computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software, before presenting the results of the analysis. Finally, we discuss strengths and limitations of the study, describe policy implications, such as generating empirically researched counter-narratives, draw conclusions, and give suggestions for further research.

Defining terrorism

Defining a “terrorist” is a power play; many CDA researchers will ask what the use of this definition is and how power is constructed by this definition, since none of the groups to be analyzed see themselves as terrorists. The selection of the terrorist groups is assisted through the European Union point of view. This definition is juxtaposed with the terrorist groups’ description of identity on their websites. Hence, our analysis reveals a power play in definitions, rhetoric, and narratives. We do not judge these different points of view but present terms as given in the Western world and as on terrorist group websites. We also critically note our own researchers’ background, aware that this influences the framing of the research project, including the analyses

and the use of Western world literature in the research. Critical, in our understanding, means that a phenomenon is constructed through discourse, i.e., language as a social process. Additionally, we are aware that “far from being a mere mirror of events, discourse may *create* its own reality.”¹⁸

A survey of academic literature provides various definitions of terrorism. According to Hirschmann, there is almost no term that is defined with more diversity and controversy than the term terrorism.¹⁹ Additionally, *The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research* lists a selection of more than 250 definitions.²⁰ Waldmann and Hirschmann use the terms “terror” and “terrorism” to differentiate between state and non-state terrorism.²¹ They apply the term “terror” for state terrorism: a terror regime of a state towards its citizens. Whereas “terrorism” is used as a synonym for non-state terrorism: terrorist acts against political authorities or a state’s system. The present study addresses the latter of the two types; therefore, in this article the term “terrorism” will refer to non-state actors.

Waldmann defines terrorism as acts of violence against a political order. Those acts are planned and organized underground, creating fear, and in minor instances, sympathy as well as support for the terrorists’ goals. Schmid observes terrorism as a combination of violence and communication that addresses a government, even while the immediate victims of terrorist acts are often innocent civilians.²² Other researchers stress terrorists’ desire for change²³ that is based on political, religious, or ideological motives.²⁴

As for classifying types of terrorism, Waldmann²⁵ developed a typology based on the self-image and ideology of terrorists, which differentiates between social-revolutionary, ethno-nationalist, and religious terrorism. Post also differentiates between social-revolutionary, nationalist-separatist, and religious fundamentalist terrorism.²⁶ As identity is closely linked with self-image, ideology, and motives, we will use this typology to study strategies used in identity building. According to Waldmann,²⁷ social-revolutionary terrorism aims to instigate a political and social revolution based on Marxist/Leninist/Maoist ideals. Ethno-nationalist terrorism occurs when a social group or a population represents a minority and feels oppressed. In this case, terrorists want to establish their own independent state or at least gain some political autonomy: “Ethnic nationalisms usually emphasize common race, culture, language, religion, shared historical experiences or kinship myths.”²⁸ Characteristics of ethnic nationalism are “exclusionary attitudes and dichotomic beliefs,”²⁹ which are often reflected in an “us versus them” partition. Religiously-motivated terrorists criticize secularization and want to live in a society based on religious principles. Referring to religiously-motivated terrorists, Post states, “there is a clear fusing of individual identity and group identity, particularly among the more radical elements of each organization.”³⁰ He further observes that the “subordination of individual identity to collective identity is found across all organizations regardless of ideological affiliation.”³¹

Waldmann³² argues that terrorists’ objectives and ideologies always derive from a specific socio-historical background, influencing how the terrorists operate. Hence, understanding the background and motivations of terrorist organizations is helpful to recognize their identity and communication strategies, which is essential for developing counter-measures. However, we recognize that some terrorist groups will certainly have multiple motivational factors.

Identity and its role in terrorism research

By reviewing relevant identity theories, we can analyze the discourse of terrorists within a sounder theoretical framework. Anna De Fina defines identity “as a property of the individual or as something that emerges through social interaction; it is regarded as residing in the mind or in concrete social behavior; it can be anchored to the individual or to the group.”³³ Colvin suggests “that identity derives both from what we do in language (who we say we are, or are not), and from what language does to, or says about, us—that is, from a discursive context that is socially and historically contingent and preexists the individual subject.”³⁴ In the case of terrorism, language and violent action go hand in hand: “To say that (terrorist) violence is an identity mode is not to trivialize it; on the contrary, it is to underline the dangerous inaccessibility of terrorists to all who find themselves outside of their circle.”³⁵ From that perspective, examining language constructions of identity can be a first step in deciphering the underlying motives of a terrorist act.

Schwartz, Dunkel, and Waterman³⁶ argue that most of the research on terrorism is based on an antagonistic point of view of terrorists. This focus limits the understanding of terrorism, especially its foundation and motivations. Hence, Schwartz et al. stress the importance of respecting the terrorists’ perspective in research. Post, Sprinzak, and Denny conducted a study focusing on terrorists’ points of view by interviewing 35 incarcerated terrorists from the Middle East. They achieve interesting findings regarding the role of personal and group identity.³⁷ The terrorists interviewed in the study did not distinguish between their personal goals and the goals of the terrorist group; being a member of the organization was a central element of their identity. Individual ideas and opinions were of no importance; instead the terrorists defined themselves by their membership and the success of their terrorist group.³⁸ Understanding a group’s identity is therefore essential in understanding terrorism.

In our study, we focus on the meso level of collective identity and rely on Simon’s³⁹ social psychological perspective, expressed in Figure 1:

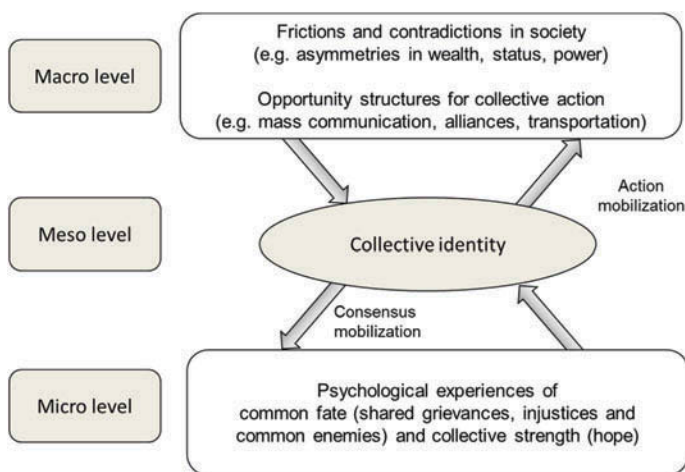


Figure 1. The role of collective identity as a mediating variable in social movement participation.⁴⁰
© Bernd Simon, 2004.

The model shows that collective identity is based upon psychological experiences of a shared, unjust fate on the micro level. On the macro level, however, the identity is based on frictions and contradictions. Additionally, on the macro level, mass communication is seen as an opportunity structure for collective action. This action starts when the terrorists build a shared identity on mediated websites. The participation and interest in such website texts may lead to “an increase in cognitive salience of this identity and/or to increased feelings of agency and empowerment.”⁴¹ Researchers emphasize that people do not become a part of terrorist groups because they are searching for an identity, but because they are looking for a channel to express their identity instead.⁴² “The feeling of standing alone against hostile forces may also add to the feeling of victimization.”⁴³ Individuals may become a target of harassment because of their ethnicity. This harassment might damage self-esteem and identity, turning into feelings of revenge.⁴⁴ We assume that this “awareness of common fate and collective strength”⁴⁵ will be a central theme (and discursive strategy) in the online texts. Yet, research on Right-Wing movements shows that individuals join such movements not because they identify with them, but for other reasons (like recognition, socio-economic benefit, failure to establish a positive identity) and develop extremist viewpoints later.⁴⁶ Another motivational factor is “curiosity and a search for excitement more than real commitment.”⁴⁷ People online often look for relationships and new friends to garner acceptance.

Terrorists and the internet

Utilizing new media tools, terrorist organizations are communicating strategically and tailoring their messages for specific audiences. Terrorists’ efforts in persuasive communication have been compared to those of professional public relations practitioners.⁴⁸ Weimann, after his analysis of terrorist website content, concludes: “Terrorist rhetoric on the Internet tries to present a mix of images and arguments in which the terrorists appear as victims forced to turn to violence to achieve their just goals in the face of a brutal, merciless enemy devoid of moral restraints.”⁴⁹ With terrorist rhetoric, Weimann means semantics and language devices used on the websites of terrorist organizations. Terrorists portray themselves as victims and their opponent as the guilty enemy against whom they have to seek revenge.

As the Internet is a global medium, terrorists are not only able to reach a larger audience, but also people outside their region.⁵⁰ The Internet then becomes more vital for groups acting in remote areas of the world. Local conflicts can come to an international forum; still, through the Internet terrorist groups can bypass gatekeepers, such as the journalists and editors of the media, as well as avoid governmental intervention or restriction.⁵¹ Terrorist groups also use their websites for organization, internal communication, recruitment, and fundraising.⁵² They do not rely on text alone but on visual communication as well, using pictures that often display: the group or its members (e.g., martyrs or leaders), citizens from the country of operation, the country itself, and respective flags.⁵³ Terrorist websites also contain audio content (e.g., patriotic songs) and self-produced video content. These videos include interviews, ideological lectures, and documentaries.⁵⁴ Besides official group websites, there are often other sites linked to these organizations, such as discussion groups, pages on the culture of the group’s country, or online newspapers.⁵⁵ On all of these sites, the groups present themselves, their ideology and identity, in their own words and discourse.

Despite the various mentioned advantages that the Internet offers terrorists, Ramsay, who studies the use of Web forums in Arabic, has a rather critical view of “terrorist websites research.”⁵⁶ Ramsay finds jihadist online discourses as something “between political reality, myth, legend and, ultimately, fantasy”⁵⁷ and reasons “that the notion of online jihadism as a security threat in itself has been badly overrated.”⁵⁸ However, the recent attacks on Paris and Brussels might argue against his criticism.

Research design

Because of our specific focus on discourse, we only consider text and not images or other visuals as appropriate for our sample. Anna De Fina⁵⁹ stresses the relevance of language to identity, arguing that language and discourse are essential in the process of identity construction and negotiation. This is because most people use language to convey images of their own selves and to identify other people. Analyzing language of terrorist groups can deliver relevant information on the organization’s identity and their ideology,⁶⁰ because “a powerful way of examining ideological structure is through the examination of language.”⁶¹ Hence, a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of terrorists’ websites is a particularly well-suited method.

Additionally, terrorist groups’ websites have previously been researched using quantitative content analysis and web spidering techniques.⁶² However, in order to thoroughly evaluate the communicative dimensions of identity building, ideology, motivational background, and political incitement, qualitative approaches are necessary. In this research, we conducted a CDA of 27 web pages belonging to one of six terrorist groups with different motivations. We worked with a pre-set codebook⁶³ of five comprehensive macro strategies, 20 sub-categories, and allowed open coding to build new categories during the coding process.

Critical discourse analysis

Critical discourse analysis is more of a discipline than a method of analysis and attempts to investigate or dissect discourse. Researchers have titled CDA a “school” or “orientation to the study of *language in use*.”⁶⁴ CDA researchers want to decipher the establishment and maintenance of unequal power relations,⁶⁵ such as the case when labeling a group “terrorists.” Furthermore, CDA researchers want to show hidden connections and causes of conflict. CDA is defined as “a problem-oriented interdisciplinary research movement, subsuming a variety of approaches. What unites them is a shared interest in the semiotic dimensions of power, injustice, abuse, and political-economic or cultural change in society.”⁶⁶

Moreover, “*critical discourse analysis* explores the connections between the use of language and the social and political contexts in which it occurs,”⁶⁷ which can be issues such as identity, religion, and ethnicity. Through the construction of these issues in language (or more specific linguistic features), this investigation may help pinpoint ideological presuppositions and constructs of identity.⁶⁸ Roberts, Davies, and Jupp point out that every “view of language must be contextual.”⁶⁹ Hence, depending on the specific culture of the organization and its members, certain discourse-management techniques and language forms are selected.⁷⁰ In this case, culture is defined as an “historically

transmitted and systematic network of meanings that allow us to understand, develop and communicate our knowledge and beliefs about the world.”⁷¹ In inter-ethnic (or cross-cultural) communication, discourse is often misunderstood or misinterpreted, while people of the same culture or ethnicity often have a shared system of meaning. However, culture is dynamic and can drift apart into sub-cultures just as inter- or intra-ethnic communication can show fundamental differences.

As mentioned before, social inequality, power relations, and discrimination play essential roles in the establishment of a collective identity. Terrorist insurgents are involved in a struggle for power, feeling unjustly treated and striving for political power. The group members feel socially, politically, or culturally marginalized; they seek liberation and justice through language as they feel that the “powerful discourses colonize the less powerful.”⁷² By using their own words and language, which are shaped by culture and at the same time an expression of it, they try to overcome this feeling of heteronomy: “emancipation of marginalized cultural identities can be brought about through a socio-political and sociocultural valorization of language and discourse. Discourse can therefore go beyond the interactional, constructing larger-scale meanings at sociocultural and sociopolitical levels ... constraining identity by erecting boundaries between ‘them and us’ be they geographical or sociocultural.”⁷³

Some understand discourse as not only a form of social practice that reflects social structures, but also essential to their (re)creation, since discourse influences and is influenced by other social practices.⁷⁴ Accordingly, discourse can never be neutral; it expresses certain stances or structures.⁷⁵ Text is a mode of discourse and provides several benefits for our analysis of terrorist organizations: “It could be said that the relation between discourse and text is one of emergence; discourse emerges in and through texts.”⁷⁶ Text as discourse is important for the construction of identity, especially if we consider discourse a social practice in which identity manifests. Through spoken or written language we create a relationship with our environment. Evans argues “that the meanings that substantiate self-concept or identity are both created through language and expressed by language.”⁷⁷ Additionally, written texts as a form of discourse provide the benefit of being static, manifest material.

Roberts, Davies, and Jupp shed light on the relationship between language and power since they describe language “as creating social identity” and “creating and maintaining social structures.”⁷⁸ They also credit language with the role of “maintaining group and, specifically, ethnic identity.”⁷⁹ In their eyes, there can be no separation of culture, language, and identity: “language and social identity are constantly recreating and reconfirming each other.”⁸⁰ In our context and with the background of CDA, it is important to point out that via language, discrimination is delivered. It is an “instrument of control”⁸¹ used to maintain or achieve power (over others), reflecting and creating the difference between “us” and “them.”

Five strategies of identity building

We base our CDA on a scheme provided by Ruth Wodak, Rudolf de Cillia, Martin Reisigl, and Karin Liebhart in their book *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*, in which the authors conducted a CDA of Austrian national identity.⁸² Wodak et al. assume that the “national identity of individuals who perceive themselves as belonging to a

national collectivity is manifested, *inter alia*, in their social practices, one of which is discursive practice.⁸³ In our research we assume that a (supposed or future) terrorist identity of individuals, those who perceive themselves as belonging to or approving of a terrorist group collective, manifests in discursive practice as well. This assumption allows us to examine website content by using CDA, and afterwards give suggestions for counter-strategies to this identity building. Wodak et al. identify five discursive macro-strategies of identity building used in Austrian “political speeches, newspaper articles, posters and brochures, interviews and focus groups.”⁸⁴ The five strategies are:

- (a) Strategies of justification and relativisation: “These are employed primarily in relation to problematic actions or events in the past which are important in the narrative creation of national [in our case: terrorist group] history ... that is they restore, maintain and defend a common ‘national [terrorist group] self-perception’ which has been ‘tainted’ in one way or another.”⁸⁵
- (b) Constructive strategies: “They attempt to construct and to establish a certain national [terrorist group] identity by promoting unification, identification and solidarity, as well as differentiation.”⁸⁶
- (c) Strategies of perpetuation: “attempt to maintain and to reproduce a threatened national [terrorist group] identity, i.e. to preserve, support and protect it.”⁸⁷
- (d) Strategies of transformation: “aim to transform a relatively well-established national [terrorist group] identity and its components into another identity.”⁸⁸
- (e) Strategies of demontage (or dismantling) and destruction: “aim at dismantling or disparaging parts of an existing national identity construct, but usually cannot provide any new model to replace the old one.”⁸⁹

We detected the strategies in our sample by looking for certain argumentation schemes and semantic means of realization, such as comparisons or metaphors. Every macro-strategy contains several sub-strategies. As the original scheme⁹⁰ referred to Austrian identity, for our analysis the scheme was altered, omitting certain strategies that were not applicable.

The five macro-strategies and 20 sub-strategies read as follows: under the “Strategies of Justification and Relativisation” we subsumed: 1.1 Shift of Blame and Responsibility, 1.2 Downplaying / Trivialisation, 1.3 Legitimation / Delegitimation. The second set, “Constructive Strategies” contains 2.1 Assimilation, Inclusion, Continuation / Unification, Cohesivation, 2.2 Singularisation / Uniqueness, 2.3 Autonomisation, 2.4 Strategy of Avoidance, and 2.5 Vitalisation. The third set, “Strategies of Perpetuation” encompasses 3.1 Continuation and 3.2 Defense / Strategy of Avoidance. The “Strategies of Transformation” include five sub-strategies: 4.1 Positive Self-Presentation, 4.2 Autonomisation, 4.3 Discontinuation / Dissimilation, 4.4 Devaluation (Downgrade) / Negative Connotation of Political Continuation, and 4.5 Vitalisation. And finally, the “Strategies of Demontage (or Dismantling) and Destruction” comprehend the following five sub-strategies: 5.1 Discrediting Opponents / Negative Presentation (of others), 5.2 Heteronomisation or Warning against Heteronomy, 5.3 Dissimilation / Exclusion, 5.4 Strategy of Pronouncing Somebody / Something “Dead,” 5.5 “Cassandra” Strategy.

Sample building

We applied the CDA to websites of groups listed as terrorist organizations by the European Union (EU). The list includes only organizations that meet the criteria of the EU's definition of terrorists.⁹¹ Using the EU's list of proscribed terrorist organizations excludes a very large number of groups that all have a web presence. Still this is a merited point of departure because it reflects a Europe-wide and common understanding of terrorism. Other definitions of the term might not have a large consensus, such as the UK Home Office list of proscribed terrorist organizations, for example, which in the last updated version of March 2015, lists 67 international terrorist organizations as well as 14 organizations in Northern Ireland, but reflects only consensus within the UK.⁹²

We based our selection on the European Union's list from July 2013.⁹³ From within this list we chose a purposive sample of six terrorist organizations with a strong and active web presence in English. This selection is based on Waldmann's typology of terrorism mentioned earlier with two organizations representative of each category of his typology. This enables comparison not only between the three types of terrorism but also between terrorist groups with the same motivations, in order to reveal similarities and differences. The sample includes the following terrorist groups:

- (a) Social-revolutionary terrorism: *Fuerzas armadas revolucionarias de Colombia* (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—FARC) and *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan* (Kurdistan Workers' Party—PKK).⁹⁴
- (b) Ethno-nationalist terrorism: Khalistan Zindabad Force (KZF) and Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).
- (c) Religious terrorism: *Gama'a al-Islamiyya* (GAI) and Hizballah Military Wing (and all units reporting to it, including the External Security Organization).

The texts from each respective website⁹⁵ were accessed on November 5, 2013, downloaded and archived. A coder training session with 23 master's students took place on November 26, 2013. The coders were also involved in a pretest using a text from the Sendero Luminoso website. The pretest showed a high consistency in the detection of macro-strategies, however the coding of sub-strategies differed in some places. In order to reveal discrepancies, every text in our main sample was double-coded. Hence, reliability was constantly tested and discussed within the coding groups. The pretest also helped reveal the applicability of Wodak's coding scheme, where additional context-specific codes (reference to international documents and to the diaspora) were added. Our coders conducted extensive background research on each selected group in order to detect all semantic devices and contexts, such as historical and political events, names of enemies, leading figures, and supporters. In order to use an accessible platform for qualitative content analysis, which allows for parallel work, we employed a Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS).⁹⁶

Results

Most common strategies

The analysis of all six terrorist groups' web texts indicates that there is strong focus on strategies of demontage and destruction, especially strategy 5.1, "discrediting opponents/negative presentation (of others)." This strategy, however, does not always go hand in hand with the strategy of positive self-presentation. Table 1 aggregates phrases in which the two strategies become apparent.

The "us vs. them" theme runs like a golden thread through many of the texts. Political decisions have long been grounded in the perception of "friend" and "enemy"⁹⁷ or to refer to Simon's model: in the perception of "common fate" and "contradictors."⁹⁸ This scheme determines any efforts in association, dissociation, participation, and separation; "from Schmitt's political theory, the friend/enemy principle emerges as the skeleton supporting and surviving all the various 'incarnations' of the political, from the Greek polis to the nation state, from the revolutionary party to the terrorist group."⁹⁹ The authors of our sample texts try to influence the readers to disapprove of the adversarial "other." Additionally, Post states the importance of the credo "It's not us—it's them" above all, especially for individuals with feelings of inadequacy or lack of success in their former lives.¹⁰⁰

Our findings reveal that the social-revolutionary and ethno-nationalist entities have a very precise image of their enemy. Each of the four social-revolutionary and ethno-nationalist groups perceives political actors as hostile, such as the FARC criticizing the Colombian president. The religiously-motivated terrorist groups, on the other hand, do not seem to have such a concrete and personalized image of their enemy. They do not discredit certain individuals or entities, but blame more or less everyone with a lifestyle, or point of view, differing from their own. The GAI for instance criticizes those who do not believe in Allah, as well as international actors who are perceived as suppressing Muslim society.

Dismantling of the opponent (the nation-state, the capitalist system, or another religion), depending on the motives of the respective group, is closely linked to the strategy of legitimizing one's cause and often a connection to human rights is depicted. The FARC, for example, claims that they "defend sovereignty and social guarantees." Similarly, delegitimizing the adversary power is done through outlining the "inability of the government to offer basic social services to its own people" (PKK).

This strategy is often found in combination with the strategy of heteronomisation or warning against heteronomy, since heteronomous power is perceived as illegitimate. The LTTE, for example, stress their rights as "earliest settlers." They deem their actions legitimate because their "armed struggle for political independence and self-government is the historical product of decades of racist oppression and injustice." The KZF alluded to non-governmental organizations that have allegedly observed the illegitimacy of the opponent's actions: "Not only one, but many international organizations, such as Amnesty International and Asia Watch among others are raising hue and cry regarding these gross violations which include extra judicial killings, massacre and genocide" (KZF). Using this argument they defend their "God given right of freedom" (KZF) and their fight against foreign domination. Hizballah finds it "a natural right to defend itself" when

Table 1. Strategies of demontage and destruction vs. strategies of positive self-presentation.

Terrorist group	Strategy of discrediting opponents	Strategy of positive self-presentation
FARC	<p>What a miserable president do we have in Colombia. Only a machine acts like you capitalists do, oligarchs, pipi Yankees or whatever your name is.</p> <p>More than 50 thousand cases of forced disappearance, massacres and false positives, tortures, power abuses, for example the massive arrests, the dramatic social and humanitarian crisis; on the whole, they'll have to be blamed for State terrorism.</p> <p>Cruel imperialism; unmask this metaphysical murderer called market; the criminality of the financial capital; the regime's agrarian policies are precarious and deceiving; the authorities trying to wash their bloody hands off the looting, carried out by State terrorism for decades; tyranny.</p>	<p>Class struggle</p> <p>We revolutionaries</p> <p>Our uprising</p> <p>Democratic and revolutionary opposition</p> <p>Heroic guerrilla fighters; brave men, martyrs, warriors</p> <p>We are a belligerent force, a political, revolutionary organization with a project for our country.</p> <p>The ones that keep up the banners of change and social justice.</p>
PKK	<p>The new implementers of genocide policies against Kurds.</p> <p>State suppression policies of massacre, oppression, torture, genocide, and assimilation; backward and anti-democratic mentalities; racist-chauvinist Unionists; colonialist fascism of the AKP government; hegemony; imperialist expansion.</p>	<p>Martyrs of the revolution; the revolutionary movement; democratic solution project of the people; struggle for socialism, freedom, and democracy; brave women of Kurdistan; heroic youth, revolutionary youth; courageous young socialists; the side of justice; the apex of the struggle for freedom; a beacon for socialism and internationalism</p>
LTTE	<p>The enemy has been deceitful, dishonest, and defiant and refused fundamental justice to our people.</p> <p>The Sinhala state oppression and discrimination unfolded in its ugly forms threatening the national identity; high-handed tactics of terror; a repressive racist state adopting the methods of brutal violence; tyranny; Sinhala chauvinistic forces; attacking everything that defined the Tamils as a nation; gross violations of human rights by Sri Lanka; the violent racial holocaust of 1983, in which thousands of Tamils perished as a consequence of communal massacres; Sinhala Government reacted with military violence and terror; racist oppression and injustice; human rights abuses and atrocities.</p>	<p>Struggle for freedom and dignity.</p> <p>Collective Tamil aspirations for identity, homeland, and nationhood.</p> <p>Both a political organization as well as a military power.</p> <p>A national liberation organization with the overwhelming support of the Tamil masses.</p>
KZF	<p>The systematic violation of riparian rights of Punjab, the Sikh holocaust, the genocide of the Sikhs, Khalistan is yet another reminder of malice and hate of Indian government and radical Hindu organizations towards the Sikhs.</p> <p>Politics of violence and state repression; large scale brutalities; massive acts of state terrorism; the rule of tyrant, communal and corrupt Bhartiya Janta Party and its intolerant and dishonest forces.</p>	<p>Peaceful, democratic, and righteous struggle to liberate Khalistan.</p>
Hizballah	<p>Pressuring threats practised by the foreign Zionist entity.</p>	<p>Islamic freedom fighting movement; important and pivotal force in Middle East politics in general and Lebanese society in particular; peaceful political action; correct beliefs.</p>
GAI	<p>Lie propagators; the unbelievers' crusades, the hypocrite's dubiousness and the phony's fabrications in religion; the mortal enemies; foreign invaders; hegemony of one superpower in the international arena.</p>	<p>Muslims have to concert their efforts and try to affect a renaissance in these countries so as to become the way they used to: strutting in glory and grandeur.</p> <p>A close-knit community; one righteous path.</p>

attacked by the enemy and when their identity is threatened. This can take place on the macro level where asymmetries in power and social welfare are stated, or on the micro level when transferred into personally experienced injustices. All the groups display sureness in their system of justice, whatever motive it stems from, e.g., religious or political.

Many texts show the groups' objective to portray their actions as legitimate and their group as positive. When referring to themselves, the organizations use words with positive connotations to gain the reader's sympathy, each different based on the groups' ideological motivation. The social-revolutionary entities describe themselves with words connoting strength and bravery like "heroic," "warriors," or "belligerent" and indicate that they are willing to fight and to use violence. In contrast, the religiously-motivated groups portray themselves far more peacefully, distancing themselves from violence, and referring repetitively to their faith. This, however, is only valid when applied to the two chosen groups and is clearly not evident in prominent jihadist groups like ISIS or Al Qaeda. The reason behind this might be that Hizballah is an official political organization (with a military wing) and that the GAI mostly renounce violence. In the texts of ethno-nationalist groups, both ways of portrayal are found, where the KZF speaks of a peaceful struggle and the LTTE points out their military forces.

Each of the six groups puts strong emphasis on solidarity among group members, as well as among those who share their fate. For instance, the LTTE talks of "the overwhelming support of the Tamil masses" whereas the GAI describes itself as "a close-knit community." In doing so, they accentuate the role of a collective identity. Potential supporters may be attracted by the prospect of meeting like-minded people who share their experiences, grievances, or perceived injustice. Implying that the factors on the micro level (identified by Simon) can be seen as the preconditions for gaining sympathy and finding support, the solution of common problems and sorrows is observed on the macro level, where frictions within a society or between social groups are perceived as causes of common grievances and actors who are perceived responsible are declared enemies.

Noting this first and most dominant group of strategies, it can be seen that the groups justify and try to legitimize their actions through stating that what they do is good for their supporters (a whole ethnic community or a community of faith) and that "deprived masses" are standing behind them. According to Simon, this arousal of hope and collective strength makes consensus mobilization possible.¹⁰¹

Foundation of groups and other common strategies

The next collection of strategies focuses on the group's reasoning for their actions. Most of our sample sees their inception triggered by a certain key event or specific circumstance that is perceived as an attack on their identity, making them take counter-measures. The GAI and FARC, however, discuss more current grievances that they want to alter with their organizations and actions. Table 2 elicits events and reasons as mentioned in the analyzed texts.

In many of these sentences, the strategy of discontinuation is identified when the groups perceive a certain period in their history where they felt oppressed by a new (hegemonic) force. By emphasizing key events as triggers for establishing the movement, the groups undertake a shift of blame and responsibility (subcategory of strategies of justification and relativisation). This is often done by dramatizing the actions of the opponent and downplaying their own violent deeds. The FARC, for instance, depicts their "class struggle" necessary to counter the "reforms and laws of misery and hunger." The PKK stresses that they opt for "the fundamental construction of democracy" and the ones to blame are the "green-Turkic fascism" using their "dirty politics." The LTTE points

Table 2. Trigger events, circumstances, and given reasons leading to formation of groups.

Terrorist group	Trigger event / circumstance / given reason
FARC	"As commander Alfonso Cano said: the FARC were born to resist to the oligarchic violence, which systematically uses political crime to annihilate the democratic and revolutionary opposition."
PKK	"Democrats of the West, the communists of the East and the national liberationist movements across the world made a new anti-capitalist movement a priority for revolutionary youths. This was the birth of the 1968 youth movement."
LTTE	"Foreign colonialism laid the foundation for the present national conflict."
KZF	"Operations 'Bluestar' and 'Woodrose' were massive acts of state terrorism."
Hizballah	"The Israeli invasion of 1982 provided the catalyst for Shiite radicalism; Hizbullah is an Islamic freedom fighting movement founded after the Israeli military seizure of Lebanon in 1982."
GAI	"Religion was and is still the major motive of all revolutions and popular uprisings in the Muslim countries till they could gain their independence from the foreign invaders."

out that their "political struggles in the early periods were peaceful, democratic and non-violent but later assumed the form of armed resistance" because of colonialism and "human rights abuses and atrocities against Tamil civilians on a genocidal scale." An interesting shift of blame can be observed with the KZF, who explain their "world-wide abuse and defamation resulting from the false and malicious propaganda by the Hindu and Indian media for over two and half decades." Here, the group identifies mass communication as a tool of the ones in power, to which the insurgents are denied access.

Even though downplaying violent actions is a strategy often encountered in the texts, there also seems to be some pride in the groups' achievements. The LTTE states that it "has achieved remarkable victories and gained global recognition as one of the most efficient fighting machines in the world." The KZF emphasizes that the "Sikh nation is proud of its glorious past and is absolutely resolute towards reclamation of its lost sovereignty, liberation of its homeland of Punjab, Khalistan and to be the master of its own destiny." Here, the group initiates action mobilization at the micro and meso levels, in order to lead to new opportunity structures for collective action on the macro level.¹⁰²

Unity through morals and international support

The following are text excerpts from the sample depicting how terror organizations use common morals as a unification force:

- You must be on the side of justice. . . . This is why we must act according to our conscience and moral outlook. (PKK)
- The seriousness and consistency of their revolutionary, democratic, emancipatory, democratic socialist, political and moral stance. (PKK)
- The laws of Islam are the supreme reference for our peoples and communities. This involves the belief, morality, acts of worship and legislations. (GAI)
- Sikh's basic ethos of . . . protecting the poor and oppressed and never yielding to tyranny and terrorism. (KZF)
- [President Santos] believes that killing people he will get us on our knees or break down our morale. Do you want me to say something, mister Santos? You are wrong. (FARC)

These quotations demonstrate that the moral “law” (of religion or certain ideology) reigns above national laws established by the government. If individuals accept this change of law, the path is free for illegal (in a traditional sense) behavior. We can observe this in today’s militant-Islamic groups, whose members do not feel as if they are committing any illegal action but fulfilling the “law of Allah” instead. These allusions to a common moral indicate that identity building is achieved by creating a feeling of unity and uniqueness, accomplished through the constructive strategies of unification and cohesivation, as well as singularisation and uniqueness. Through stressing that unity was a characteristic of a glorious, peaceful past, the FARC wants to unite and represent “those, who have been living in harmony for centuries with the palm trees and the curlews; those, who walk barefoot and who took up their lances, with their historic fierceness; a very close family; the poor people of this country, and we are majority.” In many instances they resort to a discourse of unity expressed in phrases of euphemism, e.g.: “unity is strength, united we will overcome. . . . Let’s shout all together: It’s enough!” (FARC). This example consists of several rhetorical strategies: the direct addressing of the reader is an effort to make them feel part of the collective identity, and the parallelisms are both catchy and memorable. Additionally, ethno-nationalist groups stress ethnic identity as a unifying force, which forms “a social entity, with their own history, traditions, culture, language and traditional homeland” (LTTE).

On the other hand, religiously-motivated groups do not see ethnicity as a marker of identity, but a common set of beliefs (or morals): “Our Muslim communities are innately religious and keen on emphasizing their Muslim entity” (GAI). Religion is perceived as the “sole goal,” the “one righteous path” and the “red line that is never to be crossed.” Whoever dares to cross it will be excluded and dismissed from unity (cf. strategy 5.3).

Even though the groups create a strong bond and attempt to differentiate from the opponent, they also struggle to show keenness for a peaceful solution of conflict, as can be seen from the following statements:¹⁰³

- Our commitment to peace urges us to resolve the reasons for our uprising through dialogue. . . . With dreams about peace and an olive branch in our hands . . . We sincerely want peace and we identify with the nation’s majoritarian clamor to find a dialogued solution to the conflict, opening spaces for a real citizen participation in debates and decisions. (FARC)
- Sikhs are peace-loving people, but never submit to oppression. . . . Come join the peaceful, democratic and righteous struggle to liberate Khalistan. (KZF)
- Our organisation as well as our people do not want war. . . . It is our organisation that took the initiative of declaring the cessation of hostilities unilaterally. (LTTE)
- Islam that we understand is a message that aims at establishing justice, security, peace and rights for all people no matter what nation, race or religion they belong. . . . We don’t seek the application of Islam by force or violence but by peaceful political action. (Hizballah)

The application of this strategy can be explained by the groups’ need for international support (on the meso level of organizations), which will only be provided if the group is willing to participate in peace negotiations.

Another strategy that stresses the groups’ need for international support is their effort to mark a conflict as an international issue, through stating the global residents the groups

represent. The best example is with social-revolutionary groups like the FARC, who name their deeds a struggle of “anyone who belongs to the exploited class.” The PKK indicates “clearly a global systemic crisis being expressed in the locality of Western Kurdistan. . . . What started with a group of a handful of loyal friends has now become a struggle taken up by millions.” The PKK goes on to state that their activities are “a hope to all peoples of the world.”

Specific terrorist rhetorical devices

Overall many of the strategies are executed through employing stylistic devices in the discourse. Due to identity building being closely linked to strategies of persuasion, a connection to rhetorical devices is a given. The following examples show the terrorist groups’ mastery of these devices: direct addressing (“You are wrong”), poetic writing (“an olive branch in our hand”), juxtapositions (“you oligarchs and we revolutionaries”), aggressive language (“It is time to weed out the enemy”), vitalization (“engraved their names in the hearts”), metaphors (“a beacon for socialism”), comparisons (“only a machine acts like you”), rhetorical questions (“what do you prefer?”), and threatening the opponent (“the tyrants will be brought to book”).

Furthermore, in several parts of their texts the groups accentuate their wish to “examine the real story behind the just cause” (LTTE), “to tell the truth with authentic records of historical events” (LTTE). The FARC wants “everyone to know this reality . . . pure and clean truth” (FARC). The PKK states, “No power can conceal and obscure this truth regardless of their lies.” Within this context, these statements belong to what Wodak et al. call the strategy of perpetuation: emphasizing the (historical) duration of the conflict, which justifies the insurgents’ “right” for violent action.¹⁰⁴ The groups speak of a “period of great resistance,” of an “epic struggle” where “history is witness.” They cite historic documents and refer to Marx and Engels, Fidel Castro, Lenin, Mao, cultural heritage like poems, religious leaders, Imams, or the Qur’an. All of these mentions belong to Simon’s category of psychological experiences on the meso level, which are transferred to the individual micro level.¹⁰⁵

Last but not least, an identity building strategy that Wodak et al. did not mention, since it did not apply to national identity, is the shift of labels.¹⁰⁶ The groups strongly deny the “terrorist” label and hold the government’s statements, as well as the media, responsible for their reputation. Alternatively, they also apply the “terrorist” label to their enemy: The FARC, PKK, LTTE, and KZF identify the governments’ actions as “state terrorism.” Only the two religious groups did not employ the term “terrorism,” neither in defending themselves nor in accusing their opponent.

Strengths and limitations

Even though our study did not reveal many unexpected facts, it does provide evidence on terrorist rhetorical strategies and gives examples using empirical data. An unexpected result is that religiously-motivated groups did not use extremely violent language, which was expected due to ISIS propaganda today. Instead, the religious groups analyzed distance themselves from violent actions and declare that violence is not reconcilable with Islam, ironically contradictory to the groups’ activities. As a result, religiously-motivated groups

appear as peaceful organizations through their communication; however, the strategies detected in this study are not indicative of a consistent trend.

One shortcoming of the study is the inability to verify the original creators of the text, whether they really are members of the respective terrorist group or not. Furthermore, the identity depicted is not equal to the identity of the writers or the affected readers of the text. The depiction is interpreted as the ideal and desired discursive projection of a certain collective identity of an ethnic, religious, or class-related group.

Another limitation is that some terrorist organizations do not have an official website or at least none that can easily be accessed. Some of our stored websites have already been shut down, so the ephemeral nature of these texts becomes apparent, where entire sites come and go, or are drastically changed. The content is transient, “meaning the sites appear and disappear very quickly.”¹⁰⁷ Moreover, only some of the terrorist groups’ websites are in English, which might be tailored differently for an international audience. An analysis of terrorist groups’ websites in their native language may deliver dissimilar results.

There are some final limitations regarding coding, such as the coder’s knowledge of content and contexts. Additionally, the application of Wodak et al.’s scheme of strategies of identity building could have resulted in coding only those pre-existing strategies, hindering the researchers from detecting new strategies and turning into a self-serving bias.¹⁰⁸ However, this was not the case as Wodak et al.’s scheme ensured external validity, proving suitable for identity construction research, while new codes more specific to terrorism were developed and constantly detected.

Implications

How can scientific knowledge translate into (normative) policy outcome? How can we come from violent conflict to peaceful coexistence?

Even though many disciplines have contributed empirical studies and relevant results in regard to conflict management, Yakinthou and Wolff state that this has neither improved understanding nor success in conflict reduction in the afflicted regions.¹⁰⁹ Often, suggestions lack a profound consideration of social and regional context. Still, the establishment of democratic channels is not a guarantee that terrorists will stop their activities. If the parties already have reached a deadlock, the “gap between minority and majority preferences can sometimes be overcome with the assistance of third-party mediation in extreme cases.”¹¹⁰ This third party could be a neutral country or a state federation like the European Union.

McCulloch discusses several possibilities that might allow for a reduction at least of ethnic conflict, such as consociationalism, group autonomy, and administrative federalism. This can only be achieved if the government (or a third party) practices dialogic PR, considering ethnic singularities and peculiarities deduced from the websites.¹¹¹ This is why we suggest putting more effort in two counter-terrorism strategies: a) generating counter-narratives and b) establishing proactive countermeasures that address the causes and not just the symptoms of terrorism. The first step is to counter discourse, like that found on these websites, by sowing doubts in the group’s logic and ideology. The second step is to de-radicalize those already infected, and at the same time, prevent those disposed

to radicalization. This means to influence attitudes and to change the behavior of the recipients through positive deconstruction of their negative identities.

Examples of deconstruction methods are counter-narratives. Narratives, especially a trans-historical master narrative, are deeply embedded in a particular culture: “A narrative can be defined as a storyline to communicate and legitimise a political or religious conviction, with the aim of generating support and with a call to action in support of that conviction.”¹¹² A counter-narrative (to terrorist narratives) is constructed to promote peace, communication, and democracy. This means that counter-narratives are goal-driven statements, formed as direct replies to ideologies infiltrating certain parts of society. They legitimize themselves using methods, stories, or myths that are embedded and resonate within a culturally bound group of people. Suggestions for counter-narratives include: “debunking myths, responding to misrepresentations of facts, showing the atrocities committed, and piercing the aura of heroism and camaraderie.”¹¹³ In a working paper of Hedayah and the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, different types of narratives are discussed, such as tactical, ethical, or alternative narratives (even humor and sarcasm).¹¹⁴ Visual elements, such as posters or videos for constructing effective counter-measures, should also not be neglected.

Schmid¹¹⁵ lists some counter-narrative efforts by governments and NGOs, like posting online content in Urdu and Arabic. Still, even the best narrative is not effective when accompanied by mismatched actions. “The idea that one can shape and manipulate public opinion abroad by mere messaging without changing unpopular aspects of actual foreign policies (e.g., in the Middle East) is no longer tenable in an age of multiple, and increasingly interactive, public and social media channels.”¹¹⁶ Otherwise, those producing counter-narratives will lose credibility within their target audience.

In order to avoid failure, it is important to identify the right messenger for the right counter-narrative. Schmid finds that “Muslim intellectuals and activists in Western diasporas” deserve more attention when sending an anti-extremist Muslim narrative. This is because they associate with “both their host countries and their countries of origin. They are situated best to devise a counter-narrative that has credibility, legitimacy and relevance among potential sympathisers.”¹¹⁷ Therefore, governments should spend more time finding the right messenger: “A religious counter-narrative coming from a government does not bear that credibility, whereas the same message coming from a local imam might be more effective.”¹¹⁸ The same applies to groups representing ethnic minorities, social classes, or migrants.

Where terrorist groups have a black-and-white mentality, counter-narratives have to proactively build a bridge between the “us” identity and the “them” identity.¹¹⁹ They have to adopt the linguistic style and native dialogue of the specific group and target audience, which may vary according to age, gender, sub-culture, or religion. Counter-narratives should take into account how terrorists write their plots and how they phrase their arguments. Nevertheless, some even criticize the effectiveness of elaborated counter-narratives.¹²⁰

The UK government’s “Prevent” strategy is worth mentioning; it has recognized that “the ideology of extremism and terrorism is the problem.”¹²¹ Prevent emphasizes developing a sense of belonging to the national country and supporting democratic core values. Also, “Prevent” stresses the importance of the right senders for counter-narratives, such as

former extremists or youths that disseminate these narratives into their peer group. “Prevent” recognizes the Internet as vital for counter-narrative work and for countering the radicalization processes. However, according to a *Guardian* article, many UK Muslims do not approve of Prevent and regard it as a spying tool: making the strategy deeply controversial.¹²²

Another initiative, The Counter Terrorism Internet Referral Unit (CTIRU), was created in order to remove unlawful terrorist content from the Internet. Counter-measures such as data retention or reactive retaliation sometimes are counterproductive and unite a group even stronger. “The survival of the group is paramount because of the sense of identity it provides... [For terrorists] violent societal counter-reactions reaffirm their core belief that ‘it’s us against them and they are out to destroy us.’”¹²³ Inhibiting potential recruits from joining the terrorist group is only possible when addressing or eliminating local grievances, because these grievances are one of the main causes and motivators for violence. However, as Bjørgo points out, there are too many different root causes of terrorism and no single “prime mover” can be identified.¹²⁴ Bjørgo differentiates between root causes of terrorism (e.g., modernization, poverty) and trigger causes, “immediate circumstances and events that provoke people to have recourse to terrorist action.”¹²⁵ In our study (cf. Table 2) we observed both types of causes, where groups state perceived humiliating events or specific circumstances that justify their actions.

Gupta identifies three basic sources of motivation (or motivating factors) to join a terrorist group: greed (self-utility), ideology (group-utility), and fear (cost) of not going along with the group.¹²⁶ It is politics’ task to diminish or divert this motivation, through making people aware of the power and manipulation of these groups and their language use. Awareness work can be implemented via training and workshops for civilians located in recruiting areas of these groups. Ideally, this can result in “a basis for behavior modification without loss of cultural identity for either side.”¹²⁷ Additionally, Post states: “Countering the terrorists’ highly effective media-oriented strategy through more effective dissemination of information and public education must be key elements of a proactive programme.”¹²⁸ The awareness workshops should not only focus on manipulation of language, but also on shared meanings, values, and cultural norms—not necessarily promoting the democratic narrative explicitly. Workshops can address how potential recruits *feel* and convince them that leading a nonviolent life is a moral duty, regardless of religious, ethnic, or leftist ideologies. This method will only be effective if these individuals feel respected and there is progress in eliminating the root causes of terrorism.

Waldmann pointed out that although the motives of a terrorist group may change in the course of time, they stay relevant, helping find new members and supporters, as well as establishing the group in society.¹²⁹ At the same time, authorities have failed to implement concepts for far-reaching prevention of terrorism.¹³⁰ Regarding policy implications, counter-measures must not only be reactive, but also proactive. Current measures mainly concentrate on travel bans, security checks at airports, or the freezing of assets, as done by the European Union. These measures, however, only aim at the “symptoms” of terrorism, not its causes. To counter terrorism in the political, societal, as well as religious world, we need to develop strategies that prevent people from becoming drawn to terrorist groups. By understanding the motives and rhetoric of terrorist groups, individuals such as journalists, teachers, or imams can weaken terrorists’ arguments to potential audiences, and help implement preventative, educational measures.

Political actors can develop strategies that reduce the micro and macro level factors influencing the terrorist groups' collective identity, through addressing social inequalities or making communication (and decision processes) transparent and democratic. Rosenfeld emphasizes, "the application of an interdisciplinary, evidence-based explanation of terrorism, national identity, and political legitimacy may be the most effective method of understanding and combating political violence."¹³¹ This application should be in regions with active terrorist groups, as well as countries affected by a war, conflict, or crisis.

Conclusion

This article presented a theoretical approach and empirical analysis of the rhetoric on online texts of six terrorist groups with diverging motivations. Answering our research questions, we can state that through our CDA of online discourse, we detected multiple strategies of identity building used frequently by terrorist groups. Overall, all groups employed strategies of demontage and destruction, as well as strategies of justification and relativisation. We observed a strong use of boundary construction, or the differentiation between "us" and "them": an essential element in identity building.¹³² "As a process of defining what 'we are' inevitably involves establishing what 'we are not', another central characteristic of collective identity formation is *boundary work*, which involves creating a reciprocal identification between group members that simultaneously express commonalities and difference with reference groups."¹³³ This refers again to Schmitt's concept: protagonist vs. antagonist, challenger vs. dominant group.¹³⁴ Setting boundaries seems to be crucial for the group in order to separate the insurgents from those in power on the micro, meso, and macro levels.

Our findings correspond with former research, such as Schmid's¹³⁵ work regarding the Al Qaeda narrative. He found similar rhetorical strategies, such as dehumanizing the victims, constructing moral justification, shift of blame, displacement of responsibility, and downplaying of harmful effects. From our work we can deduce that the websites of terrorist groups can be a part of the radicalization process due to their manipulative language and identity building efforts. Organizations working on "Prevent" have found "evidence to support the theory that identity and community are essential factors in radicalization."¹³⁶ Additionally, because of their use of rhetoric, these websites can be closely linked to motivation and action mobilization: "*Motivational causes* are the actual grievances that people experience at a personal level, motivating them to act. Ideologues and political leaders are sometimes able to translate causes from a structural level up to a motivational level, thereby moving people to act. The role of ideology and rhetoric is to explain how things really are, and persuade individuals and groups to take action. Motivational causes may also be seen as concrete 'symptoms' of more fundamental structural causes."¹³⁷

This radicalization interweaves elements of common fate on the micro level, as well as cleavages and opportunities on the macro level, to create a new form of building collective identity. Narrative strategies are commonly used to achieve this purpose. How much an aggrieved population is prone to become extremist and form a terrorist group also depends on the counterterrorism measures of the government.¹³⁸ It still remains unclear which counter-measures are apt to prevent this transfer from the micro level (i.e., the

personal identity perspective such as “I am a Muslim/Sikh/Colombian farmer”) to the meso level (i.e., the social or collective identity perspective of a religious/ethno-nationalist/social revolutionary violent group). This crucial step is the one that leads to individual action mobilization, and should be opposed by counter-narratives. Creating a stronger counter-identity or appealing to the identity of a group, in order to make its members feel part of the majority, can help combat radicalization.

A suggestion for further research is to analyze dialogic and interactive forms of Internet communication, such as forums or social media channels. An initial analysis on this topic, conducted by Rothenberger, indicated that terrorist groups are actively using Social Network Sites (SNS).¹³⁹ Additionally, it would be useful to conduct a longitudinal instead of a cross-sectional study, coding different sites several times during a certain period. Another suggestion would be the analysis of visual content used by terrorist organizations. The groups’ logos, colors, script style, choice and arrangement of pictures have still to be studied. A transference study of this online material would also be beneficial, where data is collected on how recipients interpret and react to the online content, or how it assists in their identity construction. We hope that our study serves as a starting point for further exploration in the mediatized methods terrorists utilize.

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- 4 of Common Position 2001/931/CFSP on the application of specific measures to combat terrorism, and repealing Decision 2012/765/CFSP. *Official Journal of the European Union*, 56 (L 201) (2013–07–26), 57–59, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:201:FULL:EN:PDF> (accessed August 2, 2013).
94. On their website, the PKK mentions its “Martyrs of Socialism” and does not focus on separatism but instead on a leftist revolution. That is why the PKK was not put into the ethno-nationalist terrorism section but instead into the social-revolutionary category.
 95. The websites were: <http://www.egyig.com/en/>; <http://www.farc-ep.com>; www.eelam.com; <http://almashriq.hiof.no> (substitute); www.khalistan.net; www.pkkonline.com/en/.
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 103. Also Weimann (2006, 53) states that “most terrorist groups avoid references on their Web sites to their own violent activities.”
 104. Wodak et al. (see note 63 above).
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125. *Ibid.*, 3.
126. Gupta (see note 5 above), 19.
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128. Post (see note 6 above), 67.
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