

Article

Extremism(s) and Their Fight against Modernity: The Case of Islamists and Eco-Radicals

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Abstract: Extremism in both its vocal and violent forms is a core topic of research, as well as a priority issue standing at the top of national and international security agendas. While most of the literature is still focused on violent forms of extremism, an emerging research trend is looking at vocal extremism and radicalisation as crucial steps to understand, as Neumann said “what happens before the bomb goes off”. Within this new trend, scholars are interested in exploring the ideology of extremist groups (rather than just their methods) and the frames (schemata of interpretation) they disseminate in order to win more followers and fidelise their members. Based on the author’s previous research, as well as on relevant data extracted from the manifestos and relevant publications of emblematic groups of both ideologies, this paper compares Islamists and Eco-radicals as two forms of extremism fighting the Western-sponsored modernisation process. By exploring the meaning of “modernity”, as well as the role played by frames, this research sheds light on three common frames present in both ideologies, i.e., the enemy to fight, the victims to protect, and the change to achieve. These three frames are the linchpin of the discourses of both forms of extremism. By innovatively unpacking these frames from a comparative perspective, this research offers new insights into the impact of modernity on the development of alternative and extremist ideologies.

Keywords: extremism(s); Islamism; eco-radicals; modernity; frames



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1. Reactions against Modernity

The term “modernity” is generally intended as a positive term in the Western world and is usually associated with progress, emancipation, and evolution (Hroch et al. 1998). Modernity stands as both a historical era (the Modern era) as well as the specific socio-cultural norms and practices that emerged during the Renaissance in the late 17th century and the Enlightenment (18th century), mostly in Europe, where the individual and his post-material needs started to gain prominence over other priorities of the past (Wagner 2012). When looking back at the 1960s, the modern era appeared to be characterised by a wealthy First World (Western countries) marked by the development of individualism, capitalism, urbanisation, and a belief in the possibilities of technological and political progress (Goody 2013; Ihde 2009).

Modernism has marked a complete revolution in common thinking and in the principles and codes of conduct, as well as producing several ethical questions for those embracing it. These ethical questions have created frictions in the choices of several individuals on how to identify their priorities, on how to deal with the problems arising during the journey of life, as well as on their identity. As Bruce Lawrence concluded in his book *Defenders of God*, modernism stands as “the search for individual autonomy driven by a set of socially encoded values emphasising change over continuity; quantity over quality; efficient production, power and profit over sympathy for traditional values or vocations, in both the public and private spheres” (Lawrence 1990, p. 1).

If this rationalisation and striving for change led to important conquests of the modern world, they also led to a deep crisis investigated by prominent intellectuals across social

sciences. In different ways, Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Sigmund Freud, and the evolutionist tradition in anthropology and sociology represented by Herbert Spencer and Edward Tylor, were anxious with the social and historical revolutions which led to the secularised, industrialised nation-states of Western Europe and North America (Woodward 2002). Although it started as a mere Western phenomenon, modernisation was exported all over the world, in different cultural contexts, accompanied by a high degree of opposition.

Modernisation has triggered and continues to trigger extreme reactions around the world. The term extremism is often associated with fundamentalism, which stands as a major adverse response to modernity, strongly rejecting all concepts associated with it, e.g., capitalism, individualism, and materialism (Lawrence 1990). While the term fundamentalism was initially associated with the evangelical Protestant movements emerging in early 20th century, preaching the return to core principles of Christianity and defending verbal inerrancy of the Bible, fundamentalism has been increasingly associated with the Muslim world after 9/11 (Ataman 2015). As the word itself suggests, fundamentalism stresses the need to go back to the “fundamental(s)”, the “essential(s)” of a religion, which is something that is regarded positively by many Muslims, as it is good and acceptable to refer to the fundamentals of Islam, such as the belief in the unity of God (*Tawheed*), in Prophet Mohammad, and the *Qur'an*.

However, soon after 9/11, Western discourses have started portraying fundamentalism as a bad word, often associated with terrorism and violence. Islamic fundamentalism¹ is today intended as an umbrella term including several groups, movements, organisations, and ideologies willing to implement an Islamist social order and often an Islamic state, i.e., the Caliphate (Piscatori 1991; Orofino 2020b). Fundamentalists see Islam as a *deen* (a way of life), not just as a religion, and therefore strive to fight (verbally and sometimes even physically) everything that clashes with the fundamentals of Islam, giving voice to strong anti-colonial arguments that often overlap or complement anti-imperialistic and anti-American stances. Given the boldness of such stances, fundamentalism and extremism are often conceptualised as synonyms.

Fundamentalists are notably against modernity and all related concepts (such as materialism, individualism, and hyper-rationality) that push men far away from God and the spiritual dimension. However, religious fundamentalists are not the only ones opposing modernity and all its effects on society. Eco-fundamentalists (or eco-radicals) have also emerged as a reaction against modernisation and the intensive exploitation of natural resources in the name of progress. As is the case of Islamist fundamentalism, eco-fundamentalism also stands as an umbrella term encompassing different groups and solo actors fighting the side effects linked to the use of technology and industrialisation on the environment, as well as fighting a society they perceive as being made up of “agents of modernisation that are emphatically caught in the maelstrom of hazards that they unleash and profit from” (Beck 1992, p. 37).

This article explores organised group action against modernity by using Islamist and Eco-fundamentalist groups as case studies. Previous research by the author has shown many commonalities between different kinds of fundamentalism causing extreme behaviours.² This article innovatively compares Islamists and Eco-fundamentalists as two reactions against modernity, and it sheds light on three common frames (schemata of interpretation) across these umbrella groups, present in both their vocal and violent expressions. This paper will first explore the significance of creating meanings and frames within a specific organisation. It will then progress by exploring specific case studies (Islamists and Eco-radicals) and will conclude with a discussion comparing the frames and highlighting the several commonalities across these two extreme ideologies.

2. “Constructing” Meanings to Fight against Modernity

“The transmission of the meaning of an institution is based on the social recognition of that institution as a ‘permanent’ solution to a ‘permanent’ problem of the given collectivity” (Berger and Luckmann 1966, p. 87).

Institutions play a pivotal role in the definition of priorities within the lives of individuals and strongly influence their behaviour. Although there are different definitions of institutions within relevant scholarship in social sciences, anthropology, and beyond, some of the most agreed-upon are [Keohane and Murphy's \(1992\)](#) and [Hodgson's \(2015\)](#). Keohane and Murphy asserted that “institutions are persistent and connected sets of rules (formal or informal) that prescribe behavioural roles, constrain activity, and shape expectations” ([Keohane and Murphy 1992](#), p. 871). Hodgson opted for a more straightforward definition stating that “institutions are integrated systems of rules that structure social interactions” ([Hodgson 2015](#), p. 501).

Both definitions comfortably sit within the constructivist theory—a meta-theoretical label that explains actions and human behaviour in light of their identification of specific sets of rules and values ([Andresky 2008](#); [Orofino 2020b](#)). These elements are powerfully conveyed when an individual is a member of a group. To use Berger's and Luckmann's words, groups can be regarded as a “permanent solution to a permanent problem of the given collectivity” ([Berger and Luckmann 1966](#), p. 87). Groups are indeed institutions, as they rely on a specific set of rules and ideological tenets as well as being established to address specific problems within a certain community. Groups represent a form of organised action that is able to address a pressing issue while providing a meaningful purpose and a sense of belonging to the members.

Constructivist scholars would concur on regarding groups as hubs where individuals are exposed to a system of beliefs and new concepts which—through continuous culturing,³ use of symbols, images, and practices—they end up internalizing ([Eggen and Kauchak 1999](#); [McInerney 2013](#); [Woolfolk 2010](#)). Vygotsky, one of the main contributors of social constructivism, has greatly theorised about the learning processes of individuals within a group, arguing that individuals learn concepts and construct meanings because of their interaction with other individuals and with their environment ([Vygotsky 1978, 1994](#)).

From a constructivist perspective, groups can shape the social reality the individual perceives by providing him/her with a new lens through which he/she interprets the world. Groups work as structures providing an ensemble of rules, bonds, processes, and means to which the individual is subject, which can limit but also empower his/her actions ([Giddens 1984](#)). Individuals place significant importance on their membership to a specific group as it comes with relevant emotional value ([Tajfel 1972](#), p. 72). Individuals identify themselves with the group to which they belong, as the group usually is able to provide a purpose in life, giving significance to the actions of the individuals as noble actions for a noble cause. Groups often enhance the self-esteem of individuals and play a pivotal role in defining who the person is and for what she/he stands ([Guan and So 2016](#)).

Groups convey meanings through specific frames, i.e., “schemata of interpretation that enable individuals ‘to locate, perceive, identify, and label occurrences within their living space and the world at large’” ([Benford and Snow 2000](#), p. 614). Frames heavily impact the members' interpretation of reality, as well as constructing precise values and priorities. Frames stand as a powerful tool used by the leadership of groups to attract new members and mobilise adherents and strengthen their loyalty. Frames are also employed to identify problems or who or what is to blame and to suggest a viable solution ([Orofino 2020a](#)).

This paper implements these theoretical assumptions using Islamic fundamentalists and Eco-fundamentalists (or radicals) as case studies for this analysis. This paper shows how common frames between the two umbrella organisations (including both non-violent and violent expressions) impact the interpretation of reality for their members and how reality appears to be filtered by three frames, i.e., the enemy to fight, the victims to protect, and the change to achieve.

2.1. Islamists Frames against Modernity

The manifestos of Islamist groups are the first place to identify specific frames against modernity. Non-violent groups like Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT), the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), and Tabligh Jama'at (TJ) all stress the decline of the Muslim world as the product of Western

influence in various areas of life (Ali and Orofino 2018). The dissolution of the Ottoman Caliphate in 1924 (after more than four centuries) is regarded by Islamists as the result of the European colonial presence in the Middle East and the subjugation of the Muslim lands during the 19th and 20th centuries. European-imported “modernity” in the *Dar al-Islam* (Land of Islam, the Muslim world) is regarded as the beginning of the decline of Islam as a *deen* (a way of life). The hostility towards the West as an immoral, materialistic, and individualistic civilisation dates much farther back than the emergence of Islamist terrorism in the early 2000s. These narratives have been circulated since the early 1900s in the Middle East through influential intellectuals, such as Hasan Al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb, and Taquiddin Al-Nabhani.

These three thinkers were impactful activists, forefathers of contemporary Islamic activism, and creators of specific frames that are narrated today almost unaltered. All these three men had experienced oppression by their contemporary political authorities and witnessed the decline of Islam in favour of a modern society based on materialism and seeking physical pleasure (Orofino 2021). The rejection of modernity— as strongly associated with Western influence—worked as a trigger for the creation of specific groups. Two of the most long-living Islamist organisations still active today were established as the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) and Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT). The MB was established in Egypt in 1928, and Al-Banna and Qutb have been the symbols of the organisation over the decades. An-Nabhani founded HT in Palestine in 1953. Both groups were characterised by a difficult relationship with national authorities and the desire to restore the glory of Islam as the only saving grace for which humanity (including non-Muslims) could hope.

The experiences and the convictions of Al-Banna, Qutb, and An-Nabhani led to the construction of specific frames that still work today as the lenses through which Islamists interpret the world. As mentioned above, these frames are: (1) the enemy to fight; (2) the victims to protect; and (3) the change to achieve. The enemy of Al-Qaeda, ISIS, and Boko Haram in recent years is exactly the same as the MB and HT in the early 1900s: the West as a system. As forefathers of Islamist activism (and fundamentalism/extremism), the three intellectuals set the grounds for understanding the West as a monolithic system of oppression (cultural, military, economic) against the Muslims. Islamists are strongly convinced of the existence of a Western agenda to annihilate the Muslims (An-Nabhani 1998), on their will to exploit resources in the *Dar al-Islam*, as well as on the will to force Muslims to adopt a Western version of Islam (Suarez-Murias 2013). For all the reasons mentioned above, Islamists in the early 1900s, as well as contemporary Islamists, are engaged in a continuous fight against the West that can be both vocal (an intellectual war) and physical (jihadi terrorism). However, as discussed, the frames motivating this perpetual fight are the same, regardless of the method used.

Moving onto the second element, the victims that Islamists strive to protect are the *ummah*, i.e., the global community of Muslims all over the world. The dismantlement of the Ottoman Caliphate in 1924, the Muslim diaspora after the occupation of Palestine, and the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 are regarded as the main factors that have caused dangers and insecurity for Muslims around the world. Islamists move from the assumption that the Caliphate was the only system of government based on Islamic law (*shari'a*) and therefore able to protect the morality of the *ummah* and to ensure fairness and accountability through a pious leader, i.e., the *Khalifa* (caliph) (Ataman 2015; Orofino 2015). The consequent advent of political modernisation with the emergence of Western-imposed nation-states stands in the eyes of Islamist groups as a further step towards political decline, moral corruption, and economic subjugation, evident in the following excerpt:

Ideologies do not end by the downfall of the states which embrace them, even if this downfall leads to the break up and fragmentation of the states, rather they terminate when their nations and peoples renounce them and embrace other ideologies and start moulding their lives on their basis. (Hizb ut-Tahrir 1996, p. 5)

This extract from HT's publication *The American Campaign to Suppress Islam* (Hizb ut-Tahrir 1996) is emblematic of the Islamist thinking behind the fall of the Caliphate and the political re-organisation of the Middle East into nation-states, which have fragmented the unity of populations under the banner of Islam and jeopardised the primary role played by Islam as a *deen* by replacing it with new ideological concepts (Western-imported) all relating to capitalism, materialism, and individualism, which are all products of modernity (Iqbal and Zulkifli 2016).

Furthermore, Islamists around the world concur on the fact that the *ummah* is in danger, both in Muslim majority countries as well as in the West. Groups like HT (non-violent) and ISIS (violent) base an important portion of their propaganda on depicting the *ummah* as in a state of perpetual threat where the only way to feel safe is to join the group (Baran 2005). While in the West, Muslims are threatened every day as they are seen as a "suspect community" and therefore victimised and vilified, in the Muslim world—allegedly controlled by corrupt leaders—"true believers" are persecuted and therefore not allowed to practice Islam (Buzan et al. 1998; Orofino 2020b).

The uncertainty and fear disseminated through Islamist discourses around the enemy and the victims lead to the third element of this analysis, i.e., the change to achieve. In a logical line of thought, the enemy (the West as a system) is persecuting the victims (the *ummah*); therefore, something needs to change, and this is a priority. The desired change within Islamist discourses is related to the re-establishment of the Islamic State (Caliphate). Whether they strongly believe the Islamic state in the contemporary world to be a viable political system (HT, ISIS, Boko Haram) or they consider participation in electoral politics as a way to promote Islamic law (Muslim Brotherhood, Jamaat-e-Islami), Islamist groups stress the need for all Muslims to go back to Islamic law in order to purify their hearts and mind from Western *kuffar* (unbelievers) thoughts (Taji-Farouki 1996; Hizb ut-Tahrir Global 2017; Shepard 2003).

The Caliphate is regarded with a romantic outlook by Islamists as it constitutes the (ideal) place where Islam reigns in all spheres of life and where the political and social dimensions do not need to be separated. Whether it should re-emerge as the product of an intellectual revolution (HT) or by means of war and coercion (ISIS, Boko Haram), the Caliphate is still a core frame in the discourses of fundamental Islamists (Ali and Orofino 2018; Rahnema 2008). The Caliphate is regarded by the Islamists as the change for which all Muslims should work to improve their lives and their security and to be on the right path as abiding by divine law.

2.2. Eco-Radical Frames against Modernity

Eco-radical groups (or, more broadly, the radical environmental movement, REM) have far deeper roots than the recent rise of Extinction Rebellion (XR) and Earth First! (EF) on the global scene. Eco-radicals' activities became prominent in the late 1960s with Greenpeace, for decades the icon of the fight against whaling ships and nuclear weapons testers (Seaman 2004). As in the case of Islamists, eco-radicals emerged as a protest-for-justice umbrella group opposing Western modernisation and related concepts (capitalism, materialism, and globalisation) and advocating for the need to reconnect with nature and preserve it (Manes 1991). Also, within this umbrella group, different organisations⁴ co-exist, having different methods but—as in the Islamist case—common frames.

In terms of methods, eco-radicals appear to be leaderless resistance organisations engaged in the defence of Mother Earth through a variety of actions, which include civil disobedience, ecotage, and monkeywrenching.⁵ Besides the prominent XR, iconic eco-radical organisations at present are the Earth Liberation Front (ELF), Earth Liberation Army (ELA), and the Animal Liberation Front (ALF). Given the leaderless nature of these organisations, recruitment and mobilisation campaigns often happen online, through social media, or dedicated websites (Mentes 2019). For instance, XR messages inundate the web, and the official website of the group has a specific section, "campaign", where members and sympathisers can learn more and get organised.⁶ The XR website also has another

section called “digital rebellion”, where they provide guidelines on how to rebel digitally if people cannot join the cause physically.⁷

Users can access several resources—including publications and press releases—that work as evidence for the claims of the group. XR also works as a good example to show how important “self-organisation” is for eco-radicals. As mentioned above, in the absence of structured leadership, organisations promote forms of spontaneous aggregation that are intended to produce specific forms of activism. In the case of XR, their official website provides a comprehensive section on their “self-organised system” (SOS) where users can access information regarding how the group operates and why they chose this particular method:

The XR UK Self-Organising System (SOS) is designed to shift power out of people and into the processes of the system so that no single person has power over another person or the system itself. The system is modular and can be used as individual parts depending on the needs. It is used closer to its entirety by more stable and core teams. ([Extinction Rebellion n.d. b](#), “Self-Organising System”)

As highlighted by the above statement regarding XR SOS on their official website, eco-radicals are very much in favour of light forms of bureaucracy and are strong advocates of spontaneous aggregation mechanisms that will eventuate into collective action. On this subject, the online space works as the best scenario to foster spontaneous aggregation. As discussed above, the actions may vary across various organisations, but the ideological frames are mostly the same across all groups. They all fight against a common multifaceted enemy that is represented by capitalistic societies and their extreme anthropocentrism, implying the superiority of humans above all other nonhuman beings ([Alberro 2020](#)). Anthropocentrism and the non-regulated quest for profits over the last century—together with the industrial and technological revolutions—led to the extreme exploitation of natural resources and nonhuman beings who are considered by eco-radicals as the victims that require protection and advocacy ([Cafaro 2015](#)).

In order to ensure this protection, eco-radicals are determined to dismantle capitalism and anthropocentrism and replace the current emphasis on the exploitation of natural resources with a culture based on renewable energies and sustainable development ([Hernandez 2007](#); [Glasser 2011](#)). As in the case of Islamists, discourses encouraging the desired change are entrenched with apocalypticism focused on the view of an imminent widespread ecological collapse. This vision fosters an urgent sense of action and moral obligation to intervene and join the cause, which is what motivates activists to join the activities of Eco-radical organisations both online and offline ([Cassegård and Thörn 2018](#); [Alberro 2021](#)).

3. Discussion

Frames play a pivotal role in influencing the behaviour of individuals, especially within collective action. The above overview of Islamist and Eco-fundamentalisms has provided useful insights into common frames across multiple ideologies and groups and how these frames impact people’s understanding of the world. Furthermore, it is a fact that modernisation and the connected notions of capitalism, materialism, and anthropocentrism have triggered different reactions around the world and throughout the decades.

In the case of Islamists, the collapse of the Ottoman Caliphate and the restriction of the role of Islam as a mere religion—rather than a *deen* (a way of life)—created important grievances that were heavily associated with Western interference in the Muslim world. Discussions above have elucidated how the economic, political, and cultural alleged subjugation of the *ummah* by the West has been perceived as the result of the modernisation process, which heavily impacted political institutions and economic progress.

The quest for profit, the shift of attention from the spiritual dimension to the material one, as well as the implementation of democracy as a Western-imported concept in the Middle East all worked as elements to enhance the alleged “clash of civilisations” highlighted by Islamist intellectuals decades before Samuel [Huntington \(2000\)](#). More specifically, An-

Nabhani—HT’s founder—conceptualised the incompatibility between Islam and the West in the early 1950s, although the full volume, including his thoughts, was published by the organisation in 2002, *The Inevitability of the Clash of Civilisations*. Thinkers like An-Nabhani see a civilisation (*hadhara*) as a “collection of concepts about life” (Hizb ut-Tahrir 2002, p. 5). These concepts derive from the core set of beliefs that the individuals have adopted and have a major influence on his/her way of interpreting the world. This means that a civilisation determines the kind of frames that are propagated within a certain society and within an organisation. As mentioned above, these frames impact individuals’ priorities in life, their behaviours, and also shape the purpose of their existence.

Therefore, Islamists believe that the main problem with Western civilisation is the fact that it is praising man-made concepts instead of God and also has opposite goals to those of Islam. In fact, while Western societies’ ultimate aims are mostly related to profit and power, a genuine Islamic society should be focused on the afterlife and on works that please God (Ahmed and Stuart 2010). Islamists are convinced that civilisations are either spiritual or man-made, and they clearly identify Islam as the spiritual one and Western civilisation as man-made (Hizb ut-Tahrir 2002).

When we say clash, we mean Muslims and their deen . . . and Christians and their religion and the Capitalists and their civilisation, on the other side. It is a malicious attempt by the leaders and intellectuals of the Capitalist civilisation to differentiate between Islam and its followers, i.e., between Islam and Muslims. So they claim that Islam is great, but Muslims are backward, and some of them are terrorists. They are liars in their view, for if Islam was really great in their view, then they would have embraced it. However, they attempt to delude the naïve from amongst Muslims, attempting to reduce the rancour against them when they strike a Muslim people or when they attempt to spread the concepts of their civilisation among Muslims. (Hizb ut-Tahrir 2002, p. 9)

As highlighted by HT’s extract above, Islamists see a clear separation between Islam and the West, standing as two opposing civilisations that would never come to an agreement as their nature (divine vs man-made) is incompatible. This is a common thought among both non-violent and violent Islamist groups, who would all agree on their role as blessed leaders for a change aimed at restoring the Islamic glory and to fight (intellectually or physically) the *kuffar*. This extract also highlights two core Islamist frames discussed above: the West as the enemy and the *ummah* as the victims. The West is depicted as a corrupted system, made up of liars who aim to jeopardise Muslims’ faith and replace it with their concepts about life. At the same time, Muslims are depicted as *naïve*, and they see it as a priority to raise awareness of Western corruption among the *ummah* so that they do not get deluded.

Although the specificities of the frames are completely different, eco-radicals’ claims mirror the Islamists’ ones as they have the same points to raise against capitalism and Western civilisation, especially after modernisation.

This is our darkest hour . . . the science is clear: we are in the sixth mass extinction event and will face catastrophe if we do not act swiftly and robustly. The wilful complicity displayed by our government has shattered meaningful democracy and cast aside the common interest in favour of short-term gain and private profits. When Government and the law fail to provide any assurance of adequate protection, as well as security for its people’s well-being and the nation’s future, it becomes the right of its citizens to seek redress in order to restore dutiful democracy and to secure the solutions needed to avert catastrophe and protect the future. It becomes not only our right, it becomes our sacred duty to rebel. (Extinction Rebellion n.d. a, “Declaration of Rebellion”)

This extract from XR UK “Declaration of Rebellion” works as an emblematic example of the frames disseminated by eco-radicals and their similarities with the Islamist ones. Although quite short, this extract includes all three relevant frames object of this study:

(1) the enemy; (2) the victims; (3) the change. The enemy is the UK government in this instance; however, when analysing other documents and manifestos of other Eco-radical groups, they blame Western governments in general for the environmental decline we are all experiencing presently.

It is easy to grasp that the European expansion and the various stages of the modernisation process caused some decline, which appears to be quite hard to reverse. The industrial revolutions and the *great acceleration* (the dramatic growth in human activities started in the second half of the 20th century) have altered the human relationship with nature and deeply damaged it (Steffen et al. 2015; Shoshitaishvili 2021). Not only Eco-radicals but also eminent scientists refer to the “epoch of anthropocene” as the present, where human activities have not only increased, but they have had a massive impact on the environment.⁸ The prominence of profit in all policies sponsored by Western governments as well as extreme expressions of capitalism (such as consumer capitalism)⁹ characterising modern society is regarded as the main enemy by Eco-radicals. However, this is exactly the same enemy Islamists are fighting against: both ideologies identify the West as a corrupt system based on an endless quest for profit and the extreme satisfaction of material needs.

XR UK’s extract also pointed out who the *victims* are in their view. Eco-radicals see humankind as both victims and perpetrators: the victims are future generations who will be forced to live in a devastated world moving towards mass extinction. The perpetrators are current and past generations, especially politicians and ruling elites who allegedly “fail to provide any assurance of adequate protection, as well as security for its people’s well-being and the nation’s future”.¹⁰ As in the case of Islamists, eco-radicals portray an apocalyptic setting where the need for action to defend the specific target group is urgent. Furthermore, just like the Islamists, Eco-radical groups present themselves as blessed leaders who are able to drive the victims towards a change. This desired change is also elucidated in XR UK’s Declaration of Rebellion: they aim to “restore dutiful democracy” in order to avoid a catastrophe and safeguard the future (ibid.). Whether it is a sustainable (dutiful) democracy or a Caliphate, both ideologies present an alternative form of government as the best option to avoid the decline that the contemporary world is unavoidably navigating.

4. Conclusions

This study has originally discussed the frames against modernity common among two of the most prominent extremist ideologies today, i.e., Islamism and Eco-radicalism. After focusing on the importance of frames as schemata of interpretation of reality—and therefore core concepts propagated by groups to their members—this study highlighted how, as different as they can be, Islamists and eco-radicals have three core common frames that are the same across all their expressions, i.e., both violent and non-violent forms of extremism.

The three frames explored were the conceptualisation of the enemy, the victims, and the desire for change. This study demonstrated how these three concepts are present in both ideologies and how they clearly define the messages of the groups, their actions, and the behaviours of their members. This study innovatively concludes that although very different in terms of contents, Islamism and eco-radicalism stand as two forms of extremism that emerged as a response against the modernisation process and the shift it implied towards materialism, capitalism, and anthropocentrism. By reading the groups’ manifestos and publications, it becomes evident that both ideologies emerged as a way to counter the Western expansion as well as the unregulated capitalism-based economic progress, which were (and still are) creating different sorts of harm worldwide.

As the Islamists expose Western colonial occupation and the introduction of *kuffar* concepts in the life of Muslims (steering them away from Islam), eco-radicals denounce the misbehaviours of governments and companies who are turning a blind eye to the consequences of their profit-oriented policies. In both cases, the grievances against the Western modern political, economic, and cultural system are what motivates the actions of these groups. As this article showed, more research is needed on this topic, as understanding the narratives of extremist groups across multiple ideologies stands as a key step to building

counter-narratives and creating a middle ground where the clash of civilisations—as well as the simple clash of opinions—can be attenuated.

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Notes

- ¹ This study differentiates between the terms “Islamic” and “Islamism”. While “Islamic” is an adjective that refers to everything related to the religion of Islam, Islamism stands as a powerful encompassing ideology inspiring thoughts, actions and groups all over the world. Emerging as a protest-for-justice ideology claiming freedom against Western colonisation of the Muslim world, Islamism has triggered both individual and collective action worldwide since early 1900s (Mozaffari 2007; Rahnema 2008). This study uses the terms “Islamism” and “Islamic fundamentalism” interchangeably.
- ² Here, Orofino and Allchorn (2022) is made to the forthcoming ground-breaking first Handbook on Non-Violent Extremism, which will be out by the end of 2022.
- ³ The term “culturing” is here intended as the process initiated by an organisation/group to instruct its affiliates on specific values and meanings, making the members familiar with the organisation’s culture (Orofino 2020b, p. 52).
- ⁴ This paper considers the terms “organisation” and “group” as synonyms.
- ⁵ “Civil disobedience” stands as a form of non-violent resistance/peaceful protest against certain laws. “Ecotage” is a form of sabotage carried out for ecological reasons. Named after Edward Abbey’s novel *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (1975), on a group of “environmental warriors” in the USA, “monkeywrenching” is a form of ecotage motivated by preservation of life and is normally restricted to two forms: non-violent disobedience or sabotage not directly endangering others (Moraro 2007).
- ⁶ See Extinction Rebellion. “Campaigns” [Website]: <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/act-now/campaigns/> (accessed on 12 June 2022).
- ⁷ See Extinction Rebellion. “Digital Rebellion” [Website]: <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/act-now/campaigns/digital-rebellion/> (accessed on 11 June 2022).
- ⁸ Among the most prominent researchers on the Anthropocene is Prof Jan Zalasiewicz, a geologist at the University of Leicester and chair of the Working Group on the Anthropocene (WGA), which started work in 2009. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/aug/29/declare-anthropocene-epoch-experts-urge-geological-congress-human-impact-earth> (accessed on 25 June 2022).
- ⁹ Consumer capitalism is intended as the manipulation of consumers to buy a product moved by desire rather than an actual need for it. Consumer capitalism as mass marketing. The beneficiaries of the consumer capitalism are the sellers.
- ¹⁰ See Extinction Rebellion. “Declaration of Rebellion” [Website]: <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/declaration/> (accessed on 12 June 2022).

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