

Conspiracy Theories and the Cultic Milieu of Neo-Nazism

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What is the appeal of neo-Nazism? After all, its political agenda is hostile and radically out of step with the norms of mainstream society, its vision for an alternate type of modern world is racist and extreme, and, perhaps most unappealing of all, even if one sympathises with its core ideas, it is also clear that it is never likely to succeed in the ultimate ambition of installing new states akin to Hitler's Germany. Yet, despite these objections, and many others that can all too easily be identified, small numbers of people continue to develop political organisations, magazines, websites, the White Power music scene, and other types of cultural production and social networks that are steeped in romanticisation of the Nazi era, and call for its return. Many are attracted for easily explicable reasons, such as searching for a sense of community or engaging in youthful rebellion that passes, and do not believe in the movement's core ideas. However, for others, those who do 'believe', what is the allure? Does its evocations on religious themes, and engagement in conspiracy theories help to explain its appeal?

For those 'outside' this radically unconventional milieu and who want to make sense of it, at first it is all too easy to focus on the messages of hatred, the overt racism, and the initially bizarre, counter-intuitive 'histories' of events like the Holocaust and to dismiss such neo-Nazi cultures as wilfully offensive, and driven solely by 'hate'. This is the typical narrative offered by journalists when commenting on neo-Nazism. However, a one-dimensional, condemnatory approach to the topic produces a quite superficial analysis, and probably also says more about a commentator's own strong objections to this type of extremism than it does on the subject matter itself. While of course recognising the often overt, and sometimes quite hysterical and extreme racism found in neo-Nazism, is also vital to understand the underlying appeal of neo-Nazism by developing a more sophisticated analysis of its various cultures needs, and to make sustained effort to penetrate beneath these surface messages of hatred. Exploring the ideational dynamics of the neo-Nazi mind-set

allows for a clearer appreciation of the point that neo-Nazism not a mere psychopathology, but rather the product of healthy minds that use the taboo and the extreme to evoke senses of meaning, including a sense of the higher, and a vision of renewal.

This chapter attempts to offer such an analysis, focusing primarily on developing a history of the similarity and difference found in variants of British and American neo-Nazi culture that developed from around the 1960s to the 1990s. It draws on documents located in a major collection of extreme right material linked to neo-Nazi groups, held at the University of Northampton.¹ Before exploring this material though, it will summarise a trend in fascism studies, analyse of conspiracy theories, and wider reflections on religion, to develop an approach to the topic that allows for interpreting the many neo-Nazi groups that have developed in the post-1945 period as manifesting, collectively, a part of the cultic milieu also explored by others in this volume – albeit an extreme element of it. To help unpick the specifically ‘Nazi’ elements of this milieu, it will explore briefly Hitler’s own ideas. Linking current approaches to conspiracy theories with the current debates in fascism studies, it will also show how neo-Nazism’s understanding of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ is derived from conspiracism, while its discourses in various ways offer followers a sense of mission and a ‘higher’ cause, at times drawing from them religious devotion – which some advocated openly describe as their ‘faith’. It will conclude by arguing that, by developing this way of reading neo-Nazi cultures, those studying this milieu can better understand why its language of conspiracism as well as salvation and redemption are central to its dynamics, an issue that continues into the neo-Nazi cultures of today.

Fascism Studies and the Cultic Milieu

Cultures of fascism have regularly been underpinned by conspiracy theories, used to justify a sense of antagonism with the political and cultural mainstream various fascists have opposed in powerful ways. One recent scholar of fascism, Aristotle Kallis, offers some particularly helpful interventions on the issue of the role that is played by anti-Semitic conspiracism in fascist ideologies and the ways they can be

¹ This collection was created by the anti-fascist organization Searchlight, and is based at the University of Northampton. To find out more, go to: <http://www.northampton.ac.uk/the-searchlight-archives/> [last accessed 15/08/2016].

used to frame a more general rejection of existing political and cultural orthodoxies. In *Fascism and Genocide*, he explains that the justification for many (though far from all) attacks by fascists on its perceived enemies, especially Jewish people, up to and including genocide during the Second World War, have developed as a consequence of such communities becoming seen not merely as scapegoats for negative social issues, but instead being defined as a ‘constituent enemy’, or an existential threat through the lens of a fascist ideology. Through underpinning ideas such as conspiracy narratives, alleged conspirator communities are perceived by fascists as people invested with powers to destroy the idealized national and or racial group that a fascist movement seeks to defend. By developing worldviews where the protagonists of conspiracy theories are deemed existential threats, extreme and even deadly violence suddenly becomes a justifiable response, also framed as a form of self-defence.

As such, Kallis’s exploration of the ways Jewish people become demonized to such extraordinary degrees by fearful fascist rhetoric, especially that of the Nazis, points to the important role played by conspiratorial thinking in such messaging. For fascist, and especially Nazis and neo-Nazis, foundational text epitomizing these themes, include the highly influential *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*, as well as many other derivatives that reproduce the core message claiming a Jewish-led conspiracy represents some form of existential threat to the race or nation. Both Nazism and its followers in neo-Nazi cultures have fostered an ideology with a long history of licensing and endorsing extreme violence to Jewish people, because they are seen as conspiring to destroy the nation and the race and so need to be opposed, with violence if necessary.²

Kallis like other modern scholars of fascism highlights that fascism revolves around the promise of change, purification renewal, not merely hate and a desire to destroy. Increasingly it is recognised this has a religious dimension too. The religious and the revolutionary are related concepts, and not just in fascism studies. For example, reflecting on the nature of religion in the wake of 9/11, Bruce Lincoln’s major book *Holy Terrors* argued powerfully that, while religion certainly can be used as a force for retaining an existing order, evocations of it can also have a powerful

² Aristotle Kallis, *Fascism and Genocide: The Eliminationist Drive in Fascist Europe* (London: Routledge, 2011).

role for those who seek to break down an existing order, and usher in the new.³ As he continues, religious ideas can offer people not merely a sense of change, but a radical new sense of being promising change in the immediate future.

While Lincoln's focus was wider than culture of neo-Nazism, there has been growing interest in the nexus between faith, revolution and hatred among scholars of fascism too. Especially those interested in examining more recent neo-Nazi fascist cultures, Colin Campbell's idea of the cultic milieu has become an important part of the critical language for examining cultures that steep themselves in opposition to mainstream perspectives, and evoke myriad conspiratorial elements to support extreme views. This was provoked in part by Jeffrey Kaplan and Heléne Lööw's edited collection, *The Cultic Milieu: Oppositional Subcultures in an Age of Globalization*,⁴ and the term has subsequently been drawn on by many central figures in fascism studies, such as Roger Griffin.⁵

The idea of the cultic milieu, as developed initially by Campbell, sought to capture the dynamics of alternate cultures, ones radically critical of and opposed to 'mainstream' perspectives, which also offered adherents something 'higher' to believe in. Campbell himself stressed that the cultic milieu was a nebulous, ever-changing phenomenon, filled with varied and contrary ideas, expressing variants of the type of religious experience that were considered 'mystical' according to Ernst Troeltsch's classic breakdown of religious experiences (Campbell 16). The model highlighted how the cultic milieu recirculates and reinterprets a diverse array of oppositional ideals, which come together to create quite vibrant cultural spaces that are genuinely supportive of, and provides a context for, people who radically oppose the political and cultural mainstream. Inevitably, ideas manifest in the heterogeneous cultic milieu are based around themes usually considered taboo; moreover, they are characterized by offering a sense of 'seekership', an eclectic and continuing quest after direct religious experience. Importantly, Campbell also presented the term not merely as pejorative; rather he intended it to lead to a more thoughtful tenor of assessment than simple condemnation when exploring the types of marginalized

³ Bruce Lincoln, *Holy Terrors: Thinking About Religion After September 11* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006) esp. p. 87.

⁴ Jeffrey Kaplan and Heléne Lööw, *The Cultic Milieu: Oppositional Subcultures in an Age of Globalization* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2002).

⁵ Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007).

countercultures that could be identified as constituting the cultic milieu. Given that neo-Nazism is steeped in tropes not only endorsing taboo themes, such as the Nazi police state and genocidal racism, but also regularly combines these with all manner of ontological tropes drawn from pagan, “occult”, Christian and existential thought systems, it is quite easy to see how the cultic milieu concept holds heuristic value for framing analysis of a wide range of neo-Nazi contexts.

The interest in the cultic milieu among scholars of fascism also represents a wider trend within fascism studies to move away from moralistic, judgemental approaches to the topic, and towards foster a more nuanced, sophisticated understanding of the cultural dynamics of those who can be labelled ‘fascist’. This cultural turn, inspired by historians such as George L. Mosse,⁶ has been developed more recently by figures such Mark Antlif,⁷ Matthew Feldman,⁸ and Gregory Maertz,⁹ among others, whose work demonstrates detailed interest in the cultural dynamics of variants of fascism. This cultural turn, which in fascism studies has tended to be built on debates attempting to define ‘generic fascism’, and whose contributors included Roger Eatwell, Stanley Payne, and Michael Mann,¹⁰ have also tended to focus on detailed exploration of some core themes identified by Roger Griffin as crucial to all forms of fascism.

Reflecting concerns developed by Lincon, historians including Emilio Gentile have also commented at length on the way fascisms can offer followers a sense of metaphysical ‘truth’, presented as a political cause, and has promoted the term ‘political religion’ to underline this point.¹¹ As Griffin and others stress, fascism can be seen as a contemporary type of politics that emerges within liberal, plural political spaces, yet fosters, and often aggressively acts upon, a mythology proposing the need for an anti-liberal revolution to redeem and ‘purify’ modern society, in order to save a nation or race from supposed destruction. Griffin’s pithy definition of fascism as

⁶ George L. Mosse, *Nazi Culture: Intellectual, Cultural and Social Life in the Third Reich* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002).

⁷ Mark Antlif, *Avant-Garde Fascism: The Mobilization of Myth, Art, and Culture in France, 1909–1939* (London: Duke University Press, 2007).

⁸ Matthew Feldman, *Ezra Pound’s Fascist Propaganda, 1935–45* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013).

⁹ Gregory Maertz, ‘The Invisible Museum: Unearthing the Lost Modernist Art of the Third Reich’, *Modernism/Modernity* Vol. 15 No. 1, (2008) pp. 63 – 85.

¹⁰ Roger Eatwell, *Fascism: A History* (London: Pimlico, 2003); Stanley Payne, *History of Fascism 1914–45* (London: UCL Press Ltd., 1995); and Michael Mann, *Fascists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

¹¹ Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralisation of Politics in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); Emilio Gentile, *Politics as Religion* (Princeton, NJ: University of Princeton Press, 2005).

‘palingenetic, populist, ultra-nationalism’ summarizes this perspective.¹² While not all scholars of fascism accept this conceptualization,¹³ it has become one prominent approach within fascism studies, and is adopted here as a basis for the term ‘fascism’, as well as the specifically Nazi-inspired variation of fascism focused on here, neo-Nazism.

These debates, arguing that fascist ideology can be seen as somehow ‘for’ something, and that its adherents pursue a visionary new agenda, have also helped to inform fresh questioning regarding the religious claims of many variants of fascism. These approaches have often been infused with borrowings from elements of cultural anthropology and other studies of new religious movements, and include Karla Powe’s interest in alternative religious narratives found in Nazi settings,¹⁴ and Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke’s seminal exploration of the bewildering array of religious and cultic elements found marginalized forms of fascism that have developed since 1945. Goodrick-Clarke in particular emphasized that there is a Manichean quality to such marginalized neo-Nazi cultures that have developed since 1945 that is crucial to their appeal, giving them a moralistic tenor that underpins, and helps to legitimize, radically oppositional stances to modern plural societies.¹⁵ What this reframing of debates around the cultural dynamics of ‘fascist’, ‘Nazi’ and ‘neo-Nazi’ ideology have achieved is a perspective that is now interested in exploring how fascism’s protagonists understand their activism, and how they create alternate, politicized cultural worlds to inhabit.

The growing effort within fascism studies to see neo-Nazi movements through the lens of the cultic milieu, and to recognize its genuine efforts to offer followers a totalized space where politics and religious ideas are fused, chimes with other debates in the study of the cultic milieu and conspiracy theories. A number of figures have claimed that at least some form of conspiracy theory is a near ubiquitous component of cultic milieu, in both its left-wing, spiritual and fascist and neo-Nazi varieties. For example, Michael Barkun’s standout account of conspiracy theories, *A Culture of Conspiracy*, drew on Campbell’s term explicitly and highlighted their central role in the cultic milieu, while also defining conspiracy theories themselves, somewhat

¹² Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Routledge, 1993).

¹³ David Renton, *Fascism: Theory and Practice* (London: Pluto Press, 1999).

¹⁴ Karla Powe, *New Religions and the Nazis* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006).

¹⁵ Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism and the Politics of Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2003).

neatly, as arguments holding three key claims: ‘nothing happens by accident’, ‘nothing is as it seems’, and ‘everything is connected’.¹⁶ Others, including Egil Asprem and Asbjørn Dyrendal, have also reflected on the relationship between conspiracy theories and the cultic milieu. While highlighting the value of Christopher Partridge’s related term ‘occultic milieu’, a modification of Campbell’s own concept, they stress: ‘Conspiracy thinking is... *built into* stigmatized knowledge claims as a standard secondary elaboration’. They go on to explain that conspiracies are central components of the cultic milieu as they offer ways to explain away wider society’s rejection of the deeply held beliefs their followers promote. Asprem and Dyrendal also suggest there is circularity between conspiracy theories both justifying the core ideas of a cultic milieu, and holding value explaining to the dedicated reasons for their marginalized nature, reinforcing the inherent utopianism that characterizes them.¹⁷

Meanwhile, Bradley Franks *et al.* argue that the religious elements found in many conspiracy theories are psychologically akin to beliefs proposed by more established religions. They present conspiracies as both products of the plurality of modernity, and ideas capable of offering a radical alternative. As they continue: ‘cultural conditions of pluralism and secularism are preconditions for the “bricolage” that engenders a CT. But on the other hand specific CTs may attempt to counter such pluralism’.¹⁸ This mixture of recombining ideas and rejecting pluralism is exactly what can be seen with neo-Nazi conspiracy theories. Moreover, the analysis of Franks *et al.* stresses that the lack of a full and complete elaboration of every component of the conspiracy theory requires an element of faith, though this faith does not automatically lead to what they call ‘counter-conspiracy action’. Indeed, it is worth being aware that belief in conspiracy theories can be quite disempowering, and they can suggest that the forces allegedly working against the ‘true’ cause of the cultic milieu are too powerful to be opposed directly – at least in the present.

With these points drawn from the wider literature on the study of fascism, neo-Nazism and conspiracy theories in mind, before exploring some evocative

¹⁶ Michael Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 3 – 4.

¹⁷ Egil Asprem and Asbjørn Dyrendal, ‘Conspiracy Reconsidered: How Surprising and How New is the Confluence of Spirituality and Conspiracy Theory?’, *Journal Of Contemporary Religion* Vol. 30 , No. 3, (2015) pp. 367 – 382, 372.

¹⁸ Bradley Franks, Adrien Bangerter, Martin W. Mauer, ‘Conspiracy Theories as Quasi-Religious Mentality: An Interpretive Account from Cognitive Science, Social Representations Theory, and Frame Theory’, *Frontiers in Psychology* Vol. 4 Article 424 (2013) pp. 1 – 12, 10.

examples of neo-Nazi culture it is useful to distil these into a theoretical description summarizing the relationship between neo-Nazism, the cultic milieu and conspiracism. Presented as no more than an ideal typical abstraction, founded on an engagement with the existing literature, and highlighting the value of interpreting neo-Nazi narratives within the cultic milieu and so generating conspiracy theories as basis explanation for the marginal status of their belief systems, this model can be used to help structure readings of various, diffuse examples of neo-Nazi cultures examined throughout the chapter:

Neo-Nazism: manifestations of the fascist cultic milieu that are primarily and explicitly inspired by the racial ideology of Hitler and the Nazi era (though this may be expressed in coded ways), recalibrated for new political contexts and augmented with new ideas. As with all areas of the cultic milieu, this is a dynamic, ever-changing phenomenon expressed in numerous cultural forms, which diverge over time and in different national contexts. It offers adherents a myriad variations of supposedly esoteric truths ignored by the political mainstream, and it promotes a sense of 'mission' justified by what are seen as 'higher' forces. Inspired by the conspiracism of Nazism itself, neo-Nazi cultures are predicated on a conspiratorial mindset that frames Jewish people as both 'evil' and an existential threat. This can be used to legitimize hatred and violence to Jewish people and others too.¹⁹

As a basis for examining neo-Nazi literature, this model raises some interesting research questions. How do neo-Nazis generate clear narratives dividing the world into simplistic narratives evoking battles between 'good' and 'evil', or rather between Aryans and Jews, in their material? How do they use these to generate a deeply held sense of faith in a marginalized cause, connecting believers with something 'higher'? And how do articulations of these themes differ over time and space?

Such questions can be answered by exploring, comparatively, the cultural products of neo-Nazi groups, especially their magazines, books and other print material – core elements needed to generate a cultic milieu. Of course, this approach is also problematic, and can suggest overly neat interpretations of what are in reality much more messy situations. What people read and even write is not necessarily what

¹⁹ I have developed a fuller ideal typical definition for neo-Nazism elsewhere. See Paul Jackson, *Colin Jordan and Hitler's Neo-Nazi Movement: Hitler's Echo* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), ch. 1.

they think, as noted in the introduction many members of milieu such a group are drawn to such movements for reasons other than its ideas. With this caveat in mind, the model set out above does allow for a focus on developing readings of the cultural production of neo-Nazi contexts, exploring ways in which conspiratorial and cultic elements combine. Neo-Nazi worlds are inherently linked to the Nazi era, and are defined by recalibrating its core ideas for new political and cultural situations. To begin an engagement with these neo-Nazi cultures, it is important to revisit briefly one of their key idols: Adolf Hitler, and the conspiratorial perspective he articulated in Hitler's *Mein Kampf* itself.

Hitler, Mein Kampf and Jews as an existential threat

A sense of the cultic and connecting people with something 'higher' was a much-noted element of Germany's culture in the Nazi era. William Shirer commented on this at events at a Nuremberg rally in 1934, stating they 'had something of the mysticism and religious fervour of an Easter or Christmas mass ... In such an atmosphere no wonder, then, that every word dropped by Hitler seemed like an inspired Word from on high'.²⁰ Connecting individuals within the Third Reich with a faith in a higher cause has been a well-debated aspect among historians of the Third Reich. Hans Maier and Michael Burleigh, among others, have examined the religion-like qualities that Hitler's regime sought to draw out.²¹ Meanwhile, as figures such as Kallis, discussed above, also stress conspiracism combined with a narrative of redemption and purification was central to the Nazi ideological perspective. These components have been of paramount significance for neo-Nazi forms of fascism as well, as by definition these fascists derive their inspiration from the Nazis.

While many figures contributed to the Nazi worldview – from Alfred Rosenberg to Hans F. K. Günther – much Nazi conspiracy theory thinking emanated from the writings of Hitler himself, and again many (though not all) neo-Nazis still regard him as their Führer and a guru figure. Some neo-Nazi cultures even propose the need for an alternate calendar, with each 'new year' beginning on Hitler's birthday, 20 April. (Indeed, at the time of writing in the summer of 2016 we are in

²⁰ William H Shirer, *Berlin Diary: The Journal of a Foreign Correspondent 1934-1941* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1942), pp. 18 – 19.

²¹ Michael Burleigh, *The Third Reich: A New History* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 2000); and Hans Maier (ed.), *Totalitarian and Political Religions. Volume 1: Concepts for the Comparison of Dictatorships* (London: Routledge, 2004).

YF-127.²²) Moreover, *Mein Kampf* offers an important representative case study for briefly examining Nazi thinking on anti-Semitic conspiracism. Hitler's discussion of the alleged Jewish plot to overtake modern Germany was a core feature of his political autobiography; various sections of the book gravitated around interpreting history through a Manichean meta-narrative centred on a conflict between Jews and Aryans, developing over many centuries. It is also worth stressing that the text was written when Hitler's own movement was still quite marginal, and when his organisation was primarily one element in the wider, anti-Semitic, *Volkish* milieu of Weimar Germany, that became particularly anti-Semitic given the ending of the First World War.²³ As the Nazi party grew before taking office, Hitler even distanced himself from the text for a period, as he was fearful it appeared too extreme.

Throughout *Mein Kampf*, Jews are talked about in wholly negative terms, while Hitler's ideas on a Jewish plot militating against the Aryan race was most fully articulated in the section 'Nation and Race'. Here, he tried to explain how Jews had 'never possessed a State with definite territorial Boundary ... and had to be counted among the ranks of the nomads',²⁴ typical of the use of emotive language to style Jews as an existential threat, he also expressly stated they operated merely as 'parasites'.²⁵ Hitler spent some time unpacking an often hazy meta-narrative in which he claimed Jewish people began their infiltration of an Aryan Germany in Roman times, initially taking the role of visiting tradesmen. Gradually, Hitler explained, Jews became more familiar and established, and so settled within villages. Over time, Jews sought to gain ever more power and influence, using their skills with trade and money to buy this from the monarchy and other powerful groups. This eventually led to what Hitler called the 'Court Jew', who was able to influence institutions of power, especially the Habsburg Monarchy. In a period roughly following Frederick the Great (Hitler's timings are not clearly expressed in the text), he then claimed Jews were able to change how people viewed them too. They stopped being seen as 'foreigners', a development that he noted horrified figures such as Goethe. Moreover, with Jews becoming seen as 'German', he continued that 'they were able to fully infiltrate German society, and claim equal rights, allowing for further extension of Jewish

²² James Harting, 'The Hitlerian New Year', at: <http://www.theneworder.org/national-socialism/idea-movement/the-hitlerian-new-year/> [last accessed 15/08/2016].

²³ Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1889 – 1936: Hubris* (London: Allen Lane, 1998) pp. 243 – 245.

²⁴ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (New York, NY: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1941) p. 418.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 419.

influence'. It was around this time – the early nineteenth century – that Hitler believed Jews were able to gain control of international finance capital as its influence grew in the nineteenth century, as well as the modern press, all of which allowed them to dominate the bourgeoisie, who became a tool of ever-growing Jewish power. Hitler claimed that Jews then developed Marxism as a means to control the proletariat. As he continued: 'First he [i.e. Jews] uses the bourgeoisie as the battle ram against the feudal world, then the worker against the bourgeois world', adding that 'he [i.e. Jews] knew how to gain by sneaking the civil rights for himself in the shadow of the bourgeoisie, thus he hopes now that in the worker's fight for his existence, he will find the way towards a leadership of his own'.²⁶

Hitler's meta-narrative was clearly developed as a means to 'reveal' a teleological quality to Jewish interests, claiming their power was ever-growing and would result in the downfall of the German national and the race. Yet, perhaps unsurprisingly, he cited little evidence to 'prove' this argument, it was assertion of a generalised worldview that people were supposed to believe in, not feel had been proved empirically; rhetorically, the entire section on Race and Nation was based on generalities and assertion alone. One of the few pieces of 'evidence' that was cited was, inevitably, *The Protocols of the Leaders Elders of Zion*. Questions regarding its authenticity were discussed, and dismissed, before Hitler then added, revealingly:

It makes no difference from the head of which Jew these disclosures come, but decisive it is that they demonstrate, with a truly horrifying certainty, the nature and the activity of the Jewish people and expose them in their inner connection as well as in their ultimate final aims. But the best criticism applied to them is reality. He who examines the historical development of the past hundred years, from the points of view of this book, will also immediately understand the clamor of the Jewish press. For once this book has become the common property of a people, the Jewish danger is bound to be considered as broken.²⁷

Clearly, imbuing Jews with a powerful, yet hidden, influence, describing their activities as 'having a goal', one that would lead to the destruction of the Aryan race, was central to Hitler's version of an anti-Semitic conspiracy theory. Hitler's readers

²⁶ Ibid., p. 444.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 424.

were not supposed to be convinced through evidence, rather they were supposed to believe, and feel, his own intuitive perspective.

Mein Kampf is an important book for neo-Nazis. It can be found on many 'essential readings' lists in magazines, and is regularly promoted by neo-Nazi bookstores. Though many neo-Nazi activists may not have read it, or merely 'dipped in', the text also acts as a symbol of core piece of 'taboo' literature for a movement that by definition looks to the Nazi period for its core, animating ideas. How have neo-Nazis reconfigured elements of Hitler's own story of hidden Jewish forces, and used them to recalibrate Nazi-inspired movements to more modern circumstances? How have they used such conspiracies to help evoke their own variants of a Nazi cultic milieu?

To answer these questions, what follows will explore primarily British and American neo-Nazi cultures, mainly from the 1960s to the 1990s, part of a wider neo-Nazi cultic milieu. This is a culture that is diffuse and variegated, but that also has had a particularly strong relationship of sharing ideas and a sense of common cause across the Atlantic.²⁸ Like ant nests that on the surface appear as separate entities, yet are connected underground to form 'super colonies', so neo-Nazi cultures develop from a range of discrete groups and organisations yet collectively these foster an interconnected cultic milieu, both specially and temporally. What follows is an effort to map some of these interconnections, and also recognise cultural specificity and difference through time and space too.

The emergence and growth of transnational neo-Nazism and conspiracy theories

There is no straightforward narrative for discussing this topic; the neo-Nazi milieu is inherently variegated and heterogeneous, and its growth and development cannot be simply reduced to a simple 'story'. One evocative activist useful for discussing the roots of this transnational neo-Nazism is Arnold Leese, a figure some American neo-Nazis continue to reference in their literature, and who spawned British neo-Nazi cultures as they developed after 1945.

Opposed to Mosley's British Union of Fascists in the 1930s, Leese developed a rival group called the Imperial Fascist League, which slavishly articulated Nazi-style biological racism and conspiracism. It published a newspaper called *The Fascist*;

²⁸ Paul Jackson and Anton Shekhovtsov (eds.), *The Post-war Anglo-American Far Right* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2014).

issued monthly, this narrated the growth of the Nazi regime through an anti-Semitic conspiracy theory lens.²⁹ For example, when Austria was annexed by the Nazi regime in 1938, it reported that ‘Another country has been freed from Jewish Money Power’, adding Hitler’s timing was excellent: as ‘the Jew Government of Russia was busy eating itself ... the Jew Blum ... had no backing’ and ‘Britain’s Jew Government had no confidence in the British people’s support for a policy of interference in the affairs of Central Europe’.³⁰ Endorsement of Hitler, specifically through a discourse highlighting his ability to outsmart the alleged conspiracy by Jews, combined with the belief that the British government too is controlled by the same forces both shine through in such statements. After serving time in prison during the Second World War for his politics, after 1945 it was Leese, not Mosley, who acted as a father figure to a new generation of emergent neo-Nazis in Britain. His book from 1945, influential among a new generation, *The Jewish War of Survival*,³¹ claimed that Jews had both started and even won the war, and that their position was enhanced by Germany’s defeat and the nature of the peace.

Leese went on to influence many figures within a tiny Nazi-inspired cultic milieu that continued into post-1945 Britain, one that was fully supportive of the Nazi regime and its attitudes towards Jewish people. One of the new generation of activists Leese inspired was Colin Jordan, who became a lifelong proponent of neo-Nazism in Britain, from the 1950s to his death in the 2000s. In 1955, Leese helped to finance publication of Jordan’s first book, *Fraudulent Conversion*, which explained how two competing elements of a Jewish plot to control the world were working in competition with each other. Here, Jordan described how Communist Jews, based in the Soviet Union, were set against the Zionist Jews, whose new homeland was Israel but whose influence was especially strong in America, as well as Britain.³² Jordan was part of a group of British activists who also included John Tyndall, leader of the National Front in the 1970s and founder of the British National Party in 1982, who learned their politics within the conspiratorial world of Leese. By 1960, both were active in another party founded that year, the British National Party, which had a small following

²⁹ Richard Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain: From Oswald Mosley’s Blackshirts to the National Front* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998) pp. ; and Thomas Linehan, *British Fascism, 1918–39: Parties, Ideology and Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

³⁰ *The Fascist*, April 1938, p. 1.

³¹ Arnold Leese, *Jewish War of Survival* (Privately Published: Guilford, 1945).

³² Colin Jordan, *Fraudulent Conversion: The Myth of Moscow’s Change of Heart* (London: Britons Publishing Society, 1955).

numbering in the hundreds, whose aims included ‘Liberation of Britain from the Coloured Invasion and Jewish Domination’.³³ Conspiratorial anti-Semitism was central to this group led by a younger generation of British neo-Nazis. In 1961, its magazine, *Combat*, produced a supplement on the Eichmann trial, largely written by Jordan, which was one of the first in Britain to engage in overt Holocaust denial themes, such as claiming that six million Jews were not killed and this was mere propaganda created by Jewish interests to increase their influence after 1945, and even that it was Jews who actually wanted to exterminate Germans.³⁴ As well as a lead author for this piece, Jordan also penned articles with self-explanatory titles, including ‘Jewish Economic Conquest’,³⁵ as well as another offering staunch defence of Rudolf Hess.³⁶ The feature underscored the ways the British National Party used the trope of conspiring Jews to frame its politics as radically opposed to mainstream perspectives, while elsewhere it evoked ideas of purification and renewal.

As well as clear endorsements of a Nazi-inspired anti-Jewish conspiracy theory mentality, Jordan’s articles in *Combat* also articulated the vision of an alternate, purified future, once the imagined conspiracy had been overthrown. It idealised what it called ‘racial nationalism’, and proposed the need for a new ‘Folk State’,³⁷ to replace the democratic order deemed ‘a pernicious fraud’, and that ‘represents the will and interests of factions dominated by Jews’. According to these features, ‘by freeing Britain from alien influence ... a Racial Nationalist government will vastly increase real government for Britons’.³⁸ Removing the alleged conspirators would allow for a new era to emerge.

As part of its activism, the BNP interacted with groups abroad too, at camps run by a sister group called the Northern European Ring. In these settings, its evocations of the cultic milieu found stronger expression. One such camp in 1961, organised by Jordan, attracted a handful of likeminded delegates from Europe and America. *Combat* revelled in reporting that the event was met with a hostile press reaction highlighting its taboo nature,³⁹ while the camp itself saw those gathered

³³ ‘A Policy for Race and Nation’, *Combat*, No. 7 July - August 1960, p. 3.

³⁴ *Combat*, No. 10 January - February 1961, pp. 3 - 6.

³⁵ Colin Jordan, ‘Jewish Economic Conquest (Part 1)’, *Combat*, No. 6, May/June 1960, p. 6.

³⁶ Colin Jordan, ‘Rudolf Hess: Prisoner of Peace, 1941–1961’, *Combat*, No. 14, November/December 1961, p. 4.

³⁷ Colin Jordan, ‘3. Nation Above Class’, *Combat*, No. 11, March/April 1961, p. 6.

³⁸ ‘Colin Jordan, ‘4. Strong Elective Government’, *Combat*, No. 11, March/April 1961, p. 6.

³⁹ ‘Combat delegated barred from Northern European Camp’ *Combat*, No. 12, May /July 1961, p.5.

engage in political rituals as an expression of their worldview. A flag with a Sunwheel emblem was raised at 9.30 am and lowered at 9.30 pm, and later a wooden Sunwheel cross was burned. Delegates wore Nazi-inspired uniforms too. Shortly after this camp, Jordan developed another Nazi-inspired feature, a uniformed, paramilitary elite unit within the BNP called Spearhead. Steeped in neo-Nazi conspiracism, and with taboo symbols and styles drawn from the Nazi era, the 1960s incarnation of the BNP, which closed with the formation of the National Front in 1967, represented a step change in the neo-Nazi cultic milieu in early 1960s Britain.

Variants of this culture were increasingly extreme too, albeit highly marginalised as well. By 1962, Jordan and Tyndall had broken away from the BNP and formed their own, even more uncompromising organisation, called simply the National Socialist Movement. Symbolically, it was formally launched on 20 April, Hitler's birthday. An essay by Jordan in its magazine *The National Socialist* explained the purpose of the NSM was to keep faith in Hitler's leadership that appeared to be all but destroyed:

In Britain – Britain of all places – the light which Hitler lit is burning, burning brighter, shining out across waters, across the mountains, across the frontiers. National Socialism is back.⁴⁰

Steeped in such language mythologizing the Nazi past, during the lifetime of the National Socialist Movement, Jordan regularly called his ideals a type of faith, a 'creed'. In one interview, when asked if he was religious, he explained: 'Yes I am, but not a Christian. National Socialism itself is a faith'. When asked if Jesus was a Jew, he added 'Some say he was and some say he wasn't'.⁴¹ The latter was a guarded response, as by the mid 1960s, material produced by the NSM was very specific in how its followers should view Christianity. The NSM claimed that Christianity was itself part of the Jewish efforts to dominate the modern world, and so terms like 'Christmas' should be rejected in favour of terms with an authentic Nordic heritage, such as 'Yuletide'. Unsurprisingly, figures such as Nietzsche were talked about in NSM material and events too, his ideas seen as a corrective to the influence of

⁴⁰ *The National Socialist* no. 1, 1962, p. 8.

⁴¹ Colin Jordan, leader of the National Socialist Movement, talks to the Levinson Brothers', *Bedales Chronicle*, Vol. 50, No. 2, Spring 1966, pp. 8 – 11.

Christianity and an effort to reclaim forgotten Nordic roots. This sort of material should not be dismissed either, it underscored the sustained efforts by the NSM to generate what it saw as an authentic, alternative to mainstream religiosity, faith underpinning its radicalism.

Like the BNP, Jordan's NSM ran a summer camp, in 1962, and again attracted international delegates. This time they included George Lincoln Rockwell of the American Nazi Party. From the end of the 1950s, Rockwell too had become fascinated with the Nazi era, had developed links with Nazis elsewhere in Europe such as Jordan and Bruno Lüdke in Germany, and was interested in creating an international movement to promote neo-Nazi themes.⁴² His American Nazi Party was again a small-scale organisation, attracting hundreds, not tens of thousands, of supporters. At the summer camp in 1962, he, Jordan and Tyndall launched a new organisation for spreading neo-Nazism across the globe, the World Union of National Socialists, with Jordan and Rockwell becoming its leaders. After Jordan went to prison at the end of 1962, Rockwell took charge of this small-scale, transnational neo-Nazi network.

Like Jordan, Rockwell conceived of his neo-Nazism in religious terms, a theme that can be found in his book setting out many of his beliefs, *White Power*. Statements here, presenting Hitler as a 'saviour' figure, evoke the cultic tenor:

The doctrine of Adolf Hitler was the political salvation of our times, and Adolf Hitler himself the rescuer sent recurrently to a collapsing humanity by an inscrutable Providence. Hitler's and Germany's "crucifixion" was all according to the inevitable workings of this unknowable Scenarist.⁴³

Chapters in the book were typical of the ultimate aims and aspirations of the American Nazi Party and its associated organisations such as the WUNS. One was titled 'Spiritual Syphilis', and argued that America was suffering from a 'SPIRITUAL failing, a DISEASE of the spirit', and needed to become 'spiritually healthy' once more; grounding such statements with references to Oswald Spengler, whose cyclical theory of history was highly influential to Nazis. Another chapter, titled 'White

⁴² For an overview of Rockwell, see: Frederick J. Simonelli, *American Fuehrer: George Lincoln Rockwell and the American Nazi Party* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999).

⁴³ This book is now widely available online, including <http://solargeneral.org/wp-content/uploads/library/white-power-george-lincoln-rockwell.pdf> [last accessed 15/08/2016].

Revolution’, endorsed Hitler’s analysis of Jewish power, claimed America was suffering from a ‘Black Revolution’, and called for a ‘WHITE REVOLUTION’ to overthrow this influence. (Rockwell was a fan of using capital letters to emphasise his points.) Rockwell himself was shot in 1967, helping secure his place as a martyr for the neo-Nazi cause. Shortly before his death, he changed the name of his party to the National Socialist White People’s Party to help it conform to standard naming practice for WUNS affiliated groups.

The WUNS itself grew into a small but on-going network of micro groups of neo-Nazis in Europe, with active groups in France, Belgium, Germany, Ireland as well as Britain. It was also active in North America, including the USA and Canada, and South America, including Chile and Argentina. The literature of the World Union of National Socialists regularly evoked tropes of fighting against a Jewish conspiracy, as well as providing followers with access to an alternative worldview, again steeped in a sense of spiritual salvation. Here the message was combined with a vision for a new world order of neo-Nazi states. In a programme for the network, it promised the WUNS would be able to ‘lift man out of his present unhappy selfishness and into the radiance of self-sacrificing idealism’. Hitler himself was described as ‘the gift of inscrutable Providence’, and his ‘blazing spirit’ would allow a new order to arise, ‘like the early Christians’. The religious themes are evoked in such statements to liken the neo-Nazi faithful to other types of religious pioneers. Meanwhile, following Hitler among others, Marxism too was described as a religion created by Jewish interests to promote selfishness, while ‘Jewish manipulations’ meant supposed democracies were actually ‘rotted to the core with corruption’ and ‘weakness’. Once again, the message that National Socialism was supposed to offer personal, national and racial redemption was perfectly clear, combined with the theme of the modern era defined through the lens of a war of religions between National Socialism and Marxism.⁴⁴

As it developed, the WUNS network tried to influence its core supporters through a quasi-academic journal as well, *National Socialist World*, edited by William Pierce. It features various articles once again evocative of the cultic milieu of neo-Nazism, including an essay by another central figure, Savitri Devi,⁴⁵ called ‘The Lightning and The Sun’, which typified her idiosyncratic bricolage of Nazi and

⁴⁴ ‘Program of the World Union of National Socialists’, Searchlight Archive, SCH/01/Res/INT/01/001.

⁴⁵ Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Hitler’s Priestess: Savitri Devi, the Hindu-Aryan Myth, and Neo-Nazism* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

Hindu themes. Showing its relevance to confronting a supposed Jewish plot, after explaining the importance of her esoteric approach Pierce's editorial described the essay as 'an important step towards eventually smashing the Jewish blackout.'⁴⁶ Other editions of the journal included essays on the Nazi era German youth movement, discussion on the 25 Points of the Nazi Party Programme, and an essay by Rockwell's successor as leader of the National Socialist White People's Party, Matt Koehl, titled 'Adolf Hitler: German Nationalist or Aryan Racist?'⁴⁷ After Rockwell's death, the WUNS dwindled, while in Britain another of its leading figures, Jordan, decided to rebrand his activism, and drop open associations with Nazism, a core requirement of membership of the WUNS.

By the end of the 1960s, Rockwell and Jordan had helped to foster a new neo-Nazi movement, with global ambitions and at least some degree of genuine transnational interchange. Both figures promoted not only Nazi-influenced anti-Semitic conspiracism, claiming Jews were involved in a plot that linked global capitalism with Marxism to destroy the Aryan race, but they also drew out elements of the cultic milieu in their activism, conceiving National Socialism in mythic and religious terms, Hitler as their redeemer figure. Faith in the movement included belief that the future would see a new world order emerge, a narrative of redemption. Jordan would continue as an overt neo-Nazi later in life, prompting such ideals again in a clandestine magazine called *Gothic Ripples* from the end of the 1970s to the 2000s, while Rockwell's own legacy was to help inspire the activism of a new generation of life-long National Socialists in America. What was the legacy of this rekindled neo-Nazi cultic milieu of the 1960s?

Anti-Semitic Conspiracism and the cultic milieu in American Neo-Nazism since the 1960s

By the 1970s, the new generation of Nazi-inspired activists in America were making their mark, and between then and now a bewildering array of Nazi-inspired groups have emerged in the USA alone. Some developed quite idiosyncratic reinterpretations of Nazi themes, such as Ben Klassen's World Church of the Creator, a movement for

⁴⁶ William Pierce, 'Editorial', *National Socialist World*, Vol. 1 pp. 3 – 4.

⁴⁷ Matt Koehl, 'Adolf Hitler: German Nationalist or Aryan Racist', *National Socialist World* vol. 4 pp. 13 – 23.

which Klassen authored a founding text called *White Man's Bible*.⁴⁸ Others more closely linked to the legacy of Rockwell tried to combine an idealisation of Hitler with their own recombinations of faith in the cause, and extreme conspiracy theory views. A standout example of such a group is William Pierce's National Alliance, a group whose neo-Nazism combined a novel faith, Cosmotheism, with more traditional themes of conspiracism and idealisation of Hitler. Pierce became one of the leading US neo-Nazi groups from the 1970s to the early 2000s, yet his organisation has dwindled since his death in 2002.⁴⁹ The group began life in 1968, as an organisation called National Youth Alliance, created by Willis Carto of the Liberty Lobby. By 1970, the National Youth Alliance was fragmenting, meanwhile Pierce left Koehl's NSWPP, and emerged as a prominent member of NYA. By 1974, he was its leader, and simplified its name to National Alliance. His idealisation of a revolution overthrowing an alleged Jewish conspiracy was most fully articulated in fiction, especially in *The Turner Diaries*.

The organisation published a tabloid, called *Attack!*, which later changed its name to *National Vanguard*, in 1978, which regularly discussed conspiracy ideas. One early *Attack!* article, 'The Nature of the Beast', focused on explaining how Jews controlled 'the Establishment', especially through the power of the media – echoing *Mein Kampf*. It also sought to defend Hitler, and argued that Jewish interests forced America to enter into war with Germany in 1941, while more recently Jewish interests in the media demonised anti-Israeli groups in the Middle East region, calling them 'terrorists', to influence American attitudes. Moreover, it explained that, while Jews did not dominate all institutions of the government, they controlled them through Jewish-owned newspapers. For example:

The slanted news in one day's printing of the Washington Post or the New York Times carries more weight than all the memoranda ever issued by all the generals in the Pentagon. Needless to say, both these papers are in the hands of Jewish families.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ George Michael, 'RAHOWA! A History of the World Church of the Creator', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (2006), pp. 561-583.

⁴⁹ For more on the National Alliance, see: Martin Durham, 'The upward path: palingenesis, political religion and the national alliance', *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, Vol. 5 No. 3 (2004), pp. 454 – 468.

⁵⁰ 'Death to the Beast', *Attack!*, No.2, 1970.

These ambiguities as to how Jews were supposed to control events are worth noting, they certainly recognise there were limiters to Jewish power, useful for explaining away times when events cut against alleged Jewish interests. Another *Attack!* article, from 1972, implored readers to ‘clear away the smokescreens and lies’, and ‘take upon himself the responsibility of fully informing himself’. It ended with a short reading lists of worthy texts to achieve this goal, including Dietrich Eckart’s *Bolshevism from Moses to Lenin*, Werner Sombart’s *The Jews and Modern Capitalism* and A. K. Chesterton’s *The New Unhappy Lords* – all notorious books articulating conspiratorial anti-Semitism.⁵¹

Other conspiratorial tropes were clear too. By the end of the 1970s, National Alliance material was also promoting what had become standard neo-Nazi themes, including Holocaust denial. One article from 1979 in *National Vanguard* reflected on Helmut Diwald’s revisionist *History of the Germans*, a text much liked by other deniers such as David Irving as it claims numbers killed were much lower than six million, and that extermination was a policy that emerged ‘from below’ not from Hitler. The article also discussed positively the plight of French denier Robert Faurisson, before concluding it was the hidden aim of Jews to make America feel guilty for not preventing genocide: ‘The Jews want *both* sympathy and support as a persecuted minority *and* continued influence and privilege as a powerful elite. They cannot have it both ways forever’, and concluded the strategy would eventually backfire and ‘erupt against the Jews’.⁵²

Conspiracism combined with evocations of a higher truth defining the direction of the National Alliance. Pierce overtly promoted a metaphysical framework too. His essay from 1977, ‘The Path’, now deemed a classic expression of his Cosmotheism, remains heralded by the current generation of the National Alliance as revelatory⁵³ – a less well remembered element of Piece’s influence. Some of its opening lines convey the redemptive tenor of this element of the National Alliance’s worldview:

⁵¹ ‘The Jewish Problem’, *Attack!*, No. 16, 1972.

⁵² “‘Holocaust’ Claims Exposed as Lies’, *National Vanguard* no. 69, 1979.

⁵³ For a more recent National Alliance discussion on ‘The Path’ see: <http://nationalvanguard.org/2015/02/cosmotheism-the-path-updated/> [last accessed: 15/08/2016].

We show you the meaning and the purpose of things. We lead you from confusion and uncertainty to knowledge; from weakness to strength; from frustrated desire to fulfillment.

We lead you to the Path of Life. We bring your souls into harmony, with the Spirit of All Things.

We give you the Truth, which is this: There is but one Reality, and that Reality is the Whole. It is the Creator, the Self-Created.

The text was often ambiguously and poetically worded, but essentially proposed the existence of a 'Divine Creator' who mankind either served as a 'sub-man', ignorant of this higher purpose, or as a 'sighted man' possessing 'Divine Consciousness'. For those who attained this higher state, their life could continue after death, becoming part of a 'Community of Divine Consciousness'. As 'The Path' concluded:

Enter now into the Cosmotheist Community. Partake of our joyful certainty that the Creator's Purpose will be fulfilled. Lay with us the foundations for the new order of things, which will rise in the place of the old ... Strive with us toward membership in the Community of the Awakened.⁵⁴

For the committed, the National Alliance offered more than an explanation of why the movement remained marginalised, as a consequence of the conspiring forces its literature often decried; it also offered an alternate way of being for those who wanted to follow Pierce's Path.

Pierce certainly was not the only figure to promote this type of ontological component as part of a neo-Nazi agenda. Another figure to move through the American Nazi Party, and then develop his own movement, was James K. Warner. A founding member of the ANP, Warner was then active in the National States Rights Party for a time in the mid 1960s. After this, he became influenced by the ideas of Wesley Swift, an early Christian Identity ideologue, and founded his New Christian Crusade Church in 1970. This was one of many variants of the nebulous Christian

⁵⁴ The full text of Pierce's essay 'The Path', alongside two more with made up the 'Cosmotheist Trilogy' are available here: <http://nationalvanguard.org/2015/02/cosmotheism-the-path-updated/> [last accessed: 15/08/2016].

Identity philosophy that emerged in post-war America, and which is usually sympathetic to Nazi ideas.⁵⁵ Its various incarnations from the 1950s onwards have fused an esoteric variant of Christianity, British Israelism, with anti-Semitic and racist themes to promote the idea of Aryan supremacy.⁵⁶ Believers in the faith tend to think that only white people are descendants from Adam and Eve, while other racial groups are supposedly descended from pre-Adamic people. Hitler is heroised as one of those who celebrated the white race, and fought for its defence.

During the 1970s, Warner's New Christian Crusade Church published a regular newspaper, *Christian Vanguard*, articulating some quite typical themes synthesising anti-Semitic conspiracism and the cultic milieu of neo-Nazism. Given the movement views Jewish people as racially sub-human, this included discussion on the need to reclaim Jesus from a false Jewish identity. One article from 1976 and titled 'Jesus Was Not Jew' was unequivocal: 'it is about time that the Christian people awaken to the fact that they have been brain washed by the Jews ... to the falsehood that Jesus was a Jew.' Specific, theological justification was used to explain why Jews were racially inferior too, 'NO RACIAL JEW IS AN ISRAELITE ... The Bible itself identifies the Jews as the seed of Cain thereby identifying Satan as their father'. Aside from placing Jews as descendants of the devil, an image accompanied the feature describing how most artistic representations of Jesus made him look Jewish, all apparently part of a Jewish 'big lie' technique to dupe gullible Christians.⁵⁷ The newspaper was steeped in a discourse fusing its religiosity with its conspiracism.

Another edition of the newspaper epitomised the existential threat deemed to be posed: it featured an editorial called 'This Time The World', again stressing that Zionism and Communism were two international movement that were controlled by Jews 'to set up a one-world order run by them alone'. It continued that Jews had the upper hand as they operated internationally, while patriots opposing them had tended to fight their battles only on a national level. It called for greater international unity and cooperation between white patriots across the globe to combat the alleged growth on Jewish power.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Chip Berlet, 'Christian identity: the apocalyptic style, political religion, palingenesis and neo-fascism', *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, Vol. 5 No.3 (2004), pp. 469 – 506.

⁵⁶ Michael Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right: The Origins of the Christian Identity Movement* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

⁵⁷ Rev. Oren F. Poriro 'Jesus Was Not A Jew', *Christian Vanguard*, No. 49, January 1976, p. 1.

⁵⁸ 'This Time The World', *Christian Vanguard*, No. 36, November 1974, p. 2.

Warner's New Christian Crusade Church epitomises the much wider and more complex phenomenon of Christian Identity, explored by a number of specialist studies. Since the 1970s, it has grown into a movement with membership numbers fluctuating between 25,000 and 50,000, according to the Anti-Defamation League.⁵⁹ It was Richard Butler who created the Christian Identity movement's most notorious organisation, Aryan Nations, in 1977 at a base in Hayden Lake, Idaho. This was a group that combined various neo-Nazi themes in its activities and has attracted the attention of many central American neo-Nazis, including Tom Metzger, Don Black, and David Lane – another figure epitomising the combination of anti-Semitic conspiracism and the promotion of the cultic elements within neo-Nazi cultures.

In the 1970s and early 1980s, Lane drifted through various extreme right organisations, including the John Birch Society and the Ku Klux Klan, as well as the Christian Identity movement, becoming its Colorado State Organiser by the early 1980s. His endorsement of Nazi themes is clear, for example he has claimed that *Mein Kampf* was required reading. Along with other standout members such as Robert Matthews, Lane then helped to found the terrorist group the *Brüder Schweigen*, or Silent Brotherhood, in 1983. A year later, one member of the group murdered the Jewish radio talk show host Alan Berg, while other activities included carrying out a string of robberies, with funds gained being distributed to other neo-Nazi inspired groups, including Pierce's National Alliance. Matthews was killed in a shootout, and has since become another neo-Nazi martyr figure. For his part in the group, Lane was sentenced to 190 years in prison and died in 2007. During his time in prison, he developed a series of writings, again typifying the combination of anti-Semitic conspiracism and an engagement with religious themes.

In particular, he created his own alternate religious system, an 'Aryanised' type of paganism that he called Wotanism, though it was also influenced by some Biblical texts.⁶⁰ This drew on the ideas of Carl Jung, such as his 1936 essay 'Wotan', though the term Wotan for Lane stood for 'Will Of The Aryan People'. He promoted Wotanism through a newsletter he was able to publish from prison, *Focus Fourteen* as well as a printing press he created with his wife and Ron McVan, 14 Words Press, based in Idaho, and became an ideologue who developed an impressive level of

⁵⁹ Anti-Defamation League, 'Christian Identity', http://archive.adl.org/learn/ext_us/christian_identity.html [last accessed 15/08/2016].

⁶⁰ George Michael, 'David Lane and the Fourteen Words', *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, Vol. 10 No. 1 (2009), pp. 43 – 61.

international recognition. His ideas were crystalized in a notorious slogan, ‘The 14 Words’ (‘We must secure the existence of our people and a future for White children’), which he coined as a summary of an 88-word piece of text found in chapter eight of *Mein Kampf*. The numbers 14 and 88 are important neo-Nazi codes, the latter also standing for ‘Heil Hitler’. Though primarily used as slogans, they can have a more overtly religious meaning for those more familiar with Lane’s ideas. Lane also wrote an essay called the ‘88 Precepts’, styled as the basic principles of Wotanism. Given his background in the Christian Identity movement, it is also interesting to see Lane has an ambivalent attitude to the Bible, while primarily promoting a variant of paganism. For him, the ‘Wotan is the best blended representation of Allfather, the Creative force, and folkish needs for the White race today. Wotan awakens our racial soul and genetic memory. He stirs our blood.’⁶¹ Lane wanted to talk to those interested in Christian Identity, and draw them to his own worldview.

To achieve this, his Wotanism saw value in parts of the Bible. In another essay he clarified a key distinction: ‘In my opinion there is a way to use the Old Testament within a White racial religion ... but the New Testament is racial suicide’.⁶² In essence, he used the King James edition to explore what he felt was a prophesy, the Pyramid Prophecy, found in the Bible. Again he the numbers 14 and 88 were crucial to uncovering a secret message, while the words ‘Jesus’ and ‘Jesus Christ’ were mere code terms according to Lane. The Pyramid Prophecy was also important as it offered further confirmation of his alternative religious beliefs. The trope of anti-Semitic conspiracism was also crucial for Lane; another of his central texts, the ‘White Genocide Manifesto’, argued over 14 points that white people were under threat from Jews, a claim summarised in point seven as follows: ‘all Western nations are ruled by a Zionist conspiracy to mix, overrun and exterminate the White race’.⁶³ Here too the combination of faith and conspiracism is clear.

Lane, Warner and Pierce represent some of the leading neo-Nazi figures in America, each influenced by the American Nazi Party of the 1960s, and the legacy of Rockwell. In different ways, each combined anti-Semitic conspiracism with the cultivation of the Nazi-inspired religion that claimed to offer a connection to a higher

⁶¹ David Lane, *Damned, Deceived and Defiant: The Revolutionary Writings of David Lane* (St. Maries ID: 14 Words Press, 1999), p. 89

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 401.

⁶³ *Ibid.* p. 4.

truth. They have also sought an international impact, including on British neo-Nazism. How have British contexts, discussed earlier, responded to the development of such trends from the 1970s?

Anti-Semitic Conspiracism and the cultic milieu in British Neo-Nazism since the 1960s

Building on the energies of figures like Jordan in the 1960s, many British activists between the 1960s and the 1990s developed their own variants of anti-Semitic conspiracism. Their environment was quite different to America's, while the US scene had a continued impact on British neo-Nazism. In the UK, the National Front was founded in 1967 and, in part as a result of the Race Relations Acts of 1965 and 1968, decided to present itself as a mass movement, and so limited its overt neo-Nazi profile. Nevertheless, two of its Chairmen between 1967 and 1979, A. K. Chesterton and John Tyndall, were both relatively overt in their promotion of conspiratorial anti-Semitism, though denied overt links to Nazism itself that anti-fascists of the period often identified. Even Colin Jordan's British Movement tried to eschew a neo-Nazi identity in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Nevertheless, the trend of neo-Nazi organisations cultivating a cultic idiom steeped in anti-Semitism and idealisation of the Nazi regime can be seen in many of the smaller, fringe groups that emerged.

Examples of these smaller outfits included the National Socialist Group, active from 1968 to early 1969. Run by David Courtney and influenced by Jordan, it tried to offer activists a National Socialist culture as well as politics. Here, activists engaged in ritualised politics, including signing orders in their own blood, engaging in Nazi-influenced parades in their back garden, and idealising the life of Hitler.⁶⁴ The group soon ceased activity when the security services became concerned about its attempts to develop paramilitary training activities. Its first 'Directive' document noted that it was Year of the Führer 79, and explained that 'We, the executive of the N.S.G., believe that the creed of National Socialism must be upheld and developed', and quoted a passage from *Mein Kampf*.⁶⁵ Some activists within the NSG who wanted to continue their activism then joined another clandestine, neo-Nazi group of 1970s Britain, Column 88. By the mid 1970s, Column 88 was engaged in both aggressive acts and pagan-influenced rituals, including one at Stonehenge on Hitler's birthday in

⁶⁴ Paul Jackson and Daniel Jones, Forthcoming

⁶⁵ *NSG Directive* no. 1, 1968, p. 1.

1974.⁶⁶ Another clandestine neo-Nazi group that developed in 1970s Britain was the League of St George. Telling of on-going Anglo-American linkages, Edward R. Fields, leader of the American neo-Nazi group the National States Rights Party, came to London to address one of their meetings in 1975.⁶⁷ Meanwhile, its publication *League Review* could be positive towards other elements of the neo-Nazi milieu in America. For example, on Warner's *Christian Vanguard* it noted:

The *Christian Vanguard* ... serves as an organ for the Identity Movement, the Movement which exposes the Jews as the children of Satan and proclaims the White Race to be true Israel. The *C.V.* offers an answer to the Judeo-Masonic 'social gospel' spewed forth by the modern churches and opposes the Jews ... the real credit for the Vanguard's excellent quality is Dr. James K. Warner.⁶⁸

Clearly, America's culture of neo-Nazism, fusing reinterpretations of neo-Nazism with a 'higher' ostensibly Christian cause, found an audience among Britain's clandestine neo-Nazis of the 1970s.

By the early 1980s, Britain's extreme right milieu became more fragmented once again, as the National Front split into various factions following failure to 'break through' in the 1979 General Election. Then, in 1982, Tyndall founded a new British National Party. As it broke into various offshoots, some elements of the National Front during the 1980s veered into developing a cultic expression of their beliefs combined with Nazi-style anti-Semitic conspiracism. This included a faction led by Nick Griffin, Patrick Harrington and Derek Holland that fetishized what it called the Political Soldier, an idealised spiritual warrior willing to fight for the preservation of the white race. Here the references were more overtly European. In particular, the concept was steeped in references to figures such as the interwar Romanian fascist Corneliu Codreanu, and the ideas of the Italian philosopher and fascist sympathiser, Julius Evola, whose thoughts on modern man needing to rediscover 'Tradition' have also been utilised by far right terrorism in Italy in the 1970s. Overt Nazi influences were less clear though.

Holland wrote a manifesto for the tiny Political Soldier movement in 1984, which again underscored the way it promoted a variant of the neo-Nazi cultic milieu.

⁶⁶ 'Column 88', *Searchlight* May 1975, pp. 3 - 6

⁶⁷ 'Dr. Fields I Presume', *Searchlight* July 1975

⁶⁸ 'What Their papers Say', *Searchlight* No. 30, pp. 14 - 16.

This explained ‘the Political Soldier must undergo a Spiritual Revolution, an inner revolution which guides, directs and pervades his life’, necessary to bring about the new way of being that would be able to usher in the new order. It described those they opposed as follows: ‘The ranks of our enemies are immense: the banks, the Communists, the Freemasons, the Zionists, the Capitalists’. The closing passages of Holland’s booklet also clarified it offered a ‘spiritually motivated world view’. While anti-Semitism was less overt, these Political Soldiers of the 1980s also promoted the destruction of Israel by supporting the total victory of Palestinians opposing the Jewish state. They also explained how the banking system was ‘corrupting modern man’. Within the context of British neo-Nazi cultures of this type, this was quite a clear, though coded, anti-Semitic statement evoking the idea of Jews controlling international finance.⁶⁹

The Political Soldiers have become one among many unique variants of Nazi-influenced ideologies to develop in Britain. Links between British and American neo-Nazism continued into the 1990s. These connections again help to draw out some of the nuances within this cultic milieu. One avenue where the culture became innovative was in the White Power music scene, fostered by British groups such as Blood & Honour. Its founder, who created the network in 1987, Ian Stuart Donaldson died in a car crash in 1992, and he has since become a martyr for neo-Nazis across the globe.⁷⁰ The cultic, a sense of mission and conspiracism are found in this White Power music context too.

Magazines linked to the White Power music scene, and that play with such heroised, and ‘legendary’ figures like Donaldson to create a cultic idiom included *Final Conflict*, a fanzine that began in 1992. Its name was supposed to be an evocation of Holland’s Political Soldier concept too,⁷¹ while the third edition showed overt endorsement for US neo-Nazism, describing Robert Matthews of the Silent Brotherhood as a martyr: ‘Robert died at the hands of the Zionist state he tried to overthrow’, the front cover explained, adding ‘Where one warrior falls one-hundred

⁶⁹ Derek Holland, ‘Political Soldier’ reproduced online here:

<http://www.gornahoor.net/library/PoliticalSoldierA4.pdf> [last accessed 15/08/2016].

⁷⁰ Paul Jackson, ‘“The Hooked-Cross, the Symbol of Re-Awakening Life”: The Memory of Ian Stuart Donaldson’, Paul Jackson and Anton Shekhovtsov (eds.) *White Power Music: Scenes of Extreme-Right Cultural Resistance* (Ilford: Searchlight and RNM Publications, 2012).

⁷¹ Anton Shekhovtsov, ‘Far Right Music and the Use of the Internet: Final Conflict and the British National Party Compared’ in Paul Jackson and Gerry Gable (eds.) *Far-Right.com: Nationalist Extremism on the Internet* (Ilford: Searchlight and RNM Publications, 2011)

shall spring from the shadows to take his place'.⁷² Inside, an essay on Matthews again styled him as a martyr, explaining to UK readers how he joined the Aryan Nations group but also read material from the National Alliance that was 'heavily influenced by the "superman" ideas of Nietzsche'. It concluded: 'HAIL BOB MATTHEWS! HAIL THE ORDER!'⁷³ In the language of *Final Conflict*, Matthews was a revolutionary who died for his cause, and so his death should inspire others to believe in this mission too.

Holocaust denial was also an on-going part of the picture of those prompting the idea of a Jewish conspiracy in Britain. In 1991, an edition of the League of St George's retitled magazine *League Sentinel* reported on the continuing dynamism within the Holocaust denial fraternity, noting that British denier David Irving was able to bring Robert Faurrison and even Fred Leuchter to Britain, the latter formally banned from entering the country by the Home Secretary. The cover of this edition of the *League Sentinel* demonstrated another example of conspiracy theory thinking, with a headline reading 'Maxwell Death. Was Mossad Responsible?', alongside a picture of the recently deceased Robert Maxwell. Conspiracies could be seen in many places, though the reference to Mossad highlights who *League Sentinel* were alluding to as well.

Anti-Semitic conspiracism was manifest at other times in the 1990s. Later in the decade, Nick Griffin was convicted of publishing Holocaust denial material in a BNP-linked magazine he edited, *The Rune*. The magazine had described the Holocaust as the 'Holohoax', while Faurrison even appeared at Griffin's trial, in 1998, as a witness for the defence.⁷⁴ Griffin was also closely involved in another notorious conspiracy theory text from the BNP in the later 1990s, *Who are the Mind-benders?*⁷⁵ The introductory essay quoted Pierce at length as a man who had seen through the conspiracy, and suggested that the Jewish-controlled media used racism to denigrate white people, and wilfully failed to report up any negative details on black and Asian people. The essay culminated with its main argument: 'members of the Jewish community ... exercise a power and influence in Britain's mass media that are out of all proportion to their number in the population'. Jewish interests were

⁷² *Final Conflict*, No. 3 p. 1.

⁷³ 'Learning from the Past: Bob Matthews and "The Order"', *Final Conflict*, No. 3 pp. 8 - 9.

⁷⁴ 'B.N.P. Boss-To-Be Hung By His Own Rope' *Searchlight*, p. 6 - 8

⁷⁵ Nigel Copsey, *Contemporary British Fascism: The British national Party and the Quest for Legitimacy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008), pp. 71 - 2.

acting to ‘weaken the national spirit and national pride of the British people’, it added.⁷⁶ Spiritual decline and a Jewish conspiracy were presented as interlinked forces.

The influence of Pierce came in other ways too. In November 1995, he came to the UK and addressed the BNP’s annual rally. Pierce had helped to mentor a faction that emerged within the BNP, before breaking away to become a discrete, hardline and anti-BNP group, Combat 18. Pierce’s address in 1995 was designed by Tyndall to draw away support from Combat 18. In terms of Combat 18 itself, some of its own material represents the truly violent end of the cultic milieu. For example, one edition of its magazine *The Stormer* evoked many of the group’s most extreme themes. A column signed J. Streicher (a reference to a major Nazi propagandist who published a magazine called *Der Stürmer*) commented positively on the Oklahoma bombing of 1995, noting ‘this ZOG [Zionist Occupational Government] building housed those responsible for the murder of “Bob Matthews”’. Elsewhere, a more aggressive tenor was underscored by some more ‘poetic’ text that read:

A STORM IS COMING. IT SHALL REIGN ‘DEATH AND DESTRUCTION’.

THEIR DEATH, THEIR DESTRUCTION. THIS STORM IS ‘WHITE REVOLUTION’.

BOMBS SHALL BE ITS THUNDER AND BULLETS ITS RAIN.

Effectively inciting violence, this was followed by the names and addresses of two left wing activists and a Jewish centre.⁷⁷ Later in the magazine, a page gave details on digging up Jewish graves, complete with relevant addresses and telephone numbers for cemeteries and synagogues. The statement ‘ZYKLON-B OVER SIX MILLION SATISFIED CUSTOMERS’ was also written on the same page, above a swastika and next to more names and addresses of synagogues. Apart from being deeply offensive, the statement is actually quite atypical as it endorses rather than denies the Holocaust.

Finally, the National alliance itself was a group that Britain’s neo-Nazi cultic milieu of the 1990s sought to recreate, quite literally. Run by Paul Jeffries, Its magazine, *The Oak*, featured essays on fermenting revolution in Britain, combined

⁷⁶ Who are the Mindbenders p. 2 – 5, in SA????

⁷⁷ *The Stormer*, No. 4, p. 5.

with reprinted material from America. It also featured the American National Alliance's life rune logo on the cover. Its pages features material inciting violence, including from Pierce himself, commenting on the corruption of the political and cultural mainstream as a consequence of a Jewish- conspiracy. Yet here too there was a further variant of juxtaposing a sense of enmity with an evocation of the higher cause that the movement sought to promote. Explaining its use of the life rune symbol, it explained:

It comes from an ancient alphabet, or futhark, used in Northern Europe for many centuries before the general adoption of the Roman alphabet there. The Life Rune signifies life, creation, birth, rebirth and renewal. It expresses in a single symbol the raison d'être of the National Alliance and the movement of Aryan renewal.

Final Reflections on the Religious Nature of neo-Nazi Conspiracy Theories

At the outset of this chapter, it was argued that conspiracy theories have a religious dynamic to them, they require a sense of belief as they cannot be proved. Linked to this, conspiracy theories from ideologies that conceive of their movement as revolutionary also require a sense of faith, in an alternate future. This essay has explored these themes in British and America neo-Nazi cultures, which have repeatedly combined expressions of a belief in a higher cause with conspiratorial anti-Semitism in their print material.

These two tropes are intimately related, and do help to explain how people drawn to neo-Nazi milieus perceive the world around them. Often, the reason that those who identify as neo-Nazi feel they are marginalised is because they see Jewish domination in field such as politics, the media, global economics, and mainstream culture in general. Epitomising how the cultic milieu offers its members esoteric perspectives ignored or actively stigmatised by wider society, they regularly claim that only they have 'seen through' the deception, only they know the 'truth'. There is a complex and dependent relationship between this sense of faith in a hidden truth and belief in the cause provided by on-going political activism. Leading neo-Nazis from Colin Jordan and Lincoln Rockwell to David Lane and even Derek Holland have repeatedly claimed a spiritual component legitimises their activism, though actually construct this in highly divergent ways. American neo-Nazis have perhaps been more overt in this practice, reworking Christian and pagan themes, and even creating new

religions to offer many new ways to believe in Hitler's cause. Yet this milieu has been influential outside America too, and generations of British activists have sought legitimisation of their own variants of Neo-Nazism by turning to figures within this American milieu, such as William Pierce and David Lane, as well as European Christian fascists, such as Codreanu.

While these core tropes of anti-Semitic conspiracism and Nazism as a 'higher' cause are staple elements of neo-Nazi cultures, as an (albeit selective) history of this milieu, this chapter has also tried to show that these themes can be recombined in many different ways. Part of understating the cultic milieu is, after all, appreciating its radical heterogeneity. An exploration of a selection of the relationships within British and American neo-Nazi cultures does show the dramatic level of variety within the Nazi-inspired elements of this cultic milieu. Neo-Nazism certainly is not a static phenomenon and needs to be examined diachronically; it is constantly changing as new ideas are grafted into the movement's repertoire. Moreover, for those who want to understand the ideas of figures from lifelong activists, such as William Pierce; to figures more concerned with developing Nazi-inspired cultural production, such as Ian Stuart Donaldson; to neo-Nazi terrorists, such as Thomas Mair, this essay hopefully offers some worthwhile observations. Focusing on the nexus between conspiracism, faith and a sense of connecting with an alternate way of being, replete with a sense of good and evil derived from the inner logic of anti-Semitic conspiracism, is far more likely to yield meaningful answers as to what drove such (and many other) divergent neo-Nazis than focusing on the ways such figures were also steeped in a politics of hatred. Finally, for those seeking a fundamental rejection of the political and cultural mainstream, divergent forms of neo-Nazism will continue to offer simplified outlook, complete with the promise of accessing 'higher' truths and claims to know what is 'really' going on.