The Web of Hate: Fragmentation of Media Authority and its Link to Right-Wing Populism and Cyber Islamophobia

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ABSTRACT

The twenty-first century has been marked strongly with two extremely significant developments, firstly the increase in international terror attacks and secondly the evolution of media and information consumption based on technological advancements. These phenomena together have led to the figurative and literal blowing up of mass media coverage, but, increasingly and more importantly, social media traffic. This shift in information consumption by the general public, especially after terror attacks, is leading to a fragmentation of authority that traditional media gained after years of being the monopoly of verified information exchange. The increased usage and wide accessibility of social media is allowing more people to feel connected globally after terror attacks and is leading to the creation of mediascapes by defining in-groups of like-minded people against Islam, as a common enemy, which leads to a drastic increase in online hate against Islam and Muslims. Digital mediascapes therefore have the ability to unify participants around an "us" that is specifically against the "other" that is labeled as an enemy. Islamophobia thus has become a useful tool for right-wing populists not only to gather a large following online but for right-wing parties to assemble electors in several European nation-states. This, in turn, can provoke the escalation of right-wing populism where people, who are experiencing the echo chamber first hand or those perceiving the viral developments from outside, can become easy prey for political influence. Therefore, social media groups, hashtags and sites can be seen as the feeding ground for right-wing populist political parties.

Keywords: *Echo-chamber, Islamophobia, cyberspace, social media, right-wing populism.*

INTRODUCTION

In an age where the word 'terrorism' is mainly linked to turbaned and explosive belt clad individuals, a growing trend in Islamophobia can be documented. Likewise, an increase in right-wing populist sentiment can be witnessed both on- and offline. Specifically, terror attack coverage on mass media has been found to cultivate images of the dangerous 'other' that is here to terrorize 'the nation' through a ritualized press performance (Aguilera-Carnerero & Azeez, 2016). With the beginning of wide usage of social media in the mid-2000s, sensemaking processes changed globally, albeit at a different rate and according to different patterns based on the people using them. While it was initially believed that social media was going to act as a democratising force (Effing, Van Hillegersberg & Huibers, 2011), today, it can be said that social media does act as a diluter of certain kinds of authority and aids in the unifying of like-minded people around the world (Gerbaudo, 2018). However, it also enables

the exchange of tremendous amounts of hate without an outward authority that regulates these comments. This is especially after highly unnerving events such as terror attacks, hate against Muslims and Islam is shown to increase drastically. Particularly, after the terror attacks on the office of Charlie Hebdo, in early 2015, Islamophobia took new heights in Europe and gained a novel aspect in which the difference between hate speech and free speech was hotly debated in and through the media. Islamophobic sentiment, within this debate, helped connect people that were anti-Islam oriented and served as a common-ground also for antagonistic European parties across borders.

Previously, the role of mass media as an authority for people to make sense of traumatizing events has been studied (Couldry, 2005), what remains under researched however is the effect that media rituals have on social media engagement. Specifically, how these can lead to the creation or development of biases or prejudices against minority groups, in this case against Islam and Muslims as a whole. Finally, after almost 15 years of global wide spread social media use, patterns concerning natural social media flows can be more accurately studied. More importantly, the indicated shift in authority which is happening more recently due to the increasing popularity in the consumption of social media over mass media and the possible resulting power vacuum needs to be addressed.

This review paper examines the role of authority in the sensemaking of terror attacks before and after social media on the general public in Europe. This paper supplements knowledge in two ways; firstly by investigating theoretical renewal in terms of insight into how traditional media framing is influencing social media usage, and secondly by proposing theoretical conception of authority and how it leads to an increase in right-wing populism and Islamophobia in cyberspace.

It aims to do this by asking the following questions: i) to what degree was traditional/mass media seen as an authority or guide by the public for making sense of traumatizing situations after terror attacks? ii) How does increased social media use, after terror attacks, lead to the loss or dilution of authority held traditional media over the general public? Iii) What role does Islamophobia play as an audience unifier in social media, how does it lead to community building and how does it finally create a shift in authority or power?

Traditional or Mass Media as Authority for Sensemaking
Terror attacks throughout history have been a cause for civilian trauma, but it has been the media that has functioned as authority to which people turn to and which guides them through the crisis even if it is at the expense of a few. Through decades Muslims and Islam has been equated with terrorism, and for decades Hollywood movies have been showing the 'Arab' as the 'other' trying to harm and terrorize the Western world (Sanborn & Harris, 2019). The 'Arab' has become a symbol of terrorism and stereotypes people from countries of the Middle East with a wide spectrum of ethnic backgrounds. However, after the attacks of September 11, 2001 stereotyping of Muslims has peaked immensely, binding new terrorism and radical Islam to one another (Gentry, 2015).

While media frames are useful strategies used to analyse traumatic situations, detect the offenders, and finally aid in the making of ethical and moral decisions concerning the events, framing is never objective (Powell, 2018). Rather, it has been found that terrorist attacks are portrayed differently in predominantly Muslim and non-Muslim countries, but that news framing in non-Muslim majority countries are more likely to choose, highlight, and downplay certain elements in order to support negative stereotypes against Muslims. "…news media framing utilizes biased, negative imagery, portraying the events in these countries in a

way that reinforces current prejudices against Muslims [...] unequal reporting increases viewership while simultaneously allowing current perceptions about terrorism and Muslims to continue" (Nickerson, 2019). This, in turn, encourages the creation of a scapegoat within the media coverage post terrorist attacks.

Cohen, who in his fundamental work focuses on delinquent and deviant behaviour of British youth culture in the 1970s, coined the term "moral panics" in the 70s but continues to elaborate and develop the term until the present (Cohen, 2002). His work has become universal in the understanding of mobilization of shared fears and anxieties through the sensationalization of media, by focusing on a specific, so-called, "folk devil". This term can be understood as the personification of an imaginary threat and is a form of scapegoating and it is this mechanism that allows for a control of the society by regulating moral boundaries (Walsh, 2020).

Specifically, mass media, which tends to largely work on a local or national level, draws greatly on an 'us vs. them' mentality which becomes particularly intense after crisis situations such as terror attacks. It has been described that in times of terrorist attacks "a heightened sense of national purpose occurs and this propels journalists to explain events as shared experiences and to delimit the voices that can comment" (Matthews, 2016). Additionally, the act of uniting people within a society receives a higher rank of importance than the actual responsibility of sharing news. In that way news outputs operate not simply to impart 'information' on terrorism events, but to reproduce shared beliefs as part of a process that literally maintains society at such times (Froio, 2018). In fact, it is found that journalists and the entire traditional communication process of news operate through the use of templates, a practice that has been adapted from production culture, that are used during the times of traumatizing events such as terror attacks. In this way the society is to be healed through what he calls an "enacted political ritual" (Elliott, 1981; Peters, 2019). Viewing terror attacks in medical terms, he believes that, through the use of media templates, the attacks are depicted as a wound inflicted on the nation that must be cauterized and then finally healed. By focusing on the selfless efforts of the general public, within this first stage of the template, a theme of social solidarity is created in light of an attack by an outside force. This stage therefore serves the means of establishing a notion that a national wound was inflicted and created as an 'us vs. them' mindset. Likewise it allows for the reconstruction the terrorism event according to the specific national society (Matthews, 2019).

The next stage, within Elliot's enacted political ritual template, is the 'cauterizing of the symbolic national wound' in which comments by political elites (and in some cases royalty) take center stage. On the first level it is the reactions of the nation's leaders that play a key role in the political ritual, because they are responsible for positioning the political standpoint of society and are made generally of denunciations of the terror attack. These reactions are known to be repeated sweepingly in headlining positions (Nussio, 2020). On the second level of this stage the reactions of world leaders and religious leaders give the reactions an international context and create a feeling of solidarity against outside perpetrators. The third level comprises reactions by the general public and within traditional media coverage normally appearing as newspaper summaries, such as: "IS THAT all you've got? That's was the City traders' defiant two-finger message to the terrorist responsible for the grotesque murder of their fellow Londoners on Thursday" (Homolar & Rodríguez-Merino, 2019). As can be seen, the cauterization stage is specifically made in order to substantiate the collective depiction of the public's point of views, opinions, and reactions and to connect

these within a national context. The 'healing of the symbolic national wound' is considered to be the last stage within political rituals of the media and takes place when coverage of solidarity is overshadowed by coverage that focuses on new legislations, political action, and efforts about finding the offenders. A change in legislations are found to include: "gaining access to individuals' personal phone communications, restricting entry [into the country] for Muslim clerics and producing new legislation to fight the 'perverted ideology' underpinning the attacks" (Christensen, Aars & Rykkja, 2019). Especially explaining the rationale of terrorists as an immoral evil is a key point in the unifying process, because through this process the motivations of the perpetrators become mystified and hence fear acts as a unifier. "The immoral actions of terrorists are thus described as irrational, even though they might be perpetrated with the purpose of creating political disruption" (Eriksson, 2016). However, mass media goes even further than just focusing on terrorists and their actions, rather terrorists are used as a benchmark for Muslims in general in the early 2000s and later especially for Muslims in Western countries. Especially for Muslims in the West, news on mass media often contends that there are important differences between Muslims and non-Muslims that generates conflict and that Muslims are progressively taking a toll on society (Green, 2019).

Mass media prospers on the notion of disasters while (and because) traditional journalistic practices and parliamentary democracy might be out of sync with the immediacy of events or may be completely incapacitated after an attack on the government or leadership (Elshimi, 2018). This advantage in terms of timing, coupled with the notion of omnipresence, allows mass media to decide on its own when a disaster may be defined as a 'national emergency' (Elshimi, 2018) or even who constitutes a terrorist. Mass media has for decades followed two accepted albeit false premises: "'[t]errorists are always (brown) Muslims' [and] 'white people are never terrorists'" (Corbin, 2017). This in itself gives mass media a power that is comparable to no other within modern societies and that additionally is also self-sufficient.

While mass media, and especially television broadcasting, manages to create the illusion of a shared collective space through the use of time-out coverage, exclusive focus on victims and their families, it is not to do so to show dignity or restraint, but takes advantage of those that are shown (Liebes, 1998). Mass media seems to play a crucial part in terrorism coverage, drawing not only its authority from these types of disaster marathons but also underlining its position within society and with regards to governmental authorities.

Additionally, mass media also creates a shared scene in which all are directed through a specific ritual that aims to manage the situation within the interest of the 'mythical center' and within the so-called frame of society. This is done to nurture a feeling of solidarity against a common foe, the Muslim, whereby neither the community exists which media struggles to unify, nor is the problem within society that leads to terror attacks addressed at the expense of the religion of Islam. However, with the introduction and wide usage of social media, the political ritual template has received a new dimension that does not weaken its influence but rather leads to the extension of its effects (Giaxoglou & Döveling, 2018). The idea of the national wound no longer exists only to help the society to process the terror attack and digest its consequences in a short period of time and under the guidance of higher national powers, but with the help of social media leads to an increase in right wing populism and Islam and Muslim hate (Horsti & Saresma, 2021).

Authority Fragmentation: Social Media and 'Produsage'

Social media allows for the scapegoating and biases used in framing against Muslims, post terror attacks in order to unite the nation, to develop and morph into islamophobia and cyberhate. Terror attacks constitute a majority of what Erikson terms "cultural traumas" (Eriksson Krutrök, 2020). In the 21st century. Eriksson (2016) describes cultural traumas as those consequences of traumatic events that call for a communal self-reflection and therefore create a heightened need for public discourse that deals with what it means to belong to the 'us'. While traditional media previously took center stage in guiding society during the post-trauma stage and within a very specific frame of coverage, Eriksson argues that social media breaks the mass media mold and extends the discussion in the online sphere. Particularly Twitter, Eriksson finds, has been useful for providing backchannel discourse negotiations that were separate from the mass media discourse concerning the attacks" (Eriksson, 2016). After post-traumatic experiences, it is found that people feel the need to socially share the emotional upheavals that they are experiencing which manifests itself in increased social media sharing (Eriksson, 2016). This leads to the fact that social media becomes a new way of meaning making for society that is outside of mass media discourse and hence outside of the frame of mass media.

Similarly, social media manages to weaken the information stronghold of mass media by not only increasing the selection of media channels and information access points, but also the social group of individuals (McQuail, 2010). This allows people to join many different interest groups and communities across cyber space and even have a "direct two-way symmetrical conversation with governmental organizations'' (Idris, 2018). Furthermore, through the power of social media people are no longer bound to a single message system to which people are "routinely and consistently exposed leading to stereotypes and the adaptation of consensual values" (Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira, 2012). This means, with the increase of information outputs, the cleverly packaged 'us - vs.-them' message can be diluted further by social media.

Social media for the first time, also allows for a two-way discussion between authority figures and society, in which individuals can answer back to figures of authority and could potentially participate actively in important political and social processes (Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira, 2012). In fact, it was all these characteristics of social media that led many to believe, before the social media revolution in 2015 (Tarman & Yigit, 2013), that social media was going to have a democratizing effect on societies and governments. While social media does possess all of these characteristics it did not work as a magic bullet to society. Therefore the lack of regulation, or even self-regulation in the realm of social media poses the danger that it exposes vulnerable groups and individuals to the risk of exploitation (McQuail, 2010). Additionally, rather than creating a platform that leads to, as the name suggests, socializing between individuals and authorities, the "internet seems essentially individuating rather than participative, despite the promise of connectivity" (McQuail, 2010). This in turn creates a social media that is highly decentralized and most importantly customized for the preferences of the individual (Wollebæk, Karlsen, Steen-Johnsen & Enjolras, 2019), where all interact within their own hubs of interest and personal convictions and never network in a grander scheme. While recent studies show that the link between social media and a previously assumed notion of a democratizing effect is not as previously thought (Persily & Tucker 2020), that is not to say that the effect of social media just simply fizzles out. In fact, social media can have the effect that people become more mobilized around individual lifestyle beliefs as

a new form of identity politics (Wollebæk et al., 2019). Living in a world that is evolving into a so-called "me generation", social media increasingly puts the "individual at the center of their own network" (Bennett, 2012, p.28).

As identification based on the norms of how to structure civic life diminish, people increasingly identify themselves with their own lifestyle values and shape their understanding of politics and thus their personal politics. What is highly important however is to acknowledge that "the right wing has become the default location for highly individualized discourses of personal freedom and market deregulation" (Bennett, 2012, p.23) resulting in certain hybrid nationalists movements, that no longer define themselves exclusively by race but by toting a "people like me" mentality that makes up who get to be considered to be true citizens and who do not (Bennett, 2012, p. 23). Nationalist hybrids are known to exploit their audiences through emotional targets, one example of these are migrants that allegedly have come to the country and are living off of the true citizens 'hard earned money'. While migrants and especially Muslim refugees are a central target for nationalist hybrids (aka right-wing populists), they also invite other participants to share highly personalized expressions against several different emotional targets (Govil & Baishya, 2018). Although one might believe that while this pattern is happening on social media, it might not be a means of alarm, since it only affects a small demographic on very exclusive internet platforms which are only accessible with invites to the online pages or groups, the reality is rather different.

Studies prove that the frequency of use, on even the highly popular and easily accessible social media platform, Twitter, translates into a higher expression of anti-Muslim hate speech and Islamophobia (Soral, Liu & Bilewicz, 2020). The magnitude of effects a simple under-moderation of social media platforms can have, can be seen especially well in attacks on the Mosque attack in New Zealand in March 2019. Brenton Tarrant filmed himself in the style of a first-person-shooter video game while violently murdering 50 Muslims at a local mosque and live streamed it on Facebook while being cheered on by around 200 live users, none of which flagged the video (Spiegel International, 2019). The video was watched by thousands of viewers after the initial livestream and Facebook, which is monitored better than most other social media platforms, received the first notice only 12 minutes after the end of the livestream. This might seem like a short period of time, but Facebook spokespeople have declared that since then they have removed 300 000 copies of the video and automated filters had blocked another 1.2 million copies from being put online, yet the video remains findable for those that look hard enough (Spiegel International, 2019).

The process of personal politics and its expression online has shown to lead to personal emotions becoming self-validating (Van Dijk & Hacker, 2018) and highly effective in what Bruns terms "produsage" (Bruns, 2007). This model summarizes the interrelationship between the producer and user on the internet and the blurring of those lines. Through this change in communication patterns, a blend of news production is presented which further obscures the borders between news, entertainment and information leading to a subtle, yet important shift in authority (Papacharissi, 2015). Produsage, specifically in closed off circles online, is believed to lead to homophily which often molds information flows of these platforms and encourages what has been termed the echo-chamber effect, creating "articulated opinion silos" which evoke the verbalization of marginalized viewpoint (Papacharissi, 2015). These communities are generally organized either around social media groups, like those found on Facebook, search term threads (i.e. Twitter hashtags), or websites and blogs dedicated to this purpose.

One pitfall of the fragmentation of authority can thus be Hate 2.0, which is the result of the blend between hate speech content and a social media platform that has the ability to make the content viral (Oboler, 2016). Hate 2.0 is based on the premise that the true aim of people partaking in such activities is of two parts. It is used not only to spread the content that is filled with hate through and across social media, but to also make such content appear commonplace in cyberspace. "If hate against a particular group is seen as just another opinion, no better or worse, for example, than having a view on a favorite football team, then such hate can be openly expressed" (Oboler, 2016). Studies by the Online Hate Prevention Institute found that Anti-Muslim Hate especially made up the majority of Hate 2.0 and that it had been at a high incline since 9/11 (Oboler, 2013).

The fragmentation of the mass media authority through increased social media use has led to what seems to be an increase in the collaborative content generation of netizens. However, the creation and organization of spheres of information and opinion communities (aka mediascapes) through the use and ultimately the organization of social media is an indication to the fact that these communities are not horizontal structures. Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira (2012), in their work with social media during the Arab springs in Egypt, found that for social media use during crisis situations there are certain "crowdsourced elites" who are individuals that are featured prominently in the news flow on social media. These elites are further divided into two groups which are the 'media elites' or 'opinion leaders'.

Social media use after crisis situations, and especially after terror attacks has had the power of overshadowing mass media outlets by continuing the discussions further than a simple cauterization of the so-called national wound. By doing so, it has led to the fragmentation of authority that mass media held over societies. While originally thought to have a democratizing effect, especially media studies conducted post social media revolution have highlighted that netizens are much more likely to produce content that is closest to their worldview. This in turn leads to homophily and echo-chamber effect and is feeding ground especially for right-wing populism, who are shown to extensively work with personal politics to further their own interests.

Us vs Them - Islamophobia as Community Builder and Unifier
The discourse of authority has always been central to the study of the shift from traditional to social media use. While it has been successfully proven that the authority mass media held on societies has been fragmented, leadership plays an important role especially in personal politics. Particularly in right-wing populism, an interesting interrelationship between the community sentiment, created by social media, and leadership exists. In fact, it is found that the very idea of authority within the realm of right-wing populism is at odds with actual leadership (Lütjen, 2021).

Social media engagement in right-wing populist circles is a clear indication of this relationship, and although social media is a reciprocal form of media a very asymmetrical form of communication between populist leaders and users exists. Leaders actually are found not to engage directly with supporters and critics and rather use the platform only to "gather formal and informal manifestations of approval on the occasion of messages posted in the name of the leaders" (Krämer, 2017). An important feature of social media platforms, that is useful for these means, is the function of 'liking' a post; which is an easy way of showing fondness towards the media shared and probably upped only by the 'sharing' feature in terms of positive evaluation. The power of this mechanism is that the 'manifestation of approval'

(Krämer, 2017) is no longer restricted to special circumstances such as elections. Additionally, "as commentators are self-selected and because the profiles of populist leaders often seem to be heavily moderated, informal approval often outweighs critical comments" (Krämer, 2017, p.17).

This form of linking and sharing can thus create a very uniform seeming viewpoint in right-wing populist circles, that gets reaffirmed through a vicious cycle created by the echo chamber effect which backs up the idea of the common will of the people at large although only a small percentage actually partakes. Sumiala (2017, p.113), who borrows from Appadurai, terms this type of an environment in cyberspace a 'mediascape' and defines it as "a fluid digital landscape that creates 'imagined worlds' through ritual practice". The focus of his work lies in the fact that social media posts, after terror attacks, are a means by which people learn to deal with and overcome loss by death. Specifically, after the Charlie Hebdo attacks the effect and power of social media post-terror attacks became obvious. Hashtag activism, specifically focused around the hashtag #JesuisCharlie, created a powerful ritual message that encouraged solidarity and invoked a deep sense of belonging within the digital mediascape globally. While #JesuisCharlie holds a central role in hashtag activism due to its novelty and popularity post Charlie Hebdo attack, which is considered the first large terror attack on European soil after the attacks in the United states on September 11, it has since inspired people to create viral hashtags post terror attacks such as the #PrayForBerlin after the Berlin Christmas market attack in 2016 (Fischer-Preßler, Schwemmer & Fischbach, 2019).

"[Hashtags] enable[s] participants in the different parts of the world to come together in this digital mediascape, to break free from the constraints of everyday lives lived in different localities and to participate in the global digital ritualization of around this death event" (Sumiala, 2017, p.123). The ritualization, specifically, of the hashtag "JesuisCharlie" however invited solidarity specifically of the cartoonists and what they stood for, ignoring other victims of the attack such as the police officers, Kosher supermarket customers and other people murdered at the offices. Sumiala points out that the ritual declaration of this hashtag went even further and made only the lives of the cartoonists 'grievable', and akin to the 'values of liberty, equality and freedom of speech" (Sumiala, 2017, p.123). Whereas those that did not agree with Charlie were marked as different and thus equal to the aggressors.

This elevated sense of ritualized imaginations thus leads to polarization, specifically one in which the 'secular West' is seen to be at odds with Islam, and where "the West imagines itself as representing life and rationality, and those identified with religion (here in particular Islam) are imagined to represent death and aggression" (Sumiala, 2017, p.124). Digital mediascapes therefore have the ability to unify participants around an 'us' that is specifically against an 'other' that is labeled as an enemy (Sumiala, 2017). Islamophobia thus has become a useful tool for right-wing populists not only to gather a large following online but for right-wing parties to assemble electors in several European nation-states (Aked, Jones & Miller, 2019). The focus of right-wing populists, who should not to be confused with right-wing nationalists, is no longer the dependent on the characteristics that identify people as being part of the 'in' group but is rather on the exclusionary factors. Right wing populists have been gaining ground in Europe for over three decades (Hafez, 2014) and have constantly worked on racializing Islam and Muslims; although Muslims clearly have a very diverse ethnic background. Hafez believes that "Islamophobia has become the main exclusionary project of the far right: an attempt to mark Muslims as naturally different – at times as inferior and capable of conspiring against their western 'host societies' – in order to oppress them collectively and exclude them from the national collective" (Hafez, 2014, p.481).

An interesting development within right-wing politics has also been that right-wing populists no longer need to discuss or debate on nationalism ideologies but are able to link various national far right parties without having to elaborate on national origins, which would be highly controversial considering the ethnic backgrounds found alone in Europe. This development has even shown potential to unify views of Western and Eastern European states that had been divided due to racist stances. The manifesto of the European Alliance for Freedom (EAF), a former right-wing populist pan-European alliance of members of the European Parliament founded in 2010 and dissolved in 2016, clearly underlines the focus on Islam as a common enemy but skillfully brushes over the details of European identifying characteristics by creating a mythical common front. One of the main focuses of such groups is to protest the "Islamization of Europe" in which specifically the building and existence in general of mosques is key to the cause.

Authority and Echo Chambers
Authority, whether perceived or unperceived, remains highly important for sensemaking processes after traumatic events, such as terror attacks. Nevertheless, the processes of sensemaking have changed with the introduction of social media.

The advent and increased use of social media has caused a fragmentation of authority. While it is still too early to speak of a complete loss of mass media authority, and with that the creation of the 'national wound', it can be said that the biggest effect that social media probably has is that it breaks the timeline of when and how fast the 'national wound' is to be healed (Gilani, Bolat, Nordberg & Wilkin, 2020). Social media for the first time allows for the discussion surrounding terror attacks to continue further and develop into hashtags, groups, and pages made that were inspired not only by the media event but also by the media frame.

It was found that authority plays a very important yet controversial role in right-wing populist cyberspace and mediascapes. While a strong aversion to elitism and authority exists, followers nominate authorities online by simply following them en masse and consuming and reproducing their content, by sharing it widely (Bergström & Belfrage, 2018). By doing so, these leaders not only gain ground and a following within cyberspace but also gain a reputation in politics and can cooperate nationally and internationally with other right-wing populist leaders and parties. The common denominator within this alliance - Islamophobia and the 'Muslims as a common enemy' discourse - has the potential to not only act as a unifier across borders but also diminish previously dividing differences at the same time.

It can be said that past technologies such as mass or traditional media give the frame by which one views the world and orient oneself. It became the authority by which the larger population refers to, to make sense of traumatizing events, having adopted an almost mechanical process to address, cauterize and heal their supposed national wound. New technologies, like social media, on the other hand allow people to continue the debate on events and to reopen the so-called cauterized and healed national wounds. They provide members the medium and the platform to find like minded people and to express their own selfhood, without an authority. This type of exchange and the ultimate creation of echo chambers can easily lead to the normalization and acceptance of Islamophobia and lay the groundwork for right wing populists especially. This in turn can provoke the escalation of right-wing populism where people, who are experiencing the echo chamber first hand or those perceiving the viral developments from outside, can become an easy prey for political

influence. In turn social media groups, hashtags and sites can be feeding ground for right wing populist political parties.

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