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A Paler Shade of White: Identity & In-group Critique in James Mason's *Siege*

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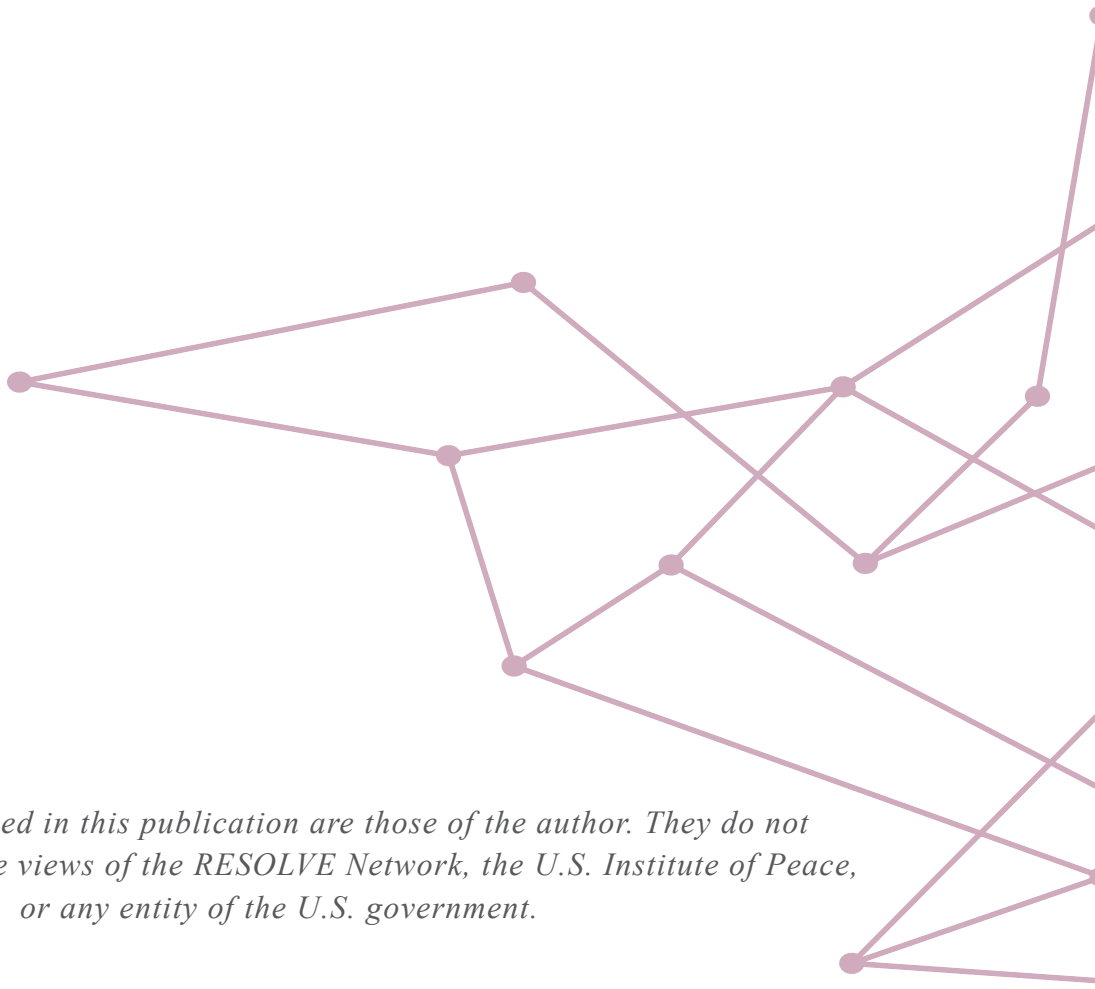

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CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 1

INTRODUCTION 2

HISTORY AND CONTEXT 4

METHODOLOGY: LINKAGE-BASED ANALYSIS 6

OVERVIEW OF CONTENT 7

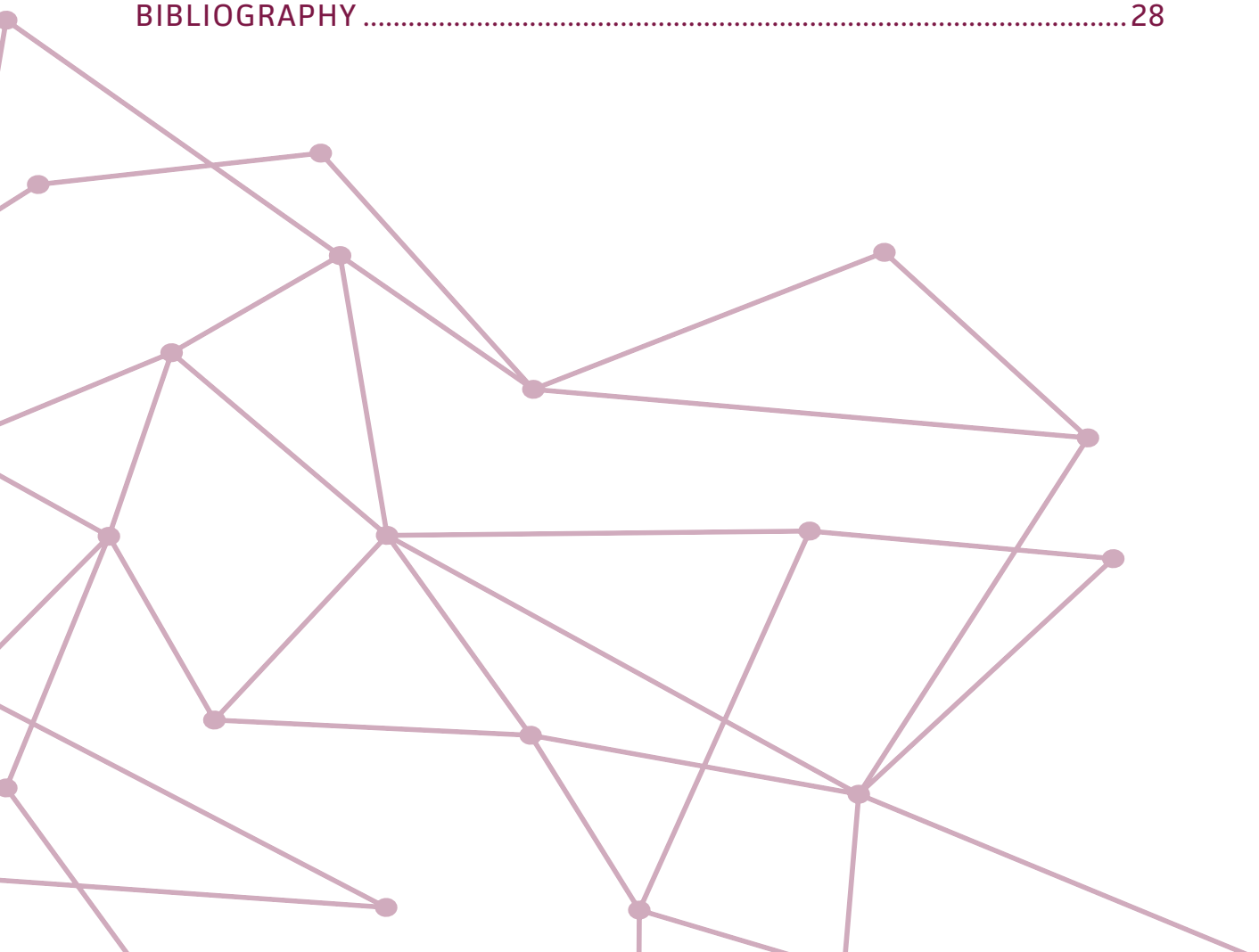
IN-GROUP CRISIS: A PALER SHADE OF WHITE 13

IN-GROUPS IN CRISIS 20

THE OUT-GROUP IN THE IN-GROUP 23

CONCLUSION: INSIGHTS & RECOMMENDATIONS 25

BIBLIOGRAPHY 28



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Discussions of extremist ideologies naturally focus on how in-groups criticize and attack out-groups. But many important extremist ideological texts are disproportionately focused on criticizing their own in-group. This research report will use linkage-based analysis to examine *Siege*, a White nationalist tract that has played an important role in shaping modern neo-Nazi movements, including such violent organizations as Atomwaffen Division and The Base. While *Siege* strongly attacks out-groups, including Jewish and Black people, the book is overwhelmingly a critique of how the White people of its in-group fall short of Nazi ideals. *Siege's* central proposition—that the White in-group is disappointing, deeply corrupt, and complacent—shapes its argument for an "accelerationist" strategy to hasten the collapse of society in order to build something entirely new. Finally, this report briefly reviews comparable extremist texts from other movements to draw insights about how in-group critiques shape extremist strategies. These insights offer policymakers and law enforcement tools to anticipate and counter violent extremist strat-egies. They also highlight less-obvious avenues for potential counter-extremist interventions and mes-saging campaigns.

INTRODUCTION

The definition of extremism is vigorously debated in academic and policy literature, but one canonical element is most widely associated with the phenomenon: extremists are generally understood to hate and wish harm on people outside of their identity group, whether or not that quality is considered definitional.[1]

In his 2015 remarks on combating extremism, President Barack Obama articulated this foundational quality of extremism as "the notion that anyone should ever be targeted because of who they are, or what they look like, or how they worship."[2]

More succinct is the widespread understanding of extremism as a set of beliefs centered on an "us versus them" (in-group versus out-group) understanding of the world, as reiterated in thousands of policy reviews, academic papers, and books.[3] The phrase "us versus them" can be found in a broad corpus of works salient to extremism, even when they do not use the word "extremism."[4]

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1 Peter T. Coleman and Andrea Bartoli, *Addressing extremism* (Columbia University, George Mason University, 2003), https://ad-store.sgp1.digitaloceanspaces.com/LUA/2015/06/Addressing-Extremism-ICCCR-ICAR.pdf; Anna C. Williford, "Blurred Lines: What Is Extremism?," *University of Michigan Journal of Law Reform 52*, no. 937 (2019), https://repository.law.umich.edu/mjlr/vol52/iss4/7?utm_source=repository.law.umich.edu%2Fmjlr%2Fvol52%2Fiss4%2F7&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages; Astrid Böttticher, "Towards Academic Consensus Definitions of Radicalism and Extremism," *Perspectives on Terrorism 11*, no. 4 (August 2017), 73-77; David Lowe, "Prevent Strategies: The Problems Associated in Defining Extremism: The Case of the United Kingdom," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism 40*, no. 11 (2017): 917-933, https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2016.1253941; Andrej Sotlar, "Some Problems with a Definition and Perception of Extremism within a Society," in *Policing in Central and Eastern Europe: Dilemmas of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, eds. Gorazd Mesko, Milan Pagon, and Bojan Dobovsek (Slovenia: University of Maribor, 2004), 703-707; William McCants and Clint Watts, "U.S. Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism: An Assessment," *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, December 10, 2012, https://www.fpri.org/article/2012/12/u-s-strategy-for-countering-violent-extremism-an-assessment/; Sam Jackson, "Non-normative political extremism: Reclaiming a concept's analytical utility," *Terrorism and political violence 31*, no. 2 (2016): 244-259, https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2016.1212599; Uwe Backes, "Meaning and forms of political extremism in past and present," *Středoevropské politické studie 9*, no. 4 (2007): 242-262, https://journals.muni.cz/cepsr/article/view/4398.

2 Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President in Closing of the Summit on Countering Violent Extremism," *The White House*, February 18, 2015, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/02/18/remarks-president-closing-summit-countering-violent-extremism.

3 A few representative examples include: Garth Davies, Christine Neudecker, Marie Ouellet, Martin Bouchard, and Benjamin Ducol, "Toward a framework understanding of online programs for countering violent extremism," *Journal for Deradicalization* 6 (Spring 2016): 51-86, https://journals.sfu.ca/jd/index.php/jd/article/view/43/0; Hedieh Mirahmadi, "Building resilience against violent extremism: A community-based approach," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 668, no. 1 (2016): 129-144, https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0002716216671303; Faizullah Jan, *The Muslim extremist discourse: Constructing us versus them* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015); Reza Aslan, *Beyond Fundamentalism: Confronting religious extremism in the age of globalization* (Penguin Random House, 2010); Simona Trip, Carmen Hortensia Bora, Mihai Marian, Angelica Halmajan, and Marius Ioan Drugas, "Psychological Mechanisms Involved in Radicalization and Extremism. A Rational Emotive Behavioral Conceptualization," *Frontiers in Psychology* 10 (2019): 437, https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00437; Shannon N. Green and Keith Proctor, *Turning Point: A New Comprehensive Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), https://csis-ilab.github.io/cve/report/Turning_Point.pdf.

4 For example: Mina Cikara, Matthew M. Botvinick, and Susan T. Fiske, "Us versus them: Social identity shapes neural responses to intergroup competition and harm," *Psychological Science 22*, no. 3 (2011): 306-313, https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0956797610397667; Patricia G. Devine, E. Ashby Plant, and Kristen Harrison, "The problem of "us" versus "them" and AIDS stigma," *American Behavioral Scientist 42*, no. 7 (1999): 1212-1228, https://doi.org/10.1177/00027649921954732; Jill Gabrielle Klein, "Us Versus Them, or Us Versus Everyone? Delineating Consumer Aversion to Foreign Goods," *Journal of International Business Studies 33*, no. 2 (2002): 345-363,

But while in-group/out-group conflict lies at the center of the extremist worldview, the foundational primacy of that conflict is not always reflected in the content of ideological texts. Sometimes extremist propagandists and ideologues focus their strongest and voluminous rhetorical attacks on members of their own identity in-groups.

This research report examines the in-group critique and in-group internal crisis described in *Siege*, a highly influential White nationalist ideological text. A book-length manuscript by James Mason comprised of excerpts from a 1980s neo-Nazi newsletter of the same name, *Siege* languished in obscurity for years before being rediscovered by contemporary White nationalists in the 2010s.

White nationalism is defined in this study as the belief that government and society should be explicitly organized to privilege White people and exclude or disadvantage non-white people. It is distinguished from White supremacy, which refers to the systems that perpetuate White control and social advantage but do not necessarily articulate a specific racial motive.[5] Neo-Nazism is defined here as a specific type of White nationalism that emulates or seeks to revive the ideology of Nazi Germany while employing its language and symbols.[6] "White" and "Black" are capitalized in this report when used to describe racial and ethnic groups consistent with American Psychological Association guidelines.[7]

Siege has influenced the formation and violent activities of a large number of neo-Nazi cells sometimes referred to as "Siege Culture" groups. Violent organizations inspired by *Siege* include Atomwaffen Division, The Base, and other neo-Nazi groups around the world, as well as a constantly shifting array of online collectives.[8]

While Mason and *Siege* are strongly oriented toward hate for and violence against out-groups, such as Jewish people and people of color, the narrative of the book is strongly—almost overwhelmingly—comprised of harsh criticism for White Americans, including most living leaders and adherents of White nationalist movements in the United States.

This report will examine the substance of this in-group critique and how it shapes *Siege*'s wider system of meaning. *Siege* advocates for a strategy known as "accelerationism," arguing for actions that weaken

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https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.jibs.8491020; National Institute of Justice, "Radicalization and Violent Extremism: Lessons Learned From Canada, the UK and the US," Meeting Summary, July 28-30, 2015, *U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs*, https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/249947.pdf.

5 Eric K. Ward, "As White Supremacy Falls Down, White Nationalism Stands Up," *Pop Culture Collab*, October 31, 2017, https://popcollab.org/white-supremacy-falls-white-nationalism-stands/.

6 Oxford English Dictionary, "neo-Nazism, n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2021, www.oed.com/view/Entry/256194.

7 "Racial and Ethnic Identity, Spelling and capitalization of racial and ethnic terms," American Psychological Association, September, 2019, https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/bias-free-language/racial-ethnic-minorities#:~:text=Racial%20and%20ethnic%20groups%20are,Hispanic%2C%E2%80%9D%20and%20so%20on.

8 Hatewatch, "Atomwaffen and the SIEGE parallax: how one neo-Nazi's life's work is fueling a younger generation," *Southern Poverty Law Center*, February 22, 2018, https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2018/02/22/atomwaffen-and-siege-parallax-how-one-neo-nazi%E2%80%99s-life%E2%80%99s-work-fueling-younger-generation; Counter Extremism Project, "James Mason's Siege: Ties to Extremists," circa February 2020, accessed January 14, 2021, https://www.counterextremism.com/james-masons-siege-ties-to-extremists.

society with the goal of accelerating its eventual collapse. The stated reason for this strategy is that the movement's White in-group is irredeemably complacent and complicit in the system controlled by the out-group. Because of these in-group deficiencies, Mason argues that incremental and political solutions are not sufficient to achieve necessary change.

The research report is broken into three major analytical sections:

- A description of the content of Siege, focused on its treatment of different identity groupings
- A detailed examination of its in-group critique
- A comparison to in-group critiques in other extremist texts

It then concludes with a discussion of the findings and their implications for future research directions and policy development.

HISTORY AND CONTEXT

Siege is the work of James Mason, a veteran neo-Nazi who joined the American Nazi Party (ANP) during the 1960s. He later joined the National Socialist Liberation Front (NSLF), an extremist group led by Joseph Tommasi, another ANP alumnus, who argued that neo-Nazis should foment "anarchy and chaos" in the process of attacking what he understood to be a Jewish-controlled "power structure" in the United States, talking points that Mason took to heart.[9]

Tommasi was killed by a fellow White nationalist in 1975, and Mason subsequently staged an NSLF revival. Starting in 1980, Mason resumed publication of the NSLF newsletter *Siege*.[10] He broke with the NSLF brand in 1982 to found a new and even more extreme movement, Universal Order, working with imprisoned cult leader Charles Manson. Universal Order was deeply polarizing among neo-Nazis at the time of its introduction, initially to the detriment of Mason's status in the movement.[11]

Under Mason, the newsletter *Siege* was published from 1980 to 1986, and was subsequently collected as a lightly edited volume in 1993 with additional material added in later years, including appendices in some cases and a 2003 interview with Mason in others.[12] The collected edition of the main text rings in at more than 160,000 words, not counting the later additions.[13]

9 Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Black sun: Aryan cults, esoteric Nazism, and the politics of identity* (New York: NYU Press, 2003), 18.

10 Ibid., 19.

11 Jeffrey S. Kaplan, ed., *Encyclopedia of White Power: A Sourcebook on the Radical Racist Right* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 195, 307-308.

12 "Universal Order: An Interview with James Mason by AAC," 2003, accessed March 22, 2021, http://readsiege.com/interview.html.

13 "Extremist Files: Atomwaffen Division," *Southern Poverty Law Center*, n.d., accessed July 13, 2020, https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/atomwaffen-division; James Mason, *Siege (*SolarGeneral (PDF), compiled circa 2006).

Siege is formatted into small chapters that are individually digestible, but the flow of the overall text is uneven. The book largely lacks a clear narrative trajectory and is written in a casual tone filled with repetition and numerous tangents.

Despite the limitations of the text itself and the controversy around Mason's embrace of Manson, *Siege* continued to percolate in fringe neo-Nazi and far-right circles for several years, leaping to prominence in the 2010s after being posted on internet forums. In 2015, members of the Iron March online forum created the neo-Nazi organization Atomwaffen Division (AWD), which adopted many of Mason's concepts.

The book became required reading for new AWD members,[14] although one iteration of the group subsequently broke with Mason in a public dispute.[15] *Siege* has also inspired a host of AWD-influenced peers, imitators and splinters, organized along similar lines. These groups are sometimes collectively referred to the "Siege Culture" movement, a phrase coined by Mason and AWD.[16]

In addition to inspiring the group's strategic priorities, the book has featured strongly in its recruitment activities. Infamously, adherents have littered online fora with the meme "Read Siege" in an effort to attract new members, as well as hosting a website with the same name, which features the full text of the book and related materials.[17] More recently, adherents have attempted to condense the lengthy tract into a more digestible format known as the "Tenets of Siege," a short collection of neo-Nazi aphorisms that bears little resemblance to its eponymous source.[18]

Collectively, Siege Culture groups have been the subject of multiple prosecutions, including at least two for murder.[19] At least fourteen members of AWD have been arrested on various charges since its founding, including murder, firearms violations, and conspiracy with the intent to commit bombings and massacres. Eight members of the American Siege Culture group The Base were arrested in 2020 alone on an assortment of charges. In addition to its reach within the United States, Siege Culture has expanded globally, with the formation of AWD-inspired movements such as Sonnenkrieg Division in the United Kingdom and the multinational Feuerkrieg Division.[20]

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14 "Extremist Files: Atomwaffen Division," *Southern Poverty Law Center*.

15 Conor McCormick-Cavanagh, "James Mason Announces Neo-Nazi Militant Group Is Disbanding," *Westword*, March 17, 2020, https://www.westword.com/news/atomwaffen-division-is-disbanding-james-mason-says-11664712; Ben Makuch, "Audio Recording Claims Neo-Nazi Terror Group Is Disbanding," *Vice*, March 14, 2020, https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/qjdnam/audio-recording-claims-neo-nazi-terror-group-is-disbanding.

16 "Extremist Files: Atomwaffen Division," *Southern Poverty Law Center*; Counter Extremism Project, "James Mason's Siege: Ties to Extremists."

17 Zack Beauchamp, "Accelerationism: the obscure idea inspiring white supremacist killers around the world," *Vox*, November 18, 2019, https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/2019/11/11/20882005/accelerationism-white-supremacy-christchurch.

18 See, for example: "The 20 Tenets of Learned Elder SIEGE," n.d., accessed April 2, 2021, http://readsiege.com/20-tenets-of-siege/.

19 Emma Boches and Julia Solomon-Strauss, "White Supremacist Prosecutions Roundup," *Lawfare*, July 13, 2020, https://www.lawfareblog.com/White-supremacist-prosecutions-roundup; Jason Wilson, "Sweep of arrests hits US neo-Nazi group connected to five murders," *The Guardian*, March 6, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/06/neo-nazi-arrests-deals-blow-us-group-atomwaffen-division.

20 Tore Bjørgo and Jacob Aasland Ravndal, *Extreme-right violence and terrorism: Concepts, patterns, and responses* (International Centre for Counter-Terrorism—The Hague, 2019), https://icct.nl/publication/extreme-right-violence-and-terrorism-concepts-patterns-and-

Siege Culture is also endemic in online neo-Nazi circles, including extensive networks of adherents and fans active on Telegram and other social platforms with loose moderation and low public visibility. *Siege*-oriented Telegram channels often grow to encompass thousands of participants. Networks of channels such as "Terrorgram" discuss *Siege* in detail and glorify acts of "lone wolf" violence in keeping with the text's recommendations. Terrorgram and similar channels are purged by Telegram periodically and thus rarely exceed 10,000 members.[21]

Siege Culture groups vary in their particular beliefs but are generally oriented around *Siege*'s central argument, which states that a total societal collapse and rebirth is necessary to achieve a White nationalist victory. This argument is referred to by analysts as "accelerationism," a term that does not appear in *Siege* but accurately describes its content. The term has since been adopted by various neo-Nazi and other right-wing extremist groups. Accelerationism stands in contrast to other extremist strategies focused on swaying public opinion or effecting strategic change within or parallel to an existing political system.[22]

METHODOLOGY: LINKAGE-BASED ANALYSIS

This report will examine *Siege* using the linkage-based analysis framework developed by Haroro Ingram and subsequently iterated by this author.[23] Linkage-based analysis examines the role of *in-groups* and *out-groups* in delineating extremist belief. In this context an *in-group* is defined as a group to which an individual belongs, and *out-groups* are defined as groups to which the individual does not belong.[24]

Extremist ideologies typically outline a narrative, or a *system of meaning*, in which the eligible in-group is threatened by a *crisis* or crises that has been caused by an out-group or out-groups. The ideology then stipulates a *solution* to the crisis consisting of hostile action directed against the out-group or out-groups.[25]

responses/; Anti-Defamation League, "Feuerkrieg Division (FKD)," n.d., accessed January 14, 2021, https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounders/feuerkrieg-division-fkd.

21 Ayushman Kaul, "Terrorgram: A community built on hate," *Medium,* April 20, 2020, https://medium.com/dfrlab/terrorgram-a-community-built-on-hate-e02fd59ee329; author interviews with law enforcement analyst.

22 Beauchamp, "Accelerationism."

23 Haroro J. Ingram, *A "Linkage-Based" Approach to Combating Militant Islamist Propaganda: A Two-Tiered Framework for Practitioners* (International Centre for Counter-Terrorism—The Hague, 2016), http://doi.org/10.19165/2016.2.06; J.M. Berger, *Extremism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018).

24 Henri Tajfel, ed., *Social identity and intergroup relations (European Studies in Social Psychology, Series Number 7)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

25 Ingram, *A "Linkage-Based" Approach*; Berger, *Extremism*.

An ideological text is one that defines and links each of these elements: in-groups, out-groups, crises and solutions. In addition, extremist ideologies typically identify subdivisions of the in-group, including:

- The *extremist in-group*: the extremist movement itself;
- The *eligible in-group*: the identity that an extremist movement purports to defend or protect and to which it appeals for support or recruits.

In *Siege*, the eligible in-group is the *White race*, while the extremist in-group is comprised mainly of White Americans with *National Socialist* (Nazi) or other White nationalist beliefs. The out-group is *The System*, a broadly defined coalition working against White interests that creates a crisis by discriminating against White people and corrupting their cultural and racial purity. The solution *Siege* proposes is to carry out through violent and unpredictable attacks against the System and its collaborators, with the intention of weakening it and contributing incrementally to its eventual collapse.

OVERVIEW OF CONTENT

Siege is grouped into eight roughly thematic sections, each containing up to dozens of short chapters. Most of the chapters were originally short articles in the *Siege* newsletter. For the collected edition examined here, the source articles have been lightly edited to suggest some degree of book-like continuity.

Siege is not written for the general public, but for an audience of committed neo-Nazis. Mason is focused on changing attitudes and strategies within an existing extremist movement, which already subscribes to an out-group crisis narrative. As such, the discussion is heavily focused on in-group activities. *Siege* is best understood as targeting readers who are already deeply radicalized, with the aim of moving them toward violent action.

Mason urges readers who already identify as neo-Nazis or White nationalists to adopt escalating and largely non-strategic violence that may help accelerate the collapse of America's existing sociopolitical system. Related to this shift toward greater and more frequent acts of violence, Mason is seen in the text to slowly move away from the National Socialist Liberation Front (NSLF), the organizational brand with which he was associated when he started writing the newsletter.

Inspired by and in communication with mass-murdering cult leader Charles Manson, Mason goes on to form Universal Order, a movement even more focused on extreme violence in the absence of particular strategic goals. Mason's transition from NSLF to Universal Order can be roughly traced in the text of *Siege*.

The broadest identity formulations sketched out in Siege are as follows:

Eligible in-group:	**the "White race,"** generally referring to people with White skin and White European ancestry. Mason capitalizes "White" throughout the text, and this paper will follow that usage.
Extremist in-group:	**"the Movement,"** an umbrella term used flexibly to discuss a range of political views from far-right conservatism to White nationalism to National Socialism (Nazism). "Movement" most commonly refers to the more extreme portion of that spectrum.
Out-group:	**"the System,"** referring to existing social and political structures, including the government. The System's interests are allied with those of other out-groups, chiefly Jewish and Black people.

Eligible in-group: the "White race"

The word "White" denotes the primary characteristic that defines *Siege*'s eligible in-group, which is understood to be racial in nature. The "White race" is demarcated by "White skin," but more importantly by "White genes" and "White blood," concepts explicitly constructed to exclude Jewish people with White skin. In its most basic form, Whiteness therefore encompasses all people with White skin whose ancestry is White European and non-Jewish.

Siege associates Whiteness with specific social groupings and dynamics. These qualities contribute to a sense of "entitativity," or "groupiness," with the accompanying implication that White people are part of a distinct collective.[26] *Siege* frequently addresses Whiteness as American, strongly situating it within an American context. Mason also contextualizes the collectivity of Whiteness in other social and political configurations, with phrases such as White society, (the) White world, White Christian(s), White nation(s) and White power.

Extremist texts often describe the prototypical traits of the eligible in-group, outlining why the in-group is superior to the out-group.[27] *Siege*, perhaps because of its target audience, does not undertake this process of affirmation to any great extent. The text associates the White collective with decency, order, and civilization, usually in extremely vague terms.

26 Michael A. Hogg and Danielle L. Blaylock, eds., *Extremism and the Psychology of Uncertainty*, Volume 3 of Blackwell/Claremont Applied Social Psychology Series (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2011), Kindle edition, 780.

27 J. M. Berger, *Extremist Construction of Identity: How Escalating Demands for Legitimacy Shape and Define In-Group and Out-Group Dynamics* (International Centre for Counter-Terrorism—The Hague, 2017), http://doi.org/10.19165/2017.1.07.

A recurring theme claims that White culture is "ancient" and "true," but it must be "rediscovered" or "claimed" because White people are not sufficiently educated about their past. In a typical example, Mason writes:

> All of the White nations of the earth—from antiquity to the recent past—possess the most magnificent histories, customs, and traditions of their own equal to the best that Germany has. All branches of the White Race have great cause to be proud of their own heritage... so long as that great heritage is made known to them.[28]

While Mason asserts that the collective nature of Whiteness is vitally important, he says it has been compromised by countervailing tendencies:

> The White Man's greatest strength in the past has been his genius for organization. His greatest weakness has always been his tendency to contrariness and disunity.[29]

The most important positive trait associated with Whiteness is implicit rather than explicit. Words associated or co-located with "White" in *Siege* incorporate personhood in ways that words associated with "Black" or "Jew" do not. For instance, the following terms are co-located with White in the text:[30]

- White person/people/population
- White man
- White woman/girl
- White brother and/or sister
- White families
- White children

The co-located terms appear infrequently or not at all in connection with Black or Jewish people or any other non-White people. Possessive pronouns follow the same tendency— "people" are almost always "ours" (White) and almost never "theirs" (non-white). Extremist texts are well-known to employ language that dehumanizes out-groups,[31] but these linguistic associations illustrate the corollary to that rhetorical approach. In *Siege*, members of the in-group are explicitly humanized, while out-group members are not.

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28 Mason, *Siege,* 102.

29 Ibid., 107.

30 All co-locations, word frequency, and n-grams were analyzed using SketchEngine and AntConc 3.5.8 software.

31 Roger Giner-Sorolla, Bernhard Leidner, and Emanuele Castano, "Dehumanization, demonization, and morality shifting: Paths to moral certainty in extremist violence," in *Extremism and the Psychology of Uncertainty*, eds. Michael A. Hogg and Danielle L. Blaylock (Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell, 2012), 165-182, https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444344073.ch10; Paola Mayer and Ruediger Mueller, "Fascism as

Extremist in-group: The Movement

In an extremist worldview, an *extremist in-group* is the organization or movement that takes action to secure the health and success of the eligible in-group. For many extremist ideologues, the description of the extremist in-group is a celebration of the movement's merits. When the composition of such movements is in flux or in competition, the tone can be markedly different. So it is with *Siege*, which was composed as its author was in the process of changing his organizational affiliation.

Mason, a controversial figure even within extremist circles, delivers an extensive critique of multiple extremist organizations and ideologies. As a result, the overarching extremist in-group—described most consistently as "the Movement"—can be seen as a rapidly moving target, distinguished by overlapping, and sometimes conflicting, concerns and interests.

In a chapter titled "What Movement, Whose Movement?," Mason lays out the complexity of the competing social strains encompassed by the term:

> The Nazi Movement? The Klan Movement? State's Rights? Racial Nationalist? German-American? Anti-Communist? Majority Rights? White Christian? White Conservative? For practically every cell of the Hard Right in this country you'll find a separate definition of what the Movement is, as well as what the goal is and the methods for achieving that goal. Not to mention the identity of that "special person" to lead us onto that great destiny. Some of it gets pretty damned ridiculous which is why I stopped where I was in listing Movement "brand names" above. It is never my intent to offend anyone doing the best they can.[32]

The Movement is roughly broken down into the following major groupings, all of whose members are explicitly or implicitly limited to White people:

> **The Right Wing:**
>
> Mason notes that the Movement is, for the most part, a subset of the Right-Wing, which also includes:
>
> - Anti-Communists
> - Conservatives of various stripes
> - Far-right Christians

Dehumanization: Alexander Moritz Frey's Political Fables," *Oxford German Studies* 46, no. 1 (2017): 58-74, https://doi.org/10.1080/00787191.2017.1282657.

32 Mason, *Siege*, 51.

Racialists (Mason's word for White nationalists):

- The Ku Klux Klan
- Christian Identity

National Socialists:

- Historical German Nazis
- Contemporary American neo-Nazis

The National Socialist Liberation Front (NSLF, the neo-Nazi organization/movement with which Mason identifies at the beginning of the text)

Universal Order (the splinter movement founded by Mason during the course of writing *Siege*)

The listing above presents the Movement's components in ascending order of alignment with Mason's ideological project, with each further refinement coming closer to his evolving idea of a prototypical Movement organization.

A critical distinction between the eligible in-group (Whites) and the extremist in-group (the Movement) can be found in action. Mason rarely discusses Whites in action terms, relying primarily on constructions such as "Whites are" or "the White race is." The Movement, in contrast, is often discussed in terms of the actions it takes, or is expected to take, and the actions that members of the Movement are expected to undertake on its behalf. The eligible in-group *is*, but the extremist in-group *does*.

This can be seen in the co-location of Movement (and the associated pronouns, "we" and "us") with active verbs. Mason discusses the Movement in two primary action frames:

- What the Movement stands for (what it "knows," "believes," and "demands").
- How the Movement falls short of its ideals (how it "fails," "struggles," "splinters," and "wastes" opportunity and resources).

These points are played out over time, in lengthy discussions of what the Movement has been and what it must "become," although Mason is overwhelmingly focused on the present—what is happening now, and especially what adherents must do now. Imperatives, representing his prescription for the Movement's health, are strongly focused on building and nurturing:

- "We must *build* confidence within the entire movement…"[33]
- "…these are the only type of people that can ever *make* a true movement…"[34]
- "Can you not find sufficient motivation and discipline to fall in line, to *forge* a movement with which to smash pig power?"[35]

While "building" is a positive action, it carries a clear implication that the Movement has not yet achieved its ideal configuration. Indeed, The Movement's shortcomings comprise an overwhelming theme in *Siege*, reiterated and emphasized throughout the course of the text.

Out-groups: The System

The primary out-group described in Siege is known as "the System" (capitalization in original), which is the most-used word in the text after excluding common parts of speech. Mason construes the System to include virtually any form of authority and any structure of society. It is both communist and capitalist in nature (the two go "hand-in-hand" according to Mason).

The System, Mason claims, is largely controlled by Jewish people and shaped by Jewish ideology. It serves to advance the interests of non-White people more broadly. However, the System is not monolithic. It includes White collaborators in its ranks and counts Black and leftist "revolutionary" factions among its enemies (these factions are not, however, allies to the Movement).

Mason defines the System as follows:

> We use the term 'System' in place of the word 'government' because what controls America and the whole West today are not governments, they are faceless tyrannies, branch offices of a single monstrous SYSTEM. When we speak of the thousands of interchangeable, expendable parts of the alien, inhuman bureaucracy, we speak of the System. From police to welfare bureaucrats, to city, local, state and national appointees and so-called "elected officials"; from prison administration to the Armed Forces; those who either represent the System or who are in the employ of the System ARE in fact the System itself.[36]

33 Mason, *Siege*, 287.

34 Ibid., 338.

35 Ibid., 319.

36 Ibid., 155.

Under the broad umbrella of the System, Mason frequently uses the following terms, which he defines as follows:

The Enemy:	generally, a synonym for the System but includes non-White people in general, as well as White people who collaborate with the System or engage in interracial relationships. Mason repeats in the text that "the enemy is anyone who attacks."
The Establishment:	representing "the economic and social goings-on in the nation and the world today"—essentially meaning any existing social, political or economic power.
Big Brother:	representing "the Conspiracy," which is controlled by Jewish people but includes wider elements of the System. It is the concept or source of control and ideology, "the alien worldview which now permeates everything consumed by the public."

These words, and others, are often combined, creating a fairly consistent pattern, such as "Big Brother System," "Beast System," "Jew System," and "Enemy System." They are less subdivisions than functional synonyms.

Although the System has facets, Mason does not describe it in complex terms. The Movement is made up of people (often specific people), while the System is monolithic, and more mechanistic than humanistic—described as "alien," "intellectualized, computerized, mechanized, de-humanized."

The System is "rotten," "filthy," "evil" and "degenerate," and a source of "brainwashing," "compulsory liberal education," and "propaganda" that keeps people passive and subdued. Another key source of the System's control is "economic," "capitalism," or simply "money," which is associated with Jewishness. (Paradoxically, Jewish elements of the System are condemned for being both capitalist and "Marxist.")

Action words associated with the System (or the pronouns they/them) contrast sharply with those linked to the Movement, both in the variety of terms, and most notably for verbs where the System is the object, which reflect the definitional stipulation that extremists must insist on hostile action against an out-group. Readers are repeatedly urged to "fight," "smash," "destroy," "break," and "cripple" the System, and to "kill" its supporters and adherents. These and other violent words lie at the heart of Siege's extremism. But the System is not the only target of Mason's ire.

IN-GROUP CRISIS: A PALER SHADE OF WHITE

Extremism is the belief than an in-group can never be healthy or successful unless it is engaged in hostile action against an out-group, and the extremist orientation of *Siege* is clear from the language it applies to each group. This hostile action is typically justified by a *system of meaning* stipulating that an out-group

or -groups is responsible for a crisis that afflicts the in-group.[37] The eligible in-group is understood to be weakened by the crisis, but the crisis may also be exacerbated or even precipitated by the weakness of the eligible in-group.

Mason's ideological argument is intensely concerned with the weakness and broad deficiencies of the in-group. The *White race* is measured and found to be lacking: wan, tepid, and unworthy of the mantle of pride and strength associated with prototypical *Whiteness*. This extremist framing of an *internal crisis* is not unique to *Siege*, but it is particularly visible here.

The internal crisis narrative pervades *Siege*, discussed in almost every part of the book, as well as being the primary subject of dedicated sections, including "Conservatism and the Lost Movement" and "Leaders." While Mason's critique of in-groups is sweeping, he continuously returns to three overarching themes:

> **1. Passivity of the (White) eligible in-group:**
>
> White people lack the will to fight against the System, having become passive consumers who are content with less than their due.
>
> **2. Complicity of the (White) eligible in-group:**
>
> White people actively participate in the System, contributing to their own oppression, and mix with or emulate racial out-groups.
>
> **3. Inadequacy of the (Movement) extremist in-group:**
>
> Leaders of the Movement have adopted a variety of bad strategies and engage in ego-driven conflict with each other.

Complacency of the eligible in-group

While Mason is deeply concerned with advancing the supremacy of the "White race" on principles of genetic superiority, his assessment of White people is deeply negative and pessimistic. According to Mason:

> Aryans, or Whites, on the other hand, as we have seen, by and large have abdicated not only their world role but their individual roles as members of the Great Race, to the point where the Race is now only "great" in so far as its past and potential are concerned.[38]

37 Ingram, *A "Linkage-Based" Approach to Combating Militant Islamist Propaganda*.

38 Mason, *Siege*, 174.

White people, in Mason's view, bear much of the responsibility for the System's dominance because they are passive and complacent. Mason criticizes those who are willing to accept "business-as-usual," a phrase that serves as the title of one chapter bemoaning the failure of White people to resist the System, opting instead to "to work their jobs, go home or to the bar, drink and watch television," indulging in what Mason calls "comfort corruption." The problem pervades White society but is concentrated in the upper and middle classes, which have a stronger interest in the System's success and the maintenance of their comfortable "lifestyles."

This passivity and acceptance of the status quo renders White people "positively incapable of turning a page of history," providing part of the rationale for Mason's accelerationist argument: only a complete collapse of society is enough to shake such White people out of their stupor and force them to change.

In another chapter, Mason argues that White people have had their "character and will" drained by the System's brainwashing to the point that "there's nothing left of them." While the System is blamed for this brainwashing, Mason takes pains to contrast the general White population with himself and other committed extremists, who have chosen to reject the System's media, propaganda, and "total brainwash job." Brainwashing is a malicious activity, but accepting the System's media output is a sign of White people's stupidity, complacency, and cowardice.

As these passages indicate, passivity is frequently framed in terms of fear, distraction, and/or laziness. The word "coward" appears 19 times in *Siege*, almost always in relation to White people. In another section of the text, Mason writes:

> [W]hen given a choice, human nature inevitably takes the course of least resistance. The diabolic nature of the Big Brother System in power today may be largely responsible for breeding a race of docile "consumers" who roll over like a spaniel when kicked and otherwise outraged, but for us that is no reason, no excuse, for revolutionary inaction. It CAN be done!
>
> They say a coward will allow himself to be bullied and backed up as long as there is room left for him to back up. All of White America has been behaving like a damned coward in the face of arrogant Blacks and traitors in government dismantling the once-great United States of America.[39]

But Mason does not truly believe that White people will "come out fighting." Rather than elevating the eligible in-group, he argues that the Movement must dominate it. In victory, at some point after a future societal collapse, the Movement will exploit the same White passivity that empowered the System:

39 Ibid., 44.

> In the face of the implied threat from the System today they behave like sheep. After witnessing the fire and fury that removes the System, don't expect any problems from them. No consideration is due to cowards and shirkers.[40]

Ultimately, these White mediocrities "have lost all racial pride and identity" and are "alienated from their own people, their own past." And for the Movement to succeed, many of them must be "removed," even if doing so means the end of the United States as it is currently constituted. This level of alienation is serious enough that some White people must be disqualified from the eligible in-group, even though they meet the prima facie criteria.

> Then there is also dysgenics which means, though a person is nominally "White", he is so only in color, there is nothing underneath. This is the product of fratricidal wars and total lack of breeding: the creation of a race of boobs.[41]

In some cases, this dissociation with White racial identity goes so far that the White person becomes a "would-be n****r,"[42] Mason writes, who is "more closely related" to Black people than to White people.

Passages like these put a punctuation mark on the social construction of race, even within movements predicated on the belief that race is a non-negotiable biological reality. White nationalists insist it is impossible for non-White people to cross the racial barrier and join the in-group, but almost all of them stipulate than people who violate racial taboos can have their in-group status revoked. The biological reality of race is irrefutable, until it becomes convenient to refute.

Complicity of the eligible in-group

White people who are passive within the System are to be ignored, at best, and are fated to be dominated by the Movement after its victory. But another class of the eligible in-group must be dealt with more harshly. These are the collaborators, or "race traitors," whose complicity with the System and its norms requires a reclassification that moves them functionally into an out-group, even if they meet the strictest movement racial criteria for Whiteness (so-called "pure blood" or "genes").

There are two major categories of complicit White people:

1. Those who collaborate with the System, including working for it in positions of authority;
2. Those who have sexual relations with non-White people, thus diluting the purity or integrity of White identity.

40 Ibid., 169.

41 Ibid., 130.

42 RESOLVE editorial guidelines redact offensive language in RESOLVE publications.

Collaborators include a wide range of people involved with the System, frequently referred to as "White renegades" or "traitors." White traitors include people who work in government at any level, from bureaucracy to elected office. Although the System is Jewish in nature and ideology, "the Beast System is still basically manned and operated by renegade, sold-out Whites," Mason writes. "What we are fighting has always been, and will always be, *a sickness from within.*"[43]

Mason also expresses a high level of contempt for police and military personnel, referring to them as the System's "most dangerous and irredeemable reactionaries." Quoting another Movement figure, he opens one chapter with the sentence, "The only thing lower than n****rs and Jews is police that protect them," an observation Mason characterizes as "profoundly correct." Informants and White people who collaborate with the police (referred to as "Uncle Toms") are similarly condemned.

Worst of all are the "race-mixers." The System and its educational system encourage race-mixing, according to Mason, making America "a cesspool of miscegenation." Mason attributes this in significant part to the degeneracy of White people who participate in the System, claiming that "[h]ealthy people aren't susceptible" to race-mixing impulses.

"Real White Americans … HATE the very sight of race-mixing," Mason writes. "They HATE those of their own race who are involved in it." Yet race-mixers are genetically White, Mason concedes, writing, "a lot of the most rabid, sneering miscegenators are blond, blue-eyed doll babies."[44]

Quoting Hitler, Mason writes that the Movement must "close [its] heart to pity" when dealing with those who break the racial boundaries around sexual conduct. Race-mixers and collaborators are to be killed under the vaguely defined new world order that will arise after the collapse of the System. According to Mason, "there will be no need for concentration camps of any kind, for not a single transgressor will survive long enough to make it to that kind of haven."[45]

Inadequacy of the extremist in-group

Extremist texts often contain some degree of critique directed at the eligible in-group. Mason does not stop there, however. Siege includes a lengthy and substantive criticism of the Movement itself, addressing flaws and failures at almost every level of extremist in-group activity.

To some extent, these criticisms can be understood as emanating from Mason's personality—a mix of egotism and ideological evolution. Mason is convinced that his attitudes and ideas are superior to those held by most living Movement figures, and his commentary on his peers often takes on an air of axe-grinding.

43 Ibid., 113.

44 Ibid., 76-77.

45 Ibid.

But *Siege* is also the work of an ideologue whose ideology and group affiliation are in the process of changing. Mason begins *Siege* as a committed National Socialist before transitioning to herald the formation of a splinter movement, Universal Order, which is centered primarily on the personality of cult leader Charles Manson.

Mason sees Manson as a more honest and action-oriented leader than those who currently exist within the Movement, comparing him favorably to honored dead Nazi and neo-Nazi icons such as Adolf Hitler, George Lincoln Rockwell, and Joseph Tommassi. The extremist in-group critique in *Siege* can arguably be seen as a process of trying to bring the extremist in-group in line with a new set of principles. Universal Order is not well-defined in the text and has not manifested organizationally in the real world, but it follows the Manson model (as understood by Mason) in two respects: first, it prioritizes violence that is relatively indiscriminate, and second, it encourages adherents to "drop out" from the System rather than trying to live a life of accommodation within society.

Mason delivers a scathing, lengthy critique of the Movement and its leadership, including the following major points:

1. The Movement is not unified.
2. The Movement's leaders are egotistical, petty or otherwise unqualified.
3. Some members of the Movement cannot be trusted, either because they are turncoats or because they seek to profit from true believers.
4. The Movement is unwilling to adopt sufficiently violent tactics.

The first three items overlap significantly. Mason stipulates early in the text that there are "huge ideological and theoretical differences" in the Movement's many components (for instance, the KKK versus National Socialism). Although these differences are "very slight" compared to their common purpose (White supremacy), some Movement leaders see their role as competing with others in the Movement rather than acting against the System, Mason writes.

Without naming names, Mason paints a dire portrait of Movement leaders as "flunkies," "pretenders," "cowards," "overblown losers," "dabblers," "idiots," "fakers," "two-bit 'leaders' [in] flashy uniforms," and "krinklejammers" (referring to people who adhere to a Nazi ideology but use less inflammatory terms to describe it). Many of these criticisms revolve around "ego-cult[s] built around … self-styled *'Führer[s]*.'"

More serious than personal shortcomings, in Mason's view, is the failure to adopt "armed struggle" as the Movement's strategic focus. He argues that too many in the Movement are following a "mass strategy," trying to build popular support by appealing to large portions of the eligible in-group (White Americans).

Mason considers the eligible in-group beyond redemption. Because of their complacency and complicity, White people can only be rehabilitated after the System has been completely destroyed.

From the outset of *Siege*, Mason's prescribed solution in the extremist system of meaning is violence, preferably against the System, but almost any violence will do. The exact contours are fluid depending on context, but Mason generally supports terrorism and so-called "lone wolf" attacks that theoretically weaken the System in advance of a more decisive confrontation at some undefined point in the future. Mason is highly critical of Movement leaders and adherents who do not support armed struggle, at least in principle if not practice.

> The worst critics of the Armed Struggle are inside the Movement. If you want to be told how "not to do it", just consult the "Phony Führers". For some very good reasons do they fear and reject the concept of the Armed Struggle. It is because you can be a damned, total fool in the Mass Strategy and still live. You cannot be thus in the Armed Struggle. You can be a complete incompetent and an abject failure in the Mass Strategy and yet still live to formulate clever and complicated reasons to hide or justify your failure. You can get away with being a faker and a blowhard within the Mass Strategy and no one can tell you apart from those who may be sincere. You can eke out a "living" as a Mass Strategy mail-order fraud but the Armed Struggle holds no reward unless made a total success. It is therefore a decidedly uninviting climate for the fakers and the kooks.[46]

Mason does not demand that every member of the Movement be continually engaged in violence. But he praises individuals and groups who do take violent action, such as The Order (a White nationalist terrorist cell)[47] and Joseph Paul Franklin (a serial killer who targeted mixed-race couples).[48] Mason criticizes Movement leaders for failing to praise such violent actors, accusing them of timidity and laziness.

> I have not read a single word in any Right Wing publication—Nazi or Klan regarding James Vaughn/Joseph Franklin, either for or against. It is as though he has become a non-person. One could then safely assume the so-called "Movement" has disowned him or wants no part of him. But by "playing it safe" they do not "disown" Vaughn, they in effect RULE THEMSELVES OUT as being worthy of anything except total oblivion.[49]

Finally, Mason addresses the issue of infiltrators, informants and turncoats within the Movement, which is caught between the rock of misplaced trust and the hard place of excessive paranoia. For those who betray the Movement to the System by informing to the authorities or betraying confidences, "death is the proper medicine," Mason writes.

46 Ibid., 116.

47 Ibid., 179, 182, 228-229, 231-232, 323.

48 Ibid., 81, 116, 146, 187, 200-208, 213, 216-217, 331, 350, 383-384.

49 Ibid., 206.

IN-GROUPS IN CRISIS

While this paper is focused on *Siege* specifically, it is useful to note that in-group critique and crisis narratives are not unique to this text. Some extremist in-groups may capture support from a majority of the eligible in-group, but more frequently, extremist movements find their legitimacy challenged by the very people they claim to represent.

Ideologues can respond to this challenge with a variety of overlapping arguments, for instance by asserting that the purity of the eligible in-group has been corrupted by an out-group or that members of the eligible in-group are ignorant of relevant facts. Some antagonistic members of the eligible in-group may be deemed to suffer from deficiencies of character or morality, and these deficiencies may be deemed so severe as to potentially or actually disqualify them from in-group membership altogether.

People who possess the canonical requirements for eligible in-group membership but who oppose or fail to support the extremist in-group can be assigned to an *ineligible in-group*. The ineligible in-group consists of:

- In-group people who are at risk of being assigned to an out-group due to neglect of the extremist in-group's priorities;
- In-group people who have been provisionally assigned to an out-group but who may be forgiven and reabsorbed into the in-group under the right conditions;
- In-group people who have been irrevocably assigned to an out-group.

This dynamic is clear in *Siege*, where large swathes of the eligible in-group are dismissed for their complacency. Mason argues that a "mass strategy" designed to win over ordinary White Americans is pointless. They can only be dominated by the extremist in-group after the System has collapsed and been replaced. While this is purportedly in their best interests, domination is still a form of hostile action, albeit less severe than Mason's genocidal intentions toward out-groups.

However, Mason also describes a group of White collaborators and race-mixers who are fully equivalent to an out-group, despite meeting the canonical requirements of the in-group (e.g., White skin and White genes). Mason prescribes death as the only possible solution to the crisis these ineligible in-group members create. This solution is arguably harsher than the hostile action prescribed for some out-groups (for instance, Black people, who Mason allows could be permitted to live in autonomous, racially segregated societies).[50]

While *Siege* is exceptionally focused on ineligible in-groups and in-group crises, Mason is not unique in delivering an extensive in-group critique. Many extremist ideological texts contain similar arguments,

50 Ibid., 159.

often delivered in more detail and at greater length than their corresponding critiques of out-groups. The remainder of this section will briefly review some representative examples of this phenomenon that the author has encountered in his previous research.

The Turner Diaries

One of the few then-living Movement leaders that Mason seems to respect at all is William Luther Pierce, leader of the neo-Nazi National Alliance and author of *The Turner Diaries*, a White nationalist dystopian novel that has had an outsized impact on the Movement as Mason defines it.[51]

The Turner Diaries was first published shortly before Mason began work on Siege, and likely influenced its content. Mason knew Pierce and directly cites *The Turner Diaries* multiple times in *Siege*, extolling its merits.

As in *Siege*, some of Pierce's sharpest criticisms are aimed at White "conservatives" and "right-wingers." The failure of these groups and individuals to act, "due to a combination of cowardice complacency and corruption," is directly blamed for the rise of the dystopian regime that Pierce's protagonists battle.[52]

Pierce's fictional insurgent group, The Organization, takes steps to purge the "fainthearts," "hobbyists," and "talkers." When The Organization launches its rebellion, it does so in the hopes that the right-wingers will support its guerilla war. But those hopes prove to be fruitless. The solution to this internal crisis, proposed by Pierce in the words of the book's narrator, Earl Turner, foreshadows sentiments found in *Siege*:

> Of all the segments of the population from which we had hoped to draw new members, the "conservatives" and "right wingers" have been the biggest disappointment. They are the world's worst conspiracy-mongers—and also the world's greatest cowards. […] Woe betide any whining conservative, "responsible" or otherwise, who gets in the way of our revolution when I am around! I will listen to no more excuses from these self-serving collaborators but will simply reach for my pistol.[53]

51 J.M. Berger, *The Turner Legacy: The Storied Origins and Enduring Impact of White Nationalism's Deadly Bible* (International Centre for Counter-Terrorism—The Hague, 2016), http://doi.org/10.19165/2016.1.11.

52 Ibid.

53 William Luther Pierce (as Andrew Macdonald), *The Turner Diaries* (Publication history: Serialized in *Attack!* newsletter starting in January 1975. Published as a book by National Alliance, 1978, and Barricade Books Inc., 1996. Published online by Lulu Enterprises Incorporated, 2015).

Join the Caravan

First published in 1987, Abullah Azzam's *Join the Caravan* is a classic text of jihadist ideology, arguing that Muslims around the world are individually obligated to take part in military action (*jihad*) against forces occupying a Muslim country, in this case with specific reference to the contemporaneous Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.[54]

Join the Caravan emanates from a completely different historical and literary tradition from works like *Siege* and *The Turner Diaries*. Yet here again we find an extensive discussion of eligible in-group shortcomings. Like *Siege*, *Join the Caravan* is a text intended to inspire in-group members to take part in violence against an out-group. And like *Siege*, the text is disproportionately weighted toward a critique of the in-group rather than an enumeration of grievances against the out-group.

The nature of the critique is also similar. While Azzam is considerably more generous in his praise for the eligible in-group (the *ummah*, or global community of Sunni Muslims) and his description of its prototypical merits, a significant portion of the text is dedicated to sharp criticism.

While the *ummah* is inherently noble and filled with potential, it suffers from serious shortcomings. In Azzam's view, too many Muslims "sit back" and neglect their obligation to jihad. Many of "those who sit back" are characterized as being "unfeeling" and afflicted with "cold hearts." Others fail to recognize the evil working against the *ummah* or feel an excessive "greed for life." Some are distracted by trivialities, such as the appropriate "food and styles of speech."

As in *Siege*, passivity is the chief criticism leveled against the eligible in-group, but Azzam also spares some harsh words for the "rash," "reckless," and angry who lack focus on the specific mission (*Siege*, in contrast, praises virtually any act of violence that targets the System, even tangentially). Ultimately, Azzam is more concerned with strategic violence than with violence for violence's sake.

Islamic State

The term "ineligible in-group" was first coined by this author in the context of propaganda generated by the jihadist movement known as Islamic State (IS).[55] IS propaganda frequently discusses ineligible in-groups, due to its status as an extreme outlier within the eligible in-group of Sunni Muslims.

At one point, IS faced existential challenges from within the eligible in-group, notably emanating from the Sunni Awakening (*sahwat*) movement, which opposed its designs using military force in Iraq. In the

54 Abdullah Azzam, *Join the Caravan* (Boston: CARE International, 2nd ed., 1989).

55 J.M. Berger, *Countering Islamic State Messaging Through "Linkage-Based" Analysis* (International Centre for Counter-Terrorism—The Hague, 2017), http://.doi.org/10.19165/2017.2.02.

wake of this conflict, IS devoted extensive propaganda focus to the question of whether and how participants in the Awakening could be "rehabilitated" into IS. An initial focus on reconciliation soon gave way to stronger condemnation, although IS officials still conceded that *sahwat* members remained part of the eligible in-group, at least if they were willing to recant.[56]

Later, however, this question escalated in importance, as internal ideological conflicts broke out within IS on the question of excommunication (*takfir*), the formal expulsion of ineligible in-group members from the eligible in-group (the Sunni Muslim *ummah*). While *takfir* has always featured in IS thought, the more extreme faction of IS argued for a much broader implementation, which would potentially deem most Sunni Muslims to be apostates, formally assigning them to an out-group (*kufr*, or disbelievers).[57] The dispute led to a serious fracture that continues today, weakening and dividing IS during a period when it also faced external setbacks.[58]

THE OUT-GROUP IN THE IN-GROUP

Extremist movements typically position themselves as the defenders and promoters of an eligible in-group identity,[59] and extremism is defined by a commitment to hostile action against an out-group. So why do extremist ideologues sometimes choose to criticize or even attack members of their own in-group?

When extremist movements fail to capture significant support from their eligible in-groups, they seek to rationalize that failure with a critique of the eligible in-group. This rationalization can take many forms. For instance, extremists may argue that eligible in-group members are misinformed, complacent, or have become corrupted by contact with an out-group. When this critique escalates, extremists may attempt to revoke the eligibility of problematic in-group members ("they're not really White") or prescribe hostile action against them ("race traitors must be killed").

This internal crisis can grow so significant that it eclipses the traditional extremist narrative describing a crisis caused by an out-group. In both *Siege* and *Join the Caravan*, the internal crisis is discussed in more detail, and at greater length, than the crises precipitated by out-groups.

In *Siege* especially, the dimensions of the internal crisis have dire implications for the in-group and profoundly shape the hostile action prescribed to counter the out-group. Thus, the particular strain of extremism articulated in *Siege* is inseparable from its in-group critique.

56 Ibid.

57 Cole Bunzel, "The Islamic State's Mufti on Trial: The Saga of the 'Silsila 'Ilmiyya,'" *CTC Sentinel* 11, no. 9 (2018): 14-18, https://ctc.usma.edu/islamic-states-mufti-trial-saga-silsila-ilmiyya/.

58 Asaad Almohammad, "New Caliph, Same Old Problems," *Foreign Affairs*, January 1, 2020, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/west-africa/2020-01-01/new-caliph-same-old-problems.

59 Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, "Mechanisms of political radicalization: Pathways toward terrorism," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20, no. 3 (2008): 415-433, https://doi.org/10.1080/09546550802073367.

Ideologues may have specific aims in crafting in-group critiques, such as:

- Attempting to shift the eligible in-group's practices and consensus views so that they are better aligned with the extremist in-group;
- Increasing extremist in-group recruitment by shaming or inspiring the eligible in-group to take hostile action against an out-group;
- Defending the legitimacy of the extremist in-group in the face of opposition by some or all of the eligible in-group or competing extremist movements.

In practice, most ideologues are likely motivated by some combination of these three factors, but in some cases, one motive supersedes the others. For instance, in *Join the Caravan*, Azzam explicitly seeks to shame members of the eligible in-group into adopting his military mission against the out-group. In contrast, Islamic State has struggled to assert its legitimacy in the face of overwhelming condemnation and even physical assaults originating with the eligible in-group.

Siege explicitly disavows the first two motives as part of its critique, arguing that any "mass mobilization strategy" is doomed to fail due to the eligible in-group's complacency and corruption. Instead, Mason seeks to defend the legitimacy of his very specific extremist in-groups (National Socialism and Universal Order) against the overwhelming rebuke of the eligible in-group and against conflicting ideological views held by competing extremist in-groups and their leaders.

Mason's critique of the eligible in-group as irremediably complacent and corrupt also supports his accelerationist strategy preference. In *Siege*, accelerationism is necessary not just because of the System's "tyrannical power," but because the System has changed the nature of the eligible in-group itself. The System's corruption weakens the eligible in-group, while the in-group's complicity strengthens the System in turn. In Mason's view, this vicious circle can only be broken by the System's total collapse.

Other extremist groups may determine that the in-group must be purified or improved before the crisis can been solved and may take action against the ineligible in-group prior to or concurrent with action against out-groups. The White nationalist fixation on race-mixing is one example. The infamous "Day of the Rope"—an oft-cited mass execution described in *The Turner Diaries*—squarely targets race-mixers and White collaborators for especially harsh treatment. These ineligible in-group members are hanged and disgraced in an extremely graphic public spectacle, while out-group members (non-White people) are killed concurrently, but efficiently, out of the public eye.

In Siege, the in-group critique plays a critical role in dictating the type of hostile action—accelerationist—to be directed against out-groups. In Mason's estimation, the vast majority of the eligible in-group has become complacent or complicit with respect to the System, rendering futile any strategy that depends on awakening or mobilizing the masses.

While the System's "tyrannical power" is partly to blame for the situation, the in-group's deficiencies are the primary reason that a "mass strategy" cannot succeed. Mason's strategies proceed directly from his diagnosis of in-group weakness, which precludes more ambitious or strategic forms of violence. As Mason writes:

> We are the first to realize that no popular revolt can be contemplated at this time as the only thing "popular" at the moment is further pleasure and more diversion among the quivering masses.[60]

Instead, Mason encourages a war of attrition to be carried out by so-called "lone wolves" and very small groups. In *Siege,* Mason endorses and praises even relatively wanton and astrategic acts of violence on the presumption that such attacks will damage the System and "hasten its demise."

Toward the end of the text, Mason adds further guidance, encouraging Movement adherents to "drop out" of society—to segregate themselves from both the out-group and the deficient eligible in-group—in order to better survive the System's expected collapse.

Notably, Mason offers no meaningful blueprint or mechanism for creating a new society in the wake of the old. Despite vague allusions to a more ideal social order, *Siege* proposes only destruction, unlike other extremist groups such as Islamic State, which offer and even implement very specific plans for the society they wish to build. Mason shows no interest in building, only in demolition.

CONCLUSION: INSIGHTS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The prominence of in-group critique in *Siege* and other extremist ideological texts raises important questions for those seeking to counter violent extremism and opens avenues for future research.

While the presence of in-group critiques will come as no surprise to most people working in terrorism and extremism studies,[61] there is considerable room for continued and more focused analysis that may provide better insights into exactly how internal crises shape an extremist movement's beliefs and behavior.

While the goal of countering extremism is to reduce violence and hate directed toward out-groups, dismantling in-group critiques could offer a back door to weakening the overall structure of extremist belief. In addition, it may be possible to develop more nuanced approaches to reducing hostile action against out-groups by understanding how in-group critiques fuel extremist belief and/or shape extremist strategies.

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60 Mason, *Siege*, 37.

61 See, for example: Jacob Zenn and Zacharias Pieri, "How much Takfir is too much Takfir? The evolution of Boko Haram's factionalization," *Journal for Deradicalization* 11 (Summer 2017): 281-308, https://journals.sfu.ca/jd/index.php/jd/article/view/107.

Some avenues for further research and potential policy development include the following:

» **With respect to Racially and Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremism (REMVE) specifically, in-group critique narratives offer a window into racial coding.** While REMVE movements insist that race and ethnicity represent absolute biological barriers to the migration of members from out-groups to the in-group, their propensity for reassigning in-group members to out-group status creates an opening for cognitive dissonance and counter-messaging. In simpler terms, if race is a biological reality and not a social construct, how can the excommunication of in-group members (such as race-mixers) be justified?

» **Building on that point, the examples of in-group excommunication in *Siege* are only one part of a wider literature showing that the concept of race is socially constructed, fluid and changeable,[62] even in movements explicitly devoted to asserting the absolutism of racial boundaries.[63]** Understanding why and how racial views shift and how ideologues justify redefining racial boundaries may offer more effective approaches to countering REMVE. Additional research into this phenomenon may yield greater insight into the origin of racist ideologies and approaches to countering their appeal.

» **Past research has found that people tend to view their in-groups as less homogenous and more differentiated than out-groups, which goes some way toward explaining why extremist ideologues spend so much time parsing in-group differences.[64]** Future research could explore whether this phenomenon is exaggerated in extremist movements when compared to control groups, which seems quite likely. Findings from such research could inform potential CVE measures. For instance, messaging and interventions that focus keenly on the heterogeneity of out-groups might prove more effective at mitigating extremist attitudes than blunter approaches designed to foster goodwill more directly.

» **Relatedly, previous research suggests the existence of a "black sheep" effect, in which likeable in-group members are more intensely liked and unlikeable in-group members intensely disliked than comparable out-group members.[65]** This is clearly visible in the extremist ideological texts discussed herein, including White nationalists' fixation on race-mixing and jihadist obsessions with apostasy. Perceived betrayals of the in-group are often judged more harshly and punished more severely than out-group transgressions.[66] Additional focused research could establish defini-

62 Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish became White* (Milton Park, UK: Routledge, 2009).

63 Berger, *Extremist Construction of Identity.*

64 Bernadette Park and Myron Rothbart, "Perception of out-group homogeneity and levels of social categorization: Memory for the subordinate attributes of in-group and out-group members," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 42, no. 6 (1982): 1051-1068, https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.42.6.1051; Marilynn B. Brewer, "Social identity, distinctiveness, and in-group homogeneity," *Social Cognition* 11, no. 1 (1993): 150-164, https://doi.org/10.1521/soco.1993.11.1.150.

65 José M. Marques and Vincent Y. Yzerbyt, "The black sheep effect: Judgmental extremity towards ingroup members in inter-and intragroup situations," *European Journal of Social Psychology* 18, no. 3 (1988): 287-292, https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2420180308.

66 Amy C. Lewis and Steven J. Sherman, "Perceived Entitativity and the Black-Sheep Effect: When Will We Denigrate Negative Ingroup Members?," *The Journal of Social Psychology* 150, no. 2 (2010): 211-225, https://doi.org/10.1080/00224540903366388.

tively whether and how this effect is exaggerated in extremist ideologies, potentially yielding additional insights.

» The prominence of an in-group critique may offer insights into how extremist movements perceive their own legitimacy relative to the eligible in-group and may serve to indicate when they feel their legitimacy is facing an existential challenge. Extremists concerned with rebutting attacks on their legitimacy often engage in ideological innovation, which can lead to escalatory radicalization and violence.[67]

» For many people a strong in-group affiliation offers a way to reduce cognitive uncertainty by strengthening belief in the in-group's consensus reality. This helps explain and contextualize research showing that extremism thrives under conditions of uncertainty.[68] When an extremist in-group is very ideologically distinct from the eligible in-group, an in-group critique may offer a route to reconcile conflicting consensuses or may be employed (as in *Siege*) to discredit the eligible in-group consensus in favor of the extremist consensus. Because these are complex dynamics, a fruitful area for future research would examine extremist texts from diverse types of extremist movements (religious, racial, nationalist) at different stages in their life cycles (for instance, fringe extremist movements versus mainstreamed extremist movements).

» In *Siege*, the in-group critique plays a clear role in shaping its primary strategy recommendations, while the cited jihadist in-group critiques also relate to strategic choices, in somewhat less direct ways. Additional focused research into how in-group critiques dictate extremist strategic choices could help inform efforts to predict the trajectory of extremist activities, including the type and scale of violence they are likely to attempt and whether they are succeeding in converting the eligible in-group to their cause.

» Finally, the intensity and severity of an extremist movement's in-group critique might correlate in a fairly direct way to the type and scale of violence that the movement is likely to attempt. Research to test the validity of this theorized correlation could assist intelligence agencies and online platforms in identifying dangerous content, reducing false positives, and offering a more balanced, accurate assessment of extremist landscapes.

Discussions about extremist ideology and group formation tend to revolve around attitudes toward outgroups, because they are the most visible and frequent targets of extremist violence. This focus is appropriate, but a more extensive examination of intra-group dynamics and divisions may help shed light on the broader mechanics of radicalization, the appeal of extremist ideologies to would-be adherents, and strategies for mitigating extremist violence.

67 Berger, *Extremist Construction of Identity.*

68 J.M. Berger, "The Year of Living Uncertainly," *The Atlantic*, October 9, 2020, https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/10/year-living-uncertainly/616648/.

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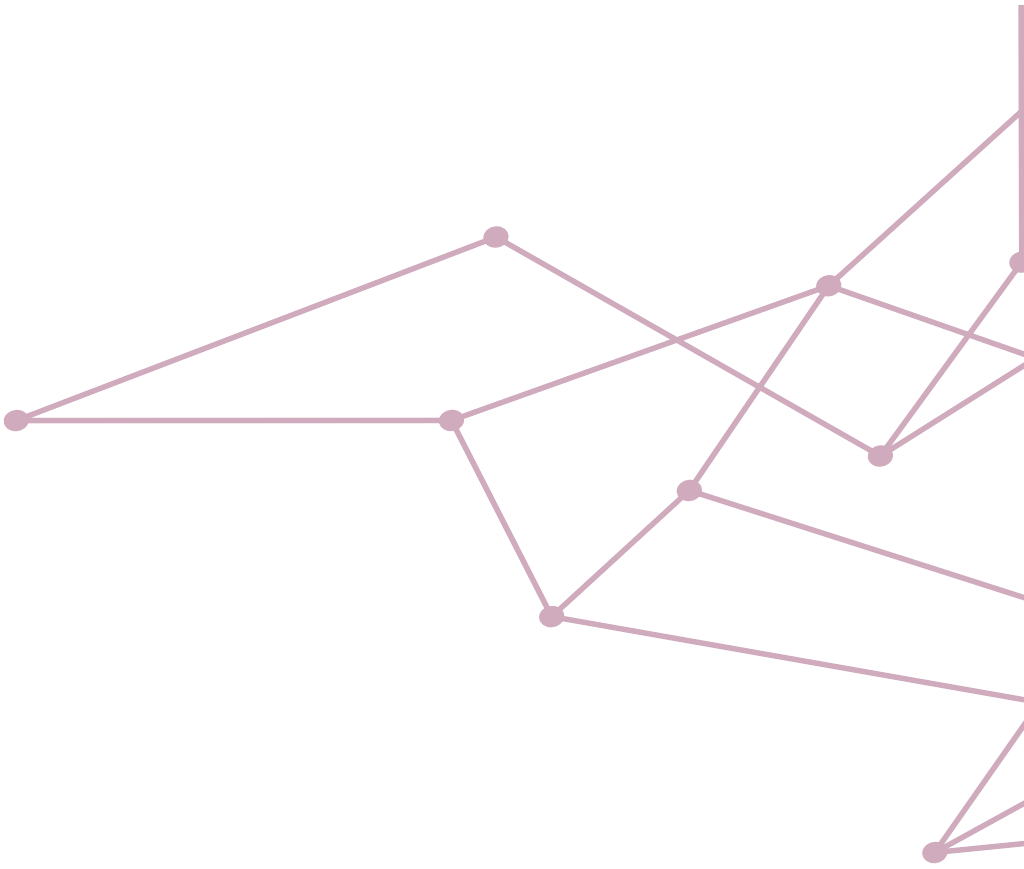

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