

LIBTARDS, LIBERTARIANS AND LONERS IN THE CREATION OF INSECURE SPACE ON PARLER: (IN)SECURITIZATION ON A SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM

Chris Farrands¹. Nottingham Trent University, UK

Recibido: 21-3-2022

Aceptado: 6-5-2022

Resumen

Basándose en un examen día a día del sitio web Parler desde septiembre de 2020 hasta enero de 2021, un sitio que promueve puntos de vista de extrema derecha en los EE. UU., este artículo examina cómo se construyen y actúan la seguridad y la inseguridad dentro del espacio virtual. Explora el lenguaje extremo de los colaboradores de Parler (cerrado debido a esa violencia después de la insurrección del 6 de enero de 2021 para anular el resultado de las elecciones presidenciales de noviembre). Examina los electores representados por Parler, el papel del liderazgo y la clase, así como la raza y el género en los intercambios en línea, y ofrece una descripción etnográfica de los temas centrales y los problemas que plantean los participantes. Examina las diferencias entre las comunidades de Parler y los problemas que las unen, en particular el odio a los "democraps", los "libtards" ("retardados liberales") y las mujeres negras políticamente comprometidas. Hace algunas sugerencias sobre por qué este nivel extremo de violencia se hizo posible en la sociedad estadounidense. Encuentra que muchas de las publicaciones más extremas están respaldadas por un sentido de exclusión y una necesidad,

¹ E-mail: chrisfarrands@outlook.com

Dr Chris Farrands BSc (Econ), MSc (Econ), PhD, FRSA, FRAI is an independent scholar and researcher who, after retirement from full time academic work, teaches and supervises part time at Nottingham Trent University, where he was formerly Head of the International Relations team. He studied at Aberystwyth University and the London School of Economics. He has also worked at American University, Washington DC, the Open University, Leicester University and the London School of Economics and been visiting professor at a number of French and US universities. He is the author, editor or co-editor of fourteen books and around one hundred published papers and articles on international relations, technology and social philosophy.

aunque injustificada en la 'realidad', de defender identidades específicas que los colaboradores comparten y realizan en línea, sacralizando líderes, narrativas y lo que se ven como identidades amenazadas. Basándose en este análisis de (in)securitización, busca una mejor comprensión de la dinámica de la actividad en línea de la derecha.

Palabras clave: Seguridad/inseguridad; Parler; Violencia; identidades en disputa.

Abstract

Drawing on day-by-day examination of the website Parler from September 2020 to January 2021, a site promoting far right views in the US, this paper examines how security and insecurity are constructed and performed within virtual space. It explores the extreme language of contributors to Parler (closed down because of that violence after the 6 January 2021 insurrection to overturn the November Presidential election result). It examines the constituencies Parler represented, the role of leadership and class, as well as race and gender in exchanges online, and offers an ethnographic account of the core issues and problems participants raise. It examines differences between Parler communities and issues that unite them, notably hatred of 'democraps', 'libtards' ('liberal retards') and politically engaged black women. It makes some suggestions as to why this extreme level of violence became possible in US society. It finds that many of the most extreme posts are underpinned by a sense of exclusion and a need -however unjustified in 'reality'- to defend specific identities which contributors share and perform online, sacralising leaders, narratives and what are seen as threatened identities. Drawing on this analysis of (in)securitization, it seeks better understanding of the dynamics of right wing online activity.

Keywords: Security/insecurity; Parler; Violence; contested identities.

This paper explores what Gusterson (2004) has called 'securityscapes' in a particular context, the online site Parler. Similar to Twitter, but with a much smaller membership, Parler had become a space within which securitisation and insecurity play out in very distinctive performances which have both ritual and linguistic characteristics. These, although sometimes extreme, have important things to suggest about social interactions in virtual communities. Founded in 2018, Parler rapidly became a focus of discussion and argument for the extreme right in the United States and, to a lesser extent, for others in the English speaking right.

Contributors are overwhelmingly white and, although there are a few significant women posting on the site, predominantly male. They are not specifically identifiable by class, but many contributors are blue collar workers who feel themselves excluded from power or economic security. Above all, they are or have been supporters of the former US president, Donald Trump. Whatever their electoral politics, they are also frequently adherents of a range of conspiracy theories. Thus they present repetitions of well established (but false) arguments such as that major governments are part of secret world state manipulated by and for Jews, that the US government is run by and for a secret conspiracy concealing the working of a paedophile elite (the QAnon theory), and that efforts by families of victims of school massacres to limit in any way the availability of firearms are an attempt to ‘take away our guns’, removing *all* Second Amendment rights in the United States (which no weapons reformer has ever suggested). The site also provides a forum for conspiracy theories about vaccinations and the Covid-19 crisis, including narratives that vaccinations are intended to inject controlling microchips and that Covid-19 itself is ‘a hoax’. Parler therefore provides a framework within which contributors construct virtual spaces which are for the most part sites of insecurity: spaces where ideas of insecurity, fear, loss of identity -especially ‘white’ identities- and masculinities are articulated and performed. Parler was closed immediately after the 6 January 2021 insurrection in Washington DC. Its brief trajectory provides a significant pool of material for research into the questions of security and insecurity which shape US politics, and which will continue to have powerful resonance into the future given the current arguments about ‘culture wars’ and violence in the United States.

While the ideas debated on Parler seem to coalesce into one online frame, it is important to bear in mind that there are separate communities here, each with their own fears, aspirations, experience and rituals. They construct parallel, close, but still distinct, identities which have in common their opposition to -often a hatred of- what they see as a mainstream identities and priorities. This mainstream enemy is sometimes characterised as a ‘liberal retard’ -a ‘libtard’. But the targets of Parler posts include political activists who would reject the label ‘liberal’ (anarchists, radicals, Marxists). They target people of colour, Muslims, Jews, and others who do not share a narrowly extreme, evangelical protestant Christianity. The targets also include teachers and educators pretty much wholesale, and the large social media companies and everyday ‘mainstream media’ TV and press (MSM). Attilawbodnor posted on 26 November 2020 ‘There should be blood still [even if Biden conceded the election he had won] ... we must purge all democrap (sic) from our nation’; officials who supported the

carefully compiled election result, including Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Roberts, were told ‘you will be in jail..... better flee to China where you belong while you can..... Executions are coming to you for treason’ [posted by Terryconnors1948, one of the few more violent contributors to use his apparently real name].

Parler contributors understand their identity as one of loss: one trope very widely repeated across the site is ‘replacement theory’, the idea that a dominant white society is under siege, but that non-white people *will not* replace whites, which is to say they must not be allowed to. That racist view is -or is presented as- defensive. It resists an alleged takeover by black people (notably the Black lives Matter movement) or Jewish people: ‘Jews will not replace us’ was chanted at demonstrations in Michigan and Charleston, South Carolina by white supremacist ‘Proud Boy’ gangs. There is also a widespread fear of globalisation and of those who are seen as having benefitted from it, including ‘Wall Street’ and the mainstream media. ‘We are about to see Trump end the globalist siege’, TrumpNation posted on 5 January 2021, on the eve of the violent insurrection at Congress, in which five people died. White citizens vastly outnumber black and Asian communities across the US, although if one lumps all non-white people together, the ‘replacement’ has already occurred in the major cities of the United States (NBC News, 25 June 2020). But this is a notably weak claim in so far as both categories are so diverse and varied and racial identities so complex. Precarity, the loss of certainty, the loss of identities which provide a satisfying sense of social location and the loss of economic status and economic prospects shape much of the emergence of the far/extreme right worldwide, as Curtis (2020) and Worth (2017) have both shown. These senses of unhinged identity and enhanced precarity are widely evidenced on Parler: among many examples, Malcolm posted (1.1.21) ‘the consequences will be death and destruction beyond our comprehension’. More bluntly, replacement theory has prospered on Parler. Given the gender of its main advocates, replacement theory is better understood as the idea that dominant white masculinities are under direct threat from social movements such as Black Lives Matter, from feminism, and from efforts to get more black or Hispanic voters registered. So Parler contributors unite around the idea that the ‘white ruling elite’ is under attack and must be defended. This mythology often holds that Jewish and Black groups are combining to oust white power, so that racist and antisemitic violence takes a ‘self-defence’ form: that lay at the root of racist demonstrations such as the previously mentioned Reclaim the White march in Charlotte, South Carolina in 2017, where rioters including the white supremacist gang ‘Proud Boys’ chanted ‘Jews will Not Replace Us’ (Cosentino, 2020).

The sense of being under siege lends a powerful binding coherence to these varied groups. Contributors nearly all claim to be ‘patriots’, but mean different things by that label. So Info4patriots posted a series of posts after the 3 November Presidential election in an increasingly messianic: ‘I get the sense that the ruling class sees their doom and decided to go out with a bang’ at the prospect of the violence which would follow a denial of Trump’s false claims to have won the election. Timeforcivilwar patriots (the hashtags are rarely subtle) posted ‘America needs a civil war like never before. Its time to clean our house!’ (31.12.20). The ethnography and politics of far right groups has been widely explored in recent literature (Jones, 2018, Mazzarella, 2019, Urman and Katz, 2020, Wahlström et al, 2020). The rise of a specific cult following around Donald Trump has also been explored by Bessire and Bond (2017) and his links to ‘patriot’ and ‘alt right’ groups, and this paper builds on that work. The call for violence is a common trope across Parler and needs some further explanation, discussed later in this paper.

Parler is also used by a smaller ‘leadership group’ of recognisable political figures such as the California Congressman Devin Nunes, Senator Ted Cruz and Congressional candidate and online ‘influencer’ Laura Loomer. The British self-publicist Nigel Farage also contributed regularly to Parler. Powerful longstanding culture warriors also include Alex Jones, whose Infowars website used Parler as a main means of communication after it was thrown off Twitter and Facebook for extremist rants and repetition of untruths about the Covid19 crisis. The conspiracy theory QAnon had its own site on Parler, has thousands of followers, and is also widely cited by others. QAnon has other outlets, but Parler was one important channel. In so far as the leadership group share a political identity, it is Republican and pro-Trump. In the time period studied here, September 2020 to January 2021, Infowars posted more material on Parler than any other single contributor; although its posts have been more moderately worded than some, Infowars has never made any secret of the white supremacism and racism it encourages, or of the hatred of anything that inclines away from the hard right both on Parler and the other platforms it has used. Mostly, Infowars contributions are devoted to fighting culture wars rather than party politics, like the majority of Parler posts. And much of the most vituperative criticisms on Parler are reserved for ‘RINOs’, so-called Republicans in name only. RINOs are (one should say are alleged to be) Republican politicians and state government officials who have not supported the increasingly erratic statements of the former President, his lawyers Rudy Giuliani and Sidney Powell, and his family. The Amazon-Parler legal action (henceforth A-P

2021, see endnote for clarification) cites one post: ‘shoot the police that protect those shitbag senators right in the head then make the senators grovel a bit before capping they ass (sic)’. Winter (2019) identifies a wide range of key movements within ‘alt-right’ communities including a number of the key figures who had been active for a long time on different platforms, and who helped to establish a more mainstream image for those individuals, even though many of them had been removed from mainstream platforms such as Youtube and Facebook. A number of these people subsequently moved to Parler, although other did not and have moved to end-to-end encrypted sites which protect (or seem to protect) their identity.

The paper proceeds by exploring an analytic framework for researching online sites; Parler raises specific questions which need untangling. It then links the questions asked here about Parler to questions of how we might understand security, spaces of securitisation, insecurity and the imaginaries which are involved or contested on online sites. Parler is only one example, and although some of its posts are extreme in any terms, such material can be found quite easily online, including most recently Telegram. The chapter goes on to explore social interactions, the construction of meanings and the structure of Parler as a community. That then leads to some more detailed questions which the author suggests answers to without claiming at this stage that the research leads to definitive conclusions. An anthropological gaze allows more attention to be paid to the rituals and language of the research subject, as well as the creation of sacred spaces in which language which would not be sayable outside in a ‘polite’ world can be said freely, and where the expression of calls for violence give the speaker a sense of identity and belonging rather than a sense of being excluded or criminal.

The main source for this essay is a reading of Parler, which the author consulted widely from late October 2020 through to 12 January 2021, when it was closed down. I was able to go backwards in time as well as read the site daily and make extensive notes. Those include some limited quantitative analysis cited below; but the main analysis is qualitative and linguistic. Sources also include other online sites, notably Twitter. I have also used the long legal text presented in court as the basis of a counter-suit by Amazon Web Services (AWS): when closed by Amazon, Parler’s managers sued for restraint of trade and breach of contract, to which AWS responded with their counter-suit alleging breach of contract through breach of terms of service, citing many of the posts on Parler which were either obscene or violent or threatening -or all three. This is cited as ‘A-P 2021’ below, an abbreviation of a long title beginning ‘Amazon Counter Suit to Parler’ and dated January 13 2021 (see also note in references). As a public

document, it is widely available online, including on Twitter, Facebook and other sources. It should not be taken as representative of Parler as whole, since its aim is to demonstrate the most reprehensible elements of Parler, those which most clearly breach the terms of use conditions by which AWS acted as web host to Parler. But it is a valuable source: the court documentation cites more than one hundred calls for violence of different kinds in different posts. Research methods used in researching online practices, rituals and narratives have followed established sources on observation and recording of online sources, in particular Phillips and Plesner (2013) and Kozinets (2020), and the author claims no particular originality for them; but there are currently no other studies at all available which look specifically at Parler, although no doubt the events surrounding the attack on the Capitol on 6 January 2021 will be widely discussed for years, as they are currently the focus of forensic examination in Congressional hearings in Washington DC (which to my knowledge have so far not touched on the Parler community as a factor contributing to the insurrection).

Security, No-Places and Spaces of Insecuritization

There is an analytic school that argues that securitization and desecuritization take place fundamentally through speech acts, a group of scholars led by Thierry Balzacq (2005, see also Balzacq, Leonard and Ruzicker, 2016 and Taurek, 2006). It is also important to understand both the material contexts of these issues and their social grounding, for these ‘speech acts’ have material contexts and consequences (Aradau, 2010). Criticism of the security studies/speech act conceptualisation of security/insecurity has moved the debate more towards an ethnographic approach, whether that is described as belonging to the discipline of International Relations (Huysmans, 2004; Philipsen, 2013; Aradau 2018) or Anthropology, so much so that the disciplinary boundary has pretty much broken down. But a specific argument within anthropology has a solid grounding (Goldstein, 2010; Hurtado and Ercolani, 2016) on which this paper builds. It also builds on an established literature on the ethnographic study of online and digital behaviours (Spitulnik, 1993, Gavrilovic, 2017, Miller, 2018), which is further discussed below.

The approach here takes into account the socio-linguistic frame of a political analysis advanced by Balzacq and others, but it aims to go beyond the limits of political analysis. In exploring practices of securitization and insecuritization, it might be recognised that social

media construct very distinctive forms of space where roles are performed, responsibilities taken or shrugged off, and relationships redefined in particular -peculiar- ways (Gavrilovic, 2017; see also Bachelard, 2014). Social media create virtual spaces which are ambiguous, which carry ambiguous symbols, and which command ambiguous loyalties. They form non-spaces in which social interactions lose their expected meanings, comparable to, but not quite the same as, the non-spaces of street architecture and airports understood by Marc Augé (2009; see also Pütz, 2012). They transform between identifiable places and non-places depending on the actions of those within them. It is in part this capacity to code switch between meaningfulness and anomie that creates the insecurities associated with them. This linguistic behaviour raises questions to which a socio-linguistic analysis can contribute in understanding the repertoire of language use and its relationships with space and securitisation (Rampton and Charalambous, 2019). One task for the scholar is to examine these behaviours; but going beyond behaviour demands an examination of the imaginaries and self-understandings which shape these virtual performances and expressions, along with the mythologies which sustain them (Bouchard, 2017). That is what this paper aims to achieve with respect to Parler.

Within this online space, contradictions abound. As later discussion below shows, Parler posts both promote and dismiss democracy; they call for violence and claim refuge in an image of a mythically peaceful America; they demonise elected officials and they claim that elections (if run in the interests of one side) carry a sacred authority; they provide a basis for what has been widely called in the media a ‘Trump cult’, while advocating a strict, usually protestant, Christianity; they promote a white masculinity and pretend that America was already an equal society. Some posts simply shout into the darkness, an expression of anger rather than a coherent social or political position, and anger is the most important emotion evidenced on the site, clearly present well before Trump lost the 3 November 2020 Presidential Election, but all the more ferocious after that. All these contradictory articulations involve an ambiguous use of language, what has been called ‘code switching’, where words are set up with a given meaning and then knocked down to mean something different and potentially opposite. In linguistic usage on Parler, these ambiguities create an insecurity even as they express insecurity.

Researching Online Platforms

Researching far right movements requires specific methodologies and poses specific

dilemmas when the primary source material is online. But online research is an essential tool for understanding given that a great deal of communication between groups and individuals takes place solely online, and that people build, maintain and change identities through their online personas. Those personas may well be more a form of avatar than any attempt to represent the actual person. Assuming this identity allows an individual to extend their self into levels of violence or obscenity through which they would perhaps not present themselves if one were encountering them face-to-face. But the ‘perhaps’ is important here. The persona offered online might be much closer to a character in a video game, often a very violent game, than the father/brother/work colleague one might meet. But to assume that is the case would be a mistake. US law enforcement allows a lot of leeway in online material. But when interventions and arrests take place the threats or trolling or images are taken entirely literally. The scholar has less obligation to assume that everything online is equally seriously meant. But all the same, threats to kill, hang, flay, rape, burn or torture named individuals have a reality, especially through repetition, and the contributor who wants himself to be thought of as a murderer, rapist, torturer or as an enthusiastic contributor to a lynch mob. Repetition is the main social practice on Parler whether it is through reposting material or simply repeating the same language, and it provides a ritual reinforcement of views which contributors seek to normalise.

Social media managers may hold that they ‘invite you to join the conversation’, as Twitter proclaimed when it was launched, but a good deal of social media behaviour is not necessarily interactive, and those interactions which take place do so in a framework of regulation which is more or less evidently loaded by political and social norms. Both Twitter and Facebook have recently tried to take rather greater control of their content. Instagram and WhatsApp have done the same. They have done so in part in response to threats of legislation. But they have been much more driven in response to threats of boycott by key companies and socially powerful actors trying to limit the use of hate speech, which included racist, sexist and anti-Semitic language and threats of outright violence. Parler ignored these pressures and grew because it put itself outside them.

At its peak, Parler had around 4.5 million participants. By contrast, Facebook has around 1.3 billion members, Instagram 800 Million, Twitter 330 million, Reddit 250 million and the Chinese site WeChat about a billion. Parler managers claimed a mass exodus from Twitter and Facebook to Parler because of their ‘censorship’ by moderators, which saw it grow from 2.4 million to its peak in late summer 2020, but this scarcely dented the participation on the other

platforms. Although it is so much smaller, researching Parler offers glimpses of online society one would not otherwise get.

Parler and Its Denizens

The range of people inhabiting Parler has already been noted. In this section, this question is examined more closely. The ways in which people choose to represent themselves online are not necessarily those they would choose to represent themselves in everyday life. It may thus be dangerous to make direct connections from how online posts appear to the character or motivation of those who post them. But there clearly is a connection. In many cases it is clear from the content of the messages and their target that the contributor wishes to represent themselves in a particular way, however extreme or ridiculously unconnected to reality they may appear to outsiders. It is a basic principal of ethnographic research that one takes the language people use and the ways they choose to represent themselves seriously, and that applies also to online research. Facebook requires users to give their real names (not that they always do); sites such as Twitter and Parler allow contributors to create their own user identities or remain anonymous. Only about half of Parler users have a traceable online identity. Anonymity allows things to be said or exchanged that are illegal (even given 'free speech' First Amendment Rights enjoyed in the US). The task of the scholar reviewing this material is to unwrap and turn it over, to examine it, to make sense of it in a context, as well as to establish connections between ideas and context and language and the social meanings (plural) which a post may invoke. But this is a forensic task: to take it on should not be taken to signify approval. The comparison is important because some of the posts examined call for the murder of others, some call for their torture in graphic ways, and quite a lot called for armed civil insurrection. A significant proportion of the posts on Parler use language and express emotions which could only make sense to people -nearly always men- who are familiar with language, images and conversations around violent pornography. Merely 'giving offence' is not the criterion of extremism here. On Parler, one can find posts calling for the gang rape and burning alive of the former First Lady of the United States Michelle Obama. Posts call for the execution not only of her husband, but of all representatives of, and even *all voters* for, the Democrat party. Other posts call for the lynching of key figures in the Black Lives Matter campaign, or, as already noted, for the launching of a 'new Civil War' which, at least for some, would reverse the outcome of the original US Civil War in 1865- flags of secessionist states and the Confederacy decorate

many user's pages. These cannot be read simply as 'routine' expressions of a distinctive white identity, not only because most Americans (of all ethnicities) do not share them, but even more because of the history of African American oppression, voter suppression and identity politics (Eyerman, 2001). It is a site where the dominant voices, if not the majority, see themselves as both besieged and as bearers of the right to express their identities through violent language and the threats of actual violence.

At the same time, it is important to say that many of the posts on Parler are much more everyday expressions of support for Donald Trump, for gun rights, for various conservative or libertarian agendas, or reflections on the failure of governments of all parties to provide for the basic expectations of white blue collar Americans away from the large and more successful coastal cities. 'StoptheSteal', the belief that the November 2020 election was in some way 'stolen', became a key hashtag on Parler, but it made wider sense in the context of the conversations and performances on the site, and indeed on Trump supporting radio and television. The routine rituals of individual posts accumulate as an expression of these concerns without regard for the (often explicitly) hated norms of politically correct language and behaviour. In the process, one can note, threats of actual 'free speech censorship' in the US are hugely exaggerated.

One key group on Parler seeking a 'free space' are activists one can broadly describe as libertarians, who reject media control for decency, hate speech or the promotion of untruth. Although there are both 'left' and 'right' libertarians, Parler is dominated by populist right and extreme right social and political views held by contributors who routinely dismiss their opponents as 'libtards'. The site is socially conservative and superficially economically liberal, but embraces the authoritarian tropes of those who call for a 'new civil war' and for the lynching of black and feminist activists. Indeed, despite the libertarian tropes and symbolic self-presentation of some contributors, a significant number of posts seek to establish a much more controlled, coercive society in the US. The logic of Parler economics is also an economic nationalism that goes beyond even that mercantilism Trump offers in his speeches (and less often practiced). That paradox between contributors simultaneously wanting a more open and a more controlled society runs right across Parler. It can most specifically be found quite easily within the single posts of individuals, including especially the Republican activist Laura Loomer, who used the site for a prolific series of posts across the time period studied here. Loomer is interesting as a conservative, vociferous self-publicist with political ambitions who

used Parler to build support for some radical right views but who did not explicitly argue for a violent politics, and who identified with right wing (much more than merely ‘conservative’) positions on race and the future of democracy, as well as on Trump’s presidency, but in controlled, more rational argument than many other participants.

Parler is home to a large number of people who describe themselves as ‘patriots’. About 15% of users describe themselves as ‘white christian’: there are only a very few African American or Hispanic users on the site, nearly all of whom self-describe as veterans of the US military. Although predominantly US in orientation, the site does include Canadian, British and Australian participants. The site is dominated by key influencers such as the just-mentioned activist and congressional candidate Laura Loomer and the blogger Alex Jones, both of whom have had vociferous sites on other platforms closed down. For the most part, posts on Parler depend on US First Amendment protections. Many posts would be blatantly unlawful under hate speech laws operating in many other countries, including the UK. The site draws together concerns and fears of a white underclass, although that phrase exaggerates their social and economic cohesion: fear of declining US global power; fear of the impact of globalization; economic marginalisation; loss of connection with elected government at state as well as national level; ferocious anti-intellectualism (most of Trump’s rally attenders do not have a college education; one post claims ‘when we have killed all the politicians we will come for the teachers next’); and more directly of social and demographic change in the US. The underlying fear is therefore of loss of cultural identity. These factors intermix with issues about masculinity and reaction against changing conceptions of sexualities which have divided metropolitan cities from hinterlands in many countries including the US. But on Parler, race and concerns with racial difference remained the most powerful centres of gravity of conversations, whether they are expressed directly or much more obliquely. Its centre of gravity is always white nationalist.

Although it is common for analysts to talk of the ‘conversation’ on social media, a significant number of posts on Parler do not *converse*, and do not appear to aim to do so. One can see that many posts have only a few or no ‘likes’; many others have no response. In contrast, most posts on Twitter evoke likes or criticism: there are posts there to which there is no response, but they are rarer. Many posts on Parler are more like an impotent bellow in the dark. Writers express themselves; they shout in exasperation; they do not seem to care if they are heard or not. This could be seen as an extension of a rugged individualism (American or not), which also embodies a self-image of a particular kind of masculinity. It is part of a sustaining

myth of standing alone which contradicts the notion of an ‘online community’ of sharing and supporting which is a characteristic of other social media platforms such as Twitter. Individualist posts with no response are more to perform the self. They provide a means by which a contributor can contribute to the tone of exchanges. They assert their membership of a ‘community’ of loners. They can express themselves freely and so validate themselves. That is to say that in taking part, contributors show how they relate to accepted mythologies and in the majority of cases reassert those mythologies. Claims that ‘we need to act like our forefathers’ [A-P 2021] and ‘we need to take our country back’ and ‘we need to clean house’ [both posted by TimeforCivilWarPatriots] embody a masculinity and a sense of identity, but does not care if there is nobody else there.

Rituals and Responsibilities of Leadership

I have already identified some key ‘community leaders’ on Parler; they include both those with genuinely large followings, sometime thousands of followers, and those who make frequent posts with a significant but perhaps smaller following, who are seeking to use their Parler contributions to promote their own social and political standing -often with a stated intention to stand for office if they were not already standing in the 2020 elections. Some of these ‘lead’ figures have hundreds of followers but post very little; a few, including the Infowars’ Alex Jones, have many followers and often add a score or more of posts a day. TrumpNation (not Trump himself, but clearly an important figure from his/her several thousand followers) posted the following on 16.12.20: ‘With his back to the wall and years of preparation for this moment in time [Trump] will go for broke, proverbial bayonet in hand, not unloading until he sees the whites of their eyes’ and calling for followers to join the ‘civil war’ against the election result which culminated in the 6 January assault. One of the few women’s posts linked all of the main perceived enemies of her community together when Tina549, also with a number of followers, posted ‘The democrats and Antifa’s Big Tech companies which belong to China must fall’.

Donald Trump himself was an exception. There were over a dozen Parler member sites which mention his name, and at least two which appeared to be controlled by the White House. But even after Trump was banned from Twitter, he did not direct message on Parler himself. Both his sons had accounts and used them. His daughter, Ivanka, had a page of her own although

as far as I could find she never posted anything, perhaps because her site was controlled by staff who advised against joining the mêlée of disorder they could see. It may be that Trump's activities on some social media were also managed mainly by staffers, but he famously used Twitter himself with the hashtag @realDonaldTrump. The worship of Trump and what posters believed he stood for, the repetition of his slogans 'Make America Great Again' and 'Patriots for Trump', created an identifiable community during the 2020 election campaign, and Parler clearly played some role in mobilising voters, although not as much as Trump's own posts on Twitter. The shared symbols and language sought to mobilise a majority, but at the same time expressed a sense of a minority under threat, a community under siege. One active contributor used the Parler identity 'Remember the Alamo', while two others used tag lines mentioning Valley Forge. The comparison between these mythical events in the early history of the US with the present structures a narrative of urgency, an immediate threat to security, which mobilised Trump supporters on Parler in campaigning against the election result and in the assault on the Capitol on 6 January. It also puts Trump in the position of an American hero (as he undoubtedly is to his supporters) comparable to George Washington or Sam Houston, the leader of the Texas insurgents in the 1840s.

One evident facet of leadership which is remarkably absent is a restraining hand. As Guillaume (2018) has pointed out, silences in the creation of (in)securitization are often at least as important as specific articulations. None of the various figures taking a leading role on Parler suggest at any point at all that more extreme posts go too far. The insecurity expressed by the more violent posts is radical, but no sense of insecurity is considered too extreme or too inappropriate. Nobody asks for an antisemitic statement to be withdrawn or reconsidered; nobody suggests that calls for violent attacks on elected officials such as the Secretaries of State in Pennsylvania, Michigan, Georgia and Arizona who signed off on the election results (three of whom are elected Republican officials), which is their constitutional function, might be out of order. I was unable to find even a single post from a key influencer which suggested that others' comments calling for violent overthrow of institutions, a new Civil War or the murder of people individually or in groups was unacceptable or crudely wrong. This no doubt reflects in part a convention of a kind that the free speech of others on the site should not be questioned. However, the lack of challenge to the most outrageous and violent statements in any of the four months I followed the site every day was remarkable. Equally, the founders and managers of Parler have never (on the site or off) suggested they had the slightest regret about any of the material they superintended.

Building and Maintaining Spaces of Security on Parler

Parler exchanges such as the calls for violence and the cries of helplessness noted above create virtual space in the sense that one can see the extension of relations and exchanges between actors as enlarging a social virtual space. While these relationships are mutable rather than fixed, that space has a reality for participants (Bachelard, 2010; Bouchard, 2010). This space is concrete but unreal. It articulates a power structure and a space in which social capital is earned and expended. It exists as a visual representation in the imaginary of contributors to social media in the way that computer games construct a visual world in which one has to enter to take part (Macleod, 2016). What makes such a space real are the images and language of participants (Goldstein, 2010), the conversations they may exchange, and the identities they perform within that space.

These spaces are spaces of securitization: participants seek collective identity, aim to endorse collective values. But they are equally spaces of insecurity: taking part creates as well as reflects a sense of endangerment and crisis. As the code switching of language/meanings creating insecurities, so the transformation of virtual spaces creates ambiguity and fear in itself among Parler contributors. In response to the conflicts around the 2020 Presidential election, FrontSiteFocus posted two words, 'Nuke China', while hundreds of posts called for a new Civil War. This is hardly a 'security imaginary' - the 1861-65 war killed around 650,000 Americans, more than all her other wars put together, as well as wrecking the economy of the South. But what is at issue here is, at least for some, to reverse the outcome of 1865. 'White people need to ignite their racial identity and rain down suffering and death like a hurricane upon Zionists' and 'We need to act like our forefathers did Kill [Black and Jewish] people all Leave no victims or survivors' were posted during these debates and are cited by A-P 2021 as examples of the ramping up of a sense of threat during the election campaign (e.g. even before Trump lost the election). 'We are coming with our LIST we know where you live we know who you ARE we are coming for you..... Enjoy the LAST few days you have' is also cited at A-P 2021. And this is not in fact even close to the Civil War, which although it was terrifyingly violent was also conducted within the then understood laws of war. The scale of violence imagined here is much more the spectacle of mayhem unleashed in an all-against-all video game. It might perhaps be 'legitimised' by the very story that it is *not real*, that it takes place in 'no place' (Augé 2009,

Pütz, 2012); but in a society with five firearms to every adult, 46,000 gun deaths a year, and where the practice of domestic right wing political terrorism has (according to the FBI) overtaken any other security threat, that legitimisation claim looks very thin indeed.

Parler exchanges have also turned on the power of ‘big Pharma’ -large corporations involved in the opioid crisis which has affected blue collar communities in rural and small town America, and on the power of large media corporations. Posts by VirginiaPatriot and others draw attention to the dominance of corporate power to manage news and generate (what is seen as) ‘fake news’ around these issues. This has come to form part of a larger culture war against big companies, major elite groups and mainstream media, based in faraway cities. These concerns often interweave with questions about violence and social legitimacy in a swirl of argument. There is also a clear anti-intellectualism among contributors: even as they claim to support the ‘American Dream’ -the mythologies that one can start a business in the garage or college laboratory and grow it into a great success-there is deep resentment against those who have actually done so. This is combined with a sense of exclusion, not perhaps unjustified, even as contributors to Parler are actually using the technology and intellectual property which they claim to detest. Posts are common (the author counted over 130 in his brief foray into measurement) saying that the big companies have stolen power from representative institutions, that they have excessive lobbying power to resist greater regulation, and that they undermine democracy. All these arguments have at least a sensible point, and many are shared by others across the political spectrum. But on Parler these views are expressed by calling for the execution of founders of major tech companies: Mark Zuckerberg is a favourite target; so too are Noah Glass and Jack Dorsey, who set up Twitter, and Jef Bezos of Amazon. Although Dorsey and Bezos are not Jewish, all four are targets of antisemitic abuse on Parler as well as other forms of hate speech: ‘Death to @zucherberg @realjefbezos @jackdorsey @pinchai’ (A-P 2021); two posts cited earlier also mention big tech companies.

But more commonly, as with Second Amendment rights, which is to say the constitutional right to own and bear firearms, Parler sustains a common theme with a few variations but little ‘conversation’. Contributors ritually repeat the language of other posts. This invokes, again, a sense of panic, of being under siege. Among Parler users it is taken for granted that all citizens must defend the right to own as many assault rifles and automatic weapons as they can afford, with no limitations and few restraints on the character or mental stability of those who own them. This is extraordinary. The Second Amendment itself does not say this; it

simply says ‘A well regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free state the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed’. In many legal cases since 1791, the US Supreme Court has prevented attempts to limit the scope of this brief paragraph. But it has also ruled on several occasions that the right to own and carry firearms is not unlimited. Parler posts frequently suggested either that ‘the Democrats’ or ‘Liberals’ are trying to take away *all* gun rights, which they have never sought to do in any context. They also deny the threats and actions which have raised the question of gun control. Many posts either mention firearms in the user’s hashtag or call for readers to ‘pick up your gun’ or ‘go armed’. In the 2016 Presidential election, Trump supporters ferociously backed an argument that several of the massacres in schools by lone gunmen, such as the Sandy Hook massacre in December 2012, were either fake news (i.e. they hadn’t happened at all), or involved some element of deceit (they were carried out by someone other than the real gunman), or that children and teachers had been abducted and were not dead, but might now be being used for some paedophile purpose. The activist Alex Jones, owner of Infowars, was behind some of this conspiracy theory until a group of Sandy Hook parents sued him, winning a large sum in compensation and a retraction. This has not stopped the conspiracy theory being repeated by others. It was always part of the conspiracy theories reinforced on Parler surrounding that such attacks they were engineered ‘to take away our guns’. The US is a society historically built on firearms as it is built on slavery. It is also a society where owning a firearm is maintained as an element in myths of masculine individuality, even though many legal gun owners are women. This cannot be separated from the pursuit of culture war defence of identity and defence against imagined attacks on ‘patriot’ masculinity on Parler and elsewhere.

Sustaining Mythologies and Rituals

‘Death and Destruction Beyond Imagination’ [Malmcomp]

‘The only way to do it, to teach the commie Marxist libs democrats a lesson is- butcher there (sic) children, grandkids, greatgrand kids, grandmas, aunts, nieces, wives last. Skin them all. Slowly, in front of the commie men. May be it starts in one city and then another, and another. Only then will the commie traitors realize that they fucked up when they see their own lineage stop in front of their eyes. The sweet music of commie women shrieking in agony and pain, only drowned by the gurgling in their own blood. [JuarezTX]

Fry’em up -the whole fkn crew [A-P 2021]

One might at this stage ask in what world the violence and misogyny witnessed on Parler might be 'normal'? The question is not asked to justify such posts. One might suggest that the world in which the extremism of many Parler contributions makes sense is consistent with three world views.

This language, these attitudes, this inhumanity, reflects the world of violent video games, in which it is not just acceptable but entirely necessary to kill one's enemies or rivals in order to progress from one level to another. Not all video games are equally violent, of course. But the language and ritual of kill-or-fail games is closer to the language and practice of those more violent Parler posts than anything in everyday actual social space. While in some games the 'enemy' may be little green figures from space, in many games the enemy is identifiably human. They may be stereotyped, but they are real. The 'enemy' may perhaps be black or brown. Today they may more often be someone of Muslim appearance or a Hispanic American 'narco', where the player is taking a 'hero' position, perhaps a law enforcement or mercenary sniper role. Women may figure less often, and in some games not at all; but if they do, they are often there to be shot, chopped up or heaved off a cliff with the same rigour as male opponents. The normalization of violence includes not just the need for killing, but the weapons, ferocity and graphic illustration of the killing. The quality of the visual imagery is a part of the appeal of a game (see Macleod, 2016). Many of the most successful games either have their origins in film or have spawned film follow-ups, but in both it is the graphic casual violence of the games that defines the genre.

Equally important in the imaginary shaping the construction of Parler space -again, drawing primarily on online games and practices- are the dungeon, the execution ground, the concentration camp, or the dark street of violent pornography where the viewer (nearly always 'he') has control, or identifies with whoever is doing the torturing or 'punishment' (although there are, of course, exceptions). The victims have no agency because they deserve none in the mind of the viewer. But the paradox of this situation is that the less the victim(s) have agency, the more they are treated purely as 'things', the less powerfully significant is the power and possession of the 'player'. This framework, however bizarre, might be the most appropriate imaginary to make sense of the most extreme posts on Parler, those calling for the 'skinning' or 'burning' of women, liberals or opponents, or the torture of democrat politicians' families in front of them (see quotation above). These uses of language and creations of imagined space

form an adolescent and immature response to political marginalization, which many Parler posts certainly embody; but understanding Parler in these terms helps to make sense of the extremism of those most violent posts. It is a psychologising over-simplification to say that these behaviours and attitudes help individuals to deal with the complexity of the world they live in, but it is not wholly untrue. That one can be anonymous and gifted with a kind of social power on both game and pornographic sites is part of the compelling strength of Parler anonymity for many of its users. Parler celebrates male narratives of domination in too many posts for this to be unintended, and the misogyny points well beyond racial hatred.

Running through many of the violent posts on Parler is a third trope which appears more in racist pornography but can be found in US politics: the language, attitudes and solidarity of the lynch mob. Historians looking at the evolution of the United States have emphasized the role of slavery, Jim Crow law and continuing discrimination after Reconstruction (in and after the 1870s) more since the emergence of the Black Lives Matter campaigns, although those themes have never been wholly absent. To revive the language of the lynch mobs of the 1920s in particular is significant (see also Lartey and Morris, 2018). In the 1920s, lynchings were directed not only at the poorest or most militant black men in the US. They were directed equally at men and women, and although poor working blacks were often a target, lynch mobs also aimed at the newly emerging black middle class (or skilled working class) who owned businesses and money, who were perhaps seeking to become elected, and whose aspirations for better social and economic standing were crushed in a series of mass murders, occasionally of hundreds rather than tens of victims. Of these, the most notorious took place in Greenwood, a suburb of Tulsa, Oklahoma, in 1921, when around 300 men and women were killed. Poor whites may have led the killings, but they were supported and protected by political and economic leaders from a small distance who wanted neither the political nor the economic competition represented by successful black entrepreneurs and political activists. Beliso-de-Jesus and Pierre (2020) explore the relationship between the history of racism and the persistence of white supremacy, while Curtis (2020) and Wahlström et al (2020) examine more closely the relationship between historic practices of racism and racial supremacy and the current issues of racial conflict in which many Parler posts are active participants. The language of the 1920s lynch mob, aimed at the suppression of voting rights, economic freedoms and individual expression by blacks, is reproduced in Parler posts such as those cited above. In short, they aim to deny power to groups of citizens they see as a threat to be excluded. They also target Black Lives Matter activists who have tried to end voter suppression in states such as Georgia and

Louisiana, such as Stacy Abrams, a woman who has been credited with Biden's narrow election success in Georgia: 'Hang the N***** bitch' and 'This bitch will be good target practice for our beginners' are both posts directed specifically at Adams, who has needed additional security since 2016, cited on A-P 2021. In a country with the history of lynching which Americans share, this is not a game or passing joke. If one takes the apparent extreme language of a significant proportion of Parler posts and compares it to the experience of (some) video gamers, of viewers of extreme pornography, and of the passed down world-view of the lynch mob, one begins to make more sense of both the extremism and the paranoid sense of exclusion and lack of self-worth of many of the more extreme Parler contributors.

Daniel Winter (2020) has given a distinctive and important account of how extremist groups organise their social practices. He identifies that such groups are not so much founded on simple ignorance of facts as on deliberate strategies of *information avoidance*. These they use as a bulwark against ideas which they find inconvenient or objectionable. This is combined with what has often been called 'groupthink' to construct a narrative of the world which conforms with *what they want to believe*. For Winter, this motivated ignorance is directed towards avoidance of information or narratives which might undermine cherished beliefs either for specific individuals and at a group level. But such beliefs are most powerfully sustained against evidence and a broader social convention of a contrary narrative where (a) both individual level and group/collective level processes of denial are at work, and (b) where denial of specific truths or narratives are replaced by a coherently maintained counter narrative, and (c) where agents have motivations for continuing in their views because they are socially rewarded for continuing to do so. This provides the basis for what Winter calls 'rationally motivated ignorance'. This map of narrative construction and maintenance also helps build an understanding of the imaginaries which sustain Parler conversations and performances.

Sacralization

The intensity of some Parler posts will strike any reader. Their certainty is an equally distinctive common feature. Key ideas and images are held as sacred values or sacred truths in Parler discourse. This extends most obviously to the American flag, to which US schools 'pledge allegiance', almost always every day. The flag, the Stars and Stripes, appears as an image on roughly 40% of all the posts this author read in his research, usually as part of the

writer's identity, which is of course neither unusual nor problematic in itself. At the same time this sacred image is muddled by the repetition of the Stars and Bars, commonly called the civil war Confederate flag, but actually the battle flag of Confederate States of America's armies rather than the official flag of the CSA itself. It is precisely because the Stars and Bars has come to be widely condemned as a symbol of racist politics and racist nostalgia even before the Black Lives Matter movement in the 2010s, that it figures widely in virtual space. It is used as much as a provocation as a group unifier. It matters to Parler posters to support a symbol that has become disapproved by the wider public, and it helps to sustain their sense of isolation and being under siege. Having specific visual symbols contributes to the language of a coherent group (Macleod, 2016). The individualism noted above might be seen as a fundamental value, but equally important is 'liberty' in some form or other as a core value of the main Parler communities. 'Libertarian' here is primarily a value opposed to active government, opposed to relatively heavier taxation -and in a few cases opposed to any taxation at all. It equally paradoxically seems in some posts to imply a fierce commitment to 'law and order'; but at the same time, it proposes a commitment to law breaking in response to any action by government, however lawful, that the Parler culture and its contributors object to. As already explored, it appears to run counter to the more authoritarian vision of the US many protagonists seem to want. This formed one of the bases of the many calls for a 'New Civil War'; this author counted 120 such calls in the three weeks after the November 3rd Presidential Election which Trump lost, before he stopped counting. When Parler contributors called for the overthrow of the election result by force, they also called for the overthrow of the Court, which has usually been seen as a sacred, stable pillar of the Constitution. At least a dozen posts called for the death of the (conservative) Chief Justice John Roberts, including those by Terryconnors1948 on 28.12.20. This was echoed among the rioters who stormed the Capitol on 6 January, who called for Roberts and other justices to be hanged, setting up a noose for the purpose, because the Court had refused to rule in favour of Trump's unproven and largely unevidenced claim that he had actual won the November 2020 election. However, a primary target of the insurgents was the Democrat House majority leader Nancy Pelosi, a hate figure for Parler posts and for the radical right because of her leadership position in Congress as well as for her gender. More broadly, Parler posts and 6 January insurgents alike called for the murder of any lawyers or legal authorities who they thought were obstructing the 'restoration' of trump's Presidency. The theme of 'death to lawyers' is hardly a new one in populist uprisings in any country -it was a main demand of the Peasants Revolt in England in 1381; in a polity as much managed by lawyers and law as the United States, it is a remarkable event unique in at least the years since

1865.

What is at stake in making the core values of Parler sacred, and therefore untouchable, unmodifiable, beyond question, is democracy itself. Democracies must have the right to change their minds. Posts on Parler, along with other Trump supporters on other platforms and on the streets, treat Trump as a sacred persona who cannot be wrong, cannot be mistaken, cannot be dishonest. Therefore, he could not possibly have lost an election in which he did indeed win a mountain of votes, but, crucially, in which roughly seven million more citizens voted for his opponent than for him. Trump himself correctly points to the fact that he received more votes than any previous Republican candidate. But he then could not accept he lost, and does not see the contradiction between his attack on the election process and his claim that he won the majority of votes. The logic of this is not that the votes were forged or fiddled, but simply that turnout was very high on both sides across a country where turnout in elections has traditionally been lower than in many other effective democracies. So both main candidates scored record numbers of votes. Trump and his supporters challenged the validity of voting machine technology widely used across the US for years. In a shotgun approach to complaint, they alleged the machines had been interfered with by China, or the communist leadership of Venezuela, by the 'deep state' or the FBI. All this was repeated and ritually affirmed on Parler. Trump's lawyer Giuliani is currently being sued for \$1.3bn, a huge amount for personal damages even in the US, for alleging that the makers of the voting machine, Dominion, were so much at fault and deliberately manipulated their machines to switch the votes from Trump to Biden. It would not be surprising if Trump himself were also sued in future, now he has lost the Presidency. Posts on Parler and other sites, and Trump supporters including some in Congress, claim that the election process was flawed and seek to overturn democratic processes while at the same time calling for new elections. Alternatively, they call for martial law so that new election 'results' can be imposed, while all the time urging that they are calling for these authoritarian measures in 'defence of democracy'. Fantastic stories have been told in court and on social media, and especially on Parler, to avoid admitting the possibility that the election was lost and that the 'people' rejected Trump. All that ignores the fact that in several hundred court cases at state and federal level, no significant evidence of election fraud or misconduct of any kind has been presented. This makes a good deal of sense only in the light of Winter's (2020) analysis of 'rationally motivated ignorance' discussed in the previous section.

Conclusions

In the Capitol ‘insurrection’ of 6 January 2021, a young man (unnamed) passing a correspondent for a British newspaper stopped to speak to her. The journalist, Rozina Sabur, reported that after he explained how urgent the need was to storm the building and overturn the November election result, she asked him about the likely outcome whether they succeeded or not. His first reply was, ‘Whatever...!’; then he added ‘Death is the remedy!’ (Daily Telegraph, 14 January 2021). Was he proposing the death of legislators? Or the death of the legislature? Or was he embracing his own death if the uprising failed? Or had he read too many existentialist novels? In hindsight, it is remarkable looking at the images of several thousand people storming the US legislature that only five people actually lost their lives in the assault (one Capitol police officer died later of injuries, and a state policeman who took part in the attack shot himself a few days after before he could be arrested for his role). Trump’s supporters have come to be described in some commentary as a ‘death cult’, and it may be that Sabur’s interviewee identified with all three propositions. But as this paper has tried to explore, the Parler social space has been much more complex and ambiguous even than this. It has formed a community in which people have at the same time sought security in a recognisable community of their peers, and tried to create a climate of insecurity in which outcomes which might otherwise have seemed insane (or the doctrine of extreme versions of anarchism) apparently became normalised. The spaces of (in)security on Parler retained their deep ambiguities and fluidity throughout its active life. It is a universe where seeking security by invoking ever greater levels of personal and social violence seems to be coherent and rational.

As this paper has also suggested, the ambiguities of space/no space and place/no place in themselves create securitization both for those reading Parler and for those contributing to it, identifying with it, and avidly following its leaders. The code switchings of meanings in language use in itself create an ontological unhinging which add to the ‘real’ insecurities of people who are, or at least feel themselves to be, excluded from power, social status or economic prospects. While there is clearly a material base for these perceptions and self-images, as Worth (2017) and Curtis (2020) emphasise, there are also intense social exchanges which have taken on a life of their own within the specific virtual space of Parler. Postings support, reinforce and echo each other; but they also push each other to greater extremes. Aspiring leaders have no interest in restraining posts, although they clearly have a stake in avoiding direct involvement, as Trump’s daughter Ivanka most clearly showed in having a Parler account which attracted a large following but almost never posting anything herself (or by her media staff). Devin Nunes, right wing Republican politician, did the same. Of pro-Trump political figures, only the self-

publicists Laura Loomer, Alex Jones and Nigel Farage made a significant number of posts during the weeks between the Presidential election and the uprising, all three calling for moves to 'stop the steal'. But of these three only Jones, who had a long history of inflammatory posts on a range of platforms which got him banned from almost all except Parler, posted anything which suggested a commitment to violence of any kind. A number of figures on the right of US politics, including journalists, think tankers and elected officials, seem to have quit Parler before 6 January, although one cannot tell whether they were ashamed of the company they found themselves keeping or just being cautious.

Alongside its political and social significance, and the remarkable spectacle of the fall of a powerful demagogue, Parler offers an important case of the social construction of online space as a space of security and securitization. In this paper, it has been suggested that Parler represents a series of communities with comparable ideologies, but that those communities remain separate and sometimes disparate. The paper suggests that some of the violent language and ritual hatred of a radically othered enemy can be understood as rooted more in online gaming, online pornography or the mythology of the lynch mob than in any kind of political movement, but it does not suggest those (overlapping rather than exclusive) images offer a sufficient explanation. Those strategies might be deployed in resisting medical evidence (on Covid-19, but other issues such as MMR vaccines and blood transfusions), on conspiracy theories including the QAnon narrative widely touted on Parler, but also other forms of extremism. Online communities on Parler have sacralised beliefs and narratives which have the power in the minds of acolytes to justify the extreme actions of January 6th in Washington DC. Bouchard's analysis of the nature of myths and their enduring resilience helps one to make more sense of these events. Loners, leaders, deliberate manipulators of untruth and the merely very anxious formed a community space around the stories of a 'stolen election' and the sacred unquestionable persona of Trump to act in ways that seem bizarre as well as cruel and unacceptable. What has been called a 'riot' and an 'uprising' as well as an 'insurrection' was swept along by the logic of a lynch mob, at least until they had stormed the Capitol, when, all passion spent, they flopped into the leather chairs, looted the furniture, stole the laptops of elected legislators, and wandered home. The courts are slowly dealing with the aftermath.

Parler was closed down on 12 January 2021 by Amazon Web Services (AWS) a few days after the attack on the Capitol. Parler played less direct role in organising the attack, which was done primarily on encrypted sites such as Telegram; but Parler certainly holds some

responsibility for those events. How much is likely to be shown in future court proceedings. The Amazon action against Parler already cited makes a direct claim that Parler ‘was used to incite, organise and coordinate’ the attack (A-P 2021, p.8). Although the policing at the Capitol was inadequate, it was enough to protect members of Congress who took shelter in safe rooms; but they feared for their lives. And there can be no doubt that if the mob had caught key members of Congress, especially some of the hated Democrat women in both Houses they named as targets, they would have killed them. At the beginning of the day, Trump gave a speech to the mob which undoubtedly helped to fire them up. Trump and his family watched closely from a safe distance. Although Eric Trump added some inflammatory words online while the storming took place, Donald Trump was more guarded, partly ‘protected’ by having already been excluded from his favourite Twitter. On Saturday 9th January, Amazon announced that it would bar Parler altogether with effect from the following night, and on the night of Monday 11th it was no longer possible to access Parler at all. Social media had eaten itself.

Parler was therefore not closed because of the material it allowed or because it failed to regulate posts. It was not closed because it was a focus for calls for civil war or violence. It was closed by superior social media power because the extremist speech it allowed formed specific breaches of its contract with AWS that governed terms and conditions of AWS hosting the site. Archives of its material are said to have resurfaced on the dark web but this author has not accessed them. It provides important evidence of a significant set of social relations, rituals, identity politics and the use of language which are of compelling interest in themselves as well as for what they suggest about politics and social division in the United States.

References

Amazon-Parler (2021) (abbreviated to ‘A-P 2021), *Proceedings brought by Amazon as a counter suit to Parler’s court documents suing Amazon for breach of contract in terminating their hosting of Parler*, reproduced in full and publicly available on Twitter first accessed 13.1.21. The full reference is: ‘Parler LLC v Amazon Web Services Inc (2:21-cv-00031), District Court, W.D. Washington’, where the document I cite is one of a complex list of court dockets. It is more easily found on its own through a search on Twitter.

Aradau, Claudia(2010), ‘Security that matters: critical infrastructure and objects of

- protection', *Security Dialogue*, 41, 5: 491–514.
- Aradau, Claudia (2018), 'From securitization theory to critical approaches to (in)security', *European Journal of International Security*, 3, 3: 300-305.
- Augé, Marc (2009), *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*, new edition, London: Verso Books.
- Bachelard, Gaston (2014), *The Poetics of Space*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Baele, S. J., Brace, L. and Coan, T. G. (2020), 'Uncovering the Far-Right Online Ecosystem: An Analytic Framework and Research Agenda', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, DOI:1.1080/1057610X.2020.1862895: 1-21.
- Balzacq, T. (ed) (2011), *Understanding Securitization Theory: How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve*, London: Routledge.
- Balzacq, T., Léonard, S. and Ruzicka, J. (2016), Securitization Revisited: theory and Cases, *International Relations*, 30, 4: 494-531.
- Beliso-de-Jesus, A.M. and Pierre, J. (2020), 'Anthropology of White Supremacy (Special Section)', *American Anthropologist*, 122, 1, DOI10.1111/aman.13351.
- Bessire, L. and Bond, D. (2017), *The rise of Trumpism: Hot spots*, available at: <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/1030-the-rise-of-trumpism>
- Bouchard, Gerald (2017), *Social Myths and Collective Imaginaries*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Cosentino, G. (2020), 'From Pizzagate to the Great Replacement: The Globalization of Conspiracy Theories', in G Cosentino (ed), *Social Media and the Post Truth World Order: the Global Dynamics of Disinformation*, Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Crosset, V., Tanner, S. and Campana, A. (2018), 'Researching far right groups on Twitter: methodological challenges 2.0', *New Media and Society*, 21, 4:1-22.
- Curtis, Neal (2020), *Hate in Precarious Times: Mobilizing Anxiety from the Alt-Right to Brexit*, London: I.B. Tauris.
- Dignam, P. A. and Rohlinger, D. A. (2019), 'Misogynistic Men Online: How the Red Pill Helped Elect Trump', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 44, 3:589-612.
- Eyerman, R. (2001), *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity*, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Gavrilovic, Liliana (2017), *Anthropology of Digital Worlds*, downloaded from Academia.Edu at DOI:572:004(100):159-170.
- Goldstein, D. M. (2010), 'Towards a critical anthropology of security', *Current Anthropology*, 51, 4: 487-517.

- Guillaume, X. (2018), 'How to do things with silence: rethinking the centrality of speech to the securitization framework', *Security Dialogue*, 49, 6: 476-492.
- Gusterson, H. (2004), *People of the Bomb: Portraits of America's Nuclear Complex*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Hurtado, Fina Antón and Ercolani, Giovanni (2016), Sorting out the insecurity process: reading security as a myth and ritual through the anthropological gaze, in F.A. Hurtado and G. Ercolani (eds), *Anthropology and Security*, Murcia: University of Murcia.
- Huysmans, Jef (2004), 'Minding exceptions: the politics of security and liberal democracy', *Contemporary Political Theory*, 3, 321-341.
- Jones, Seth G. (2018), *The Rise of Far-Right Extremism in the United States*, Center for International Studies: Washington DC (CIS Briefs November 2018) at www.cis.org
- Kozinets, Robert V. (2020), *Netnography: The Essential Guide to Qualitative Social Media Research*, Thousand Oaks CA: Sage, 3rd edition.
- Lartey, Jamiles and Morris, Sam (2018), 'How white Americans used lynchings to terrorise and control black people', *The Guardian*, 26 April 2018.
- Masco, J. (2017), The crisis in crisis, *Current Anthropology*, 58(S15), pp. 65-76.
- Mazzarella, W. (2019), The Anthropology of Populism, *Annual Review of Anthropology 2019*, 48, pp. 45-60.
- Macleod, Alex (2016), 'La Culture Populaire Visuelle: Un Espace à Explorer Pour Les Études Critiques De Sécurité', *Cultures Et Conflits*, no. 102: 17-32.
- Miller, D. (2018), Digital Anthropology, in *Cambridge Encyclopaedia of Anthropology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, (digital format no page numbers).
- Phillips, Louise and Plesner, Ursula (2013), *Researching Virtual Worlds: Methodologies for Studying Emergent Practices*, London: Routledge.
- Philipsen, L. (2018), 'Performative securitization: from conditions of success to conditions of possibility', *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 23, 1: 139-163.
- Pütz, Ole (2012), 'From non-places to non events: the airport security checkpoint', *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 41, 2: 154-188.
- Rampton, Ben and Charalambous, Constadina (2019), 'Sociolinguistics and everyday (in)securitization', *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 24, 1: 75-88.
- Rothenbuhler E.W. and Coman, M. (eds) (2005), *Media Anthropology*, Thousand Oaks CA and London, Sage.
- Sommer, R. (2019), Brexit as Cultural Performance: Towards a Narratology of Social Drama, in A. Erli and R. Sommer (eds), *Narrative in Culture*, Berlin: De Gruyter, pp. 293-320.

- Spitulnik, D. (1993), 'Anthropology and Mass Media', in *Annual Review of Anthropology* 1993, 22, pp., 293-315.
- Taurek, Rita (2006), 'Securitization theory and securitization studies', *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 9: 53-61.
- Urman, A. and Katz, S. (2020), 'What they do in the shadows: examining the far-right on Telegram', *Information, Communication and Society*, ahead of print on Google Scholar: 1-20.
- Wahlström, M., Tömberg, A. and Ekbrand, H. (2020), 'Dynamics of violent and dehumanizing rhetoric in far-right social media', *New Media and Society*: 1-22.
- Williams, Daniel (2020), 'Motivated ignorance, rationality and democratic politics', *Synthese*, Open Access published online, no page numbers.
- Winter, Aaron (2019), 'Online Hate: From the Far-Right to the 'Alt-Right' and From the Margins to the Mainstream', in K. Lumsden and E. Harmer (eds), *Online Othering*, Basingstoke: Palgrave: 39-63.
- Worth, Owen (2017), 'Globalisation and the 'far right turn' in International Affairs, *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, 28:19-28.