Languages of "National Socialism": From Reactionary Apocalypse to Social Media Clickbait

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ABSTRACT

In this article I examine language used to define, express, and exploit "National Socialism". These different uses vary in time and purpose, and need to be understood in context. The Nazis did not create much of the language most closely associated with National Socialism, but their use of certain language, symbols, and images has been so firmly established that we immediately recognize them even when partially spoken or indirectly referenced. This easy recognition, combined with the emotional charge of anger and horror, lends itself to commercial and political exploitation. I discuss this with examples from scholarly publishing and current events, and also discuss possibilities for crowd manipulation made possible by political use of interactive social networks.

My purpose in this article is to examine the language used to define, express, and exploit "National Socialism", the amorphous set of recycled ideas that will forever be associated with the murderous practice that destroyed millions of lives and much of Europe[1]. These different uses vary in time and purpose, and need to be understood in context. In other work I have been primarily interested in the various forms of support for Hitler and Nazism that were possible within

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[1]   This text is a revised version of the paper presented at the international workshop "Languages of National Socialism", held November 12, 2021 at the University of Trieste in Italy. I thank Prof. Riccardo Martinelli for the invitation to participate in this event.

German philosophy at that time, and the mechanisms by which that support was expressed and encouraged[2]. Here I will discuss larger issues, including commercial exploitation of this language and incentives for its continuing political use. When referring to the language or languages of National Socialism I am referring to words and symbols that have meaning within the coordinated political vocabulary of words, images, and uniformed spectacle that we recognize from the Nazi's entire self-presentation. This vocabulary is highly distinctive, and will always be emotionally charged with memories of ethnic hate, genocide, and the most destructive war in history. The original natural language and context of National Socialism was German, and Nazism will always be remembered as the uniquely German form of fascism. But the general political objectives of Nazism are familiar in any language and its murderous practice can be pursued in any country. This topic will remain relevant for continuing study as long as race and ethnic nationalism are used as justifications by any people to subjugate others.

A discussion of the language of National Socialism should begin with a brief review of familiar elements that are not specific to Nazism. The Nazis did not, for example, invent the language of anti-Semitic bigotry and racist superstitions widely shared in Europe at that time. Nor did they create German "racial science", with its analysis of the origin of Europe's populations and hierarchy of racial classifications. They also did not create the still common belief that personal character traits and cultural differences among countries can be explained by "biologically inherited factors" visible in any individual's face, skull shape, or physical features[3]. All of the language of "blood composition" (*Blutzusammensetzung*), "hereditary health" (*Erbgesundheit*), and the "looming demise of the Nordic race" (*drohender Untergang der nordischen Rasse*) had been in wide use in Germany well before the Nazis took power[4]. An extensive polemical literature

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[2]   G. Leaman, *Die Philosophie und Nationalsozialismus: Was ist noch aktuell?*, Arbeitskreis "Aufarbeitung" des Fachschaftsrates Philosophie der Universität Leipzig, 14. Okt.2019; G. Leaman, *Offering Leibniz to Hitler: Otto Reichl Verlag and the Leibniz Ausgabe*, in: "Leibniz" in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus, "Studia Leibnitiana – Sonderheft", 2012, pp. 75-86; G. Leaman, *Reflections on German Philosophy and National Socialism: What Happened and Why it Matters to Philosophy*, in: *Philosophie und Zeitgeist im Nationalsozialismus*, M. Heinz (Hrsg.) Königshausen und Neumann, 2006, pp. 233-250; G. Leaman, G. Simon, *Die Kant-Studien im Dritten Reich*, in: "Kant-Studien", Bd.85, Nr.4, 1994; G. Leaman, G. *Deutsche Philosophen und das Amt Rosenberg*, in: *»Die besten Geister der Nation«: Philosophie und Nationalsozialismus*. I. Korotin (Hrsg.), Picus Verlag, 1994, pp. 41-65; G. Leaman, G. Simon, *Deutsche Philosophen aus der Sicht des Sicherheitsdienstes des Reichsführers SS*, in: "Jahrbuch für Soziologiegeschichte" 1992, pp. 261-292; G. Leaman, *Heidegger im Kontext: Gesamtüberblick zum NS-Engagement der Universitätsphilosophen*, Hamburg, Argument Verlag, 1993.

[3]   For discussion of the international roots of the study of skull shape as science see J. Poskett, *Materials of the Mind: Phrenology, Race, and the Global History of Science, 1815-1920*, University of Chicago Press, 2019.

[4]   Hans F. K. Günther's *Rassenkunde des deutschen Volkes* was already in its 15th edition in 1933 and over 100,000 copies had been sold. See *J.F. Lehmann Verlag in München: Dienst am Deutschtum 1890-1932*, in: "Börsenblatt für den Deutschen Buchhandel", 100.Jg., Nr.1, 1933, p. 87.

based on the assumed biological supremacy of a "Germanic" or "Nordic race", the so-called "Nordic idea", had been in wide circulation in Germany and elsewhere for decades[5]. This supremacist belief was also a common premise of the several *Völkisch*, or German ethno-nationalist, political movements that had been a feature of the German political Right since the late 19th century. One also does not find original ideas in the Nazi Party's official platform[6]. Each point of its "25-Point Program" could have been found in the literature of another German political party at that time. Even the concept of the German "national community" (*Volksgemeinschaft*), later seen as the core concept of National Socialism, was in wide use before the Nazi Party was established[7].

The Nazis were unique in their combination of pan-Germanic ethnic nationalism and extreme anti-Semitism, with a mix of anti-capitalist sounding demands and collectivist goals. Their appeal combined nationalist resentment, ethnic bigotry, and hope, using language that emphasized German ethnic unity and political action for the "common good" (*Gemeinnutz vor Eigennutz*). This combination was reflected in the name of the Party – *National Socialist* German Workers Party – which expressed an apparent consolidation of political forces from the nationalist Right and the working-class Left. The Nazi vision appeared to overcome German class divisions by asserting a biologically determined ethnic identity as the foundation for the German state, and followed the assumptions of German "racial science" and the "Nordic Idea" in presuming the biological superiority of Germanic peoples over non-Germans. Within this vision all "genuine" ethnic-Germans (*Volksgenossen*) shared a kind of equality, regardless of social standing or national borders. The Nazis called for invalidation of the treaties that ended World War I, expansion of Germany's borders on the basis of national (ethnic) self-determination, and unification of all ethnic Germans in Europe. They amplified existing German prejudices, building on the popular conceit of a special German mission (*Sendung*) to lead other countries in life and culture[8]. They branded "Jews" as non-German enemies of a different "race"

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[5]   A. J. Gregor, *Nordicism Revisited*, in: "Phylon", Vol. 22, No. 4, 1961, pp. 351-360; H. J. Lutzhöft, *Der Nordische Gedanke in Deutschland 1920-1940*, Stuttgart, Klett Verlag, 1971.

[6]   "25-Punkte-Programm" der NSDAP, Februar 1920, <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/25-Punkte-Programm>; see also, R. Murphy (ed.), *National Socialism*, Washington, U.S. Department of State, 1943, pp. 222-25.

[7]   The original use was based on an understanding of the *Volk* that included all Germans, including Jews and Social Democrats. See M. Wildt, *Volksgemeinschaft A Controversy* in: *Beyond the Racial State: Rethinking Nazi Germany*, O. D. Pendas, M. Roseman, R. F. Wetzell (ed.), Cambridge University Press, 2017, p. 320.

[8]   This conceit was captured in an Imperial German political slogan taken from Emanuel Geibel's poem "Deutschlands Beruf". "Und es mag am deutschen Wesen, einmal noch die Welt genesen". (And it may be up to German Spirit to heal the world once again). Similar sentiments in defense of assumed

and viewed "Jewishness" (*Judentum*) as a threat to cultural and ethnic "Germanness" (*Deutschtum*). In their view of the world, Soviet Communism, international "Marxism", socialist labor unions, and Social Democrats were all related parts of an international "Jewish conspiracy". The Nazis presented themselves as anti-Communist defenders of private property, but also emphasized collectivist social demands that may still resonate today, such as increasing employment and retirement benefits, nationalization of corporate trusts, land reform, profit-sharing, and abolition of unearned income. In 1942 the political theorist Franz Neumann described this combination of ethno-nationalist and strong working class appeals as "racial proletarianism", and considered it to be the genuine theory of National Socialism and its most dangerous expression[9]. It combined the language of racial supremacy with ethnic solidarity to frame discussion of all political and economic problems. The Nazi appeal did not rely on rational persuasion and logical arguments. It could be *felt* by people who shared a sense of belonging to the same ethnic organism. Fostering this sense of belonging was a primary goal of Nazi propaganda, and it began with exploitation of shared prejudices and resentments. To succeed it needed public acceptance of an assumed "natural" superiority of racial "Germanness" as the foundation of a national community (*Volksgemeinschaft*) that had "natural" claims to power and territory.

Anti-Semitism was the main difference between the Nazi understanding of the *Volksgemeinschaft* and earlier conceptions. The Nazi version only included ethnic Germans identified by "German" blood (*Blut*), who were also said to share a special bond or rootedness to "German" soil (*Boden*), where ever that might be. The Nazis therefore required understandings of the "*Volk*" and the larger concept of the Germanic "race" that were broad enough to include Germans from all over central Europe, but also specific enough to exclude Jews and other non-Germans who shared the same language, history, and culture, and often the same political commitments and physical appearance. To put this in the German terms of that time, the Nazis understood the "*Volk*" to be a community of common blood (*Blutgemeinschaft*), that was also in part a community of common language (*Sprachgemeinschaft*), shared culture (*Kulturgemeinschaft*), and shared struggles and fate (*Kampf- und Schicksalsgemeinschaft*). The biological criteria they claimed as the essence of German strength and identity were always used in conjunction

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special missions to "lead" or "civilize" other peoples have been expressed in every country that ever tried to establish colonial territories.

[9]   F. Neumann, *Behemoth: The Structure and Practice of National Socialism*, 1942, reprinted by Octagon Books, 1983, p. 188; note his description of the National Socialist structure as "a form of society in which the ruling groups control the rest of the population directly, without the mediation of the rational though coercive apparatus hitherto known as the state." (p. 470); political use of social media has given this insight new urgency.

with language, culture, history, soul, spirit, and other non-biological criteria[10]. Widely shared assertions of a special historical mission (*geschichtlicher Auftrag*) for German culture, and claims for some unique expressive power of the German language, should also be understood in this context[11].

As a practical matter these inconsistencies in the Nazi discourse of racial purity and Germanic superiority were a political asset, not a problem. They made it easier for the Nazis to gain acceptance from others on the German Right who embraced some understanding of "Germanness" as their core political principle. They could look past the Nazi's anti-Semitism and their *Blut und Boden* language of Germanic identity to find common cause with them as German nationalist voters and coalition partners. The shared desire to defend some idea of "Germanness" and eliminate perceived foreign threat, whatever the cost, was the common goal of the Nazi's "National Revolution" in 1933. It included rejection of the supposed influence of "Jewishness" and "international finance", and embraced a purge of the "unGerman spirit" (*undeutscher Geist*) from German public life. The Nazi language of active defense of "Germanness", "Jewish" exclusion, and "Aryanization" was popular and widely accepted. It was used to justify the enforced process of "consolidation" (*Gleichschaltung*) that extended the Nazi Party's reach into all aspects of German life, and was taken up and expressed in the professions, medicine, and law, as well as all fields of higher learning, including mathematics, physics, and psychology[12]. In philosophy the Nazi language of Germanic superiority was expressed through the language of the philosophical tradition, including the language of Plato, Kant, Hegel, Fichte, and Nietzsche. There was discussion and disagreement about the categories of German racial science, with dozens of interpretive efforts to find deeper meaning and better philosophical foundations for some understanding of National Socialism. It was conveyed in all the ways we would recognize today: university lectures, journal articles, books, conferences and meetings or professional societies, all with the general approval of multiple levels of Nazi government and Party bureaucracy. The same was true in other academic fields.

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[10]   This is also true of the concept of race used in the most widely distributed German racial science literature. «Eine Rasse stellt sich dar in einer Menschengruppe, die sich durch die ihr eigene Vereinigung körperlicher Merkmale und seelischer Eigenschaften von jeder anderen (in solcher Weise) zusammengefassten Menschengruppe unterscheidet und immer wieder nur ihresgleichen zeugt» H. F. K. Günther, *Rassenkunde des deutschen Volkes*, J. F. Lehmann, 1930, p. 15.

[11]   E. Kühnemann, *Deutschtum als Sendung*, Leipzig, K.F. Koehler Verlag, 1930; R. Murphy (ed.), *National Socialism*, Washington, DC., U.S. Department of State, 1943, p.10.

[12]   Understanding these efforts in each field therefore requires knowledge of the literature of the field published at that time, familiarity with the vocabulary and literature of German ethno-nationalism, and some familiarity with a spectrum of Nazi Party literature beyond *Mein Kampf* and *Der Mythos der 20. Jahrhunderts*.

Political and military success made it easy to ignore fundamental disagreements about the meaning of the racial categories in the Nazi doctrine of ethnic German supremacy and celebrate the apparent success of Germanic superiority in world historic terms. A common thread interpreted Nazi success as a historic rejection of the political legacy of the French Revolution of 1789, a shift of political thought away from the universalist assumption of the unity, fraternity, and equality of mankind[13]. A related view saw German victory in western Europe as an anti-capitalist challenge to the financial and political power of the western democracies, a rejection of "pseudo" universalism in favor of the ethnic-national community of German blood and race[14]. Others saw German victories as confirmation of the power of a Nordic-Germanic racial elite, and embraced a political concept for the domination of Europe that assumed Germans had the natural right to seize territory and "resettle" or eliminate whole populations however they wished. This was the SS vision of Germanic racial masters (*Herrenmenschen*) destroying "subhumans" (*Untermenschen*) and "Jews" as "vermin" (*Ungeziefer*). The mass executions in eastern Europe, systematic starvation of captured prisoners and civilian populations, and the Holocaust were outgrowths of this thinking. All of this was used to justify increasingly murderous practices that were sometimes turned on the German people themselves in the last months of the war to prevent German surrender.

The liberation of the camps in 1945 confirmed the full meaning of the Nazi language of Germanic superiority and elimination of "Jewishness", and this was displayed to the world in the Nuremberg trials. For the Allies and victims of the Nazis the only remaining language of National Socialism was "denazification", a flawed process whose intended purpose still retains a sense of justice[15]. For most Germans and Nazi collaborators, however, the remaining language of National Socialism became silence, often expressed though denial[16]. This was in part a consequence of defeat and the need to build new lives in a world controlled by others. But it was also due to human weakness in the face of complete moral disgrace. I didn't know... I wasn't there... It wasn't me. The military version of this is now known as the Nuremberg defense: I was only following orders... These

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[13] J. Chapoutot, *How the Nazis Viewed History: The Time of Nature and the Abolition of History*", in: "Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire", Vol. 117, Issue 1, 2013, 43-55; see also G. Krueger, *Um den Reichsgedanken*, in: "Historisches Zeitschrift", Nr.165, Heft 3, 1941, pp. 457-471.

[14] A. Baeumler, *Weltdemokratie und Nationalsozialismus: Die neue Ordnung Europas als geschichtsphilosophisches Problem*, Berlin, Duncker & Humblot, 1943.

[15] This sense of just purpose can be seen in the use of the idea of "denazification" in other contexts that have nothing to do with postwar Germany; see A. K. Zeren, *From De-Nazification of Germany to De-Baathification of Iraq*, in: "Political Science Quarterly", 132 (2), 2017, pp. 259-290.

[16] This is a general statement about the behavior of individuals, applicable in particular to individuals who had been eager supporters of National Socialism in some form.

statements are seen now from the safe distance of time (*mit der Gnade der späten Geburt*) without looming threats of denunciation, disappearance, and execution. No one should say how they themselves would have behaved until confronted with the same circumstances. At the same time human weakness now is not different than it was then, and it is reasonable to see nothing deep or complicated about most of these denials of personal responsibility. Silence was accompanied by wide-spread lying, active efforts to deny and avoid legal or moral responsibility, that continued for decades. For university faculty who had been outspoken in their support of National Socialism or who joined the Nazi Party, such lying was also motivated by a desire to continue to teach and publish, and to retain pension benefits. It included quiet efforts to change the scholarly record, with unacknowledged changes of post-war editions of scholarly work originally published before 1945. This has had ripple effects through the entire system of scholarly communication and we are still working through the aftermath of this[17].

Getting past silence and the distortions of the post-war period has been an ongoing effort, slowed by the need to work through archival records divided among multiple countries and jurisdictions, subject to access restrictions that reflected the post-war division of Europe. This process has unfolded differently in different subject areas, with the level of public interest often determined by the commercial success of books or films. Public discussion of this past in philosophy has been dominated by debates about the German philosopher Martin Heidegger, his support of Hitler, and the political dimension of his philosophical work. Detailed discussion of Heidegger and Nazism has been ongoing in academic and commercial publications for over *thirty years*[18]. It has become a subfield, with books, anthologies, special issues of journals and magazine, conferences, media discussion, filmed interviews, dedicated web sites, and on and on. How has it been possible to sustain continuing discussion of the same issues, circling around the same questions, for decades? A close look at this discussion points to circumstances and incentives that can make interpretive discussion of this past, including past use of the language of National Socialism, *more* difficult and less precise over time, even in scholarly work.

The current phase of the Heidegger discussion began in 2014 after publication of three volumes of his so-called "Black Notebooks", as final volumes of

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[17]   See G. Leaman, *Reflections on German Philosophy and National Socialism: What Happened and Why it Matters to Philosophy*, pp. 244-246; this problem includes post-war changes to unpublished manuscripts completed before 1945; see S. Kellerer, *Rewording the Past: The Postwar Publication of a 1938 Lecture by Martin Heidegger*, in: "Modern Intellectual History", Vol.11, Nr.3, 2014, pp. 575-602.

[18]   For this article I am dating the beginning of this discussion with publication of V. Farías, *Heidegger et le nazisme*, Lagrasse, Éditions Verdier, 1987; and H. Ott, *Martin Heidegger: Unterwegs zur seiner Biographie*, Frankfurt am Main, Campus Verlag, 1988, but there had been discussion of Heidegger and Nazism long before this.

his Collected Works. These volumes contain personal notes and reflections on a range of topics, and confirm the depth and continuity of his long-reported anti-Semitism. There are passages that make his Nazi Party membership and famously repeated affirmation of the "inner truth and greatness" of National Socialism seem obvious. They also show his anti-Semitism and reactionary political commitments framed within his philosophical language[19], and reinforce questions about the political implications of his philosophical work. There was much surprise and shock at the depth of the anti-Semitism captured in his own words, and renewed interest in understanding how his political commitments are both visible and obscured in his philosophical work. It renewed attention to the disastrous supervision of the publication of his Collected Works that has been well documented as a scandal of philosophical scholarship[20]. The fact that the content of the Black Notebooks was a surprise, after decades of research, is an indication of the impact that commercial publishing decisions and access restrictions have had on the long path of this discussion. It has also been affected by all too human denial of professional error, as some scholars have struggled to accept that past reception of Heidegger's work had been partial or incorrect. This is a common problem in academic life, not unique to philosophy. Discussions can be carried on far longer than necessary by a refusal to accept new information. Most importantly, this discussion has been prolonged and distorted by the loss, removal, or unawareness of contextual information needed to understand words and actions from that time. It is not possible to make sound interpretive judgments about the meanings of philosophical language without knowing what was actually said and without a clear understanding of the historical setting and social context in which the language was originally used. In this case scholars have been encouraged to *avoid* reading Heidegger's language in context and have not known what was said at the time[21], and this has had

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[19]   For an excellent discussion of this see D. Di Cesare, *Heidegger and the Jews: The Black Notebooks*, Cambridge, Polity Books, 2018.

[20]   See T. Kisiel, *In Response to my Overwrought Critics*, in: "Studia Phaenomenologica", Vol.7, 2007, pp. 545-552; T. Kisiel, *Review and Overview of Recent Heidegger Translations and Their German Originals: A Grassroots Archival Perspective*, in: "Studia Phaenomenologica", 2005, pp. 277-300; T. Kisiel, *Heidegger's Gesamtausgabe: An International Scandal of Scholarship*, in: "Philosophy Today", Vol.39, Nr.1, 1995, pp. 3-15; T. Kisiel, *Heidegger's Gesamtausgabe as a Philosophical Problem: Prolegomena*, Heidegger Circle Proceedings, Vol.27, 1993, pp. 111-169.

[21]   «Stattdessen ist heute mehr denn je nötig, kritische Distanz zu Heideggers selbstreferentiellem Diskurs zu wahren und unerlässlich ist es, nüchterne Philologie in den Dienst der philosophischen Interpretation zu stellen. Eine Philosophie, die vom Leser Texthörigkeit einfordert, wird durchschaubar nur, wenn der Blick sich über die Texte hinaus auf den Kontext, und über den Kontext hinaus auf den historischen Zusammenhang richtet. Will man totalitäres Denken in der Moderne verstehen, so darf man sich Heideggers Forderung nach allein textimmanenter Auseinandersetzung mit seinen Werken nicht ausliefern. Statt losgelöst von sozialen und politischen Verflechtungen propagiert und hingenommen zu werden, kann Ideengeschichte nur mit all ihren Wurzeln und Implikationen verstanden werden. Es ist

disastrous consequences. Discussion of meaning without contextual knowledge has sometimes had the effect of reducing unfamiliar details to a story of good and evil, accompanied by repetition of the same questions, with partial information and moral indignation. But despite this, *and perhaps because of this*, the discussion has continued, sustained by reader interest and publisher income. It seems plain that publishers have long recognized what attracts many readers and viewers to this discussion: the number of people who share some interest in the history or memory of Nazism is much larger than the number of people who share some interest in Heidegger. It is the emotional response to the legacy of Nazism that generates much of the attention that has sustained this discussion and publications can be commercially successful even when they are repetitious, historically inaccurate, or both. I will return to this below.

The language of Nazism still evoke passionate memories of ethnic hate and genocide, and their continuing potential for political mobilization is evident in the legal restrictions on the use of Nazi flags or symbols or flags in many countries[22]. This potential is also evident in their use by the various neo-Nazi, fascist, and ethnic supremacist groups that openly reject the idea of racial equality and multi-ethnic social cohesion[23]. Use of Nazi language and symbols by different groups makes it easier for them to find common purpose. *Anti*-Nazism draws on the same passionate memories, and can mobilize resistance to ethnic hate and the politics of racial supremacy, as well as nationalist pride in the countries that fought Nazi Germany. As with commercial use of this language and memory of Nazism, any political use today may or may not accurately reflect the original context and history, but will still find political value in the emotional response to their use.

We have been witnessing a continuing demonstration of this in the Russian government's use of the language of anti-Nazism and "denazification, even the

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weder philosophisch, noch philosophiegeschichtlich noch auch rezeptionsgeschichtlich belanglos, ob für Heidegger in den Jahren des Nationalsozialismus der »entfesselte Technizismus« einem geschichtlichen deutschen Auftrag diente und ob er damals der »entarteten Subjektivität« die authentische deutsche »Subjektivität« entgegenstellte. Gerade im Falle Heideggers wird deutlich, wie sehr das Herauslösen eines philosophischen Denkens aus seinem Kontext intellektuellem Leerlauf und Immunisierung gegen Kritik erzeugt«, S. Kellerer, *Zerrissene Moderne: Descartes bei den Neukantianern, Husserl und Heidegger*, Konstanz University Press, 2013, p. 257.

[22] Countries with such restrictions have included Belgium, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, and Ukraine, as well as Germany and Austria. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bans_on_Nazi_symbols>.

[23] Rechtsextremismus: Symbole, Zeichen und verbotene Organisationen (2022), Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz. See also "Hate on Display" Hate Symbols Database maintained by the Anti-Defamation League at <https://www.adl.org/resources/hate-symbols/search> and <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Identitarian_movement>.

declared goal of a "World Without Nazism" (Мир без нацизма)[24], to justify its invasion of Ukraine.[25] It has described the Ukrainian government as a group of "neo-Nazis and drug addicts"[26], and invoked the memory Soviet victory in the war against Nazi Germany to present itself as a defender of the people of Ukraine, and an anti-fascist liberator of Russian people and territory[27]. In adopting this anti-Nazi posture of liberation the Russian government is claiming both self-defense and dominion over a territorial sphere defined for Russians in religious terms[28]. Its choice of this emotionally charged language has been planned and sometimes elaborately staged (Figure 1).

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[24]   "World Without Nazism" is a Russian political organization founded in 2010 that uses anti-Nazism to mobilize support for Russian foreign policy in countries formerly occupied by the Soviet Union. See A. Zaitchik, *Anti-Anti-Semitism*, in: "Tablet Magazine", Sept.20, 2010, <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/news/articles/anti-anti-semitism>; see also <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Without_Nazism>.

[25]   *Decision taken on denazification, demilitarization of Ukraine − Putin*, TASS, Feb.24, 2022, <https://tass.com/politics/1409189>; see also: *World Without Nazism movement warns about threats Ukraine's Nazi pose to ethnic minorities*, in: "TASS", March 11, 2014. <https://tass.com/world/723023>.

[26]   *Putin calls Ukraine government 'drug addicts and neo-Nazis'*, Feb.25, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qvneygfQ4iw>.

[27]   «"Antifascism" has .... become a central element of the new national idea and the motor of mass nationalist mobilization in today's Russia. This "antifascism" addresses both internal and external publics: Russia's own population and Russophones in the near abroad on the one hand, and the West on the other. With regards to the internal public, Russia's crusade against "neo-fascism" in Ukraine and the Baltic states serves to mobilize and consolidate Russian society around a nationalist agenda, providing it with an "enemy" that resonates with the still-powerful narrative of the Great Patriotic War. Interestingly, the new Russian nationalist / imperialist discourse associates the revival of fascism and neo-Nazism in Ukraine with a Western conspiracy. Accusing the West of silent support for neo-Nazism (and evoking Russia's historical mission of preventing its return to Europe) is part of a rhetoric that has its roots in the anti-Western propaganda of the Soviet era. At the same time, "Russia's fight against fascism" in Ukraine and the Baltic states is a strong message to the West, above all to Europe, but also the US and Israel. Depicting the pro-western political elites in the post-Soviet states as fascist, Russia presents those states as a failed experiment in nation building (Ukraine as a failed state) and admonishes the countries of old Europe to reconsider the post-Cold War order in eastern Europe»; see T. Zhurzhenko, *Russia's Never-Ending War against "Fascism". Memory Politics in the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict*, in: "Eurozine", 8 May 2015; <https://www.eurozine.com/russias-never-ending-war-against-fascism/> and <https://www.iwm.at/transit-online/russias-never-ending-war-against-fascism-memory-politics-in-the-russian>; see also M. Luxmoore, *'Orange Plague': World War II and the Symbolic Politics of Pro-state Mobilization in Putin's Russia*, in: "Nationalities Papers", 47(5), 2019, pp. 822-839.

[28]   «The core of the Russian world today is Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and the holy reverend Lavrenty of Chernigov expressed this idea with the famous phrase: 'Russia, Ukraine, Belarus – this is Holy Russia.' It is this understanding of the Russian world that is embedded in the modern self-name of our Church. The church is called Russian not on an ethnic basis. This name indicates that the Russian Orthodox Church performs a pastoral mission among peoples who accept the Russian spiritual and cultural tradition as the basis of their national identity, or at least as an essential part of it». Patriarch Kirill, *Speech by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill at the Opening Ceremony of the Third Assembly of the Russian World*, November 3, 2009, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/print/928446.html>; see also, "Article by Vladimir Putin "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians"", July 12, 2021, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181>.

Figure 1. "For a world without Nazism, For Russia"[29].

For the use of anti-Nazi language to be effective in this good versus evil scenario the Russian government must be seen by its audience to be the "liberator". This has gotten harder since the defeat of its gambit for a quick "liberation" of Ukraine, and the continuation of a full-scale war of ethno-national conquest[30]. Russian use of the language of anti-Nazi liberation continues[31], now explained to entail forced "de-Ukrainization" of the territory of Ukraine and elimination of Ukrainian sovereignty[32]. Russians who oppose the war have been denounced as "traitors and

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[29]   Luzhniki Stadium, Moscow, March 18, 2022, «Za мир без нацизма, Za Россию, Za президента», <https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-60798290>.

[30]   R. Anin, *How Putin Decided to Go to War*, in: "Istories", May 16, 2022 (Романа Анина, "Как Путин принимал решение о войне?") <https://istories.media/opinions/2022/05/16/kak-putin-prin-yal-reshenie-o-voine/>.

[31]   For example: "*Putin lauds liberation of Mariupol as success and its liberators as heroes*", April 21, 2022. <https://tass.com/politics/1440949>. "*Putin congratulates Russian troops on 'liberating' Ukraine's Luhansk region*", July 4, 2022. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/putin-congratulates-russian-troops-liberating-ukraines-luhansk-region-2022-07-04/>.

[32]   «Denazification is a set of measures aimed at the nazified population [of Ukraine], which technically cannot be subjected to direct punishment like war criminals ... a significant part of the masses of the people ... are passive Nazis ... The name "Ukraine" apparently cannot be retained as the title of any fully denazified state entity in a territory liberated from the Nazi regime. ... Denazification is inevitably also de-Ukrainization: a rejection of the artificial inflation of the ethnic self-identification of the population of the territories of historical Little Russia and New Russia»; see S. Timofei, *What Russia Should Do With Ukraine*, in: "RIA Novosti", 3 April 2022. Original text: Тимофей Сергейцев (2022), "Что Россия должна сделать с Украиной", РИА НОВОСТИ, April 3, 2022, <https://ria.ru/20220403/ukraina-1781469605.html>.

scum"[33], and legal restrictions have been imposed to prevent characterization of Russia as the aggressor – even to prevent the use of the word "war" to describe the invasion[34]. Russia's invasion of Ukraine is now presented as a continuing struggle of good versus evil with shifting objectives[35], celebrated with traditional Russian military symbols[36], that Russian citizens cannot call a "war" without risk of a prison sentence. The moral force of anti-Nazi discourse of liberation is being used to fuel Russian nationalism, silence opposition, and disguise imperial ambition.

The Ukrainians have their own memories of Nazism, German invasion and anti-fascist liberation, and those memories have been used, along with the language and symbols of Nazism, to mobilize national resistance to the Russian in-

[33]   "Putin warns Russia against pro-Western 'traitors' and scum", March 16, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/putin-warns-russia-against-pro-western-traitors-scum-2022-03-16/>; "'Scum and traitors': Putin threatens Russians who oppose war in Ukraine – video", March 17, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/video/2022/mar/17/scum-and-traitors-putin-threatens-russians-who-oppose-war-in-ukraine-video>.

[34]   "Soviet Rock Star Prosecuted for 'Putin's Ass' Anti-War Speech", May 19, 2022, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/05/19/soviet-rock-star-prosecuted-for-putins-ass-anti-war-speech-a77732>. "Moscow city councillor gets seven years' jail for anti-war comment", July 8, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/moscow-city-councillor-gets-seven-years-jail-anti-war-comment-2022-07-08/>; see: "Russian 2022 Laws Establishing War Censorship and Prohibiting Anti-War Statements and Calls for Sanctions", <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_2022_war_censorship_laws>; also: "Putin ally moves to up jail time for insulting the army, protect mercenaries", March 1, 2023 <https://www.reuters.com/world/russian-law-amendments-punish-discrediting-military-including-voluntary-2023-03-01/>.

[35]   "Russia does not want war with Ukraine, says Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov", January 28, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-does-not-want-war-with-ukraine-says-russian-foreign-minister-lavrov-2022-01-28/>.
"Russia's Lavrov questions Ukraine's right to sovereignty - Ifax", February 22, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russias-lavrov-questions-ukraines-right-sovereignty-ifax-2022-02-22/>.
"Russia's Lavrov says Moscow wants Ukrainian people to be independent", February 25, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russias-lavrov-says-moscow-wants-ukrainian-people-be-independent-2022-02-25/>.
"Lavrov says Russia will continue Ukraine war till 'the end'", March 3, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russias-lavrov-no-doubt-that-solution-ukraine-crisis-will-be-found-2022-03-03/>.
"Russia will not pause military operation in Ukraine for peace talks", April 11, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-will-not-pause-military-operation-ukraine-peace-talks-2022-04-11/>.
"Lavrov says Russia does not want war in Europe", May 11, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/lavrov-says-russia-does-not-want-war-europe-2022-05-11/>.
"Russia declares expanded war goals beyond Ukraine's Donbas", July 20, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/lavrov-says-russias-objectives-ukraine-now-go-beyond-donbas-2022-07-20/>.
"Lavrov pledges 'full protection' for any territory annexed by Russia", September 25, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/lavrov-un-pledges-full-protection-any-territory-annexed-by-russia-2022-09-24/>.

[36]   The orange and black Georgian ribbon is an old Russian military symbol used on many flags and decorations, including the Soviet medal "For the Victory Over Germany in the Great Patriotic War 1941–1945". Since 2005 it has been used in Russia on May 9 in Victory Day ceremonies and has become a symbol of nationalist support for the Russian government. See P. Kolstø, *Symbol of the War – But Which One? The St George Ribbon in Russian Nation-Building*, in: "Slavonic and East European Review" 94(4), 2016, pp. 660-701; also *Russia awash with symbols of WW2 victory*, BBC, May 8, 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-32650024>.

vasion (Figure 2). This use seems less complicated and easier to understand, and likely to remain more consistent.

Figure 2. "We defeated Nazism - We will also defeat rashism"[37].

Possibilities for commercial and political exploitation of the languages of Nazism have been evolving in new ways since the development of interactive online networks and targeted communication between websites and individual users. The major search engines and social media platforms have created networks of individuals with common interests by recording and analyzing their online behavior. Each user's data and search history are used to create sub-networks of like-minded users, who then communicate with others and provide more usage and search data to each site. Data on all users of a platform, or multiple platforms, can be aggregated and analyzed for identification of common preferences. The more usage and search data recorded for each individual, the greater the predictive power of the behavioral data captured for each profile. We are now in the age of unlimited data collection, storage, and commodification, with continuous collection and deployment of user data now possible on a vast scale in real time.[38] Analysis of this data can predict

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37   Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance, May 2022; <https://www.uzhnu.edu.ua/en/news/pro-nashu-pamyat-I-nashu-peremogu.htm>, "Rashism" combines the words "russian" and "fascism" to characterize the Russian invasion of Ukraine from the Ukrainian perspective; see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rashism>.

38   Shoshana Zuboff has described the business model behind this phenomenon as "surveillance capitalism", defined thus: «I define surveillance capitalism as the unilateral claiming of private human experience

the behavior of likely voters as well as customers, or identify potential political opponents instead of business competitors. We are living through a revolution in the technology of commercial and political communication, with new possibilities for the control or distortion of public discussion for commercial or political benefit, driven by age-old human desires to maximize wealth and power.[39]

While few people alive today have personal experience from the Nazi era, much of the history of the period, including the Holocaust and the anti-Nazi death struggle of the Second World War, remains familiar. It has been well documented, and is firmly established in popular culture and modern memory. Certain words, images, and symbols (even fonts[40]) are instantly recognizable as signifiers of Nazism and genocide, and this makes them useful in attracting attention. What might be called the Nazi "brand" is easily recognizable because the unified iconic language of National Socialism created by the Nazis has survived them, and it is still being used as a commercial tool and a political weapon in struggles about ethnic nationalism and racial supremacy.[41] The combination of easy recognition and emotionally charged political identification of good and evil can make it particularly useful in the online information space. Social media usage is increased and monetized by conflict, real or imagined, and each user's online experience is determined in part by algorithmic responses to user action designed to hold user attention. Such use of the language of this "brand" does not require knowledge of the history of that time. In fact, *it does not require any historical knowledge at all*. It only requires recognition of the highly charged polarity of good and evil associated with this language, and awareness of predictable user reactions generated when it is invoked.

We should expect distortion and *overuse* of the language and symbols of Nazism in this environment because they generate interest and can hold user attention[42],

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as free raw material for translation into behavioral data. These data are then computed and packaged as prediction products and sold into behavioral futures markets – business customers with a commercial interest in knowing what we will do now, soon, and later. It was Google that first learned how to capture surplus behavioral data, more than what they needed for services, and used it to compute prediction products that they could sell to their business customers, in this case advertisers. But I argue that surveillance capitalism is no more restricted to that initial context than, for example, mass production was restricted to the fabrication of Model T's». S. Zuboff, interview with *The Harvard Gazette*, March 4, 2019. <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2019/03/harvard-professor-says-surveillance-capitalism-is-undermining-democracy/>.

[39] The attack on the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021 demonstrated the power of this technology. The crowd was mobilized with the help of social media memes that made explicit use of Nazi, white supremacist, and "identitarian" symbols. The actual history of these symbols or correct rendering of them was not important. What mattered was their power to generate emotional identification with the cause of the Leader among people ready for violence.

[40] For an example of such a font see "Tannenberg Fett".

[41] See N. O'Shaughnessy, *Marketing the Third Reich: Persuasion, Packaging and Propaganda*, Routledge, 2018; N. O'Shaughnessy, *Selling Hitler: Propaganda and the Nazi Brand*, Hurts & Co, 2016.

[42] «Godwin's law (or rule) of Nazi analogies is an Internet adage asserting that, as an online discussion grows longer (regardless of topic or scope), the probability of a comparison to Nazis or Adolf Hitler ap-

and so easily lend themselves to creation of click-bait memes. These jumbles of images and text often appear silly and just for fun, using ironic humor to attract the attention of - and identify - other social media users who get the joke[43]. A click on the image confirms user engagement and is a voluntary form of self-identification to the social media platform that hosts it. User interest in particular topics and images is tracked across platforms[44], making it possible to choose images and texts that will generate the most response and keep the audience engaged[45]. The accuracy and purpose of the message is irrelevant; what matters to the platform is the ability to track and hold user interest so usage can be monetized. Social media usage tracking also makes click-bait memes useful for political organizing, with humor used as camouflage for political messages to build online communities of like-minded people. Short, funny messages can serve the same function as political leaflets, with no concern for accuracy or attribution (Figure 3).

Figure 3. "I bet you did 'not see' that coming".

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proaches 1. Promulgated by the American attorney and author Mike Godwin in 1990, Godwin's law originally referred specifically to Usenet newsgroup discussions. He stated that he introduced Godwin's law in 1990 as an experiment in memetics. Later it was applied to any threaded online discussion, such as Internet forums, chat rooms, and comment threads, as well as to speeches, articles, and other rhetoric where *reductio ad Hitlerum* occurs»; see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Godwin%27s_law>.

[43] H. Lewis, *The Joke's on Us*, in: "The Atlantic", September 20, 2020. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2020/09/how-memes-lulz-and-ironic-bigotry-won-internet/616427/>.

[44] Know Your Meme: Internet Meme Database, <https://knowyourmeme.com/>; see also: <https://www.facebook.com/knowyourmeme/> and <https://www.youtube.com/knowyourmeme>.

[45] M. Lewis, *How to Use Memes to Create Social Media Engagement*, in: "SocialMediaToday", April 3, 2012, <https://www.socialmediatoday.com/content/how-use-memes-create-social-media-engagement>.

Whether one laughs or not, it is clear that humor is intended to soften the impact of an image of Hitler in full-throated roar. Perhaps the next image from the same site would be an altered image of Hitler with someone else's face and another text to demonize a contemporary politician.[46] User response to the image, filtered through the algorithms of the commercial social medial platforms and search engines, would determine what comes next after that, regardless of the original context or history of what is posted. With good animation and deep fake videos, even "Pepe the Frog" could become a symbol of the Nordic hero of the future.[47] This sounds absurd, but the online information space is already full of misinformation and absurd fictions that use Nazi symbols to feed conflict and engage users for political or commercial purposes.[48] The language, images, and symbols of Nazism will continue to be used as an instruments, without regard to the actual history of that time, as long as some advantage is found in their ability to hold user attention.

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[46]   Hitler memes have been part of U.S. politics for years. See V. Heffernan, *The Hitler Meme*, in: "The New York Times", Oct.24, 2008; N. Lederman, *Playing the Nazi Card: Comparing Obama to Hitler becomes a standard right-wing trop*, in: *"FAIR"*, March 1, 2010; E. Greenberg, *The Meme That Cried Hitler: American Alternatives to Hitler Hyperbole in the Age of Trump*, in: "Topics of Meta", August 14, 2018.

[47]   "Pepe the Frog" is an internet meme used for white supremacist messaging, in conjunction with "Kek" symbols based on National Socialist designs. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pepe_the_Frog> and documentary film "Feels Good Man" (2020); also J. Demsky, *That Is Really Meme: Nazi Pepe the Frog and the Subversion of Anglo-American Holocaust Remembrance* in *Nazi and Holocaust Representations in Anglo-American Popular Culture, 1945–2020*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2021, pp.105-125.

[48]   The evidence of this is overwhelming. See for example D. Mastrangelo, *Elon Musk blasted for tweeting Adolf Hitler meme*, in: "The Hill", Feb.17, 2022; A. Slisco, *Oklahoma GOP Posts Facebook Meme Comparing Unvaccinated to Jews in Nazi Germany*, in: "Newsweek", July 30, 2021; R. Evans, *White Boy Summer, Nazi Memes and the Mainstreaming of White Supremacist Violence*, in: "Bellingcat", July 1, 2021; "*False claims about George Soros*", Sept. 29, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-factcheck-false-george-soros-claims/fact-checkfalseclaims-about-george-soros-idUSKBN23P2XJ>. This also applies to online gaming. For example, "Heal Hitler" is an online game built around language from *Mein Kampf* that is presented as a psychological simulation. The premise is to "heal" Hitler with talk therapy in 1925, the year *Mein Kampf* was published. Inflammatory anti-Semitic rants are repeated in the context of "healing" (or "heil machen"), and this both obscures and reinforces their shock appeal.