The Cultic Milieu of Kekistan: Disentangling the Internet's Chaos Continent

“People know what they do; frequently they know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what what they do does.” Foucault

Intro

"Kekistan" is the term of art for a fictional internet troll nation-state at war with social-justice warriors and "the Normies of Newfagland" (in the vernacular netspeak). Its fans see it as a joke, while for its critics, it is a form of neofascist metapolitics. As an internet meme, having initially emerged from the subcultures of the deep vernacular web, Kekistan is intwined in an "ambivalent tangle" (Phillips and Milner 2017: 191) of abstruse subcultural styles which are in turn shaped by various platform affordances. Teasing apart this tangle involves recounting the story of the meme, understanding its politics and negotiating with the algorithmic logics that shape these dynamics. This essay considers how Kekistan employs humour as a means by which to pre-emptively depoliticize the political agenda of the "partisan" (Schmitt 2004: 1-79). The argument is that, as a joke, Kekistan functions to underpin the cohesion of a collective who may significantly diverge in terms of their political commitments, but who share an ironically occult outlook that helps to make them adaptable to the fluid exchange of ideas across a shared "cultic milieu" (Kaplan and Lööw 2002: 12-25).

Having emerged, at least initially, from the same online milieus that helped to popularize the alt-right, Kekistan tends to often be associated with American white nationalist politics. While this critique is not entirely off-base, it is missing in nuance, certainly from the perspective of the adherents of this particular memetic subculture. At the same time, ethnographic reportage from the emic perspective of the "Kekistani" risks lending legitimacy to dangerously reactionary right-wing metapolitics (Maly 2018). In recognition of this complexity we offer the following essay as an empirically-grounded exploration of the Kekistan meme that seeks to describe the mutual shaping dynamics between the meme and its media environment. On this empirical level we thus use platform mechanisms, specifically YouTube’s search and recommendation features, as a means by which to literally map Kekistan. After having contextualized the concept of Kekistan with reference to recent developments in American right-wing politics, this paper thus includes an empirical component. Using the term "kekistan" as a keyword to search related videos on YouTube, we describe the imaginary region of Kekistan as a "channel-linked milieu" through which ideas and people can migrate between groups. In querying YouTube for "kekistan" in early 2018, one encounters in the related videos bar a mix of arcane references to 4chan, gamer culture and Egyptian mythology and videos by Youtube’s new-right micro-celebrities — including Richard Spencer, Carl Benjamin (AKA Sarkon of Akkad), Colin Robertson (AKA Millennial Woes), Tim Pool and Alex Jones.

In trying to make sense of Kekistan, at the outset, we might summarize it in seven simple points. First, and most obviously, Kekistan is an internet thing. While it originated in 4chan/pol/, as we will discuss below, it is largely a YouTube issue. Second, Kekistan is a joke based on the trolling axiom that "internet is serious business”, which is to say that it is not. Third, Kekistan is a belief

system which uses belief as a tool to create belief and whose adepts thus bear witness to its effects without necessarily believing in its veracity. Fourth, Kekistan is "magic" in that it refers to the idea that memes can magically affect culture and politics and relate to the esoteric belief of meaning in apparent coincidence. Fifth, Kekistan is a provocation: an imagined homeland (or in alt-right jargon, an ‘ethno-state’) united by the idea of "triggering" Social Justice Warriors (SJWs). Sixth, Kekistan is a contradiction: it is an identity for those who define themselves by their explicit opposition to "identity politics". Finally, Kekistan is metapolitics: as expressed in the quote "politics is downstream from culture" (Meyers 2011), Kekistan represents the avant-garde of a new collective political project with close ties to far-right politics, notably white nationalism in the U.S. Although this has led at least one noted scholar of the far-right in the United States to identify Kekistan with the white nationalist alt-right (Neiwert 2017), it would in fact be more accurate to identify Kekistan with the libertarian, Western supremacist "alt-lite", a group of online pundits who, it has been argued, can in some circumstances function as "strategic mouthpieces" or "useful idiots" for advancing the alt-right's broader metapolitical agenda (Davey and Ebner 2017; Nagle 2017; Hawley 2017).



Image 1.) Top 25 videos for "kekistan" in Youtube

The Deep Vernacular Web… Politicized

In the first instance, Kekistan should be understood as an artefact of the cultural context and material affordances of 4chan. Given the fact that 4chan boards are anonymous and relatively ephemeral, posters (or "anons") are constantly innovating vernacular images and slang to serve as "credibility mechanisms" (M. S. Bernstein et al. 2011) in order to demonstrate their in-group

status in the absence of any persistent reputation markers. In the late 2000's, 4chan's /b/ board, commonly referred to as "the asshole of the Internet", had given rise to the Anonymous movement that lead it, having been theorized as a space of resistance and even quasi-Situationist media critique (Coleman 2014; Phillips 2015). Following a US government crackdown on the Anonymous movement in the early 2010's, however, the site underwent substantive transformations in terms of demographics, on-site affordances, policies, and ownership. With 4chan's political discussion board, /pol/, having come to eclipse /b/ in terms of popularity, 4chan has increasingly become a bastion of "edgy" or transgressive hate speech in the last several years, and as such has functioned for some as a gateway into organized neo-Nazi movements (Reitman 2018).

Within rhetoric, vernacular refers to common everyday speech patterns that are thought to be entwined in the material affordances of daily routine. Adapting this concept for use within the field of new media, scholars have written about the "vernacular web" and "vernacular creativity" as a kind of hybrid combination of media together with folkloric practices (Lialina 2005; Burgess 2006; Howard 2008). As a partially indexed region of the web characterized above all by its anonymity and ephemerality, we can consider 4chan as a central node in what we might call the "deep vernacular web". Etymologically derived from the Roman "verna", meaning a slave born in captivity, the term "vernacular" implies two seemingly counterposed yet irreducible subject positions that also seem to describe irony (to which we will return shortly). Due to these affordances and this bizarre dualism, the deep vernacular web is not only the birthplace of memes, but also to a wide variety of other "bullshit", such as, for example, the Pizzagate conspiracy theory (Bach, Jokubauskaite, and Tuters 2018). The techniques, the mythos and the peculiar vernacular theories developed in these backwater regions are popularly imagined as representing a kind of "dark influence" over communities on "the surface web". We offer Kekistan as a case study of this dynamic.

4chan has been identified as one of the primary sources of creative energies for the new alt-right movement, which rose to prominence alongside Trump's insurgent campaign during the election season of the 2016 US presidential election (Nagle 2017). Kekistan builds on the concept of "kek", which developed on the 4chan boards /pol/, /x/ and /sp/ as a shorthand for the magical chaos that would accompany Trump's presidency. Memes imagined Pepe the Frog and Donald Trump in decidedly esoteric terms as quasi-divine figures of chaos. In 2016, the bizarre visual vernaculars culture of 4chan captured global attention with the rise of Donald Trump, whom, a year prior to his election, famously Tweeted an image of himself rendered as Pepe the Frog. Shortly thereafter, that particular meme came to be seen as the embodiment of an alt-right style of online activism that developed on 4chan, which some would see as central to his insurgency (Marantz 2016; Beran 2017). While, in retrospect, such claims seem hyperbolic, for a period, the alt-right appeared to have been one of the biggest winners of Trump's election (Morgan 2016). Almost totally lacking in any coherent political project or organizational structures (Hawley 2017: 171), the alt-right's remarkable rise to international recognition can partly be attributed to their clever use of memes and other online media tactics associated to a 4chan trolling subculture that had grown increasingly illiberal over recent years.

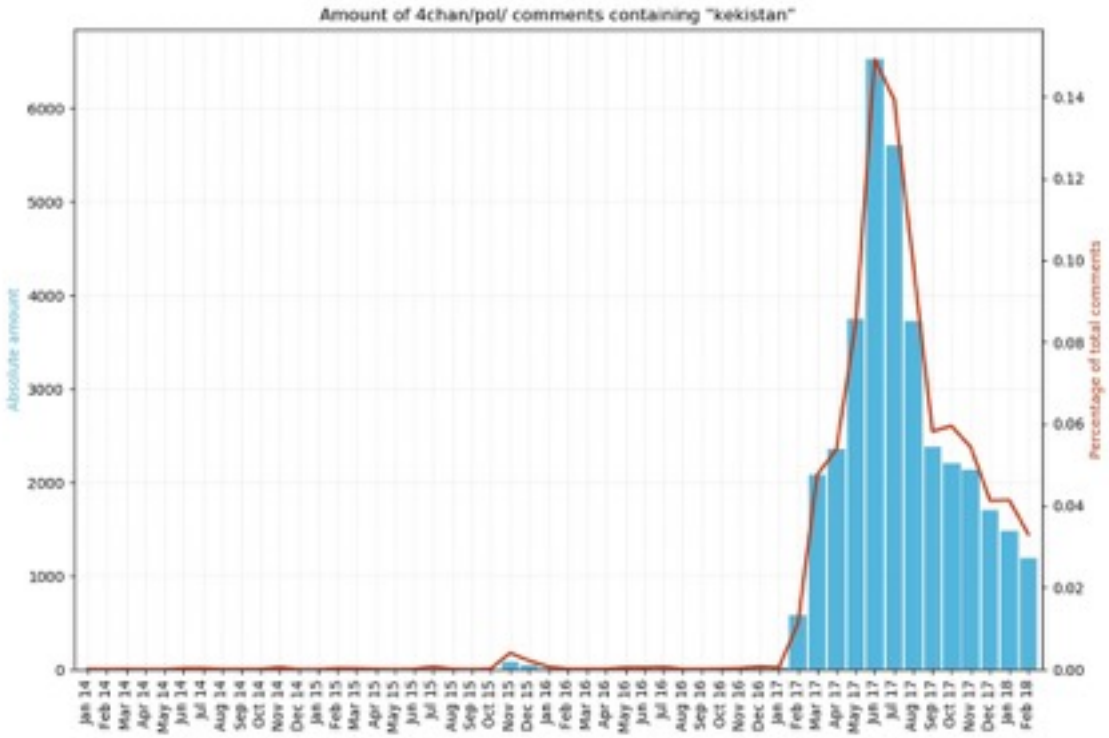


Image 2.): "kekistan" as search string on 4chan/pol/

While trolling had previously been framed in terms of malicious deception (Donath 1999), Whitney Phillips argues for reading the history of trolling on 4chan as a subcultural practice that developed during the mid-2000's and whose golden years were 2008-2011. In Phillips' account of this period, trolling on 4chan sought to mock the sensationalism of American corporate media by, for example, baiting Fox News into labelling them as an the "Internet Hate Machine" in 2007. Similarly, they manipulated internet polls in order to elect 4chan's founder, Christopher Poole (AKA 'moot'), as Time Magazine's Most Influential Person of 2008. As well as a joking rebuttal to Time Magazine's decision two years earlier to name "You" as the person of the year, this instance of coordinated action might be seen as a response to the dominant theories of the time, which sought to frame online coordinated action in progressive terms as "a tool to ensure cultural diversity" (Jenkins 2006: 250). By the end of Phillips' golden era in 2012, the jokes on 4chan had become much darker, with users manipulating an online poll to name a new Mountain Dew's soft drink flavour so that the top entry was "Hitler did nothing wrong".

Within a few years, 4chan's in-jokes would provide an opening for a new style of white supremacist humour in the comment sections of websites like The Right Stuff, with its podcast "The Daily Shoah", "Fash the Nation" and The Daily Stormer, the latter being described by its founder as "Non-ironic Nazism masquerading as ironic Nazism" (O'Brien 2017). By acting as if any statement, no matter how controversial, could be rolled back by appealing to a kind of self-reflexive ironic performativity, the most extreme of these political memes served a dual purpose: they expanded the range of expressible ideas to include anything that can be said, testing the limits of free speech, while at the same time serially transgressing the boundaries of appropriate speech, thereby, in effect, creating *a space of safe hate*. In the aftermath of the 2016 US election, these figures, along with many others, came to view the successful use of political memes such

as God Emperor Trump or Pepe the Frog in the heroic, if ironic terms of a Great Meme War where fantasy collided with consensus reality to chaotic effect.

In trying to make sense of this spectacular rise, journalists frequently returned to the narrative of how Trump's campaign managed to seemingly expand the epistemic range of publicly acceptable debate (Manjoo 2016; Marantz 2016). In part, the answer may lie in Trump's perceived ability to "get away with" a type of speech that "resist[s] political correctness" and made him so appealing to the alt-right (Gourarie 2016). The alt-right is a term for a new "edgy" type of American white nationalism and European far-right, literate in the use of memes, which emerged into public attention around the time of Trump's election. As traditional conservatism withered, the alt-right, with Trump at their lead, seemed to represent the ascent of new martial right-wing style in which, for a while at least, it appeared as though a new blood and soil fascist rhetoric of national identity had suddenly emerged in the US. In actual fact, it was probably more a matter old bigotries finding rejuvenation in new forms of online expression, in particular through the strategic weaponization of the 4chan trolling tactic of "triggering", which seeks to elicit reactions from opponents through so-called "shitposting" -- here, we can identify the aforementioned dualistic subject position where bad taste and even hate speech are routinely deployed to mock any and all forms of what is perceived as self-serious liberal propriety in the (ironic) name of preserving the playful spirit of the authentic culture of the deep vernacular web.

Having elicited awe-struck reverence from the emerging alt-right for its use of racist and anti-semitic memes -- which had originated on 4chan and 8chan -- an anti-liberal political movement thus came to cohere around Trump, a candidate whose platform, it has been observed, "consisted not of policy proposals or thoughtful argumentation, but almost entirely of memes" (Milner and Phillips 2017). The strategic alignment between Trump and the new anti-liberal 4chan culture has also been attributed in part to the "luciferous insight" of Trump's chief advisor, Steve Bannon, who supposedly looked upon 4chan as an avant-garde of Trump's coming political insurgency (Green 2017: 94). With Trump's insurgent rise, then, transgressive alt-right memes increasingly came to circulate through a broader social media ecosystem, which had become a fertile ground for hyperpartian political messaging of all kinds. Thus, seeming to originate in the deep vernacular regions of the chanosphere and particularly 4chan/pol/, a frenzy of Trump activism spread across the web in 2016, soon taking hold of platforms like Reddit and YouTube.

While scholars have argued against facile comparisons between the earlier supposedly progressive-era of 4chan and its current alt-right manifestation (Phillips, Beyer, and Coleman 2017), it has also been argued that this very transformation may be interpreted as illustrating the essentially ideological neutrality of leaderless internet movements (Nagle 2017). While /pol/ was in fact initially created in 2001 to syphon off bigoted discussion threads from its popular /b/ board, this shift in 4chan culture may be periodized in the so-called Gamergate controversy (Massanari 2016), which — in addition to leading to the site forking into a more extreme version, 8chan — increased the relative popularity of /pol/, attracting new anons interested in campaigns against SJWs. This latter development may be placed in stark contrast with the dominant "cyberutopianism" of a great many of the most widely read scholars in the field who have tended to promote

a substantivist perspective that frames peer production technologies in essentially virtuous terms, and of which the chans are clearly very successful examples (Kreiss, Finn, and Turner 2011).

The Great Meme War

Many anons like to imagine themselves as having engaged in a "Great Meme War" (Schreckinger 2017). As part of the fantasy that 4chan helped to 'meme Trump into presidency', the militaristic framing of Kekistan can thus be understood as an ironic invocation of McLuhan's prophecies that the third World War would be an informational guerrilla war that would blur distinctions between the military and civilians (McLuhan 1970). Instead of dismissing the veracity of this seemingly ridiculous claim out of hand, as would seem appropriate, we might consider the circulation of such ideas in popular discourse (insulated from scrutiny as they are by layers of irony) as nevertheless perhaps containing a kernel of seriousness, insofar as they may be seen to signify popular theories and suspicions about how media works, and how memes effect us — in spite of the fact that "media effects" is considered a dubious theory by many contemporary media studies scholars. In this sense, we might consider 4chan's theory of meme war as well its notion of Kekistan, as in some sense a form of "vernacular media critique" — as media historian Charles Acland writes in his history of popular theories of subliminal advertising, "we are all media critics, though only a few of us are paid as such" (Acland 2011: 31).

The media war narrative has a pedigree in American conservatism going back at least to the early 60's, notably as an "epic, high-stakes struggle between the coordinated forces of oppression and the embattled, noble right" (Hemmer 2016: 124). While Kekistan follows the outlines of this same script, the tone has changed. Consistent with Corey Robin's (2011) history of conservatism's cooptation of ideas normally associated with the progressive left, the embattled Kekistanis are thus united in opposition to the liberal establishment through a kind of "reverse victimization politics" that takes on the trappings of a genuine youth counterculture, a "chanterculture" (Bernstein 2015), imagining themselves as "the new punk" (Watson 2017). The ascendency of this new conservative counterculture is perhaps best represented by the phenomenal rise of r/The_Donald, a subreddit whose edgy trollish style of fandom would come to set the tone of many of Trump's own rallies (Sarlin 2016; Koebler 2016), and which trended so much in mid-2016 that it appeared to be taking over Reddit.

United in 2015-16 by the insurgent rise of Trump, this new right movement, like its conservative forebears, often imagined itself as waging a Great Meme War against the mainstream media (MSM). We find evidence of this war against the liberal establishment in the vernacular use of the term "meme war" in Reddit, which trended both around the time of Trump's election and once again when Trump used Twitter to share a crudely composited animated gif of himself wresting the CNN logo with the hashtag #FNN (for fake news network). This meme had in fact originated from r/The_Donald, where it had been created by a regular and quite typical shitposter of the forum whose past posts were replete with alt-right and xenophobic slurs. The #FNN meme, which went on to become his most retweeted tweet up until that point, captures something of the way in which memes became a medium for Trump's cartoonish and antagonistic populist discourse, whereby he would dismiss CNN at press briefings as "fake news". Taking as

its target the popular perception of corruption in the mainstream media (Siles and Boczkowski 2012), the Great Meme War can thus be seen as a carnivalesque celebration of the death of the MSM's hold over formal politics and through the amplification of a fiduciary and epistemic crisis.

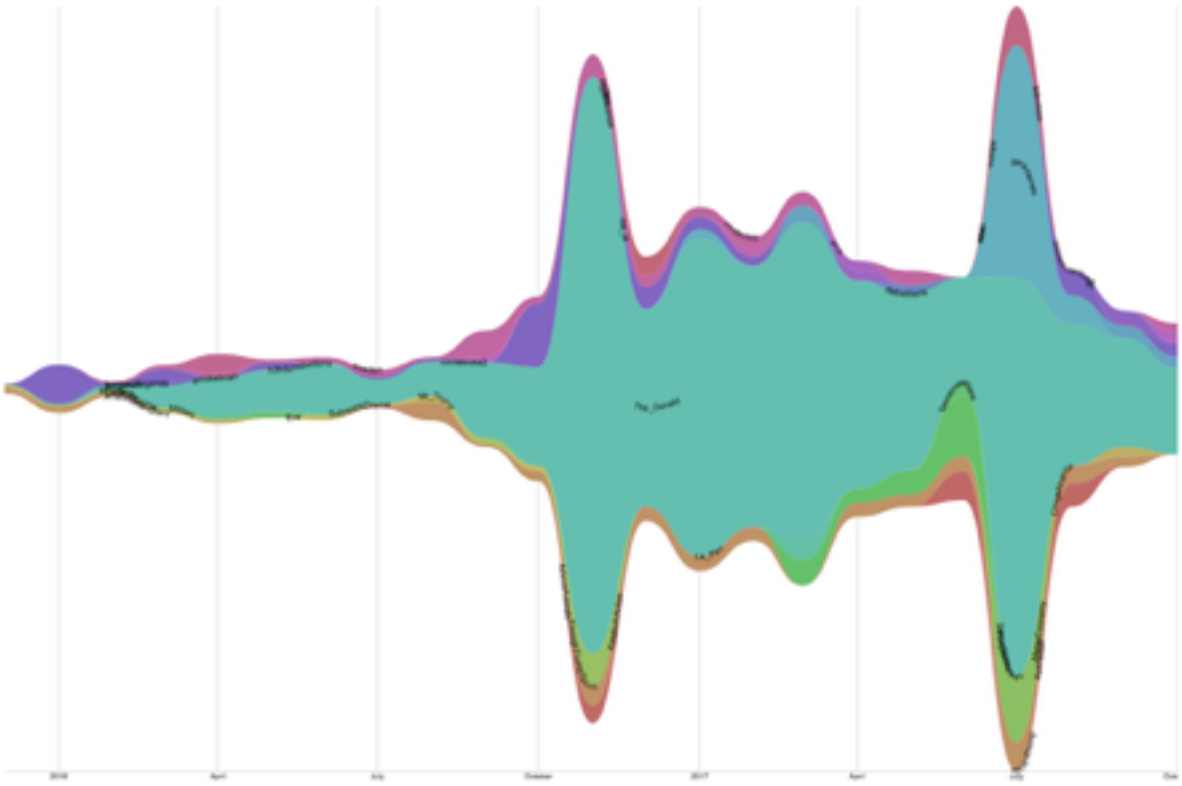


Image 3.) "meme war" as search string on Reddit

In spite of its ironic tone, there is paradoxically a degree of earnestness in the concept of The Great Meme War (Nagle 2017: 7). This can be seen, for example, in anon's fascination with the military literature on so-called "memetic warfare" (Goerzen 2017). Derived from evolutionary biology, memes were initially hypothesized as "viruses of the mind" and "informational parasite[s]" (Dawkins 1993). Following Richard Dawkins' self-gene hypothesis, the success of a given meme was thus to be measured based on it longevity, its widespread appeal, and its copying-fidelity or its capacity to maintain a core meaning through the process of imitation. This theory seems to retain its currency in contemporary military strategy discourse (Siegel 2017), where it can be seen to inform a variety of techniques, including the Russian cyberwarfare approach of using memes in order to amplify social antagonism regardless of their specific political content (Collins et al 2017, Madrigal 2017). In assessing the new landscape of political subcultures in the aftermath of Trump, and following Cass Sunstein's echo chamber thesis, Timur Kuran has proposed the concept of 'availability chambers', where ideas accepted by groups become increas-

ingly available to them. "Myths get concocted, elaborated, and disseminated [&] different entities get demonized" in part based on vernacular interpretations "about the other side's machinations" (Kuran 2017: 14).

Having long been a subcultural internet form, memes started to go mainstream at about the same point that political events started to become memetic during the 2012 US election. An analysis of political memes from the time of that election framed them as a new kind of political discourse, the "meme speech act" (Graeff 2014), which demarcated in-group status within a networked public while at the same time serving to expand the spectrum of debate to include marginalized political viewpoints. As such, political memes were initially interpreted as lowering the transaction costs for engaging in political activism by obfuscating subversive content within the broader flux of trivial humorous content, thereby making it more difficult for authoritarian regimes to use censorship — something Ethan Zuckerman (2013) referred to as the Cute Cat Theory of Digital Activism. Political memes were thus initially discussed in a manner consistent with the optimistic outlook commonly used to frame events and movements in the news at the time — from Anonymous and Wikileaks to Occupy Wall Street and the Egyptian Revolution of 2011 — a framing that one activist later admitted to have been "breathtakingly naive" (Haddow 2016).

Lulz-Space

Meme theorists have often sought to conceptualize political memes in terms of a protest against liberal consensus politics — where consensus is seen as "the crystallisation of relations of power" (Mouffe 2000: 49). Responding then to this characterisation of liberal consensus as a mask for domination, political memes are theorized as "impure dissent" (Graeff 2014) against democratic "instruments of agreeability" (Phillips and Milner 2017: 170). In their seeming esoteric capacity to disrupt "consensus reality" (Krämer 2015: 13), political memes can thus be theorized in terms of a radical notion of epistemological disruption and dissensus that sees politics and aesthetics as fundamentally intertwined. This is such that "configurations of experience that create new modes of sense perception […] induce novel forms of political subjectivity" (Rancière 2004: 9) — a theory of resistance that has also been used to frame internet trolling as a legitimate mode of dissent (Holmes 2013), to which we will return in a moment. It is in this spirit, then, that the Dutch media design group Metahaven would write a manifesto in 2012 entitled "Can jokes bring down governments?". In it, they celebrated the political meme as "an open-source weapon of the public" capable of disrupting what they referred to as "reality-management" (Metahaven 2012).

Political memes have thus been theorized in terms of an "agonistic" form of communication, a medium by which otherwise ideologically marginalized voices might express their symbolic dissent (Graeff 2014; Milner 2015; Phillips and Milner 2017). The concept of agonistic pluralism within media studies argues for the use of participatory media as a means for "counterpublics" to contest dominant framings (Dahlberg 2011; Milner 2013). This is derived from Carl Schmitt's foundational argument that the sphere of the "political" must allow for the possibility for real conflict, as opposed to liberal attempts to eradicate it with false "consensus". In this sense, we may say that agonistic conflict only works when there is a tacit agreement on all sides to play by

the rules and where base antagonisms are not tolerated. Since shitposters, trolls and griefers are in a sense defined by their very rejection of normie morality (and left-leaning users of theirs), conflict does tend to descend into unalloyed antagonism.

In place of the idealized adversary of agonistic pluralism, the new forms of "online antagonistic communities" -- whose emergence has been associated with the rise of the alt-right (Mulhall, Lawrence, and Murdoch 2017) -- tend to be held together by the spirit of absolute enmity that Carl Schmitt (2004) identified in guerrilla or partisan fighting in his *Theory of the Partisan,* originally published in 1962. Contrasting the "irregularity" of guerrilla tactics with “regular” and “established” institutional forces, to name classical military strategy, Schmitt characterised the guerrilla warrior as also often introducing new sets of technical innovation by which he "forces his enemy into another space [and] thus adds another, darker dimension […] of depth" to the theatre of conflict (Schmitt 2004: 49). In identifying the modern origins of these guerrilla tactics, Schmitt considered the Marxist left to have in essence created a new kind of total enemy, the 'class enemy'. While acknowledging this as an innovation — in essence, the fullest expression of the Clausewitzian dictum that politics is war by other means — Schmitt also considered the class enemy as an "abyss of total devaluation" (Schmitt 2004: 67), of absolute enmity, which in fact precluded the possibility for 'the political' proper.

The 'memes as agonism' argument can thus be seen to build on present-day critical theory’s rereading of Schmitt’s distinction between the concept of an adversary and of an all-out enemy (Mouffe 2005). Prompted by Metahaven's question, "Can jokes bring down governments?”, we may ask: what is it that prevents the meme warrior’s symbolic mode of dissent from descending into Schmitt's abyss of total devaluation? For the meme historians Whitney Phillips and Ryan Milner, the answer is to be found in a respect for the terms of agonistic engagement, whereby "speech that silences […] may justifiably be silenced" (Phillips and Milner 2017: 184). The question for political theory then becomes: to what extent do the Kekistanis play by these rules? Given that, from the griefer perspective, nothing is off limits online, as we will see below, the self-styled guerrilla combatants of the Great Meme War more often than not perceive of their opponents as enemies rather than adversaries. This does not, however, mean that we are to accept their terms of engagement.

If, for the sake of argument, we consider the Kekistani’s in terms of Schmitt's theory of the partisan, then we could say that they are indeed technically skilled at forcing conflict into 'another space' with a 'darker dimension', this being the space of ironical internet humour, which we could call *lulz-space*. While the claim here is not that lulz-space is somehow inherently alt-right, we can say, however, that the prevalence here of disparagement-based humour does tend towards the reactionary and conservative. Under the guise of irreverence, then, jokes in lulz-space can function to promulgate what has been referred to as "memetic racism" (Milner 2015: 115-150). While jokes have long been used to propagate bigotry -- the Ku Klux Klan, for example, began as a joke by bored veterans of the American Confederacy dressing up in silly costumes and parading around as the ghosts of the dead soldiers of the Battle of Shiloh (Tenold 2018: 74) -- in lulz-space the distinction between jokes and bigotry are blurred in the extreme, through "weaponiz-

ing irony" (Wilson 2017), which in turn offers an effective shield against criticism.



Image 4.) Kekistan meme

In this light, we can think of Kekistan as a kind of culmination of a way of thinking that we might here refer to as "digital ironic reason". The concept of digital ironic reason departs from the notion of cynical reason in which individuals outwardly reject conscious "belief" while they continue to behave 'as if' they believe, their habits and tactic behaviours thus implicitly betraying a deeper ideological commitment of which they are consciously unaware (Sloterdijk 1988; Žižek 1989). But whereas cynical reason begins by rejecting belief only to further cement the grip of ideology, ironic reason, while fundamentally sceptical, is open to the concept of belief. As Rorty observed, ironists are open to the arguments of their opponents as they are "impressed by other vocabularies" (Rorty 1989: 73). As such the ironist in a sense lives in a subjunctive semi-fictionalized state of wish fulfilment. But whereas Rorty figured irony as a kind of hedge against nihilism -- which philosophers since Nietzsche have theorized as a fundamental movement in the history of West (Heidegger 1977: 62) -- the use of irony within Kekistan seems more akin to Giambattista Vico's theory of irony as a figures of speech which he associated with the age of decadence (White 1985).

While there is nothing inherently reactionary about digital ironic reason, far-right actors have claimed to use irony as a means to disarm opposition to taboos in order to promote their reactionary agenda (Aglin 2016; McFeels in Hawley 2017: 69). To understand the concept of digital ironic reason we can consider Poe's law, the so-called internet law that is used to name the problem of how it is impossible, from the perspective of the observer, to distinguish between real and ironic expressions of belief online. In a sense, then, digital ironic reason seems entangled with questions of theology, an observation that might help make sense of the often sublime aesthetics

associated with Kekistan memes. If we accept that secular liberal democracy doesn't motivate, that it has had the effect of generating a "motivational deficit" particularly amongst the young (Critchley 2012), then irony can paradoxically come to secure meaning. On a certain level, the cult of kek serves as an antidote to the classic Weberian diagnosis of capitalist modernity: a re-enchantment of the world. In Kekistan's alternative subjunctive reality of live action role-play (LARP), "gods are made of memes" and the call to "praise Kek" serves to strengthen social bonds, thereby tempering nihilist individuality with an ironic collectivism (Burton 2017). This imagined collectivity departs from the presumption of its own pre-given unity — returning for a moment to Schmitt's theory of 'the political', this presumption has been identified as the fundamental flaw in his thought (Mouffe 2000; Latour 2013). As with 4chan/pol/, on the whole, Kekistan may be seen as "either consciously or subconsciously performing whiteness" (Phillips 2015: 54), or at the least performing Westernness — the latter indeed being part of what makes the Asiatic atmosphere of Kekistan's mythos so amusing to so many of its adherents. United against their collective enemy (the MSM, SJWs and normies in general), the Kekistani *volk*, as it were, can be seen to flirt with the fascist tendency towards purification latent in the Schmittian critique of liberalism.

The Metapolitical Cult of Kek

When we contextualize Kekistan in relation to a history of ideas, it appears less original, but no less surprising. From this perspective, Kekistan can be seen in continuity with the European New Right's efforts of the late 60's at metapoliticizing fascist ideology (Griffin 2000). In this light, it is rather the European New Right that has, over the years, pioneered the essential conceptual innovation of a new 'subjunctive' type of fascism, as opposed to the old 'authentic' variety. Updating this distinction to the present, we can thus contrast the Kekistani green with the Nazi brown variant. Thus, while expressed in a contemporary ironic tone entangled with endless references to vernacular web culture, the basic narrative of Kekistan may be understood as building on the European New Right's reworking of certain tenants of fascist ideology into a kind of postmodern anti-liberalism and anti-modernism discourse. Indeed, one of the few figures to have consistently followed these intellectual developments within American conservatism, Paul Gottfried, would later go on to develop the original idea of the "Alternative Right", as well as to mentor the leading US white nationalist Richard Spencer (Hawley 2017: 32). Spotting the latent possibilities for esoteric fascist ideology in this discourse, Spencer would himself circulate the Kekistan meme (Spencer 2017) as well as framing 'kek' — anon vernacular for the phenomenon of meme magic by which their collective dreams are conjured into existence — in fascist terms, as representing "the victory of will... that started out as a joke and then it became real" (Spencer in Reeve 2016).

In the post-68 period, particularly in France, political theorists on the right came to the same conclusion as many of those on the left: that the revolution had failed. Both the left and the right were concerned with the threat of capitalist hegemony, but thinkers on the right were additionally preoccupied with the loss of homogenous cultural identity. Thus, whereas the post-68 thinkers on the left tried to outdo one another in terms of their radical proposals to accelerate consumer capitalism in order to exacerbate its dissolution and redirect its forces (Noys 2014), the thinkers on the right turned to pre-modern values, embracing the universal myth of religiosity as a means of

renewal against demographic heterogeneity (Ross 2017: 99-105; Sedgewick 2004: 207-219; Simpson and Druxes 2015: 177-190). Influential figures on the European New Right rejected Judeo-Christianity in favour of an pan-European neo-pagan archaic revival. Here, they tapped into a strain of esoteric thought with a distinct fascist lineage known as Traditionalism, which sought to restore Western civilization to a prelapsarian divine order through the mystical transmission of primal truth thought to be encoded in traditional occult practices. What anons refer to as "the cult of kek" can also be understood here in relation to the concept of chaos magic, introduced by the 1960's American countercultural religion of Discordianism, as a syncretic theology that emphasized the invention of new pragmatic and unorthodox uses for technology and which viewed *belief as a tool*. Inspired in part by William Burroughs' methodological experiments with serendipity and preoccupation with Egyptian mythology (Burroughs and Gysin 1977; Burroughs 1987), chaos magicians thus ascribed meaning to coincidence. Examples of this magic thinking abound in the early days of the Kekistan meme, as for example when, in 2016, anons 'discovered a 1986 Italo-disco song, written by a band named PEPE and released by a music label named 'Magic Sound', whose album cover featured a frog holding a magic wand (anon 2016).

With its supposedly occult origins, we can think of Kekistan in relation to sociologist Colin Campbell's concept of the "cultic milieu", which he claimed functioned as a repository for an accumulation of "alternative perspectives" that stand in contrast to the "common consciousness" of the dominant culture (Kaplan and Lööw 2002: 12-25). Campbell developed the concept while contemplating the 'spiritual marketplace' of the post-counterculture period of the early 1970's. Because of their ephemerality and rapid turnover, Campbell posited that cults required a milieu. While cults come and go, Campbell argued that the milieu persisted in part due its shared media, namely the underground and New Age magazines of the period. United by the idea of a 'forbidden knowledge', Campbell argued that those involved in the cultic milieu share a 'seekership' ideology characterized by libertarian as well as mystical leanings. The continual fragmentation of cults was thus counteracted by the syncretic worldview of their initiates, which rendered them open to each other's ideas. He thus deemed the cultic milieu as a "society of seekers", adaptable to the fluid exchange of ideas. According to Campbell, this combination of revelation and syncretization made the cultic milieu productive of "innovation", for which reason he referred to it a "cultural gene pool" — a language that is reminiscent of Dawkins' framing of the meme (Dawkins 1976). Like meme culture and street culture before it, Campbell's cultic milieu thus served as a reservoir for fashion, what he calls a "cultural underground of society" whose ideas will always have been "thoroughly vetted, debated [and] reformulated" before going mainstream.

As a sociologist, Campbell offered his concept of the cultic milieu as a means by which to account for the ironic flourishing of "hardier" esoteric religions against a widespread context of secularization. The thriving of esotericism against the broader context of secularization may be understood in terms of a kind of response to the Weberian hypothesis, which olds that the essence of modernity lies in the disenchantment of the social world. Developed just as the New Age movement would have been taking shape, Campbell's concept was thus intended to account for how easily ideas and people seemed to migrate between various new religious movements via shared venues, publications and even key thinkers. In recent years, the concept has been used in

particular to consider the traffic of ideas in the area of fascist esotericism (Kaplan and Lööw 2002; Sedgewick 2004). We have thus chosen to employ this particular concept in order to emphasize a thematic continuity with the aforementioned literature, thereby positioning Kekistan as an esoteric counterculture which also has quasi-fascist dimensions. At the same time, our discipline calls for attending to the material infrastructural supports (in this case 4chan and YouTube) that underpin Kekistan as an object of study and which make it very much a product of its particular historical moment.

The Chronology of Kekistan

While Kekistan began and evolved on 4chan, it only really became stabilized as a concept when it was popularized by the YouTube new-right pundit Sargon of Akkad, from where it spread out virally, being take up by users on YouTube, Twitter and Reddit. There, it became something of a banner for a common cause united against the perceived excesses of Anglo-American Social Justice Warriors. Successful memes like Kekistan can be understood as introducing new forms of expression. While emojis can be understood as new kind of digital language, memes, are not subject to any standards-setting process. Instead, their meaning can be thought to emerge as a result of their use, which inevitably changes over time. Indeed, since its first appearance on 4chan some six years ago, the idea behind ‘Kekistan’ appears to have undergone several such mutations before stabilizing into its familiar meaning of an online troll nation. As with other 4chan memes like Pepe, the maintenance of a degree of ambiguity seems important in order for them to be able to speak about different issues (from belief to nationalism) as well as to adapt to different events. If there is one clear invariable, however, Kekistan has always served to demarcate anons form their opponents.

On 4chan, then, ‘kekistan’ began as a relatively benign and empty joke. The term ‘kek’ had already been in circulation since at least 2012 and was mostly used as an alternative to ‘lol’ as a response to threads, comments or pictures anons would find laughable, questionable or genuinely funny (4plebs 2018) -- the origins of 'kek' can in fact be traced to the video game fandom (Know Your Meme 2018). It was only during 2014 that Kekistan began to refer to something more tangible and politically engaging. At the onset of the migrant crisis and the ongoing war against ISIS, the term began to refer to countries anons saw as excessively receptive to incoming refugees and Middle Eastern immigrants . The term insinuated that countries such as Canada, Sweden (‘Swedistan’), France and The Netherlands set about processes of ‘demographic replacement’, in which local populations are replaced by either a majority of alien populations and gradual miscegenation, and ‘shitskinization’, where miscegenation would denigrate and extinguish the racial heritage of ‘white’ Europeans (anon 2015a). By then, the term marked a clear association between centre-right, left and centre-left governance (otherwise known as politically bland ‘establishments’), left-wing social justice activism, and racialism.

In parallel with the aforementioned uses of the term, Kekistan also began to be used to refer to various territories in a kind of board game in the comments section of /pol/ imagined along the lines of the early 19th century "Great Game" in which imperial powers jockeyed for control of the Middle East (anon 2015b). From late 2012 until late 2016, this particular notion extended to

fantasies and projects to build Kekistan as a kind of 4chan nation on private islands ideally peopled by an alpha male warrior type — who, paradoxically, represent the ego-ideal of anons and in some sense another one their antagonists. It was at about this time that Carl Benjamin, a YouTube and Alt-Lite celebrity otherwise known as Sargon of Akkad came across the meme. On January 30th, 2017, Benjamin tweeted that he was going to attempt to place Kekistan in the British census as a way of mocking the alleged arbitrariness with which the government defined ethnicities.

Soon thereafter, the joke spread via Twitter to Reddit and especially to YouTube where the meme took the form of impromptu campaign videos to ‘free Kekistan’. Benjamin’s take on Kekistan was (and remains) ridiculed on 4chan, on the one hand for having minimized the original extremist white nationalist dimensions of the meme, while on the other for having now associated the meme with an actual political issue — it had become a meme for ‘causefags’ (anon 2017, anon 2017b). Thanks to Benjamin and the meme's explosion on YouTube by early February 2017, Kekistan sparked a great deal of discussion on /pol/ (anon 2017c, 2017d, 2017e, 2017f) with a number of anons coming to appreciate Benjamin’s campaign as an opportunity to ‘redpill the world’ (anon 2017g). And so, with Sargon of Akkad’s tweet, Kekistan was in a sense memed into existence. From a relatively contained, internal 4chan joke, Kekistan was suddenly transformed into a symbol that would come to be used in a whole variety of peculiar but consequential political activities, forming a kind of ideological tissue for uniting fragments of a movement formerly known as the alt-right. Thus, when it arrived on YouTube as a form of disparagement-based humour that made a common enemy the butt of a collective joke, Kekistan had a receptive audience that helped it to spread virally.

Imagined in terms of a virtual ethnostate, as Kekistan spread on YouTube, it can likewise be imagined as having in a sense founded a kind of territory of users in on the joke. While interactions between YouTube users, 4chan anons and their respective opponents have, for a significant part, shaped the story of Kekistan on YouTube, they have done so in a space governed by multiple platform mechanisms. As such, due to its tendency to prioritize personal preference, YouTube’s recommender system can be understood as an having itself played an instrumental role in demarcating the territories of Kekistan. For this reason, we cannot do justice to the emic viewpoint of Kekistanis and their metaphors of meme war without also taking into consideration the essential role that YouTube, as a platform, played in staging the conflict; we have seen most of the myth of Kekistan has been developed therein.

As the second most popular website in the world and the single most linked platform at the time of writing, YouTube has been positively characterized by an emerging class of punditry operating on the platform as providing them with a "right-wing safe space" (Herrman 2017). With pundits from the far-right finding platforms to present their ideas on less extreme channels, YouTube has been furthermore framed as a kind of radicalization machine (Holt 2017). In at attempt to represent one possible dimension of this broader phenomenon, we have mapped the channels and videos interacting with each other that YouTube’s recommender system returns for the query "kekistan". One of the first things we notice in observing the resultant network is that recom-

mended videos tend to lead to other content from the same channel, thereby creating tight-knit, channel-centred clusters. As a result, the map that we have produced of Kekistan on YouTube features distinct "regions" which mostly belong to channels of various pundits and Kekistan devotees. While Kekistan seems to mean subtly different things to different users at different points in the network, on the whole, we can state that Kekistanis appear united by their common abyssal enmity for the evil menace of 'identity politics' — this in spit of the fact that Kekistani is nothing if not an identity itself.



Image 5.) Recommendation network of top 25 videos for "kekistan" in Youtube

The story of Kekistan develops rapidly on YouTube. The term first appears on YouTube in September of 2016 in an ensemble of videos showcasing 4chan threads under the narration of robotic voice-overs or the sound of Shadilay (Succpapi 2018), a 1986 Italo-disco song by a band called PEPE whose 'discovery' on /pol/ some time earlier had been taken as evidence that the meme magic of kek was real (anon 2016). These early videos consist in recounting the myth of Kekistan as a land suffering from Normie oppression and striving for liberation. In short order, explainer videos begin to appear, offering accounts of the Kekistan mythos, what the nation is, who inhabits it, where it is set, and who it fights against (‘The Republic of Kekistan & Pepe & Lord Keke & #FreeKekistan’, ‘#FreeKekistan Battle to Free Kekistan’ and ‘KEKISTAN: The Story of Us | #FreeKekistan’). These are accompanied by a genre of militaristic call to arms, inspired by cavalry scenes from action movies, many of which invite users to unite and free their land against their oppressors (Meme Alert 2018; Johnny Medlar - Weird Little Bro 2018) and a proliferation of dub videos in which real world events are reinterpreted through the lens of Kekistan, such as ISIS soldiers interacting with captured Yazidi women (Head Trauma 2018). Around

this time we also begin to see the emergence of the first significant YouTube channels expressly debate on Kekistan. By the end of March, Big Man Tyrone, a YouTuber who sells custom-made videos, declares ‘the creation of the Kekistan nation-state’ (Big Man Tyrone 2018)

While many anons considered the new post-Sargon Kekistan on YouTube as ‘forced’ and ‘cringy as fuck’ (anon 2017h), others celebrated its mainstream success with calls to "praise Kek" (anon 2017f). While acknowledging Poe’s law, we might say that for some anons, then, Kekistan was seen as evidence of a successful metapolitical strategy. For some anons, Kekistan on YouTube develops into the ultimate means by which to trigger their opponents. Indeed, it is at this point that we see the emergence of the new Kekistani flag whose design is based on the Reichskriegs-flagge, the Nazi flag of war. The flag becomes central to the new genre of what has been called protest LARPing of "LARP-ing activism" (Stewart 2017), in which Kekistanis treat protest as a kind of live action role playing game. The first instance of this seems to be on November of 2017, when a channel named Very Fake News covers a protest against Facebook at its Palo Alto headquarters (Very Fake News 2018). Protest LARPings increase after Kekistan receives media coverage by an MSNBC programme and is denounced by the Southern Poverty Law Centre at the beginning of May 2017. Videos like ‘Free Kekistan’, ‘Antifa will never admit kekistan is a place’, ‘normie wants to help Kekistan but can’t because of ISIS #FreeKekistan’, ‘#Kekistan Soldier Vs. #SJW #Seattle #Mayday’ depict young men with helmets and flags arguing with SJWs in protests located in Seattle, Boston and Charlottesville (Cassandra Fairbanks 2018; Clearmotivesglass #1 2018; Jonny McFlounderfish 2018; Duerst The Wuerst 2018a). By mid-May 2017, a channel by the name of Duerst the Wuerst becomes central to the protest LARPing genre, posting now-popular videos on "SJWs" "overreacting" to the Kekistani flag and pro-Trump protesters celebrating their victory over their rivals in a “#Kekistan March” (Duerst The Wuerst 2018b, 2018c).

Having thus taken on much larger proportions than when it began as a joke on 4chan, those fighting in the name of Kekistan on YouTube begin to become increasingly organized and strategic. It is at this point that a new genre of what we might call journalism LARPing merges the Kekistan mythos with meme war reportage. Exemplary of this new genre is the Free Press of Kekistan (later renamed Free Press of Gulf City) which would release illustrated narratives on ‘the Complete / REAL History of Ancient Kekistan’, detailing the ancient Egyptian origins and political and religious beliefs of Kekistan, outlining the formation of its territories and their inhabitants and commenting on events including the ‘Keklections, Berkeley and Hillary’, the state of the ‘Oppression Olympics’ and ‘Harambe, Anita and Overwatch.’ (Free Press of Gulf City 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2018d). Subsequently, such commentaries would also be produced by notable YouTube new-right pundits including Uzalu, Sargon of Akkad, Roaming Millennial, Tim Pool, Computing Forever and others, primarily as a platform for critiquing the overreach of "identity politics" (Computing Forever 2018; Sargon of Akkad 2018; Roaming Millennial 2018a; Tim Pool 2018).

Somewhat oddly around this time, in February 2017, another Kekistan emerges, as video games create a range of Kekistan-themed skins for modifying gameplay in Destiny 2 and Fortnite (Wild

Smile 2018a; Kekistan King 2018). Players download mods designed to include references to Kekistan, such as maps in Iron Hearts IV, Kekistan-themed military campaigns in Medieval II (Laugh Over Life 2018; CalmDownLevelUp 2018) and an armour in Destiny 2 inscribed with a ‘KEK’ logo — the latter would lead Destiny 2’s developer to release a statement apologizing for incorporating a "hate symbol" into their game (Bungie 2017). Indeed, from this point on, gaming videos make up an increasingly significant portion of Kekistan-themed videos on YouTube, eventually coming to eclipse the other genre altogether. This preoccupation with gaming is not surprising considering the historical significance of the Gamergate controversy some years earlier, which united gamers against their newly perceived foe (the mythical social justice warrior) as represented by the much reviled figure of the feminist media studies academic Anita Sarkeesian (Massanari 2016). Indeed, Sarkeesian remains a preoccupation across a number of channels participating in the Kekistan meme, as for example seen in videos by Roaming Millennial and Wild Smile (Wild Smile 2018b; Roaming Millennial 2018b).

By the end of March 2017, the Kekistan meme on YouTube seems to reach full maturity. While there are, by this point, quite a number of different takes on the meme coming from across YouTube. Most of the channels, including many much smaller ones than discussed above, seem to produce at least a few videos explicitly themed as anti-SJW. Here, protest LARPing is central, as for example in one of the many videos disrupting Shia LaBeouf’s ‘He Will Not Divide Us’ art installation (d e s u 2018). Within a few months from this point, on the 8th of May 2017, the Southern Poverty Law Centre will publish a exposé on the racist and antisemitic connotations of Kekistan, which will in turn attract major media outlets such as MSNBC to report on Kekistan in sensationalistic and inaccurate terms that of course becomes the source of much humour online (Lizz Reptile 2018). While Carl Benjamin critiques the SPLC’s piece on his second YouTube channel The Thinkery, other channels such as Part-Time Enlightenment and Jeff Holiday produce what could be understood as public-facing explainers intended to sever any far-right associations with the meme (Jeff Holiday 2018; Part-Time Enlightenment 2018). Soon thereafter, these more "diplomatic" initiates become eclipsed by a proliferation of videos explicitly attacking the mainstream media for what amounts to their meme illiteracy (Sovereign Order of Kekistan 2018; Xylene 2018).

Kekistan is ultimately endowed with scholarly legitimacy when Joe Rogan, whom the New York Times has identified a key figure YouTube’s "dark intellectual web”, discussed the topic with the Canadian academic and Jungian psychologists Jordan Peterson (Ricky 2018). Indeed, beginning in the summer of 2017, Peterson become a favourite theme of many YouTube videos, for example with a Harvard lecture on the difference between Kekistan and Normiestan in which he is animated as the ‘ultimate rare Pepe’ (Marduk son of Ea 2018; Jordan B Peterson 2018; Homophobic Horse 2018). By the end of the year it would indeed seem that Peterson had ascended to the status of a kind of intellectual figurehead in Kekistan, dethroning Benjamin who seemed to loose status after his poor performance in a YouTube debate against the notorious white-nationalist Richard Spencer. Finally, by February 2018, Kekistan goes international, gaining a new wave of attention and videos in Spanish and Russian-speaking gaming communities. Long since having lost its dynamic energy on 4chan, by this point, many of the channels that helped build Kek-

istan on YouTube have mine on, and the meme seems to have run its course.

In the end, while it is hard to pin down exactly what Kekistan is, or more accurately what it was, we can nevertheless conclude from the way that YouTube would process a search for "kekistan" by the spring of 2018 that the resulting network seemed to hang together around a mutual antagonism towards SJWs. Recurrent scholarship has argued that YouTube's recommender seems to induce polarization by strengthening homophily and preventing a user's encounter with different, unusual or unknown content (Bessi et al.; Lewis; van Zoonen et al.). Both the chronology of Kekistan on YouTube and the network graph generated by the YouTube recommender seem to support this hypothesis.

After having now somewhat disentangled the antagonistic dynamics of Kekistan by describing its presence on YouTube, we can perhaps indeed locate the essence of this meme its sense of humour, more specifically in its weaponization of irony as a means by which to transgress the boundaries of appropriate (liberal) speech in the name of (libertarian) free speech — and while some might like to see this legacy in activist terms, their predecessor is much more Timothy May than Mario Savio. Insofar as its adepts like to imagine Kekistan as an essentially apolitical project they arguably expose their ideological commitment to what, at the end of the day, is in a sense the very essence of the liberal political project, a commitment above all to individual liberty. This returns us in conclusion to the contradiction at the core of Kekistan, at the end of the day it is an collective project for those who define themselves by their opposition to collectivism. The only reason why they can not see this is because they refuse to take themselves seriously. We, however, have chosen to take Kekistan seriously. Viewed from this light Kekistan is indeed a joke.

Conclusion

Since Trump's election, bizarre internet subcultures have been scrutinized by journalists, watchdog organizations and academics for their apparent associations with the rise of new right-wing reactionary movements. These exposés are universally mocked within those communities — as indeed this article may well be. In addition to providing "lulz", these exposés help these communities cement a sense of themselves as an aggrieved and oppressed people, struggling against a moral police force of liberal social justice warriors. The essence of this reactionary narrative connects Kekistan with a history of modern American conservatism media activism (Hemmer 2016) as well as to dark European history of anti-liberal and anti-modern thought (Sedgewick 2004).

At the same time, as with the alt-right movement, Kekistan can be seen as relatively novel in terms of its innovative deployment of new political meme formats. Kekistan may furthermore be considered as a kind of 'dark fandom'; a collectively creative endeavour largely produced by fans following the worldbuilding methodology favoured by the creators the fictional universe in fantasy novels, video games and sci-fi movies (Wolf 2014). As a collective endeavour, Kekistan developed an aesthetic of so-called "transmedia storytelling" (Jenkins 2006), weaving its mythos across YouTube channels, platforms and even into physical space. At a formal level, these prac-

tices may in fact be seen in line with those of "transmedia organizing" on the left (Costanza-Chock 2014) — in fact, protest-LARPing seems a genuine tactical innovations in this latter category.

At the same time, for all its transmedia innovations, we can also say that Kekistan is (or was) a perfect example of a "filter bubble" (Pariser 2011) with all the consequences that this applies for liberal political theory. As a YouTube channel-linked "cultic milieu", Kekistan functioned to accumulate 'alternative perspectives' that stood in contrast to the dominant culture. This in combination with its quasi-ironic, quasi-magical outlook, in essence inoculated Kekistan against its critics: whether media watchdogs like the SPLC, news organizations like CNN or simply concerned liberals, they were all seen as overreacting, as puppets for a liberal agenda set on taking away their freedoms, taking away their internet, their games.

Without an internal understanding of what the meme is about and how it is intended to work, its critics cannot penetrate its rhetorical armour in order to do battle with the (frequently) reactionary political arguments that can indeed often be found under the layers of ironic collectivism. This challenge calls for empirical as well as theoretical research that avoids polemics attributed to mischaracterisations, so as describe the anthropological object and to placing it in its socio-political context, while trying to avoid becoming caricatured as a "shill" — as evidence with which partisan disqualifies its opponent.

This debate does not occur in the imagined neutral context of the public sphere. Rather, it has to contend with the tendency for platforms to perpetuate bias, to posit race and gender as immutable categories and to launder hate into collective love (Chun 2016). Insofar as they reflect embedded social discrimination, Kekistanis, may thus be seen as the grotesque pantomime of our socially networked age, as with the subcultural trolls the came before them (Phillips 2015: 8).

The Kekistan meme acts out an antagonistic (and ironical) political project that initially developed in 4chan, but which the YouTube recommender system seems to have amplified. In dialogue with the use of Carl Schmitt’s ideas to conceptualize political memes (Milner 2015; Phillips and Milner 2017), this paper applied Schmitt’s theory of the partisan in order to conceptualize the tactics and strategies of Kekistan. In YouTube, for example, there self-styled meme-warriors can be seen to jockey for position by strengthen their ranking in the recommender system, thereby coming to define the concept.

If, as Schimtt famously claimed, "[a]ll significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts" (Schmitt 2005: 36) perhaps we too can idea appreciate the idea "kek" as a secular god of the deep vernacular web that brought unity through collective joy, briefly founding a new ironic political project, before it was fell apart due to its own lack of commitment and ideological incoherence.

Despite the aesthetic trappings of a guerrilla information war, it would however be incorrect to analyze Kekistan merely in such strategic terms, as it might lend it a degree of impact, of legiti-

macy and of coherence that it does not possess. As much as the imagined inhabitants of Kekistani were united by their shared antagonisms, as well have seen they did it for the lulz. Went the lulz left, so did Kekistan.

In addition to its characteristics listed at the outset, we can thus conclude here by adding that, in the end, Kekistan was essentially a violent teenage 'acting-out' fantasy — a "passage à l'acte" in the psychoanalytic jargon. In a subjunctive modus, more often than not ridiculous in tone, it imagined a just war against a justifiably heinous enemy — a fantasy that has been used to channel the destructive energies of young men throughout the history of civilization, Freud's death drive.

Kekistan offered a collective project standing against liberalism's motivational deficit which thereby functioned to generates a self reproducing mythology. As with video games, this "lore" could be dawned like a suit of armour for LARPers venturing for the first time into the unfamiliar world of political protests.

With its explicit reference to Nazi iconography, the apparent violence of Kekistani lore worked like the sign on the proverbial children's fort for adults to "keep out". It was as if these other forms of life were constitutionally unable to understand by dint of their essential lameness.

Before anything else then, Kekistan is (or was) a children's conspiracy against the adult world. As a bloodless fantasy, Kekistan is capable of imagining particularly extreme violence. Its' ironic reason seems at once to shield the normies from 'getting it' while at the same time disguising the meme's impact from its participants whom, to paraphrase Foucault, know what they do and frequently know why they are doing it, but don't know what they do does.

A mutual openness between the aggrieved antagonists might transcend this apparent deadlock as they come to see positions as less absolute. While this kind of nuance tends to comes with age, countercultural youth movements are also potentially capable of renewing themselves in perpetuity. Not even 4chan, though, would give Kekistan the imprimatur of being an actual counterculture. While for all intents and purposes Kekistan is dead, the meme war, however, will live to be fought another day.

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