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### **Abstract**

Taking as a starting point a politically motivated mass killing in Norway in 2011, the article argues that this was not an isolated incident but forms part of a broader European surge of right-wing extremism and populist political rhetoric. These have become manifest in many parts of Europe and other regions in recent years, including the Christchurch killings in March 2019 in New Zealand. Against this backdrop, some reflections are offered on challenges to political leadership in democratic societies and how intercultural communication studies can assist in the analysis of political right-wing rhetoric and populism.

**Keywords:** political rhetoric, populism, intercultural communication, terrorism

### **The 2011 mass killings in Norway**

On 22. July 2011, the Norwegian far-right extremist Anders Behring Breivik murdered 77 people in Norway, mostly members of the youth branch of the ruling Labour Party. His motivation, as became evident in his subsequent trial, was to protest against this party's liberal immigration policy. Shortly before launching his killing spree, he published online under a pseudonym his 1,500 page political manifesto “2083 – A European Declaration of Independence” (*Berwick 2011, von Brömssen 2013, Vaagan 2014*). After a 10-week trial starting in April 2012, Breivik was found to be sane after lengthy psychiatric evaluations, and sentenced to 21 years' of preventive detention (with the possibility of extension). Subsequently, he has from prison influenced the rise in recent years of the extreme right and their populist rhetoric as well as copycat terrorists in Norway and beyond. In Norway, his views have been echoed by right-wing websites such as document.no and reset.no. His manifesto contains e.g. 39 essays by a Norwegian extremist blogger (“Fjordman”), a plagiarized rendition of the American Unabomber's manifesto as well as minor parts he wrote himself, e.g. recounting his preparations for the attack.

Immediately after 22 July 2012, the Norwegian Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg and his government got massive public support for their handling of the crisis. The rose is a symbol of the Labour Party in Norway and thousands turned out for peaceful and dignified

“rose marches” in support of the victims, their families and the government. The Prime Minister and his government underlined that Norway was an open society and had never wanted massive security measures that probably could have stopped the terrorist. Prime Minister Stoltenberg and several of his ministers attended the funerals of the victims, including the several Muslim victims.

Yet as evaluations started to appear on how such a tragic event could take place, the government came under increasing criticism for lack of preparedness and public security. The terrorist managed to drive a van unchecked with a 900-kilogrammes fertilizer bomb using an access road leading to the main building of the Norwegian government and Prime Minister’s office, park it and walk away unchallenged to his escape vehicle nearby parked nearby to continue his killing spree at the island of Utoya. The Norwegian government and the Municipality of Oslo had been quarrelling for 7 (seven) years about blocking the access road leading to the Prime Minister’s office that the terrorist used.

Elsewhere, I have argued that in terms of crisis management theory and practice, the Norwegian government’s poor handling of the 22. July 2011 terrorist attacks can be most meaningfully analyzed using e.g. Coombs comprehensive 3-phase model with separate phases for planning, implementation and evaluation (Coombs 2007) or theories of corporate apologia and/or image repair (*Vaagan 2014, 2015*).

A series of reports and evaluations regarding public security leading up to the tragedy were completed in 2011-2012 by Parliament, several ministries, The Directorate of Health, The Directorate of Civil Protection and Emergency Planning, The Directorate for Emergency Communication, The Joint Rescue Coordination Centres, The National Security Authority, The Police Security Service and the police. In November 2011, The Minister of Justice left office and the Ministry was renamed Ministry of Police and Public Security. Several top officials in the police also departed quietly. Many of the evaluations and reports revealed system failure in the gathering, processing and sharing of information, in communication and media management. Some critics also called for the resignation of Prime Minister Stoltenberg, who rejected the criticism, stating that he “took responsibility” by remaining in office. Yet in the September 2013 parliamentary election his Red-Green coalition alliance suffered defeat. In October 2014 Stoltenberg became Secretary General of NATO. We shall later return to Stoltenberg’s leadership and crisis management.

In 2014, the Norwegian constitution was revised, bringing in human rights. This influenced Breivik to sue the Norwegian state over alleged violations of his human rights. In 2015 Oslo municipal court passed a verdict that partially supported his claim that some of the

restrictions imposed on him in prison amounted to a violation of his human rights. However, this verdict was overturned in 2016 by the appellate court. Later the Norwegian Supreme Court and subsequently The European Court of Human Rights declined his appeal to review his case (*Vaagan 2015*).

### **The manifesto**

The manifesto has been analyzed by several scholars and writers drawing mainly on discourse analysis and rhetorical analysis (*von Brömssen 2013, Berntzen & Sandberg 2014, Sandberg 2015*). The title refers to the projected 400-year celebration in 2083 of the Battle of Vienna in 1683 when the Ottomans were defeated, ending the 300-year struggle between the Holy Roman - Ottoman Empires. *Berntzen & Sandberg (2014)* build on other scholars who have pointed out the rhetorical influence of far-right movements and Islamist extremism on lone wolf terrorists like Breivik. They conclude that Breivik used familiar narratives to partly reproduce and partly construct a new ideology for anti-Islamic terrorism, drawing on the us/them dichotomy and metaphors like “civil war”, “occupation” and “traitors” in order to dehumanize opponents and thereby mitigate taking lives (*p.772*). These rhetorical features are consistent with the turn in rhetorical analysis noted by *Martin (2014), Larsen (2015)* from the focus in classical rhetoric on written and spoken communication to contemporary rhetoric that embraces visual forms, semiotics and symbols. These can include terrorist online manifestos and social media streaming of attacks and executions (*Krady 2017*). *von Brömssen (2013)* notes the hodgepodge character of the Manifesto and that Breivik may have written very and little of it himself, most seems to be snatched from various sources. She found three dominating discourses throughout the manifesto: multicultural Europe, feminism and Islam which in her view together form “an inconceivably racist and xenophobic worldview” (*p.14*).

### **Breivik’s supporters**

The Latin phrase ‘Vox populi, vox dei’ (The voice of the people [is] the voice of God’) is a reminder that the term ‘populism’ can be traced back to Antiquity. However, in the social sciences it is usually argued that the Russian *narodniki* movement of the 1860s-1870s is generally seen as the first appearance of modern populism (*Abts & van Kessel 2015: 609*). Interestingly, the most extensive support for Anders Behring Breivik immediately after his act of terror and trial, came from Russia. *Enstad (2016)* in his analysis of the Russian far-right and its links with Breivik, highlights Russia as a hub of right-wing extremism in Europe. He advances three reasons to explain why Breivik has received much more open support in

Russia than in Western Europe. First, a weaker social stigma associated with right-wing extremism makes it less onerous to publicly support right-wing terrorists. Second, higher rates of violence in Russia have made Russians and Russian society more desensitized and more prone to accept violence. Third, embracing Breivik is consistent with a strong tradition of iconizing right-wing militants on the Russian far-right.

Today, 'populism' is often used pejoratively about politicians' cheap and emotional propaganda. This is partly why it remains a contested concept in the social sciences. Some clarity was attempted introduced by *Reinemann, Aalberg, Esser, Strömbäck & de Vreese (2016)* who saw it as "a form of political communication characterized by some crucial key elements" (p.1) notably reference to or the construction of 'the people' combined with anti-elitism and the exclusion of out-groups, i.e. groups that are not seen as legitimate part of the 'real' people (p.3). On this basis they developed a comparative, heuristic model for the analysis of populist political communication centering on politicians, the media and citizens.

Building on this, *Jupskas, Ivarsflaten, Kalsnes and Aalberg (2016)* analyzed the rise of populist political communication in Norway, but limited their analysis to the Progress Party (FrP) which is widely considered to be the only populist political party in Norway. They trace its development from its foundation in 1973 as a single-issue anti-taxation party until 2013 when it had become one of the main political parties in Norway and for the first time joined the government in a minority coalition with the Conservative Party. Its ascendance to power has been marked by strong leadership, a constant fight for media attention and extensive use of PR expertise. The authors note that:

According to different typologies of populism, the FrP has usually been classified as *neoliberal populist* rather than *national populist*, even if xenophobia is at the core of the party's ideology. However, [...] the party also fits the category of *complete populism*; not only does the party frequently portray itself as the sole defender of the "common people," it also criticizes the elites (i.e., political, bureaucratic, cultural, and media elites) and excludes various out-groups from the national community (i.e., asylum seekers, Roma, Muslims). The content and intensity of the exclusionary rhetoric seem to depend on the political and societal context (*Jupskas et al 2016:3*).

The article ends by noting reduced overall support for the FrP immediately after the terrorist attacks on 22. July 2011. But surprisingly, it does not mention that Anders Behring Breivik,

according to *Aftenposten* 23. July 2011, was a member of the FrP from 1999 to 2004, and held several positions in the FrP youth party. This was when he had considerable income from selling forged diplomas on the Internet which he later used to finance his bomb production. He was deleted from the FrP membership list in 2006 and resigned from the FrP youth party in 2007. He apparently gave up on the FrP since he found them unreceptive to more extremist policies on Muslim immigration.

Apart from the populist Progress Party (FrP), the extreme right in Norway has mostly been shunned by mainstream media and therefore resorted to social media or alternative media, such as the two main websites Document.no and Resett.no. In addition, the extreme right have occasionally staged demonstrations in the streets in various Norwegian cities and towns, sometimes illegally, and have usually been met by counter-demonstrations by leftist groups. In Norway, the increase of populist rhetoric and polarization in public debate has been noticeable since 2013 when the Progress Party (FrP) became junior partner with the Conservative Party (H) in a conservative minority government. One indication of this was the visit in May 2019 to Norway of Steve Bannon. His visit was part of a tour of European right-wing movements. He was invited to Norway by the organizers of the Media Days event in Bergen and he received extensive media coverage. His visit triggered a debate on No platform and denying him media attention. Bannon is no doubt a controversial figure. He served as leader of the far-right website *Breitbart News* from 2012 until 2018, interrupted by the period from August 2016 to January 2018 when he served as head of Donald Trump's successful election campaign, reinforced (as later became transparent) by targeted ads of the scandal-plagued Cambridge Analytica. Politically, Bannon is associated with the Tea Party movement and the alt-Right movement.

## **Europe**

While the extreme right in Norway are largely shunned by the mainstream media and relegated to extremist websites and social media combined with occasional demonstrations, developments in several European countries seem to follow a different track. 30 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, many European countries have experienced an increase in racially motivated crime combined with divisive migration policies and polarized political discourse, especially after the 2015-2016 migration crisis. There is overall less tolerance for diversity, and this is apparent in countries like the United Kingdom, Germany, Hungary, Poland and Austria. These developments are also reflected in legal developments in many European countries that weaken the basis of democracy, especially a) concentration of executive power,

b) weakening of judicial independence, c) restrictions on the freedom of associations and meetings, d) restrictions on democratic participation, e) weakening of legal individual security, f) reinforced laws on morality, and g) academic freedom. In addition, we have seen also internments of asylum seekers and bans on offending political leaders (*Morgenbladet* 22. March 2019). In his monograph *The Rise of Populism in Western Europe*, Timo Lochoki (2018) claims that populist right-wing parties in Europe - especially the Netherlands, Sweden, Germany and the United Kingdom - have been strengthened by the failed political messaging of moderate political actors. He concludes that his study has “provided reliable and valid empirical evidence for how processes of political messaging benefit or hinder the electoral advances of populist radical right parties” and also that it “explains the reasons for the varying rationales of established parties in debates about identity politics.” (p.151).

According to *Anderson (2019)* the far right gained ground but less than expected in the elections to the European Parliament in May 2019. Populist, euro-skeptic parties across Europe saw gains, but less than what some pre-election polls had predicted — and what pro-EU forces had feared. And the various nationalist parties' differences over issues like migration and attitudes toward Russia could cloud prospects for a united right. The center-right group known as the European People's Party (EPP) and the center-left Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) held 54% of the seats before the vote. Now they're down to 43% and the two blocs together lost more than 70 seats, along with the majority they held for decades. (*EU Parliament 2019*).

### **Christchurch, New Zealand**

During Friday prayer on 15. March 2019 the deadliest mass shootings in modern New Zealand history took place. In two consecutive terrorist attacks in two mosques in Christchurch, a 28-year old Australian named Brenton Harrison Tarrant killed 51 people and injured another 49. The gunman who livestreamed the first attack on Facebook Live, was described by the media as a white supremacist belonging to the alt-right movement. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern received worldwide acclaim over her active and compassionate leadership during and after the crisis, a point we address below. Tarrant went on trial in May 2019 and pleaded not guilty to the charges of murder, attempted murder and terrorism. He became radicalized around 2012 after visiting several countries in Asia and Europa and had been planning the attack for two years. He published a 74-page manifesto titled “The Great Replacement” on the Internet and also sent it to several politicians.

The title “The Great Replacement” refers to

“the racist, anti-immigration, misogynist conspiracy theories set out in the Great Replacement by Renaud Camus and which replaces the term ‘white genocide’ as used by Alt-right in USA, that white people face existential demise and ultimately extinction” (*Besley & Peters (2019:4)*).

Disconcertingly, *Moses (2019:211)* in his analysis of the origin of the ‘white genocide’ theory published in the *Journal of Genocide Research*, concludes that although Tarrant’s and Breivik’s ideas are marginal, especially when mixed with neo-Nazi conspiracy theories, the notion that Europe is being swamped by Third World migrants and especially Moslems, is today mainstream discourse. In his manifesto Tarrant cites Anders Behring Breivik as one of his heroes and he claims to have received a ‘blessing’ for the attack through contacts with Breivik’s resurrected ‘Knights Templar Order’. However, Norwegian police have refused to comment on the possibility of any contact between Tarrant and Breivik. Although Breivik is known to carry on active correspondence with ideologic supporters from his prison apartment, all correspondence is logged and checked. During Breivik’s trial the existence of a Knights Templar order was never proven and the police believe this was something construed by Breivik (*Talos & Lorentsen 2019, Moses 2019*).

### **Leadership and crisis management**

It was noted earlier that the Norwegian government was criticized for the lack of preparedness and public security that proved to be a catalyst for the tragedy of 22. July 2011; further, that there were calls for the resignation of Prime Minister Stoltenberg over his failed crisis management, especially lack of preparedness and public security. Theories such as Coombs’ 3-phase model (planning, implementation and evaluation) and image repair are potentially helpful in shedding light on the Norwegian government’s crisis communication and management during and after the tragic 22. July 2011 events. As its name suggests, image repair theory emphasizes repairing the image of the stakeholder, it accounts for organizational (in)actions leading up to the crisis and it stresses communication strategies for managing the public crisis narrative (*Vaagan 2014, 2015*).

By contrast, New Zealand’s Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern received worldwide acclaim for her crisis management during and after the Christchurch killings. Also here Coombs’ 3-phase model is useful: Apparently, there was inadequate planning and prevention

since the terrorist Tarrant managed to kill 51 people and wound another 49. But the terrorist was quickly apprehended and Prime Minister Arden's conduct quickly demonstrated that both planning, implementation and evaluation were in place. Whereas image repair theory can explain the Norwegian case, I would argue that organizational renewal theory best explains the New Zealand case. Organizational renewal theory emphasizes the opportunities to learn and grow from the crisis and create opportunities inherent to crisis events. It also stresses leadership and organizational communication guidelines, underlining positive values, looking forward and overcoming the crisis (*Ullmer et al. 2011:16*).

This takes us to the final question of political leadership. If we compare the Norwegian situation with the Christchurch killings 8 years later and the actions of New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Arden, we find several similarities but also marked differences: Both countries had largely been spared from prior large-scale terrorist attacks and in a sense both countries were therefore relatively unprepared. In both countries white supremacists attacked innocent victims, were apprehended and sentenced to long prison terms. In Norway the victims were fellow Norwegians some of whom had a minority background. In New Zealand, the victims were minority Muslims killed or wounded during Friday prayers in their mosques. Both Prime Ministers represent the Labour Party of their respective countries. When she took office in 2017, Jacinda Arden (born 1980) was the youngest Prime Minister in New Zealand's history, and only 39 when the Christchurch killings occurred. Having kept initially a low profile as Prime Minister, the Christchurch killings catapulted her onto the world stage. When the 22. July 2011 terrorist attacks in Norway took place, Stoltenberg (born 1959) was 52 and had already been Prime Minister since 2005. Thus, he was older and more experienced as Prime Minister compared with Arden, and therefore potentially better prepared to handle a terror crisis. Both publicly castigated terrorism and defended democracy, both demonstrated sympathy for the victims and their families, both maintained a high media profile during the crises. But whereas Stoltenberg appointed committees to study the causes of the 22. July 2011 terrorist attacks, Arden took action and immediately banned all semi-automatic assault weapons. Draped in respectful head-dress, she immediately visited the attacked mosques and victims, and she reacted to the terrorist Tarrant's weaponising of social media by refusing to utter his name. With French President Macron, she initiated two months after the Christchurch killings, the Christchurch Call to Action, a set of shared actions designed to stop the spread of terrorism and violent extremist online content, bringing together countries and companies to stop online streaming of terrorism. Her government also banned all semi-automatic assault weapons in



the wake of the attacks. She also called for more inclusive societies where people's differences are celebrated and everyone has a stake in their local community (*Ardern 2019*). In doing all this, she evinced all the qualities of leadership that the textbooks advocate today: the "soft" qualities of especially: purpose, trust, moral behaviour, values, vision, authenticity, emotional intelligence, empathy, resilience, perseverance and the "hard qualities" of ambition, global understanding, and appreciation of information technology (*Marques & Dhiman 2017; Schedlitzki & Edwards 2018, Northouse 2019*).

### **Intercultural communication**

Given that the rise of populism and nationalism suggest a rise in conflicts at the national and international level with challenges to political leadership, I will consider now how insights from intercultural communication can provide some guidance in the troubled waters we see ahead. Elsewhere I have theorized in more detail about the concept of "culture" and the relationship between intercultural communication and ethics (*Vaagan 2016, 2019*).

There are 4 main traditions of use regarding the term 'culture': a) the universalist tradition that sees culture as certain standards of human perfection that are universally binding; b) the anthropological, tradition in which culture is relative to time and place so that all cultures are equally valuable; c) the structural tradition that sees culture as distinct from other forms of practice such as social, political, economic, and then tries to identify the mechanisms that govern relations between these; and finally d) the instrumentalist tradition that sees culture as a resource that can be used to a variety of social, economic and political ends (*Bennett & Frow 2008:3-4*).

Complexities often increase when cultures meet or intersect. In the field of intercultural communication studies, various aspects of culture and cultural interaction are scrutinized from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. The analysis will also depend on the chosen time perspective and level of analysis (individual, family, group, institution etc). At the individual, family and group level of analysis intercultural communication studies often address issues such as cultural identity and the sense of belonging, diversity, verbal and nonverbal interaction, cultural contexts and the influence of the setting, biculturalism or even multiculturalism and competency, ethics, ethnocentricity, media influences etc. On higher levels of analysis other issues may come into focus (*Durham & Kellner 2012, Hofstede 2016, Hepp 2015, Kiesling & Paulston 2005, Neuliep, 2006*).

In 1947 the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz coined the term 'transculturation', i.e. the merging and converging of cultures (*Ortiz 1947*). When cultures meet and blend, various

outcomes are possible: assimilation, hybridization, or the kind of paradigmatic shifts that *Foucault (1966, 2005)* defined as epistemological ‘ruptures’, or what *Huntington (1996)* termed ‘clash of civilizations’. Occasionally, the media have an apparent agenda and become driving forces in transcultural conflicts. For instance, in 2006 the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-posten* published irreverent cartoons of the prophet Mohammed, causing an uproar in many Moslem countries. The consequences are still felt a decade later by many writers and editors living under police protection. In January 2015 eleven staff members of the satirical French weekly *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris were assassinated by islamist terrorists. The weekly had a long history of satirical coverage of politics and religion, including islam.

In my own fields, which are Media Studies, Journalism and Intercultural Communication, we take for granted that the media, especially social media from 2000 onwards, have vastly accelerated the pace of globalization and transcultural exchange. Some media scholars believe that while we in the past lived our lives *with* the media, today we seem to live *in and through* the media, at least in those parts of the world where Internet penetration is the highest (*Deuze 2012, Vaagan 2015:15*). It is true there have been some skeptics, notably *Hafez (2007)* who dismissed the concept of media globalization as a myth, instead insisting on the continued primacy of the nation state in the production and dissemination of information. Yet other media and communication scholars are clear on the key role of media in globalization and transcultural exchange. For example, Manuel Castells, whose influential trilogy on the network society (*Castells 1996, 1997, 1998*) propelled him to world acclaim, in 2009 coined the term “mass self-communication” in recognition of the self-generated global potential reach of social media (*Castells 2009*). Similarly, globalization is often defined as:

The overall process whereby the location of production, transmission and reception of media content ceases to be geographically fixed, partly as a result of technology, but also through international media structure and organization. Many cultural consequences are predicted to follow, especially the delocalizing of content and undermining of local cultures. These may be regarded as positive when local cultures are enriched by new impulses and creative hybridization occurs. More often they are viewed as negative because of threats to cultural identity, autonomy and integrity. The new media are widely thought to be accelerating the process of globalization (*McQuail 2010:558*).

As the term “glocalization” suggests, globalization may strengthen local values, identity and initiative. More recently, some media and communication scholars have developed Ortiz’ concept of “transculturation”, arguing that we are today living in an epoch of mediated transculturality in which transcultural media products are made and consumed globally (*Hepp 2015*).

‘Transcultural exchange’ does not imply that the merging and converging of cultures take place without problems, or are beneficial to all sides involved. Culture is continually in flux, culture moves without respect for any kinds of borders. History shows that attempts to ‘contain’ a particular culture, or purify it within ethnic, religious or national boundaries, also carry a heavy downside.

In Jurmala, a Latvian coastal town close to Riga, there is a street called *Vikinga ela* (Viking Street). This is where Scandinavian Vikings arrived to use the Daugava river to reach Kiev and Byzantium. In Scandinavia, we are continuously reassessing our common Viking heritage: were the Vikings mostly murderers, robbers and rapists, or were they driven out to sea in their longships primarily to trade? The history of colonization and slavery also show the potential downside of transcultural exchange. The enforced transmigration policy in Indonesia, though scaled down, continues to be controversial, as are the illegal Israeli settlements on the occupied West Bank. The migrant crisis in Europe in 2015-2016 and growing Islamophobia remind us that *Huntington (1996)* cannot be dismissed.

In addition to ‘globalization’, ‘glocalization’, ‘and transculturation’ there are many concepts that each suggest what can take place when different cultures intersect and blend, e.g. ‘cosmopolitanism’, ‘cross-culturalism’, ‘interculturalism’, ‘transnationalism’, ‘hybridity’, ‘creolization’, ‘multiculturalism’, ‘cultural diversity’, ‘acculturation’, ‘assimilation’, ‘culture shock’, ‘fragmentation of social cohesion’, ‘Balkanization’, ‘diaspora’. Some of these concepts are used also in contextual models of intercultural communication that focus on cultural, micro-cultural, environmental, socio-relational, verbal/non-verbal and perceptual contexts (*Neuliep 2006*).

### **Clash or confluence of civilizations and cultures?**

Within international relations theory, culture has always been attributed considerable importance. *Hurrell (2007)* noted the deep-rooted tradition in Western thought of associating social order and political institutions with notions of common values and ‘shared culture’, e.g. of political elites. This way of thinking about culture in international relations has generated

considerable criticism, esp. of the inherent assumption that shared values automatically lead to harmonious cooperation. As Edward Said reminds us of in his analysis of orientalism,

My argument is that history is made by men and women, just as it can also be unmade and rewritten, always with various silences and elisions, always with shapes imposed and disfigurements tolerated, so that “our” East, “our” orient becomes “ours” to possess and direct (*Said 1978, 1994: xix*).

In the wake of Samuel Huntington’s “The Clash of Civilization” (1996), culture attracted new interest in international relations theory. Three aspects of this renewed interest are clear. First, international system changes such as globalization appeared to accentuate cultural differences and promote a reassertion of cultural traditionalism and particularism. A resurgence of nationalism and ethnic, separatist and irredentist conflicts, e.g. in the Balkans, the Caucasus, and most recently in the Ukraine and Syria has put cultural identity centre-stage. Western insistence on human rights issues and democracy generated old arguments of cultural relativism and Asian values. From the perspective of post-colonial studies, many have noted the negative impact of Western colonialism, Western stereotypes, ‘othering’ and Orientalism on the cultures and people of the South, to the extent that the empire is seen to ‘write back’ (*Ashcroft et al. 2002, Zaman et al. 1999*). Not only Western powers but several Eastern powers were guilty in colonial transgressions, e.g. Russia. For instance, starting in the mid 1500s, tsarist Russia started to fight back against what Russian historians term “the Mongol yoke”. They drove the Mongols back eastwards and expanded into Siberia and later southwestwards into the Caucasus and Central Asia. This led to the enforced subjugation, Russification and christening by the Russian Orthodox Church of many peoples in what became the Russian Empire (*Sahni 1997*). Secondly, renewed concern in culture was also part of a wider concern with the relative weight of ideas and non-material forces in explaining social phenomena. Thirdly, Huntington’s broad characterizations of the post-Cold War international order attributed cultural or civilizational lines a fundamental and divisive role that he argued would determine global politics. Minimizing conflict according to Huntington means accepting the facts of civilizational difference, abandon attempts to promote Western liberal values globally and, in consequence, return to a pluralist world order based not on balanced power but on hegemonic self-restraint (*Hurrell 2007*).

While cultural exchanges nonetheless are often mutually beneficial, sometimes they are not, as noted earlier. The European migration crisis 2015-16 and rise of the political right in

many European countries reflect this well. Discrepancies in cultural values and norms often decide the extent to which cultural exchanges are judged to be advantageous for those involved. It will be remembered that in 2005 attempts to formulate a common European constitution floundered on disagreement in defining the role of Christianity in European history and its role in shaping a European identity. At the micro-level, cultural misunderstandings and breakdowns in communication can be generated by a simple thing, e.g. culturally diverging monochronic vs. polychronic time orientations (*Neuliep 2006:159-162*).

## **Conclusion**

To summarize how insights from intercultural communication analysis can assist in bridging languages and cultures and thereby also counteract right-wing political rhetoric, growing nationalism, populism and attendant narrow-minded leadership, I will advance 4 main arguments: First, as academics, we believe in progress through science. Scholarly analysis can generate clearer and deeper conceptual understanding of the many dynamics that affect intercultural contacts and conduct. It is vital that we as academics seek to disseminate our research to the public and to our political leaders. Secondly, networking in pursuit of knowledge and scholarship, which is the essence of academic meetings and conferences, can generate cognitive synergies and mutually beneficial learning and enlightenment. As noted earlier, one of the factors mentioned behind the rise of populism is a perceived lack of common space and meeting points. Thirdly, communication is a two-way process, a dialogue, that can clarify possible misconceptions and misunderstandings and dialogue is always preferable to hostility and aggression. Fourth, in democratic societies the electorate must not relinquish on their right to hold politicians accountable.

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