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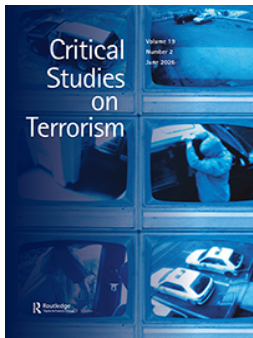
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Where the far-right is not: critical terrorism studies and the epistemological limits of far-right extremism in non-Western contexts

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ABSTRACT

This article questions how critical terrorism studies (CTS) understands, identifies, and delimits the far-right, by examining vernacular ethnonationalist discourse in Nigeria. Responding to recent CTS interventions to problematise “far-right extremism” as constructed categories rather than self-evident objects, the article advances an epistemological critique of how far-right extremism (FRE) is known within the field. Drawing on an analysis of 300 X (Twitter) posts, it examines how territorial nativism, autochthony claims, historical grievance, divine nationalism, economic ethnonationalism, and imaginaries of annihilation circulate as everyday socio-political discourses. While these discourses resonate strongly with analytical markers commonly associated with FRE and far-right logic broadly, they do so in the absence of recognised far-right organisations, formal mobilisation, and spectacular violent events— all indicators that animate theoretical understanding of far right. I argue that these depicts a deeper limitation within CTS itself. That is, frameworks developed in Western contexts, where FRE is made visible, travel poorly to postcolonial settings where exclusionary nationalist logics are embedded within the society and circulate as everyday conditions and not as exceptional threats. The Nigerian case shows how CTS, even in its criticality, remains attached to FRE Western-centric expectations of visibility and eventfulness, reproducing the epistemic assumptions it seeks to unsettle.

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Introduction

Over the past decade, the far-right has become an increasingly prominent object of inquiry within terrorism studies (Ahmed and Lynch 2024; Auger 2020; Collins 2021; Koehler 2019; Lowe 2022; Bjorgo and Rvandal 2022), driven by the proliferation of the nature of its attacks in Europe, North America, New Zealand, and also by the growing recognition that political violence cannot be analytically confined to Islamist movements alone. Within the critical terrorism studies (CTS) field, this shift has been welcomed as

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a corrective to the field's long-standing Eurocentric and racialised hierarchies of threat and knowledge production (Abu-Bakare 2024; Guerra 2025; Martini and da Silva 2022), in which non-Western and Muslim subjects have disproportionately anchored scholarly attention (Gunning and Jackson 2011; Jackson, Smyth, and Gunning 2009). However, the incorporation of the far right into CTS has not been without its own tensions, anxieties, and contemplations. As several scholars have noted, critical engagement with far-right violence risks reproducing the very epistemological assumptions that CTS originally set out to challenge, particularly when it treats "far-right terrorism" and "extremism" as stable, self-evident categories awaiting empirical elaboration (Jarvis 2022; Martini and da Silva 2022; Toros 2022). These contemplations and anxieties have become a dilemma that CTS scholarship has long grappled with and has increasingly paid attention to lately. As a result, a special issue and two edited volumes have foregrounded questions of definition, labelling, representation, and securitisation around and about the far right, emphasising that far-right violence is neither a novel phenomenon nor an analytically neutral object (Martini and da Silva 2022, 2023, 2024). Importantly, these interventions note that how the far right is named, framed, and made visible is closely intertwined with political projects of security and knowledge production (Jarvis 2022; Martini and da Silva 2023, 2024, 2022; Meier 2024; Toros, 2022). However, nonetheless the critical insights offered by these interventions, much of this strand of work remains oriented towards expanding the empirical terrain of the field, that is, adding new actors, ideologies, or media frames (da Silva et al. 2022; de Mosteyrín and Martini 2023; Dixit and Miller 2023; James 2023; Richards, Smith, and Barton 2024; Zdjelar and Davies 2021) with considerably little efforts aimed at interrogating the deeper epistemic foundations through which far-right extremism (FRE) is recognised (Jarvis 2022, 2023). Jarvis's intervention is especially instructive in this regard, owing to his critique of both orthodox and critical approaches to FRE. Principally, he argues that scholarship on the FRE is frequently animated by two encumbrances, which are a problem-solving ambition that seeks to identify, explain, and counter far-right terrorism, and a broadening aspiration that aims to correct the field's historical neglect of non-Islamist violence (Jarvis 2022). While these encumbrances are politically and ethically understandable, Jarvis implicitly contends that they also risk reinforcing a securitised ontology in which far-right extremism is presumed to exist as a separate object. Explicitly he acknowledges that there is "a tendency to essentialise far right-violences and groups as if their existence were extra-discursive and amenable to objective identification" (Jarvis 2022, 13). In response, he called for and proposed two research strategies (problematising and desecuritising) as being better suited to critical engagement with Far-right' extremism' than the problem solving and broadening ambitions, which seem to be the common trope; Speaking on the first approach particularly, he argues for the need to problematise "far-right terrorism" and "extremism" as constructs embedded within wider political discourses rather than pre-given realities (Jarvis 2022). It is within this analytical prognosis, as well as two additional interconnected reasons, that unpacking the epistemological limits of FRE scholarship becomes very expedient. First is Joel Busher's (2016) argument that the far-right is deserving of scholarly attention because of the cultural and normative worlds it constructs for participants. Secondly, Busher and Morrison's (2018) claim that the existing categories available for describing radical formations are constitutively inadequate. As such, the question of whether those

categories can travel beyond the Western empirical contexts in which they were developed becomes expedient.

The article takes up the above challenges and approaches of problematising far-right extremism. In doing so, rather than asking whether far-right extremism exists in Nigeria, or whether Nigerian ethnonationalist discourse should be classified as extremist, it instead questions the epistemological conditions under which far-right extremism becomes recognisable at all. It does so by examining vernacular ethnonationalist discourse circulating on the Nigerian digital public space, specifically on X (formerly Twitter), between 2022 to 2024. During this period, Nigerian online spaces, partly due to the 2023 general elections, witnessed intense ethnocentric mobilisation around questions of belonging, historical grievance, morality, and political legitimacy. These discourses frequently articulated exclusionary claims that resonate strongly with markers most commonly associated with far-right extremism – nativism, autochthony, and hierarchical constructions of worth (Miller-Idriss 2022; Mudde 2017, 2019). However, they did so in the absence of recognised far-right movements, organisations, explicit ideological self-identification, or events that could be conventionally labelled as violent extremism or terrorism. This empirical absence is analytically significant because existing CTS-informed analyses of the far right tend to remain anchored to Western cases in which far-right extremism is made visible through identifiable movements, manifestos, violent attacks, and state designation (Dixit and Miller 2023; Martini and da Silva 2022, 2024; Skoczylis and Andrews 2022). These benchmarks of visibility – organisation, violence, and eventfulness – are seldom questioned, even within critical scholarship that acknowledges the constructed nature of categories of terrorism. Thus, contexts (such as those presented in this article) in which exclusionary nationalist logics circulate vernacularly without eventful violence risk appearing analytically irrelevant or empirically deficient within broader theoretical understandings of FRE. The result of this is that it inadvertently reproduces a Western-centric bias in which the far-right extremism (FRE) is implicitly equated with “white supremacist” violence and organisational mobilisation, thereby limiting the field’s capacity to recognise how similar logics operate elsewhere, especially in places without visible organisational and eventful violence metrics. Socio-political contexts such as Nigeria expose the limits of this approach, as the Nigerian case does not explicitly align with European and American far-right typologies; however, it is structured by markers and conditions that commonly define FRE and far-right politics generally. These conditions produce exclusionary political imaginaries that are normalised within everyday discourse rather than articulated through formal extremist movements. In essence, the article asserts that treating such dynamics as analytically marginal reflects not just their insignificance, but also the epistemic constraints of frameworks that privilege extraordinary violence over seemingly subtle everyday hostility, and organisational coherence over vernacular circulation. Additionally, the analytical significance of the discursive analysis that emerged herein is not in any way reduced by the absence of identifiable violent events or formal far-right extremist groups. I make this point considering that scholarship on far-right politics and ideas continues to argue for the need to centre the cultural and normative preconditions of political violence. Epitomising this viewpoint is Cynthia Miller-Idriss’s (2022) argument that far-right aesthetics and rhetorics are absorbed into everyday cultural life, thereby underscoring that the analytical

significance of far-right formations does not need to wait for them to crystallise into violence. Against this backdrop, the everyday exclusionary ethnonationalist discourse circulating on Nigerian X constitutes a politically and analytically useful object/tool because it is situated in this sort of pre-violent cultural and normative space, one that existing frameworks have yet to adequately theorise.

It is important to note, however, that this article does not seek to resolve the previously highlighted tension by expanding the definitional parameters of far-right extremism to include Nigerian ethnonationalism in a simplistic manner, as doing so would reproduce the problem-solving logic that Jarvis cautions against in his intervention (Jarvis 2022). Instead, it uses the Nigerian case as a lens to question how the CTS field itself continues to rely on Western conditions of recognition even when engaging in critique. In this sense, the article operationalises Jarvis's call to problematise far-right extremism while also subjecting that very strategy to some form of reflexive scrutiny. It does this by probing, what problematisation reveals when the empirical study context does not conform to the dominant expectations that make far-right extremism visible in the first place? In attempting to answer this question, the article argues that far-right extremism can function as a socially distributed condition – rooted in everyday political life, historical memory, ethnic and moral hierarchies, and economic narratives – long before, or even without, formal mobilisation or eventful violence. In doing so, it challenges CTS to rethink not only where the far right is studied but also how its very existence is made sense of. Two frameworks within the broad scholarship on political violence further help illuminate these theoretical and empirical claims. Gurr's (1970) relative deprivation theory argues that political hostility emerges from a perceived discrepancy between expectations and outcomes, especially when a rival group is seen as advancing at the expense of another group. This is useful for analysing Nigeria's ethnonationalist discourse where various forms of narratives frame ethnic and religious others as threats. In this sense, it is discernible that the key driver is perceived displacement, not objective deprivation. In essence, the logic is zero-sum, in that the other's civic and political presence is seen and treated as an encroachment. Ehud Sprinzak's (1991) theory of split delegitimization adds another dimension. In his argument, he posits that far-right radicalisation begins with hostility towards a communal outgroup, the "inferior" group against which the in-group defines itself. The state only becomes a target of hostility when it is seen as protecting or granting recognition to that outgroup. Within the context of this article, the discourses examined basically sit within this primary communal scope. Its main targets are those constructed as ethnic and religious others, and not exactly the Nigerian state; thereby consistent with Sprinzak's claims.

CTS, the far right, and the limits of recognition

Critical Terrorism Studies (CTS) has long defined itself through epistemological critique (Heath-Kelly 2019; Jackson 2007). One of its foundational claims – that terrorism is not an objective phenomenon, instead a socially constructed category shaped, amongst other things, by power, discourse, and institutional interests – has structured decades of scholarship (Jackson 2007; Jackson, Smyth, and Gunning 2009; Jarvis 2009). Nonetheless, the recent turn towards the far-right within CTS suggests an unresolved tension between critique and recognition. While CTS scholars have correctly identified the

racialised and geopolitical biases that historically privileged Islamist violence as the definitive object of terrorism research, efforts to correct this supposed imbalance take as its starting point an expansion of the category and parameters of terrorism rather than critically questioning the epistemic conditions under which such categories operate. Deeply reflective of this ambivalence is the growing CTS literature on the far right “extremism” (FRE). On the one hand, it offers important critiques of how right-wing violence has been under-recognised, depoliticised, or framed as aberrational lone-actor behaviour (Martini and da Silva 2022, 2024). Importantly, the structural dimension of this misrecognition requires closer scrutiny. Sweeney and Perliger’s (2018) analysis of over a thousand far-right incidents in the United States found that the majority were spontaneous, unpremeditated, and carried out without formal organisational ties. These incidents rarely attract the terrorism label mainly because the nature of terrorism analysis is attuned to a form of violence that is statistically atypical of how far-right hostility actually works.

Furthermore, on the other hand, it more often than not relies on the same analytical anchors – organisation, ideology, violence, and eventfulness – that structured the so-called orthodox terrorism studies. Capturing this phenomenon aptly, Jarvis (2022) described it as a situation in which far-right violence becomes an extra-discursive object to be identified and researched (2022, 24). In other words, the far-right is still implicitly treated as a bounded object that becomes visible through attacks, manifestos, or formal movements. A condition which, according to him, “risks reproducing the assumptions and limitations of an earlier (critical) debate on state terrorism” (2022, 25). Furthermore, for Jarvis, the central task of the sub-field is not to decide whether far-right violence counts as terrorism, but to examine how such designations emerge, circulate, and become authoritative within political and scholarly discourse. This entails a shift away from classificatory ambition towards problematisation as method – a move that also chimes with the broader CTS commitments to power-sensitive analysis (Jackson 2007). One further constraint worth highlighting is that the analytical separation between far-right and jihadist extremism is more unstable than it appears. Meili Criezis (2020) substantiates this point by arguing that more often than not, white nationalist and Salafi-jihadist propaganda tend to share foundational structural features, especially with respect to the construction of essentialist narratives about outgroups.

This problematisation agenda, as vital as it is, encounters limitations when scholarship continues privileging Western empirical sites, even within the broader spectrum of the scholarship of far-right politics. Prominent far-right scholar, Cynthia Miller-Idriss’s (2022) work on how far-right extremism circulates through surprising places, from fashion brands and fitness culture to gaming communities and commercial products, challenges the prevalent narrow organisational focus by focusing on cultural mainstreaming and everyday spaces. Her analysis of how extremist ideologies enter mainstream culture demonstrates that far-right politics operate beyond formal movements, circulating through commodified aesthetics and subcultural practices. However, even this methodologically innovative attention to cultural circulation remains anchored to Western contexts, particularly Europe and America, where far-right movements exhibit recognisable aesthetic markers, coded symbols, and identifiable subcultures. The framework presumes visibility conditions, such as branded merchandise, particular clothing styles, and platform-specific discourse, that may not necessarily obtain where ethnonationalism, for

instance, operates through different cultural parameters and historical trajectories. This reveals a persistent tension, which is that, while scholars develop innovative accounts of how extremism becomes mainstream (Miller-Idriss 2022), they struggle to theorise contexts where exclusionary nationalism was never marginal but rather embedded within the polity and in political sensibilities from the very beginning.

Furthermore, scholarship on far-right politics, and even far-right extremism, has begun reconceiving what constitutes a meaningful object of analysis in this field. Take for instance, Joel Busher's (2016) study of the English Defence League which shows that the analytical importance of studying anti-minority activism lies in its internal cultural and normative dynamics, through which participants forge identities, sustain emotional investment, and construct interpretations of their social world. Consequently, the significance of far-right activism is not indexed or benchmarked to violent incidents alone but also tied to social and ideological environments that make such activism possible. Relatedly, Busher and Morrison (2018) push this reconceptualisation further by arguing that the standard descriptive and classificatory strategies applied to radical groups, strategies derived primarily from terrorism studies, are analytically ill-suited to two related challenges. First, there is insufficiency in capturing what they refer to as "cultural messiness and dynamism of contentious politics", and interpreting the intersections between extreme formations and the societal mainstream. Instead, they propose analysing what they term the "micro-moral worlds" of contentious politics, arguing that this framework better captures how radical formations actually operate than any taxonomy or definitional schema built around organisational form or violent incidents.

Recent CTS interventions have begun addressing some of these constraints, though progress remains underdeveloped, especially empirically. Martini and da Silva's (2024) analysis of how "far-right terrorism" operates as a contested political label usefully interrogates definitional struggles, while their attention to representational politics challenges the assumed neutrality of terrorism categories. Gentry's (2023, 2022) examination of misogyny's centrality to far-right formations addresses longstanding gender blindness, demonstrating how masculine grievance and anti-feminist backlash constitute rather than merely accompany far-right mobilisation. These works, as useful as they appear, continue to privilege contexts in which far-right extremism or right-wing populism already appear recognisable according to Western benchmarks: white supremacist ideology, explicit nativist and racial hierarchies (Mudde 2004, 2017), and obvious acts of violence. As a result, the CTS sub-field has struggled to theorise cases where exclusionary, supremacist, or nativist logics circulate without crystallising into named organisations or violent events. This limitation is especially pronounced in African contexts, which remain marginal within far-right scholarship despite CTS's attempt to decentring Eurocentric knowledge production that encumbers terrorism studies (Mohammed 2022), and amidst calls to be more contextually suited to our analytical adventures (Njoku 2021a). The absence of African cases in CTS's far-right literature, I contend, is more epistemologically inclined than it is empirical in nature. It reflects an implicit assumption that far-right extremism is a phenomenon tied to specific historical trajectories – fascism, Nazism, white supremacy – that make it restrictively visible primarily in Western settings. While these histories matter, treating them as universal benchmarks risks foreclosing analysis of how equivalent logics operate elsewhere through different idioms, histories, and social cleavages. While CTS has repeatedly warned against such epistemic universalism (Achieng

and Oando 2023; Jackson 2007), still far-right scholarship remains one of its least decolonised strands.

It is at this point that the article seeks to make its intervention. I contend that it is more analytically profitable to ask how FRE is made visible or invisible through the epistemologies that underpin CTS, instead of inquiring whether Nigeria has an FRE issue. While I do not discount the pertinence of the latter question, it would be tantamount to an analytical leap if we begin answering the latter question instead of the former. By examining vernacular ethnonationalist discourse in Nigeria, this article shifts attention from FRE analytical common markers of organisations and attacks to socially distributed logics that structure political belonging, hierarchy, and exclusion. In doing so, the article operationalises Jarvis's call to problematise far-right extremism while also simultaneously demonstrating the limits of that strategy when it remains attached to Western conditions of recognition. The article's theoretical relevance lies in showing that problematisation proves incomplete when it interrogates how states define terrorism, while leaving unexamined how CTS itself delimits what counts as recognisable extremism worthy of critical attention. In essence, Nigerian vernacular ethnonationalism, which circulates without groups or organisations, emerges without known events, and operates as socio-political condition rather than an aberration, suggests that CTS's critical commitments require extension to examine the field's own analytical thresholds for both making sense of extremism, and making it recognisable. The empirical analysis that follows in subsequent parts understands the various ethnonationalist discourses not explicitly as some unsophisticated hostility waiting to crystallise into organisationally structured forms, but rather as a political practice through which exclusionary nationalism attains social traction without the institutional markers that typically command CTS's analytical attention.

Extremism, violence, and the Nigerian context

The Nigerianist literature on violent extremism and terrorism has understandably been tightly focused on the country's most visible manifestation of political violence, the activities of Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). Consequently, scholars have impressively teased out the emergence and responses of terrorism. Some other critical interventions have also examined the political economy of counter-terrorism (Njoku 2020b), its constraints on civil society organisations (Njoku 2020a, 2020c, 2021b, 2022a, 2022b), and its gendered dimensions (Ejiofor 2025; Njoku and Akintayo 2021, 2021; Njoku and Dery 2021, 2023; Njoku, Akintayo, and Mohammed 2022, 2025; Njoku, Dery, and Romaniuk 2026; Oyawale 2025). This strand of scholarship has been crucial for documenting the problematic logic structuring the nature of state responses. Recently, studies within this theoretical lens have also continued in this tradition of looking beyond statist frameworks, by underpinning the pertinence of non-elites understandings and impacts of (counter)terrorism. For instance, Oyawale's (2022) analysis of how ordinary Nigerians make sense of terrorism and counterterrorism challenges elite-centred security narratives, while his examination of how gender structures both Boko Haram violence and state military responses complicates masculinist assumptions (Oyawale 2025). Quite similarly, Kodili Chukwuma (2022, 2025) analysis of how Nigeria's counterterrorism discourse constructs and designates northeastern Nigeria as an "ungoverned space" highlights that counterterrorism strategy operates as a political

identity construction project. Furthermore, scholarship on Nigeria's preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) measures also show how seemingly participatory "whole-of-society" approaches that underscore the policy, actually function to subtly co-opt civil society organisations into state security logics, thereby undermining their agency (Akintayo 2024).

However, for all of these critical underpinnings, it is not out of place to posit that Nigerian terrorism scholarship still operates within inherited categorical boundaries that structure what counts as extremism, as well as what is worthy of sustained analytical attention. Take for instance on the one hand, when violence involves Islamic ideology, it appears easily recognisable as terrorism, requiring analysis and policy response likewise. On the other hand, when violence involves ethnic rather than religious logic, it gets classified differently despite comparable lethality and political significance. Promise Ejiofor's work on farmer-herder conflicts exemplifies this sort of bifurcation. His analysis of how Fulani pastoralists become constructed as "foreign terrorists" through social processes unrelated to actual violence patterns (Ejiofor 2022a), his examination of structural conditions linking pastoralism to terrorism (Ejiofor 2022b), and his detailing of how structural violence generates armed conflict across northwestern Nigeria (Ejiofor 2024) all engage violence operating through ethnic and economic logics. However, this scholarship appears under the rubrics of "communal conflict" or "banditry", and not explicitly within terrorism and extremism frameworks, despite involving systematic violence, territorial control, and political violence that elsewhere would attract such labels. In addition to being analytical and empirical, the gap is also epistemological, considering that Nigerian scholars have extensively analysed ethnic antagonisms and conflicts (Higazi 2016; Osaghae and Suberu 2005; Suberu 2001; Ukiwo 2003). What remains underexamined within the analysis of extremism is how these formations operate outside the known parameters of organisational vehicles, ideological coherence, and violence through which violent extremism and terrorism scholarship recognises extremism.

Method

This article adopts a qualitative, interpretive research design. The data was gathered from X (formerly Twitter), which is operationalised here as a performative political arena in which claims about identity, territory, and authority are publicly contested. It is important to note that the study does not assert that the view of X is a representative mirror of the entirety of Nigerian society, as there are other social media platforms where views and vitriol are expressed. However, the choice of its selection is hinged on the premise of its architecture – public visibility and conversational interaction – allowing political meanings to accumulate through repetition and engagement. Thus, making it particularly suited to analysing how exclusionary narratives acquire normative force without any known organisational coordination. In this sense, the study approaches the digital space and platform as a context where political realities are constituted through discourse and not necessarily reflected within it, thus making it consistent with interpretive and discourse-orientated traditions within CTS that understand language as producing security practices and imaginaries (Jackson 2005). The study uses netnography as a strategy of digital observation and data generation (Kozinets 2010, adapted to analyse dispersed discourse and discursive

practices). Data collection proceeded through purposive keyword searches designed to capture moments where ethnicity, belonging, and territorial entitlement intersected explicitly in everyday political conversation. Keywords were developed iteratively through my lived experiences as a Nigerian and via continuous observation of the conversations and discourse on the platform, alongside engagement with Nigerianist scholarship. This abductive approach led to the emergence of search terms which included ethnic identifiers, political-cultural signifiers, and vernacular expressions commonly associated with ethnically encrypted political antagonism. As a result, search was not restricted to English-language content, it was conducted across English, Nigerian Pidgin, Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa, languages, reflecting the linguistic diversity of online political discourse in Nigeria. Although the final corpus of X (formerly Twitter) posts contained material in these languages, non-English posts were not directly reproduced as excerpts in this article. This decision was made to minimise the risk of inadvertently reproducing slurs or other potentially offensive language and to ensure accessibility and comprehensibility for an international readership. The search parameters also encompassed posts that captured discourses by IPOB (Pro Biafra) and Yoruba Nation agitators. They were included on the grounds that their discourse exemplifies nativism as expounded by Cas Mudde (2007). The search words deployed include but are not restricted to Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo, Odua, Biafra, Arewa, Nyamiris, Yariba, Afonja, Ndi Igbo, Ronu, Agbado Ronu, Igboti, Yorubastard and IPOB. The inclusion of colloquial and derogatory variants was intentional, reflecting the analytical aim of capturing political meaning as it is articulated in vernacular terms rather than in formal ideological language. Posts were gathered through repeated manual searches conducted over an observation period from 2022 through to the 2023 Nigerian electoral cycle, up to 2024, a period in which questions of belonging, political ownership, and territorial legitimacy became publicly visible. Sampling prioritised posts that articulated claims about territorial entitlement, exclusion, the protection of ethnic space, or imagined violence. Retweets without additional commentary and duplicate content were excluded to maintain analytical focus on discursive production. The resulting data comprises 300 publicly accessible posts that were analysed both as a body of political narration and as individual expressions of opinion.

The data analysis followed an inductive thematic approach informed by interpretive discourse analysis. The coding was done iteratively, beginning with open reading to identify recurring patterns through which belonging and exclusion were articulated. Six interrelated thematic formations emerged from repeated reading and rereading of the data and posts. These are as follows: territorial nativism, autochthony, historical grievance, divine nationalism, economic ethnonationalism, and imaginaries of annihilation. Importantly, analytical attention focused on how these themes functioned relationally; the aim was to trace how recurring narrative logics collectively produced a shared grammar of exclusion. In keeping with CTS approaches to discourse analysis, posts were analysed more as performative acts and less as depicting belief or intent. In terms of ethics, although all materials analysed were publicly accessible at the time of collection, the identifying information was removed, and excerpts were anonymised due to the sensitivity of ethnic discourse and the potential risks associated with traceability, thereby minimising personal exposure while preserving the analytical integrity of the data. Furthermore, the study also acknowledges that online identities are inherently unstable,

users of the social media platform may operate pseudonymously, and some content may originate from automated or coordinated accounts. Hence, rather than attempting to verify, the posts are treated as political texts whose effects derive from circulation as against authorial authenticity.

Findings: vernacular ethnonationalism and the epistemological limits of far-right

This section presents an analysis that examines six interconnected themes through which exclusionary ethnonationalism circulates in Nigerian digital publics. Each theme unpacks specific assumptions embedded within CTS's epistemological architecture vis-à-vis the literature of far-right and FRE.

Posts circulating on social media gathered for this study articulated territorial nativism and exclusionary claims to Lagos State. Narratives such as, “

” exemplified these territorial nativist claims and appeared frequently across the data that we gathered and analysed in this article. Essentially, these nativist narratives and posts performed the role of politics of territorial ownership, which is rooted in ethnic belonging, as against an expected civic sense of belongingness. Thus, implying that territory is configured as an ethnic patrimony that is genealogically transmitted, instead of it being seen as a political jurisdictional shared space. It is important to note that the territorial nativism described above differs significantly from conventional nationalist rhetoric and serves a distinct political purpose. While nationalist discourse normally frames territory as belonging to the state, the invocation of territorial nativism in the Nigerian context of the data moves authority away from the state and into the hands of ethnic collectives themselves. Hence, instead of appealing to state institutions, ethnic ownership is foregrounded as self-evident and incontestable. Further illustrating this point is a post from March 2023, which states,

. The post does not invoke citizenship or constitutional rights, nor does it demand state action. Instead, it exercises sovereignty at an ethnic level by emphasising the right to grant or deny territorial access independently of any kind of state recognition. In doing so, territorial belonging is framed as a moral inheritance that is grounded in ancestry and not from a legal perspective.

These above-mentioned vernacular territorial claims unsettle CTS approaches to the far right in several ways. On the one hand, much of the literature on far-right territoriality focuses on movements that address the state directly (Mudde 2017). These frameworks assume that extremist politics treats the state as its primary audience. Sprinzak (1991), however, shows that even within the Western genealogy of far-right radicalisation, the primary conflict is directed not at the state but at a communal outgroup, the ethnic or religious community designated as inferior, with governmental targeting emerging only secondarily when the state appears to defend that group. On this basis, what Nigerian territorial nativism enacts is not solely a departure from how far-right politics operates but a reproduction of its foundational structure. The data captures this directly when we

consider that posts such as ! " #\$\$\$% or & (, all tend to frame exclusion as a social act instead of being a political demand. The claims and enactment of sovereignty are attained interpersonally and digitally, and not through state institutions, thereby making the state largely irrelevant to the performance of territorial authority. This creates analytical difficulty for CTS because many of its analytical frameworks presume liberal democratic contexts in which citizenship, however imperfectly, establishes formal equality before the law. In those settings, far-right movements position themselves against state-enforced equality by demanding ethnonational hierarchy in its place. However, Nigerian territorial nativism arises in a different situation, where ethnic hierarchy is already part of social and political practices through systems that distinguish locals from outsiders. Exclusionary logics, a prominent marker of the far-right, do not always appear as complete radical departures from established political norms; they also circulate within ordinary political discourse and everyday life.

The spatial dimension embedded in these territorial nativist claims is also of significant analytical value, as these claims and their assertions of ethnic superiority are grounded in specific contexts rather than being abstract. These claims territorialise Lagos in many subtle and intricate ways. For instance, statements emanating from various accounts, such as & ") transform Lagos from a multi-ethnic and cosmopolitan city into an ethnic domain where economic participation by outsiders is redefined as territorial violation. This language configures space as an extension of an ethnic group, therefore making exclusion appear as a form of protection and not as aggression. This spatial logic also helps explain why CTS's event-centred focus struggles to capture the dynamics at work. Many posts from the data call for outsiders to "leave" or "go back" without explicitly threatening violence. However, by categorising outsiders as territorially illegitimate, they create conditions under which violence, if it occurs, can be framed as permissible defence rather than expulsion. Although periods such as the 2023 elections intensified these claims, territorial nativism does not operate as a reaction to discrete events. It circulates continuously across the data as an everyday condition within which violence becomes a thinkable phenomenon and not an exceptional event.

A visible but unassuming aspect of this territorial nativist claim lies in its inherent vernacular character. Specifically, there was no organisational coordination nor was there any known or unknown manifesto codifying it as an ideology. In fact, an instinctive point that comes to mind upon encountering the posts is to think that the individual who made these posts likely understands their statements as ordinary political opinions rather than extremist speeches. However, one cumulative effect of these posts, which number in the hundreds, is that they inadvertently normalise territorial exclusion as common sense and make it less likely to be viewed as political contestation. The consequence of this is to see and understand the far right as operating through distributed social practice in contrast to the commonplace assumption of being comprehended via organised movement, thereby posing a challenge to CTS frameworks that continue to equate extremism with visibility, coordination, and eventfulness (Jarvis 2022; Martini and da Silva 2022).

While territorial nativism invokes exclusion through space, autochthony performs exclusion via time. Evident in the data are various autochthonous claims that do not claim ownership of territory but establish hierarchies of belonging based on temporal importance and genealogical depth. Exemplifying this theme of autochthony are posts such as,

"... * or ... * ..."

Embedded in these posts are two vital points. First is with regard to the central question of who can be counted as being an authentic Lagosian (the state in reference). Second is the delimitation of the defining indices or metrics of membership of Lagos. Subliminally, membership is defined by ancestry and not by residence, participation, or even citizenship. These autochthonous claims took a different level against the backdrop of the 2023 Presidential campaign of Peter Obi, one of the Presidential aspirants. As an Igbo candidate seeking national office, Obi became a focal point for assertions that political authority appropriately belongs to those deemed original occupants. Posts such as +

! " frame exclusion as ontological disqualification. The argument is not that Igbos should leave Lagos or Nigeria, but that they lack the standing to govern because they are fundamentally outsiders. Another post — , ! -

—makes the temporal logic explicit, dividing political subjects into founders and latecomers.

It is important to note that autochthony differs from territorial nativism in that it operates independently of specific locations. Statements such as "

or , construct exclusion that follows subjects wherever they go. Even if Igbos were to leave Lagos as the posts suggested, autochthonous logic would still mark them as outsiders outside Igbo-majority areas. Thus, meaning that the issue is not presence in a particular place but presence outside a designated ethnic homeland. Consequently, this produces a political imaginary in which ethnic groups possess exclusive domains, and mobility itself becomes a marker of illegitimacy. Further building on this, we also see how autochthonous claims perform some kind of citizenship function. Posts across the data frequently distinguish "indigenes" from citizens, as in " * " , formal nationality is treated as insufficient for full belonging, and by so doing autochthony reinforces exclusion not against the state but through categories already embedded within. This reflects the postcolonial bifurcation Mamdani (2001) identifies between citizens who belong and citizens who merely reside. Importantly, it is also axiomatic of arguments by African scholars who use tribalism as a key lens for understanding ethnic discrimination in postcolonial civic, wherein tribalism is seen as the primary form of intra-African ethno-cultural discrimination.

CTS frameworks struggle to explain autochthony because it operates as an ontological claim and not as an ideological one. Unlike the far-right movements CTS often studies, autochthony does not articulate systematic programmes or justificatory narratives. This is because, statements such as & or " ' (' , do not create any basis for argument, they explicitly assert. In other words, belonging is presented as recognisable, requiring no explanation or defence. It is this exact logic that distinguishes autochthony from ideologies that must be learned or

adopted, thereby making it difficult to capture within CTS approaches that focus on belief systems and radicalisation pathways. Furthermore, CTS's actor-centred orientation also obscures the operational dimension of autochthony. This is because frameworks that search for extremist actors or organised movements miss how autochthony circulates as common sense. Take for instance, from the data, posters rarely see themselves as extremists; instead, they articulate what appears at least to the and many others, an obvious reality – that ancestry determines belonging. While the absence of self-identified extremism does not lessen autochthony's political effects, it does however render them invisible to approaches that are predominant expectant of conscious ideological commitment. Another important point to take note of is that the autochthony also unsettles the event-centric nature of CTS. The various autochthonous claims scattered across the data do not explicitly emerge in response to specific incidents, but persist across time, albeit intensifying during elections but still continuously circulating beyond. Emanating from this is a crucial point that CTS frameworks often tends to overlook autochthony by presuming extremism requires organisation, ideology, and events. Nigerian autochthony operates as a vernacular structure of political thought, that is distributed, uncoordinated, and stubbornly persistent.

Whereas autochthony legitimises and sanctions exclusion via the logic of ancestral, the theme of historical grievance extends this logic by mobilising past violence as political authority in the present. Despite being over 30 years since its occurrence, Nigeria's civil war of 1967–1970 appeared quite strongly in the data as recurring reference through which ethnic exclusion is normalised and the possibility of future violence is made thinkable and plausible. Posts such as, & . /01 ! or 2 ! (, treat historical violence as evidence that ethnic antagonism is inevitable and only resolvable through the use of force. This use of history directly supports the article's central argument that far-right logics in Nigeria circulate as everyday conditions of political possibility, instead of being an exceptional or event-driven phenomena. The constant references to the civil war appear routinely, outside moments of crisis, without organisational coordination, ideological elaboration, or explicit calls to violence. Instead, the war functions as shared background knowledge, that is invoked casually to frame ethnic difference as permanently conflictual. The political work performed by these references lies in how they reframe past mass violence as precedent and not as tragedy. For instance, posts such as . /01 " (* do not position the war as an interrupted process. Implicitly embedded in all these posts and its framing is a logic of temporality, where violence could be reactivated if and when necessary. This temporal logic challenges frameworks in terrorism scholarship that treat historical grievance as background condition explaining radicalisation (Dalgaard-Nielsen 2010; Hafez and Mullins 2015). In terrorism scholarship, history is most assumed causal, something that produces extremism under specific conditions. However, in the Nigerian case being considered in this article, history is more operational in nature. It is not something that leads to extremism; it is how extremism is articulated. The discourse on civil war circulates as an ever-present reference

that structures how ethnic belonging, political participation, and legitimacy are understood in the present.

One of the explanatory factors that amplifies this operation described above is the absence of post-war reckoning in Nigeria. The Nigerian state's declaration of "no victor, no vanquished" foreclosed public acknowledgement of mass death (Heerten and Moses 2014), and as a result, civil war memory remains politically uncontained and available for vernacular appropriation. Although presented as some sort of reconciliation strategy, this policy effectively suppressed collective mourning and accountability, leaving the war's meaning politically unresolved. The absence of transitional justice mechanisms allowed the civil war to persist as a contested symbolic resource. Within this vacuum, references to the civil war circulate in vernacular discourse not as explanatory background but as evidence that ethnic elimination has occurred before and can occur again. A such, posts invoking the civil war therefore do not mobilise grievance to justify future violence; they normalise violence by embedding it within an already-established historical precedent. This use of history challenges CTS approaches that conceptualise FRE largely through recognisable ideological articulation or organisational activity. Much terrorism research, including strands within CTS, continues to privilege explicit ideology, manifestos, group formation, and event-based violence as the primary markers through which extremism becomes comprehensible (Jackson 2007; Jarvis 2022).

Another noticeable pattern in the data is that various posts draw on this unresolved history to reduce complex political events into simple ethnic indictments, thereby, transforming what should ideally be a national catastrophe into evidence of ethnic incompatibility. This mechanism becomes especially visible during electioneering period. Posts asserting tend to frame democratic participation not as civic right but as attempted historical reversal. As such, political equality appears as threat to an imagined ethnic order already validated through past violence. Yet, these claims do not increase only during electioneering periods. They also persist post elections, and in fact continue to function as interpretive frames in the everyday, thereby reinforcing the article's claims that far-right logics operate continuously and not episodically. This inherent banality reveals how historical violence functions not as extremist rhetoric, which is marked by urgency, but also as ordinary common sense. As Jarvis (2022) cautions, even critical approaches risk reproducing the very problem-solving logics they seek to critique when they rely on recognisable extremist actors, coherent belief systems, or spectacular moments of violence as analytical entry points. The Nigerian civil war discourse demonstrates how far-right logics can circulate without organisations, without programmes, and without events, operating instead through everyday historical invocation that makes future violence plausible, imaginable, defensible, and repetitive. In essence, by treating historical violence as a continuous discursive resource as against being than an exceptional event, or a closed past event, the Nigerian case demonstrates the limits of CTS, and even terrorism studies frameworks that remain oriented towards rupture, radicalisation trajectories, and identifiable extremist subjects. In this case, history does not explicitly radicalise actors, it sustains a political environment in which the possibility of eliminationist orientation is permanently available as a tool to be used.

Although religious rhetoric and language permeates Nigerian ethnonationalist discourse, they do not just do so passively without any manifest or latent functions. They actively reorganise ethnic hierarchy, political legitimacy, and violence are imagined. Posts such as

3 or !

do not just appeal to religion metaphorically. They do more insidious work, in that they frame ethnic conflict as cosmological struggle in which divine will determines political legitimacy. This thus suggests that ethnicity is rendered sacred, and exclusion appears as theologically necessary. This sacralisation becomes especially visible during periods of intensified political competition like elections. During the 2023 elections, posts frequently framed the possibility of Igbo political leadership as violation of divine order.

Posts containing statements such as " or " (

! are not hinged on policy positions or governance competence. They explicitly deny metaphysical eligibility and recast political opposition as a disobedience of God's will. To put differently, these posts do not argue for ethnic hierarchy, they assert it as already divinely established. Consequently, religious language is not just a means to justify exclusion, it also completely expunges exclusion from political debate in its entirety. This form of ethnonationalism sits uneasily within the prevailing analytical categories in both orthodox and critical approaches to terrorism. For instance, religious extremism has conventionally been examined through organised movements, doctrinal systems, and forms of clerical or authoritative religious legitimisation, with analytical attention focused on how theology is systematised, transmitted, and mobilised to justify violence (Hegghammer 2010; Juergensmeyer 2003). Even within critical terrorism studies, analyses of religious extremism largely retain this movement-centric orientation, locating extremism in identifiable actors, ideological projects, and institutional religious authority rather than in diffuse vernacular religious cultures (Gunning and Jackson 2011; Jackson, Smyth, and Gunning 2009). Nigerian divine nationalism fits neither of the above strands, considering that theology is not necessarily instrumental to an underlying political ideology, it is more constitutive of the political claim itself.

A central organising principle to this operation of divine nationalism is the Biblical language. Verses of the Bible such as are directly appropriated and applied to ethnic groups. However, this formation operates without one, or any known organisational infrastructure. Across the data, there is no mention of any church articulating ethnic supremacy as formal doctrine, and no identifiable leaders mobilising followers. Contrastingly, divine nationalism circulates through vernacular Christian idioms embedded in everyday political talk, and the posters of such narratives do not self-identify as extremists. This vernacular diffusion inadvertently makes divine nationalism largely invisible to CTS frameworks that tend to more often than not, locate extremism in organisations, leaders, or explicit ideological programmes. Explicitly, the thematic discussion herein directly responds to Jarvis's call to problematise far-right categories (Jarvis 2022). Thus, in contrast to asking whether Nigerian ethnonationalist discourse should be included within existing definitions of far-right extremism, the analysis shows how those definitions themselves obscure forms of far-right politics

that operate through cosmology, through vernacular religious discourses, and through ambient moral certainty.

Although economic resentment or put differently economic ethnonationalism, is a prominent theme across the data, it is contrary to expected assumptions not articulated through class relations, labour exploitation, or structural inequality. Instead, it is organised through ethnicity. Post such as 4

5 make the economic dimension overt. In this post, property acquisition and commercial capacity are mentioned as the essential fact, however the explanation for the distribution is located entirely in ethnic character. In the instance even where the post concedes Igbo economic productivity, that concession is framed through ethnic moral reasoning; in the sense that Yoruba underperformance is attributed to ethnic laziness, while Igbo success is attributed to ethnic industriousness. Socio-economic outcomes cease to be products of historical or institutional conditions and become naturalised as innate ethnic traits. This move forecloses structural interpretation by ethnicizing uneven development, such that the pressing question is not how capitalism distributes outcomes, but which ethnic group deserves to succeed within it.

The most analytically instructive framing in the data is one that acknowledges structural conditions only to also discard them. For instance, one post addresses Yoruba-majority states directly:

As it is obvious in this post, the speaker begins with a recognisably structural diagnosis, which are, government failure, inadequate conditions for private investment, but in contradistinction, the conclusion drawn is not a demand for policy reform. Instead, it is puzzlement, that then moves into resentment, that those constructed as ethnic inferiors are accumulating property. The structural explanation is named and almost immediately rendered analytically useless within a framework where economic outcomes must confirm ethnic hierarchy instead of challenging it. In this sense, commercial success by those designated as outsiders is not just only unexpected, it also functions as an inversion of the supposed proper order.

Further intensifying these narratives by politicising economic presence was the 2023 elections. Posts asking, "6 1\$7

)," regardless of the inaccuracy of the figures, perform normative function in the true sense of it. Specifically, these posts invariably assert that non-indigenes cannot legitimately dominate economic space, regardless of how such dominance was attained. Similarly, when another post declares, "

," economic success itself becomes framed as insult, and wealth accumulation by outsiders is reinterpreted as moral violation. Such reasoning as this defers from how scholarship on populism has theorised economic drivers of far-right mobilisation. A point in reference is the argument by political scientists, Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin, that neoliberal restructuring and material insecurity generate grievances that extremist actors subsequently mobilise (Eatwell and Goodwin 2018); this argument presumes

economic hardship as prior condition. Gurr's (1970) relative deprivation framework, however, accommodates the Nigerian pattern, in that the operative variable is the perceived narrowing of the gap between what the ingroup considers its rightful position and what a rival group is seen to attain. Thus, prosperity accumulating in the wrong ethnic hands is experienced as a form of dispossession, which is analytically why economic success becomes the object of resentment here. In essence, extremism in this context is not solely a response to economic failure but a reaction to what is described as misallocated success. Quite interestingly however, the solution to this misallocation of success is ethnic reallocation. Statements such as "& (" leave capitalism intact while demanding ethnic gatekeeping. This mirrors broader patterns in exclusionary nationalism, where economic justice is redefined as proper allocation among bounded communities rather than equitable outcomes overall (Mudde 2016).

The theme of economic ethnonationalism in the data exposes a form of far-right dynamics and politics that CTS scholarship is yet to come to terms with. As against appearing as organised mobilisation or ideological programme, economic resentment circulates as vernacular moral reasoning that rationalises market outcomes as indication of ethnic legitimacy or deficiency. This challenges both the scholarship on far-right and CTS's FRE logics, tendency to treat economic grievance as an underlying condition that extremists actors exploit. In the Nigerian case, economic difference itself seems to be the extremist claim, as prosperity by those considered ethnic others or outsiders is constructed as illegitimate regardless of the legality, contribution, or duration of their presence. As a result, empirical materials that have been analysed therefore give insights into how far-right exclusion can operate without organisations, manifestos, or overt calls to violence, through everyday economic discourse that normalises dehumanisation and ethnic gatekeeping.

Across the later phases of the data, ethnonationalist discourse shifts from exclusion and dehumanisation towards open annihilatory imaginaries. Posts no longer stop at demanding that Igbos "leave" Lagos or framing them as economic or territorial intruders. Instead, they circulate futures in which Igbo life in Yorubaland is imagined as extinguished. Statements such as "

" do not function as direct threats in the conventional sense. Rather, they rehearse genocide as a political possibility, thereby making ethnic elimination thinkable without requiring an explicit call to action. The form of these statements is analytically significant. Violence is articulated through futurity and abstraction. For instance, phases such as, "Will remain" replaces "we will kill"; "has no future" substitutes for categorical elimination. This grammar displaces responsibility from human actors to inevitability, destiny, or historical logic. In doing so, it allows speakers to articulate genocidal horizons while also maintaining plausible deniability. Even posts that imply preparation – such as claims that Igbo residents are being "documented" so they can be "found when the time comes" – avoids mentioning violence directly. The threat is neither immediate nor operational; however, its meaning is unmistakable. This mode of expression sits below the analytical thresholds typically used to identify extremist violence. CTS frameworks often tend to prioritise organisation, plotting, or mobilisation as

indicators of escalation. This presumption, however, is empirically unstable even in Western contexts, as Sweeney and Perliger (2018) argue that the majority of far-right violence in the United States occurred spontaneously and without prior organisational planning, suggesting that the assumed relationship between eliminationist discourse and organisational infrastructure does not hold in the cases CTS treats as its reference point. The data in this article presents elimination not as something to be prepared or organised, but as something that will happen, ultimately, spontaneously, and eventually, under the right conditions.

Equally important is the ordinariness of this language. Annihilatory statements appear alongside gender wars, football commentary, electoral gossip, and everyday complaints. Users of social media accounts move seamlessly between discussing ethnic elimination and mundane social life without any conspicuous shift. The normalisation of such eliminationist speech is treated as one political opinion among others, subject to disagreement or correction but rarely challenged as illegitimate. In essence, the normalisation of these annihilatory language, which occurs via repetition in everyday vernacular space, inadvertently produces cumulative effects and consequences. Early posts establish exclusion; later posts dehumanise; subsequent posts imagine eradication. This progression, beyond being just the radicalisation of individual users, also signifies a collective escalation that is produced through circulation itself. Mbembe's concept of necropolitics is useful for making sense of this empirical reality (Mbembe 2020). Obviously, the posts do not kill; however, they work to determine whose lives are politically valued and whose deaths are imaginable. For instance, declaring that a population "has no future", inadvertently renders its continued existence contingent and revocable; thereby meaning that in the eventuality that violence occurs, it would look like the fulfilment of an already articulated trajectory. Hence, annihilatory imaginaries function as necropolitical governance that is exercised through discourse rather than through state policy or organised force.

The absence of organisation in these annihilatory claims is an analytical condition of their political effectiveness. Critical Terrorism Studies has repeatedly challenged the field of terrorism's fixation on events, actors, and infrastructures as the primary markers of extremism (Gunning 2007; Jackson 2007), yet eliminationist violence is still commonly presumed to require organisational capacity, leadership, or operational intent. However, the empirical data and material examined here complicate that assumption. Annihilation is articulated performatively allowing speakers to assert ethnic dominance and future violence without movements or command structure. These utterances nevertheless reorder political life by rendering belonging provisional and by forcing targeted populations to inhabit social space under the constant awareness of potential erasure. Event-centred and methodologically statist frameworks struggle to apprehend this modality because it neither escalates towards attacks nor seeks recognition through spectacular violence. The political work lies instead in the production of elimination as a thinkable and increasingly ordinary horizon of ethnic relations. In this sense, annihilatory imaginaries do not just precede violence; instead, it constitutes a form of extremism that functions through the discourse that produces it.

Towards epistemological reflexivity of far-right extremism in CTS

The foregoing thematic discussions demonstrate that far-right logics in Nigeria operate without the empirical markers that typically render extremism decipherable within CTS. For instance, there are no named movements to analyse, no designated leaders to profile, no manifestos to decode, and no attacks to reconstruct. The absence of these markers, which structure the vast majority of not only CTS FRE scholarship but also far-right extremism in the orthodox scholarship of terrorism, forces a recognition that current frameworks for identifying far-right extremism are not universal analytical tools but historically and geographically situated products of studying particular formations in particular places. Nigeria reveals that far right can exist as condition instead of a movement, as discourse instead of organisation, and as a gradual normalisation instead of a dramatic rupture. Exclusionary nationalism circulates vernacularly, through everyday speech acts which require no ideological coherence, no organisational discipline, and no violence threshold. The far right operates here through distributed repetition and through common sense. Recognising this requires CTS to extend its critical commitments beyond interrogating state definitions towards reflexive examination of its own analytical thresholds and inherited assumptions about what makes extremism recognisable, governable, and worthy of sustained scholarly attention. Importantly, the Nigerian case, an interesting addition to the literature, further reveals that when CTS looks for far-right extremism where it resembles Euro-American formations, it overlooks far-right politics where it does not. Put differently, the field's conceptual architecture, methodological toolkit, and analytical priorities are calibrated to recognise extremism that emerges from liberal democratic breakdowns, operates through organisational forms visible to counterterrorism agencies, and escalates towards violence that threatens state security. Nigerian ethnonationalism operating through vernacular sovereignty claims and circulating without organisational form cannot make sense within these inherited frameworks despite performing functionally equivalent political work: the hierarchical ordering of human worth, the moral legitimisation of exclusion, and the imaginative preparation for eliminationist violence. This is the article's central contribution to ongoing CTS debates on FRE. Following Jarvis (2022), who argues for "problematisation and desecuritisation" of FRE, Nigeria demonstrates why such argument on prioritizing the problematisation approach is necessary; this is because CTS's analytical parameters inadvertently reproduce the very minimalist assumptions it critiques in the state counterterrorism debates. Just as states define terrorism to serve political ends, CTS defines far-right extremism in ways that privilege certain empirical formations while marginalising others. The Nigerian case reveals the epistemological limits of how that scholarship delimits its object of analysis.

Conclusion

This article has examined how CTS scholarship delimits far-right extremism as object of study through examining discourse of Nigerian vernacular ethnonationalism. The six themes analysed demonstrate that exclusionary nationalism can exist as socially distributed condition embedded within everyday political discourse other than requiring the organisational scaffolding, ideological coherence, and eventful violence through which extremism typically becomes recognisable. Nigerian digital publics circulate eliminationist

logics, hierarchical orderings of human worth, and preparatory imaginaries for genocidal violence without the empirical markers structuring CTS's analytical attention. The analytical implications extend beyond the specific Nigerian context. Terrorism studies broadly, and more specifically CTS's conceptual framing, encodes assumptions about what extremism looks like derived from studying particular formations in particular places. The analytical expectations prove indispensable for contexts where far-right extremism exhibits these features but becomes epistemological constraints when universalised as definitional requirements determining what counts as extremism worthy of critical attention. While Jarvis's call to problematise rather than classify far-right terrorism offers crucial intervention, the basis of its rationalisation (especially its empirical foundations) remains attached to contexts where extremism already appears recognisable through established benchmarks. Nigerian vernacular ethnonationalism operationalises this call to problematisation, while simultaneously subjecting it to reflexive scrutiny. In essence, this requires problematisation extending beyond questioning state designations towards examining how CTS itself delimits its object through conditions of recognition privileging Western-visible markers.

Consequently, the analytical choice confronting CTS is stark and raises two possibilities. First, the Nigerian case is either excluded because it does not fit existing definitions of FRE, which reveals that current frameworks are geographically limited. Second, in the case that it is recognised as extremist, thus thereby necessitating a rethink of FRE beyond the markers of organisational structures, ideological consistency, and eventful violence that currently shape how the field identifies it. The second option implies a deeper shift, which is that the underlying assumptions that determine what counts as FRE must be reconsidered. In other words, Nigerian vernacular ethnonationalism should therefore not be treated as just another empirical example. This is analytically expedient because it exposes how dominant Critical Terrorism Studies frameworks present Western experiences and standards as if they were universally applicable. This is counterintuitive, as the field cannot claim critical orientation while maintaining analytical apparatus calibrated exclusively to contexts where FRE looks like Western cases. As such, it is my hope that this article becomes the first of many more that seeks to further engage, unpack and tease out the dynamics, nuances and complexities of FRE from a non-western perspective in much more different ways drawing on the critical lens. As a result, future research addressing far-right extremism within CTS must confront these epistemological limits as against just working within them. First, developing analytical frameworks adequate to extremism operating as ambient condition rather than exceptional movement requires abandoning presumptions that far-right politics necessarily crystallise into organisational forms. Second, scholarship must interrogate how violence thresholds embedded within the analysis of terrorism prevent the recognition of eliminationist politics that prepare atrocity through discourse. By doing so, we can aim towards extending CTS's critical commitments beyond event-centred frameworks. Finally, CTS must develop methodologies for studying extremism that exists prior to and independent of the counterterrorism apparatuses that typically make it manageable and therefore analytically visible.

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