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Seduction of far-right actions: A pathway to an authentic self?

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Abstract

Far-right civil movements have emerged as a significant predicament in numerous regions worldwide. Despite abundant research on the tactics employed by far-right groups to instil ideologies, behaviours and sentiments in their followers, such as street demonstrations, investigations into the meaning-making of far-right actions in relation to the trajectories of the participants' lives remain scarce. The present study uses the analytical tool proposed by Katz to explore how far-right activists obtain a sense of moral transcendence through their activism, including participating in the liminal moments of far-right rallies, revelling in unrestricted speech, discovering new abilities, acquiring knowledge and engaging in self-expression. We contend that these experiences engender in participants the sense that they are acquiring that which is absent from their lives and recovering their 'true selves'. The study maintains that to comprehend the allure of the far right, it is essential to contextualise far-right actions within the participants' lives, the societies that they inhabit, and the circumstances that surround them. In short, the sensation that one is rediscovering one's 'true self' may encourage activists to pursue the more remote objective of reclaiming what they perceive as their nations' lost ideals.

Keywords

Authenticity, far-right movement, hate speech, Ikigai, Japan, psychosocial studies

Introduction

Far-right activism has emerged as a significant societal issue in various regions worldwide, most notably in Europe and America. Right-wing extremist terrorism has resulted in severe casualties, and rallies that culminate in violent clashes with counter-activists and law enforcement have garnered considerable attention. The siege on the US Capitol by supporters of Donald Trump on 6 January 2021 remains a vivid reminder of how the mainstreaming of far-right politics can provoke civil unrest.

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The aim of the present investigation is to contribute to the existing body of research on far-right actions (e.g., Pilkington, 2016; Virchow, 2007; Windisch et al., 2018), employing a utilitarian perspective and seeking to determine what benefits activists derive from participation in far-right actions. Here, our primary focus is on a range of actions undertaken by far-right groups in pursuit of their political objectives, as discussed in Caiani et al.'s (2012) study. Unlike their study, which analyses far-right actions in terms of their utility to mobilise followers, our conceptualisation of 'actions' is more akin to Goffman's (1959), in that we are concerned with how individuals use these actions to express themselves to others, whose (perceived) ideas about the subjects will, in turn, reflect upon their own self-concepts (Mead, 1934). It is important to note, however, that this emphasis on actions does not diminish the significance of their political ideologies, given that these ideologies influence how participants interpret and justify these actions.

Katz (1988) proposed an analytical lens that posits that the sense of moral supremacy enhances the allure of crime and deviance. By applying Katz' theory and the concept of the culture of authenticity (Taylor, 1991), the present study seeks to examine the unique sense of fulfilment, including *ikigai(-kan)* (the sense that one's life is worth living), that far-right actions bring to the lives of activists and to explore why these actions hold a particular appeal in contemporary Japan.

We shall argue that participants derive a sense of authenticity from various aspects of far-right actions, consonant with a political vision that seeks to reclaim what Japan could and should have been. First, we shall briefly introduce the history of far-right movements in Japan. After reviewing previous research on the meaning of far-right actions and detailing the above-mentioned analytical tools, we shall provide a brief account of the data and methodology. This will be followed by an investigation into the activists' narratives regarding their experiences before and after becoming involved in far-right movements. We shall then make the case for an integrated study of the far-right experience that focuses not only on ideology but also on the actions involved to clarify the appeal.

Far-right movements in Japan

The rise of far-right movements has been observed in Japan since the mid-2000s, with occasional violent confrontations and the use of hate speech. These movements are collectively referred to as Action Conservative Movements (Kodo suru Hoshu Undo or ACM), and they began to attract increased public attention in the late 2000s. Groups such as Zaitoku-kai, established in 2006, engaged in street demonstrations that featured chants of hateful and resentful slogans directed towards ethnic minorities (Ito, 2014). Action plays a crucial role in these groups' identity. Makoto Sakurai, an ACM leader, established the group as a means of rejecting the stances of existing conservatives who, according to Sakurai, believed that features of civil movements, such as petitions and rallies, were exclusive to leftist movements (Sakurai, 2016).

The ACM's' agendas vary widely, and classification of their ideology (or ideologies) is a complex endeavour. The themes of their street rallies include the denial of wartime atrocities caused by Imperial Japan; neighbouring Asian countries, such as China and South and North Korea; leftists; resident (Zainichi) Koreans in Japan; and immigrants (Higuchi, 2014). Zainichi Koreans, who are 'a population of colonial-era migrants from the Korean peninsula that settled in the Japanese archipelago and their descendants' (Lie, 2008: x), were among the primary targets of the ACM,

particularly at its inception. By the time the first author conducted fieldwork among ACM activists in 2018 and 2019, it had become less common for them to target Zainichi Koreans, but some of the activists still indicated the antipathy against Koreans. Drawing on the concept of the 'privileges of Zainichi', they argued that Zainichi Koreans receive social welfare illegitimately or are exempted from taxation (Ito, 2014). Behind this anti-Zainichi Korean movement were diplomatic issues between Japan and South/North Korea, particularly the Japanese government's recognition of and compensation for wartime atrocities perpetrated against the populations of other Asian countries, which has been the source of significant diplomatic problems since the early 1990s (Higuchi, 2014; Kimura, 2014). As such, the denial of wartime atrocities features on their agendas (Ito, 2014). Ito (2019) argues that, behind the antipathy against Zainichi Koreans, was anti-elitist sentiment against the conventional media and the left. The ACM's antipathy toward Zainichi Koreans and neighbouring Asian countries distinguishes itself from that of preceding right-wing factions, such as *kisei uyoku* ('the old right'), whose primary concerns are communists, or *shin-uyoku* ('the new right'), who are characterised by their anti-Americanism and pan-Americanism (Smith, 2018). However, these distinctions should not be over-emphasised, as some core ACM members have connections with these other right-wing factions (Ito, 2019).

The ACM's use of hate speech against Zainichi Koreans and other minorities soon became a key social concern in the late 2000s, prompting backlash across multiple strata of Japanese society. This backlash included the introduction of the Hate Speech Elimination Act in 2016 – which defines hate speech against those with foreign origins as unacceptable (though it does not impose penalties for this) – and the rise of counter-activist initiatives against ACM's street oratories (Löschke, 2021; Nasu and Higaki, 2021). Meanwhile, Sakurai established the Japan First Party in 2016, sending its members to local and national parliament and shifting the ACM's focus, while other factions continued to engage in street actions.

The internet has played a significant role in the development of these movements. In particular, encounters between various far-right factions on blogs, bulletin boards and the mega discussion board 2-*channeru* produced some of the core ACM discourse, including that of the 'privileges of *Zainichi*' (Ito, 2019). Technology was also integral to the mobilisation of the ACM's followers: among the ACM's more notable features is its use of video-sharing platforms, such as *Nico Nico Douga* and YouTube. Yamaguchi (2013) observed how real-time broadcasting of their confrontational activities has attracted followers, while the immediate responses from these followers sustain the activists' motivation. While the ACM's members did not necessarily discover the movements or become indoctrinated into their ideologies through online content, the internet has nonetheless facilitated networking among the movement's members, helping them to deepen their understanding of far-right agendas (Higuchi, 2014) and to understand the emotional reactions typical of ACM activists – such as anger against perceived enemies (Asahina, 2019). Despite the prominent role afforded to the internet, it would be erroneous to assume that ACM activists and online right-wingers (commonly referred to as '*neto-uyo*') are necessarily on harmonious terms. Several ACM activists whom I (the first author) interviewed complained that *neto-uyo* fail to engage sufficiently with offline activities, are irresponsible in their criticism of ACM actions, and engage in behaviours that the ACM activists perceive as pathological or immature. As their name suggests, 'action' is an essential part of their identity, and they did not appear to regard online activities as equally valuable or morally praiseworthy as offline actions.

The roles of far-right actions

Studies have demonstrated that far-right movements engage in a broad range of actions for a variety of purposes. These actions include street rallies; conventional political behaviour, such as participation in electoral campaigns; cultural events for their supporters and extreme acts of violence, including terrorism (Caiani et al., 2012). These actions are crucial not only for conveying their political messages to the public but also for ensuring that existing members remain engaged with the movement. Violence, for example, is not merely used to intimidate enemies and to demonstrate to potential sympathisers an ability to respond to local issues (Petrou and Kandylis, 2016); it can also fulfil a ritualistic function by reinforcing the bonds between followers (Castelli and Froio, 2014; Windisch et al., 2018). Violence can evoke ideals of masculinity, such as heroism and courage (Castelli and Froio, 2014), and the excitement that it generates may be a significant attraction for followers, with the result that it becomes the centre of their activities (Mattsson and Johansson, 2023; Windisch et al., 2018). Street rallies are another critical tool for the far-right. Participants who join these rallies become far-right activists, internalising far-right ideologies and behaviours and experiencing the same emotions – such as anger and pride – that others in the far-right culture experience (Asahina, 2019; Virchow, 2007; Volk, 2022). Other, less provocative actions are also crucial for mobilising followers, such as martial arts training (Sehgal, 2007), bible studies and music festivals (Futrell and Simi, 2004). The emotions generated during far-right activities not only engage followers but can also sustain their involvement even after they have ceased to embrace the associated ideology, bringing them back to the movement after periods of absence (Latif et al., 2018).

Previous studies have explored the means by which actions sustain far-right movements by shaping participants' identities into those of activists. However, the present study is more concerned with the benefits that individuals derive from engaging in such far-right actions (Ransome, 2005), irrespective of whether these individuals are conscious of such utilitarian benefits. Ransome (2005: 185) conceptualises individuals' identity formation as occurring through acts of consumption – namely, actions that 'feed the spirit and mind' and 'express our sense of purpose and creativity'. Accordingly, the current study will consider the desires that activists satisfy when they experience different versions of themselves through their far-right actions. This perspective will yield new insights into why far-right actions might intoxicate some individuals in ways that these movements' organisers may neither intend nor notice.

Previous studies have demonstrated that, far from being passively mobilised by movements' leaders, rank-and-file activists actively attach meanings to far-right activism, underscoring the importance of adopting a 'bottom-up' approach when exploring these movements' attractions. Busher (2016) found that English Defence League (EDL) activists derived a sense of pride and dignity from tangential aspects of the actions, such as learning how to deal with police officers. Pilkington (2016) discovered that by travelling together, participating in rallies that frequently culminate in violence, and experiencing a sense of acceptance, EDL activists developed the sense that they were part of a 'big family'. The present study's novelty lies in its focus on individuals and the social contexts of these joyful experiences to determine why such positive feelings might render far-right actions so attractive to some individuals living in contemporary Japan. One study that shares a similar academic interest is Kimmel's (2007) investigation of Scandinavian neo-Nazi youth, which illustrated how comradeship and fierce group images compensated for the shame

associated with underachievement and unpopularity at school. Although the present study will also highlight the importance of a threatened sense of masculinity, it aims to cover a wider range of grievances. Aligning with Kimmel's (2007) research, Hamm's (2004) scrutiny of the life stories of two skinhead activists offers a compelling revelation. What is conventionally perceived as apocalyptic violence may, in fact, be traced to a desire to transcend one's feelings of inadequacy. This void is often compensated for by assuming the role of a prominent and violent skinhead leader or by achieving celebrity status as a creator of skinhead content. Other studies have focussed on how far-right followers use representations, attire, and tattoos as tools of resistance against certain characteristics of contemporary society, such as the uncertainty of late modernity (Miller-Idriss, 2017) and the obsessive risk-management of one's body (Gillespie, 2021). By focusing on these actions, the present study will contribute to this discussion of the connections between the far-right and wider social trends.

The seduction of deviance and the culture of authenticity

To explore the meanings that the subjects attach to their far-right actions, the present study aligns with Jack Katz's assertion that the seduction of criminal/deviant activities lies in 'overcoming a personal challenge to moral – not to material – existence' (Katz, 1988: 9). In his attempts to criticise explanations of crime and deviance that focus on perpetrators' class and racial/ethnic backgrounds, Katz highlights 'wonderful attractions within the lived experiences of criminality' (Katz, 1988: 3), whereby a criminal or delinquent 'can genuinely experience a new and different world' when 'experienc[ing] himself as an object controlled by transcendent forces' (Katz, 1988: 8). This does not mean that Katz ignores the significance of the social structure; on the contrary, his analysis of the experiences of young delinquents, gang members and robbers illustrates the extent to which their carefully crafted indifference to – or disturbance of – social norms is key to the sense of moral transcendence (Katz, 1988). In other words, the sense of moral transcendence is a product of negotiating one's (perceived) stance vis-a-vis other people's intentions and expectations. Moreover, culture, identity, and the history of class or racial/ethnic group influence the discourse in which they become invested when individuals – particularly gang members – seek to signal their moral transcendence over the 'dominant' norm by using specific symbols, names, attire and behaviours that are associated with particular groups (Katz, 1988).

Cultural criminology, inspired by Katz, has explored the sensations that individuals experience while engaging in deviant, criminal or anti-social activities, occasionally drawing upon ideas from positive psychology (for example, Csikszentmihalyi's [1992] concept of 'flow') and how these sensations relate to the broader social context. At one level, the enjoyment derived from such activities serves as a means of escaping from the normative constraints of everyday life, particularly those found within the matrix of capitalist society (Ferrell, 2004; Lyng, 1990). Simultaneously, cultural criminologists have revealed the proximity of late-modern capitalist society to the world of crime and deviant behaviours, noting that the two share core norms (Hayward and Fenwick 2000; Lyng 1990; Young, 2007). Indeed, cultural criminology has played a pivotal role in enhancing our comprehension of the allure of far-right ideologies. For instance, Hamm (1993) underscored the importance of an intricate network of symbols, publications and behaviours associated with the skinhead subculture. This subculture serves as a welcoming haven for working-class youth, offering them a platform from which they can resist the dominance of middle-class culture.

Paradoxically, as Hamm (1993, 2004) aptly pointed out, the allure of the skinhead subculture is significantly influenced by the very mainstream culture that each individual has experienced. This influence is evident in the prevalence of pop culture, including phenomena like heavy metal rock music, that accentuated a form of military-type masculinity during the Reagan administration. Furthermore, Larsen and Jensen (2022) have recently undertaken an analysis of 'fashwave' (a niche offshoot of vaporwave and synthwave that is characterised by its focus on far-right themes) content, elucidating the ways in which it fosters a shared sense of nostalgia and thereby strengthens the sense of solidarity within the far-right community. Simultaneously, it fuels antipathy towards those who are perceived as belonging to out-groups. Acknowledging the crucial role that culture plays in shaping the emotions of far-right adherents, the present study focuses on the activists' narrative trajectories, considering their experiences both before and during their involvement in far-right actions to understand the mechanisms by which they attain a sense of moral transcendence.

The present study anchors its analysis of moral righteousness in the concept of authenticity. Authenticity is among the modern world's most influential moral values, whereby one supposedly need only listen to 'a voice within' to know what is right and wrong (Taylor, 1991: 26). Individuals are assumed to be able to find their most suitable way of life by simply 'being true to [their] own originality, and that is something only [they] can articulate and discover' (Taylor, 1991: 29). Thus, authenticity refers to two distinct yet closely related issues: the origin of subjects/objects and the unimpeded expression of their identity (Lindholm, 2013). The centrality of the concept of authenticity in the Western world arose as a result of several factors that were vital to its modernisation, some of which have influenced the structure of modern Japanese society: the rise of a free labour market under capitalism, which separates one's work from one's identity; the notion of national subjects who are believed to share something essential with their compatriots; and the desire for a monolithic national ideology rooted in an imagined heritage (Creighton 1997; McMorran 2008). Furthermore, increased unpredictability in the context of liquid modernity (Baumann, 2007), combined with the rise of new technologies for self-presentation and communication, has fostered greater demand for authenticity (Thurnesll et al., 2023). Populist politics and right-wing media have effectively created an aura of authenticity around their messages as a means of attracting adherents (Holtz-Bacha, 2023), and evidence indicates that radical right-wing populism uses national nostalgia extensively as a means of eliciting a longing for the 'good old days' characterised by the (imagined) ethnic homogeneity of a given nation (Smeekes et al., 2021).

The present study argues that specific far-right actions provide individuals with what is experienced as the pleasure of being authentic, or 'eudaimonia'. Turner and Schutte (1981) contributed a novel perspective to the study of authenticity by highlighting the importance of examining instances in which individuals experience a sense of authenticity. Arnould and Price (2000) contended that, in response to the unease associated with the erosion of social institutions, individuals opt for 'authenticating acts' and 'authoritative performances'. The latter denotes actions that demonstrate conformity with societal norms, such as participation in 'traditional' rituals, while the former pertains to behaviours with which individuals feel that they can express themselves, such as risk-taking or creative endeavours. A series of studies on eudaimonic pleasure and self-actualisation have yielded considerable insight into the nature of the positive feelings that individuals experience when they feel they are expressing themselves. 'Eudaimonia' denotes a profound sense of gratification that is distinct from hedonic pleasure or mere happiness (Ryan and Deci, 2001). It has its

roots in Aristotle's philosophy – specifically in his *Nicomachean Ethics* – and is linked to the discovery of and living according to one's 'true self' or daimon (Norton, 1976). Self-actualisation, which constitutes 'a self-becoming which amount[s] to a continuous self-overcoming' (Rapport 2003: 35), is considered key to eudaimonic well-being (Ryan and Deci, 2001). According to Arnould and Price's (2000) classification, acts of nationalism are easily categorised as 'authoritative performances' owing to their expression of allegiance to the nation. However, it remains unclear whether 'authenticating acts' actually exist and, if so, what they might entail. The present study will examine the personal accounts of ACM activists to explore how aspects of far-right actions function as 'authenticating acts' for them.

Data and methodology

The present study will analyse the narratives of ACM activists. As Aspden and Hayward (2015) pointed out, the relatively new, narrative-focussed approaches in criminology – namely, narrative and psychosocial criminology – have much in common with cultural criminology: while the latter often uses the subjects' narratives as primary data, the former considers the broader influence of the surrounding culture when analysing these narratives (e.g., Sandberg, 2013; Treadwell and Garland, 2011). The present study adopts a psychosocial approach, aligning with Glynos and Stavrakakis' (2008) perspective on the role of the ontological sense of lack and the analytic strategy to explore the meanings that the subjects attach to events by contextualising them holistically within the subjects' lives (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000). Analysis of the participants' lives from a psychosocial perspective is essential to ensuring the study's rigour in multiple respects. First, respondents may have indicated that certain actions attracted them, but they did not always clearly articulate the meanings and significance of these actions in their lives; for example, they might mention the changes that far-right actions have brought about for them, but the question of whether these changes constitute mere behavioural shifts or signify a process of self-overcoming (Rapport, 2003) cannot be determined without examining their earlier life stages. The psychosocial method's capacity to explore the meanings of specific events through the trajectories of the subjects' lives (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000) helps clarify the meanings that the actions hold for them and the ways in which they felt they were reclaiming what they perceived as lacking yet essential to themselves. Initiating the analysis by examining the activists' life stories will elucidate how the prevailing normative pressure to express authenticity interacts with one's psyche. As Jefferson (2021) contends, any speculation about the source of subjects' dissatisfaction that is derived solely from a pre-existing viewpoint on the pathology of modern society runs the risk of neglecting the subjects' unique experiences. In support of Stuart Hall's 'eclectic' use of theories, Jefferson (2021) advocates that researchers should incorporate the psychoanalysis of subjects' biographies into their investigative tools. This perspective is applicable to the present study, which aspires to explain not only the pleasures that the ACM activists experience during their actions but also why those pleasures are so profoundly experienced by these individuals. For Katz, one of the most significant benefits of being a 'hardman' is that it leaves one with the sense of having '*the ability always to know what to do*' (Katz, 1988: 235, italics original) and, as such, '[t]hose who persist in stickups use violence when it is not justified on cost-benefit grounds because not to use violence would be to *raise chaotic question about their purpose of life*' (Katz, 1988: 321; italics added). The question, then, is why the avoidance of this existential question is so important for

some individuals that they will take risks to achieve it. One approach to exploring the source of this strong desire is to examine the trauma experienced by those individuals. As Frankle (2014) argued, traumatic experiences may initiate one's quest to discover the meaning of life.

Second, related to the first point, its advantage lies in uncovering the grievances of the Japanese far right. While several studies have sought to identify the possible collective grievances of the Japanese population that gave rise to the movement (Kawamura and Iwabuchi, 2022; Yoon and Asahina, 2021), research on the individual-level grievances of ACM activists is limited with the exception of a limited number of case studies conducted by the first author (Yoshida, 2020, forthcoming). The psychosocial inquiry – with the emphasis on the 'social' element – will provide insights into the characteristics of Japanese society that either cause or reinforce grievances among the far right, similarly to its elucidation of the ways in which class-based disadvantages in British society fostered a sense of shame among young males whose aspirations for masculinity were thwarted (Treadwell and Garland, 2011). In turn, the analysis of individual-level grievances and how they stem from facets of Japanese culture will offer a more nuanced understanding of how the widespread norm of authenticity can interact with local Japanese culture.

Of particular relevance to the notion of 'recovering' a sense of authenticity is Glynos and Stavrakakis' (2008) observation that a sense of lack may impel individuals towards objects that appear to provide fulfilment, even when they are unrelated to the thing that is lacking. This analytical perspective has proven validity: for example, Mercan (2020) examined the biographies of Turkish youths to determine why participation in a burglary group was so alluring to them. The same dynamics may be found in the minds of the 'true believers' who take the lives of others – and/or their own lives – for the sake of their ideological goals (Meloy, 2004). Grievances that often stem from a sense of personal failure can drive these individuals to become invested in figures typically with physical strength and glory, such as soldiers, and to derive positive feelings of affirmation therefrom (Meloy and Yakeley, 2014). Therefore, the present study will analyse the biographies of far-right activists to explore how the 'pre-activist' stages of their lives contributed to the ontological sense of lack that ultimately attracted them to the promise that they might regain their 'true selves' through activism. It should be clarified that the application of a psychosocial analysis does not equate to the pathologising of the subject; rather, it phenomenologically humanises the subject. The experiential perspective on far-right activists' process of self-overcoming (Rapport 2003) adopted in this study aligns with Merleau-Ponty's (1958) "being-in-the-world" (p. 441) in which activists confirm the ownership of their authentic selves. Drawing upon Merleau-Ponty's (1958) argument that trauma shapes one's present self, influencing perception and interaction with the environment, Fuchs (2012) contends that trauma is embodied and expressed through actions or bodily sensations triggered by external stimuli. Accordingly, this study adopts a psychoanalytical perspective to explore how activists experience actions that are part of their routine practices. Nor does the current study deny the possibility that ACM activists join the movement out of faith in the ACM's ideologies. Toward the end of the paper, we shall discuss how individuals' sense of self-overcoming might compensate for the ACM's failure to achieve its political goals through its day-to-day activities.

The data utilised in this research were collected through fieldwork that I (the first author) conducted between July 2018 and March 2019. I obtained life-story interviews with 25 ACM activists through direct approaches and via introductions by other activists. Seven of the participants were female. In light of previous studies' findings that those who support far-right ideologies in Japan

are not exclusively young (Higuchi, 2014; Nagayoshi, 2019), I endeavoured to recruit participants from a wide range of age cohorts, ranging from 20 to 73 years. Consistent with Higuchi's (2014) findings, the participants' occupations were not necessarily indicative of low socio-economic status, and the participants included current and former public officers, full-time white-collar workers for private companies, and a former business owner.

The interview data were collected using the free association narrative interview method devised by Hollway and Jefferson (2000) and subsequently developed by Gadd (2012). In this method, the interviewee is encouraged to freely articulate whatever comes to mind, even if their narratives appear to be irrelevant or inconsistent with one another. The method is advantageous for exploring the interviewees' unconscious meaning-making with respect to events and the connections between these events in their minds (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000). This method has been used to investigate the causes of various criminal and deviant activities, such as hate crime and participation in far-right movements (Gadd and Dixon, 2011; Treadwell and Garland, 2011; Yoshida, 2020, forthcoming), street crime (Mercan 2020; Reid, 2023) and illegal immigration (Luo et al., 2022).

Although I disclosed my background as a researcher and my intention to investigate why the participants were attracted to ACM, just as Waldner and Dobratz (2019) did, I refrained from engaging in argument with the participants regarding their ideologies and racist attitudes. Many – if not all – of the participants divulged details of their past that they had never previously shared with anyone. Although some participants refrained from discussing their pasts in full detail, all participants' stories included accounts of how they had become involved with the far-right groups, along with graphic descriptions of their emotional reactions, including surprise, excitement, respect, joy and reassurance.

Findings and analyses

An ontological sense of lack emerging over the course of activists' lives

An ontological sense of lack regarding one's life often originates in childhood experiences. Some individuals, such as 'Gonda' (30s, F), 'Kuroda' (50s, F), 'Sasaki' (60s, M), 'Sato' (60s, M) and 'Yamaguchi' (50s, F), indicated a strong sense of shame regarding their inability to assert their needs or resist maltreatment by their family and friends, resulting in them being labelled 'timid' during their childhoods (as described by Sasaki and Yamaguchi). Personality issues were frequently caused or amplified by family problems. Many individuals had issues with their parents, with some being victims of physical and emotional abuse or oppression (including 'Aoki' [40s, F], 'Honda' [50s, M], Kuroda, 'Matsushita' [50s, F], 'Takeda' [20s, M] and Yamaguchi) or having witnessed the abuse of a parent by the other (including 'Esaki' [50s, M], 'Umino' [20s, M], Sasaki, Sato and 'Tegoshi' [40s, M]).

However, it would be wrong to assume that this sense of lack was solely rooted in the early life stages. Indeed, the subjects' interactions with society and social norms at later stages of their lives had also played a significant role. Elsewhere, the first author (Yoshida, 2020) have explained that a threatened sense of white-collar masculinity can be instrumental in attracting men to far-right ideologies. Sasaki's account indicates a similar pattern. One of the most significant sources of his guilt was his perceived poor contribution to the company that he had left after having worked with them for over 30 years.

> Those who joined the company after the 'Lehman shock' [the financial crisis in 2008] are truly brilliant, I guess. Compared with them, we were irresponsible [*charan poran*]. The time [Japan's post-war period of rapid economic growth] was, um, the time was [characterised by] an easy-going way of thinking. [. . .] where we would give up and resign, those who experienced the 'Lehman shock' would try to sort things out.

Sasaki's regret that he did not seek to overcome the company's period of hardship appears to have amplified his lifelong shame at being 'timid', enhancing his unconscious desire to become a stronger individual who could step forward to guard someone or something important to him.

While the compelling force behind the attraction to far-right movements is often associated with masculinity (Treadwell and Garland, 2011), it is not only men who suffer from gender-related issues (Yoshida, forthcoming). Yamaguchi, a woman in her 50s, felt silenced as a result of her precarious status as a female agency worker who had to endure various forms of maltreatment, such as sexual harassment. Matsushita, another woman in her 50s, recalls thinking 'Go on, go on, destroy this country' at the time of Aum Shinrikyo's attack on Tokyo's subway in 1995. She had been subjected to rape by her father and domestic violence by her ex-husband. Women's dissatisfaction is not solely due to gendered socio-economic disadvantages but is also caused by the pressure to conform to gender ideals. An interesting case is that of 'Yamase', a woman in her 50s, who enjoyed mixing and playing with boys during her childhood. Yamase remembered complaining to her parents that she wished she had been born a boy. While she reported that she 'accepted being a woman' and started 'wearing a skirt' in her 20s, her style – dressed like a blue-collar labourer with her hair cut short, which symbolises a masculine quality in Japan – when I met her at ACM activities gave the impression that the far-right movement allowed her to access the masculine side of herself.

An ontological sense of lack is not invariably caused by an overt failure: even seemingly successful individuals can perceive themselves as alienated from the rest of their peers, feeling that they do not have something that the others have in common. 'Kanda' (70s, M), a former business owner, hypothesised that he had an unconscious urge to be 'self-expressive'. This was partially due to the fact that he did not conform to the typical white-collar Japanese way of life.

> The business was a way of expressing myself [. . .] I had the option to work for a company, get employed, win the race, and become a president, but I was not interested. I had my own way, independent of others. [But,] I don't know how to articulate it, I felt like an outcast.

As Kanda's tale suggests, a sense of estrangement from the Japanese way of life can contribute to activists' attraction to far-right movements. In some cases, such as that of 'Naito' (50s, M), who felt as though he was a soulless being prior to encountering the ACM, childhood trauma and alienation from social norms go hand in hand. Naito was born into a poor family, lost his mother at a young age, and remained in a low socio-economic position for most of his life. Due in large part to his low self-esteem, which originated partly from his traumatic experience of being unable to save his mother and partly from his deprived socio-economic status, he harboured a sheer sense of alienation under Japan's consumerist culture of during the 1990s, the immediate aftermath of the post-war rapid economic growth. He felt, 'If you are ordinary, you must enjoy yourself, you must be rich. This is natural and normal, but it is painful. What should I do when I am not enjoying myself, and I am not rich?'

It is difficult to determine whether all activists shared the same ontological sense of lack, given that not all of them explicitly referred to negative emotions that they had encountered throughout their lives. It is possible that some activists' experiences may be better explained by alternative theories than by the psychosocial approach. However, instances in which activists have expressed feelings of being silenced, powerless and alienated abound. For activists, the 'thing' that is felt to be lacking and therefore desired may be a version of self that is vocal, capable of withstanding adversarial circumstances, self-expressive, and that maintains a sense of connection with oneself and the environment. As such, their participation may be regarded as part of their perpetual quest for such a 'true self'.

Rallies as liminal spaces

The subjects' accounts of their first encounters with the rallies – including watching online videos of them – are characterised by a sense of shock owing to the scenes' extraordinariness rather than because of their pre-existing interest in the ACM's ideologies. Umino was approximately ten years old when he first watched a video of the ACM rally on YouTube: 'It's like conflict, like rabbles, how to put it, I didn't understand the meaning, but it was exciting'. This experience induced him to return repeatedly to the video, as he gradually began to understand the ideologies behind the rally. Physical presence during moments of action provides extraordinary sensations. According to Gonda, 'there was someone shouting on the frontline [. . .] I had known that it would be like this, but it was shocking to experience it in person'. A highly confrontational rally provides an extraordinary moment even for a seasoned activist: 'One time there was a tornado of voices on Okubo Street [in one of the central parts of Tokyo]. I simply had never seen such a phenomenon and I was, like, moved' ('Koda', age unknown, M).

The sense that one is experiencing something distinctive from one's daily life is partly generated by interactions with other activists who appear to bear unruly behaviours and/or delinquent appearances, which often engenders a sense of fear and revulsion among the activists. This contrasts starkly with the positive depictions of immediate trust established in studies conducted on far-right movements in other contexts (Busher, 2016; Pilkington, 2016). Some recalled being surprised by the delinquent outlook of other activists 'look[ing] like *yakuza* [Japanese gang]' (Sasaki) or 'clash[ing] with police officers, saying like "Stop messing with us!"', which caused him to think, 'I should go home' ('Sawada', 30s, M). However, individuals may find themselves becoming addicted to the exceptionality of the far-right culture, as the following comments suggest: 'I didn't know that going to the territory of the enemies could be this kind of fun' (Kasuga). One activist vividly describes it, saying that, 'This world [of the ACM] is like having festivals everyday' ('Kida', 30s, F).

The concept of liminality, as introduced by Turner (1969), is relevant in making sense of the emotional response evoked by uncommon scenes. Liminality offers individuals an opportunity to break free from the social norms that typically constrain daily life (Shields, 1990). Encounters with counter-activists, sporadic violence, the arrests of fellow activists, and the atypical scenes depicted above combine to create an exceptional sense of excitement. Kida's reference to 'festivals' is also reminiscent of the carnivalesque, a term popularised by Bakhtin (1984), who argued that this is a space in which the hierarchy between 'low' and 'high' is temporarily overturned. However, Stallybrass and White (1986) criticised this dichotomy, arguing instead that the 'high' and 'low'

come together to create an imagined space that is distinct from the usual order. Indeed, from the participants' perspective, the combination of various factors encountered during far-right actions – the rallies on Tokyo's high streets featuring the occasional use of derogatory language, white national flags and the rising sun flag symbolic of Japan's Imperial order, activists who resemble outlaws and ordinary citizens – may offer individuals an opportunity to experience the inversion of the hierarchy.

This liminal moment not only liberates the participants from order but they may also feel more conscious of being alive by experiencing activities that they perceive as highly risky. Embarking on a protest action against what they deemed to be the headquarters of an ultra-leftist group, Kida recalls, 'I thought I might really die. So, I wrote a will at that time [laughs]'. In a similar vein, recalling an occasion when he attacked the tents of anti-nuclear activists, Naito recalls, 'I had made a resolution to be killed', pointing out that 'ultra-leftists have fought against right-wingers and caused many deaths'. Their intimacy with the liminal moments of disturbance of social norms, along with their sense of having survived the 'risky' situations, is reminiscent of how criminals in the study by Katz (1988) obtain transcendent appeal by causing and overcoming chaotic moments of violence. Moreover, exposure to life-threatening situations and the successful return from such experiences are known to provide individuals with a sense of self-realisation, generating intense feelings of personal significance and connection with one's authentic self (Arnould and Price, 2000; Le Breton, 2000; Lyng, 1990). The attraction of even seemingly politically motivated actions, such as terrorism, may stem from this pursuit of self-realisation through survival in life-threatening environments (Cottee and Hayward, 2011). It is noteworthy that individuals need not engage in objectively risky actions in situations over which they have no control: what matters, rather, are the meanings that they ascribe to the situations, as Gailey (2009) argues in an exploration of the perceptions of women who subscribe to pro-anorexic ideologies. This finding is applicable to some of the ACM activists who I interviewed. Although it is true that radical left-wing groups in Japan have committed acts of murder and terrorism in the past, notably during the 1970s and 1980s, no instances of terrorist activity on the part of any such group have been recorded since 2003 (Mainichi, 2021). Nonetheless, the selective emphasis on these radical-left group histories allows far-right activists to imagine that they are participating in high-risk endeavours. The heightened sense of excitement that follows, accompanying the imagined 'risky' actions, is particularly pronounced in Japanese society, in which murder is considered rare (Kawai, 2009) and riots are uncommon (Osaka's more deprived might be regarded as an exception, but the last riots to occur there took place in 1992 and 2008). Thus, the sense of self-efficacy heightened by the exceptionality of 'risk-taking' actions may compensate for the far-right participants' sense of powerlessness and alienation.

The moment of liminality not only signifies a temporary closure of ordinary life but can also initiate a journey towards a new version of oneself (Arbuckle, 1996). Sasaki, who voiced his disappointment in his inability to confront difficult situations for six decades, discovered a different facet of himself with the support of his peers and police officers.

> During a rally, when I walked straight towards a counter-activist and stared at him, he stopped the car and got out. It could have been intimidating since he was large, but I had the mobile units with us, so there was no way he could have beaten me. The surrounding people then said, 'Arrest that Korean!'

Sasaki's sense of close ties with his peers during the liminal moment (Turner, 1969) helped him to consolidate a sense of strength. Another example comes from Takeda, a 20-year-old activist, whose pre-ACM life was characterised by a tendency to try to be favoured by teachers, possibly due to his authoritative father's abuse. Regarding his arrest for hitting a counter-activist during a rally, Takeda said, 'I never expected to be in a position to be sanctioned by national law, as I respected it so much. I had no idea that I was going to engage myself with the revolution of society'. Despite this, Takeda's life story suggests that he had harboured contradictory desires to be both a good student and a rule-breaker even before he joined the ACM. Far-right rallies are liminal spaces in which someone like Takeda can see the version of themselves that they aspire to become.

'Fearlessness' and 'aggressiveness' associated with hate speech

The public delivery of anti-minority, anti-China, anti-Korea, and anti-mass-media speech – or chanting slogans of such a nature – is a characteristic tactic of the ACM (Ito, 2014). The ACM activists' stories suggest that such actions not only serve to communicate their political ideology but also attract followers who are drawn to their apparent fearlessness. Esaki enjoyed watching Sakurai 'beat[ing] everyone by saying what he wanted to say [*iitaihoudai*]' in some of his early footage. For Sato, this attitude was in stark contrast with his own, which caused him to admire Sakurai:

> I worked as a salaryman for 36 years. I could not say what I wanted to say. I shut up and obeyed [the bosses] and sometimes I projected my dissatisfaction onto my family. You know, my personality, I have always listened [to what others say], putting a smile on my face. When I saw the actions of Mr Sakurai, who will never compromise, I just envied him.

Qualities such as honesty and independence are associated with authenticity (Louden and McCauliff, 2004), and the violation of political correctness is a tactic that politicians use to assert their authenticity (Theye and Melling, 2018). Moreover, the exhibition of disregard for the will and expectations of others is key to asserting one's own moral superiority (Katz, 1988). For those who have suffered from a sense of powerlessness, fearlessness might appear to be something that they have lacked and that they should seek to obtain. In fact, the adoption of such an attitude often comes with a sense of joy, as exemplified by remarks such as, 'I guess I enjoyed it [hate speech]. Like, "I will beat the enemy by doing this"' [Yamaguchi].

This joy is not necessarily temporary: the cultivation of an *iitaihoudai* attitude can fundamentally change one's fearful self-concept. Naito, who used to feel like the 'living dead' now has a positive attitude toward his life. 'It's all right to get killed. How can I die without saying what I want to say? Let me say whatever I want'. Naito developed a more robust sense of self after joining the ACM, culminating in his storming into the headquarters of the leading party, the Liberal Democratic Party, to 'show my will that I will do what I want to'. Identification with the fearless *iitaihoudai* attitude can affect an activist's attitude towards all aspects of their life. According to Kuroda, who felt that she had always been exploited by others,

> He [Sakurai] says things, like cutting something up [*zubazuba iu* (speaking straightforwardly)], doesn't he? [3-second pause] Well, I do not know how to put this, but I have become able to cut useless things away [*zubazuba kitteikeru*]. Now I am all right being alone.

Thus, for some activists, identification with the far-right activists' *iitaihoudai* attitude is a key process in their self-overcoming (Rapport, 2003).

The role played by the ACM's culture should not be overlooked. As Cottee (2020) and Larsen and Jensen (2022) have emphasised, the emotion of any movement's members (whether they are far-right activists or incels) can be shaped by discourses produced and prevalent in the movement's subculture – in particular, discourses surrounding their identities, 'others', and how they should feel about the latter. The moral righteousness of the *iitaihoudai* attitude is bolstered by the ACM's belief that the Japanese are victims, oppressed by 'privileged' Zainichi Koreans and neighbouring Asian countries (Ito, 2014). The intercontextuality between the fearful self-concept embraced by activists such as Sato, Yamaguchi, and Kuroda and the imagined victimhood of the Japanese national enables them to obtain a sense of self-overcoming by identifying with a nationalist who would not shy away from attacking the nation's enemies.

Discovering talents, gaining skills and becoming creative during far-right actions

The pivotal position that speech occupies in the ACM's culture may be attributed to the charisma exhibited by Sakurai, which derives partially from his skill in delivering an emotionally compelling speech. For example, Sawada recalls that it was not the content of the speech that attracted him to Sakurai's video but the speaker's 'intensity' [*hakuryoku*]. Kuroda was impressed by 'the way he projects his voices, you know, it rocks the hearts of people'.

In the realm of the ACM, the ability to articulate oneself through speech is deemed an essential trait. In interviews, it is not uncommon for activists to either laud or denounce their peers based on their oratory prowess. In this culture that prioritises speech, some individuals have uncovered – in the context of far-right actions – talents that they did not previously realise they had.

> At first, I just read aloud what I had written beforehand and I found that [other activists] liked it [. . .] It was crazily well-received and I started to suspect that maybe I am talented, gifted. (Naito)

Waterman (1990, 2004) posits that the pursuit of self-expressiveness fosters a sense of eudaimonia. Acts of self-expression facilitate identity formation, self-actualisation and control (Waterman, 1990), bringing joy and a sense of connectedness to those who discover new talents, such as public speaking, in the context of far-right activism. The above quote illustrates how speech-related abilities can elicit immediate positive feedback from peers and garner respect, which is key to fostering positive self-regard (Csikszentmihalyi, 1992; Park, 2015). For Kida, the reaction played a key role:

> When I said something like, 'Don't you have this and that experience in your daily life?' and people stopped, so I asked, 'Why don't you think like this?' and people said, 'Right on!' or clapped their hands and it was really enjoyable. That's how I became addicted [to the activities].

The sense of recognition that individuals derive from public attention may be particularly rewarding in the context of contemporary Japan's precarious circumstances of social division (McCormack and

Kawabata, 2020; Yoneyama, 2008). It is important to note, however, that not all individuals possess the innate ability to speak confidently in public from the outset. Some activists may initially be nervous and can only speak for a few minutes at a time. Nonetheless, due in part to the pressure from their peer activists, they learn to deliver a speech, and in so doing, some have the opportunity to experience personal growth, a key factor in eudaimonic pleasure (Ryff and Singer, 2008):

> I was originally not good at talking. I am not the kind of person who speaks a lot, so I did not have a chance to give a speech in front of people. Yes, that is the sort of person I was, so I had no clue that I was going to be talking about this and that to strangers with a microphone. (Gonda)

Busher (2016) asserts that EDL activists derive a sense of pride from acquiring new knowledge about the movement's agenda, how to interact with police officers, and so on. This is also evident in the ACM, where Yamase notes that she has learned various skills, including how to negotiate with police when organising rallies. Activists also acquire better understandings of the far-right agenda and develop advanced communication skills. Takeda reflected on his initial use of Twitter as a high school student and reported that he regrets having sounded like a '*neto-uyo*' [online right-winger], disseminating conspiracy theories bluntly. He has since learned to write 'in a way that would not be embarrassing to the world as someone with a status [in the movement]'. Such growth as an ACM activist is essential, especially because the internet is a vital tool for the movement (Yamaguchi, 2013). Thus, in becoming far-right activists, individuals acquire a sense of personal development.

Arnould and Price (2000) contend that 'production' is a means of authenticating acts. Crafting personalised products can help to consolidate one's sense of identity. Far-right actions offer numerous opportunities for activists to express their creativity, such as the production of handmade placards to accompany each group's flag. Yamase, who enjoys working with crafts, mentioned that she has made over a hundred placards and intends to continue making them. Rallies and speeches require the production of far-right content, tailored to each activist's preference. When asked about her most cherished memory from her involvement in the far-right movement, Gonda reminisces about the time when she experimented with a new form of demonstration that centred on ridiculing the ACM's opponents. The ACM's decentralised network structure permits a wide range of approaches, with activists customising their methods of involvement according to their own preferences, which enables them to express themselves.

Ikigai and the internet

Some activists explicitly reported that they were happier than they had been in the past. Naito's account vividly illustrates how far-right actions, which constitute only one aspect of his life, have altered his perception of his deprived socio-economic status – on the grounds of which he refers to himself as '*kuzu yarou*' (trash).

> Since I started this activity, joined the movement, my life has been full of stimulus and fun. It's okay to be poor, if I can drink; I am okay with anything else. In my daily life, I work covered by mud and shit to fund this activity. And that's all right.

This feeling appears to be closely related to the Japanese concept of *ikigai*, which has recently attracted attention from psychologists. *Ikigai* may be translated as a 'life worth living' (Kono and Walker, 2020). The word can be used in two ways: to refer to that which gives rise to this sense (perhaps a particular activity or object) and the sense itself. The latter is sometimes referred to as *ikigai-kan*, to distinguish it from the contexts associated with *ikigai* (Kamiya 1966/2015; Yamamoto-Mitani and Wallhagen 2002). The experience of *ikigai* or *ikigai-kan* can foster a deep sense of pleasure in association with one's raison d'être: in fact, Kumano (2018) reveals that Japanese respondents use *ikigai* as a eudaimonic concept, distinguishing it from *shiawase* (happiness), which designates a more hedonic pleasure.

Among the key drivers of a sense of *ikigai* is the recognition of others (Park, 2015). In addition to the immediate reactions of in-person audiences and other activists, as described above, internet exposure also plays a significant role.

> After the rally, I looked at Twitter and ordinary people were saying, 'There is a spectacle in front of the station'. It made me laugh so much [. . .] Dissemination of information on the internet can make such an impact. I was like, 'Wow this is great. Have I become famous?' ('Doke', 40s, M)

The similarity between Doke's description of his excitement about being famous and Hamm's (2004) account of white supremacists' desire to become 'celebrities' by creating far-right content is remarkable. It would not be an exaggeration to say that celebrity and its attractions are becoming increasingly relevant today, given the ubiquitous availability of video-sharing platforms. This may be particularly applicable to the ACM, which implements a strategy of attracting followers by sharing videos and live broadcasts of its often-contentious rallies (Yamaguchi, 2013).

Also key to a sense of *ikigai* is a clear idea of one's own life trajectory and engagement with the future (Imai et al., 2012; Kono and Walker, 2020; Saint Arnault and Shimabukuro, 2016). This is comparable to the benefit of being a 'hardman', as Katz has argued – namely, '*the ability always to know what to do*' (Katz, 1988: 235, italics in original). Any political activity is essentially future-oriented, and the internet, with its capacity to record such activities, provides activists with positive prospects for the impact of their actions. According to Gonda, 'I will not know [the future], I cannot, but I am leaving the evidence that I have done what I can. That's why there are blogs and videos'. The presence of a future audience, which the internet appears to promise, affirms the activist's sense that the public will one day appreciate their activities, thus fuelling the individual's sense that their life is meaningful: *ikigai* (Imai et al. 2012; Martela and Steger, 2016). As Naito's remarks ('In my daily life, I work covered by mud and shit to fund the activity. And that's all right.') demonstrate, the identification of *ikigai* and the investment of one's own meaning in what might otherwise appear to be a humble life may play a significant role in the attainment of moral transcendence. In considering the far-right actions to be his top priority, Naito appeared to have liberated himself from the perceived capitalist social norm that maintains that 'you must enjoy your life, you must be rich'.

Discussion

As this in-depth analysis of the experiences of ACM activists has revealed, a comprehensive understanding of the allure of far-right actions cannot be attained by solely examining the

mobilisational tactics employed by the movement. While the ACM has implemented effective strategies for attracting followers – including the use of video-sharing platforms (Yamaguchi, 2013) and the organisation of emotionally charged rallies (Asahina, 2019) – activists do not passively 'learn' far-right emotions. Rather, they attribute meaning to various aspects of far-right actions by unconsciously or consciously contextualising them within the trajectories of their own lives. By 'surviving' imagined danger, becoming or identifying as fearless activists, discovering new talents, learning new skills, exploring their creativity and leaving records of their lives for future generations, activists develop a more robust sense of identity, a genuine connection with themselves and a sense that their lives are valuable. The tumultuous and often-violent scenes of far-right actions create a liminal moment that facilitates the subjective transition to a new and 'true' version of the self. To acquire a more accurate understanding of the allure of far-right actions, it is necessary to comprehend the dynamics of the interplay of the groups' mobilisational tactics and the desires of the activists who employ them, which may exceed the expectations of far-right leaders.

The present study expands on the conclusion reached by Miller-Idriss (2017) – namely, that the meanings that far-right symbols hold for their followers cannot be understood without placing the symbols into the social contexts in which they are consumed. The present research suggests that the subjects' sense that they are obtaining moral transcendence occur at the intersection of the subjects' unique life trajectories, the meso-level context (or the sphere imagined as a nation), and the macro-level context (e.g., liquid modernity). As Miller-Idriss (2017) and other researchers (e.g., Oguma and Ueno, 2002) have argued, the attractiveness of far-right ideologies, symbols, and actions might derived from the late-modern anxiety arising from rapidly changing social landscapes, accentuating the need for authenticity. In much the same way that the criminal 'subculture' is heavily influenced by the 'mainstream' culture (Hamm, 1993; Hayward and Fenwick 2000; Lyng 1990; Young, 2007), and although far-right actions' attractiveness owes much to their disruption of social norms and social control in Japan, as detailed above, the ACM activists appear to have internalised the mentality of the culture of authenticity. Meanwhile, an examination of the activists' biographies suggests that their aspirations for a stronger and more assertive version of the self may be related to negative experiences from their pasts, which cannot be reduced to a vague sense of anxiety stemming from the destabilisation of borders and boundaries. Their self-loathing with respect to their 'timid' personalities, experiences of domestic abuse, and perceived alienation from gendered social ideals may leave activists with a sense of powerlessness and rejection. Therefore, the sense that they are accessing an authentic version of themselves compensates for these individuals' ontological sense of lack and causes them to gravitate towards far-right actions.

As Katz (1988) observed, a sense of moral transcendence may be obtained by ignoring or betraying the expectations of others. However, as Katz was careful to illustrate, this does not mean that subjects disregard the existence of social norms. On the contrary, they must be knowledgeable about these social rules to determine which discourses (attitude, attire, or actions) can most effectively disturb them. As such, it is imperative to remain observant of the contextual nuances within each society to fully comprehend the underlying reasons behind the preferences for certain forms of far-right actions. The exhilarating sensation of confronting perceived foes who are considered to be life-threatening, coupled with the gratification of delivering frank speeches, can only be understood by acknowledging the infrequency of violent collisions and conflicts in Japan (including rallies and labour disputes).

It may also be the case that the cultural context of Japan has exacerbated the distress that activists feel about the negative experiences in their lives. The sense of alienation experienced by far-right men as well as the more overt form of subordination experienced by far-right women may be partly attributed to the post-war ideal of Japanese citizenship (Allison, 2013). Gendered expectations are integral to expected social functions in Japan (North, 2012), which operates a gendered welfare system that relies on constrictive social roles (Miura, 2012; Schoppa, 2006). The idealised image of a middle-class nuclear family – consisting of a white-collar breadwinner, often characterised by 'salaryman masculinity' (Dasgupta, 2017), and his counterpart, a full-time housewife – is the manifestation of the sociopolitical and economic structure in Japan, with its taxation system designed to preserve the breadwinner-and-housewife model by limiting women's labour participation (Akabayashi, 2006; Ronald and Allison, 2010) and encouraging early family planning through school education (Fassbender, 2016). Post-industrial, post-growth Japan has not accommodated alternatives to this predetermined gendered life course, resulting in the population's struggle to reconcile other desires and choices (North, 2012; North and Morioka, 2016).

Notably, this sense of shame may arise even in the minds of individuals such as Kanda, a successful business owner, and Sato, a civil servant promoted to a high-ranking position within their department, simply because their lives differ even slightly from that of the perceived 'successful corporate worker'. The extent to which social norms are internalised and behaviours self-policed by Japanese citizens became particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, as was manifested in their strict adherence to mask-wearing and voluntary self-restraining (*jishuku*) behaviours advised by the government (Wright, 2021). It may be that this strict self-policing of deviance from the 'normal Japanese citizen' ideal is a consequence of the 'myth of homogeneity' (Oguma, 1995), which was widely accepted in post-war Japan. This myth claims that the Japanese people are culturally unique and homogenous, having shared the same blood lineage since ancient times. This notion of cultural homogeneity is firmly embraced and reproduced in a bottom-up manner by Japan's citizens (Befu, 2001; Yoshino, 1992). However, it fails to accurately capture the diversity of cultures within the Japanese archipelago and marginalises ethnic minorities, such as *Z*ainichi Koreans (Weiner, 1997). It may even have exacerbated the fear, shame, and loneliness experienced by those who do not consider themselves part of these minority groups. Therefore, it is understandable that interactions with activists who adopt a rebellious attitude may be experienced as empowering by participants in far-right actions. Similarly, an *opportunistic* display of the self as 'paupers', 'rabble' and 'irresponsible dudes' was observed among the post-Fukushima anti-nuke protesters in 2011 (Cassegård, 2013), when self-presentation and visibility as a deviant minority in relation to mainstream society eclipsed the issues surrounding environmental threat (Mōri in Cassegård, 2018). This observation is fascinating, given that these activists and supporters often identify themselves as 'ordinary Japanese' (*futsu no Nihonjin*) (Hata, 2022). This fluctuation in their self-representation may reflect a conflict between their desire to conform and be perceived as 'normal' and their pursuit of liberation from the normative constraints of Japanese society.

Our intention is not to suggest that people are attracted to far-right movements solely for the pleasure that they experience during far-right action while ignoring the significance of their political beliefs. Moreover, we do not argue that such pleasures have no correlation with the pursuit of political objectives, as Kimmel (2007) observed in relation to Scandinavian neo-Nazi youth. Rather we propose that the joys of far-right actions may be crucial in lending a sense of reality to activists'

pursuit of their goals, which may otherwise appear abstract and distant. In the Japanese context, far-right ideals may involve removing *han'nichi* (anti-Japan) *Zaincihi* Koreans, left-wing people, and mass media; restoring historical education materials that deny wartime atrocities to instil 'patriotism' in children; or adopting a stronger stance against neighbouring Asian countries on territorial disputes, all in an effort to restore a sense of something essential that the country has lost, hindering it from reaching its full potential. Although we were surprised to discover that many of the far-right participants in this study were not enthusiastic about the late former Prime Minister Abe, who was viewed as a hawkish politician, his discourses, such as *Nippon o Torimodosu* ('take back Japan') (Liberal Democratic Party, 2012), suggest that such a sense of loss was widespread among those who supported conservative/far-right views in Japan. The aforementioned analysis reveals how far-right activists derive a sense of accomplishment from pursuing their grand goal of bringing back the 'thing' that they believe has been lost. While the day-to-day actions of the far-right may not appear to be genuinely altering Japanese society, the sense that one is regaining an authentic self may nonetheless persuade the activists that their activities are making a difference.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the attraction that far-right actions hold for activists by analysing the activists' narratives about these experiences and their previous life histories. By analysing the significance of these actions for individual participants and the emotions that these actions elicit, we have revealed an underlying factor in the allure of far-right movements that could not be fully explained by any examination of mobilisational techniques alone. For individuals who feel frustrated and anxious in a culture of authenticity, various far-right actions provide them with opportunities to pursue what they consider to be their true selves and that which they might have perceived as missing from their lives. Such experiences may reinforce their motivations by convincing activists that changes are occurring, even as they pursue the grand and inherently unattainable goal of restoring that which Japan is believed to have lost. The interplay between ideology and joy creates a complementary relationship, and it is crucial that the roles of both be appreciated to understand the appeal of far-right movements. The exploration of the eudaimonic sense of joy derived from being 'authentic' will also be valuable for comprehending the allure of groups in which actions and the discovery of 'truths' in a world of 'fakes' play pivotal roles, such as Japan's recent populist Sansei-tou Party, which emerged rapidly, as well as Q-Anon, which is attested in the United States and beyond, including Japan.

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