

Kin and Peer Contexts, Ideological Transmission and the Move to Extremist Involvement

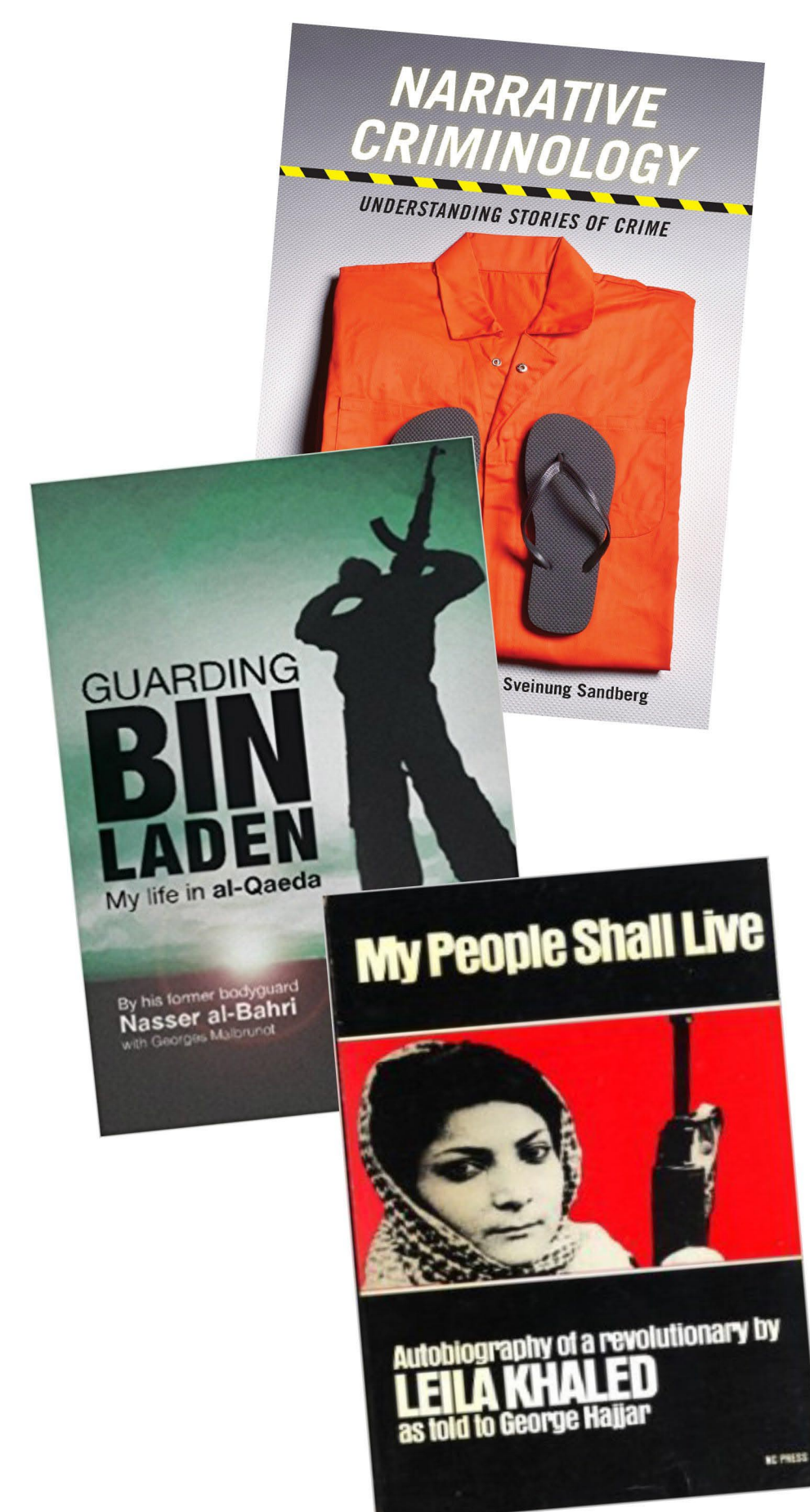
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Key research question

What are the roles and impacts of kin and peer networks in the transmission of extremist ideologies and individuals' engagement in terrorism and extremism?

Additional questions

- Which family members and peers impact upon individuals' narrative accounts of their 'terrorist careers', and what is the nature of this impact?
- What do terrorists' accounts reveal about domestic environments and friendship groups as sites of ideological transmission or even conversion to extremist positions and identities?
- What emotions and values are associated with kin and peer influence in autobiographical accounts?

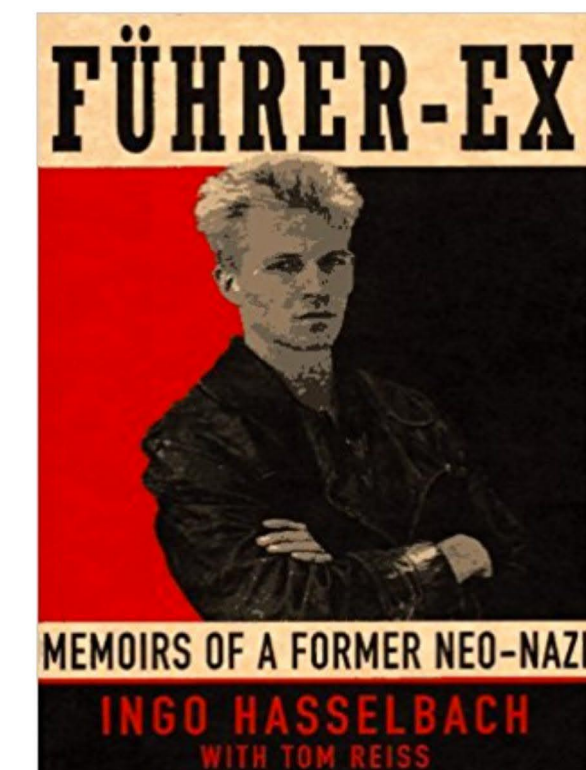
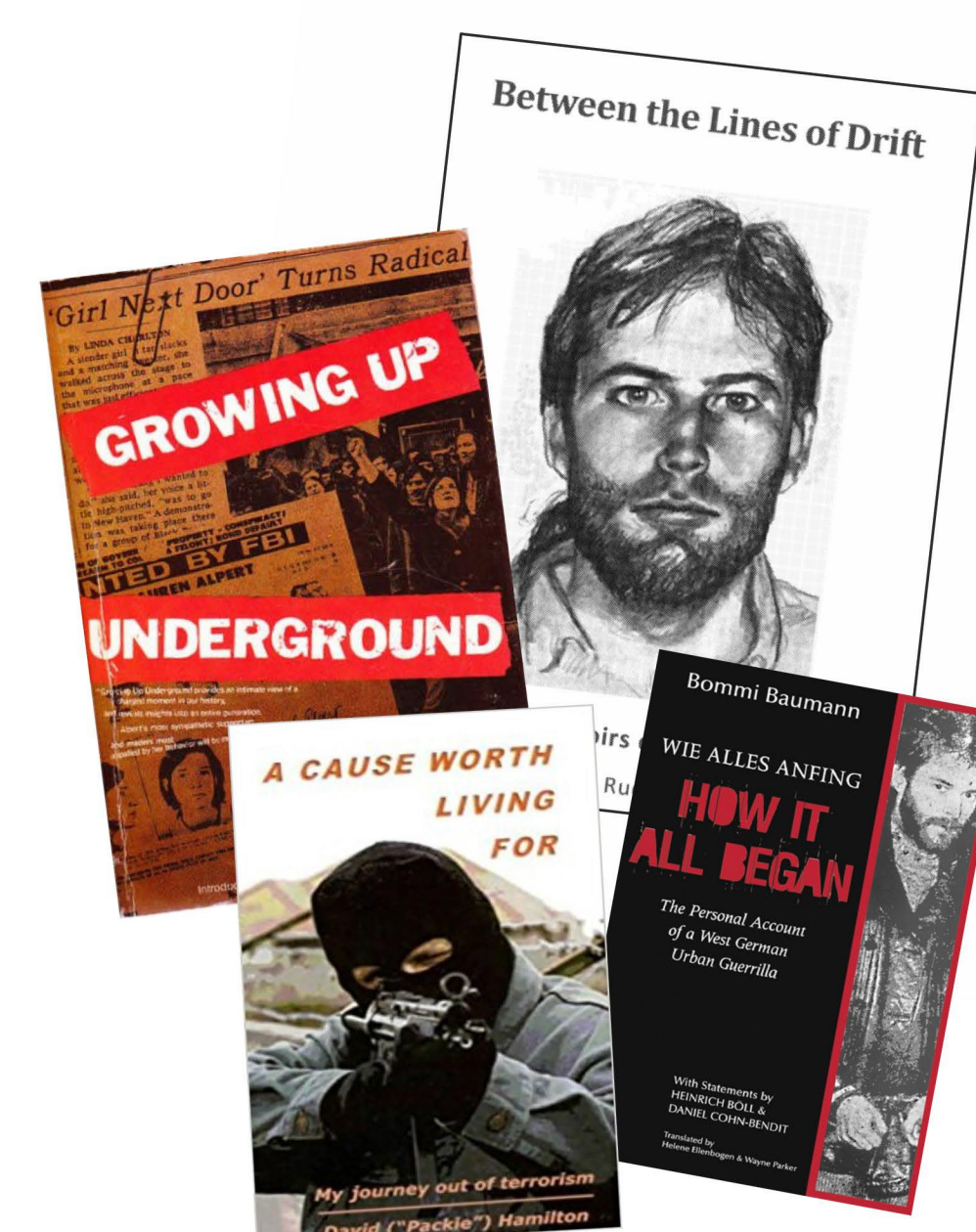


Kin and peer influences and terrorism

- Studies of violent activism, in various contexts, recognise that kin and peer networks play a significant role in the recruitment processes of terrorist groups. Analysis, however, has tended to focus on the tangible links these networks provide for individuals to interact with those already involved in terrorism.
- Much analysis fails to take into account the role of family, kin and peer relationships in shaping stories that facilitate or prevent harm. These include the stories terrorists tell about themselves, and their actions, or their 'narrative identity'.
- Drawing on narrative criminology, this thesis examines those stories that reflect, record, narrate or suggest how kin and peer relationships in some way facilitate or restrict individuals' engagement in violence.

Utilising terrorists' own accounts

- Terrorists' own accounts remain underutilised given they are often viewed as unreliable representations of their experiences.
- However, the process of narrating past events may also be seen as a shaping experience in itself, rather than something imposed upon pre-existing 'real' events. Analysis of kin and peer influences in how terrorists story their own lives is therefore not limited by concerns regarding the accuracy of the events as described.

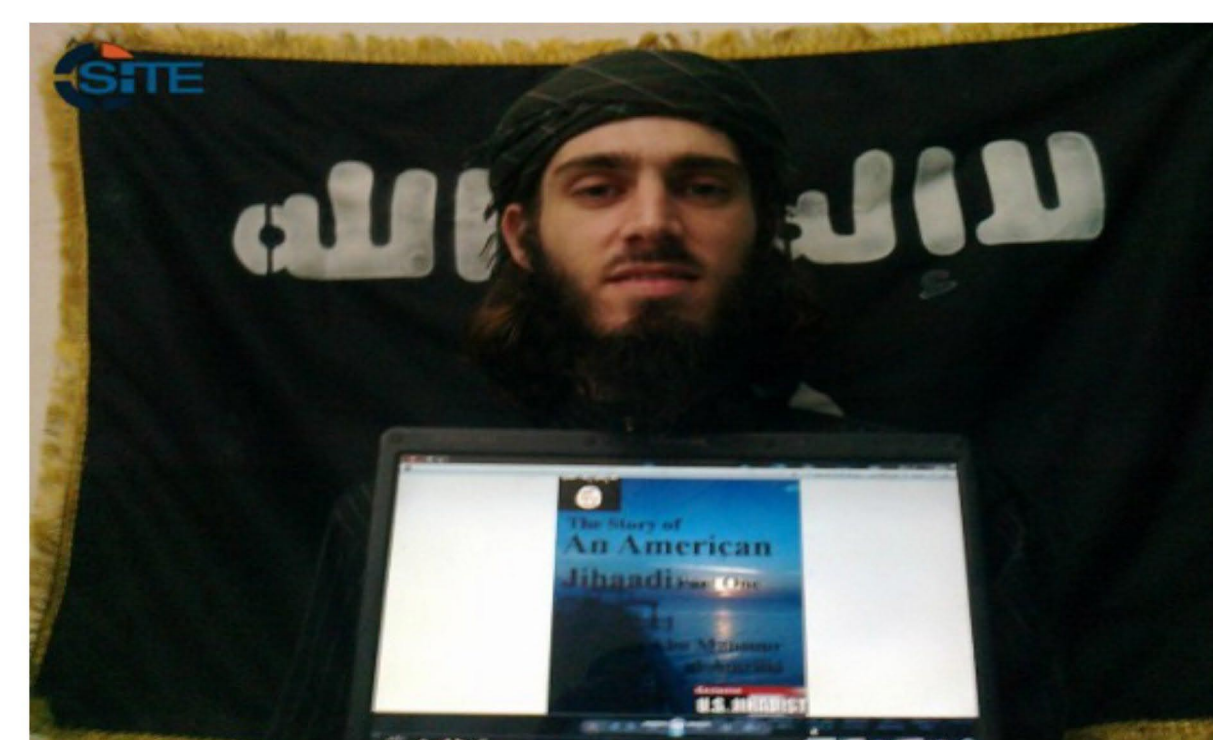


How is kinship constituted?

Western-centric, traditional anthropological approaches have advanced 'blood ties' as the fundamental basis of kinship. However, it is useful to understand kinship as being 'made' through social means as well as being 'given' by biological links. The concept of 'relatedness', or simply the ways in which people create similarity or difference between themselves and others, provides a more nuanced starting point for thinking about kinship.

Approach

Autobiographical works, interviews and court testimonies provide means to access terrorists' self-narratives. Through inductive coding it is possible to identify and interrogate recurring themes, devices and tropes in these accounts that relate to kin and peer influence.



'From that day on I considered myself a Chechen; my blood mixing with their soil earned me the right'.

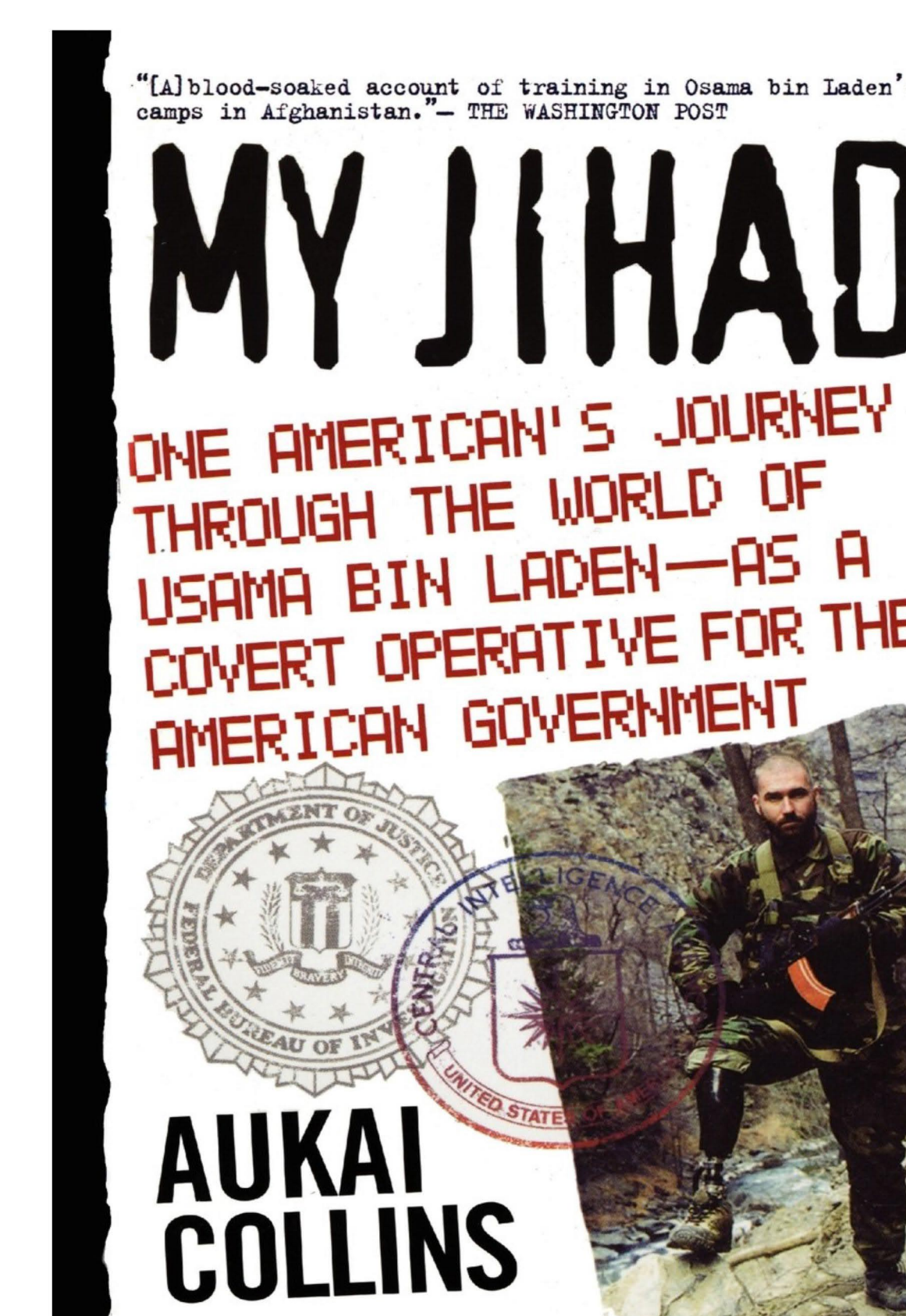
Aukai Collins after being wounded fighting in Chechnya.

Authenticity through kin struggle

A recurring trope in many terrorists' accounts, is the need to claim authenticity by locating oneself as continuing kin or family tradition of engagement in ideological struggles. The act of standing up for one's beliefs, however, is often more important than the cause itself. Some terrorists go to great lengths to establish kin links to ideological struggles that conflict with their own cause or beliefs.

'Hadn't my father been willing to go to jail for his political beliefs?'

Neo-Nazi, Ingo Hasselbach after learning his biological father was a local Communist hero.



Narrative and kinship

Group identities are often difficult to substantively define. Instead, the identity of any group, culture, people or nation can be best thought of as a recounted story, within which individuals are placed. Narrative approaches provide a means to interrogate relatedness and how identities are shaped in locally preferred ways. Significantly, these stories often imbue action with emotional and transcendent collective value.



'I believed that in our actions we gave form to the stifled rage of our ancestors'.

IRA volunteer Eamon Collins

How do terrorists conceive their own kinship?

Terrorists' accounts reveal a whole host of ways in which they construct their kinship with others, including through the shared employment of violence. Whilst 'blood' is often still afforded significance, all understandings are necessarily bounded by cultural narratives. These dictate who is recognised as a 'blood' relative and how such ties can be 'made' without biological basis. Likewise, the kinship that forms between members of terrorist groups often competes with that of individuals' 'real' families to influence their continued involvement.