### ****Extreme Beliefs****

### ****Interdisciplinary workshop: Mapping the Terrain****

December 15th and 16th, 2021  
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

HG-03C01: Agora 1

**Map

Description automatically generated**

**Conference booklet****Interdisciplinary workshop:**

**Graphical user interface, application, website

Description automatically generatedMapping the Terrain**

**International Book Symposium:**

**Extremism**

**A Philosophical Analysis**

**Graphical user interface, website

Description automatically generated**

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**Theme**

Fundamentalism, extremism, radicalism, fanaticism, terrorism, and conspiricism have something in common: they are often driven by extreme beliefs. Of course, these phenomena consist of much more than just beliefs; they comprise affections, actions, rituals, customs, symbols, and much more. Yet, extreme beliefs seem an inalienable part of them. Since such beliefs are less visible than actions, they have received less attention in academic scholarship. They raise many questions, though: when are beliefs extreme?, what makes an extreme belief ‘extreme’?, can fundamentalist and extremist beliefs be justified?, to what extent do extreme beliefs play a role in explaining phenomena like extremism and terrorism?, are there common ways that such extreme beliefs come about among these different movements?, how do extreme beliefs relate to moral and epistemic character?

This international workshop addresses these pivotal questions at the intersection of research on extremism, conspiracy theory, fundamentalism, terrorism, and radicalism. The aim, then, is to provide a rigorous conceptual map of the terrain of extreme beliefs, so that scholars in these fields have the resources to empirically and historically scrutinize these challenging societal phenomena.

**Set-up**

The workshop is entirely plenary and consists only of key-note lectures. It is preceded by a book symposium on Quassim Cassam’s monograph *Extremism: A Philosophical Analysis* (Routledge, September 2021). Anyone who attends the workshop is welcome to freely attend the book symposium.

**Questions**

What are radicalism, fundamentalism, extremism, terrorism, and fanaticism and how do they relate to one another?

Do these phenomena come in degrees?

What are the challenges in defining and mapping radicalism, fundamentalism, extremism, terrorism, and fanaticism and what are desiderata that fruitful conceptualizations would meet?

Is there a time-dimension to these phenomena?

How does belief in conspiracy theory relate to each of these?

What is the role of extreme beliefs in accounting for these phenomena and what is their relation to affections, dispositions, actions, and so on, when it comes to explaining, predicting, and preventing them?

Is extremism inherently violent?

What is the relation between extremism and epistemic and moral virtue and vice?

Are extremism and fundamentalism necessarily morally and or epistemically deficient?

Is extremism always unjust?

Can extremism, or extreme beliefs, ever be rational?

Can beliefs be extreme in ways that are not political (e.g., moral, metaphysical)?

**Extreme Beliefs: Mapping the Terrain**

*Workshop Schedule*

**Day 1: Wednesday 15th**

09.00-12.00h: Book symposium on Quassim Cassam’s *Extremism* (Routledge 2021)

09.00-09.10h Introduction to the symposium (Rik Peels)

09.10-09.30h Introduction to the book (Quassim Cassam)

09.30-09.50h Reply by Tahir Abbas

09.50-10.10h Reply by Naomi Kloosterboer

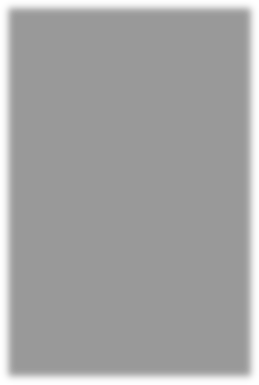
10.10-10.30h Reply by Rik Peels

10.30-10.50h Break

10.50-11.10h Initial reply by Cassam

11.10-11.30h Discussion among the respondents

11..30-12.00h Q&A with the audience



12.00-14.00h: Lunch

14.00-14.15h: Introduction to the conference (Rik Peels)

14.15-15.15h: Lecture by Tahir Abbas

15.15-15.30h: Break

15.30-16.30h: *Framing Political Extremism* by Nomi Claire Lazar

16.30-17.30h: Avatar session: informal meeting online

17.30h Drinks & conference Dinner

**Day 2: Thursday 16th**

09.45-10.45h: *Extremism, Fanaticism, Fundamentalism, Terrorism: A Conceptual Map* by Ruth Tietjen and Rik Peels

10.45-11.00h: Break

11.00-12.00h: *Extremism, Fundamentalism, And Constructionism* by Quassim Cassam

12.15-14.00h: Lunch

14.00-15.00h: *Religious Radicalization: Social Appraisals and Finding Radical Redemption In Extreme Beliefs* by Beatrice de Graaf

15.00-15.15h: Break

15.15-16.15h: *Mapping Definitions Of ‘Fundamentalism’ – A Scoping Review* by Nora Kindermann

16.15-16.30h: Break

16.30-17.30h: *The Epistemology Of Echo Chambers* by Chris Ranalli and Finlay Malcolm

17.30-17.45h: Closing thoughts (Rik Peels)

17.45h: Dinner with speakers and Extreme Beliefs team

**Speakers and abstracts**

**THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF ECHO CHAMBERS**

Finlay Malcolm & Chris Ranalli

**Abstract:** Echo chambers are widely thought to be bad for us as believers. They have been touted as promoting polarization and extreme beliefs; facilitating confirmation bias; and over-inflating self-confidence. However, recent work in epistemology suggests that this popular view is mistaken – some echo chambers might actually be good since they protect true beliefs and enable the avoidance of misleading evidence. This paper defends the view that even echo chambers that protect true beliefs are epistemically problematic. It first outlines a range of theories for what makes echo chambers epistemically good and bad, and, by appealing to cases involving indoctrination and young adult cults, shows that each of these theories is inadequate. We then defend an alternative position – the Reason-Undermining View – that echo chambers necessarily undermine our sensitivity to reasons, our capacity to consider good objections, and our ability to defend our beliefs. On this basis, we claim that even apparently good echo chambers are epistemically problematic.

**About the speakers:**

**Finlay Malcolm**

*Dr. Finlay Malcolm is a Research Fellow in philosophy at the University of Hertfordshire (UK). His primary research interests are in religious, social and political epistemology, particularly the nature and rationality of religious faith and trust, the role of knowledge in democracy, and the ethics of trusting the testimony of others. He is the author of a forthcoming monograph on the relationship between faith, belief and epistemic resilience, along with over a dozen journal articles in publications including The Monist and Pacific Philosophical Quarterly.*

**Chris Ranalli**

*Chris is a post-doctoral researcher within the ERC project ‘Extreme Beliefs – The Epistemology and Ethics of Fundamentalism’ in the Department of Philosophy and the Faculty of Religion and Theology. He is currently working on indoctrination and extremism.*

*Chris has on-going interests in political epistemology and its applications as well as the interaction between epistemology, philosophy of mind, and moral philosophy, especially the relationship between epistemic and moral normativity, the value of knowledge and truth, the value of first-hand experience, and the value of conviction and belief. He is happy to advise students in philosophy or religious studies that are interested in any of these topics.*

*Chris received his PhD in Philosophy from the University of Edinburgh, having previously studied at VCU and the University of Edinburgh as an undergraduate, and as a visiting scholar at the University of California, Berkeley. He was a post-doctoral researcher at VU Amsterdam as part of the NWO project Knowledgeable Democracy: A Social Epistemological Inquiry, and was a lecturer at the John Stuart Mill College. Previously, he was an Alexander von Humboldt Foundation fellow at the University of Cologne, and a post-doctoral research fellow at the Instituto de Investigaciones Filosóficas at UNAM in Mexico City. He is one of the organizers of the Socrates Café Amsterdam and regularly facilitates public philosophy events.*

**FRAMING POLITICAL EXTREMISM**

Nomi Claire Lazar

**Abstract:** What differentiates extreme political beliefs? Political beliefs of all kinds range left to right, radical to conservative, religious to secular, and advocate diverse methods - violent to peaceable - too. But we can usefully distinguish extreme from other politics by noting their distinctive temporal-rhetorical frame, the ‘stasis-frame.’ This distinction is useful because it is arguably the temporal frame that generates extreme consequences.

Non-extreme politics frame events as continuous through linear, cyclical or pendular time. These are process politics: they involve struggle, contestation, action, even violence. But any imagined endpoint is far off, more a guiding light than a destination. By contrast, extreme politics are a politics of imminent ultimacy. They aim to ultimately destroy some evil, to ultimately end some perceived crisis or conflict, to bring about ultimate justice and to bring about a final condition of order that won't move. That is, extreme politics aim to stop the world from spinning: they aim at imminent stasis.

Deploying the criterion of distinct temporal-rhetorical framing as one means of distinguishing extreme from non-extreme political beliefs has both intrinsic and functional value. It illuminates why extremist beliefs interest us in the first place by illuminating how they justify certain kinds of action or inaction. It is specifically with reference to the ultimate character of rupture, the stasis imminently to come - that the most extreme beliefs seem to justify the most extreme behaviour. Thus, attention to temporal framing, may open up opportunities for challenging and reframing extreme political claims, perhaps enabling more fruitful engagement and de-escalation.

**About the speaker:**

**Nomi Claire Lazar**

*Nomi Claire Lazar is Full Professor in the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs at the University of Ottawa, Canada, her hometown. Her work engages crisis from a number of angles, touching on constitutionalism, temporality, rhetoric, and legitimacy. At work on a new manuscript tentatively titled This Movement Will Self-Destruct: a political theory of apocalyptics, her previous books include States of Emergency in Liberal Democracies (Cambridge, 2009/13), and the highly acclaimed Out of Joint: Power, Crisis, and the Rhetoric of Time (Yale, 2019). Lazar has taught at the University of Chicago and Yale, and served as Associate Dean of Faculty at Yale-NUS College. In addition to her academic work, she is a frequent contributor of commentaries to news outlets and blogs in North America and Asia and serves as an elected member of the University of Ottawa's Board of Governors.*

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**EXTREMISM, FANATICISM, FUNDAMENTALISM, TERRORISM**

**A CONCEPTUAL MAP**

Rik Peels, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (the Netherlands), [h.d.peels@vu.nl](mailto:h.d.peels@vu.nl)

Ruth Rebecca Tietjen, University of Copenhagen (Denmark), [rrt@hum.ku.dk](mailto:rrt@hum.ku.dk)

John Horgan, Georgia State University (ATL, USA), [jhorgan@gsu.edu](mailto:jhorgan@gsu.edu)

J.M. Berger, Swansea University (United Kingdom), [jmberger@gmail.com](mailto:jmberger@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** We provide a conceptual map of extremism, fanaticism, fundamentalism, terrorism. This is needed because of conceptual confusion in the literature, because many conceptualizations are tacit and superficial making operationalizations difficult, and because the bodies of literature involved are often rather distinct from one another, partly due to disciplinary boundaries. We first describe each of these phenomena in detail, identifying core and stereotypical properties, such as whether they are time-bound and their relation to the use of violence. We, thus, sketch not so much how they *are* often conceptualized, but how they *should* be conceptualized. Each analysis takes into account five dimensions of the phenomenon: beliefs, affections, conative states (hopes, desires), actions and omissions, and practical affairs (rituals, symbols, etc.). We then lay out their internal and mutual relations, describing such relations as exclusion, entailment, and probable co-exemplification. Finally, we sketch the theoretical ramifications for debates about such extreme beliefs and extreme behaviour, and the practical ramifications for policy and public debate.

**About the speakers:**

**Rik Peels**

*Dr. Rik Peels is Associate Professor in Philosophy and Religion & Theology at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, the Netherlands. His primary research interests are fundamentalism, the ethics of belief, ignorance, scientism, common sense philosophy, and various issues in the philosophy of religion. His most recent monograph is Responsible Belief: A Theory in Ethics and Epistemology (Oxford University Press, 2017). He edited Moral and Social Perspectives on Ignorance (Routledge, 2017), and co-edited The Epistemic Dimensions of Ignorance (Cambridge University Press, 2016), Scientism: A Philosophical Exposition and Evaluation (Oxford University Press, 2018), and The Cambridge Companion to Common Sense Philosophy (Cambridge University Press, 2020). He published over 50 articles in such journals as Nature, Philosophical Quarterly, Philosophical Studies, Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, and The Journal of Philosophy. He also regularly publishes opinion pieces in newspapers, does radio and television interviews, and engages in public debates on several issues in ethics and the philosophy of religion.*

**Ruth Tietjen**

*Dr. Ruth Rebecca Tietjen is a postdoc at the Center for Subjectivity Research at the University of Copenhagen (DK), where she is working on antagonistic political emotions. Her research is situated at the intersection of the philosophy of emotion, the philosophy of religion, anthropology, ethics, and political philosophy. It is focused on the ethical and political ambiguity of religious zeal and the affective dimensions of fanaticism and populism. Moreover, she is working on existential phenomena such as loneliness, melancholy, mortality, and the limits of language. She feels committed to the idea of critically engaged philosophy: philosophy that addresses pressing problems of today’s world and aims at making an existential or political difference. Ruth is co-editor of The Philosophy of Fanaticism: Epistemological, Affective, and Political Dimensions (Routledge, forthcoming) and working on the monograph Philosophische Variationen über den Fanatismus. She published a monograph on fear and anxiety (Mentis, 2019) and articles in journals such as The Journal of the American Philosophical Association, Philosophia, and Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences.*

**EXTREMISM, FUNDAMENTALISM, AND CONSTRUCTIONISM**

Quassim Cassam

**Abstract:** In my book Extremism: A Philosophical Analysis, I briefly discuss the relationship between extremism and fundamentalism. My discussion does not seriously question the legitimacy of the concept of fundamentalism or the assumption that it picks out a genuine phenomenon. However, some have questioned the usefulness and general applicability of the concept. Others have suggested that ‘Islamic fundamentalism’, in particular, is an Orientalist and/ or rationalist construction which serves to generate a sense of the vast distance between the rational self and the irrational and implacable Other. I will examine these and other related ideas to see if they have any merit. I will also consider whether, if we are constructionists about fundamentalism, we should also be constructionists about extremism.

**About the speaker:**

**Quassim Cassam**

*Quassim Cassam is Professor of Philosophy at Warwick University, UK. He was previously Knightbridge Professor of Philosophy at Cambridge, Professor of Philosophy at UCL, and, for 18 years, Fellow and Tutor in Philosophy at Wadham College, Oxford. He works on various topics in epistemology, philosophy of mind, and the philosophy of terrrorism and extremism. He has published numerous books, including Self and World (Oxford 1997), The Possibility of Knowledge (Oxford 2007), Self-Knowledge for Humans (Oxford 2014), with John Campbell, Berkeley's Puzzle: What Does Experience Teach Us? (Oxford 2014), Vices of the Mind : From the Intellectual to the Political (Oxford 2019), and Conspiracy Theories (Polity 2019). His next book, Extremism: A Philosophical Analysis (Routledge) is due to be published in 2021. He has also edited a collection of essays called Self-Knowledge (Oxford 1994) and co-edited Vice Epistemology (Routledge 2021).*

*For more about Professor Cassam and his work, please go to:* [*https://www.quassimcassam.com/*](https://www.quassimcassam.com/)

**MAPPING DEFINITIONS OF ‘FUNDAMENTALISM’ – A SCOPING REVIEW**

Nora Kindermann

**Abstract:** A clear definition of the term ‘fundamentalism’ is crucial for systematic research. Yet, there is no consensus on its scope or on how to define it. In order to develop a robust definition of ‘fundamentalism,’ an overview of the many existing definitions and conceptualisations is needed. In this presentation, I provide an overview of the results of a scoping review of definitions and characterizations of ‘fundamentalism’. A systematic search in electronic databases has been conducted to identify studies published after 1995. The definitions and characterizations of the term ‘fundamentalism’ in more than seven hundred studies were analyzed. On the basis of that analysis, the so-called Domain-Dimension-Matrix was construed. Its domains are the historical, social, political, normative, metaphysical, and epistemic, whereas the dimensions are the doxastic, behavioural, affective, conative, and structural. This matrix was then used to map the components of the definitions and characterizations of ‘fundamentalism’. I will present the Domain-Dimension-Matrix, provide an overview of the most recurrent components of fundamentalism, and point out aspects that need firmer conceptualization.

**About the speaker:**

**Nora Kindermann**

*Nora is a PhD candidate within the project ‘Extreme Beliefs – The Epistemology and Ethics of Fundamentalism’. Her research focuses on developing an epistemology of fundamentalist belief of individuals. Specifically, during her research she analyses the notion of fundamentalist belief, explores the relation of fundamentalist belief and other epistemically detrimental phenomena, and investigates which positive and negative epistemic statuses fundamentalist belief can have.*

*Nora holds a BA in Humanistic Studies (2016) from the University of Humanistic Studies, and a BA in Philosophy (2017) from Utrecht University. In the course of the MA in Conflict Studies and Human Rights (2018) at Utrecht University she researched the actions of the anti-IS coalition in Syria and the perception thereof by the local population. During the MA Religion and Identity in the Modern World at the University of Amsterdam (2020) she researched the assumed role of religion in the process of radicalization.*

*Nora previously worked as a policy officer at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and was affiliated to the project ‘The Intimacies of Remote Warfare’ as an assistant research fellow.*

**RELIGIOUS RADICALIZATION:**

**SOCIAL APPRAISALS AND FINDING RADICAL REDEMPTION IN EXTREME BELIEFS**

Beatrice de Graaf

(Partly based on a research note with Kees van den Bos)

Approaching the religious dimension in radicalization processes is still a hotly debated issue. Macro-level approaches (regarding structural conditions in society) and micro-level approaches (that focus on psychological coping and personal appraisal of individual conditions) cannot adequately explain radical behavior of members of extreme religious groups. Instead, we propose that meso-level approaches best explain religious radicalization. These meso-level approaches explain how members of extreme religious groups appraise societal conditions and find redemption in radical beliefs. The role of religious communities in developing new interpretations of holy texts, and far more important, of ‘holy practices’, is paramount. But what communities fulfill this role? And how does this discussion on ‘orthopraxis’ play out? We argue for a more in-depth examination of the historical and societal contexts in which religious radicalization processes take place and narratives of radical redemption hold sway. This paper is based on interviews and accounts of jihadist detainees and (former) convicts in the Netherlands and Indonesia.

**About the speaker:**

**Beatrice de Graaf**

*Beatrice de Graaf is a historian and a security & terrorism researcher. Her research focuses on how states and societies try to maintain high levels of security and how these attempts relate to core values and institutions, such as democracy, freedom, rule of law, constitutional and responsible government. She studies the emergence of and threats to such security arrangements from the 19th century until the present, including in times where both the effectiveness and the legitimacy of these arrangements were at risk. As a strong science communicator, Beatrice appears regularly on (international) television and radio stations, and in newspapers.*

*She currently leads the “Securing Europe” (SECURE) project, funded by an ERC Consolidator Grant. She is a fellow in the ISIS Files project/Program on Extremism at the George Washington University. In Utrecht, she is also lead developer of the TerInfo project, an open source platform for primary schools, secondary schools and higher education to prepare material on sensitive issues such as terrorism, conflict and radicalization for use in the classroom. De Graaf is a member of The Netherlands Academy of Sciences (KNAW). In 2018, she was awarded the NWO Stevin Prize, one of the highest honours in Dutch Academia. As of 1 December 2019, Beatrice has been appointed Distinguished Professor in the Faculty of Humanities.*

**Other speakers:**

***Tahir Abbas***

*Tahir Abbas FRSA is an Associate Professor in Terrorism and Political Violence at the Institute of Security and Global Affairs at Leiden University in The Hague. He holds a PhD in Ethnic Relations from the University of Warwick (2001). His current research interests are the intersections of Islamophobia and radicalisation, gender and violence, inter-generational transmission of Islamism, and ethnic relations. He is the author, editor, and co-editor of 14 books (18 vols) and over 70 peer-reviewed articles, book chapters, and encyclopaedic entries.*

***Naomi Kloosterboer***

*Dr. Naomi Kloosterboer is postdoc within the project ‘Extreme Beliefs – The Epistemology and Ethics of Fundamentalism’. She will focus on the question whether those harboring fundamentalist beliefs can appeal to excuses that mitigate their responsibility. She will develop an account of how rational capacities can be undermined by social factors, such as isolation, group pressure or indoctrination, to such a degree that individual or group moral responsibility is mitigated.*

*This project furthers Naomi’s interests in human rational capacities, (mental) agency, and responsibility. In 2019, Naomi finished her dissertation Attitude and Commitment: A Study of Transparent Self-Knowledge. She has published several articles in academic journals and engaged in public discussions via blog posts, public debates, and Socratic conversations. She has taught courses on philosophy of action, ethics, medical ethics, moral psychology, political and social philosophy and philosophy of science.*

# Information on Avatar

We have planned an Avatar session on Wednesday 15th December to be able to meet online informally.

Use the following link to enter our Space on Avatar:  
[https://spatial.chat/s/extremebeliefs](https://u15680805.ct.sendgrid.net/ls/click?upn=fkNx49oS-2B-2BGByESre0bxk6NEmiLzOnctTrb-2FENx1fj4jdPINpEWqgueAuUQbl5MwVitz_oTzwx574XC-2BNGMn-2FB71JAQVueeXPc2NnoUTOcofOacyrnC-2BR8XC9m16zX-2FDLzsvT1vRRLl9X7FJ-2Fa-2BxGfRhUKI12Fj2O-2F-2FPWOqbeh6rcnjcPskLaJkdTZW97N5nDybTpYe3J38gzwtrUbvopWlwTzxtrN9-2BjkeMQNDdd4xg5zJ6CKWfhZjrzbOWWCPzftdaNlyiPKvU9ERx6YyabMBZ5dGvaIVEsx-2B66fLqYG-2BlxdnzjvLheSiIwrN2CA6MYErb4QHRq6d-2BpYYullq7P2x8Um8p8VKsoTR7-2FMmXO3n-2F9frNC3O7Yh6Dyf-2FVepj2Mn6tZXCMZTHKjiA0Cjg4o-2FgK-2Fmw-3D-3D)

**Generated password for this space:**

LMSkQ

# Contact details & addresses

### Conference Venue

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam  
Room HG-03C01 (Agora foyer 1)

Main Building, 3rd floor  
De Boelelaan 1105  
1081 HV Amsterdam  
  
  
**Evening program of December 15th**

* **Dinner at restaurant De Veranda**

*From 18:00 hrs*

Amstelveenseweg 764

1081 JK Amsterdam

<https://deveranda.nl/>

# Contact details organizing committee

**Rik Peels**

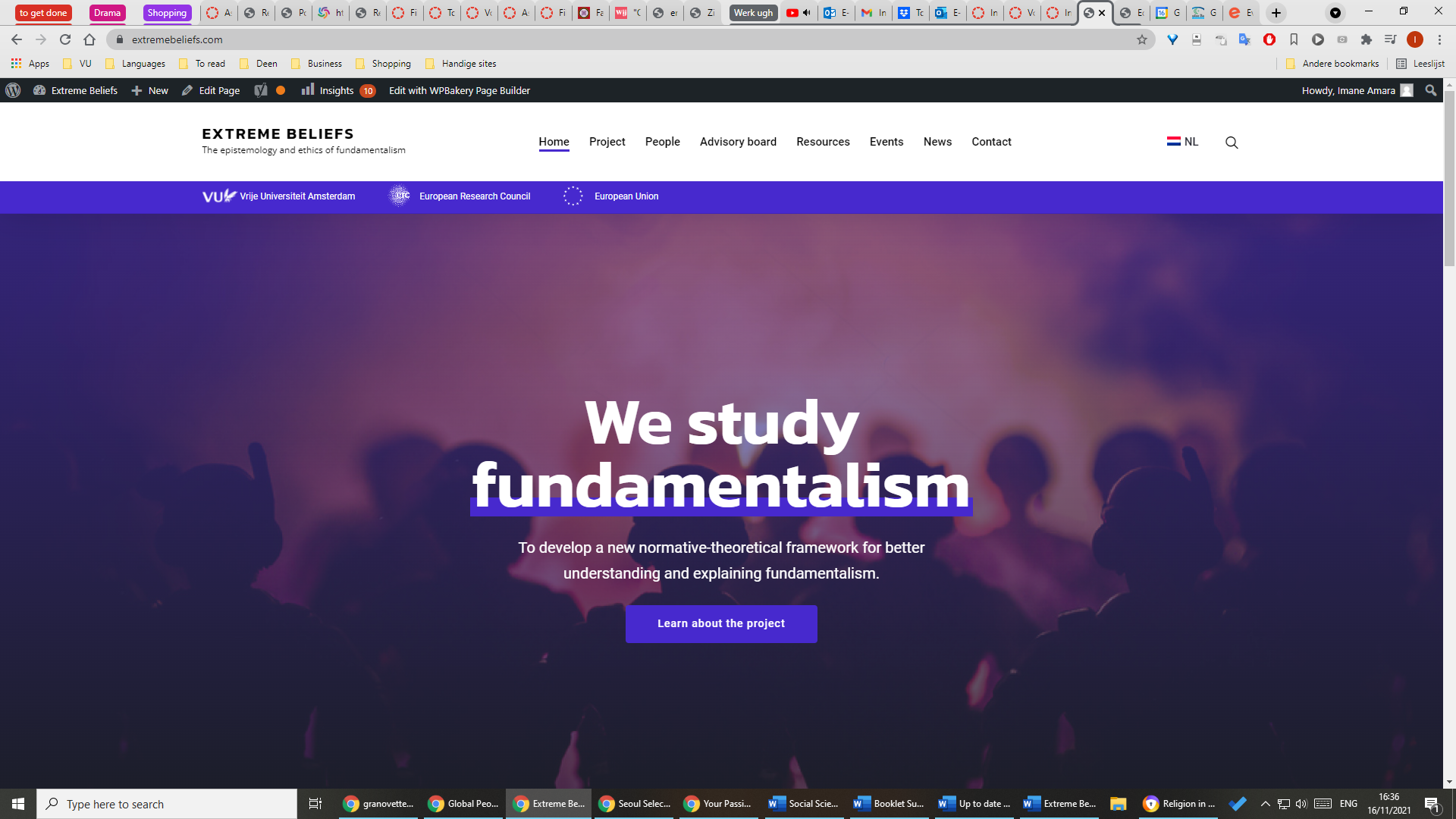
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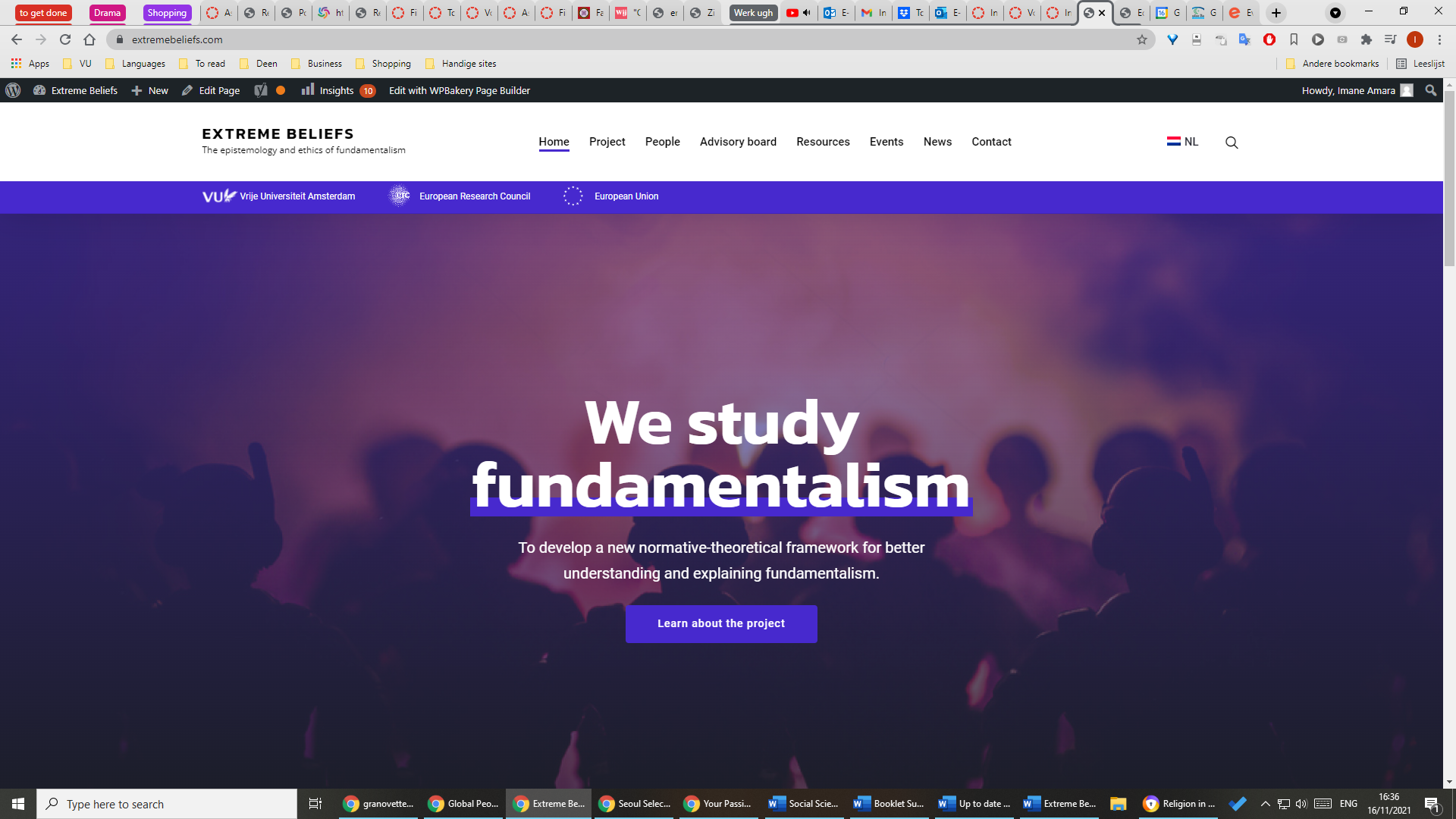
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<http://www.extremebeliefs.com>





# Covid-19 regulations

Find information on Dutch measures against COVID-19 on this website: <https://www.government.nl/topics/coronavirus-covid-19/tackling-new-coronavirus-in-the-netherlands>

* We will be wearing masks inside the building as we walk, not as we sit down.
* We will keep 1,5 meters distance from one another.
* There will be a separate room booked for us in the restaurant.
* There are just the speakers and team members in the conference room (all vaccinated), everyone else can attend online.

We encourage our speakers and team members to test themselves at the beginning of each day, just to make sure.