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On my honour as a student of the Diplomatische Akademie Wien, I submit this work in good faith and pledge that I have neither given nor received unauthorized assistance on it.



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Table of Contents

Abstract	4
Introduction	5
Chapter I: The origins of Right-Wing Politics and Terrorism	9
Chapter II: The Case Studies.....	18
Chapter III: Themes in Recent Right-Wing Terrorist Attacks	22
Chapter VI: From Lone Wolves to Lone Actors.....	33
Chapter V: Legal Considerations and Policy Recommendations	38
Conclusion.....	43
Acknowledgement.....	45
Bibliography.....	46

Abstract:

Since the attacks by Anders Breivik in Norway in 2011, right-wing terrorism has been on the rise globally. While the media has commonly portrayed these terrorists as lone wolves or single gunmen, this thesis contends that recent attacks are interconnected and indeed part of the same phenomenon: a new wave of right-wing terrorism. In developing its argument, the thesis highlights the limits of current terrorism research, which cannot account for many of the particularities this new type of terrorism entails. The traditional understanding of terrorism has been shaped by what the author considers to be an 'Islamist' paradigm; the actions of organisations like al-Qaeda and the Islamic State have shaped the understanding of what terrorist attacks look like and thus how terrorists operate. However, recent right-wing attacks show a different pattern, which nonetheless has to be classified as terrorism. To develop its argument, the thesis will draw on nine case studies of recent right-wing attacks, highlighting connections and similarities ranging from the nature of the attacks to the compilation of manifestos and the shared ideological beliefs these entail. It will conclude by suggesting the use of the term "lone-actor" terrorism to classify this new type of terrorism, as well as offering certain policy options to address this growing threat.

Diese Masterarbeit befasst sich mit der gegenwärtigen Welle des neuen Rechtsterrorismus, beginnend mit dem Anschlag von Anders Behring Breivik in Norwegen aus dem Jahr 2011. Obwohl in den Medien oft anders dargestellt, handelt es sich bei diesen Anschlägen um ein kohärentes Phänomen. Um dieses Argument zu untermauern, behandelt die Arbeit neun Fallstudien rechtsterroristischer Anschläge aus den Jahren 2011 bis 2020. Diese Studien zeigen mehrere Gemeinsamkeiten auf, die dafürsprechen, dass es sich hier nicht um Einzelfälle, sondern vielmehr um ein globales Netz an terroristischen Straftaten handelt, die alle von einer gemeinsamen Energie ausgehen. Dementsprechend werden etablierte Annahmen aus der Terrorismusforschung in Frage gestellt und kritisiert. Das Resultat dieses Prozesses ist der Vorschlag, diese Attentäter nicht mehr als sogenannte „lone wolves“ zu bezeichnen, sondern stattdessen die Definition „lone actor“ zu verwenden. Der Term „lone actor“ bezieht sich auf den eigentlichen Anschlag, der von einem Einzeltäter ausgeführt wird, ermöglicht es aber zugleich, auf die verschiedenen Verbindungen, sowie den Umstand, dass der Prozess der Radikalisierung und Planung immer ein sozialer ist, hinzuweisen.

A New Axis? Right-Wing Terrorism in an Ever-Closer World

Introduction

At approximately 22:00 on February 19th, 2020, a lone gunman opened fire outside a shisha bar in the centre of Hanau, a town in the German state of Hesse. The assailant, a 43-year-old German, killed four people before driving to his next target, a Kiosk, where he shot and killed another five people. Before the police could arrest the attacker, he executed his mother and himself. The police investigation made evident that the victims had specifically been targeted due to their ethnicity, which was underlined by racist and xenophobic remarks found in the manifesto the attacker left behind. The attack of Hanau is the latest in a recent and global streak of terrorist attacks fuelled by a far-right ideology. However, as most of these recent right-wing terrorist attacks were carried out by perpetrators who were not part of an institutionalised terrorist organisation, they were either not regarded as terrorist attacks at all or classified as “lone-wolf” attacks. Lone-wolf attacks are most commonly defined as acts of terrorism carried out by an individual who was not part of any ideological group and who carried out the attack without the assistance of others.¹ This thesis seeks to challenge the perception that recent right-wing terrorist attacks were carried out by isolated “lone-wolfs” but rather are part of the same phenomenon and as such are linked on several levels. To do this, it will investigate the degree to which a collection of nine right-wing attacks from 2011 to 2020 are interconnected. This interconnectedness may not follow the traditional, institutionalised pattern to which we have become accustomed, including as a result of the extensive media attention that Islamic terrorism receives compared to other types of terrorism.² The practice of viewing this category of terrorist acts as isolated crimes is based on a fundamentally flawed understanding of how radical ideas are connected and spread globally.

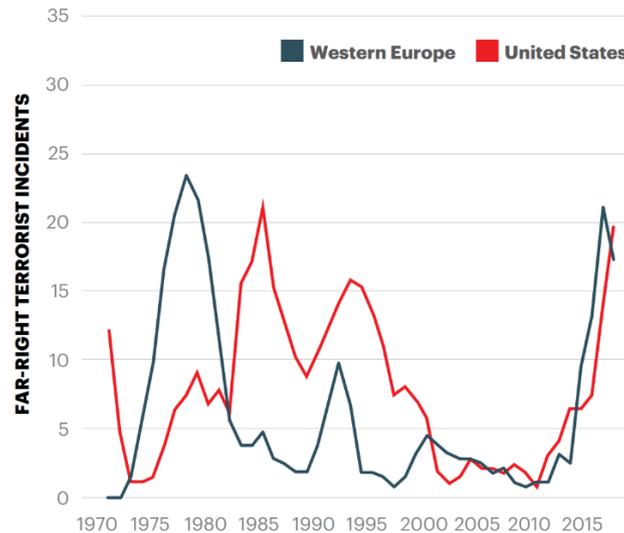
Since the attacks by Anders Behring Breivik in Norway in 2011, right-wing terrorism has been on the rise globally. To put this trend into numerical terms: between 2002 and 2010, there have been 6 deaths caused by right-wing terrorism in Europe and North America, whereas 152 people were killed from 2011 to 2017.³ Furthermore, as recent attacks have shown, this

¹ Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Nathaniel Barr, *The Myth of Lone-Wolf Terrorism*, Foreign Affairs, 26.06.2016.

² Erin M. Kearns et al., *Why Do Some Terrorist Attacks Receive More Media Attention Than Others?*, Justice Quarterly, 22 January 2019, p. 10.

³ Global Terrorism Index 2018, p. 47.

development continues to escalate. Another insight to be gained from statistical analysis is the fact that right-wing terrorist attacks in Western Europe and the United States follow similar trends, and have done so since the 1980s. The graph below illustrates this point, showing the number of far-right attacks in Western Europe and the US since 1970.⁴



Source: START GTD. IEP Calculations

These findings also support David C. Rapoport's theorisation, which describes terrorism as occurring in waves. As Rapoport contends, a wave is 'a cycle of activity in a given time period with expansion and contraction phases'.⁵ Those activities occur in multiple countries, driven by 'a common, predominant energy shaping the relationship of participating groups'.⁶ According to Rapoport, the world has seen four such waves of terrorism: the 'anarchist wave' starting in the late 19th century and ending around 1920, the 'anti-colonial' wave from the 1920s until 1960, the 'new left wave' of the 1960s, and finally the 'religious wave' which commenced with the Iranian Revolution of 1979.⁷ Using Rapoport's concept of waves, I propose to classify the recent streak of right-wing attacks as a new wave of terrorism, inspired by a common energy. As Rapoport has noted, nationalism is a feature of every wave; however, this new wave seems to be driven by what could be termed an ethnonationalist or nativist energy - although I am not inclined to argue that this feature would warrant naming the wave after it. What has to be said, however, is that this wave does not fit all the criteria set out by Rapoport. Notably, Rapoport argues that waves are composed of terrorist organisations, whose lifecycles are shorter than that of their respective wave. While it is historically accurate to say that terrorist action has typically

⁴ Global Terrorism Index 2019, p. 50.

⁵ David C. Rapoport, *The four waves of modern terror: International dimensions and consequences*, p. 3.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 3.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 2.

been perpetrated by organisations, a perception which the last wave, i.e. religious terrorism solidified, this understanding is not applicable to the attacks investigated in this thesis.

Thomas Kuhn, who conceived the concept of paradigms, has contended that what a person sees ‘depends both upon what he looks at and also upon what his previous visual-conceptual experience has taught him to see’.⁸ Consequently, as Rapoport has rightfully pointed out, terrorism has historically been carried out by organisational units. Therefore, there was - and to a certain degree still is - a consensus that organisational structure is a distinctive feature of all waves of terrorism. This view, I contend, was solidified by the attacks of September 11, 2001, which profoundly shaped the paradigmatic understanding of how terrorists operate and therefore what defines a terrorist. The attacks by al-Qaeda led to what I will refer to as the Islamist paradigm in the discourse on terrorism. In part, the solidification of this paradigmatic understanding of terrorism can be attributed to the fact that this new wave of terrorism, although unique in scale and reach, fits within previously conceived notions of organisational structures. On the other hand, it can also be explained by the extensive media coverage Islamic terrorism has received. On average, attacks carried out by a Muslim assailant receive 357% more media attention than other terrorist attacks.⁹ This argument can even be extended to movies and other forms of entertainment in which this “orientalising” of terrorism can also be traced, especially those released after 2001. This paradigmatic view helps to explain why right-wing terrorism has, at least until very recently, not featured prominently in debates on terrorism despite it being on the rise. The fact that the recent uptick in right-wing terrorist attacks has been driven by seemingly disconnected individuals rather than organizations leads many to perceive that each attack represents an isolated event. However, the failure to recognize linkages between recent “lone-wolf” incidents could prove to be not only misguided but dangerous, which is why this thesis seeks to explain why these trends should be understood as a connected wave of attacks.

The first chapter of this thesis will trace the history of right-wing terrorism and extremism. For this, a range of theoretical literature will be consulted, in order to develop an explanatory model of the underlying current of this wave. The second chapter will introduce the nine case studies chosen for this investigation. These cases were selected in such a way as to create a representative sample of terrorist attacks, including cases from 2011 to 2020, and from all three continents where right-wing terrorist attacks occurred. These are the 2011

⁸ Thomas H. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, p. 113.

⁹ Erin M. Kearns et al., *Why Do Some Terrorist Attacks Receive More Media Attention Than Others?*, Justice Quarterly, 22 January 2019, p. 10.

Norway attacks, the 2016 murder of British MP Jo Cox, the 2018 Pittsburgh synagogue shooting, the 2019 Christchurch mosque shootings, Poway synagogue shooting, murder of Walter Lübcke, El Paso shooting and Halle synagogue shooting, as well as the 2020 Hanau shooting. Based on these case studies, the third chapter will investigate the connections we can see between these attacks, developing the main argument of this thesis while also paying attention to cases that may not fit into this argumentative framework. These connections range from direct contact between terrorists to shared ideological beliefs, present in the different manifestos published by the terrorists as well as in their activity on the internet. The ideological underpinnings will then be contextualised and investigated, in order to highlight the common language used by terrorists and other political actors. Furthermore, the chapter will explain why these assailants did not have to depend on the traditional organisational framework by highlighting the role of the internet in their radicalisation and in the planning of their terrorist plots. The fourth chapter will analyse the previous findings by contrasting them with different definitions of lone-wolf terrorism, discussing which descriptive label is best suited to define the cases at hand. It will conclude by suggesting the adaptation of the term “lone-actor terrorism” as it more accurately captures the solitary nature of the attacks while still allowing for the dynamic social process of radicalisation as well as the inspiring effect an attack can have on others. Finally, the last chapter will discuss several policy options that arise from this thesis as well as those approaches which seem less promising in light of the presented evidence. In particular, the chapter will deal with the legal framework within which counterterrorism is being conducted, highlighting potential shortcomings and possible improvements. Furthermore, it will investigate proposals, such as the prohibition of political movements or organisations and the possible implications this could have, both legally and politically.

Chapter I

The Origins of Right-Wing Politics and Terrorism

The term “right-wing” has long entered our political vocabulary. Like the word terrorism, the expression dates back to the aftermath of the French Revolution. Both terms are also ambiguous and problematic, in part because they are often used to discredit a political adversary. This chapter will trace the historical development of right-wing politics from the French Revolution to its contemporary form in order to properly define the phenomenon under investigation. In doing so, it will highlight the forces that lead people to adopt extremist views. Later, the focus will narrow to right-wing terrorism, defining what classifies as such and explaining the causes of this form of violence. Finally, a working definition of terrorism will be developed, in order to equip the reader with all the theoretical tools needed for the following investigation.

The original meaning of right-wing politics dates back to the *Assemblée nationale constituante*, the effective government of France following the storming of the Bastille. When the Assembly first convened, the aristocrats, who supported the *Ancien Régime* and rejected the revolution completely, were seated farthest to the right of the president.¹⁰ However, this ‘far-right’ of French revolutionary politics was markedly different from our current understanding of the term. It consisted of highly religious, anti-revolutionary traditionalists, who primarily belonged to the former nobility.¹¹ Nonetheless, their ideas were soon supplemented by conspiracy theories suggesting that the revolution was instigated by the freemasons, the “Illuminati”, or the Jews.¹² Interestingly, one of the most prominent thinkers of this new political right, Abbé Augustin Barruel, coined a new term to discredit his political adversaries: nationalism. Together with other elements originally attributed to the political left like populism and anti-Semitism, nationalism found its way into the repertoire of the right during the 19th century. One reason for this is the fact that right-wing movements have typically appeared in reaction to developments on the political left. For example, the word Socialism was adopted by right-wing politicians simply because it attracted a popular following on the left. By being claimed by the right, socialism came to be understood as national and ethnic unity in opposition to the class struggle propagated by left-wing actors.¹³ Likewise, fascism, at least in part, was an

¹⁰ Jean-Yves Camus, Nicolas Lebourg, *Far-Right Politics in Europe*, p. 2.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 2 ff.

¹² *Ibid*, p. 4.

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 8.

‘acculturation by the right of the lessons of the October Revolution’.¹⁴ Finally, when Marx and Engels proclaimed that ‘the working men have no country’, nationalism became monopolised by the political right.¹⁵ Thus, right-wing politics have evolved over the course of more than two centuries but have always included a reactionary element.

Nationalism is the core concept of most modern right-wing organisations and groups. As such, using Terence Ball’s definition, it is ‘both central to, and constitutive of, a particular ideology and therefore of the ideological community to which it gives inspiration and identity’.¹⁶ The work of Ernest Gellner and Eric Hobsbawm has redefined nationalism as a political doctrine, rather than an attitude.¹⁷ The fundamental goal of this doctrine is ‘to achieve a monocultural state’ made up of a homogenous population.¹⁸ Importantly, nationalism always appears as a combination of ethnic and state nationalism, which includes civic and ethnic elements. Furthermore, as Benedict Anderson contends, ‘nationalism has to be understood by aligning it not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with the large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which – as well as against which – it came into being’, explaining its often-reactionary nature.¹⁹ However, the term nationalism does not allow for a distinction between liberal and radical interpretations of the concept, which is why some scholars like Cas Mudde have suggested using the term “nativist” when describing the far-right. Nativism is defined as an ideology, ‘which holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group (“the nation”) and that nonnative elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the homogenous nation-state’.²⁰ Notably, since the nation has to be understood as an “imagined community”, the basis for its definition can range from religion to ethnicity or race.²¹ However, as Mudde contends, nativism always contains a cultural element.²² Consequently, all right-wing movements share a nationalistic element, which on the far-right takes the more radical form of nativism. Additionally, the far-right can be divided into radical actors, who use conventional democratic means, and extremists, who resort to violence

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 8.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 10.

¹⁶ Terence Ball, *From 'core' to 'sore' concepts: Ideological innovation and conceptual change*, *Journal of Political Ideologies*; Oct 1999; 4, p. 391 ff.

¹⁷ Cas Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*, p. 16.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 16.

¹⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 12.

²⁰ Cas Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*, p. 19.

²¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 12 ff.

²² Cas Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*, p. 19.

to generate revolutionary change.²³ The terrorists investigated in this paper thus all fall into the extremist category of the far-right, adhering to a nativist ideology.

One of the first thinkers to investigate the origins of right-wing extremism after the Second World War was Theodor Adorno. Writing in the 1960s, Adorno traced several distinctive characteristics of right-wing radicalism that remain relevant today. For example, Adorno observed that increasing migration flows contribute to the fear of losing one's national identity as well as the fact that real demographic developments were used to create an ideology of lies and conspiracy theories. He also pointed out the important role of propaganda which indeed becomes the very substance of politics of right-wing movements.²⁴ This point is especially significant in our case, as terrorism by its very nature seeks to convey a certain message and thus can also be understood as the most violent, extreme form of propaganda. The most fundamental aspect of Adorno's thought, however, is his claim that the societal preconditions, which led to the rise of the National Socialists, still existed in Germany more than twenty years after the end of the war.²⁵ These preconditions are primarily concerned with the concentration of capital in the hands of a small elite and the permanent threat of loss of social status for the middle-class.²⁶ This process is accelerated by the progress of technology, which renders the work of many labourers superfluous, resulting in what Adorno calls the 'anticipation of disaster', a feeling of an imminent social catastrophe, which is not only expected to occur but indeed anxiously anticipated. The hope for disaster is directly connected to the expectation of social decline, leading those concerned to do away with the entire system in an apocalyptic scenario rather than forfeit their "rightful" place within society.²⁷

The focus on socio-economic conditions in explaining the rise of violent extremism is also present in Ted Robert Gurr's concept of "relative deprivation". Gurr defines relative deprivation as a discrepancy between value expectations and value capabilities and identifies them as the main source of political violence.²⁸ A person feels relatively deprived if they believe that society does not provide them with the goods or opportunities to which they feel entitled. It seems logical to assume that this mechanism would only be amplified if, as Adorno suggests,

²³ Jacob Aasland Ravndal, *Explaining right-wing terrorism and violence in Western Europe: Grievances, opportunities and polarisation*, p. 846.

²⁴ Theodor W. Adorno, *Aspekte des neuen Rechtsradikalismus*, p. 24.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 9.

²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 10.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 20.

²⁸ Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*, p. 24.

a real loss in value capabilities occurs, such as a decline in social status or employment prospects. Importantly, Gurr observes that value expectations are themselves social constructs and thus have to be understood in the societal context within which they exist. In the case of right-wing extremism, value expectations are often attached to ethnicity and race, which allow feelings of relative deprivation to easily be transformed into racism and xenophobia. Recent demographical data underlines this phenomenon and highlights the increasing multinational character of Western societies. Take for example Germany, where more than 11 million foreigners currently live with a residence permit and one in four citizens has a migration background.²⁹ Adorno and Gurr show how these real demographical trends, together with other socio-economic developments lead to the rise of political violence, which is often directed towards perceived foreigners. Gurr contends that perceived deprivation translates into violence through the frustration-aggression relationship, which is a psychological mechanism present in every human mind. Consequently, though frustration might not necessarily lead to any violent action at all, if sufficiently prolonged or combined with other personal grievances, it may well lead to aggressive behaviour.³⁰ Importantly, while the frustration-aggression mechanism is rooted within human nature, ‘the beliefs and symbols that determine the timing, forms, and objects of violence are learned’.³¹ This issue will be revisited later, when discussing the influence the attacks investigated in this thesis had on one another. For now, it is sufficient to underline that ideologies, regardless of their content, allow people to mould their frustrations into distinctive forms of violence.

The ideology chosen by a frustrated individual often correlates with their identity; more specifically, with the aspect of their identity which they perceive to be under pressure. As Amin Maalouf contends, an identity is comprised of a unique set of countless factors such as allegiance to a religious tradition, a profession, an institution, a particular social milieu, nationality, gender or sexual orientation.³² The relevance of these factors may vary over time: certain factors will remain present more consistently while others may vanish or be added throughout the course of one’s life.³³ Importantly, Maalouf has contended that whenever a certain aspect of an individual’s identity is threatened, it is this factor with which they will

²⁹ Statistisches Bundesamt, https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Gesellschaft-Umwelt/Bevoelkerung/Migration-Integration/_inhalt.html.

³⁰ Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*, p. 36, ff.

³¹ *Ibid*, p. 36.

³² Amin Maalouf, *In the Name of Identity: Violence and the Need to Belong*, p. 10.

³³ *Ibid*, p. 11.

primarily identify.³⁴ Thus, like the nation, which defines itself in opposition to others, the individual too defines his or her identity in a dynamic process and in response to societal forces. In Europe, the most common 'other' in this dichotomy has been the Jewish population, which, for centuries, has been the target of stigmatisation, persecution and violence. It is, therefore, unfortunately unsurprising that anti-Semitism remains an important ideological force on the far-right.

As Walter Laqueur has pointed out, the scientific study of anti-Semitism is a relatively new discipline, and thus we lack historical accounts that would help to trace its origins. Consequently, there is an ongoing academic debate on whether anti-Semitism existed before or came into being with the rise of Christianity, or whether it might only have commenced at the end of the Middle Ages. As Hannah Arendt contends, modern anti-Semitism is not a secularised form of medieval superstitions, but rather came into being with the rise of nation-states throughout Europe.³⁵ Thus, it had political rather than economic causes as the case of post-Napoleonic Prussia illustrates. In this first instance of modern anti-Semitism, Jews were targeted by the shrinking aristocracy and portrayed as enjoying special privileges.³⁶ They were blamed for the social tensions that arose with the collapse of feudal society and the advent of modernity, signified by the rise of nation-states. While agreeing with Arendt's theorisation of the emergence of modern anti-Semitism, Laqueur cautions against overemphasising the break between the older, religion-centred hatred of Jews and its modern, racial form. Arendt's treatment thus accurately depicts the situation in Germany and France, but it might not be as applicable to anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe or the Muslim world, where it remains primarily religiously motivated. Nonetheless, Arendt's work importantly underlines the ideological power anti-Semitism in combination with nativism possesses, as it provided the foundation for people to give in to Terror - in her case the Terror of totalitarianism. Susanne Urban has pointed out that anti-Semitism has become more multifaceted in the 21st century, especially in Europe. In this context, anti-Semitic ideas are often propagated not only by neo-Nazis, but also by left-wing groups which often pair them with anti-imperialist, anti-globalisation and anti-Zionist attitudes.³⁷ The revival of anti-Semitic ideas correlates with a spike in anti-Semitic violence, as recent numbers illustrate. From 2014 to 2018, violent anti-Semitic attacks increased by more

³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 13.

³⁵ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 14

³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 31.

³⁷ Susanne Urban, *Anti-Semitism in Germany Today: Its Roots and Tendencies*, *Jewish Political Studies Review*, Vol. 16, No. 3/4, "Emerging Anti-Semitic Themes"(Fall 2004), p. 119.

than 40% in the United States.³⁸ A similar trend can be detected in Europe, where Germany has seen a 60% increase, France a 74% rise and the United Kingdom has reported a record high for the third consecutive year in 2019.³⁹

After 2015, anti-Semitism has been increasingly supplemented with an anti-Muslim rhetoric, which is founded in the recent demographic developments in Western Europe and the United States. Applying Maalouf's theory, an influx of migrants can be seen as creating societal pressures on an identity level. On the one hand, migrants are often faced with significant resentment, reinforcing their perception of themselves as foreigners, Turks, Syrians, Muslims and so on. On the other hand, particularly among the political right, some perceive the influx of new residents and citizens as threatening not only to their social status, but also their culture, their language and many other aspects of their identity. If this pressure is especially high, it can lead to what Maalouf calls an "identity crisis", which often translates into violent opposition. It seems logical to assume that these two trends are mutually reinforcing in a vicious cycle of hate, which often turns violent. It is at this point important to note that an investigation of the systemic forces that lead to an increase in far-right violence should not be seen as excusing the actions of individuals. The fact that far-right politics can often be understood as reactionary does not mean they are morally acceptable or justified. It only means that we can scientifically trace the aspects which fuel far-right hatred and violence and thus try and understand the underlying conditions which play into the rise of right-wing terrorism. The reactionist nature also underlines an aspect highlighted by Adorno, namely the severe lack of any coherent ideological theory amongst the far-right. Even under Nazism, the focus of politics was on power and the unconditional rule of the party; ideological convictions were only secondary, which gave the movement the flexibility to instrumentalise them in whatever way they saw fit in order to achieve their primary objective. In this way, right-wing movements can compensate their lack of a real ideology by reacting to societal issues and monopolising the political discourse on topics such as migration or national identity.

The reactionary dynamic of far-right violence has also been linked to the latest wave of Islamic terrorism by several scholars including Ryan Shaffer, who contends that the attacks of September 11 as well as the 2005 attacks on public transport in London, carried out by al-

³⁸ Nigel Chiwaya, *It's not just New York: Anti-Jewish attacks are part of a wave of 'more violent' hate crimes* *Anti-Semitic violence is growing across the country, experts say*, NBC News, 03.01.2020.

³⁹ Jon Henley, *Antisemitism rising sharply across Europe, latest figures show*, The Guardian, 15.02.2019; Harriet Sherwood, *Antisemitic incidents in UK at record high for third year in a row*, The Guardian, 07.02.2019.

Qaeda, marked an important turning point. Following these attacks, the far-right changed its simple anti-immigration rhetoric to a distinctively Islamophobic, anti-Muslim one.⁴⁰ This trend of “counter-jihad” - which, as the name suggests, is clearly a reactionary movement - is traceable in many of the attacks discussed in this study, most notably in those which specifically targeted immigrants from Muslim majority countries or mosques. However, this treatment of identity and “counter-jihad” should not lead to a monocausal explanation of right-wing terrorism as the result of a “clash of civilisations”. Rather, they are but two of a plurality of factors that led to the global rise of right-wing terrorism. This plurality has also been underlined by Jacob Aasland Ravndal who, writing in 2015, has pointed out several factors beneficial to the rise of right-wing terrorism and violence, such as the recent migration crisis, a prolonged financial crisis, rising Islamist terrorism and growing support for radical right parties.⁴¹ Ravndal’s study is based on a dataset of 578 cases of violence in Western Europe, in which the targets were selected based on far-right beliefs. The data shows two “causal recipes” for far-right violence. The first is applicable to Northern European countries that have high levels of ethnic diversity or immigration, low electoral support for right-wing parties and an extensive repression or stigmatisation of right-wing actors.⁴² These three causal factors can explain the rise of right-wing extremist violence in Germany, the United Kingdom and Sweden. The second ‘causal recipe’ applies to Southern European states like Spain, Italy and Greece, where a combination of socio-economic hardship and strong authoritarian legacies create favourable conditions for extremist forces on both sides of the political spectrum. This strong polarisation between the far-left and the far-right leads to a violent spiral of reciprocal attacks, explaining why the most common targets of far-right violence in these countries are far-left actors.⁴³ Although right-wing parties have recently gained significant electoral support in Northern Europe, Ravndal’s study importantly highlights the fact that both too much lenience and too much repression of far-right actors lead to greater support and an increase in violence.⁴⁴

Importantly, Ravndal’s study focuses on all forms of violence, while the investigation at hand is strictly limited to terrorism. Consequently, it is important to discuss what constitutes terrorism and what does not. Although there is much debate, both legally and politically, on

⁴⁰ Ryan Shaffer, *Jihad and Counter-Jihad in Europe: Islamic Radicals, Right-Wing Extremists, and Counter-Terrorism Responses*, Terrorism and Political Violence Volume 28, 2016 - Issue 2, p. 385.

⁴¹ Jacob Aasland Ravndal, *Explaining right-wing terrorism and violence in Western Europe: Grievances, opportunities and polarisation*, p. 846.

⁴² *Ibid*, p. 858 ff.

⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 859.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 862.

how to properly define terrorism, the essence of the crime can be described as ‘the unlawful use or threat of physical violence outside the framework of war, which is resorted to in order to achieve political objectives and not for ‘common’ criminal purposes like material profit or for personal reasons like hatred and jealousy’.⁴⁵ Other definitions, such as that of the United Nations (UN) have focused on the targeting of civilians as well as the harm done by the attack. As the UN High Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change contends, an act shall be defined as terrorism

‘if it is intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians and non-combatants, with the purpose of intimidating a population or compelling a Government or an international Organization to do or abstain from any act’.⁴⁶

As has been pointed out, this definition contains several shortcomings, such as the precondition that violence must be committed against civilians.⁴⁷ One has to assume that under this definition, the killing of a soldier standing guard, with the intention of creating political pressure, would not be classified as an act of terrorism. Additionally, the purpose of the attack has to be the intimidation of an entire population. The term intimidation, however, is quite vague and does not clarify whether such results as panic or terrorisation would also be constitutive of terrorism.⁴⁸ Furthermore, terrorism might not target the entire population, as it may be directed against a sub-group of society such as a religious community or people in a specific profession, such as the attacks on doctors performing abortions by religious extremists in the United States. Some of these criticisms are mitigated by the definition adopted by the European Union in 2001, which in turn entails different shortcomings.⁴⁹ Such definitions, especially by an international organisation, remain the product of different political interests and as such rarely possess the needed clarity. Another difficulty when defining terrorism is its

⁴⁵ Hanspeter Neuhold, *Post-cold war terrorism: systemic background, phenomenology and definitions*, in: Société française pour le droit international (ed.), *Journée Franco-Allemande. Les nouvelles menaces contre la paix et la sécurité internationales. New Threats to International Peace and Security* (Paris 2004), p. 18.

⁴⁶ Javier Rupérez, ‘The United Nations in the Fight Against Terrorism’, 2005. Located at https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/2006_01_26_cted_lecture.pdf

⁴⁷ Hanspeter Neuhold, *International Terrorism: Definitions, Challenges and Responses*, in: Dieter Mahncke und Jörg Monar (Ed.), *International Terrorism - A European Response to a Global Threat?*, (Brussels 2006), pp. 23-46.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 26.

⁴⁹ The EU Council defined terrorism as a crimes which, given their nature or context, may seriously damage a country or an international organisation where committed with the aim of:

- seriously intimidating a population, or
- unduly compelling a Government or international organisation to perform or abstain from performing any act, or
- seriously destabilising or destroying the fundamental political, constitutional, economic or social structures of a country or an international organisation. (Council Framework Decision of 13 June 2002 on combating terrorism). For a discussion see Hanspeter Neuhold, *International Terrorism: Definitions, Challenges and Responses*, p. 26.

heterogenous nature. As Hanspeter Neuhold has noted, terrorism can be committed by a variety of actors, from a single individual to an organisation or even the state, as was the case during the reign of terror in post-revolutionary France. Furthermore, terrorists come from all social and educational backgrounds, as the cases of the Afghan mujahedin or the German Red Army Faction illustrate. There is a wide range of terrorist attacks, from the ‘total’ terrorism of September 11 to stabbings and shootings, carried out in the name of the Islamic State in Europe. Finally, terrorists pursue different political objectives, by different strategies, with various tools and weapons and different motives.⁵⁰

As we have seen, right-wing movements all share a nationalist element, which on the far-right takes the extreme form of nativism. Furthermore, these movements share a reactionary tendency, giving them the ideological flexibility to cater to a variety of societal tensions and grievances. Theodor Adorno has made the valuable observation that today’s far-right movements profit from the same socio-economic tensions that led to the rise of fascism in the first half of the twentieth century. More nuance can be added to this dynamic by supplementing it with Ted Robert Gurr’s concept of relative deprivation, which shows not only how these tensions arise, but also how they translate into violent action. Amin Maalouf’s treatment of identity furthers our understanding of how certain demographic trends put pressure on individuals’ identities, which can be seen as shaping the grievances created by relative deprivation into xenophobic or racist sentiments. This dynamic can also be seen as one of the roots of anti-Semitism, especially in Europe, where Jews have always been a minority group and thus provided a convenient ‘other’ in a racialised discourse which blamed foreigners for the ills produced by modernity and all the changes that come with it. We do, however, also see a recent trend of wide-spread anti-Semitism being combined with strong anti-Muslim resentments, which is mirrored in an increase in attacks on mosques. Focusing on right-wing violence, Jacob Aasland Ravndal has noted that highly diverse societies with a strong repression of far-right tendencies are most likely to see violent attacks by far-right actors. Such violence can be classified as terrorist if it is unlawfully used or threatened and has the objective of achieving a political goal.

⁵⁰ Hanspeter Neuhold, *Post-cold war terrorism: systemic background, phenomenology and definitions*, pp. 19.

Chapter II

The Case Studies

In order to investigate the degree to which recent right-wing terrorist attacks have been interconnected, this thesis will investigate nine case studies. These nine cases have been selected in order to provide a representative sample of attacks committed between 2011 and February of 2020. All cases meet the criteria of a terroristic act outlined in the previous chapter, while also falling into the of category right-wing terrorism. The selected cases also aim to show the differences that exist between right-wing attacks, such as variations in target selection (Muslims, Jews, politicians) and method (assassination, shooting, use of explosives). The cases will be introduced in chronological order and will be investigated in the following chapter.

The first case investigated are the two attacks carried out by Anders Behring Breivik on the 22nd of July 2011 in Norway. Breivik commenced by detonating a car bomb placed in the government quarter of Oslo, outside the office of Labour prime minister Jens Stoltenberg, killing eight people. Later, the assailant moved to the island of Utøya where a youth camp organised by the governing Labour Party was held. Disguised as a police officer, Breivik shot and killed 69 attendees, more than half of whom were under the age of 18.⁵¹ Upon his arrest, Breivik stated that he wished to explain his action and, in court, claimed the defence of necessity (*jus necessitatis*). Both in court as well as in his 1,518-page manifesto entitled “2083: A European Declaration of Independence”, Breivik argued that his attack was in response to the increasing ethnic pluralism in Europe, the rise of Islam as well as the tolerance towards these trends by the ‘corrupt and suicidal cultural Marxist/multiculturalist elites’.⁵² Thus, the targets of the attacks were selected for signifying the system that had allowed Norwegian society to become corrupted, while Breivik presented himself not only as its defender, but as that of all of Western civilisation.

The next case study investigated is the 2016 murder of British Member of Parliament Joe Cox. Cox was shot and stabbed to death by Thomas Mair due to her support for the European Union and her pro-immigration stance, leading him to view her as working towards

⁵¹ CBS News, *A look back at the Norway massacre*, 18.02.2013, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/a-look-back-at-the-norway-massacre/>.

⁵² Anders Behring Breivik, *2083: A European Declaration of Independence*, p. 1412. (Page numbers refer to those of the PDF document).

the detriment of “white people”.⁵³ As early as 1999, Mair closely followed the bombing spree of neo-Nazi David Copeland and ordered books on how to build firearms and explosives. Furthermore, police found a large collection of books dedicated to Nazism, the Holocaust, and race theory in Mair’s apartment.⁵⁴ Finally, Mair showed a particular fascination for Anders Breivik, collecting newspaper articles about his attack.⁵⁵ Mair’s case shows a dynamic that is a reoccurring theme of these attacks, namely that perpetrators closely study the attacks of previous assailants, likely gaining inspiration and validation for their own acts.

The first distinctly anti-Semitic attack investigated in this paper is the 2018 Pittsburgh synagogue shooting. On October 27th, 46-year-old Robert Bowers attacked the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, killing 11 people in what is the deadliest attack on Jews in the United States. As research has shown, the attack followed a 57% increase in anti-Semitic incidents in 2017 and a spike in anti-Semitic activity online.⁵⁶ The British intelligence service MI5 has confirmed that Bowers had connections to neo-Nazis in Britain.⁵⁷ Furthermore, Bowers shared posts promoting the “white genocide” conspiracy theory online, suggesting that there is a plot (often allegedly planned by Jews) to cause the extinction of white people.⁵⁸ This theory is often given intellectual credibility by linking it to the work of Renaud Camus, a French thinker who developed the concept of the ‘Great Replacement’, according to which Europe’s white population is deliberately being replaced by immigrants, predominantly Muslims.⁵⁹

The ‘Great Replacement’ conspiracy theory is also at the centre of the 2019 Christchurch attack. On the 15th of March 2019, Brenton Tarrant stormed two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, during the Friday prayer, killing a total of 51 people. Tarrant had previously travelled widely throughout Europe, particularly to sites of battles between Christian European nations and the Ottoman Empire. He also donated considerable amounts to the Austrian and French branches of the Identitarian Movement and was in touch with one of the

⁵³ Ian Cobain, Nazia Parveen and Matthew Taylor, *The slow-burning hatred that led Thomas Mair to murder Jo Cox*, The Guardian, 23.11.2016.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Tom Burgis, *Thomas Mair: The making of a neo-Nazi killer What drove the murderer of Labour MP Jo Cox to strike in the days before the EU referendum?*, Financial Times, 23.11.2016.

⁵⁶ Harriet Sherwood, *Rising antisemitism worldwide boils over at Pittsburgh synagogue*, The Guardian, 28.10.2018.

⁵⁷ Duncan Gardham, *Pittsburgh synagogue gunman Robert Bower’s links to British far right*, The Times, 05.11.2018.

⁵⁸ Jarrett Renshaw, *Who is Robert Bowers, the Pittsburgh synagogue shooting suspect?*, Reuters, 27.10.2018.

⁵⁹ See below, p. 25.

leading figures of the Austrian branch, Martin Sellner.⁶⁰ Like Breivik, Tarrant wrote a manifesto which he entitled “The Great Replacement”, an obvious reference to Camus’ work.⁶¹ In this manifesto, Tarrant claims to have been in contact with Breivik and received a blessing for his ‘mission’ from him.⁶²

The idea of a “white genocide” was also one of the motives of the 2019 Poway synagogue shooting. On the last day of the Jewish Passover holiday, the 27th of April 2019, 19-year-old John Timothy Earnest opened fire in the Poway synagogue in California, killing one and injuring another 3 people.⁶³ In an open letter, Earnest expressed his admiration for Tarrant and Bowers and explained his actions by referencing the white genocide theory, stating that ‘every Jew is responsible for the genocide of the European race’.⁶⁴

Germany has also been among the countries that have seen a significant increase of right-wing violence and terrorism. One of the most notable cases is the 2019 murder of Walter Lübcke. On the 2nd of June 2019 the German politician Lübcke was shot outside his home. The primary suspect, Stefan Ernst, had several previous convictions for various crimes, most of which had neo-Nazi underpinnings.⁶⁵ Lübcke was specifically targeted for his pro-immigration stance and his public criticism of the far-right Pegida movement.⁶⁶ This case has been included as it clearly fits the definition of right-wing terror; however, it does not conform to some of the other characteristics we can see in the majority of the cases discussed in this study. These diverging factors will be highlighted in the following analysis.

In contrast, the 2019 El Paso shooting very much falls in line with the pattern we have seen emerging over the past decade. On August 3rd, 2019, 21-year-old Patrick Crusius shot and killed 22 people in a retail store in El Paso, Texas, and injuring another 24. Previous to the attack, Crusius had uploaded a manifesto entitled ‘The Inconvenient Truth’ to the internet, in which he expressed his admiration for the Christchurch attacks. Furthermore, Crusius

⁶⁰ Kim Sengupta, *Brenton Tarrant: Suspected New Zealand attacker ‘met extreme right-wing groups’ during Europe visit, according to security sources*, The Independent, 15.05.2019.

⁶¹ Rosa Schwartzburg, *The ‘white replacement theory’ motivates alt-right killers the world over*, The Guardian, 05.08.2019.

⁶² Brenton Tarrant, *The Great Replacement*, p. 24.

⁶³ Deanna Paul and Katie Mettler, *Authorities identify suspect in ‘hate crime’ synagogue shooting that left 1 dead, 3 injured*, The Washington Post, 28.04.2019.

⁶⁴ Michael Davis, *The Anti-Jewish Manifesto Of John T. Earnest, The San Diego Synagogue Shooter*, The Middle East Media Research Institute, 15.05.2019.

⁶⁵ Der Spiegel, *Mordfall Walter Lübcke: Was wir über den Täter wissen*, 26.06.2019.

⁶⁶ *Pegida* stands for “Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes” (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the West (or Occident)).

referenced the Great Replacement theory of Renaud Camus and proclaimed his hatred for Hispanics, which explains why he chose a city in immediate proximity to the Mexican border for his attack.⁶⁷ It was the 7th deadliest shooting in the US since 1949.

The trend of terroristic shooting sprees has also manifested itself in Germany. On the five-year anniversary of Breivik's attack, an 18-year-old assailant shot and killed nine people, all of whom had a multi-ethnic background.⁶⁸ However, in order to underline the role of anti-Semitism in right-wing terroristic attacks in Germany, this paper will engage with the 2019 Halle synagogue shooting. On October 9th, the day of Yom Kippur, the highest Jewish holiday, 27-year-old Stephan Balliet attacked a synagogue in Halle (Saale). After failing to gain entrance to the synagogue, he shot and killed two bystanders and injured another two. He claimed responsibility for the attack in a letter, posted online before the attack, outlining his highly anti-Semitic world view and propagated several conspiracy theories, including the denial of the Holocaust.⁶⁹⁷⁰ In many ways, his attack followed the examples of Breivik and Tarrant. Additionally, the fact that his letter was posted in English can be seen as an attempt to find like-minded people globally and motivate them to carry out similar attacks.

The final attack investigated in this paper is the 2020 Hanau shooting. On February 19th, 2020, a single gunman fired shots at two shisha bars, mainly frequented by citizens of Turkish origin. The attacks killed nine people, all of whom were either foreigners or were German citizens with multi-ethnic backgrounds. Later, the assailant killed his mother and himself. The 43-year-old attacker, who, according to his own manifesto, suffered from different psychological disorders, held strongly racist and xenophobic views and believed in different conspiracy theories as well as eugenics. In his 24-page manifesto, the assailant claims that certain races have proven throughout the course of their history that they are not productive and should thus be exterminated. The Germans, on the other hand, have 'elevated all of mankind' in his view.⁷¹ He also engages with American politics, praising president Trump and the construction of a wall on the border with Mexico.⁷²

⁶⁷ Ben Collins, *Investigators 'reasonably confident' Texas suspect left anti-immigrant screed, tipped off before attack*, NBC News, 04.08.2019.

⁶⁸ Die Welt, *Bayern stuft OEZ-Attentat nun als rechtsradikal motiviert ein*, 25.10.2019.

⁶⁹ Philipp Bovermann und Joachim Käppner, *Eine Stadt geht in Deckung*, Süddeutsche Zeitung, 09.10.2019.

⁷⁰ Kai Biermann et. al., *Anschlag in Halle: Attentäter mordete aus Judenhass*, Die Zeit, 09.10.2019.

⁷¹ Peter Maxwill, *Tödliche Schüsse in Hanau Die Wahnwelt des mutmaßlichen Attentäters*, Der Spiegel, 20.02.2020.

⁷² Peter Maxill, *Psychogramm eines Terroristen*, Der Spiegel, 21.02.2020.

Chapter III

Themes in Recent Right-Wing Terrorist Attacks

These case studies raise several themes worthy of investigation. The most obvious observation certainly concerns the terrorists' ethnicity and gender as they were all white males. While noteworthy, the fact that all of the investigated assailants were white can easily be attributed to their ideology, as far-right beliefs predominantly focus on the superiority of the "white race" provide these men with a heroic narrative. However, why it is particularly men who engage in right-wing violence requires a closer look. Furthermore, the chapter will discuss why all attacks included the use of some form of firearm. The chapter will also address resurfacing claims about the sanity of these terrorists. Finally, the later part will closely analyse and evaluate the reoccurring ideological themes, which connect these attacks. This investigation will then be used in the subsequent chapter to showcase why these attacks should be classified as a cohesive phenomenon. Attention will also be given to the ways in which these men adopted these ideological beliefs, especially the role of the internet. Finally, these findings will be combined in a Weberian ideal type to highlight the converging factors, while also discussing some of the aspects that do not fit within this argument.

The first and most striking similarity between these case studies is the fact that all of these terrorist attacks have been committed by men. This trend is also observable on a larger scale. In a study conducted between 2015 and 2017, the Institute for Economics and Peace found that 93% of terrorist attacks committed by a single assailant were carried out by men.⁷³ In part, this trend can be explained by the ideology that drives these attacks and its understanding of the role of women. As Breivik expresses in a quote found in his manifesto: 'The truth is that any nation is always protected from external aggression by the men. The women can play a supporting role in this, but never more than that'.⁷⁴ The image of the man as the protector of the nation is another factor driving the radicalisation of male terrorists, not just amongst far-right attackers. Mark Juergensmeyer has suggested that being part of a violent pseudo-militaristic cause can empower marginalised men and strengthen their sense of masculinity, which seemingly is under threat by the forces of modernity. As Juergensmeyer contends, the violent cultures out of which these terrorists emerge attract followers by

⁷³ Global Terrorism Index 2017, p. 69.

⁷⁴ Anders Behring Breivik, 2003: *A European Declaration of Independence*, p. 343.

exploiting the humiliations experienced by these men and offering them images of glory.⁷⁵ These humiliations can have a plurality of origins, from economic hardship to sexual frustration or social exclusion, and often are interconnected. An overcompensation of the terrorists' masculinity can also be used to explain why all of these men used some form of firearm in their attacks. Indeed, masculism and militarism go hand-in-hand and stand directly opposed to the identity politics associated with the new left.⁷⁶⁷⁷ Firearms have for centuries been symbols of power, of war and of domination: it is the gun which turns a civilian into a soldier. Consequently, it seems unsurprising that all of these terrorists shared a fascination for militarism, military history and arms, and many of them were part of a shooting club.

This occupation with masculinity can also be seen as explaining, at least in part, the distinctly anti-feminist and indeed misogynistic mindset many of these terrorists have expressed. As mentioned, Breivik understood the role of women as subordinate to men in society. The attacker of Hanau expressed his anger towards women and blamed them, as well as an unnamed secret society, for not having had a relationship with a woman. The most common form of anti-feminist expression is the allegation that the emancipation of women is responsible for the demise of the white race by causing birth rates to fall. This idea is central to the manifesto written by the attacker of Christchurch, which commences with the words: 'It's the birthrates. It's the birthrates. It's the birthrates'.⁷⁸ However, it can also be found in the writings of Breivik, Balliet and Rathjen. Thus, we see a connection between personal frustrations, maybe even humiliations, and an ideology that allows these men to combine these feelings with a notion of racial and sexual superiority, giving them a rightful claim over the bodies of white women.⁷⁹ Some scientists and police investigators have even suggested that matricide, the act of killing one's own mother, can be seen as an expression of a deeply troubled relationship with women. After killing nine people in Hanau, Tobias Rathjen killed his mother and himself. Furthermore, Thomas Mair, the murderer of Jo Cox, had researched matricide online and reloaded his gun after killing Cox, leading one police investigator to suggest that he intended to also kill his mother.⁸⁰ In psychoanalysis, matricide is seen as the expression of a

⁷⁵ Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God - The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, p. 194.

⁷⁶ Michael A. Peters, *The return of fascism: Youth, violence and nationalism*, Educational Philosophy and Theory, 51:7, p. 677.

⁷⁷ Although a discussion of masculinity is beyond the scope of this paper, it has to be mentioned that the term remains problematic. For a detailed discussion see Julian Murphet (ed.), *Modernism and Masculinity*, Cambridge University Press: 2014.

⁷⁸ Brenton Tarrant, *The Great Replacement*, p. 4.

⁷⁹ Meredith Haaf, *Was hinter dem Frauenhass rechter Attentäter steckt*, Süddeutsche Zeitung, 23.02.2020.

⁸⁰ Kester Aspden, *The making of a bedsit Nazi: who was the man who killed Jo Cox?* The Guardian, 06.12.2019.

more fundamental conflict of a man's gender identity in relation to the female sex, which the mother symbolises.⁸¹ Thus, the act of a man killing his own mother is seen as the result of 'a desire for the same-sex parent and hatred of the opposite-sex parent', suggesting underlying homosexual tendencies, which the person cannot live out or which lead them to doubt their own masculinity.⁸² Although interesting speculative studies have made the theoretical connection between terrorists' sexuality and the influence this had on their attacks, no empirical evidence has been found to underline such an argumentation.⁸³

A factor that is present in several of these case studies is some aspect of psychological disorder or personal trauma leading to debates about the assailants' sanity often overshadowing the respective media coverage. For example, Thomas Mair, the murderer of Jo Cox, received treatment for his depression, Anders Breivik raised the attention of Norwegian social services as a child and Stephan Balliet, who attacked the synagogue in Halle, claims to have autistic tendencies.⁸⁴ A comparative approach does not suggest that these individual factors are unimportant in explaining what led these men to commit truly abhorrent crimes. However, the aim of this thesis is not to provide a psychological analysis but rather to underline a detectable trend which should lead us to classify these attacks as part of an interrelated phenomenon. Furthermore, it has to be said that focusing purely on psychological anomalies can lead one to commit the fallacy famously pointed out by Hannah Arendt.⁸⁵ It is certainly more comfortable to classify violent actions we struggle to comprehend as insanity. It is much more unsettling to think that a sane person, not different from someone we may know, could be capable of doing real evil. Nonetheless, the fact that ordinary people may commit not at all ordinary crimes is a truth with which we must come to grips and one that is certainly an important aspect of this analysis.

The role of the internet is a crucial factor in understanding these terrorist attacks. All of the terrorists investigated were active online, researching far-right ideology, exchanging with like-minded people and radicalising their views. As Gary LaFree has pointed out, the internet

⁸¹ Christina Wieland, *The Undead Mother: Psychoanalytic Explorations of Masculinity, Femininity and Matricide*, p. 10.

⁸² Andrew M. Colman, *A Dictionary of Psychology*, p. 224.

⁸³ For such a study see Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei, *Anders Breivik: On Copying the Obscure*, continent.1.3 (2011) 213-223.

⁸⁴ Kester Aspden, *The making of a bedsit Nazi: who was the man who killed Jo Cox?* The Guardian, 06.12.2019; Aslak Syse, *Breivik - The Norwegian Terrorist Case*, Behav. Sci. Law 32, p. 391; Annette Rammelsberger, *Attentäter von Halle legt umfassendes Geständnis ab*, Süddeutsche Zeitung, 29.03.2020.

⁸⁵ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, p. 276; *Ibid*, p. 287/288.

has revolutionised terrorism and Islamic organisations such as al-Qaeda and the Islamic State were the entrepreneurs. They were the first to understand the potential this new form of communication could offer to their cause, both in terms of recruitment and planning.⁸⁶ Importantly, a recent study has shown that ‘extreme-right-wing offenders were 3.39 times more likely to learn online than were Jihadist-inspired individuals’, highlighting the significant role the internet has for these terrorists.⁸⁷ In response to the increase of sensitive materials on their websites, big online platform providers like Facebook, Twitter and Google, which owns the video platform YouTube, have implemented stricter guidelines to remove radical and violent content from their websites.⁸⁸ This led platforms with less oversight such as 8chan and Gab to gain prominence amongst right-wing radicals. 8chan is an online message board, known for its anonymity and lack of content regulation, making it ideal for radicals to spread their ideas and as such it has been linked to several attacks. For example, the terrorist who killed 51 people in Christchurch was active on the site and his manifesto was posted there shortly after the attack. Furthermore, the assailant from the Poway synagogue attack posted his racist and anti-Semitic manifesto on the site, and the man behind the El Paso attack even announced his crimes on 8chan shortly before committing them.⁸⁹ Similarly, Gab, an unregulated social media platform has become a safe haven for right-wing extremists. Robert Bowers, who attacked the synagogue in Pittsburgh, was very active on Gab and announced his attack on the platform with the words ‘I can’t sit by and watch my people get slaughtered. Screw your optics. I’m going in.’.⁹⁰ Importantly, these terrorists did not just happen to be active on these platforms, they were part of an online community of like-minded people. When news about the El Paso attack broke on 8chan, users praised the high number of casualties, calling the attacker “our guy”.⁹¹ This relationship between terrorists and their associates online is made most obvious by the fact that recent attacks have been livestreamed by the assailants, letting their followers witness the acts in real time.

Recent research on the role of the internet in terroristic attacks has led scientists to contend that the internet serves as an indicator that so-called ‘lone wolves’ do not act as

⁸⁶ Gary LaFree, *Terrorism and the Internet*, 16 *Criminology & Pub. Pol'y* 93 (2017), p. 94.

⁸⁷ Paul Gill (et al), *Terrorist Use of the Internet by the Numbers Quantifying Behaviors, Patterns, and Processes*, *Criminology & Public Policy* Volume 16 Issue 1, 2017, p. 110.

⁸⁸ Olivia Solon, *Facebook, Twitter, Google and Microsoft team up to tackle extremist content*, *The Guardian*, 06.12.2016.

⁸⁹ Julia Carrie Wong, *8chan: the far-right website linked to the rise in hate crimes*, *The Guardian*, 05.08.2019.

⁹⁰ Kevin Roose, *On Gab, an Extremist-Friendly Site, Pittsburgh Shooting Suspect Aired His Hatred in Full*, *The New York Times*, 28.10.2018.

⁹¹ Julia Carrie Wong, *8chan: the far-right website linked to the rise in hate crimes*, *The Guardian*, 05.08.2019.

independently as their name seems to suggest. Investigating Jihadi terrorists, Gabriel Weimann has pointed out that all lone-wolf terrorists share a characteristic, namely that ‘they are motivated, taught, recruited, incited or even trained by external sources; they display a degree of commitment to and identification with extremist movements; in other words, their solitary actions do not take place in a vacuum’.⁹² As radicalisation is a social process, these alleged lone wolves have a pack of like-minded people behind them, encouraging them as well as providing ideological and technical knowledge.⁹³ Furthermore, Paul Gill (et al) has nuanced the understanding of how the internet contributes to the radicalisation process.⁹⁴ As Gill contends, the internet must not be seen as disconnected from the offline world. Researchers and law enforcement agents should ‘understand the individuals’ breadth of interactions’ instead of relying on a ‘dichotomous understanding of offline versus online, which represent two extremes of a spectrum that regularly provide prototypical examples in reality’.⁹⁵ This important learning will be revisited when it comes to the policy implications suggested by the change of perception of these terrorist attacks as interconnected events. For now, it is sufficient to note that the internet has taken over many of the roles previously held by formal terrorist organisations, from encouraging radicalisation to facilitating the planning of an attack, rendering these organisations less relevant.

Another commonality between many of these terrorists is the compilation of a manifesto or some other form of written document, outlining the attackers’ ideology and motivation as well as voicing the call for others to follow their lead. Six of the nine terrorists investigated created such a document, drawing on different ideological sources and often referencing the works of previous assailants. In order to fully trace the ideological homogeneity of these attacks, it is important to investigate the sources and arguments from which these terrorists conceived their worldview. Furthermore, these texts show another important dynamic, namely that starting with Brenton Tarrant, who refers to Anders Breivik, these terrorists cite previous attacks as inspiration and arguably as moral justification for their acts.⁹⁶ John Timothy Earnest, the Poway synagogue shooter, referred to both Tarrant as well as Robert Bowers who had attacked the synagogue in Pittsburgh. Furthermore, Tarrant was mentioned by Patrick Crusius, Stephan

⁹² Gabriel Weimann, *Lone Wolves in Cyberspace*, Journal of Terrorism Research, Volume 3, Issue 2 - Autumn 2012.

⁹³ *Ibid*, p. 78.

⁹⁴ Paul Gill (et al), *Terrorist Use of the Internet by the Numbers Quantifying Behaviors, Patterns, and Processes*, Criminology & Public Policy Volume 16 Issue 1, 2017.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 114.

⁹⁶ Brenton Tarrant, *The Great Replacement*, p. 24.

Balliet and Tobias Rathjen, while the last terrorist also referred to Anders Breivik.⁹⁷ This mutual appreciation additionally supports the theory that these acts are part of a global phenomenon. Furthermore, it seems reasonable to assume that these men are not only inspired by previous attacks but also hope to inspire new terrorist plots in order to gain further approval and recognition.

As mentioned, terrorists use their manifestos to outline their ideology in order to justify their violent crimes. The most common denominator of these writings is the citation of a nativist set of beliefs, according to which the nation, defined as the European or more generally white race, is under threat. However, we do see variations in the perceptions of who exactly poses this threat and consequently who is being targeted in the attack. For example, Anders Breivik devotes a large part of his manifesto to the discussion of cultural Marxism, outlining how left-wing politicians are responsible for the demise of white people in Norway, which explains his targeting of government buildings and a Labour Party summer camp.⁹⁸ Brenton Tarrant cited his perception of Islam as a threat to the ethnically European population in their ‘lands’, in which he includes New Zealand, as motivation for his attack.⁹⁹ Thus, he described his attack as ‘revenge for the enslavement of millions of Europeans taken from their lands by the Islamic slavers’.¹⁰⁰ Finally, John Timothy Earnest’s manifesto was filled with anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, including that of the alleged murder of a small boy by Jews in 15th century Italy, seeking to justify his attack on a synagogue.¹⁰¹ Nativism thus plays an important role in understanding what drove these men to commit terrorist acts as well as how they selected their victims. The variety in victims highlights the flexible nature of nativism, and thus of all right-wing ideologies, allowing these terrorists to place their specific political objectives within the broader framework of the far-right’s narrative.

Although several of these attackers refer back to Anders Breivik, it is important to underline that, despite being the first terrorist investigated in this paper and thus commencing this new wave of terrorism, Breivik’s attacks were still influenced and inspired by a plurality

⁹⁷ Talia Lavin, *The San Diego shooter’s manifesto is a modern form of an old lie about Jews*, The Washington Post, 29.04.2019; Annette Rammelsberger, *Attentäter von Halle legt umfassendes Geständnis ab*, Süddeutsche Zeitung, 29.03.2020; Yassin Musharbash, Tom Sundermann, *Rassismus, Verschwörungen und Paranoia*, Die Zeit, 20.02.2020.

⁹⁸ Anders Behring Breivik, *2083: A European Declaration of Independence*, p. 12 ff.

⁹⁹ Brenton Tarrant, *The Great Replacement*, p. 10.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p. 7.

¹⁰¹ Talia Lavin, *The San Diego shooter’s manifesto is a modern form of an old lie about Jews*, The Washington Post, 29.04.2019.

of sources and people. For example, Breivik's lengthy discussion of the dangers posed by Islam were largely based on the work of Hugh Fitzgerald, the co-founder of Jihad Watch. Jihad Watch claims to be a blog dedicated to 'bringing public attention to the role that jihad theology and ideology plays in the modern world, and to correcting popular misconceptions about the role of jihad and religion in modern-day conflicts', but has been widely identified as an anti-Muslim conspiracy propagating Islamophobia.¹⁰² Drawing on Fitzgerald, Breivik contends that:

The most civilised thing we can do in order to save ourselves as a civilisation, but also to limit the loss of life among both Muslims and non-Muslims in what increasingly looks like a world war, is for Westerners and indeed non-Muslims in general to implement a policy of containment of the Islamic world, as suggested by Mr. Fitzgerald. This includes completely stopping Muslim immigration, but also by making our countries Islam-unfriendly, thus presenting the Muslims already here between the options of adapting to our societies or leaving if they desire sharia law.¹⁰³

Furthermore, Breivik discusses the so-called "Eurabia" theory at length, according to which immigration will lead to the downfall of European democracy, causing Europe to become an appendix of the Arab world.¹⁰⁴ This theory was partly developed by Norwegian far-right blogger Peder Jensen, who goes by the pseudonym Fjordman. A total of 37 articles written by Jensen make up a seventh of Breivik's manifesto, suggesting a more significant connection than a mere citing of literature Breivik enjoyed reading.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, Paul Jackson has argued that Jensen created the 'cultural framework' for Breivik's attack, issuing an 'implicit license' to commit violent acts against ideological foes.¹⁰⁶ Worryingly, Breivik's adherence to the Eurabia theory was cited by the Norwegian court as proof for his sanity, as it is a view that 'many people share'.¹⁰⁷ However, the court did find that 'very few people, however, share Breivik's idea that the alleged 'Islamization' should be fought with terror'.¹⁰⁸ Nonetheless, Jensen's thought seems to have very real and dangerous implications, warranting a closer look.

As Jackson notes, Jensen's thought can be categorised as fascist. Like all far-right extremist ideologies, fascism assumes a national community which has to be protected from foreign influences. Thus, 'fascism is essentially a type of politics based on a binary juxtaposing radically "imagined" and "pure" national communities that are seen as suffering at the hands of

¹⁰² Jihad Watch, 28.03.2010. <https://web.archive.org/web/20100331112501/http://www.jihadwatch.org/why-jihad-watch.html>; Christopher A. Bail, Terrified: How Anti-Muslim Fringe Organizations Became Mainstream, p. 84.

¹⁰³ Anders Behring Breivik, 2083: A European Declaration of Independence, p. 523.

¹⁰⁴ Aslak Syse, *Breivik - The Norwegian Terrorist Case*, Behav. Sci. Law 32: 389 407 (2014).

¹⁰⁵ Paul Jackson, *The License to Hate: Peder Jensen's Fascist Rhetoric in Anders Breivik's Manifesto 2083: A European Declaration*, Democracy and Security, 9: p. 248.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, p. 248.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p. 248.

¹⁰⁸ Aslak Syse, *Breivik - The Norwegian Terrorist Case*, Behav. Sci. Law 32, p. 391.

a seemingly alien force, specifically to the point that the imagined community is facing an extreme existential threat'.¹⁰⁹ Fascist acts consequently aim to cleanse or purify the community, that is the nation state. According to Jensen, the main threat to European civilisation is posed by Islam, leading him to develop his theory of Eurabia, which in turn is based on the works of British author Gisèle Littman, better known under her pseudonym Bat Ye'or. Presenting an alternative history of European integration, Jensen like Bat Ye'or identifies the European Union as a trojan horse to advance the Islamisation of Western society.¹¹⁰ In a passage quoted by Breivik, Jensen claims:

It would make sense to remember that all empires in history have been created through war. If the EU is an empire, this means that a war is being waged against somebody. And it is: A cultural and demographic war waged by mass immigration against native Europeans.¹¹¹

Furthermore, Jensen disseminates a conspiracy theory known as “the Project” according to which the Muslim Brotherhood seeks world domination for the benefit of all Muslim people, and suggesting that every Muslim is implicated in this plot, similar to the Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion for anti-Semitic conspiracy theories.¹¹² While underlining that Jensen is not the only ideological influence present in Breivik’s writing, Jackson nonetheless contends that Jensen’s role in providing a framework that allows ‘people to justify, and give a rationale to, their heterophobia’ played a significant role in Breivik’s radicalisation.¹¹³ Importantly, by creating a sense of urgency and crisis, writers like Jensen morally justify violent action, that would otherwise not be tolerable, allowing people like Breivik to argue their actions were *necessary*. The fact that Breivik appropriated the theoretical discourse developed by others highlights several key factors. First of all, these underpinnings already existed in European society before 2011 and thus before the migrant crisis of 2015. Secondly, so-called lone-wolf radicalisation is a dynamic social process, which does not occur in a vacuum. And thirdly, it shows a remarkable cohesiveness of themes and ideological beliefs, as they were in turn adopted by subsequent attackers, inspired by Breivik.

One of the most common themes found in these manifestos is a conspiracy theory called the “great replacement theory” which is often advanced into so-called “white genocide theories”. The previously mentioned idea of the great replacement is most commonly associated

¹⁰⁹ Paul Jackson, *The License to Hate: Peder Jensen’s Fascist Rhetoric in Anders Breivik’s Manifesto 2083: A European Declaration*, p. 249.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 255.

¹¹¹ Anders Behring Breivik, *2083: A European Declaration of Independence*, p. 311.

¹¹² Paul Jackson, *The License to Hate: Peder Jensen’s Fascist Rhetoric in Anders Breivik’s Manifesto 2083: A European Declaration*, p. 255

¹¹³ *Ibid*, p. 266.

with French writer Renaud Camus. In 2012, Camus published his book *Le Grand Remplacement*, arguing without consultation of any real statistical data or deployment of a scientific methodology that France was falling under Muslim rule while French culture was being lost. For example, Camus polemically suggests that due the influx of Muslims, his hometown Colombey-les-Deux-Églises will soon be called “Colombey-les-Deux-Mosquées”.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, Camus argues that this development is part of a conscious effort by what he calls the “media-political complex” to convince the people that immigration has always been a part of France’s history and should be seen as something positive, as the elites benefit from the cheap labour that is provided by immigrants.¹¹⁵ Although Camus’ theory is solely based on his personal observations, it has been widely shared in far-right circles around the world. For example, the leader of the German *Alternative für Deutschland*, Alexander Gauland has argued that a replacement of the population is well under way while then vice-chancellor of Austria Heinz-Christian Strache (FPÖ) has referred to the great replacement as a reality. Although Camus condemned the attacks of Christchurch, his ideas nonetheless encourage an active resistance against the political leadership, the “elites” and immigrants, as they are “occupiers” and a threat to Western society. Furthermore, his theory served as the foundation for others to further radicalise his thought, advocating that there is not only a mere replacement but indeed a systematic genocide currently under way against the white race.¹¹⁶ The great replacement and white genocide theory are present in the manifestos of six of the terrorists investigated, most prominently in that of the Christchurch attacker, who even entitled his document ‘The Great Replacement’.

An understanding of the ideological worldview these terrorists hold is crucial to understanding their attacks. As Ted Robert Gurr has noted, ‘the beliefs and symbols that determine the timing, forms, and objects of violence are learned’.¹¹⁷ Thus, the ideology as well as previous attacks clearly serve as inspiration for these men, shaping their violent outbursts into the terroristic acts we study. Additionally, the commitment of extreme violence is only made possible by adherence to strong and radical ideological beliefs. The question of what makes ideologies powerful and how they affect the human mind occupies large parts of the works of Eric Hoffer and Hannah Arendt. As Hoffer has noted, the most powerful doctrines all share the fact that they are radical, meaning that they wish to alter the status quo and thus appeal

¹¹⁴ Renaud Camus, *Le Grand Remplacement et discours d'Orange*, p. 18.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 25.

¹¹⁶ Kevin C. Thompson, *WATCHING THE STORMFRONT: White Nationalists and the Building of Community in Cyberspace*, p. 10.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 36.

to the people in terms of the future, rather than the present.¹¹⁸ Consequently, these ideologies profit off of people's discontent, while also playing on humans' natural inclination to hope and providing agency for the believer to bring about the desired change himself. Furthermore, as Arendt has shown, ideologies hinder the human need to think and thus the ability to properly judge the morality of one's actions.¹¹⁹ This is the case as thinking, for Arendt, is the process of questioning all norms and values, which constantly destroys and re-establishes the personal notion of good and evil.¹²⁰ If this purging effect is no longer present due to an ideology hindering the mind's capacity of critical thought, the ability to judge and thus to act morally is lost.

The results of this investigation can be distilled into a Weberian ideal type of a right-wing terrorist and his attack. Max Weber coined the term ideal type as a scientific tool, which 'by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena' represents 'a unified analytical construct'.¹²¹ In other words, an ideal type is an abstract scientific construct, which does not correspond to reality but rather combines a plurality of factors from different sources into an analytical utopia in order to highlight certain commonalities. It is especially important in this context to underline that the word "ideal" does not refer to any moral judgement of the concept under investigation, but rather highlights the combination of common factors into an abstract concept. The ideal type of a right-wing terrorist thus is a white male, who was at least in part radicalised via the internet, where he actively engages with like-minded people who all share a nativist ideology. He has suffered some form of marginalisation, be it economic, racial or sexual, and is sexually frustrated and single. He struggles with his own masculinity but is fascinated by militarism, firearms and previous attackers, leading his terror attack to take the form of a shooting. His targets are chosen based on their belonging to a certain group, deemed to be an ideological enemy. Finally, he drafts a manifesto outlining his ideology, in the hopes of inspiring further attacks and gaining validation.

Of course, none of the cases investigated completely fit this description. Nonetheless, the profile combines the most prominent commonalities of the case studies at hand, highlighting the significant amount of overlaps we can observe. It is, however, worth noting that many

¹¹⁸ Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements*, p. 9.

¹¹⁹ Hannah Arendt, *Thinking and Moral Considerations*, p. 37.

¹²⁰ Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, p. 192.

¹²¹ Max Weber, *Methodology of Social Sciences*, p. 90.

aspects of these attacks do not fit this profile. Most notably, Stephan Balliet, the attacker of Halle, contradicted his own confession and claimed to hold no nativist or neo-Nazi views during his hearing in court. Balliet's lawyer expressed his client's motivations with the words: 'One doesn't have to be a neo-Nazi to be an anti-Semite'.¹²² Furthermore, Stefan Ernst, the suspected murderer of Walter Lübcke, had strong connections to German neo-Nazi groups and even the *Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund* (NSU), a neo-Nazi terrorist organisation that carried out several attacks in the early 2000s.¹²³ Consequently, his attack has to be seen in the specific context of the German neo-Nazi scene and the different groups that operate there. Nonetheless, the ideal type outlined above shows reliable patterns, supporting the claim that these attacks should be seen as part of a global phenomenon.

¹²² Tobias Roth, Karlsruher Pflichtverteidiger beschreibt Stephan B. als intelligenten und wortgewandten Mann, *Badische Neueste Nachrichten*, 11.10.2019.

¹²³ Hanning Voigts, *Lübcke-Mord in Hessen: Stephan E. stand in NSU-Bericht*, Frankfurter Rundschau, 22.09.2019.

Chapter IV

From Lone Wolves to Lone Actors

The evidence provided in the previous chapter clearly supports the hypothesis that these terror attacks are part of a bigger phenomenon, a new wave of right-wing terrorism. However, there are numerous factors that support a different interpretation. These terrorists clearly carried out their attacks on their own and there is no evidence that they had hands-on outside support when planning their acts. As the question of defining lone-wolf terrorism is at the centre of an ongoing academic debate, it is worth investigating the arguments of both sides in order to situate the cases at hand within the broader scientific context. This chapter will briefly introduce several definitions of lone-wolf terrorism, analysing their applicability to this investigation. Based on this discussion, the investigation will move to the term lone-wolf terrorism itself, analysing its usefulness in academic and practical debates. Finally, the chapter will conclude by offering a possible alternative to the term lone-wolf.

The term lone-wolf first emerged in the American far-right scene amongst white supremacists, who called for attacks carried out by single individuals, without support from a larger network or cell.¹²⁴ This type of attack offered several logistical benefits, such as more swift and unpredictable attacks as well as a decreased need for recruitment, which is always one of the most difficult stages for terrorist organisations. Since then, different scientific definitions have been developed in order to explain what kind of attack and attacker the term really describes. For example, a widely used definition is that of Fred Burton and Scott Stewart, who define a lone-wolf terrorist as ‘a person who acts on his or her own without orders from—or even connections to—an organization’.¹²⁵ This definition is clearly shaped by the Islamist paradigm, previously mentioned, as it adheres to the notion that terrorism is usually carried out by formal organisations with a clear objective. Although it is easy to criticise this definition ex post, it has to be said that more recent attacks clearly question what constitutes an organisation and what classifies connections. Terrorism as a tactic clearly has evolved and we are less likely to witness another attack like 9/11 but rather a plot planned and carried out by a small number of people, maybe even an individual, with an improvised explosive device, a firearm or even a knife. However, such an attack could still have some connections to a formal or informal

¹²⁴ Alex Curtis: 'Lone-wolf' of Hate Prowls the Internet, Anti-Defamation League, 2012.

¹²⁵ Fred Burton and Scott Stewart, *The 'Lone-wolf' Disconnect*, STRATFOR Global Intelligence, 2008, <http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/lone-wolf-disconnect>.

terrorist organisation, raising the question at what point a lone-wolf becomes part of such an organisation. Although the simplicity of Burton and Stewart's definition makes it very comprehensible, its black-and-white understanding of lone-wolf attacks is outdated and not conducive to our investigation.

Some of the shortcomings of Burton and Stewart's definition are mitigated by the one developed by Gabriel Weimann, who contends that:

A lone-wolf is an individual or a small group of individuals who uses traditional terrorist tactics – including the targeting of civilians – to achieve explicitly political or ideological goals, but who acts without membership in, or cooperation with, an official or unofficial terrorist organization, cell, or group.¹²⁶

Importantly, Weimann allows for more flexibility by including the possibility of a small group involved in the attack. However, this definition clearly hinges on the word cooperation, which can be interpreted in several ways. It seems logical to assume that Weimann intended cooperation to mean tangible connections and input from a terrorist organisation during the planning stages or help when it comes to aspects such as identifying targets or procuring a weapon. However, the line is blurred where such a cooperation ends and the argument could well be made that the online forums, in which these men were radicalised, influenced their target selection or the planning of the attack. This could be done by the discussion of previous attacks or reinforcing certain ideological positions. Furthermore, just because we do not see the influence of an 'official or unofficial terrorist organization, cell, or group', this does not mean that these men did not perceive themselves to be part of a bigger organisation, an issue that will be discussed in more detail later.

Vincenz Leuschner has suggested that lone-wolf terrorism can be compared to school shootings such as those of Columbine and Sandy Hook.¹²⁷ Leuschner draws several parallels between these two types of attacks; for example, that they use excessive violence, that there is a symbolic element to their target selection, that they are planned and premeditated and, most importantly, that they are carried out by individuals.¹²⁸ Indeed, this aspect is key to Leuschner's understanding of these forms of violence, as the perpetrators have a large degree of autonomy and personal motivation, which differentiates them from cases in which the individual attacker is part of a larger collective effort.¹²⁹ Although Leuschner does mention that radicalisation is

¹²⁶ Gabriel Weimann, *Lone Wolves in Cyberspace*, Journal of Terrorism Research, Volume 3, Issue 2 - Autumn 2012, p. 75.

¹²⁷ Vincenz Leuschner, *Excessive individual violence. School shootings and lone-wolf terrorism as social phenomena*, Berlin J Soziol (2013) 23:27–49.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 40.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 41.

not a solitary process and highlights the fact that both school shooters and the so-called “lone wolves” he refers to were part of informal networks, largely online, he does not take into consideration that individual violence in a collective effort is still facilitated by personal factors. Take for example Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel, who drove a truck into a crowd in Nice, killing 86 people. His attack was clearly premeditated and deliberate, excessive in violence and carried out on the 14th of July, the symbolic national holiday of France.¹³⁰ Furthermore, although others knew of his plans and supplied him with a pistol, he carried out the attack by himself.¹³¹ However, as the Columbine shooting was carried out by two attackers, clearly not all the criteria have to be met completely in order to fulfil Leuschner’s definition, making evident that this case indeed does so. Nonetheless, responsibility for the attack was claimed by the so-called Islamic State, despite the fact that the attacker was not part of any formal group or cell. Thus, the terrorist organisation had no known bearing on the attack, it simply allowed these men to frame their actions within a larger narrative, in a similar way as the terrorists of the case studies at hand used right-wing ideology. Any type of radicalisation is an individual process, shaped by personal experiences and grievances and as such is present in both school shootings as well as terrorist attacks, regardless of whether they are carried out by a group or an individual. The important difference is that terrorism pursues a political goal which goes beyond the act of violence, resulting in the dual nature of terrorism comprised of the attack itself as well as the terrorisation of the target audience. Consequently, the comparison should focus on patterns of radicalisation rather than on the violence itself, as there is a noticeable difference. This shows that lone-actor attacks still have more in common with more collective terrorist attacks than with other forms of violence, suggesting that we should question the lone-wolf narrative within terrorism research instead of looking for possible comparisons with other forms of violence.

Dissecting the Norway attacks, Raffaello Pantucci argues that Anders Breivik constitutes the ‘archetypal lone-wolf’.¹³² As such, Breivik used his manifesto to portray himself as a lone vanguard and lone warrior.¹³³ At the same time, Breivik also perceived himself to be part of a larger network, which he calls the *Pauperes commilitones Christi Templique Solomonici* or Knights Templars and claims to hold the rank of Justiciar Knight Commander

¹³⁰ The BBC, *Attack on Nice: Who was Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel?*, 19.08.2016.

¹³¹ Par Soren Seelow, *Attaque de Nice : un projet « mûri depuis plusieurs mois » et plusieurs complices*, Le Monde, 22.07.2016.

¹³² Raffaello Pantucci, *What Have We Learned about Lone Wolves from Anders Behring Breivik?*, PERSPECTIVES ON TERRORISM Volume 5, Issues 5--6, p. 32.

¹³³ *Ibid*, p. 33.

within this organisation.¹³⁴ According to Pantucci, who seems to believe that this network really exists or at least has existed, this membership is not at odds with Breivik's classification as a lone-wolf, as he acted without external orders and on his own. Indeed, it cannot be determined whether this network truly existed or if it was invented by Breivik. However, the attempt to fit his actions into a larger framework already shows the wish of belonging to something bigger than oneself. This theme is also present in Brenton Tarrant's manifesto, in which he refers to Breivik as 'Knight Justiciar Breivik', a clear reference to the organisation mentioned in Breivik's manifesto.¹³⁵ Thus, referencing this organisation can be seen as a similar mechanism as referring to previous attackers, giving meaning and legitimacy to one's actions. This mechanism has been studied by Francis Fukuyama, who claims that violence is connected to the basic human need for recognition. Through heroic struggles, people gain recognition for themselves as superior to others, satisfying their cravings.¹³⁶ Consequently, even if an actor carries out his attacks alone, he can still refer to a larger group, fictitious or real, as well as to previous attacks, to situate his acts within a larger struggle, thus gaining more recognition. This further complicates our understanding of lone-actors, while also exposing more shortcomings of more traditional definitions of lone-wolf terrorism.

A more useful definition was developed by the Countering Lone-actor Terrorism project, co-organised by the European Union, Chatham House and the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism at The Hague, which defines lone-actor terrorism as:

The threat or use of violence by a single perpetrator (or small cell), not acting out of purely personal-material reasons, with the aim of influencing a wider audience, and who acts without any direct support in the planning, preparation and execution of the attack, and whose decision to act is not directed by any group or other individuals (although possibly inspired by others).¹³⁷

This definition fits all of the cases investigated in this thesis while also allowing for more flexibility by clearly referring only to 'direct support' and excluding the possible inspiration of an actor by another. Overall, however, I contend that the term lone-wolf terrorism should be re-evaluated in light of this new wave of terrorism we are currently witnessing. The rigid dichotomy of collective terrorism like the September 11 attacks and lone-actor attacks like those of the Unabomber is no longer conducive to the study of terrorism. Rather, we should look for more subtle and informal connections, which, as has been shown, can be present and influential

¹³⁴ Anders Behring Breivik, *2083: A European Declaration of Independence*, p. 812.

¹³⁵ Brenton Tarrant, *The Great Replacement*, p. 24.

¹³⁶ Francis Fukuyama, *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment*, p. 9.

¹³⁷ Edwin Bakker and Jeanine de Roy van Zuijdewijn, Lone-Actor Terrorism Definitional Workshop, Countering Lone-Actor Terrorism Series No. 2, p. 5.

in determining the way in which an attack is carried out. Thus, I contend that the use of the term lone-actor as defined by the Countering Lone-actor Terrorism project is more appropriate than the lone-wolf label, which will always carry the connotation of the old American right as well as attackers such as the Unabomber. Using the term lone-actor allows for more nuance as the word “lone” only refers to the act of the attack being carried out by an individual, still allowing us to situate the individual within his personal context. From this perspective, we can observe a plurality of connections and influences, which drive this new wave of terrorism.

As has become evident, the term lone-wolf terrorism is a label that is too often used in a dichotomous understanding of terrorism as being either the actions of a completely solitary individual or a distinctively collective effort. However, the case studies at hand suggest that this understanding no longer fits the phenomenon we are studying. Terrorists interact with like-minded people and even each other, they move seamlessly between the online and offline world and they seek to inspire others to copy their actions. Thus, they are not lone-wolves, but part of a larger pack. They hunt together, at least in spirit, even if only one of them actually strikes. The term lone-actor allows for more flexibility and is consequently more appropriate when discussing this new type of terrorism, which questions older understandings of how terrorists operate.

Chapter V

Legal Considerations and Policy Implications

Understanding these attacks as a coherent phenomenon gives rise to several policy questions. On the one hand, our understanding of the role of the internet has been improved, warranting the development of new strategies to counter online extremism and radicalisation. These strategies must address both the criminalisation of certain acts, even if they are committed online, as well as possible technical solutions to combat the dissemination of extremist content. On the other hand, we see that new actors who propagate certain ideologies, giving them credibility and legitimacy. To discuss this aspect, this chapter will use the Identitarian movement in Austria as a case study, outlining their efforts and the implications of a possible ban, especially from a legal viewpoint.

As we have seen, the internet has had a fundamental and lasting effect on terrorism. The past years have shown that a dichotomous understanding of the internet is not useful, as terrorists seamlessly move between the physical and the virtual world. Consequently, the legislation must follow suit in order to actively combat terrorism, especially lone-actor terrorism. The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ICSR) has suggested using selective takedowns of websites and the prosecution of people who create and share extremist content online in order to deter others from doing so, thereby creating a more hostile environment for extremist messages.¹³⁸ For this, the distinction between an act that was committed online or offline must be done away with, as has happened, for example, in Austria with the legal reform of 2016. Under §283 of the Austrian Criminal Code (StGB), it is a criminal offence to call publicly for

(1) violence against a church or religious community or any other group of persons defined by reference to the existing or absent criteria of race, colour, language, religion or belief, nationality, descent or national or ethnic origin, sex, physical or mental disability, age or sexual orientation, or against a member of such a group explicitly inciting to violence or hatred against him or her on the grounds of membership of that group.¹³⁹

¹³⁸International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, *Countering Online Radicalisation A Strategy for Action*, p. 26.

¹³⁹ Österreichisches Strafgesetzbuch, Paragraph 283 (1/1), <https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=10002296> (my own translation).

Furthermore, still under §283, people who ‘with the intention of violating the human dignity of others, insult one of the groups specified in section 1, in a manner that is likely to disparage or demean this group in public opinion’ are to be punished by up to two years of imprisonment.¹⁴⁰ Although the law does not explicitly refer to the use of the internet, it does mention that disseminating such material in print media or broadcasting services ‘or by other ways through which it will be made available to the broad public’ is to be punished with a prison sentence of up to one year. The fact that posting on the internet does fall under this criterion is also underlined by recent case law.¹⁴¹ Furthermore, the punishment for this crime can be extended to up to five years if the agitation results in violence against one of the groups outlined above, even if the act of violence was not committed by the person calling for it.¹⁴²

However, this aspect is difficult to implement, as connections, especially if they occur via the internet, might be informal and less tangible. Take, for example, the case of the Christchurch attack and its connections to the leader of the Identitarian Movement in Austria (IBÖ) Martin Sellner, who was in contact with Brenton Tarrant. Sellner shares many of the ideological beliefs outlined in the previous chapter, such as the idea of the *Great Replacement* and a nativist understanding of the nation state.¹⁴³ Indeed, the Identitarian Movement itself propagates the protection of European identity, which is understood to be under threat by an influx of migrants and the growing number of Muslims living in Europe.¹⁴⁴ Furthermore, Sellner himself admitted to not only having been in contact with Tarrant, but also to having received a donation of 1500 Euros.¹⁴⁵ In an E-Mail, Tarrant called the donation a small contribution compared to the work that Sellner was doing.¹⁴⁶ Finally, several scholars have also contended that Sellner inspired Tarrant and contributed to his

¹⁴⁰ Österreichisches Strafgesetzbuch, Paragraph 283 (1/2), <https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=10002296> (my own translation).

¹⁴¹ For examples of recent case law see OGH 150s129/17k.

¹⁴² Österreichisches Strafgesetzbuch, Paragraph 283 (3), <https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=10002296> (my own translation).

¹⁴³ Ivo Mijnsen, *Österreichs Freiheitliche sind eng mit den Identitären verbandelt – wie ernst ist es ihnen mit dem Bruch?*, Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 15.04.2019.

¹⁴⁴ Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz und Terrorismusbekämpfung, *Verfassungsschutzbericht 2018*, p. 31.

¹⁴⁵ Ivo Mijnsen, *Österreichs Freiheitliche sind eng mit den Identitären verbandelt – wie ernst ist es ihnen mit dem Bruch?*, Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 15.04.2019.

¹⁴⁶ Fabian Schmid, Laurin Lorenz, *Nach E-Mail-Kontakt mit Sellner buchte Christchurch-Attentäter Mietauto in Österreich*, Der Standard, 14.05.2019.

radicalisation.¹⁴⁷ Despite subsequent investigations by the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution and Counterterrorism (BVT), no charges were raised against Sellner under §283 (3) StGB. This raises the question of what constitutes a crime as outlined in the aforementioned article. Unlike Article 282, which deals with the actual incitement of a crime, §283 (3) clearly deals with anyone who, ‘through an act in accordance with subsections 1 or 2, causes other persons to use violence against a group referred to in subsection 1(1) or against a member of such a group’.¹⁴⁸ Thus, we see that although legal foundations for the prosecution of propagating an ideology conducive to terrorism are already established, their implementation is difficult and unlikely to succeed as a strategy for combatting radicalisation and violence. However, as Ulrich Wagrandl has argued, such a legislative arrangement is not necessary within a liberal democracy but could on the contrary lead to an abuse of rights, prohibited under Article 17 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).¹⁴⁹

Another policy option to address online radicalisation is the restriction of violent and extremist content online. This policy has already been adopted by several countries and online platform providers but remains difficult to successfully implement. For example, YouTube deleted Martin Sellner’s account for violating their community guidelines, only to reopen it the next day. Failing to give a justification for their actions, one has to assume that, given the fact that Sellner had more than 100.000 active followers, the decision was not only a political question but also a business consideration for YouTube.¹⁵⁰ At the same time, and as mentioned previously, removing extremist content on mainstream platforms only relocates the problem to less regulated sites. Here, the government would have to pursue a more active line, which nonetheless remains difficult, ‘as the service providers need to be located in the same jurisdiction as the government that wishes to remove a particular website’.¹⁵¹ Additionally, a complete ban of extremist content can only be achieved by either filtering the entire internet, which is impossible from a technological point of view, or by pre-emptively banning a large number of sites, an approach which will inevitably infringe

¹⁴⁷ Patrick Stegemann, Sören Musyal, *Die rechte Mobilmachung. Wie radikale Netzwerkaktivisten die Demokratie angreifen*, p. 57; Matthias Benz, *Verbindung zwischen dem Christchurch-Attentäter und der Identitären Bewegung schlägt in Österreich hohe Wellen*, Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 27.03.2019.

¹⁴⁸ Österreichisches Strafgesetzbuch, Paragraph 283 (3), <https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=10002296> (my own translation).

¹⁴⁹ Ulrich Wagrandl, *Wehrhafte Demokratie in Österreich*, p. 195.

¹⁵⁰ Michael Hanfeld, YouTube Löscht und Gibt Frei: Identitären-Chef Sellner ist wieder da, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 29.08.2019.

¹⁵¹ International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, *Countering Online Radicalisation A Strategy for Action*, p. 17.

upon basic human rights such as freedom of speech and freedom of information. Thus, relying on eradicating hate-speech online will not suffice as a policy option, as it cannot be implemented fully.

These considerations raise the question of how far the prosecution of actors who actively promote ideologies that, as we have seen, provide the foundation for the radicalisation of violent individuals should go. In 2019, the Austrian government suggested to ban the Identitarian Movement and the appropriate legislation was introduced to the National Assembly (*Nationalrat*) by the ruling People's Party (ÖVP).¹⁵² However, such a ban is problematic, both legally as well as politically. Although the appropriate legislation does not yet exist, the People's Party suggested that a political organisation such as the IBÖ can be banned under Article 11 of the ECHR. According to Article 11 (2) of the Convention, the right of assembly may be suspended if it is:

prescribed by law and (is) necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.¹⁵³

However, this interpretation of Article 11 can in turn be seen as opposed to the prohibition of the abuse of rights outlined in Article 17 of the ECHR. Indeed, commentators have argued that the appropriate legislation already exists. For example §278 StGB outlaws the foundation of a criminal organisation, defined as 'a long-term association of more than two persons, with the aim of one or more members of the association to commit one or more crimes'.¹⁵⁴ Furthermore, Section b of §278 outlaws the formation of a terrorist organisation while section f even outlaws the sharing of instructions on how to commit a terrorist offence, for example by disseminating a manifesto that includes appropriate plans.¹⁵⁵ Thus, there is an existing legal framework within which organisations deemed to be a threat to society can be outlawed and, as the IBÖ does not fit these legal categories, it arguably does not pose a threat to Austrian liberal democracy. This argument is underlined by a ruling by the Higher

¹⁵² Wiener Zeitung, *ÖVP bringt Identitären-Verbot in den Nationalrat*, 17.09.2019.

¹⁵³ European Convention on Human Rights, Article 17 (2).

https://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Convention_ENG.pdf

¹⁵⁴ Österreichisches Strafgesetzbuch, Paragraph 278 (2),

<https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=10002296> (my own translation).

¹⁵⁵ Österreichisches Strafgesetzbuch, Paragraph 278b; Österreichisches Strafgesetzbuch, Paragraph 278f, <https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=10002296> (my own translation).

Regional Court of Graz, which acquitted members of the IBÖ on charges under §287 and 283 StGB.¹⁵⁶

Additionally, the policy of outlawing organisations like the IBÖ has also been criticised from a political standpoint. As Jacob Aasland Ravndal has shown, extensive repression or stigmatisation of right-wing actors further advances their radicalisation and willingness to use violence.¹⁵⁷ Thus, having organisations like the Identitarian Movement operate openly, under the watchful eye of law enforcement agencies, can ensure that actors on the political right have a medium through which they can voice their opinions freely, as long as they conform to the guidelines set out by the existing criminal law. Indeed, studies have shown that terroristic violence often emerges out of a perceived lack of political freedom and the corresponding need to operate outside of the boundaries and rules of democratic political competition.¹⁵⁸ Arguably, the presence of organisations like the IBÖ and parties on the political right like the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) have provided a channel for right ideologies within the democratic framework, contributing to the disconnect we see between high electoral support for such parties and the low numbers of far-right violence, especially when compared to countries like Germany or Norway.

Combating terrorism is a difficult task, especially within the legal framework of a liberal democracy. The previous discussion highlights the very fine line between rights and repression, liberty and security, and, as we have seen, legal scholars come down on different sides of this argument. I believe that creating the legal foundation to outlaw organisations like the Identitarian Movement would establish a dangerous precedent to prohibit a variety of organisations, from animal rights activists to other NGOs. Therefore, a societal approach to combating terrorism and creating resilience among the population seems more advisable. As Ulrich Wagrاندl has contended, there are certain challenges a liberal democracy needs to be able to absorb. Outlawing them and pushing far-right actors even further towards extremism may have the opposite of the effect intended.

¹⁵⁶ Die Presse, *Freisprüche im Identitären-Prozess bestätigt*, 23.01.2019.

¹⁵⁷ Jacob Aasland Ravndal, *Explaining right-wing terrorism and violence in Western Europe: Grievances, opportunities and polarisation*, p. 858 ff.

¹⁵⁸ Alberto Abadie, *Poverty, Political Freedom, and the Roots of Terrorism*, *The American Economic Review*, Vol. 96, No. 2, May 2006, p. 52.

Conclusion

This thesis has investigated the extent to which nine recent right-wing terrorist attacks are interconnected in order to establish whether they should be considered part of a larger, overarching phenomenon. The evidence provided supports such a hypothesis and calls for a reconsideration of established notions within terrorism research. As has been shown, recent right-wing attacks do not fit within the organisational framework that we have become accustomed to through the prevalence of Islamic terrorism. These terrorists operate alone, without support from a formal terrorist organisation and are usually radicalised online, resulting in the repeated mislabelling of their attacks as non-terroristic incidents. However, they also do not fit the category of lone-wolf attacks, as there are clear connections between these terrorists, both amongst each other as well as with a larger community of like-minded people. This finding warrants the development of a new classification for these types of actors. To achieve this, the thesis suggests the adaptation of the term ‘lone-actor’ terrorism to describe these attacks, as it highlights the solitary nature of the attack while also allowing for a higher degree of outside influences on the terrorists.

As David Rapoport has noted, waves of terrorism are driven by a ‘predominant energy, shaping the relationship of participating groups’.¹⁵⁹ Although the requirement for a group is no longer appropriate when it comes to the study of terrorism, the basic argument, that there is a common energy which has an effect on the actors involved as well as on their relations, is an important point that lies at the centre of this analysis. All of the men who carried out these atrocious acts were guided by the same ideological forces, similar grievances and personal struggles as well as the desire to belong to something bigger than themselves. Thus, they were seeking for ways of giving meaning to their lives and gaining recognition by others. They communicate with each other predominantly through their acts, which connects them with those who came before them while also reaching out to those who may come after. As such, they use the same language and symbols. They are part of the same community, which radicalises itself online, and which fulfils many of the needs previously outlined. In other words, their attacks do not take place in a vacuum, but are the result of a plurality of social dynamics. The fact that we can trace those also gives hope that we can study them more closely, hopefully resulting in a better understanding of what can be done

¹⁵⁹ David C. Rapoport, *The four waves of modern terror: International dimensions and consequences*, p. 3.

to avoid or at least reverse the radicalisation process and the sway these ideologies hold over certain people.

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This paper has investigated the similarities between nine terrorists and their respective attacks. However, a very important aspect has not been sufficiently dealt with: the victims of these crimes. When analysing these events in academic terms, it is easy, yet incredibly dangerous, to reduce the devastating loss of life to simple numerical terms, without acknowledging the pain and suffering their parting has caused for many. Representative of all those who have fallen victim to right-wing terrorism, I would like to include the names of the ten people who were shot and killed in Hanau in February of this year.

Ferhat U.

Mercedes K.

Sedat G.

Gökhan G.

Hamza K.

Kaloyan V.

Vili P.

Said H.

Fatih S.

Gabriele R.

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