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Right-Wing Extremists and anti-Islam Activists in Norway: Constraints against Violence

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Given the abundance of violent ideologies and rhetoric among different strands of right-wing extremism and anti-Islamism in Norway, most activists never engage in actual violence and most of them distance themselves from violent methods. Even some of those with very extreme views have some limits to the kinds of violent acts they would actually commit. What restrains most of these activists from engaging in actual violence? Whereas most research on radicalisation processes focus on those few who actually engage in terrorist violence, the large majority of people who radicalize into accepting violence as a legitimate option but for various reasons never make use of violence. From a prevention point of view we can possibly learn more from those who were restrained from engaging in terrorism than from those few who cross the line (Bjørgo 2016; Bjørgo & Gjelsvik 2015).

In this paper we are trying to identify various constraints against violence among right wing extremists and anti-Islam activists in Norway based on recent interviews with 10 individuals from such movements and our previous research on these movements. We start off with a description of the context and recent history of right wing extremism in Norway and Scandinavia. After presenting our interview sample we move on to the statements our interviewees made which throw light on what has restrained them from engaging in violence. Finally, we discuss the findings.

¹ This paper is written as a contribution to an international research project titled "*Who Does Not Become a Terrorist, and Why? Towards an Empirically Grounded Understanding of Individual Motivation in Terrorism*", which has received some funding from the Minerva Research Initiative of the US Department of Defense. The research project consists of around 15 research teams who interview 10 radicals from different types of ideological movements around the globe, focusing on individuals who have chosen to abstain from engaging in political violence or terrorism, and their reasons for not doing so. Our team was asked to interview right-wing extremists and anti-Islam activists in Scandinavia and/or Norway. We carried out the 10 interviews out during the first half of 2014. Since the planned anthology has not yet materialized, we have decided to publish our contribution as a working paper. Thus, the paper was not intended as a stand-alone study but as part of a larger comparative research project, which would have provided a broader context to our case study.

The context of right-wing extremism in Norway and Scandinavia

When we ask what constrains right-wing extremists and anti-Islam activists in Norway from engaging in violence, we have to discuss this on the background on what has actually happened in terms of right-wing extremist violence in Norway in the past, and in the context of the history of right-wing extremism in Norway and Scandinavia.

Right-wing extremism and violence in Norway before the 22 July 2011 attacks

During the 1980s and 1990s right-wing extremism and xenophobic violence was a serious issue in some local communities and to some extent also at the national level in Norway. There were a considerable number of small-scale acts of violence against immigrants and minorities in Norway, typically by the use of fire-bomb and small explosives, assaults, shootings and knife attacks, some of which had fatal outcomes (Bjørø 1997). Many of these incidents were perpetrated by unorganized groups of friends or local xenophobic gangs with hardly any ideology, whereas other incidents were carried out by Nazi skinheads or individuals linked with extremist groups like Bootboys or the so-called Nationalist Milieu. There have also been many violent clashes between neo-Nazis and militant anti-racists. These groups were actively hunting and assaulting each other but clashes also happened during demonstrations and public meetings.²

The brutal murder of a 15 year black old boy Benjamin Hermansen by Nazi skinheads in Oslo in 2001 became a turning point, shocking large parts of the population and mobilizing many to stand up against racism and violence. However, the killing also shocked many young people who were involved with or flirted with the right-wing extremist youth scenes. Combined with effective preventive efforts from the police, municipalities and civil society, recruitment to these right-wing extremist scenes almost stopped in the aftermath of this murder. The Nazis skinhead scene, represented mostly by Bootboys gangs in several cities, virtually disappeared. The only youth-oriented group which had some following during the early 2000s was Vigrid, a quasi-religious group which tried to fuse Nazi and anti-Semitic ideology with old Norse religious symbols and mythology.

From 2002 onwards there was very limited militant right-wing extremist activity or violence in Norway until the horrible terrorist attacks of 22 July 2011, which came totally out of the blue. Anders Behring Breivik, an unknown right-wing extremist inspired by anti-Islam discourse and Internet bloggers but acting entirely on his own, set off a one ton fertilizer-based car bomb outside the main government building, killing 8, injuring more than 100, and causing enormous material damage. After the blast in Oslo he carried out a shooting massacre at the summer camp of the Labour party' youth movement at Utøya, killing 69 people, including 33 victims below the age of 18 (Hemmingby & Bjørø 2015).

As we will come back to, the impacts of the murder of Benjamin Hermansen and the 22. July attacks in particular constituted significant constraints on the practice and discourse on violence among right-wing extremists and anti-Islam activists in Norway after 2011.

² These patterns of violence are described and analyzed in the study "Racist and Right-Wing Violence in Scandinavia: Patterns, Perpetrators and Responses" (Bjørø 1997).

Two main varieties of right-wing extremist discourses in Scandinavia

Since the late 1980s, there have been two main strands of militant rightwing extremist movements and discourses in Norway and the other Scandinavian countries, Sweden and Denmark. One movement, far stronger in Sweden than in Norway and Denmark, can be characterized as neo-Nazi, often using a virulent anti-Jewish discourse and propagating violence. In Norway, this rhetoric was represented by groups like Vigrid, Bootboys and the Einsatz group. The other type of movement can be characterized as radical nationalist and ethnocentric, mainly propagating against immigration in general and Muslim immigration in particular. This direction has been dominant on the extreme right in Norway and Denmark. It will be described more in detail below.

There is an obvious historical explanation for why the neo-Nazi movement has been and still is far weaker in Norway and Denmark than in Sweden: Norway and Denmark were invaded and occupied by Nazi Germany during World War II, and after the war local Nazi collaborators were convicted as national traitors. The Norwegian “minister president” Vidkun Quisling, who headed a Nazi collaborationist regime in Norway during World War II, literally gave treason a name. Thus, being a National Socialist and a patriot became a contradiction in terms in Norway and Denmark in the post-war era. This was not the case in Sweden, where the local Nazis never got the opportunity to collaborate with Nazi occupiers and were not stigmatized to the same extent. Nazi activists continued their activities after the war and had unbroken links to the present-day Nazi movement in Sweden (Lööv 1999, 2004, 2015).

In Norway and Denmark, nationalist sentiments and symbols are still closely associated with the struggle against Nazism and occupation and the struggle for freedom and democracy. Thus, national symbols are embraced by the entire political spectrum. In Sweden, with its great power history of military expansionism during the 17th and 18th century, nationalist symbols are mainly associated with conservative and far right circles and even with the neo-Nazis, who are the only ones embracing the Swedish flag and the national anthem with some enthusiasm (Bjørge 1995, 1997, ch. 8).

In spite of their different historical and ideological roots, the structure of the discourse among neo-Nazis militants (in all the Scandinavian countries) and the nationalist militants in Norway and Denmark have been strikingly similar in the structure of their rhetoric. The anti-immigration movement (during the 1980s and 1990s in particular) viewed themselves as the new resistance movement, combating Muslim invasion and national traitors, whereas the neo-Nazis have proclaimed themselves a white/Aryan resistance movement fighting the Zionist Occupation Government (ZOG) and racial traitors. Among the first category of nationalist activists many claimed that a civil war would break out unless their warnings against the Muslim invasion are heeded, while the ZOG ideologues claimed that the racial war had already begun. The common traits are the double enemy image of an external enemy and the internal traitors helping them to destroy our people, and the justification of violent by a heroic resistance movement to fight this evil conspiracy (Bjørge 1995).

In Norway this discourse on resistance against the Muslim invasion was promoted by several groups, in particular the “People’s Movement Against Immigration” (FMI) and “Norway

Against Immigration” (NMI). In Denmark, “The Danish Association” was the main proponent of this rhetoric. Interestingly, in both Norway and Denmark, several leading activists in these movements during the 1980s and 1990s had actually been resistance fighters against the German occupation and used this link to bolster the legitimacy of their violent rhetoric. In an interview Tore Bjørgo conducted in 1989 with the chairman of FMI at the time (and later NMI), Arne Myrdal, who also became the leading figure of the militant extreme right in Norway during the following years Myrdal was not ambiguous about his promotion of violence:

Myrdal: The Norwegians will no longer accept this national treason. When politicians provoke the population, young people will seek recourse in violence. First against the immigrants, then against those who promote immigration, and finally against the politicians and the System. Then civil war will break out. It’s too bad that the immigrants will be targeted - it is not their fault. They [i.e. the young militants] should rather go for the politicians.

[T.B.:] How?

Myrdal: By beating or killing them. The people will rise against them with violence. The government and the Parliament are out of touch with the people. If they do not govern the way we want, things will escalate to a civil war. There are many resistance groups, and the boys are armed. I know everything about this; I direct the resistance all over the country. There have been many weapons thefts [from military depots] during the last few years. These weapons end up with the resistance groups. It is not our intention to use the weapons against the immigrants. It is our own national traitors we have to fight against.³

Myrdal also described immigrants and asylum seekers as “pioneers” in a Muslim army of conquest. According to this theory, the so-called “refugees” have come to establish “bridgeheads” in Norway as part of an evil conspiracy to establish global Islamic rule.

The Muslims have come to conquer Europe. I believe there will be civil war in three years from now [1989!]. We can either surrender and let them take over our country - rape our country! Or we can prepare ourselves for resistance, and that is what we are doing right now.⁴

In his book “Sannheten skal frem” (The truth must be told) from 1990 he continues:

...all those foreign intruders who came here [...] have not come to save their lives, as they have tried to make us believe. They have come for nothing less than to take over our country, to become so numerous as to make the Norwegians a minority in their own country.⁵

³ Quoted from Tore Bjørgo’s interview with Arne Myrdal, 23 June, 1989.

⁴ Quoted from Tore Bjørgo’s interview with Arne Myrdal (12 August 1989).

⁵ Arne Myrdal, *Sannheten skal fram* (The Truth Must be Told) (Oslo: Lunderød Forlag, 1990), pp. 3-4.

In addition to Arne Myrdal, there were also a number of other leading anti-immigration activists in Norway and Denmark during the 1990s who promoted violent resistance, using the same rhetoric, although usually not quite as explicitly as Myrdal did (Bjørøgo 1995, 1997).

Breivik and the impact of the 22. July 2011 attacks

Anders Behring Breivik, who killed 77 people, had a very similar rhetoric in his compendium and his statements during the trial. He claimed that he represented the «Knights Templar», an alleged secret terrorist organisation (which turned out to be non-existing beyond himself), and that they are the new Crusaders fighting against the third attempt of the Muslims to conquer Europe for Islam, and against the traitors aiding them.⁶ Breivik repeatedly referred to the so-called “Eurabia” plot, where EU leaders allegedly conspired with Arab leaders to facilitate an Islamic invasion and takeover of Europe by Muslim immigrants. Although Breivik viewed the Muslim immigrants as the main external threat against the European peoples, and considered terrorist attacks against Muslim targets as justified, he decided to rather attack what he called “Cultural Marxists”, the alleged traitors responsible for the multiculturalist policies which facilitated the Muslim invasion. He had a long list of various categories of traitors but the main culprits in Norway were the Labour Party and the news media. For various reasons, he failed to attack any media targets though. Interestingly, Breivik decided *not* to attack Muslim targets in Norway because he considered that it would be counter-productive. He had observed the strong popular response against racism and right-wing extremism in the aftermath of the killing of Benjamin Hermansen ten years earlier, leading to a complete stop in recruitment to the militant nationalist movement. He therefore decided to attack the alleged “traitors” rather than the Muslims (Hemmingby & Bjørøgo 2015). What he apparently did not foresee was that his terrorist attacks would also have a very negative impact on the anti-Islam movement to which he claimed to belong, severely restricting what anti-Islam activist could express publicly in the aftermath of the 22. July 2011 attacks. Breivik stated during the trial that one of his objectives with his attacks was to provoke a witch-hunt against moderate cultural conservative (i.a. anti-Islam activists) in order to radicalize them like himself.⁷ This did not happen quite like that, and the anti-Islam/counter-Jihad movements in Norway and Western Europe generally distanced themselves from Breivik and his actions. The only movements which endorsed him were to be found among fascist and neo-Nazi movements, to a limited extent in Scandinavia but far more so and more broadly in Eastern Europa and Russia (Enstad 2015). This “cold shoulder” is probably one of the main reasons why Breivik in several statements from prison distanced himself from the main parts of the counter-Jihad movement and identified himself first as a fascist and later even as a National Socialist with an agenda of protecting the survival of the Nordic race.⁸

The post-22 July 2011 movements in Norway

The present scene of right-wing and anti-Islam movements in Norway consists of several (partly cooperating and partly competing) organisations and parties. The development and

⁶ See Bjørøgo (2012) for an analysis of Breivik’s rhetoric compared with that of Arne Myrdal and radical parts of the anti-immigration lobby in Norway.

⁷ According to our notes from the trial, NTB court transcripts (23.04.2012), Hemmingby & Bjørøgo 2015: 35.

⁸ Open letter from Breivik in prison, titled “Explanations, clarifications and the peace proposal – NRK, TV2, Aftenposten, VG and Dagbladet (“the big five” are refusing to consider)” (undated, probably January 2014).

impact of these groups cannot be understood without seeing them in relation to the right-wing populist Progress Party, which for several decades has represented the main opposition to the current immigration policy, and at times used rather blatant xenophobic rhetoric, such as the statement by the party leader (and present Minister of Finance) in 2009 on “the Islamisation by disguise” (*snik-islamisering*) of Norway. Playing the “immigration card” has contributed to making the Progress Party the third (and at times even the second) largest political party in Norway (Jupskås 2015, 2016). In general, however, the Progress Party is more moderate than other right-wing populist parties in Scandinavia and Europe, and in particular when becoming a member of the conservative government coalition after the parliamentary elections in 2013. This moderation has led to discontent among more radical members. Some of the more radical anti-immigration MPs continues to express fierce views on Muslims and immigrants in spite of the more responsible party line. In the past, several leading party members and even MPs have been excluded from the party and have started up their own more radical parties. The most lasting splinter party is the Democrats, with candidates elected in several municipal and regional elections.

Beyond the parties there are also several organisations, like the People’s Movement against Immigration, which has been active since the late 1980s, and the more recent Stop Islamisation of Norway (SIAN) (inspired by “Stop Islamisation of...” in several European countries), Norwegian Defence League (NDL) (inspired by associated with English Defence League) and Pegida Norway (inspired by the original Pegida marches in Dresden, Germany). Thus, it is striking that these more or less nationalist movements are all highly transnational. There is collaboration as well as rivalry between these organisations, and several of these groups have had severe internal conflicts and splits, due to personal differences as well as political disagreements. Most of the activities take place in social media and blogs (Haanshuus 2015). Even the largest groups are only able to muster a few dozens for public demonstrations, partly because many sympathisers fear violent counter-demonstrators, but also due to the fear of being identified and the stigmatization that follows with being connected to these types of groups.

This leads us to the interviews we did with ten right-wing extremist and anti-Islam activists in Norway.

Our sample

As mentioned our sample for this particular study consists of ten interviews conducted during 2014 and 2015. Three of them were with individuals who had been active in the neo-Nazi and militant nationalist groups in Norway during the 1990s and early 2000s. By the time of the interviews, they had all disengaged and distanced themselves from the movement several years earlier. Six of the other seven interviewees were at the time of the interviews all active in leading roles in organisations like *Stop Islamisation of Norway* (SIAN), *Pegida Norway*, *Norwegian Defence League* (NDL) and the right-wing party *Demokratene*. As public leaders they did not want to be anonymized. Their names have nevertheless not been used here. The final interviewee had recently broken with one of these anti-Islam and anti-immigration groups.

The interviewees were informed about the project and their rights. They were also informed about the measures taken to protect their identity. However, those who were active leaders in organisations generally did *not* want to be anonymized, as they considered the public profile as integral of their activism. Only one of the former activists in the militant neo-Nazi scene was concerned about being identified and some of his data has been modified to mask his identity. It did not make any sense to anonymise the organisations, with a few exceptions when severe illegal acts were planned (and dropped).

When informing properly about the purpose of this project to the interviewees, that we “wanted to gain more knowledge on those who decided to refrain from political violence and why” may have given a possible side effect. Although it probably made more people willing to participate, this way to present the project may also have influenced the way they responded to our questions, possibly leading them to play down any more aggressive views they might have had.

Most of the interviews were conducted in Norwegian and later translated to English when transcribed. However, three of the interviews were done in English when the interviewee was comfortable with that, which simplified the transcription process. The sample includes eight men and two women.

There are some holes in our sample. Our ten final interviewees were either former activists in the neo-Nazi scene who participated or were very close to participating in violence in the past (but had some restraints about going all the way), or they were present activists in the anti-Islam scene with considerably stronger boundaries against using violence, although some had a rhetoric alluding more to violence than others. We tried hard to get informants who were presently active in the very small neo-Nazi scene in Norway but after a lengthy process our most promising “candidate” eventually decided not to give his consent to an interview. We also miss interviewees from the present the anti-Islam scene who are more open about promoting violence. These people exist but we failed to recruit them to our study.

However, in addition to these ten interviews, Tore Bjørgo has previously (in particular during the period 1988-2001) conducted around 100 interviews with different varieties of right-wing extremist activists in Norway, Denmark and Sweden (Bjørgo 1997, Bjørgo et al. 2005), covering both neo-Nazis as well as militant nationalists and anti-immigrant and anti-Islam activists. These earlier interviews provide data about the broader movements and the historical and ideological context of present day activists, and thus a basis for comparison over time and between movements.

Our sample is obviously too small to make any generalization about constraints to violence in these movements. These individual cases nevertheless provide some good indications, and the interviewees also described the discussions around the use of violence in their respective movements.

Barriers to actually engaging in (lethal) violence

Anders Behring Breivik was an outlier when it comes to actually translating the violent discourse into actual lethal violence, even mass-murder. Many right-wing extremists do a lot of violent talking, bragging that they will kill this or that Muslim or politician. Only a few commit real violence. What keeps most of them from actually doing what they talk about?

Among our interviewees we find a wide variety of approaches, ranging from those who take a principled position against using violence, on the one end of the continuum, to those who have just stopped short of committing murder, on the other extreme.

Three of our activists have actually, to various degrees, been involved in violent activism but still had some barriers which restrained them from committing lethal violence. One of Norway's most extreme neo-Nazis during the 1990s describe the violence carried out in the following way:

Violence was always a part of the picture. But [... to begin with it was mainly] street thug kind of violence. We would fight with our fists and throw stones at each other, but we didn't kick while people were lying down, it wasn't that kind of brutal violence. [...But while I was sitting in prison the first time] I think that reading especially [the books] "Revolution by number 14", "Hunter" and "The Turner Diaries", and these books made me realise that we actually have to fight [with arms]. As soon as I got out of jail, it was a very aggressive ideology among the neo Nazis and especially from [the Swedish group] White Aryan Resistance. Very aggressive. "It is a military solution; we have to start a guerrilla war" and all these things. [...]

Q: You were thinking about murder, but could you imagine what would have stopped you apart from the police? Were there any barriers between you and murder?

I am actually not sure. What I once did, which really surprises me today, is that there was this one guy, who [...] was a bit "simple". One evening I had a Glock pistol, but I didn't have any bullets in it. I was just carrying that Glock from one place to the other. I saw this anti-racist activist, and I told [our guy]: "Could you take this Glock and go over and shoot him?" And he said "yeah", and he went straight over and he did this [pointing the gun at the person's head and pulled the trigger] and the other guy ran as fast as he could. [Our guy] came back to me and said: "It was no bullets in this gun". "Yeah I know, I was just testing you", I said and we walked on. So he would have done it, because he didn't know that there was no bullet in the gun.

This informant also recounted that they were planning to hang a local politician who had promoted multi-culturalism in his home-town.

We went out [to his house] with a rope and a sign "I am a race traitor", [...] like they did in the Turner Diaries, to hang him in a light pole outside his house. We actually went around his house and we wanted to knock on the door. But then I made up an excuse [...] to my two friends who were with me. My aunt lived two houses down, so I said she saw us, so we had to do this another night. A few times when we actually

did have a concrete plan to kill somebody I would always find an excuse for not going through.

Q: Why?

Well, I don't think I actually wanted to kill. [...] I know that killing is bad. The last few years I was a neo-Nazi I knew that it was wrong. [...] But [being a Nazi] was my identity. That was what I was known as, what everybody thought I was. In a way I knew that what I was doing was wrong, so I think maybe that also was a part of it. [...] I don't think I had it in me to actually kill somebody. Because I was always thinking about what will happen then, what will happen to my mum and dad? So even if I took it quite far, when I was a [media] celebrity in a negative way as a Nazi and that became my identity. And I really messed up for my family in many ways and for myself.

This activist described his family background as very positive, with family members who cared for him even if they abhorred his Nazi views. Because he cared for them as well, this restrained his violence. When he left the movement some years later, the tipping point had much to do with his family ties and people who cared for him – among others a cook who was working in the prison he was doing his sentence.

The cook, he took me into the kitchen one day, and we had long talks while making foods and things. He never criticized my ideology but he just asked [...] critical constructive questions that made me think. [...] He had seen] this movie called the “American History X” [about a neo-Nazi who eventually left the movement...] so he asked me a question: “You know, when you look at all the things you have done in your life, what good has it done to yourself and your family?”

This was at the time when all the impressions [...] that had been happening in the past year or two, were really sinking in. All this doubt and all these things were on my mind when I was in jail [...] and he asked that question. I had just recently learned that my grandfather's truck company had gone bankrupt because of lack of business [...], because nobody wanted to do business with him anymore. [...] The road crossing near where my family lives was now called “the Nazi crossing”. My sister had a hard time at school and my mum had a hard time, and everybody had a hard time because of what I had done. My grandfather's truck company – he fought against the Germans during the WWII so for him this was pretty bad. All these things were taking its hold on me in a way. So one day, I thought to myself, I can't stand for this anymore. This is not me, this is not who I am. So I called my parents and I said it is over. I can't stand for this anymore, it is over, I said.

[...] When I left that prison it was like I weighed a hundred kilo less, because hate is a very heavy burden to carry. To have all these paranoid world views, thinking that everybody hates you and wants to kill you, and you have to kill them and it is going to be a war, you hate the blacks, you hate the gays – it is heavy. For me to walk out of

that gate, I felt like I left that bag behind in a way. I travelled home with my mum and [step] dad and father, because they all met me outside the jail.⁹

Another former neo-Nazi recounts that the organisation where he was a leading activist had an official policy of using (excessive) violence in self-defense only.

It is hard to stay out of jail if you are neo-Nazi, because you are in a constant conflict with left wing extremists as well. So [our leader] decided [that ...] it was okay to use excessive violence in self-defense, without [any] proportion. So he made like a principle that if somebody attacked [our group], during that encounter it was encouraged to use excessive self-defense, way beyond self-defense. But that actually never happened.

However, they also planned and trained for terrorist attacks and assassinations. They had bought a submachine gun from another violent Nazi group but they let the seller keep it stored for them. For training purposes their own group had bought a large number of paintball guns:

We didn't use them [just for] normal paintball fights. We used them in the woods and we would have some people going up the road and some people would lie [along] the road and ambush and stuff like that. But then the secret police got a hold of this and I remember one time there was a guy observing us and he didn't [try to] hide that he was there and that he was watching us. And we got into the mind-set that we were [under] more surveillance than we actually probably were. I think that might have been one of the main reasons why [our group] didn't turn more violent because that was by far the end goal. The goal was not to do propaganda forever. It was just something we did because it was something we knew how to. [...]

Q: Why didn't you go further in using violence?

It might be two-sided. I always had a job, compared to a lot of people in movement who were unemployed. [...] I think that the number one reason was the police actually. That we believed that we were under surveillance. [...] And then [our leader] decided that we didn't need the machine gun. If we had decided that we needed it, God knows [what could have happened]. [...] But it was no reservation [among the core activists] against using violence against non-whites and no reservations at all against using violence against socialists or people from the left side of the politics or anti-racists. So it was more like a discussion of how to do it, the practical aspects of how to do it. [The other neo-Nazi group stored our] weapon and it was a will in [our group to use them]. [...] I think eventually what broke [our group] was the efforts of the police and the society as a whole. So when [our group] became too big and too unpleasant for society, somehow it broke.

In addition to the impact of both the real and the perceived surveillance by the Police Security Service (PST) in restraining them from carrying through their violent plans, this informant

⁹ This interviewee, who had served a total of four years in prison for a variety of violent crimes, broke sharply with the Nazi movement in the late 1990s.

also points to the importance of preventive dialogue interventions by the Police Security Service.

The police actually summoned everybody in [the group] person by person, targeting each and one separately. And then we lost control of what they were talking about and the incentives that the police were giving them. [...] So they interviewed everybody and then [the leader] didn't know who he could trust anymore. Because everybody had talked to the police, and you don't know what they have talked about. [The leader] talked to the people afterwards and they told him what they had talked about in some regards. But he never knew if there were telling the truth.

This preventive dialogue campaign by the Police Security Service was actually quite successful in breaking up this specific group. From 2003, the PST had preventive talks with 95 young members and associates, explaining what this extremist group was really about and what the consequences of further participation would be to them. More than half of these youths declared on the spot that they would leave the organisation, and apparently they did. The organisation gradually fell apart (Bjørgero & Gjelsvik 2015: 66).

Another former activist also emphasised the effectiveness of this “soft” police approach:

The activities of the police to stop youth from getting into the radical groups were very successful. The police visited them at home and talked to them and their parents. It was very irritating for the group leaders, really annoying. It ruined our efforts to recruit new members. We tried to talk to the youth after the police visits, but then it often was too late. Then police were very good at this work, and made a lot of youths leaving our movement. But there is a limit to how far the police should go against a radical political movement before they interfere with political freedoms.

Another former activist in the loose neo-Nazi and militant nationalist scene during the 1990s responded to the question of how people in his movement considered the utility of violence in the following way:

Many of our meetings and people were attacked by radical opponents, so violence was a normal – or daily - part of the political environment. But violence as a political instrument was not an option for me, due to personal ethics and morality. It was not an open war, but an ideological struggle against mostly civilians. Others had other opinions about this, but they were still comrades and part of the groups, so the collective responsibility was absolutely present. Self-defence was okay, or even illegal activity to get money or inside info for the political struggle was unfortunately considered okay within the group. [...] Many in our group didn't take part in organized violence, or at least not often. There were various reasons: It was stupid to get jailed and become unable to be still political active. And it would give us reduced support in society and opinion, as well as from financial supporters.

They were also concerned about the impact of excessive violence would have on the general public and on their ability to operate openly:

I remember that after the killing of Benjamin [Hermansen] you couldn't be a self-proclaimed super racist and still go and have a good time drinking, that didn't work anymore.

This racist murder in 2001 actually led to a strong decline in new recruits to the militant Nazi movements and many activists pulled out.

The three interviewees above all belonged to the Norwegian neo-Nazi and militant nationalist scene. With some differences, they were leading activists during the 1990s and early 2000s and have since broken sharply with the movement, two of them publicly. Two of them were also very close to committing terrorist violence and even murder but barriers in the form of moral constraints or the belief that they were under surveillance by the security service prevented them from going all the way.

Six of the interviewees are currently leading activist in anti-Islam groups like Norwegian Defense League (NDL), Pegida, Stop Islamisation of Norway (SIAN) and the Democrats.¹⁰ They all in principle denounced the use of violence to promote their cause although there were considerable nuances between them on this. They also conceded that there were different views among their members on the use of violence against the alleged “traitors” (i.e. politicians in charge of letting large numbers of immigrants into the country). A former member of the leadership group of Norwegian Defense League (NDL) and current leading activist in another anti-Islam movement stated:

There was no discussion about armed resistance as an alternative [...], not with me in the leadership [of NDL]. I was against all forms of violence. But some members or followers were open about wanting to acquire weapons and that we are moving towards a civil war. [...] There was a person who called me and he was talking about civil war and similar things. I called the Police Security Service straight away. I tell these people that violence doesn't solve anything.

A leading activist in Pegida clearly dissociated himself from violence and also tried to persuade hotheads in his movement:

I frequently experience people writing comments on my [Facebook] wall who encourage violence. [...] I have chatted with them after I have deleted what they have written, and tell them that we do not achieve anything by saying such things in public. [...] We need to try and see that politics is the art of possibilities. And how do we reach those possibilities? Not with violence. We need to maintain humanism in Norway and then we need to make sure that we don't use violence in Norway. We have to treat people as humans and not as animals. [...] We have all the arguments, we need to change the politics, and we are not able to change the politics if we are violent or encourage violence. Then there is no chance of getting through what we want.

¹⁰ The final interviewee was a leading member of one of these anti-Islam groups but has pulled out of all such activism.

Two of the interviewees were more inclined to use the discourse on a coming civil war and how the “traitors” should be treated. One of them, operating mainly outside any of the organisations although active in several of them, maintains several blogs. One of these blogs is an alphabetic register of several hundred individuals – politicians, journalists, academics, civil servants, bishops, activists, or other individuals – he considers as national traitors based on what these individuals have said or done in favour of immigrants in general and Muslims in particular. In another webpage, carrying a name which alluded to the military underground resistance movement against the Nazi occupation of Norway, he states (using his full name):

[Name] is an organisation¹¹ of the people which aims at stopping immigration to and islamisation of our country. [...] Immigration to Norway has now reached such a level that it must be considered an occupation. The occupiers have no intentions to integrate but demand that Norwegian society has to adapt to their culture, religion and way of life. Their ultimate goal is to take over our country completely. Immigration is therefore a perfect example of systematic political irresponsibility. The Parliament, the government, the Supreme Court and the media are siding with the occupiers and have no intention to change that. Those who resist the occupation are thrown suspicion on and punished. Therefore the grassroots in the country have to take action and covertly establish units at all levels to resist the occupation with all available means.

[...] The question is whether these [traitors] can or should be punished according to the military criminal law's clauses on high treason. [...] In 1945 we shot around 50 people on the basis of the military criminal law. [...] it is important to communicate this to the relevant people in order to make clear what will happen the day the immigration account will be settled.¹²

This rhetoric on invasion and occupation by foreigners, the traitors assisting them and the need for action by a resistance movement is very similar to the discourse used by the firebrand leader of FMI and NMI, Arne Myrdal, back in the late 1980s and early 1990s. At that time, this rhetoric was quite commonly used within the various anti-immigration movements and parties at that time (Bjørngo 1995, 1997, ch. 8). When we tried to get the interviewed leaders of the contemporary organisations against immigration and Islamisation to relate to this discourse, most of them distanced themselves from it, with the exception of two activists who to different extent used a similar rhetoric, although in a somewhat muted form.

One likely reason for their reluctance was probably that this rhetoric had been “contaminated” by Anders Behring Breivik, who justified his mass-murder by claiming to represent the “Norwegian anti-communist resistance movement” fighting the “multi-cultural traitors” who were helping the Muslims to “conquer Norway and Europe for Islam”. How to consider Breivik’s actions and ideology became a hot issue within the Norwegian anti-Islam movements in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on 22 July 2011. Some distanced themselves totally from Breivik:

¹¹ In reality this was not an organisation, just a blog where he listed people he considered to be traitors.

¹² Cited from <http://www.milorg2.no/>, our translation.

Well I only have one word for [Breivik and his attacks]: horrible. And I curse that devil, because he destroyed the opportunity to discuss Muslim immigration and Islam. This has been used for all it is worth by Muslims in Norway and the left side in Norwegian politics, to bring in so many Muslims to Norway and justify it. Horrible, in many ways (Pegida leader).

Another anti-Islam activist complained that public activists like him were identified with Anders Behring Breivik and his horrible attacks:

I have never met him ABB¹³ or talked to him [...]. If I had the opportunity, then I would have used violence, I would have shot him on the spot, because he has destroyed my life! I would have shot him without thinking about it! That's where my barriers go in regards to violence!

Q: Can you explain why he destroyed your life?

He has destroyed my life in relation to me being called in as a witness in that trial [of Breivik]. When you see all that media coverage and when they put up your picture on the front page of the newspaper with the title "This is ABB's friends" (Former leading activist in Norwegian Defence League and Pegida).

This activist broke with NDL because of internal disagreements on how to relate to Breivik. Half of the leadership group did not want him to renounce Breivik publicly, partly because they did not want the terrorist's name to be associated with the organization but also because some of them agreed with at least some of what he did. This interviewee described the split in the NDL leadership group:

One of them was such a fanatic Israel supporter so he thought it was okay to shoot at that "Palestine camp" at the island.¹⁴ The other person could defend what [Breivik] did to the [government building] but not the shooting at the island. He thought that was to go too far. [...] So then it was an easy decision for me, they wouldn't go out in public and distance themselves from Breivik, so I left. And the rest of the leadership left with me, those who thought that here we have to draw the line.

It has been quite common among anti-Islam activists to say, even in the news media, that they agree with much of Breivik's analysis in his compendium but not with his violent attacks, and in particular the massacre of youths at Utøya. One of our interviewees, a leading member of the Democrats, and also having been active in SIAN, NDL and a right-wing Christian party, received considerable media attention when she on Facebook commented Breivik's statements in court:

¹³ Anders Behring Breivik is often referred to as ABB, as many prefer to avoid using his name.

¹⁴ The Labour Party's youth organisation, AUF, which organized the youth camp at Utøya, is highly critical to Israel's occupation of Palestinian lands. According to this interviewee, some people in NDL considered the camp at the island as "a recruitment camp for PLO".

“I think Breivik’s speech is enormous. He is razor sharp. And I FULLY SUPPORT HIM IN HIS VIEWS. But of course, I distance myself from his acts.”¹⁵

When we interviewed her she stated:

I still stand by what I said [in the news media]. [...] I meant that Breivik, he did this unbelievable horrible act because he was thinking about our country and he was to prevent and hinder the next generation of Labour Party politicians. He saw what direction our country is heading when it comes to Islamisation and so on. Now we are being completely invaded. So I support his thinking behind this, the thought of protecting our country against this evilness, but of course not the tragic acts that he did – that cannot be defended in any way. But the thought behind, to protect the country, that I can support. But of course the use of violence is totally wasted. It is horrible.

The leader of Stop Islamisation of Norway (SIAN) stated:

Frankly I'm so tired of Anders Behring Breivik. In SIAN we have a policy that we don't want anybody to talk about ABB. But I notice that there are quite a few people that are against what he did but maybe some of the points he is making are valid. Especially if you see how the society and how the involvement is in many European countries. So it's very hard, because if you say you are against ABB but maybe he's right about a few things he says, then you are an extremist. So the problem is that people can't separate these two things, what he means and what he does.

Q: What impact did ABB have on your movement?

Very negative, very negative. It's been better now in the last few years but right after, if you just said one word against Muslims or immigrants or anything you were a racist and a fascist and everything. So he did much harm to our cause. But now, the last two years it has been better again, because I think that people realize that the problems were there before ABB and the attacks.

Thus, although Breivik’s mass-murder clearly had a moderating effect on the discourse of the anti-immigration and anti-Islam movements it is not obvious that this will have a lasting impact. The new wave of refugees from Syria and other countries coming to Norway and other European countries in growing numbers during 2015 (and showing no signs of declining) has provoked more violent rhetoric and even actual violence – but more so in other countries than in Norway where xenophobic violence is still very rare.

Discussion

It is quite striking in our material that leaders of the present anti-Islam movements in Norway are far more restrained in talking about or justifying violent “resistance” against Muslim immigration or an alleged coming civil war than were some of the leaders of the anti-

¹⁵ Cited from <http://www.klassekampen.no/61653/article/item/null/-jeg-stotter-breivik>.

immigration movements of the 1990s. Furthermore, the militant neo-Nazi scene in Norway is miniscule, both in terms of size and activity. This stands in sharp contrast to the situation during the 1990s, and also to the situation in neighboring Sweden.

When we asked what restrains Norwegian right-wing extremists and anti-Islam activists from engaging in actual violence, the interviews have indicated several constraining factors. Some point to their moral values which either makes engaging in violence for political purposes totally out of the question, or which stopped them from killing even if they had few barriers against other forms of violence. Most people have strong inhibitions against inflicting harm on other people, and in particular against killing (Grossman 2009). Others pointed to violence as being contra-productive in furthering their cause. When other right-wing activists, such as Anders Behring Breivik, had made use of extreme violence, it led to a backlash against their movement. The racist killing of Benjamin Hermansen in 2001 had such an impact in terms of reducing recruitment and opportunities for displaying their political views in public but the 22 July attacks of Anders Behring Breivik even more so. The strong public outcry against right-wing extremism and violence limited the rhetorical possibilities for what is acceptable to express in public regarding Muslims and political opponents, and restrained the radical groups' political room for maneuver. Even within liberal democracies, there are limits to how far radical groups trying to get a mass following can go in terms of expressing extremist views before they face social or even legal sanctions (Donselaar 1995).

The criminologist Per-Olof Wikström (2014: 75–76) explains how moral norms affect behaviour through interaction with the surroundings:

[H]umans are fundamentally rule-guided actors (not self-interested actors) and [...] their responses to motivators (temptation and provocation) are essentially an outcome of the interaction between their moral propensities and the moral norms of the settings (environments) in which they take part. People are crime prone to the extent that their personal morals encourage them to see an act of crime as an action alternative, and settings are criminogenic to the extent that their moral norms encourage the breaking of some rule(s) of law. Acts of crime are most likely to happen when crime-prone people take part in criminogenic settings (environments).

Thus, those with weak moral restraints against using violence are more likely to actually make use of violence if they are in as social environment where violence is considered acceptable or even desirable (cf. the example of the young skinhead who was asked by his leader to shoot an antiracist). Conversely, personal moral values and restraints against using violence for political purposes might be reinforced if the relevant social environment considers such violence totally unacceptable. At the collective level, this was obviously the setting in Norway in the aftermath of the killing of Benjamin Hermansen, and even more so after the 22. July attacks. Hardly any right-wing or anti-Islam activists in Norway would publicly approve of Breivik's terrorist attacks although a few were willing to endorse his ideas.

This point is illustrated in a study of Johannes Due Enstad (2015) titled "Glory to Breivik", where he explores how the Russian far right has related to the 2011 Norway attacks. He found a remarkable support among leading far right activists in Russia – not only for Breivik's ideology but also for his violent actions. When the Russian far right reception of Breivik was

compared with how far right movements in Western Europe responded, the differences were striking: The leading parties and movements either refrained from publicly addressing the subject, condemned Breivik as a murderer of White people, or dismissed him as a Zionist-controlled puppet. Even some available opinion polls indicate similar tendencies among the far right sympathisers in Western Europe (Enstad 2015: 8). This looks remarkably similar to the findings in our small panel of Norwegian right-wing and anti-Islam activists. The question is what can explain this striking difference between the reactions to Breivik's rhetoric and violent attacks among far right activists in Russia on the one hand, and in Western Europe and Norway on the other?

Enstad points to three main factors: a) There is a weaker social stigma attached to Right-Wing extremism in Russia than is the case in Western Europe, which may explain the popularity of Breivik among the Russian extreme Right. b) Violence is far more widespread in Russian society than in Western Europe. This desensitization of violence may make Breivik's spectacular violence have a less repulsive effect than it had in less violent societies. Higher acceptance of violence in general may make it more acceptable to embrace Breivik's actions. c) The Russian far right has a strong tradition of violence and also of embracing and hailing as heroes those who have committed such violence. Breivik was thus taken into this pantheon of right-wing extremist heroes (Enstad 2015: 9-12).

These factors are also relevant for explaining why Norwegian far right activists are reluctant to endorse the use of political violence in general and Breivik's attacks in particular. Right-wing extremism is highly stigmatized, partly due to Norway's experience with Nazi occupation during World War II. Norway is also a country with a low level of violence, and among the lowest homicide rates in Europe. Furthermore, there is no acceptance of violence in general and of political violence in particular. Neither are there any cults of warriors or violent "heroes". Thus, the cultural and social setting in Norway is not "criminogenic" when it comes to political violence.

However, this does not explain why there is such a huge difference in the size and militancy of the extreme right in Norway and neighboring Sweden, and in particular when it comes to the neo-Nazi scene. As mentioned above, part of the explanation is related to the history of Nazi occupation in Norway and Denmark but not in Sweden during World War II. The neo-Nazi movement in Sweden did not have to carry the stigma of being seen as the spiritual heirs of national traitors. This has helped them to reach a critical mass, enabling them to maintain an effective propaganda apparatus, a lively music industry, a stable group of leaders less vulnerable when some of them are put in prison, and lots of muscles for street confrontations with opponents. These resources are lacking among their Norwegian peers. Another factor is that until recently, there has been a taboo in Sweden to discuss the problematic aspects of mass immigration, which has left a large political space open to the right of the mainstream political parties. Much of this space has recently been filled by the successful Sweden Democrats (which has its origin in the White Power movement) but the space has also been exploited by the neo-Nazi movement. In Norway and Denmark, the rightwing populist Progress Party and Danish People's Party have filled much of this political space and linked it to the political mainstream (Jupskås 2015, Ravndal & Enstad 2015).

On a different note, some of our ex-Nazi informants also point to the ways the Police Security Service monitored them closely as an important factor which restrained them from engaging in terrorism or other forms of serious violence. They realized that any attempt to carry out an attack would be detected and disrupted in advance and also that it would lead to severe punishment. This obviously served as an effective deterrence (Bjørge 2013: 49-63). Furthermore, the preventive dialogue approach of the police and the security service was also highly effective in inducing young activist to disengage, effectively breaking up some of these militant groups.

However, in spite of these significant constraints against the use of political violence among the far right and anti-Islam activists in Norway recent history has tragically demonstrated that extreme violence may nevertheless be carried out by individuals inspired by their ideas and rhetoric.

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