

İSTANBUL BİLGİ UNIVERSITY
EUROPEAN INSTITUTE
JEAN MONNET CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE

**Beyond the Continuum: Contrasting Images from Violent and
Non-Violent Radicalization**

METİN KOCA

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PREFACE

In this Working Paper, Metin Koca, a post-doc researcher of the Prime Youth ERC Research undertaken by the European Institute of Istanbul Bilgi University, elaborates on the contested notion of radicalization. Drawing on a set of media and interview narratives held within the framework of an ongoing EU-funded research for the “PRIME Youth” project conducted under the supervision of the Principal Investigator, Prof. Dr. Ayhan Kaya, and funded by the European Research Council with the Agreement Number 785934, he reveals that radicalism is not always necessarily violent. He argues that both Islamist and nativist forms of radicalization are experienced in a wide spectrum ranging from non-violent radicalization to violent extremism.

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HORIZON 2020 ERC AdG

“Nativism, Islamophobia and Islamism in the Age of Populism: Culturalisation and Religionisation of what is Social, Economic and Political in Europe”



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About the ERC Advanced Grant Project: PRIME Youth

This research analyses the current political, social, and economic context of the European Union, which is confronted by two substantial crises, namely the global financial crisis and the refugee crisis. These crises have led to the escalation of fear and prejudice among the youth who are specifically vulnerable to discourses that culturalise and stigmatize the “other”. Young people between the ages of 18 to 30, whether native or immigrant-origin, have similar responses to globalization-rooted threats such as deindustrialization, isolation, denial, humiliation, precariousness, insecurity, and anomia. These responses tend to be essentialised in the face of current socio-economic, political and psychological disadvantages. While a number of indigenous young groups are shifting to right-wing populism, a number of Muslim youths are shifting towards Islamic radicalism. The common denominator of these groups is that they are both downwardly mobile and inclined towards radicalization. Hence, this project aims to scrutinize social, economic, political and psychological sources of the processes of radicalization among native European youth and Muslim-origin youth with migration background, who are both inclined to express their discontent through ethnicity, culture, religion, heritage, homogeneity, authenticity, past, gender and patriarchy. This project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme grant agreement no. 785934.

For more information, please visit the project Website: <https://bpy.bilgi.edu.tr>



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The ERC in a Nutshell

The European Research Council, set up by the EU in 2007, is the premiere European funding organisation for excellent frontier research. Every year, it selects and funds the very best, creative researchers of any nationality and age, to run projects based in Europe. The ERC offers four core grant schemes: Starting, Consolidator, Advanced and Synergy Grants. With its additional Proof of Concept grant scheme, the ERC helps grantees to bridge the gap between grantees' pioneering research and early phases of its commercialisation.

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Biography

Metin Koca, ERC postdoctoral researcher

Metin Koca has been working as a postdoctoral researcher in the European Research Council advanced grant project, PRIME Youth, conducted at Istanbul Bilgi University, since November 2020. Koca received his Ph.D. in Social and Political Sciences from the European University Institute, Italy, in January 2020. He is interested in the study of cultural change and reproduction, as well as the politics of tolerance, recognition, and difference. Koca completed his undergraduate degree at Bilkent University (2012) and then earned a Master's degree from the London School of Economics and Political Science (2013), where he studied as a Jean Monnet Scholar. Koca conducted part of his Ph.D. research as a visiting scholar in the Department of Sociology at the University of California, Berkeley (2016-2017). Metin Koca is the author of the monograph, *Tracing Cultural Change in Turkey's Experience of Democratization: Unexpected Dialogues on Intolerance* (London: Routledge, 2023).

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Beyond the Continuum: Contrasting Images from Violent and Non-Violent Radicalization

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Beyond the Continuum: Contrasting Images from Violent and Non-Violent Radicalization

Introduction

This working paper rests on an array of snapshots from violent and non-violent radicalization, well-mediatised or somewhat clandestine. In doing so, the paper problematizes understanding radicalization as a continuum from the *non-violent and moderate* to the *violent and radical*. Instead, I firstly offer a perspective to see how violent a moderation process could become, given that moderation in one context (e.g., religious moderation) does not mean moderation all along (e.g., the religiously moderated Christians in racist-paganistic extremist movements). Then, I will discuss how non-violent a radicalization process can become, given that violent extremism often involves reducing the ideology into violence, whereas the complete form of an ideology, and radicalization as seeking completeness as such, involves much more. By bringing together these two directions, the paper goes beyond the studies imagining radicalization exclusively as a transition to violence,¹ as well as the studies that define radicalization as exclusive of embracing political violence.²

The paper focuses on European right-wing (alternatively, Radical Right) and Islamism as two ideologies that produce violent and non-violent claims in themselves, often in opposition, I will argue. Since the study brings together images from Radical Right and Islamism on both ends, a practical starting point would be to analyze some borderline moments in which they are confused in public narratives. The paper will then initiate a brief literature review on several assumptions present in the radicalization literature that lead to confusion between the violent and non-violent representations of ideologies, as well as the passages between them. These subsections will eventually allow me to introduce some contrasts between violent and non-violent radicalizations. The empirical part of the paper will be roughly designed, with the only aim being the narrativization of some media reports and interviews rather than coming up with far-reaching arguments.

Processes instead of Origins and Outputs

Instead of distinguishing between Islamism and Radical Right, I will distinguish their violent and non-violent ideological expressions in this research task. Combining Islamism and Radical Right as such, with their similarities, provides a reason to focus on processes rather than origins (e.g., who the agent is) and outputs (e.g., what ideology the agent refers to). A noteworthy illustration is the case of Ali S., who, in 2016, in Munich, killed his migrant-origin classmates in a shopping center before committing suicide. Right after Ali's attack, the media narrative was shaped by a man who appears in the first video footage from the crime scene, yelling at Ali: "f... foreigner! [kanake]" Then, "f... Turks," an unseen voice joined him. Ali replied to the man that he was "German." Lauretta, a witness of the rampage, said she heard Ali shouting

¹ Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, "Mechanisms of Political Radicalization: Pathways Toward Terrorism," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20, no. 3 (July 1, 2008): 415–33, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546550802073367>.

² Ayhan Kaya, *State of the Art on Radicalisation*, 2020.

Ayhan Kaya, "A Concise History of the Term 'Radicalisation': A Struggle for Democracy?," Istanbul Bilgi University PRIME Youth Website, June 13, 2021, <https://bpy.bilgi.edu.tr/en/blog/a-concise-history-of-the-term-radicalisation-a-str/>.

“Allahu Akbar” during the attack.³ His age, citizenship, migrant background, suicidal method, and supposed Islamist ideology fit into the mainstream “homegrown terrorist” profiles. However, as the investigation proceeded, the prosecutors uncovered how narratives shaped around Ali’s basic profile misrepresented his ideological performance. Apart from the assumption that a relatively dark skin person who has an assault weapon in his hand is probably an Islamist, this misrepresentation emanated from the understanding that Islamism is the synonym for terrorism in cross-national public debates.

At first glance, the onslaught of this “Iranian-origin German citizen” did not seem to have a crucial difference from the previous attacks associated with Jihadism, such as that of an IS-inspired 17-year-old teenager who stabbed passengers on a German train within the same week.⁴ According to Lauretta’s observation mixed with her imagination, Ali was supposed to shout “Allahu Akbar.” Yet he did not. On the contrary, as a vocal Reich sympathizer who sought his Aryan self in his origins in the Indo-European language family’s Iranian branch, Ali deliberately targeted migrant-origin citizens, Turks and Arabs. Having expressed in an online platform how honored he felt for sharing the same birthday with Hitler, he scheduled his attack to the day precisely five years after that of Anders Breivik, who killed 77 people in the name of the “European Independence” from immigrants.⁵

In some cases, the motivation to resort to violence does not take heart from an ideological pretext but instrumentalizes the ideology on the go. Ali’s motivation for revenge in the classroom where he was bullied seems to have appeared before the ideological pretext he built for his attack. He surprised many with his Nazi cause, as his attack demonstrates that a migrant-origin citizen may act as a Radical Right extremist when the motivation (i.e., killing one’s migrant-origin classmates) finds its discourse in this particular ideology. His case is less surprising after considering that many of his Islamist counterparts are “white” native citizens who are Muslim converts who changed their names. In the cases I could derive from the EU Terrorism Situation & Trend Reports (TE-SAT), many of the post-2016 “right-wing” and “Islamist” attacks in Europe included at least one perpetrator with a conversion or start-from-scratch experience.

One may argue that the man who labeled Ali as a “kanake” sounded more radical than him in the context of their argument. However, it was Ali who massacred individuals in the name of an imagined native community. There must be a difference between these two representations of the Radical Right. Moreover, except that he acted as a right-wing extremist, my collection suggests that Ali’s trajectory included a set of elements that make sense while tracing the life of other violent extremists, particularly the Islamists. He was a young adult male receiving psychiatric treatment,⁶ suffering from isolation at school, and spending an enormous amount of time in front of his computer, mostly with online shooting games and dark web chatter.

Besides, just as many Islamist violent extremists do not shape their ideologies around a mosque community, Ali did not pass through the ways other nativists do, such as participating in the identitarian milieu. In the PRIME Youth project, we came across some migrant-origin individuals who joined the right-

³ Catherine E. Shoichet, Ralph Ellis, and Jason Hanna, “Munich Shooting: 9 Victims, Gunman Dead,” CNN, July 23, 2016, <https://www.cnn.com/2016/07/22/europe/germany-munich-shooting/index.html>.

⁴ Elizabeth Roberts, “ISIS Inspired German Train Attacker, Official Says,” CNN, July 20, 2016, <https://www.cnn.com/2016/07/20/world/germany-train-attack/index.html>.

⁵ Florian Hartleb, *Lone Wolves: The New Terrorism of Right-Wing Single Actors* (Springer Nature, 2020), p8.

⁶ Harriet Agerholm, “The Chilling Words Munich Gunman Ali Sonboly Told His Classmates before Killing 9 People,” *The Independent*, July 24, 2016, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/munich-shooting-ali-david-sonboly-classmates-i-will-kill-you-all-bullied-a7153146.html>.

wing milieu with nativist claims. They reiterated that they were welcome in the mainstream organizations such as French Action and Forum for Democracy as political fighters, once Muslim but not anymore, and migrant-origin but assimilationist. Ali did not follow this route. Contrarily, the post-organizational state of violent extremism makes itself apparent in Ali's attack, among others.⁷ He did not have an offline social circle that coincided with his online activities, the last of which was buying a weapon on the darknet and inviting his enemies to the shopping center with a fake Facebook account.⁸ Ali had commonalities with many other youngsters who conducted or planned attacks in the name of a religion or culture in Europe. While contributing to the efforts to flesh out this common youth culture, I aim to question how it differs from the broader scene of essentialism. In this scene, many other youths seek solutions in religious or cultural expressions, some pretty radical in comparison to the mainstream in articulating discontent with their perceived political order.

This working paper rests on two incomplete yet helpful datasets. Combining them, I scrutinize 47 individual representations of violent extremism (aged 15-33, based on the post-2016 attacks in Europe) in the light of 130 PRIME Youth interviews conducted with self-identified Muslim and white native European citizens (aged 18-30). As a side quest, I identify 41 other violent and non-violent extremist profiles from non-European citizens and different age groups. Apart from crude measures such as age, citizenship, and criminal and mental illness records, I take into account the following variables in this analysis: the history of grievances, reasons for discontent, family problems, born-again experiences, stories of recidivism, the discrepancy between online and offline social circles, search for a shortcut to redemption or total demise, community and organizational ties, and approach to pacifism and quietism.

Rethinking Radicalism: Assumptions, Limitations, and Alternatives

This part aims to clarify why it is significant to differentiate between “violent extremists” represented, in the scope of my research, by those who dare to kill and die for the Radical Right or Islamist cause and “radicals” who seek solutions in ideological purity. Based on Berger's definition,⁹ I use the former to refer to the idea that the in-group's well-being depends on violence directed at an out-group. As to the latter, I will not try to make a comprehensive definition since what ideology makers can make of “radicalism” depends on the limits intrinsic to the ideology and the context in which it is expressed. Radicalism lacks a timeless definition except that it challenges the status quo, utilizing a claim on the building blocks of an ideology.¹⁰ Here, I employ Hannerz's conception of repertoire, which does not remove social agency while introducing structure. Accordingly, a repertoire is a product of cultural transmission but not a producer of human beings in the form of “mindless” cultural automatons.¹¹ By giving the repertoires a fresh sound, individuals can make the same ideology say many different things.

Both as a noun and an adjective, “radical” is a relational and temporal sign which locates the *signified* in a broader group of discourses or actors at a given point in time. In Kaya's historical approach to radicalism, the 19th-century radicals were the democrats.¹² This approach is akin to Rapoport's waves

⁷ Daniel Koehler, “Recent Trends in German Right-Wing Violence and Terrorism: What Are the Contextual Factors behind ‘Hive Terrorism’?,” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 12, no. 6 (2018): 72–88.

⁸ Tom Keatinge, David Carlisle, and Florence Keen, *Virtual Currencies and Terrorist Financing: Assessing the Risks and Evaluating Responses: Counter-Terrorism* (European Parliament, 2018), p36.

⁹ J. M. Berger, *Extremism* (MIT Press, 2018), p44.

¹⁰ Astrid Bötticher, “Towards Academic Consensus Definitions of Radicalism and Extremism,” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 11, no. 4 (2017), p74-75.

¹¹ Ulf Hannerz, “Soulside: Inquiries into Ghetto Culture and Community,” 1969, p186-199.

¹² Ayhan Kaya, “State of the Art on Radicalisation: Islamist and Nativist Radicalisation in Europe,” 2020, p3.

theory, which examined “modern terrorism” in four waves, from the anarchist to the religious wave.¹³ In a similar vein, historicizing the so-called Islamic exception, Roy named the present radicalization into violent extremism as the “Islamization of radicalism.”¹⁴ The radicals in this context were the ISIS militants. However, Roy also questioned how, as opposed to ISIS militants’ fascination with killing and dying, “Salafis” were uniquely radical in desiring to code life for religious purity. The question is whether these two form a continuum. I will question the following trends in the literature to address this question.

Disputing Moderation

Moderation studies tend to be based on the assumption that moderation is desirable, often regardless of the alternative political architecture. This is at least due to the somewhat dogmatic belief that violence comes where moderation is lacking. Therefore, these studies focus on what they consider not possessed by an ideology in its radical form. In other words, from a governance perspective, equating the complete condition of ideologies with violence necessitates promoting the given ideology’s milder forms. For example, in France, illiberal value expressions, such as wearing a burkini and refusing handshaking, are held responsible for creating an atmosphere conducive to violent extremism.¹⁵ All over Europe, the Radical Right movements push for a similar value monopolism, which they identify as the “Judeo-Christian values” as opposed to the “Islamic” ones. However, the values that they keep for themselves hardly include conservative Christians’ non-negotiable values. The moderation campaign established for Muslims ultimately promotes a religious moderation that transcends Islam.

The prevalent confusion between violent and non-violent forms of radicalization precludes imagining different compositions of radicalism alternative to the religious moderation recipe. Just as I argued in the case of religious moderation of Christian conservatives into Radical Right in Europe, the real puzzle behind promoting moderation is the replacement unit at the center of the political spectrum.¹⁶ A critical question in the given context is the direction of this moderation for Christians. In support of the proposals against “Radical Islam,” many religiously conservative Catholics in France withdraw their criticisms regarding the line they see between freedom of expression and insult. Some put aside their concordat proposals and surrender to the laïc regime, although they do not appreciate it. Even the matter of family values does not bring Orthodox Calvinists together with Muslim conservatives in the Netherlands.

What brings together these individuals in our sample in the PRIME Youth Project is their acceptance of a Populist Radical Right outlook. This outlook includes an exclusionary kind of nationalism, called nativism, and, in some cases, the rendering of Christianity as identity (i.e., a fact claim without the accompanying commandments) instead of faith and values. Like the rest of the Populist Radical Right, they oppose the presence of Islam in Europe on account that it produces violence, segregation, and conflictual civilizational or cultural identities. Nevertheless, they also have to make concessions on their religious value expressions to join the Radical Right front against Islam. All in all, an elegant way to

¹³ David C. Rapoport, “The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism,” *Attacking Terrorism: Elements of a Grand Strategy* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press 2004), p47.

¹⁴ Olivier Roy, *Jihad and Death: The Global Appeal of Islamic State* (Oxford University Press, 2017), p6.

¹⁵ Tina Magazzini, “Radicalisation and Resilience Case Study: France,” *GREASE: Religion, Diversity, and Radicalization*, 2020, 19.

¹⁶ Metin Koca, “Religious Moderation into Populist Radical Right: How the Politics of ‘Muslim (de)Radicalization’ Confront Religious Christian Youths in France and the Netherlands,” in *Radicalisation, Secularism and the Governance of Religion*, ed. Tina Magazzini and Georges Fahmi (London: Routledge, 2023).

conclude from here is by referring to the lyrics of a song by Andrew Bird: “I am all for moderation, but sometimes it seems moderation itself can be a kind of extreme.”¹⁷

Violent and non-violent radicalization beyond the ideological repertoires

Many studies assume that those using a similar vocabulary are definitely connected and perhaps the same. This assumption became apparent in crucial public debates in which academic literature also played a role. An illustration of it is the assumed impact of the *banlieues* on the frequency of violent extremist attacks in France.¹⁸ Kepel’s important work establishes a network between the letter of an al-Qaeda member and the violent radicalization in Europe, arguably without identifying a tangible link.¹⁹ Even though little to no evidence suggests that Jihadi attackers in Europe have ever considered any part of the text, the spirit of globalization is assumed to connect them in a meaningful manner. In the way it appears in Kepel’s analysis, this assumption bridges the terrain of the Middle East with French *banlieues*, where “Salafists” and “radicalized Salafists” dominate the landscape. While reducing the “radical” element in Salafism into violence, this *X versus Radical-X* approach fails to take into account some fundamentally different processes that those whom it labels go through. Among these processes are the agents’ clashing motivations to adopt the repertoire, daily concerns in their immediate surroundings, primary knowledge sources, and approaches to their online and offline social circles.

This fusion has repercussions beyond the theoretical debate. At the outset of 2021, both the French Bill on “Islamist separatism” and the controversy on Generation Identity manifested a remaining confusion about the relationship between violent extremists with youths that define their political priorities around the other aspects of similar ideological repertoires. It also resurfaced the fundamentally state-centric approach associating radicalism with terrorism. As the relationship between radical organizations and terrorism remains unclear in many ways, interior minister Darmanin had to declare that the police raids against several Islamist organizations were not necessarily linked to the investigations into the acts of terror.²⁰ Before that, President Macron tried to justify this campaign with the argument that all terrorists are Salafists, even though all Salafists are not terrorists.²¹ The same rationale was at play in the process that led to the criminalization of the Identitarian Movement in France. Although the organization included a great variety of non-violent radicalism, there were examples like the Christchurch terrorist donating money to the Movement. Thus, confusion remains as to the way to approach such organizations.

Violence as “the” Result of Radicalization

While applicable radicalization models assume that up to 99% of people with “radical ideas” never turn them into action,²² they also tend to assume that this action in question will necessarily be violent. This

¹⁷ Metin Koca, “What Does Joining the Radical Right Entail for a Christian? Hint: Religious Moderation,” Istanbul Bilgi University PRIME Youth Website, September 13, 2021, <https://bpy.bilgi.edu.tr/en/blog/what-does-joining-radical-right-entail-christian-h/>.

¹⁸ Marie Breen-Smyth, “Theorising the ‘Suspect Community’: Counterterrorism, Security Practices and the Public Imagination,” *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 7, no. 2 (May 4, 2014), p223–40.

Matthew Moran, “Terrorism and the Banlieues: The Charlie Hebdo Attacks in Context,” *Modern & Contemporary France* 25, no. 3 (July 3, 2017), p315–32.

¹⁹ Gilles Kepel, *Terror in France: The Rise of Jihad in the West* (Princeton University Press, 2017), p25.

²⁰ “France Teacher Attack: Four Pupils Held over Beheading,” BBC News, October 19, 2020, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-54598546>.

²¹ “France Still Wrestling with How to Overcome ‘insidious Enemy’ That Is Radical Islamism,” March 28, 2018, <https://www.thelocal.fr/20180328/frances-ongoing-struggle-to-overcome-homegrown-radical-islam>.

²² Ayşenur Benevento, “The Necessity to Recognize Processes of Radicalization from a Socio-Cultural Perspective,” *Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science*, April 26, 2021, p10.

assumption does not imagine radicalization leading to any other outcome. According to it, a radical approach will end up siding with violence, given that the radicalization process denotes a transition to violence by definition.²³ In other words, it represents the shift on a linear plane that ranges between passive, moderate, and extreme, with the latter being a synonym for violent action or, at the very least, support for violence. Together with the previous assumptions, this assumption creates suspect communities.²⁴

I identify two significant problems with this assumption. Violent extremists are not necessarily the ones occupied most with the ideology than others in their ideological family. Amid the current contestations on Islam, quietist Salafis tend to be more radical than ISIS recruits in filling their ordinary days with strict and arguably pure religious orders. As my collection also verifies in line with the previous research, drugs and alcohol were alien to very few Western recruits of ISIS. Also, the ISIS leadership never liked the kind of radicals who were more interested in the ideology than the narrowly defined strategic goals of the organization.

Similarly, paganist organizations such as Heathens Against Hate, who cherish pagan rituals as a reflection of diversity and inclusion in nature, claim to be more concerned with the radix of paganism than neo-nazis who reduce it to their racist programs.²⁵ While the NSU militants aimed to exterminate whom they classified as others in the name of nationalism, some on the new right seek the beauty of “nations” or “races” who stay within their hinterland borders. Also among our interlocutors, many nativists make the same claim while criticizing their multiculturalist counterparts.

Violent extremists do not even share a continuum with many others whom researchers consider in the same ideological families, encompassing broad categories such as “Islamism” and “nativism.” They do not represent the endpoint of their ideologies but a particular ordering of political priorities. As Sedgwick rightly identified, different groups that share an ideological repertoire tend to “differ dramatically in terms of the mix of issues that they address.”²⁶ Ruptures, discontinuities, and conflicts explain their relationship better than imagined continuums.

Sources, Selections, and an Overview

My comparative analysis is based on two types of data. The first is constituted by open-source data collected in several languages from the media narratives, starting from 2016. Since the first-hand information that media narratives provide would otherwise be difficult to gather, this type of collections gained weight in the academic study of extremism. Despite well-known limitations such as the varying

McCauley et al., “Understanding Political Radicalization,” 2017, 21, https://repository.brynmawr.edu/psych_pubs/60.

²³ Bötticher, “Towards Academic Consensus Definitions of Radicalism and Extremism,” p76.

²⁴ Imran Awan, “‘I Am a Muslim Not an Extremist’: How the Prevent Strategy Has Constructed a ‘Suspect’ Community,” *Politics & Policy* 40, no. 6 (2012): 1158–85.

Floris Vermeulen, “Suspect Communities—Targeting Violent Extremism at the Local Level: Policies of Engagement in Amsterdam, Berlin, and London,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26, no. 2 (2014), 286–306.

Chris Allen, Arshad Isakjee, and Özlem Ögtem-Young, “Counter-Extremism, PREVENT and the Extreme Right Wing: Lessons Learned and Future Challenges,” *LIAS Working Paper Series* 2, no. 0 (February 20, 2019), 4.

²⁵ Jennifer Snook, “Reconsidering Heathenry: The Construction of an Ethnic Folkway as Religio-Ethnic Identity,” *Nova Religio* 16, no. 3 (February 1, 2013), 52–76.

²⁶ Mark Sedgwick, “The Concept of Radicalization as a Source of Confusion,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22, no. 4 (September 14, 2010), 481–482.

amount of detail, the number of unreported cases, the incoherent use of terms, and implicit ideological biases, I use media narratives to access richer narratives.

For this project, I initially identified several dichotomous variables to analyze violent radicalization. The first is each extremist act's ideological category in accordance with Europol's classification. To identify the reported cases throughout Europe, I relied primarily on the EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Reports (TE-SAT). However, I had to consider alternative sources as well, given that Europol shares only the incidents that the national governments classify as "Jihadist" or "Right-wing terrorism." Although the data covers a wide array of Jihadi cases, significant variations in the European governments' definition of "right-wing" extremism push Europol to share a subset of a much larger universe. As an illustration, North-Rhine Westphalia, which recently witnessed several incidents discussed in the media, had no single Reich citizen, according to the Judicial statistics dated 2018.²⁷ I paid particular attention to non-classified yet mediatized cases to close this gap.

The Jihadi cases after 2016 are unique in several ways, despite the ongoing patterns (e.g., lone wolf attacks, converts and born-again, homegrown perpetrators). First, the Jihadi profiles are more diverse in the sense that the attacks in France were not led exclusively by "North-African origin," just as those in Britain were not led by British citizens of "Indian-Pakistani descent." Indicating a much broader geopolitical landscape, they included key references to Somalia, Liberia, Kosovo, Chechnia, Macedonia, Palestine, Yemen, Iraq, and Iran. Moreover, according to my collection, a quarter of the perpetrators do not have a criminal record, unlike the previous wave of attacks made predominantly by delinquents. There are also older attackers among "Jihadis," whose religious conversion experience shed light on their efforts to reshape themselves.

Taking these sets of cases together, I identified the following variables: the history of grievances, experiences of being born again, search for a shortcut to salvation or total demise, family problems, criminal and mental illness records, socialization in online and offline circles, and community and organizational ties. They are derived from approaches that focus on motivational,²⁸ psychological,²⁹ sub-cultural,³⁰ strategic,³¹ and transversal³² processes, which have successfully portrayed various images of violent extremism. A combination of them can also help distinguish between these manifestations of violent radicalization from non-violent radicalization in the way I have described. Although this working paper will not aim to bridge these dimensions exhaustively, such an endeavor would be helpful for exploring "the voices of the mind,"³³ connecting cognition and culture rather than dividing the mediational means that produce discourse. Therefore, I am particularly interested in how actors put these elements together, how they transform them as they locate them differently in thinking processes, and what action they decide on at the end of this process.

²⁷ Patrick Gensing, "Reichsbürger in Deutschland: Absurd Unterschätzt," tagesschau.de, July 24, 2018, <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/reichsbuerger-159.html>.

²⁸ Paul Gill, John Horgan, and Paige Deckert, "Bombing Alone: Tracing the Motivations and Antecedent Behaviors of Lone-Actor Terrorists," *Journal of Forensic Sciences* 59, no. 2 (2014): 425–35.

²⁹ Arie W. Kruglanski et al., "The Psychology of Radicalization and Deradicalization: How Significance Quest Impacts Violent Extremism," *Political Psychology* 35, no. S1 (2014): 69–93, <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12163>.

³⁰ Daniela Pisoiu, "Subcultures, Violent Radicalization and Terrorism," *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* 7, no. 1 (January 2, 2015): 1–2, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19434472.2014.977328>.

³¹ Martha Crenshaw, "The Logic of Terrorism," *Terrorism in Perspective* 24 (2007): 24–33.

³² Olivier Roy, *Jihad and Death: The Global Appeal of Islamic State* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

³³ James V. Wertsch, *Voices of the Mind: Sociocultural Approach to Mediated Action* (Harvard University Press, 2009).

The other pillar of my data is the PRIME Youth interviews recorded in a narrative style. The project draws on semi-structured interviews conducted in France, Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands. Aged between 18 and 30, our interlocutors commonly identified themselves with Muslim or white and native identities. This starting point is very basic and includes a great variety of ideological positions that cannot be reduced to violent or non-violent radicalization. That said, it is a pool that reflects the confusion between the two. For example, it includes non-violent religious individuals who refuse to follow the burqa ban in the public sphere, or criticize traditional Muslims for not being serious enough about Islam. Similarly, the pool also includes the representations of the Radical Right that appreciate fascist economics, support forced remigration, and spend time in fight clubs to prepare for an existential physical conflict. I used pseudonyms throughout the paper to protect the personal data of the research participants.

During the interviews, which lasted between 70 and 240 minutes, we invited them to speak with us about their lives at the micro, meso, and macro levels, step by step.³⁴ We did not ask about specific policy and cultural issues or hot topics. Using these reference points, they already had a lot to tell about their identities, ideologies, concerns, motivations, and socialization processes. Based on our coding manual, each interview is coded into twelve principal codes with sub-codes about personal histories, neighborhood life, diversity, beliefs, country politics, political participation, globalization, and future expectations.³⁵ These thematic codes helped me establish a general framework. In this particular research scope, I analyzed where they evaluated the idea and the practice of violence in their narratives.

Most of our interlocutors currently have or, until recently, had organizational ties. To reach the “natives” in France, we contacted the members of the Generation Identity, National Rally, French Action, French Dissidence, and Equality and Reconciliation. In Germany, we reached Alternative for Germany, the National Democratic Party of Germany, and PEGIDA members. Among the very few who have a criminal record, as far as we could assign, all had participated in the exit programs to leave the right-wing scene. In the Netherlands, we reached youths active in the Reformed Political Party, Party for Freedom, and Forum for Democracy and its youth branch. In Belgium, we invited individuals with various ideological orientations in Vierdewereldgroep. Among them were sympathizers or members of the New Flemish Alliance, Vlaams Belang, Catholic Flemish Students Union, and List Dedecker. To reach Muslims, we focused on the Turkish and Moroccan migrant-origin citizens in the four countries. Our interlocutors were active in the diaspora organizations and mosque communities, either encouraged or financed by these states.

Because the broader project seeks to understand how their socioeconomic concerns shape their cultural identities and political orientations, we focused on the formation of nativist ideologies in (1) the remote areas such as Dresden in Germany and Lille in France, (2) the peripheries of core cities, such as Aalst in Belgium, and (3) traditionally religious conservative regions, such as the Bible Belt in the Netherlands. Our Muslim interlocutors were from the isolated pockets of the cities with much larger economies (*i.e.*, Paris, Lyon, Berlin, Cologne, Amsterdam, and Brussels).

What is the ideology for?

This part discusses some ways in which the representations of violent and non-violent radicalization part ways. More than one-third of our interlocutors (N=54/130) felt a need to describe a future dystopia, a *Kali*

³⁴ Urie Bronfenbrenner, “Toward an Experimental Ecology of Human Development,” *American Psychologist* 32, no. 7 (1977): 513–31, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.32.7.513>.

³⁵ Ayşenur Benevento, Metin Koca, and Ayhan Kaya, “Coding Manual: Nativism, Islamophobia and Islamism in the Age of Populism,” *ISLAM-OPHOB-ISM ERC Project (Number 785934)*, August 8, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6976652>.

*Yuga*³⁶ or a war on Islam, where their very existence is in danger. Instead of resorting to violence in response, which already meant losing in the eyes of many, most of them aim to build assurance utilizing a wide range of ideas, from legal to illegal but non-violent activism, to religious fatalism.³⁷ They think they will find the recipe for a golden age in cultural essence or religious purity. In the meantime, remarkably in contrast to extremists' suicidal tendencies, they want to have a life, and it does not have to be a heroic one. Fascinated with violence, the extremist state of mind reduces the ideology to a kind of attack guide. Therefore, outside of their battlefields—e.g., while organizing ordinary life, they tend to have different sources that prevail over Jihadi or right-wing repertoires. Our interlocutors pursue coherence and completeness in ideology in every aspect of their life, even though they are not always successful.

On this foundation, I shall compare and contrast a set of representations to illustrate how the difference unfolds. Violent extremists tend to undermine their individual grievances in manifesto-like documents. However, the location of their grievances is a crucial sign in the process. Some violent extremists were counting their pain even as they attacked. For example, a few seconds before committing suicide, Ali told Thomas that he was bullied for seven years at school by those he targeted.³⁸ In my collection, nearly a third of the violent extremists identified a grievance that seems somewhat related to their attack. In the face of similar individual grievances (e.g., family, school, neighborhood problems, unemployment, loneliness), our interlocutors radicalized themselves to confront the status quo by other ideological means. Among these means are disentangling sources of grievance, diversifying friends and foes through multiple issues, exceeding the scope of physical conflict, and in case the resentment becomes collective,³⁹ developing various forms of activism.

Solving Family or Peer Problems

Family or peer problems play a crucial role in the personal history of some violent extremists. At least 15% of our interlocutors reported similar family problems—e.g., domestic violence, drug addiction, and suicide. While recognizing the central role of these problems in their ideological formations, almost all of them⁴⁰ found higher benefits in their ideological repertoires than violence towards a single target. From Schaerbeek, Ömer's family problems made him discover his individual Islamic virtue and ways to become a "militant" at humanitarian work for drug addicts, whom his father despised.⁴¹ From Nieuwpoort, Andries decided to differ from his father by maintaining his self-discipline in a "white" culturalism and traditional family values.⁴² Meanwhile, he aimed to clarify for us that his emphasis on being white did not imply racism. "I judge people on their mentality," he argued while describing his understanding of constructive and destructive migrants.

³⁶ Marc Tuters, "Esoteric Fascism Online: 4chan and the Kali Yuga," in *Far-Right Revisionism and the End of History* (Routledge, 2020), 286–303.

³⁷ Our interlocutors' combination of *illegal* and *non-violent* means of activism may contribute to the classification made by Sophia Moskalenko and Clark McCauley, "Measuring Political Mobilization: The Distinction between Activism and Radicalism," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 21, no. 2 (2009): 239–60.

³⁸ Siciliano, *Munich Shooter Responds*.

³⁹ See on "collective humiliation," Jais Adam-Troian, Ayşe Tecmen, and Ayhan Kaya, "Youth Extremism as a Response to Global Threats?," *European Psychologist*, March 12, 2021.

⁴⁰ The two interlocutors who had more ambivalent positions towards ideological violence reasoned less with ideological repertoires. Instead, personal networks and traces of mental illnesses dominated their narratives.

PRIME Youth Interview, October 22, 2020.

PRIME Youth Interview, October 23, 2020.

⁴¹ *PRIME Youth Interview*, September 28, 2020.

⁴² *PRIME Youth Interview*, June 20, 2020.

Our interlocutors who had peer problems touched upon how their parents helped them, for example, by changing their schools or moving away from a troublesome neighborhood if necessary: “Without my family, I wouldn’t be where I am right now.”⁴³ Only Gerrit, from Maasdijk, had serious peer problems alongside a dysfunctional family (e.g., divorce, domestic violence, economic problems). Admittedly not having any “real” friends, Gerrit is still refusing to meet people in his neighborhood, including “dirty” migrants who are not “my kind of people.”⁴⁴ Instead, he spends most of his time at home, playing computer games and watching Netflix. Gerrit is afraid of not having a home in the future, referring to a “housing shortage” led by the prioritization of migrants and refugees. He confesses that, at times, he “quickly became aggressive” in solving his problems. On the fault line between non-ideological aggression, violent radicalization, and non-violent radicalization, Gerrit’s solution is introversion for the time being.

Our interlocutors’ engagement with the established knowledge seems to open up new opportunities for them to analyze their grievances without falling into the illusion of seeing a single battle. From Lyon, Anthoine explains he once avoided a fight with a “noisy” group of migrants: “I think that if I had interacted with them, I would have fought.”⁴⁵ To justify why he does not fight for public order as the prideful son of a policeman, he adds a little nuance to his argument: “But frankly, it would be dishonest to say these people [the Sub-Saharan Africans] are criminogenic.”

Facing the Other

While contemplating the violence option without leaving their ideological repertoires, they try to diversify their sources. On the path to violent extremism, many stop differentiating between violence as an end and a means.⁴⁶ In contrast, our interlocutors take it explicitly as a means and, much more often, as useless or self-destructive. For example, like Anthoine, Martin has problems with migrant communities, primarily Muslims who, he elaborates, refuse the “French culture,” for example, by celebrating Eids in public. Muslims destroyed many neighborhoods, in his opinion. Despite all this, he has disagreements with his mother, who has even harsher views on migrants. About “30%” of his friends are “left-wing,” and “80%” of all peers in his generation see immigration positively. Martin thinks his parents have harsher opinions ultimately because they are a part of the older generation. Between the norms of his age group and family ideology, he responds to his mother: “as long as people want to integrate, there is nothing to worry about.” Otherwise, he elaborates, it falls within the state’s responsibility to send them back. This diagnosis is a route to activism for him.

While the Radical Right organization, Generation Identity, was officially problematized due to a boxing club next to its headquarters,⁴⁷ a Judo-practicing member of the movement in Lyon, Gabriel, described illegal action as acceptable, but without endangering the lives of others: “That is my red line.”⁴⁸ Many right-wing activists put forward some kind of realism to stress the importance of legal action: “an activist in prison is useless.”⁴⁹ Beyond strategic calculations, tension rises between different value systems that our nativist interlocutors desire to align in their family of ideologies. This is in contrast with

⁴³ *PRIME Youth Interview*, May 11, 2020.

⁴⁴ *PRIME Youth Interview*, November 4, 2020.

⁴⁵ *PRIME Youth Interview*, March 1, 2020.

⁴⁶ Roy, *Jihad and Death*, p5.

⁴⁷ Kim Willsher, “France Bans Far-Right ‘paramilitary’ Group Génération Identitaire,” the Guardian, March 3, 2021, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/03/france-bans-far-right-paramilitary-group-generation-identitaire>.

⁴⁸ *PRIME Youth Interview*, June 16, 2020.

⁴⁹ *PRIME Youth Interview*, May 19, 2020.

the carefree attitude of violent extremists on the matter. Attempts to resolve these contradictions within the family can lead to polarization among radical groups, as well as new perspectives that show how fragile the harmony in the repertoire is (e.g., between the Christian and Pagan symbols).

Those who have strong community ties in the organized Turkish and Moroccan diasporas could not give any Islamic meaning to violent extremism. Blending cultural nationalism with the Islamic identity, some of our Turkish-origin interlocutors went further to blame the North-African Muslim communities for violent extremism. For example, while describing how Islam forbids compulsion, Meryem emphasized how “those who kill for the religion [...] completely miss the point.”⁵⁰ Interestingly, those with more universalist religious orientations utilized the sources associated with Salafism to promote more peaceful outcomes. Murat, who regularly visits the al-Nur mosque known as the center of Salafism in Berlin, stated that he does not see ISIS militants as Muslims since a Muslim would not destroy lives.⁵¹ Remarkably, some interlocutors who are keen to purify religion from profane symbols tended to start by rejecting the idea of suicide, for which many Jihadi violent extremists long. A few participants reminded us of conspiracy theories and suggested that the Islamophobic circles founded organizations like ISIS and al-Qaeda to alienate Muslims. From Cologne, Adil complains that Salafis, whom he defines as those following the prophet’s Islam, are associated with ISIS, Boko Haram, and al-Qaeda: “those people [...] [who] killed others harmed me.”⁵²

Mental Disturbances

Although the difficulty in accessing clinics is a limitation in sampling, a noteworthy part of young-adult violent extremists had mental disturbance records identified before or after their attacks. For some, shouting “Allahu Akbar” during the attack or mocking the Holocaust at the court may have become simple solutions to demonstrate a kind of rationality. Accessible and popular ideological frames seem to help them develop counternarratives against the humiliation of being regarded as lunatics. For example, Mahdi, a Dutch national of Somalian origin, moved back and forth between psychiatric hospitals in the UK and Somali for two years before his Manchester attack. Among his alleged problems were psychosis, hallucinations, and delusions that led him to believe that intelligence agencies constantly watched him. According to the investigators, he began to access online “extremist material” during this travel period.⁵³

Those who clearly struggle for their agency are the violent extremists who somehow stayed alive and went through mental investigations. For example, among five others charged with the attack on a mosque in Enschede, one refused to participate in the mental health analysis. Unlike Ahmad, these attackers refused to call themselves “terrorists,”⁵⁴ not because they lacked mental stability but because spreading fear among Muslims was not their single issue. Denying his association with “Nazizm” and “right-wing” extremism, Danny H. argued that their program included tackling “major social problems, such as improving care for the elderly and combating poverty among families.”⁵⁵ Arguably, for tactical reasons,

⁵⁰ *PRIME Youth Interview*, June 11, 2020.

⁵¹ *PRIME Youth Interview*, August 4, 2020.

⁵² *PRIME Youth Interview*, September 28, 2020.

⁵³ Harriet Brewis, “Man Jailed for Life for Manchester Victoria Knife Attack,” November 27, 2019, <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/manchester-victoria-stabbing-mahdi-mohamud-26-jailed-a4298131.html>.

⁵⁴ “Brandbomgooiers uit Enschede: ‘We zijn geen terroristen,’” *tubantia.nl*, February 5, 2018, <https://www.tubantia.nl/enschede/brandbomgooiers-uit-enschede-we-zijn-geen-terroristen-ae54f37f/>.

⁵⁵ “Advocaat Verdachte Enschedese Brandbomgooier: ‘OM Is Geradicaliseerd,’” *tubantia.nl*, February 6, 2018, <https://www.tubantia.nl/enschede/advocaat-verdachte-enschedese-brandbomgooier-om-is-geradicaliseerd-a6f8a1a4/>.

their defense at the court bounced between socially responsible citizens in general and a few drunk people at the attack time.

Some of our interlocutors (N=11) also notified us about their mental disturbance diagnoses, ranging from major depression to psychosis to borderline personality disorder. Their alternative solution was participating in community service for their mental health and doing a series of voluntary work, including helping others in “deradicalization” and “exit” programs to gain self-esteem. Some of them hope to become role models for people like them, seek a safe space and an occupation that will keep them relieved. In the process, some had strong opinions against the pills that, they think, switch off their thought processes; they want to keep seeking the complete form of their ideologies. From Cologne, Ahmet described his experience at a clinic in Germany as “a disgusting game of power.” His experience at a hospital in Turkey was even worse: “there was no treatment[...][T]hey gave out medicine like candy.”⁵⁶

Seeking a New Status to Compensate for Losses

A shared point in our interlocutors’ stories is that they struggled not to lose their personality to alleviate their disturbances. In this process, some of them found peace in the quietist, inward-looking forms of belief systems, including religions. For example, Adil claimed that he was approached by ISIS recruiters trying to exploit his depression. A friend of him who had similar problems “disappeared” [i.e., went to the battle], but “I wasn’t persuaded.” In the process, he is radicalizing himself in another way, which may be exemplified best by his appreciation of Salafi preacher Pierre Vogel.⁵⁷

Our interlocutors who had mental disturbance records and who support Radical Right movements sought good-tempered and non-paranoid comrades while preserving their activism. They aim to reshape the route of their radicalization instead of forgetting their reasons for discontent. Finding a new status was especially critical for our interlocutors who have participated in an exit program. Given that many attackers aim to commit suicide during their attacks, violent extremism has something to do with losing the last crumbs of hope or admitting that the *self* has to be courageous enough to die in order to revitalize hope. Diagnosed with depression one year before his suicidal behavior in Munich, Ali spent two months at a mental home. Tahar O., Haashi A., Mahdi M., and Ahmad were different from Ali only in that they were classified as “Jihadis.” Suffering from undisclosed childhood traumas and, in an investigator’s words, a “very strong psychiatric instability,” Tahar wanted to blow up a nursery school or kill a policeman to “sublimate his suicide.”⁵⁸ Haashi was more successful than Tahar in finalizing his suicide plan, a shortcut to martyrdom for many violent “Jihadi” extremists. His only past criminal offense was what he called an anti-racist attack on his former colleagues. After the brawl, the Belgian citizen, who migrated from Somalia in 2004, told the police that he had “enough of racism” in the workplace.⁵⁹ Later, having been diagnosed with paranoia, which, the doctors thought, led Haashi to believe that his colleagues chased him, he stayed voluntarily in a mental hospital for three weeks. He made his final attack on two police officers.

⁵⁶ PRIME Youth Interview, September 29, 2020.

⁵⁷ PRIME Youth Interview, September 28, 2020.

⁵⁸ “Attentat Déjoué En France: Une Attaque Dans Une École Fomentée,” April 3, 2019, <https://www.linternaute.com/actualite/societe/1405504-attentat-dejoue-a-paris-deux-individus-voulaient-attaquer-une-ecole/>.

Cecile Ollivier, “Un Homme Mis En Examen et Écroué Pour Avoir Projeté d’attaquer Une École Maternelle,” BFMTV, April 3, 2019, https://www.bfmtv.com/police-justice/terrorisme/un-homme-mis-en-examen-et-ecroue-pour-avoir-projete-d-attaquer-une-ecole-maternelle_AN-201904030025.html.

⁵⁹ “Brussels Attacker Didn’t Need to Be Sectioned,” *vrtnws.be*, August 29, 2017, https://www.vrt.be/vrtnws/en/2017/08/29/brussels_attackerdidntneedtobesectioned-1-3056836/.

Social Bonds and Practices in Line with the Ideology

Many youngsters in the incubation period, soon to become violent extremists, construct online alter-egos disconnected from the rest of their life. In a way, this is also common among the representations of non-violent radicalization and perhaps many others. Many participate in the broader youth culture, engaging with a wide array of data, from bits of information to memes and captions to grander stories threatening political and social establishments. The youth of the digital era already challenge the stability of long-standing knowledge claims. Like many others seeking global solutions to local problems, violent radicalization involves recontextualizing rituals, verses, slogans, or tactics that otherwise would symbolize irrelevant thoughts in disconnected places. Uniquely, however, they have discrepant offline and online social circles, with implications over their incoherent ideologies.

Detachment from one's offline social circle leads to a different understanding of territory. After his failed attempt to go to Syria, Adel K. decided that one does not have to be there to wage a "holy war."⁶⁰ He was under house arrest in his parents' home when he virtually met Abdel P., who lived 700 kilometers away. Ahmad A. made his own "Islamic State" flag without the contribution of IS. Many others were only imaginatively in touch with the organizations that they self-identified with. Despite having no offline friends and living in isolation with his mother in his childhood room, Stephan had a network of imagined comrades online, including the Christchurch killer Brenton T., whom he was admittedly inspired by.

Contrary to expectation, characters like Brenton do not become role models only in their ideological circles. Simultaneously, they turn out to be a matter of research for other violent extremists and potential copycat aggressors with no need to have a public ideological statement. For example, Tahar carried out research about Brenton alongside Sharia4Belgium.⁶¹ Michal S., who promoted the idea of assassinating Prince Harry for marrying a woman of mixed race, kept attack guides written in the name of both white supremacism and Islamism. He and his friend, Oskar D., did not need a right-wing repertoire to be criminals, as they would still be crime machines cheering for "rape, torture, murder of women and babies."⁶² Ali's attachment to whom he saw as his forerunners also indicates a mismatch between his inspirations and ideological rationale. While backing his attack with the knowledge claim that "Iran is considered to be the home of the Aryan race,"⁶³ he reportedly visited the spot where Tim K. killed 15 people at a school.⁶⁴ The latter had not produced a similar racist ideological pretext for his attack. Ali's attachment to Tim suggests that his feelings of emotional and social isolation, which drove his motivation

⁶⁰ "Le Jour Où Adel Kermiche a Berné La Justice Française," Valeurs actuelles, July 27, 2016,

<https://www.valeursactuelles.com/societe/le-jour-ou-adel-kermiche-a-berne-la-justice-francaise-63845>.

⁶¹ Claire Hache, "Attentat Déjoué Contre Des Enfants et Un Policier : Les Détails d'un Projet Glacant," L'Express.fr, April 5, 2019, https://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/societe/enquete/attentat-dejoue-contre-des-enfants-et-un-policier-les-details-d-un-projet-glacant_2071393.html.

⁶² "Teenage Neo-Nazis Jailed over Terror Offences," BBC News, June 18, 2019, sec. UK, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-48672929>.

⁶³ Alix Culbertson, "Brave Man Who Stood up to Munich Shooter Now Facing Prosecution for 'INSULTING Killer,'" Express.co.uk, August 5, 2016, <https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/696646/Thomas-Salbey-Munich-shooter-Ali-Sonboly-prosecution>.

⁶⁴ James Dunn, "Munich Maniac Had 'Why Kids Kill' Book in Rucksack during Murder Spree," Mail Online, July 23, 2016, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3704643/Munich-maniac-book-called-Kids-Kill-rucksack-went-murder-spree-obsessed-German-teenager-shot-dead-15-classmates-SEVEN-years-ago.html>.

"Tim K. - Der Junge Ohne Eigenschaften," Der Spiegel, November 3, 2009, <https://www.spiegel.de/panorama/justiz/amoklauf-in-baden-wuerttemberg-tim-k-der-junge-ohne-eigenschaften-a-612673.html>.

for revenge, came before his ideological statement. His general disinterest in the local right-wing milieus, scenes, and the arsenal of nativist grievances supports this suggestion.

As a “Jihadi” suspect, Tahar did not make a clear ideological statement either. The authorities eventually diagnosed him as a “psychiatrically unstable” person whose childhood traumas were coupled with major depression.⁶⁵ Haashi, Ahmad, and Mahdi seemed ideologically conscious, at least because they started their knife attacks with the phrase “Allahu Akbar.” Though Haashi shouted “Allahu Akbar,” the Belgian investigators could not confirm his ties with (supposedly Somali) Jihadi networks.⁶⁶ He was not known as a religious person in his social circle, including his lawyer, who accompanied him in a one-day stay at the mental hospital following his attack on former colleagues.⁶⁷

In case Jihadi ideological discourse played a prominent role in the process, it did not necessarily originate from the Islamist or Salafi channels. Farid I. (40), who injured a police officer in front of the Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris, was a doctoral student and journalist who wrote articles about human rights, democracy, and the politics of migration. Alongside yelling “this is for Syria” during his attack, Farid left a video in which he pledged allegiance to ISIS. Both himself and his close social circle described him as a “secular” person up until “the ten months,” in Farid’s calculation,⁶⁸ between the attack and his break-up with his girlfriend. A former colleague of him described his previous interest in good wine.⁶⁹ In many other cases like Farid, the symptoms of the “Jihadi” born-again experience included (1) religious conversion, (2) a sudden interest in religious messaging, (3) acquiring elementary-level books about Quran, (4) the problematization of previously acceptable environments or a sudden disinterest in previous habits, such as alcohol, pork, sex life and drugs, (5) changes in clothing (e.g., growing beards or changing attires).

Limitations

I shall acknowledge several limitations of this research project. First and foremost, my analysis is not intended to contribute to the early detection tools for violent radicalization. Secondly, the missing data in open-source texts is a challenge for this study. Combining “no” and “unassigned” in a single code means that many variables were left incomplete. Connectedly, the universe of violent and non-violent radicalization in my research does not include a clear separation of non-violent extremism from non-violent radicalism. Thirdly, bringing together two different datasets with different kinds of narratives (i.e., self-reporting versus media reporting) is not a flawless project. Finally, I do not include a historical analysis in this research scope. Given that violent extremists came to power on several occasions in the past and convinced others of their total demise,⁷⁰ this endeavor would be necessary to understand the intricacies of specific ideological families.

Conclusions

From debates on “Islamist separatism” to the rise of transnational right-wing organizations such as the Identitarian Movement, the political context in Europe requires considering non-violent radicalization apart

⁶⁵ Cecile Ollivier, “Un Homme Mis En Examen et Écroué Pour Avoir Projeté d’attaquer Une École Maternelle,” BFMTV, April 3, 2019, https://www.bfmtv.com/police-justice/terrorisme/un-homme-mis-en-examen-et-ecroue-pour-avoir-projete-d-attaquer-une-ecole-maternelle_AN-201904030025.html.

⁶⁶ “Incident Summary for GTDID: 201708250027,” the Global Terrorism Database, accessed January 17, 2021, <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/IncidentSummary.aspx?gtdid=201708250027>.

⁶⁷ Bjorn Maeckelbergh, “Aanvaller Militairen Ontsloeg Zichzelf Uit Psychiatrie,” hln.be, August 28, 2017, <https://www.hln.be/nieuws/aanvaller-militairen-ontsloeg-zichzelf-uit-psychiatrie~adb6d045/>.

⁶⁸ “Algerian Jailed for 28 Years for Notre Dame Attack on Police,” AP News, October 20, 2020, <https://apnews.com/article/paris-shootings-france-bf3cdf7bae9f8fd5cb291bcd822d1370>.

⁶⁹ “The Latest: Friend, Family Say Paris Suspect Not Radical,” AP NEWS, June 7, 2017, <https://apnews.com/article/be4a5de1235a4e7c97fe16a2b755ec2e>.

⁷⁰ Theodor W. Adorno, *Aspects of the New Right-Wing Extremism* (John Wiley & Sons, 2020).

from violent extremism. The latter helps indicate the gradual reduction of the ideology into killing and dying for an ideological cause. However, radicalization in the form of developing a coherent ideology, or at least expressing the desire to do so, yields contrasting social outcomes.

This working paper aimed to bring together some of these varying outcomes, drawing on a set of media and interview narratives. In line with the elementary functions of a working paper, I have left the empirical sections partly disorganized, with them being only loosely informed by the existing theories and arguments. However, I conclude from the paper that such research should engage more with the theories of reflexivity to be able to result in an acceptable conceptualization of non-violent radicalization.

This concluding remark has implications on the necessity of some kind of radical thinking in democracy. While pressures on democracy arouse controversies on the very concept, with its moderate and radical forms being disputed, any attempt to develop another imagination of democracy is likely to require non-violent radicalization. Combining the images of the Radical Right with that of Islamism makes sense in this context. Even if the doctrines they defend include the wrong recipes for the grievances they address, their shared aspiration to make foundational claims without resorting to violence is noteworthy.

[Acknowledgments](#)

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