Who are the enemies?

A study on the influence of conspiracy theories on target selection in three cases of right-wing terrorism

Karl Malmborg

Abstract

Right-wing terrorism poses an increasing threat to the safety of people all around the world. This thesis examines terrorist target selection processes in right-wing terrorism with the aim of reaching a deeper understanding on how terrorists operate. In order to do so, I have designed this study as a comparative case study, in which three cases of right-wing terrorism have been analysed. Theoretically, this study is rooted in the terrorism literature and builds on existing research on terrorist target selection and radicalization processes. Observing that conspiratorial thinking is common in extreme right ideologies, I suggest that this type of thinking might influence target selection. The analysis indicates some support for this hypothesis, but the limited scope of the study makes findings tentative. The contribution of this study lies in the attempt to advance theoretical knowledge on terrorist decision making by studying it through the lens of conspiracy theories.

Keywords: target selection, terrorism, conspiracy theories, right-wing extremism, Islamophobia, antisemitism
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1   Introduction

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In an attack directed at the Norwegian government building and a summer camp for politically engaged youths, Anders Behring Breivik killed 77 people. Brenton Tarrant opened fire inside of two mosques in Christchurch killing 49 people. The two deeds share various similarities, but they differ on one crucial point: the nature of the target being attacked. How to understand this divergence in target selection?

One approach is to conceptualize this as a difference between targeting an "inner" and an "outer" enemy (Ravndal & Bjørgo 2018: 6). This kind of distinction is found in various extremist ideologies which identify two sets of enemies: the external enemy is perceived to be alien to one's in-group, it is an unwanted "invader". The internal enemy is part of the same in-group but is perceived not to be loyal to the interests of the group, thus often being seen as a "traitor". Group belonging can be defined in terms of race, ethnicity, nationality, religious affiliation or others aspects important to a person's identity (Bjørgo 1995a: 7). Examples of this kind of double enemy image can be found within for example right-wing and Islamist terrorist groups (Bjørgo 1995b: 182-183; Laqueur 2004: 388-389).

Important insights about how terrorists operate can be drawn from the existing literature. Still, it fails to provide trustworthy explanations to the question initially posed, why seemingly similar terrorists make so radically different choices in terms of target selection.

1.1   Objective and research question

The objective of a research project should according to George and Bennett (2005: 74) be adapted to "the needs of the research program at its current stage of development". Observing that there seems to be few theories in the research literature able to explain why some terrorists target their in-group, while others target their out-group, the objective of this study is to try to address this issue by advancing theoretical knowledge in this field of study.

In order to do so, I will carry out a comparative analysis of a small number of cases with the aim of gaining insights into how terrorists choose their targets. It has been suggested that case studies aiming for theory development should focus

on one subgroup of the overall phenomenon being examined. This approach allows for more precise explanations to be developed that together with other contributions can be integrated into more general theories (George & Bennett 2005: 77-78). Therefore I have chosen to analyse three cases of terrorism from the same ideological milieu, namely the extreme right.[1] This choice is partly guided by the observation made by several researcher that this area historically has been given less attention compared to other areas in terrorism studies (Bjørgo & Ravndal 2018: 5; Blee 2005: 422; Koehler 2017: 13; Schmidt 2011b: 461; Simi 2010). Given the fact that the threat posed by right-wing terrorists is increasing (Koehler 2019), learning more about how these terrorists operate is of great importance.

Theoretically, I will seek to integrate research literature on conspiratorial thinking with the literature on terrorism in order to investigate how this form of thinking influence terrorist target selection. Although conspiratorial thinking is common in terrorists' worldview, relatively few studies have addressed this aspect (Bartlett & Miller 2010: 3). I believe this approach will prove fruitful to advance knowledge on terrorists' way of thinking and acting.

The following research question has been formulated to guide this study:

How does conspiratorial thinking influence right-wing terrorists' target selection?

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[1] The terms "the extreme right" and "right-wing extremists" will in this study be used interchangeably, referring to groups and individuals adhering to the ideology of "right-wing extremism" as it is defined in section 2.2.1. Those of these actors using the strategy of terrorism will be referred to as "right-wing terrorists".

2   Theory

This chapter will introduce the theoretical foundations for this study. First of all, the concept of target selection will be introduced and previous research reviewed. Secondly, right-wing terrorism will be defined in order to pin down the object of inquiry and clarify how it is to be distinguished from related phenomena. The ideology of right-wing extremism and the strategy of terrorism will initially be treated and defined separately before being integrated into a working definition for this study. Thirdly, conspiratorial thinking will be defined and its theoretical relevance for this study clarified. Lastly, these three concepts will be integrated into an analytical framework that will guide the empirical analysis.

2.1   Terrorist target selection

Target selection is related to the more general question of how terrorists make decisions. McCormick (2003) argues that this question can be approached from a strategic, an organizational or a psychological perspective. The strategic model - traditionally the most influential approach in terrorist studies (Abrahms 2008: 78) - sees terrorists as rational actors using terrorism as "an instrumental activity designed to achieve or help achieve a specified set of long-run and short-run objectives" (McCormick 2003: 481). In line with this assumption, researchers have identified different strategies that terrorists employ, such as provocation, morale building, advertisement, social disruption and threat elimination (Kydd & Walter 2006: 56).[2] Less optimistic about the prospects of ascribing terrorists rationality, some scholars of religiously motivated terrorism argue that the unworldly dimension of this violence makes it less subjectable to being analysed in terms of rationality (Neumann 2009: 94).

Zooming in more specifically on the literature on target selection, Drake's (1997) influential study remains a point of reference for its comprehensive approach. Drake seeks to take into account how factors such as ideology, strategy, tactics, perpetrator capabilities, national security arrangements and target protection, and the terrorist groups' organizational structure, influence the target selection process. To Drake (1998: 54-55), ideology - which he understands as the beliefs, values, principles, and objectives by which an actor defines its political identity and goals - is the central component in this process:

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[2] For a closer description of strategies see for example Thornton (1964: 82-88) and Hemmingby and Bjørgo (2016: 15).

> A group's ideology is extremely important in determining target selection because it defines how the group's members see the world around them. The ideology of a terrorist group identifies the 'enemies' of the group by providing a measure against which to assess the 'innocence' or 'guilt' of people and institutions. This gives rise to the idea that certain people or things are somehow 'legitimate targets' (Drake 1998: 55).

A similar conclusion is drawn by Becker (2014) who have studied lone-actor terrorists in the United States. He states that target selection primarily is an ideologically driven process, although influenced by the operational limitations facing lone-actor terrorists. Trying to understand how ideology influences choice of target, Neumann (2009: 120-121) argues that the rise of terrorist actors adhering to particularistic beliefs - as opposed to universalistic ideologies such as Marxism - has made target selection more indiscriminate, leading to a rise of mass-casualty terrorism and more civilian victims being targeted.

However, the explanatory potential of ideology is limited, as pointed out by Abrahms, Ward and Kennedy (2018) in a study seeking to understand why some terrorists target civilians while others do not. Noticing an operational difference between parent groups and their affiliates, their study uses conflict and organizational ecology theory to illustrate how this difference can be explained in terms of diverging goals incentivizing different target selection behaviour. Observing the need for a tool to structure and categorize variables having an impact on target selection, Hemmingby and Bjørgo (2016: 12-18) have suggested a holistic approach to target selection analysis, partially based on the work done by Drake (1997; 1998). Identifying four key categories - ideology, strategy and internal and external factors - for the sorting of variables, they stress the importance of analysing the interaction of these variables. This constant interaction gives rise to a process that is very much dynamic and therefore subject to change from the moment a decision to carry out an attack has been made up until its very realization.

I will in this study rely on this understanding of the target selection process, but the analysis will be limited to the ideological components of Hemmingby and Bjørgo model. This approach will be elaborated more fully in section 2.4.

2.2   Right-wing terrorism

2.2.1   Right-wing extremism

Defining the ideology of the extreme right can be challenging. The wide variety of definitions and terms used by researchers has given rise to what some scholars

have called a "terminological chaos" (Mudde 2007: 11-12; Perliger 2012: 13) and the lack of scholarly consensus on how to conceptualize key concepts is by some seen as an obstacle to the advancement of the research field (Ravndal & Bjørgo 2018: 6; Koehler 2017: 51).

Bobbio's (1996) work on political ideologies provides a good point of entry for devising a working definition of extreme right ideology. According to Bobbio (1996: 78-79), the political landscape can be painted with the help of two key distinctions: the distinction between equality and inequality and the distinction between liberty and authoritarianism. The political right is characterized by seeing societal inequalities as natural and an authoritarian disposition separates extremists from their more moderate counterparts (Bobbio 1996: 60-79). Such a definition, based on only two characteristics, gives the concept a high extension, that is, it refers to a wide range of empirical phenomena. While being useful for comparative purposes, the broad applicability comes at the expense of precision (Bjereld et al. 2018, 77-78).

Seeking to provide a more precise definition, Mudde (2007) has sought to identify the core feature(s) of extreme right ideology. A core feature is a concept that is "both central to, and constitutive of, a particular ideology and therefore of the ideological community to which it gives inspiration and identity" (Ball cited in Mudde 2007: 15). Mudde (2007: 19) argues that "nativism" is such a feature, defining it as "an ideology, which holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group ('the nation') and that nonnative elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the homogenous nation-state". Mudde also stresses that the basis of "nativeness" can vary, that is, it can be based on for example cultural, ethnic, racial or religious belonging.

Following these influential contributions, Ravndal and Bjørgo (2018: 7) has defined right-wing extremism as being characterized by the following key features: an acceptance of social inequalities, authoritarianism and nativism. This is the definition that I will use in this study.

2.2.2 Terrorism

Terrorism is another contested concept. Having compiled and analyzed 109 definitions of terrorism,[3] Schmid has proposed an academic consensus definition:

> Terrorism refers, on the one hand, to a doctrine about the presumed effectiveness of a special form or tactic of fear-generating, coercive political violence and, on the other hand, to a conspiratorial practice of calculated, demonstrative, direct violent action without legal or moral restraints, targeting mainly civilians and non-combatants, performed for its propagandistic and psychological effects on various audiences and conflict parties (Schmid 2011a: 86-87).

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3 For an overview of definitions, see Schmidt (2011a).

Attached to this definition are eleven additional paragraphs further specifying the nature of terrorism.

I will not go into depths on possible definitions of terrorism. However, it is important to point out some of the specificities of right-wing terrorism. As observed by Koehler (2017: 53) several aspects of the nature of the violence carried out by right-wing extremists make it difficult to decide whether it should be regarded as terrorism or not. Most importantly, the intended political outcomes are in many cases of right-wing violence not communicated, creating the impression that they are purely motivated by hate as opposed to a politically motivated strategy. Some argue that the political message of acts of violence can be self-explanatory and that such acts therefore should be understood as acts of terrorism even in the absence of statements tying the violence to a specific perpetrator (Koehler 2017: 54). Others avoid designating these attacks as terrorism. Perliger (2012: 85) for example, prefers using the broader term "political violence" arguing that many cases of right-wing violence, although arguably being politically motivated, lack the instrumental quality of terroristic violence.

A related issue is how the degree of premeditation influence how the violence is to be understood. Empirical evidence show that most incidences of extreme right violence occur spontaneously (Ravndal & Bjørgo 2018: 7). To some researchers, premediation should not be seen as compulsory for an act to be designated as terrorism (Sweeney & Perliger 2018: 53), while others argue that such an approach comes with the risk of over-stretching the concept of terrorism (Ravndal & Bjørgo 2018: 7). Some scholars argue that the degree of premediation is a central factor in differentiating between acts of terrorism and hate crimes (Mills et al. 2017: 1197).[4]

I will in this study rely on a definition formed by Ravndal and Bjørgo. In an effort to take into account the specificities of right-wing violence discussed above, Ravndal and Bjørgo (2018: 7) have proposed that an act of violence should be considered as extreme-right terrorism if the following criteria are being met:

- The target selection is premised on extreme right-ideas.
- The attack is premeditated.
- The violence is intended to trigger psychological repercussions beyond the immediate victim or target.

2.3   Conspiratorial thinking

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[4] See Mills et al. (2017) for an overview of the debate on the relationship between hate crimes and terrorism.

Conspiracy theories are prevalent in various kinds of extremist ideologies (Bartlett & Miller 2010: 3). The Norwegian Police Security Service (PST) writes for example in 2019 year's annual threat assessment report that there among extreme right activists exists a "lasting hatred against norwegian authorities and minority groups" and that "[v]arious conspiracy theories form the basis of this enemy image". Moreover, it is observed that internet has a central role in the dissemination of conspiracy theories, being "the main arena for and source of spreading right-wing extremist propaganda" through certain websites which reaches "several thousand individuals, who are exposed to a right-wing extremist conspiratorial ideology, glorification of violence and hateful statements" (Politiets Sikkerhetstjeneste 2019). While it is generally agreed that conspiratorial thinking is widespread in society (Franks et al. 2017: 1; Goertzel 1994; Sunstein & Vermeule 2009: 202), some argue that this is of little relevance since most people do not act on these beliefs. Nevertheless, conspiracy theories have many times shown to influence human behavior, and to play a pivotal role in producing violence (Sunstein & Vermeule 2009: 220). Despite this knowledge about the potentially violent consequences of conspiratorial thinking, few studies analyse terrorism through the lens of conspiracy theories (Bartlett & Miller 2010: 3).

Birchall (cited in van Buuren 2013: 207) defines a conspiracy theory as "a narrative that is constructed in order to explain an event or sequence of events as the result of a group of people secretly cooperating with evil intentions". While wordings might differ among definitions proposed, the core idea is relatively constant.[5] van Buuren (2013: 207) furthermore makes a distinction between what he calls "'top-down' conspiracy theories launched by governmental actors or supporters of an existing political regime and 'bottom-up' conspiracy theories arising from the heart of society and directed against the state or the ruling classes". While the former type serves to mobilise support for a regime, the latter - the one relevant for the purpose of this study - can be seen as "coded social critiques" in which the ethos and legitimacy of society's main institutions are contested, thus delegitimizing state's rule and legitimizing violent resistance (van Buuren 2013: 208). van Buuren summarizes:

> A "bottom-up" conspiracy dispositive, therefore (1) supplies a discursive frame in which societal developments or certain governmental policies that are perceived to be unjust or inacceptable are presented not as just inaccurate, defective, not well thought-out or fitting within the parameters of legitimate political divisions or conflict, but delegitimised as a deliberate strategy deployed by conspiratorial forces (2) with apocalyptic effects on civilisation, culture, nation or the "true people" (3), which therefore hardly can be resisted with democratic actions and strategies and (4) therefore, inevitable contain a spur to urgent, extraordinary or violent action in order to rescue civilisation from destruction (van Buuren 2013: 208).

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[5] For alternative definitions see for example Keeley (1999: 116) and Sunstein and Vermeule (2009: 205).

Having spelled out the theoretical foundation of this study, the next section will be dedicated to elaborating on how I think bottom-up conspiracy thinking affects target selection processes of right-wing terrorists.

2.4   Conspiratorial thinking and target selection

van Buuren's understanding of the mechanisms of conspiratorial thinking resonates well with a theory developed by Sprinzak (1995) on the radicalization process leading to terrorism. Sprinzak sees terrorism as the result of a "process of delegitimization". The essence of this process, he argues, is a "slowly evolving legitimacy crisis between an insurgent movement and the government" which leads to a depersonalization and dehumanization of every individual associated with the regime (Sprinzak 1995: 19-20). Terrorism is understood as the operational manifestation of this crisis of legitimacy.

Sprinzak (1995: 20) observes that right-wing terrorist groups, contrary to other terrorists, "usually avoid confrontation with the authorities and start their career by directing the majority of their operations at non-ruling groups".[6] This, he argues, is the result of a different pattern of delegitimization. It can be described as a "dual process of delegitimization" meaning that the radicalization of right-wing terrorists develops *unevenly* against *two separate enemies*. The reason for targeting "non-ruling groups" rather than the government is explained by Sprinzak as being the result of "an *intense* delegitimization vis-à-vis the unaccepted non-governmental collectivity and a *diluted* delegitimization towards the regime" (Sprinzak 1995: 20).

"Legitimacy" is thus the key concept binding together Sprinzak's understanding of terrorism and van Buuren's ideas about bottom-up conspiracies. Combining insight from these two proposals can provide us with a theory which might help us answer the question of why some right-wing terrorists target an inner enemy while other target an outer enemy. In Sprinzak's work, diminishing legitimacy is the driving force behind the radicalization process resulting in terrorism. He also suggests that the terrorists' perceptions of the legitimacy of their different enemies influence their target selection. van Buuren's theory on the delegitimizing effects of the bottom-up conspiracy helps us, in turn, to understand *how* some terrorists come to perceive the state as illegitimate. This happens when the state's actions (that one opposes) are seen as being "a deliberate strategy deployed by conspiratorial forces" (van Buuren 2013: 210). The conspiracy theory is a discursive mechanism delegitimizing the state by depicting it as a "traitorous" enemy that is betraying the interests of for example the "race", nation

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6 The empirical validity of this statement has been questioned, see for example Bjørgo (1995a: 4-5); Koehler (2017: 15); Ravndal & Bjørgo (2018: 11-13).

or the people, therefore making it "a legitimate object of violent resistance" (van Buuren 2013: 210).

The degree of bottom-up conspiratorial thinking in terrorists living in a world of a double enemy image might therefore be an important factor influencing their target selection. To put it bluntly: if you are against a certain societal change and this change is believed to be caused by a government that is controlled by evil forces seeking to destroy you, then you would be more prone to attack this government. If you do not think that the government is controlled by evil forces (even though you may still dislike its policies), then maybe you would be less inclined to interpret societal changes to be part of a conspiracy in the first place and therefore also less prone to attack the government.

From this theory, I can deduct the following hypothesis:

Right-wing terrorist with a high degree of bottom-up conspiratorial thinking to a larger extent target in-group enemies than those with a lesser degree of bottom-up conspiratorial thinking.

In order to be able to test this hypothesis empirically, the theory will have to operationalized and compiled in an analytical framework. This will be the focus of the following section.

2.5   Analytical framework and operationalization

First of all, I will describe how I construct the skeleton of the analytical framework and how I choose what variables to be included in the analysis. Secondly, these variables will be operationalized in accordance with the theory developed in section 2.3, which will allow for the hypothesis to be empirically tested.

2.5.1 Framework

At the most basic level, selection of target can be seen as a dependent variable to be explained by an independent variable. This basic model can be expanded further by adding explanatory variables. Since this introduces the challenge of analysing how variables interact, the model becomes more complex. Hemmingby and Bjørgo (2016: 12-18) have developed a model in which they include four sets of categories under which variables can be sorted. These categories are ideology, strategy, internal factors and external factors, offering a holistic approach to target selection analysis.

Since I am interested in analysing the ideological foundations of terrorist target selection, the framework will be adapted thereafter. This means that only the variables categorized under "ideology" in Hemmingby and Bjørgo's model will be included. Holistic approaches are more suitable when seeking to understand the complete target selection process of a specific case. Since I am interested in understanding the mechanisms of conspiratorial thinking, the model must allow for a close-up analysis and therefore I have chosen to isolate the ideological variables in this study.

2.5.2 Operationalization

An analysis of the ideological aspect of a target selection process should according to Hemmingby and Bjørgo (2016: 14-15) give insights about an actor's "subjective world-view, the current and futuristic threat-picture, who the identified enemies are, more detailed characterizations of these enemies, moral justifications and legitimacy for violent actions, as well as the ultimate objectives". These variables will be integrated into a compromised framework adapted to serve the purpose of this study and to allow analysis to be focused in line with its objectives. The framework will consists of the following three variables: w*orldview*, t*hreat picture* and e*nemy images*.

The *worldview* variable seeks to encompass the terrorist's overall ideas about society and the world at large. This includes descriptions of how things are, how they ought to be, and what to do in order to move from the first stage to the latter. It might include religious beliefs, ideological affiliations or other ideas having an impact on how the world is perceived and societal changes interpreted. Moral considerations and justifications are also included in this variable.

In order to be able to test this study's hypothesis, the *threat picture* and *enemy images* components will be operationalized in a way as to allow for such a test. Examining the *threat picture,* I am interested in what the terrorist perceive as threatening. These threats might be present or expected to appear in the future. I also want to assess to what degree these threats are described in terms of bottom-up conspiratorial thinking. Such an assessment can be made with the help of the four tenets that according to van Buuren (2013: 208) defines a bottom-up conspiracy theory, namely:

- Societal changes deemed unacceptable are thought to be part of a deliberate strategy deployed by conspiratorial forces.
- These changes are understood as having devastating and apocalyptic effects on the nation, culture, civilization or the "true people".
- Democratic resistance is seen as pointless.
- Violent resistance is seen as the only viable option to avoid being eliminated.

The *enemy images* variable encompass who the terrorist identify as enemies and how the enemies are described. Again, in order to allow the hypothesis to be tested, I am interested in knowing if the most important threat is seen as stemming from the in-group or from the out-group. Identifying the enemy perceived to be most threatening and how this enemy is described might provide important insights into how bottom-up conspiracy thinking work to shape enemy images and influence target selection. A summary of the operationalization is found in Table 1.

In summary, existing research suggests that legitimacy is an important concept in terrorism, both in radicalization and target selection processes, as well as in shaping enemy images. Combining these insights, it is in this study proposed that a belief in bottom-up conspiracy theories influence how terrorists choose targets. By theoretically integrating the concept of bottom-up conspiracy thinking into studies on target selection processes I hope that this elaborated framework will contribute to advance theoretical understanding of terrorist target selection. The next chapter will outline how the study will be structured methodologically to allow for this this to be achieved.

Table 1. Summary of the analytical framework

Ideological variables	Operationalization
Worldview	How is society described? What kind of society is to be created in the future? How is this future society to be created?
Threat picture	What threats are perceived to be present? What threats are expected to appear in the future? To what degree are threats described in terms of bottom-up conspiracy?
Enemy images	Who are perceived to be the enemies? Is the most threatening enemy perceived as being internal or external to the in-group?

3   Method

This chapter will introduce the methodological foundations of this study. It will put forward the reasons behind the choice of research design, explain the strategy used for case selection and discuss the strengths and weaknesses associated with these methodological choices. Lastly, I will comment on some aspects concerning the specificities of the material analysed in this study and whether it can ethically problematic to use it.

3.1   Research design

In order to provide an answer to the research question, this study has been designed as a small-n comparative case study. Having theoretically deducted a hypothesis (see section 2.4), the next step will be to test the hypothesis empirically to determine the theory's applicability and real-world relevance (Bjereld et al. 2018: 75). One advantage of comparing a small number of cases is that it allows in-depth analysis, while maintaining the comparative approach, thus being a suitable approach for hypothesis testing and theory development (George & Bennett 2005: 19-22). Nevertheless, all case study methods come with some risks since the selection of cases will have a large impact on the result. Cases included therefore have to be strategically selected in order to minimize the influence of the selection bias that is inherent to any study of a small number of cases (Halperin & Heath 2017: 218).

3.2   Case selection

The strategy for case selection chosen in this study is the so-called Most Similar Systems Design[7], originally described by John Stuart Mill. The logic behind this strategy is to choose cases that are as similar as possible on all theoretically relevant independent variables, except for one. If cases differ in outcome, the dependent variable, this suggests that it is the only independent variable that

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[7] Sometimes referred to as "Method of difference" (Teorell & Svensson 2007: 226).

differs between cases that account for the variance in outcome (Halperin & Heath 2017: 219; Teorell & Svensson 2007: 225-226).

In my study, I choose cases that differ in outcome, that is, the target selected. According to my hypothesis, this difference can be explained by a difference in to what degree the terrorists' thinking is influenced by bottom-up conspiracy theories. To allow for this to be tested, I want cases to be as similar as possible in all other relevant aspects.

I have selected the following three cases to be included in the study:

- The attacks of Anders Behring Breivik against a Norwegian government building and a political youth camp 21 July 2011.

- The attacks of Brenton Tarrant against two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand 15 March 2019.

- The attacks of John Earning against a synagogue in Poway, United States 27 April 2019.

Breivik targeted an inner enemy, while Tarrant and Earnest targeted an outer enemy, thereby the cases provide the sought for variance on the dependent variable.

One obvious weakness with the Most Similar System Design is that the real-world is too complex to provide researchers with cases that fit the design as it is ideally constructed (Teorell & Svensson 2007: 227). However, the cases chosen for this study indeed share many similarities. They are relatively close in time, the deeds were carried out in a similar way and all perpetrators published texts on online forums shortly before carrying out the attacks. Furthermore, the terrorists claim to have been inspired by one another (Tarrant by Breivik, Earnest by Tarrant) thus creating a line of continuity binding the deeds together. This said, there are still important differences which need to be highlighted. It is known that patterns of violence of extreme right actors are influenced by factors such as the history of the country and the local and national context (Bjørgo 1995b; Wigerfelt & Wigerfelt 2014). Having three cases from three different continents is therefore not optimal and can be argued to decrease the conceptual validity.

Since the amount of accessible and reliable data available to students of right-wing terrorism is limited (Koehler 2017: 7), I have been forced to be pragmatic when selecting cases, choosing among relatively few cases where data relevant to the aims of this study could be collected. This is reflected by the fact that there is only one case of terrorism directed at an inner enemy, compared to two cases of terrorism targeted at an outer enemy, even though I ideally would have wanted to have an evenly balanced design. However, since the aim of this study is to reach greater theoretical understanding, rather than being able to make empirical generalizations, I would argue that this imbalance has limited consequences on the study's relevance.

Lastly, a few words on the subject of choosing cases on the basis of outcome on the dependent variable. This approach has been subject to a lot of discussions in the case study literature and maybe most ardently opposed by King, Keohane

and Verba, who argue that inferences about causal effects will be systematically biased when studies are constructed to allow no or only limited variation in the dependent variable (King et al. 1994: 128-132). This argument and its implication on case selection criteria, has, in turn, been contested (George & Bennett 2005: 12, 22-24; Teorell & Svensson 2007: 222-225). For the purpose of this study, the critique put forth by King et al. is of little relevance. As noted by Teorell and Svensson (2007: 225), the critique is mostly relevant to studies aiming to assess the strength of a causal effect. The aim of this study is to explain the mechanisms behind certain actions, and the ability to do so is not affected by biases introduced by case selection.

3.3 Intentional explanation

In order to be able to understand differences in target selection, I will examine the motives of three right-wing terrorists. Since motives are mental processes, not observable with human senses (Esaiasson et al. 2017: 301-302), I will study the terrorists' motivations. Motivations can be spelled out and analysed and will here be understood as *indicators* of the terrorists motives.

Explanations seeking to explain actions with reference to the actor's underlying intentions and motives are called intentional explanations. Since humans are not rule-bound, it is important to underline that we do not speak of mechanical causation when referring to the relationship between a motive and an action. The same motive can inspire different actions, and similarly, the same actions can be inspired by different motives (Bjereld et al. 2018: 59-60). Thus, when seeking to explain human action, it is more precise to talk about identifying the intentions, reasons and motives, than it is to talk about identifying the "causes". Intentions, reasons and motives are explaining the action, but they are not causing it (Beckman 2005: 81-83). One common objection to this approach is that researchers never with confidence can learn about people's true motives (Bjereld et al. 2018: 61). This is the reason why I study motivations, treating them as indicators of motives.

3.4 Material

The credibility of any intentional explanations rests on finding trustworthy indicators of the motives of interest, and naturally the explanations given by the one carrying out the action are highly relevant (Esaiasson 2017: 306; Teorell & Svensson 2007: 251). In all the three cases of terrorism included in this study, the

perpetrator published a text online shortly before carrying out the deed. These three documents are the main sources of this study and will here be briefly introduced:

- Breivik: *2083 - A Declaration of European Independence.* This compendium is a 1516-page compilation of texts, the majority authored by others than Breivik himself (Gardell 2013: 193). The compendium is divided into three books. Book one and two spell out Breivik's view of contemporary society and its history. In book three Breivik declares a "pre-emptive War" against his enemies.

- Tarrant: *The Great Replacement.* This document is a self-authored 77-page long manifesto in which Tarrant describes his understanding of the state of contemporary society. In a self-designed Q&A Tarrant answers questions that he thinks the readers would like to ask him. One section of the manifesto consists of a series of mini-essays in which Tarrant gives his views on various societal issues and urges his alleged followers to take violent action.

- Earnest: *An open letter.* In this seven-page letter Earnest focuses on explaining his deed. Earnest describes his personal Christian faith and his ideas about society. He is also inciting the readers to follow his lead and to carry out similar acts of violence.

Apart from these main sources I will consult news articles for factual information about the deeds. Articles written by researchers commenting on these cases will also be consulted to complement the analysis.

3.4.1 Reflections on the material and ethical considerations

Before proceeding to the analysis of these texts, there are two aspects of working with this material that I would like to comment on.

Firstly: the manifesto written by Tarrant and the letter written by Earnest were both published on the anonymous internet message board 8chan shortly before the attacks were carried out. Several commentators have observed how these texts are imbued with a certain kind of language and symbolism characteristic to a digital hate culture dominating this and similar platforms, milieus that are becoming increasingly important to extreme right activists (Ganesh 2019; Marwick & Lewis 2017; Sundell 2019). Evan (2019) observes that: "this [Tarrant's, my note] manifesto is a trap itself, laid for journalists searching for the meaning behind this horrific crime. There is truth in there, and valuable clues to the shooter's radicalization, but it is buried beneath a great deal of, for lack of a better word, 'shitposting[8]'". I would like to highlight the importance of being aware of these

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8 Defined by Evans (2019) as "the act of throwing out huge amounts of content, most of it ironic, low-quality trolling, for the purpose of provoking an emotional reaction in less Internet-savvy viewers".

aspects when analysing these and similar documents in order to not fall into the "traps" laid out by the terrorists in these texts.

Secondly, carrying out this study inevitably implies engaging with and reproducing the words and ideas of perpetrators of horrendous crimes. I think that it can be ethically problematic to give attention to and thereby further disseminating these ideas of hatred and racism. Maybe we are better off trying to limit the reach of these ideas by ignoring them? Personally, I have come to the conclusion that the aim of trying to get a better understanding of this kind of terrorism, in order to develop more efficient responses to it, justifies the use of this material.

I have also consulted the ethical guidelines for social science research issued by two separate bodies: the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet 2002) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Guchteneire). None of the recommendations in these documents suggest that this study would be unethical.

4   Analysis

In this section the material introduced will be analysed with the help of the analytical framework.

4.1   Anders Behring Breivik

21 July 2011 Anders Behring Breivik detonated a homemade bomb in a complex of buildings housing the Norwegian government. Breivik continued his attack at the island of Utøya where the Norwegian Labour Party's youth wing organized an annual summer camp. Dressed as a policeman and equipped with firearms, Breivik systematically executed his victims – mainly adolescents and young adults - for over an hour, before being arrested. 77 persons were killed in the attacks (Gardell 2014: 129-130).[9]

4.1.1   Worldview

Breivik wants to "liberate" Europe from the now ruling tyrannical and non-democratic "multiculturalist regimes". These regimes are responsible for the "annihilation" of their own people by indoctrinating the public with "multiculturalism" and allowing "Islamic demographical warfare" (Berwick[10] 2011: 795). He wants to build monocultural nations based on cultural conservatism, patriarchal structures, traditional family values and Christian identity. To do so the "National Resistance Movements of Western Europe" (of which he sees himself to be a part), must seize political and military power through coup d'états in order to deport all Muslims and execute all of the "multiculturalist elites" (Berwick 2011: passim). Gardell has summarized Breivik's ideological foundation as follows:

> Examining the ideological contents of the 2083 compendium, Breivik's worldview is found to be mainly influenced by the Islamophobic tradition, cultural conservative nationalism, and antifeminism, combined with substantial

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[9] Breivik was in 2012 sentenced to the maximum penalty under Norwegian law for his crimes (Gardell 2013: 212).

[10] Anders Behring Breivik uses the pseudonym "Andrew Berwick" in his compendium.

elements from White Power thought, selected aspects of right-wing evangelical theology, and material from the Knights Templar tradition, all imbued with romantic male warrior ideals with its call for heroism, bravery, and sacrifice (Gardell 2014: 132).

4.1.2 Threat picture

Breivik sees Europe as threatened by an ongoing "islamisation" of the continent, a colonization carried out through "demographic warfare" which is facilitated by the European leaders. This colonization will lead to the "enslavement" of the European people under "Islamic majority rule in our own countries" (Berwick 2011: 15-16). He believes that European politicians have entered into an strategic alliance with Arab leaders in order to strengthen Europe's political power, and in exchange agreed to allow Muslim immigration to Europe, aiming to merge together Europe with the Arab world, creating "Eurabia" (Berwick 2011: 287-315). The political establishment - politicians, the media, the education system etc. - are adhering to the ideology of "cultural Marxism", using their power and influence to indoctrinate people into thinking "politically correct" and thus silencing critique against this promotion of multiculturalism (Berwick 2011: 16, 303). This establishment, incarnated by the European Union, is said to be "deliberately destroying the cultural traditions of member states by flooding them with immigrants and eradicating native traditions" (Berwick 2011: 320).

This so-called "Eurabia" conspiracy theory is well established among anti-Muslim activists whose writings Breivik include in his compendium (Gardell 2014: 134-135). Its narrative fits well with the description of a bottom-up conspiracy theory. The political establishment is the evil conspiring elite that is understood to be responsible for the societal development ("islamisation of Europe") deemed unwanted by Breivik. This betrayal is thought to have apocalyptic effects on the European culture. These drastic effects create a sensation of urgency which justifies violent "resistance". Breivik's threat image can thus be said to be highly influenced by bottom-up conspiratorial thinking.

4.1.3 Enemy images

Breivik goes to great lengths to describe his ideas about "traitorous" internal enemies, creating a classification system to hierarchically rank in terms of culpability those considered responsible for the crimes committed against the European peoples (Berwick 2011:780-794, 938). "Category A traitors" are top leaders from the political, industrial, cultural and media sectors. Found in the next category are politicians, civil servants and professionals such as certain journalists, artists, academics and technicians, as well as human right activists, and feminists. Both these groups are considered to deserve death penalty, while

individuals with less influential positions in society are seen as deserving less severe punishment, or to not be "guilty" at all (Berwick 2011: 938-939).

Islam is depicted by Breivik the number one external enemy of the European people. Gardell vigorously summarizes Breivik's Islamophobia:

> [...] Breivik evokes a Manichean struggle between the forces of Light and Darkness, alleging that the Western world is locked in an apocalyptic conflict with ''Islam,'' depicted as a sinister Being who tirelessly seeks the eradication of Christian Europe. Muslims are construed as an imagined collective, by ''nature'' bestowed with inherent, timeless, and malevolent features said to derive from ''Islam,'' which sets them apart from universal man (Gardell 2014: 135).

While it is clear that Islam is seen as the foremost threat to European culture, Breivik nevertheless makes it clear that the most important threat comes from the inner enemy, as exemplified in this passage:

> [...] muslims must be considered as wild animals. Do not blame the wild animals but rather the multiculturalist category A and B traitors who allowed these animals to enter our lands, and continue to facilitate them. This is nothing less than a genocide aided and abetted by our own elites, primarily Marxist, suicidal humanist and capitalist globalist politicians and journalists (Berwick 2011: 489).

4.2   Brenton Tarrant

15 March 2019 Brenton Tarrant opened fire on Muslim worshippers attending Friday prayers in Christchurch, New Zealand. The attack was carried out against two mosques, located approximately six kilometers apart. Tarrant filmed the attack and broadcasted it on social media. 51 persons were killed in the attacks (Britton 2019; Greenfield 2019). [11]

4.2.1   Worldview

Brenton Tarrant is clear about his ultimate goal. In a self-designed Q&A composing approximately one fourth of the manifesto Tarrant answers the question of "What do you want?" with "We must ensure the existence of our people, and a future for white children" (Tarrant 2019: 7). This is the so-called "14 words" slogan coined by the leading white supremacy ideologist David Lane

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[11] Tarrant has at the time of writing not had his case tried in court.

and used in his "White Genocide Manifesto". The slogan is widely spread and referred to in racist communities (Gardell 2007: 39).

Tarrant describes himself as an eco-fascist and an ethno-nationalist wanting "[e]thnic autonomy for all peoples with a focus on the preservation of nature, and the natural order" (Tarrant 2019: 20-21). Moreover, he describes himself as a racist: "[...] I believe racial differences exist between peoples and they have a great impact on the way we shape our societies" (Tarrant 2019: 25). Tarrant denies being a xenophobe, an antisemite or an Islamophobe. He nevertheless states that there was an "anti-islamic" motivation to his attacks because "Islamic nations in particular have high birth rates" and because he wanted revenge against Islam for "the 1300 years of war and devastation that it has brought upon the people of the West and other peoples of the world" (Tarrant 2019: 18-21).

4.2.2 Threat picture

Tarrant believes that the "European people" and the "white race" are threatened to be culturally and racially destroyed and replaced in what he calls a "white genocide". A central tenet in his manifesto is his concern with birth rates, writing in the first paragraph of the text that "[i]f there is one thing I want you to remember from these writings, its that the birthrates must change". Tarrant states that "[t]o maintain a population the people must achieve a birthrate that reaches replacement fertility levels" and expresses concern that "[t]here is not a single Western country, not a single white nation, that reaches these levels" (Tarrant 2019: 3-4).

This passage seems to suggest that Tarrant believes this threat to have two sources:

> To return to replacement fertility levels is priority number one. But it is no simple task.There are myriad reasons behind the decline in fertility rates and the destruction of the traditional family unit. We must inevitably correct the disaster of hedonistic,nihilistic individualism. But it will take take some time, time we do not have due to the crisis of mass immigration (Tarrant 2019: 4).

Firstly, Tarrant seems to consider the core problem to be the breakdown of the "traditional family unit" caused by a changing society adhering to values leading to its own destruction. Secondly, this problem is aggravated by an ongoing "crisis of mass immigration" which threatens to lead to the complete "replacement" of the "white race".

It is debatable to what extent the threats described by Tarrant are influenced by bottom-up conspiracy theories. In many ways, Tarrant's narrative is typical to conspiratorial thinking:

> Democracy is mob rule and the mob itself is ruled by our enemies. The global and corporate run press controls them, the education system(long since fallen to the long march through the institutions carried out by the marxists)controls them, the state(long since heavily lost to its corporate backers)controls them and the anti-white media machine controls them (Tarrant 2019: 20).

This rhetoric, as well as Tarrant's reference to a "white genocide" echoes ideas about a "Zionist" conspiracy to control the world common in neo-Nazi conspiracy theories (Moses 2019: 7-11). Moreover, the name of Tarrant's manifesto - "The Great Replacement" - is taken from a book written by French writer Renaud Camus which has gained a lot of attention among white nationalist movements (Moses 2019: 8-9). Camus argues that immigration to Europe is leading to the "self-abolition" of "Western civilization" and that development is driven by a transnational elite of liberal globalists who see humans as interchangeable units. ignoring people's cultural and historical roots (Wilson 2019).

On the other hand, Tarrant also seems to think that the threat caused by declining birth-rates has an etiology of its own:

> Even if all invaders are deported tomorrow and all traitors are dealt with as they truly deserve, we are still living on borrowed time. Whether it takes ten years or a thousands years, whilst we are facing birth rates at sub-replacement levels, then our people are dying (Tarrant 2019: 58).

Tarrant believes the issue of reversing declining fertility rates to be a complicated matter. He paints a picture of "European culture" being in a state of "social and moral decay", plagued by "rampant nihilism, consumerism and individualism" which disintegrate traditional norms and values, leading to mental illness, drug use and divorce. Pedophilia, modern architecture, hazard games, empty churches, urbanization: to Tarrant signs of "the true depravity of our age" (Tarrant 2019: 35).

The point here is to show that there are perceived apocalyptical societal changes that are understood as having other roots than being the work of an evil conspiracy. So on the one hand, Tarrant's rhetoric is heavily influenced by various forms of conspiratorial ideas. Still, van Buuren's definition of a bottom-up conspiracy theory calls for societal changes to be understood as being caused by a "*deliberate* [my italics] strategy deployed by conspiratorial forces". I would argue there is room for an interpretation saying that Tarrant, at least to some extent, consider that the societal changes deemed threatening are the matter-of-fact consequences of some aspects of the modern era, rather than part of a conspiracy to eliminate the "White race".

4.2.3 Enemy images

Tarrant sees the external enemy to be every non-European being on "European soil". These he refers to as "invaders". Origin is of less importance: "Roma, African, Indian, Turkish, Semitic or other. If they are not of our people, but live in

our lands, they must be removed" (Tarrant 2019: 59). Muslims are throughout the manifesto depicted as the most important enemy because of their alleged high birth rates and because he understands Islam to be an inherently hostile religion (Tarrant 2019: 17).

The inner enemies abound in Tarrant's world: "anti-white politicians", "traitorous media and corporations", poisonous "marxists", "traitorous" non-governmental organizations (Tarrant 2019: 64, 69). The same goes for "capitalists" and "the economic elites" who profit from the ongoing "ethnic replacement" by replacing "native european populations" through the "importation of cheap labour" (Tarrant 2019: 57). The state is accused for allowing legal immigration and therefore facilitating the "ethnic replacement" and for working in unison with the media and judiciary system to hide atrocities perpetrated by "non-white scum" against "European women" (Tarrant 2019: 39-41).

Is it possible to say whether Tarrant consider one of these enemies to be more threatening than the other? In his own Q&A, the question "Why do you blame the immigrants and not the capitalists?" is given the answer: "I blame both, and plan to deal with both". The question "[w]hy attack immigrants when 'X' are the issue?" is answered with: "Because the 'x' groups can be dealt with in time, but the high fertility immigrants will destroy us now, soon it is a matter of survival we destroy them first" (Tarrant 2019: 21). This seems to suggest that both enemy groups are considered equally threatening and that target selection rather was motivated by the extreme urgency to reduce the actual number of "high fertility immigrants".

4.3   John Earnest

27 April 2019, on the last day of the Jewish Passover holiday, John Earnest walked into the Poway synagogue in California, United States and opened fire, killing one person. Earnest left the synagogue when his semiautomatic rifle malfunctioned shortly after the attack was initiated. In the seven-page letter posted by Earnest on an internet forum right before the attacks, he laid out his motives for the attack and also claimed responsibility for an arson attack on a local mosque approximately one month earlier (British Broadcasting Corporation 2019; O´Brien 2019).[12]

4.3.1   Worldview

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12 Earnest is pleading not guilty to the charges raised against him and has at the time of writing not had his case tried in court (O´Brien 2019).

Earnest does not spell out in any detail his idea of an ideal society. He claims to be "just a normal dude who wanted to have a family, help and heal people, and play piano" but who saw it as his "duty to keep this world from falling into darkness" and therefore was willing to "sacrifice" his future "for the sake of my people". "I willingly sacrifice my future—the future of having a fulfilling job, a loving wife, and amazing kids" (Earnest 2019: 2, 6). Earnest's letter indicates that his thinking is heavily influenced by a white supremacist theology that supports a racial interpretation of Christianity (Walsh 2019).[13] This is illustrated in the following passage, which is followed by various quotations from the New Testament, seemingly chosen to give support to his antisemitic interpretation of the Christian Bible.

> My God does not take kindly to the destruction of His creation. Especially one of the most beautiful, intelligent, and innovative races that He has created. Least of all at the hands of one of the most ugly, sinful, deceitful, cursed, and corrupt. My God understands why I did what I did (Earnest 2019: 2).

This rhetoric mirrors ideas found in the so-called Christian Identity movement. Basically this school of thinking is a mix of Christian fundamentalism and white supremacy racism and is characterized by antisemitism, apocalyptic thinking and the idea of the superiority of the Aryan race (Perliger 2012: 31-34). These ideas are reflected in Earnest's letter, although with some modification. For example, Earnest (2019) does not speak of an "Aryan race" but of an "European race/people".

4.3.2 Threat picture

Earnest believes that the Jewish people is conspiring to eradicate the "European race" through a "meticulously planned genocide" and that every Jewish person - consciously or subconsciously - is partaking in this deed. The genocide, Earnest says, is carried out by the Jews in a number of different ways: by funding politicians supportive of liberal immigration policies, by spreading lies and starting wars, by promoting "race mixing", by persecuting Christians etc. Moreover, he thinks that Jews use usury and banks "to enslave nations in debt" and to control finance "for the purpose of funding evil" (Earnest 2019:1). Earnest's ideas about how an "international Jewry" is manipulating the people are clearly articulated in the following paragraph:

> Is it worth it for me to live a comfortable life at the cost of international Jewry sealing the doom of my race? No. I will not sell my soul by sitting idly by as evil

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13 Earnest belongs to a Presbyterian Orthodox Church (POC) which has condemned his deed. The theological content of Earnest letter has spurred a debate among some evangelical pastors on the role of evangelicalism in Earnest radicalization (Zauzmer 2019).

grows. I'd rather die in glory or spend the rest of my life in prison than waste away knowing that I did nothing to stop this evil. It is not in my blood to be a coward. I do not care about the debt-based currency that Jews like to pretend is money. I do not care for the bread and circus that Jewry has used to attempt to pacify my people (Earnest 2019: 1).

Earnest's threat picture fits well with van Buuren's definition of bottom-up conspiracy thinking. The survival of the "European race" is threatened by a Jewish conspiratorial force which cannot be opposed by democratic means and therefore needs to be fought with violence in order to save the "race" from extinction.

4.3.3 Enemy images

The external enemy is easily identified as the Jewish people. Earnest also uses derogatory terms to speak of Muslims, Hispanics and Blacks referring to the two latter groups as "useful puppets for the Jew in terms of replacing Whites" but not being intelligent enough "to realize that the Jew is using them and they will be enslaved if Europeans are eliminated" (Earnest 2019: 3,4).

Earnest strong belief in a Jewish conspiracy to destroy the "European race" makes him think that powerful institutions and people in positions of power are controlled by Jews. These institutions and politicians are thus considered to be internal enemies. "Politicians", for example, are referred to as "traitorous", and the sitting president Donald Trump is described as being "Zionist", "Jew-loving" and "anti-white" (Earnest 2019: 3-4). Earnest hopes his attack will incite the U.S. government to confiscate firearms since this would "[m]ake the Jew play all of his cards to make it apparent to more people how their rights are being taken away right before their eyes" (Earnest 2019: 5) thus insinuating that the government is controlled by Jews.

Earnest ardently hateful antisemitism clearly shows who he sees as the main enemy. Nevertheless, we here see an example of how the two enemy categories can sometimes overlap. When the establishment and the state is believed to be controlled by the external enemy, in this case the Jewish people, the clear-cut distinction between internal-external enemies becomes somewhat blurred.

Having applied the analytical framework to the three cases chosen for this study, it is now time to turn to see what conclusions that can be drawn. This will be the focus of the next chapter which also will include a more general discussion on conspiracy theories

5 Results

The analysis of the three cases of right-wing terrorism shows that the terrorists display many similarities in their way of thinking, but also important differences. The results suggest that bottom-up conspiracy theories indeed can have a delegitimizing effect with an impact on target selection. However, such a conclusion remain tentative due to the small number of cases being analysed.

In this final section I will walk through the three ideological variables analysed in the previous section to discuss what implications these have on our understanding of terrorist target selection. Special attention will be given to a discussion of the conceptual weaknesses of dual enemy images. Lastly, the key findings of this thesis will be summarized in some concluding remarks.

5.1 Discussion

The three terrorists do share many similarities in their *worldviews*: in how they depict the world and in the way they wish to change it. They see themselves as being involved in an epic battle between good and evil, being self-sacrificing "soldiers" ready to take action against the disintegrating forces threatening to extinguish "Western civilization", "the white race" or "the European people". Wishing to create states reserved for the members of their native in-groups their ideologies fit well into the concept of nativism described by Mudde (see section 2.2.1). There are, however, noteworthy differences. Earnest's Christian fundamentalism and violent antisemitism distinguishes him from the two others who both denies seeing the Jewish people as an enemy. Furthermore, Tarrant's obsession with fertility rates and "mass immigration" shares many similarities with, but is also distinct from, Breivik's one-sided Islamophobia.

Furthermore, there are both similarities as well as differences in their *threat pictures*. Basically, they all agree that there is something distinct "European" that is being threatened. Zooming in on to what degree they describe this threat in terms of bottom-up conspiratorial thinking, it is clear that they agree on three of the four components in van Buuren's definition (see section 2.3): the "European people/race/culture" is about to go under, democracy is useless, and violent resistance is justified and urgently needed. The question then becomes - do they think that there is a conspiratorial force behind this perceived catastrophe?

In the cases of Breivik and Earnest, the answer is straightforward. Breivik dedicates hundreds of pages in his compendium to a detailed description of the "Eurabia"-conspiracy theory, focusing on an alleged deal made between European

and Arabic leaders in the 1970's to secure European access to oil in exchange of a secret "islamisation" of Europe. Earnest's letter is anchored in an archetypical antisemitism, providing an exposé of antisemitic canards: from medieval ideas of Jewish deicide and blood libel, to more modern of representations such as the idea that Jews control the international banking system.

The case of Tarrant is, as previously mentioned, more open to interpretation. Tarrant's manifesto uses a rhetoric that echoes ideas found in a wide variety of conspiracy theories, referring to "traitorous politicians", "globalist forces" and "white genocide". On the other hand, his constant avoidance to describe in closer detail his ideas about these "forces" opens up for the interpretation that his threat picture is less influenced by bottom-up conspiratorial thinking compared to the other two terrorists. Another interpretation could be that his ideas are not fully spelled out in the material used in this study. The implications of this last suggestion should not be underestimated. Except for the limited content of their texts, little is still known about the ideas of Earnest and Tarrant. Compared to Breivik, who, in addition to the large scope of his compendium, also has been thoroughly interrogated by police, in court and by researchers from various fields of study, all conclusions on the ideological foundations of Tarrant and Earnest remain speculative.

The three terrorists have relatively different *enemy images*. While Breivik sees Islam as an evil force wanting to enslave European nations, he is nevertheless openly more concerned with the inner enemy, the "traitorous" politicians and the political establishment. Tarrant believes that the external enemy - the "invaders" and "occupiers", that is, "non-europeans" being on "European soil" - are threatening to completely "replace" the "European people". On the other hand, the inner enemies - "media", "traitorous politicians", "capitalists", and to some extent the degenerative state of "Western culture" itself - are contributing to this "replacement" by allowing "mass immigration" and by spreading a culture of nihilistic individualism causing " sub-replacement fertility rates". It is based on his texts difficult to judge which enemy he sees as posing the biggest threat. To Earnest, the Jews are the undisputed enemies, thought to be "inspired by demons" and seeking to destroy the "European race". The most threatening enemy is thus an external enemy. However, as we have seen, the enemy categories tend to overlap in the case of antisemitic conspiracy theories. This observation points to a divergence in the way that Islamophobic and antisemitic conspiracy theories are constructed, a divergence that has repercussions on the usefulness of the concept of dual enemy images, and that therefore needs the be examined closer.[14]

Commonly found in antisemitic conspiracy theories is the idea that Jews control the world through "lackeys" in national governments and in the political establishment in general (Bjørgo 1995b: 196). It has been noticed by Bjørgo (1995a: 7) that people believing in these theories tend to make no distinction

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[14] Islamophobic and antisemitic conspiracy theories tend to overlap and making a clear-cut distinction between the two forms of thinking can be difficult (Bjørgo 1995b: 209; Shiffer & Wagner 2011). In the following discussion they will be treated as ideal types in order to highlight differences of importance.

between an outer and an inner enemy: the Jews are both a "racial minority" and in control of powerful institutions. Thus Sprinzak's theory of a diluted process of delegitimization against the government and an intense delegitimization against "non-ruling groups" loses its applicability since the two categories float together. According to this logic, it seems like attacking civilians in a synagogue or attacking a government representative would not make a whole lot of difference. Put differently, the inner enemy vanishes, or rather, goes up into the outer enemy.

Is this also the case, then, in Islamophobic conspiracy theories, such as the "Eurabia"-theory? This question highlights an important observation made by Schiffer and Wagner (2011) in a comparative analysis of antisemitism and Islamophobia. Schiffer and Wagner points to the historical divergences in the way that Muslims and Jews have been depicted as enemies of "the West". Symbolic imagery such as the Ottoman Turks reaching the gates of Vienna in 1683 and the Moors presence in Spain narrate in an articulate manner the "foreignness" of the Muslim in relation to Europe, which fits well into a racist worldview of an external, visible, enemy.[15] Modern antisemitism, in contrast, faced an "invisible" enemy, coming from within society itself in the form of an assimilated Jewish population (Schiffer & Wagner 2011: 81). The distinction between an inner and an outer enemy is thus more tangible in predominantly Islamophobic ideologies.

At this point it becomes clear that, even if the distinction inner-outer enemy can be found both within Islamophobic and antisemitic conspiracy theories, these categories have different meanings and connotations, which complicates clear-cut comparisons. Schiffer and Wagner (2011: 81) also point out that there is a tendency among antisemites to see Jews as powerful - "representatives of modernism, whether in the form of liberalism, capitalism, or communism" - while Muslims tend to "be perceived as 'backwardness' incarnate". This further manifests that different dynamics related to the ability to exert power are involved. A quick comparison between the "Eurabia" and the "Jewish world-domination" narratives seems to confirm this observation. While antisemites tend to depict political leaders to be "controlled", "steered" or "manipulated" by the Jewish cabal, the "Eurabia" narrative makes different assumptions on the power relationship between European and Arab leaders. Maybe this narrative - that European leaders have freely made an agreement with the Arab world - gives Islamophobic conspiracy theories more drastically delegitimizing effects compared to antisemitic theories depicting leaders as being "manipulated" by an "cunning" Jewish cabal.

If this is true, then we might face an increased threat from right-wing terrorists as we see Islamophobic discourses gain influence and acceptance in public discourse (Moses 2019: 11-13).

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15 The title of Breivik's compendium "2083: A Declaration of European Independence" makes use of this imagery. 2083 is the year Breivik imagines that his goal of a monocultural Christian Europe will have been reached, 400-years after the Battle of Vienna (Juergensmeyer 2017: 20-21).

5.2 Concluding remarks

This study's hypothesis suggest that the delegitimizing effects of bottom-up conspiracy thinking would influence believers in those theories to target an inner enemy. It is, based on the analysis of the three cases of right-wing terrorism, not possible to say whether this hypothesis is strengthened or should be rejected. The case of Breivik seems to fit in well and could easily be understood through the theory of the delegitimizing effects of bottom-up conspiratorial thinking. Nevertheless, Earnest's ideas are equally influenced by this kind of thinking, yet he is not targeting an internal enemy, and it is not sure how he himself conceives the distinction between the two categories. Tarrant's ambiguity does not allow us to draw any firm conclusions on to what extent his thinking is influenced by bottom-up conspiracy theories. It would be possible to argue that this ambiguity itself can be understood as indicating that he does not believe in an evil conspiracy, which therefore could help us explain his target selection. Still, such an argument lies closer to speculation than empirically supported reasoning. Given these circumstances, it is not possible to tell to what extent the investigated mechanism of delegitimization can be thought to be applicable to other forms of terrorism.

However, some steps towards addressing the general research question can be said to have been made through the proposed theoretical and analytical framework. In order to be able to assess their validity and usefulness, future studies would need to rely on a more solid empirical base and include more cases in analysis. Moreover, the reflections of the specificities of Islamophobic and antisemitic conspiracy theories might suggest that the dynamics of these narratives are too different to be addressed simultaneously and that a more fruitful approach for future studies would be to address them separately. Hopefully the frameworks proposed in this study can serve as a springboard to these studies.

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