

Anders Behring Breivik – mirror reflection of Jihadism?

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Abstract

The current paper aims to shed light on a number of converging features of both Jihadism and the far right ideology patented by Anders Behring Breivik, author of two massive terrorist attacks carried out in Norway in 2011. These features are later on discussed and placed in the larger context of the postmodern global environment so as to highlight systemic dysfunctions identified by the author to be the trigger of violent extremist behavior. Subsequently, once systemic dysfunctions are identified, framed and highlighted in Breivik's own personal narrative, the paper continues by providing a potential model for building up an efficient counternarrative which can be used in establishing contact and interaction with radicalised or radicalising individuals.

Keywords: identity, alterity, violent extremism, terrorism, radicalization.

1. Introduction

Anders Behring Breivik is the famous author of two terrorist attacks carried out first in Oslo, and the second, just a few hours later, on the Utoya Island nearby. For the massive attacks, which lead to the death of 77 victims, Breivik used a vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) which he detonated close to governmental buildings downtown Oslo. Nevertheless, most victims were made not by the VBIED but by Breivik's own gunfire attack on the small Utoya Island. He chose the island as the governing left party held there at the time a youth summer camp. For two long hours, Breivik stalked, shot, wounded or killed more than 170 people, most of them teenagers.

The question we want to answer in this article is what connection could be between the far right ideology at the back of Breivik's attack and Jihadism? Apparently, none, as the two place themselves in distant corners. Jihadists hate – what they call – the West, the Evil Crusaders, Zionists, liberal society and multiculturalism. Anders Behring Breivik, on the other hand, in a large manifesto published on the Internet just hours before the attacks, the so called “2083 – A European declaration

of *Independence*”, vocally attacked the left ideology, Muslims, as well as – and here we find our first link – multiculturalism, all perceived as factors polluting European identity.

During the trial, Breivik declared himself to be “a cultural conservative”, admitted to be the author of the attacks, yet not the responsibility for the killings. In order to try and grasp the meaning behind this rather strange declaration, we turned to his manifesto. The title evokes the 400 years commemoration of the Ottoman Empire’s siege of Vienna. It also sets the vision of a new chivaleric order, echoing Medieval Crusaders, with medals and well established ranks, an order meant to set soldiers in a new fight against Islam. Another intriguing aspect of his manifesto is that Breivik does not, in this prolific text of hundreds of pages, ever mention Christian religion. The premises for his so called ideology are strictly political in nature and target purification of the European space from polluting drives. First, such drives are nominated to be cultural Marxism and the large pool of left socio-political ideologies, such as the one promoted by the governing labour party. Muslims and Islam are seen in context as second line enemies, or should we say rather, indirect enemies that could never attack Europe in the absence of a weakness provoked by the first. That is how the attack against the government and, most of all, young labour party supporters is motivated. Because young political militants are the ones that could potentially perpetrate an ideology “stained” by the practice of multiculturalism and the assignment of equal value to the various cultural elements in its landscape.

And here Islamist extremism and Breivik’s own syncretic cultural conservative brand converge in a single type of narrative. In it, the fight in which followers feel proud to take part is augmented to eschatological proportions. Islamists view the death of the Evil West as a first act in a global play whose happy end is represented by the return of the golden age and the birth of the Universal Islamic Caliphate.

Breivik, on the other hand, perceives himself as the spark that shall start the civil war in Europe, which, in its turn, will gloriously end in the utopia of a self determined world, replicating the medieval system of mapping reality in good and evil. Needless to say then, for Breivik, the opposites are the keeper of cultural conservatism and the perpetrator against it.

These points of confluence in building the ideological creed demonstrate that, beyond obvious differences of opinion and oppositions of systems of values they promote, the two ideologies share a common pattern in constructing perceptions. They also share an inability to anchor identity in a world without center. Both need alterity in order to be able to define

themselves via oppositions and both perceive the present as the twilight of a dying world. More than that, we can argue that both also aspire to create a grandiose model of so called heroism and sacrifice. And digging into the more or less coherent structure and argumentation of the two ideologies, what seems to lie beyond is a rather ontological search for a predetermined law which can, violently imposed, rehabilitate an altered world.

In psychoanalytical terms, what we identify here is *the hunger for the name of the father*, as defined by Jacques Lacan¹. In other words, the manifestation of the need for a central figure that can and does regulate, sanction and establish the margins of the individual and the frontier of the other (alter). We can then speculate that terrorism, in the forms here discussed, can be explained as symptom of a series of systemic malfunctions of the multicultural world. Once these malfunctions identified, we can only hope they will trigger new ideas and remedies. This is what the present exercise attempts to achieve...

2. Setting the frame

The Anders Behring Breivik case is, in our opinion, a typical example of a terrorist whose inner drive is represented by an intense aspiration for a fixed, univocal authority exercising the law and sanctioning both the private and the public space.

The subject's personal history made public after the terror attack testifies to a rupture in the family fabric. However, it should not be treated as evidence that a disintegrated family produces a priori such serious and frightful consequences. Events detailed below should also not be treated as *a psychological case study of how Breivik's personal extremist mindframe and validation of terrorism occurred*.

The author's true objective in putting together narratives constructed around Breivik's public figure (through details reflected by his manifesto, family testimonies and press accounts), was to identify systemic dysfunctions of our postmodern world and the way they can potentially manifest in personal biography. The relevance of the attempt lies in the fact that it provides an understanding of a narrative and a mindview. It is also meant to potentially highlight the "how" and "why" systemic dysfunctions impact a narrative of the self, of the world and of a heroic behavior.

¹ Transcendental legislating principle, introduced by the French philosopher and psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, detailed below.

3. A personal narrative of the topsy-turvy world

Breivik perceives himself as set astray from family authority. The rupture appears to be perceived in his case as mainly that from the paternal stance. Disintegration of the family of origin (through parents divorce and later subject's disconnection from the father) occurs when he was only one year old. According to his memoirs², interaction with the father continues via sporadic visits until adolescence, when, as a result of a dispute on graffiti engravings, it is suddenly terminated by the father will. When 27, Breivik confesses to have tried to reconnect. He was however rejected as the father was not, in Breivik's own words, "mentally prepared for the reunion"³. Nevertheless, his manifesto records a constant search for a universally acknowledged authority to which he can submit his efforts for personal achievement.

Going back to the roots, we see that Breivik's father is a diplomat and a supporter of the Labour party, the very party Breivik holds responsible for the loss of conservative values in the modern Norwegian society. **It appears that state and father symbolically blend into a central figure which refuses to exercise its role of rightful governing.**

About Breivik we also know that he was close to the mother, with which he apparently lived until he turned 30. It has been speculated that at that time he decided to carry out the terrorist attack and therefore moved to a farm to build the alibi he needed in order to purchase fertilizers used in building the bomb. Breivik describes the way in which he was educated by the mother as follows: *"I do not agree with the super-liberal and matriarchal education I got from my mother, because it lacked me entirely of the discipline I needed and therefore contributed to my effemination to some extent"*. He also blames his sister for multiple sexual relationships and the mother for lack of judgement, which made her remarry to a Norwegian army major which he described as *"a beast with a primitive sexuality"*⁴. Above accounts testify to an undervaluing of all possible paternal figures as well as to a frustration in front of female choice of manhood. Behind it we can only grasp Breivik's hesitant anxiety in defining his own masculine identity under what he perceived to be the effeminate pressure of the mother figure. Facts seem to show that in the end, his model of masculinity was shaped in the form of rigid military discipline and aggressive behavior. A masculinity that the subject seems to have tried hard yet not succeed in successfully

² <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2018198/Norway-massacre-Killer-Anders-Behring-Breivik-privileged-son-diplomat.html>

³ *Idem.*

⁴ *Idem.*

replicating. The absence of a father figure to validate such efforts and their result must have been perceived as essential. An overcompensation mechanism is then set in place: Breivik uses steroid anabolisants, practices extreme sports, builds up a cult of messianic personality via his manifesto, only to later on raise the stake with an act of terrorism he envisages as a final touch of heroism.

Another biographical element we can add to the puzzle is Breivik's teenage friendship with a young fellow of Pakistani extraction, also suddenly terminated at the same time with Breivik's estrangement from the father. In his short biography until the attack, Breivik had few friends and no stable girlfriend.

It is also possible that separation from the father and the latter's constant refuse to reconnect to Breivik that is to see, recognize and confirm him as distinct identity, was an essential factor in the way he constructed the narrative of his personal history. First extreme right, then neo-nazism and finally his own self – constructed collage of ideologies provided the elements Breivik needed in order to build up opposition and thus evade the extinction of personality. We thus understand that writing the Manifesto was not an excentric choice, but, rather, a stringent necessity to create a set of values and a worldview that could compensate for the absent representation of the name of the father that he so strigently needed. As previously mentioned, we refer here to the law of the name of the father as defined by Jaques Lacan and consecrated by the post-structuralist school: the law of the name of the father represents a fundamental mediator which allows the child exit the oedipian complex and transgress the order of the imaginary in order to be able to acces the superior order of the symbolic and that "égo idéal" which cannot be seen, devoured or taken in possession: *words, language, collective identity norms and social directives are all forms of impersonating the law of the father.*⁵ **According to the Lacanian theory, external stimuli and the family system can sometimes make difficult the child's transgression of the order of the imaginary, expressed by request. Nevertheless, without transgressing it, and gaining access to the order of the symbolic (expressed by desire), the relationship with the Other cannot be constructed in the limits of normality.** Why? Because in the order of the imaginary the Other represents what cannot be assimilated via identification (as in the order of the real small children experience), nor subjected to our own will by demand (as in the order of the imaginary experienced during later childhood).

⁵ cf. <http://www.iep.utm.edu/> Internet encyclopedia of philosophy.

And going back to our subject of interest, what both Jihadism and Breivik's personal ideological collage demonstrate is exactly this impossibility to negotiate with the existence of the Other and enter in communication with him. The two ideologies narrate the other as lack, absence, minus or degradation of essential identity, *alter* being the one that does not have, understand or is what I am. As mere projection of the subject's own fears, in the order of the imaginary *alter* can never be incorporated into a relationship. He remains forever positioned outside the margins of the acceptable.

And perhaps not accidentally, this is exactly how Lacan defines a psychotic mindframe: *"by constructing the image of the other at an imaginary and not a symbolic level, psychotics take the phantasmatic representation built by demand as real, which leads to repeated failures in understanding the outer world. Failures will then make the psychotic mind conclude that the law of the symbolic (that is the name of the father) is not real and, therefore, there is an Other responsible for the failure. An Other whose function is represented by the manipulation of the symbolic world, the so called «Evil stalker»"*.⁶

And here we close the circle opened with the narrative. We see that the narrative, as embodiment of the language is, in psychoanalytical terms, manifestation of the law of the name of the father, desired, searched for but impossible to integrate by the extremist mindframe. Other contemporary studies in psychology speak about "a father hunger"⁷ experienced today by a drifting generation that feels *the paternal wound* as a *wound of absence*. Not few are then cases in which young men touched by the father hunger are sometimes attracted to fake models of masculinity which they attempt to use in order to validate themselves: overcompensation through alcohol, drugs, sex, aggressive behavior or (terrorist) violence as way to exercise the language of power. And again not accidentally, we can then argue, today's homegrown terrorists of the Western world have first experienced alternative forms of compensation for the father hunger such as sexual libertinage, drug abuse, only to later on adhere to anarchist or jihadist violence. Studies concerned with radicalization in prison demonstrate it all too well. However, since this is not the object of the current article, we shall focus in the following subchapter on configuring a potential alternative mechanism of compensation, with direct implications in preventing and countering radicalisation and terrorism.

⁶ <http://www.kristien.be/docs/schrijfsels/lacanintro.pdf>, "An Introduction to the Ideas of Jaques Lacan", and www.lacanonline.com/index/links

⁷ Gordon Dalbey, *Healing the Father wound today*, <http://www.abbafather.com/>. See also James R. Herzog – *Father Hunger*, explorations with adults and children, Hillsdale Analytic Press, 2001.

4. Taming alterity and building possible counternarratives

Taming alterity and including it in the familiar landscape can be seen as a means of conflict resolution. In the extremist mindframe, this can be achieved, we believe, by recomposing the law of the father and placing language in a new epistemological paradigm. New connotations are thus conferred to the fight between the positive and the negative expressions of alterity. The difficulty in designing solutions on this pattern of thought comes from the fact that no radicalized individual could ever accept direct dialogue and unmediated interaction with the Other. And that because the Other is, for any extremist, “the evil stalker” invoked by Lacan. And if those above mentioned are valid, the solution consists in finding a way to indirectly address the Imaginary order of demand and, from there onwards, support transgression towards the symbolic order and the restructuring of the law of the name of the father. **Such an endeavor is nevertheless personal and subjective. It implies progressive communication and interaction, repeated changes of roles and meeting needs built as demands.** And here we must keep in mind that the most recurrent need/demand imbedded in the extremist narrative is **the ability to anchor the self**, to acknowledge and confirm identity and missionary status. **We therefore assess that any narrative targeting deradicalization should start by building up an emotional answer addressed to the imaginary. Such an answer must aim at integrating positive variants of anchoring the subject in his daily life, as well as confirming identity and purpose.** Needless to say that this solution applies only to relatively functional individuals, who, even if suffering from depression or anxiety, have not crossed the line to clinical psychiatric disease.

Deradicalisation studies and programs drafted to the present moment have a rather intuitive and empiric character. Testimonials of those that radicalized, such as Ed Husain⁸, an ex-Hizb-ut-Tahrir member, demonstrate that a decisive moment in the derad process is the moment in which alterity is incorporated in the epistemologic construction of the self. That is when the other is perceived not as minus or lacking values which define the identity of the subject, but rather via points of confluence and positive feelings.

A very illustrative example is that of Aicha El Wafi and Phyllis Rodriguez. Aicha El Wafi is the mother of Zacarias Massoui, one of the terrorists convicted for the plot which led to the 9/11 terrorist attack. Phyllis Rodriguez, on the other hand, is the mother of one of the victims that died in the attack. The two joined their stories to build up a counter-narrative

⁸ Ed Husain, author of the book “The Islamist : why I joined radical Islam in Britain, what I saw inside and why I left”, Penguin Books, 2007, actively involved in various NGO’s and social platforms which promote deradicalisation among British youth.

to terrorism. Together they speak to the world about the common pain of losing their sons. In a very eloquent testimonial, Phillys Rodriguez confesses: *"I never thought this is about forgiveness. You cannot forgive something like that. And still... in time I have come to realize that forgiveness is in fact a way of getting to know the other, know his feelings, understand the common pain, understand that people are capable of both violence and forgiveness"*⁹. Maybe these words do not mean much evidence for a psychologist or sociologist researching radicalization and even less for an intelligence officer focused on preventing and countering a lethal threat. But for the author of these lines, this testimony was, subjectively speaking, the trigger which lead to the present analytical attempt.

Conclusive studies on possible methods of deradicalisation are still at an early stage. Researchers and law enforcement authorities do not benefit at this time from an objective system of measuring results. Yet, NGO's and civil platforms carry out projects which demonstrate that, on an empiric and intuitive level, psychologists, sociologists and simple people caught in between, have managed to find topical solutions. And although not systematic, such interventions can be a good starting point for those devoted to finding and insuring an alternative future, in which violent extremism and terrorism are narratives of the past. For the author, they stand proof that the extremist/terrorist construct has its cracks. Cracks, which, adequately exploited, can lead to identification of innovative methods in preventing and countering radicalization.

In conclusion, let's invite the other introduce himself in the extremist paradigm. How? A possible intervention model is depicted below. It can be used both in stopping on-going radicalisation and in deradicalisation. It requires time, personal effort and inclusion in this equation of a model based on understanding differences... plus a vision of starting from the grassroots, from individual effort. The desired result: to be able to counter the inability experienced by some individuals in our generation to stop the drifting and anchor their identity in a global environment. Another convincing aspect is that such a solution can be applied – via prevention programmes – by private NGO's, psychologists, sociologists, and social workers alike. It can also be used by intelligence officers in establishing relevant contacts with those radicalized or in the process of radicalisation. In the end, any individual alternative future can lead to a collective alternative future.

A possible derad model: progressive steps in building up an alternative narrative

⁹ Women without borders, SAVE sisters initiative, womenwithoutborders-save.blogspot.com/, last accessed November 2011.

1. Assigning a voice to the radicalized individual by non-judgemental listening and thus confirming identity. This bridges gaps and makes the communication channel possible.

2. Placing at the other end of the communication channel a symbolic paternal figure and, then, turning the subject towards a community that can allow him develop alternative affinities and a feeling of belonging to a community other than the extremist one.

3. Once the two poles of the communication channel are established and consolidated, debates on extremist ideology can be initiated. The objective: revealing cracks in the logic of the extremist narrative.

4. The new ordaining, paternal figure introduces elements of understanding the world from a new perspective. It is however necessary that the author of the change (i. e. the paternal figure) maintains his central role and position in communication long enough so as to allow the subject manage the inherent oscillation between the two epistemological paradigms claiming him simultaneously.

In all of the stages above mentioned the solution in maintaining the communication channel open is to appeal to the order of the imaginary and fulfill the individual's need for recognition and confirmation.

5. Once confirmation has been achieved, the next step is represented by the actual transgression of the order of the imaginary and access into the order of the symbolic. Accepting the law of the name of the father in the form of a new authority governing from now onwards the referential system of the derad individual shall prepare the last phase of this complex process:

6. Permanent anchoring of the subject into a non-violent identity paradigm.

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