

CASE STUDIES OF INTERACTIVE RADICALISATION

Germany



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DARE: Dialogue about Radicalisation and Equality


**Case studies of interactive radicalisation
Germany**

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Executive Summary

This paper investigates a particular case study of cumulative/reciprocal radicalisation which took place in early May 2012 in the cities of Solingen and Bonn. The *Bürgerbewegung Pro NRW* (Citizens' Movement Pro North-Rhine Westphalia), which has a long tradition of hate speech against minorities including Roma people, refugees and Muslims, staged rallies against mosques and Salafist groups as part of their election campaign. These actions met with a violent response by the Jihadi Salafist group *Millatu Ibrahim* whose followers heavily attacked police forces protecting the racist rallies.

Key findings from this case study contribute to the academic research on cumulative/reciprocal radicalisation in different ways:

- a. Violent escalation between hostile groups is not automatic, even if both accept the use of violence as a means of provocation in politics. Every escalation rests on *decisions* taken by the protagonists of the particular conflict. Such decisions might be connected to principled hostility rooted in ideology, by narratives of victimisation, by the need to take a situational approach to violent contestation in competition with similar actors, or by other reasons further to be explored by empirical research in the future.
- b. If, when and in which situation a group enters into a dynamic of escalation depends on several factors which might be locally, nationally, or globally relevant. They include how opposing sides view one another, but also if there are alternative places and options to fulfil the task ascribed to one's group. This might lead to a shift in action from place A to place B, which then might include leaving the escalated situation rather than perpetuating it, even though the activities of the group at place B can also be violent, but against another opponent.
- c. Dynamics of reciprocal radicalisation do not necessarily need actors who share the same level of propensity to violence.

While a detailed analysis of the situational dynamic of escalation is necessary, further research should include a strong diachronic perspective. This argument rests in the fact that the escalated conflict between two particular parties might have ended – in a way coming to a kind of closure, but another protagonist arrives later and tries to escalate the conflict again through acts of violence. It might also be that the same protagonist returns to the earlier conflict constellation as this has regained importance in pushing through the group's political agenda in light of losing political ground somewhere else. For the Jihadi Salafist group under investigation here in particular, it is a worldwide struggle, in which the local focus of attention and action might shift over time.

1. Introduction

Cumulative extremism has gained increased attention since Eatwell (2006) argued that considering the interaction between different extremist groups helps to better understand trajectories of radicalisation. He points out that extremists of (at least) two groups enter into a cumulative process in which the activity of one group leads to or fosters the activity of another in a way that radicalises its actions. This then may radicalise the other group in return. Bartlett and Birdwell (2013) have coined the term cumulative radicalisation, some others use the term reciprocal radicalisation (Knott, Lee and Copeland, 2018). Over time, a consensus has emerged that it is not enough to only take into consideration the two main conflict participants (individuals or groups) as ‘relationships between extremist groups are more complex, and are mediated by the state, digital technology, and the news media’ (ibid: 4).

There is also a broad academic consensus that there are different patterns and dynamics of reciprocal radicalisation, especially regarding the nature and depth of the interaction. This includes dimensions such as the durability and length of a conflict, the number of parties involved, the increase or decrease of the intensity of the conflict, and the time and the form of expressing the conflict (violence?). Further notes on the theoretical and empirical treatment of this subject have been formulated by Busher and Macklin (2015).

In German context, anti-Muslim groups as well as extreme right organisations frequently refer to either Muslim groups or Islamist networks as one of the most pressing dangers to society. Accordingly, there is not only a large number of declarations and statements, but also a large number of activities that deny Muslims the constitutionally guaranteed right to free practice of religion. In February 2018, for example, activists of the Bavarian branch of the extreme right *Identitäre Bewegung* (IB) erected twenty-six wooden crosses on the site of a future mosque. As each cross bore the name of a victim of a terrorist attack in Brussels in March 2016, the extreme right activists claimed that there is a necessary correlation between practicing the Muslim faith and Jihadi terrorism. The *Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs* (DİTİB) that was building the mosque condemned the action as an attack on the peaceful coexistence of Christians and Muslims and demanded better protection by security forces in order to prevent similar attacks in the future. DİTİB did not call for action against the IB with similar means.

An example of more direct interaction was the use of the Twitter hashtag *#nichtohneinkopftuch* (engl.: not without my headscarf) which originated from the Hamburg-based Salafist group *Generation Islam* (GI) in April 2018. GI was a group that propagated the idea of the caliphate as the sole possible social order for Muslims and subsequently for all people. The group tried intensively to address and radicalise conservative Muslims. It was seen by security forces as being close to *Hizb ut-Tahrir* that had been banned in January 2003 (Freie und Hansestadt Hamburg, 2019: 46-47, but also Möller 2019, for a more general overview Karagiannis and McCauley, 2006). *Hizb ut-Tahrir* was founded in 1953 as a political organisation in Jerusalem and later spread to more than 50 countries, its membership reaching several hundred thousand people. GI’s social media reacted to the idea from members of the state government of North Rhine-Westphalia to introduce a headscarf ban at schools for children under the age of 14 by asking Muslims to participate in a “Weekend of Outrage”. More than 100,000 people also signed a petition to the German Bundestag. Shortly after the GI campaign reached its peak, the IB took over the Hashtag and spread messages hostile to Islam and Muslims such as “If Muslims do not want alcohol, dogs, bikinis, pork, and freedom of religion, why do they live in Europe” (ISD, 2018: 6).

Whilst this episode highlights that extremist groups regularly interact with one another rhetorically, particularly online, probably the most important case of cumulative extremism involving physical interaction between such groups in Germany took place in 2012, when the so-called *Pro-Bewegung* and Salafist groups confronted each other in the streets. The confrontation escalated with the Salafist activists planning to kill the leader of the *Pro-Bewegung* several months later.

This report explores this confrontation as a means of empirically testing some of the assumptions made with regards the dynamics of cumulative extremism and discusses the results of this case study in light of the scientific findings on cumulative/reciprocal radicalisation. In order to do so, the report starts with the description of the broader context, especially the development and the structure of the Salafist movement in Germany, but also of the Pro-Bewegung as an important actor of the multifaceted anti-Muslim and far right milieu at the same point in time.

2. Setting the scene

2.1 Anti-Muslim Racism and the *Pro-Bewegung* in Germany

A significant part of the German population hold anti-Muslim attitudes (Leibold et al, 2012). For example, in July 2019, 52 percent of the interviewees perceived Islam as threatening; 40 percent would object to a Muslim marrying into the family, and 13 per cent of the interviewees would prohibit Muslim women from immigrating (Pickel, 2019: 76-84). In 2018, more than 53 percent of interviewees of another nationwide survey rejected the statement that Islam fits into Germany (Ahrens, 2018). Anti-Muslim attitudes are much stronger than negative attitudes towards people holding Hindu or Buddhist beliefs (Foroutan, 2012: 19) and they are held by people from different social backgrounds (Bielefeldt, 2008). Anti-Muslim prejudices mainly work around issues such as equalising Muslims to be non-German citizens, claiming a higher fertility rate of Muslim women as a biological fact, and alleging an unwillingness to integrate (Foroutan, 2012: 23-42). Unsurprisingly, therefore, right-wing groups have tried to exploit such attitudes aiming at garnering support for their agenda and enlarging their membership base.

One of the extreme right-wing groups aiming to exploit this broader hostility to Muslims in German society is the *Bürgerbewegung pro NRW*, which is central to this case study. The party was founded in 2007 in order to establish an extreme right-wing party across the state of North Rhine-Westphalia following the *Bürgerbewegung pro Köln* in the city of Cologne as a successful model (Peters et al., 2008). The *Bürgerbewegung pro Köln* had been founded in 1996 as an offspring of the extreme right *Deutsche Liga für Volk und Heimat* (DLVH) and had several members on the city council in Cologne. After March 1993, the Cologne DLVH disbanded after a scandal in which three party members put a bounty of 5,000 German marks for a woman of Roma ethnicity who was facing deportation.

From 2004 until its dissolution after ongoing infights in 2018, the *Bürgerbewegung pro Köln* had elected representatives on the local city council. Its political profile and programme consisted of racism, authoritarianism, and nationalism (Häusler, 2008). From the very beginning, one of the key issues the *Bürgerbewegung pro Köln* had been campaigning against was Muslims and Islam. In 2002, the group organised a collection of signatures against the planned building of a mosque in Cologne-Chorweiler. This campaign was extended to the entire city area, after other mosque locations had been proposed. Shortly before the local elections in 2004, the *Bürgerbewegung pro Köln* presented 28,000 signatures against the construction of a mosque to the Complaints Committee of the City of Cologne. At the same time, the group campaigned against refugees in two other districts of Cologne where a large number of Roma people were living. The anti-‘gypsy’ propaganda led to above average election results in both city districts. Another campaign, in the Cologne district of Ehrenfeld in 2007, saw the *Bürgerbewegung pro Köln* running a so-called ‘residents’ initiative’ against the expansion of the existing mosque though it failed to reach the necessary quorum for a successful citizens’ petition. Anti-Muslim campaigning proceeded with a transnational coalition, built by leading activists of the *Austrian Freedom Party*, the *Vlaams Belang* from Belgium and the parliamentary group of the *Bürgerbewegung pro Köln*. Calling this coalition ‘Cities Against Islamization’ the extreme right groups presented a narrative of Western societies becoming overwhelmed by Muslims (Kerst, 2020) and also tried to create the impression that this campaign was officially organised by the cities, rather than by some fringe groups.

From the perspective of the organisers, the ‘Cities Against Islamization’ initiative worked well, creating a large amount of media attention for an international conference – the so-called ‘Anti-Islamisation Congress’ – scheduled to take place in Cologne in autumn 2008. The organisers framed this event as a kind of resistance to ‘multicultural ideology’ through which, they argued, a situation would arise in which Muslims would be able to show their values publicly and thereby achieve the institutionalisation of their religion. In the end, the conference, for which 1,500 participants had been announced, could not take place due to protests. Only some 50 followers of the *Bürgerbewegung pro Köln* attended a rally at 21st September 2008 and listened to a speech given by a *Lega Nord* member of the European Parliament, Mario Borghesi, who has a long personal history of involvement in the extreme right in Italy, including the violent *Ordine Nuovo* group.

The German milieu was influenced by other anti-Muslim campaigns from abroad too. In Switzerland, the *Swiss Peoples Party* (SVP) started campaigning against the building of mosques in 2006 in the capital of Zurich, arguing that Islam is an expansionist and aggressive religion, proclaiming that the idea behind building minarets was the secret intention for Islam to tower above all other religious buildings as the only true religion (Storz, 2019: 102-103). The SVP ran a full-scale campaign for banning minarets in Switzerland from 2007 (Danz and Ritter, 2012), trying to make a ban part of the Swiss constitution by exploiting the controversies around the visibility of symbols of Muslim faith (Hüttermann, 2006; Allievi, 2009). On 29 November 2009, 57.5 percent of the Swiss population who took part in the referendum supported the demand.



Plate 1: The Bürgerbewegung pro Köln logo of the campaign against mosques

In anti-Muslim racism, mosques (next to the Quran) serve as the main reference for the argument that social integration of the Muslim population is impossible and that the Muslim faith *per se* is linked to political violence and terrorism. The mosque is perceived less as a place of religious acts, e.g. prayer, than as a place of conspiracy and ideological radicalisation (Schiffer, 2005: 28). In several cases, issues of construction law have been misused to hide that prejudices against Muslims and the Othering of migrant groups had influenced political decisions (Leggewie et al, 2002).

Extreme right and anti-Muslim groups across Europe greeted the result of the referendum in Switzerland with enthusiasm (IRR, 2010). The *Bürgerbewegung pro Köln* had spoken out against the construction of the mosque in Cologne in its programme for the 2009 elections to the Cologne City Council and its offshoot the *Bürgerbewegung pro NRW* organised an ‘Anti-Minarett-Conference’ in 2010, hosting a leading *Vlaams Belang* politician as the main speaker.

The *Bürgerbewegung pro Köln* and the *Bürgerbewegung pro NRW* founded in 2007 shared several of the same leading activists. In 2010, the latter took part in the state elections for the first time, but achieved only 1.4 percent of the vote. In 2013, total membership of both groups was about 1,300 people. The *Bürgerbewegung pro NRW* never succeeded in building up political structures state-wide. Bochum, Bonn, Gelsenkirchen, Hagen, Cologne, Leverkusen and Radevormwald were among the cities which had been relevant to the *Bürgerbewegung pro NRW*. It depended heavily on the intensive commitment of a comparatively small group of officials who also staged deliberately provocative events in order to create media coverage.



Plate 2:

Political advertisement of the Bürgerbewegung pro NRW on the occasion of the local elections in Leverkusen on 30 August 2009 focussing on anti-Muslim attitudes. The slogan reads “Against Islamisation and foreign infiltration”.

The Bürgerbewegung pro NRW made extensive use of cynical satire. For example, on 23 September 2013, it published a photo on its Facebook account presenting – on the left half of the picture – a person in the mountains subtitled “a hiker” (in German: Ein Wanderer), while on the right side a group of Salafists attacking police officers is shown, duly completed with the word “immigrants” (in German: Einwanderer) on the right half of the image (MIK, 2014: 76). In this way, the party equates migrants with a small group of Salafists and as being perpetrators of violence. Only a few weeks before the 23 September post, the Bürgerbewegung pro NRW made public the following comment on its Facebook page: ‘Islam is the greatest enemy of our democracy and freedom in the 21st century and highly aggressive towards those who think differently and believe people. It’s a fact.’ (quoted in MIK, 2014: 82). In 2012, when the Bürgerbewegung pro NRW had joined the ‘Cities against Islamization’ initiative, the following call for denunciation could be found on its homepage: ‘250 Euros for anyone who tracks down a burqa wearer and reports it to the police’ (quoted in MIK, 2013: 61).



Plate 3:

Flyer of the Bürgerbewegung pro NRW calling for action against the building of a minaret in the city of Bochum presenting minarets resembling rockets.

The image of a mosque crossed out in red became the symbol of anti-Muslim campaigning by the Bürgerbewegung Pro Köln and the Bürgerbewegung Pro NRW for years. The activities had the strategic aim to reach out to people critical towards the building of a mosque and to win them over. This procedure concluded instrumentalising already existing residents’ initiatives for their own goals.

2.2 Salafist structures and activities in North-Rhine Westphalia

While the media, politicians, and the general public in Germany had been interested in Islamist groups for some time, Salafism only gained academic attention beyond Oriental Studies from 2003 onwards

(Dantschke et al., 2011). According to its origin, Salafism is a religious-fundamentalist Movement within of Sunni Islam. It refers to the so-called founding fathers of Muslim faith, the ‘righteous ancestors’ (Arabic: *al-salafas-salih*) and thinks of that time as the genuine, flawless Islam. Primary sources of Islam, the Quran and the traditions of the Prophet Muhammed (the Sunna) are interpreted strictly and literally ignoring the fact that the historical situation has changed fundamentally (Schneiders, 2017).

Salafist ideology refers to the Sharia as a god-given system of order and rule. Salafists oppose democracy as being a false ‘religion’. Law can only come from God himself. All societal problems can be solved by an unrestricted following of the Koran and the Sunna. This includes a particular way of exercising one’s religious duties and of living, which e.g. demands a strict separation of men and women. While most Muslim groups agree that the da’wah, the call to Islam, should be advertised passively by means of an exemplary lifestyle, Salafist groups have committed themselves to active promotion of their understanding of an ‘authentic Islam’ (Wiedl, 2017: 24-32). Da’wah activities are also organised via the Internet where missionary work is done, but also calls for participation in Holy War and Nasheed vocals can be found (Inan, 2017).¹

Since the 1990s, the Salafist movement has split up into different strands. They share basic elements of Salafist worldview, but have different views on how to implement the ‘authentic’ faith in today’s societies. Therefore, they are distinct regarding their strategies and methods. According to Wiedl (2017: 77-110) there are four types of Salafist groups in the contemporary German context: loyalist propaganda Quietists; mainstream Salafists, radical Salafists and jihād-Salafists. The Quietists usually avoid any criticism of Muslim rulers of Islamic states and stay away from political activism in Germany. They focus on the dissemination of religious teachings with a particular emphasis on individual piety, but also make critical claims regarding Salafi scholars, preachers and movements, who they regard as enemies. Mainstream Salafists often contribute more publicly to political debates, sometimes in a very pragmatic way advocating non-violent forms of protest or voting in elections. To make themselves and/or their movement known in the public domain and to promote their goals, some mainstream Salafist preachers organise demonstrations on Islam-related topics, e.g. protest rallies against Islamophobia (Wiedl, 2017: 104). Da’wah has an important place in their work and the Internet is an important way to do it (Klevesath et al., 2019). Radical and Jihadi Salafists are also political Salafists, but they explicitly include violence as an option for action. The idea of being in a holy war against infidels is key in their narrative. Contrary to Mainstream Salafists, they declare a majority of today’s regents in Muslim majority countries to be renegades (*takfir al-hākim*) and follow a more dogmatic interpretation of Salafist worldview. At least until 2010/11, preachers in Germany belonging to the strand of radical Salafism held back with open calls for violence, mostly for tactical reasons (Wiedl, 2017: 106-107). Jihadi Salafists argued that it is the duty of a believer to fight against those who are seen as unbelievers (Arabic: *kuffār*). To achieve their goals, they actively call for attacks and war missions and consider participation in them a religious duty framed as ‘martyrdom’. In a similar way, Abou-Tamm et al. (2016) distinguish between purist conceptualisations of Salafism, political-missionary approaches rejecting violence, political-missionary approaches legitimising violence, and Jihadi Salafists who are openly calling for violence.

This report focusses upon the radical and jihadist Salafists. In the mid-2010s, Jihād-Salafists were a small minority of some ten percent within the German Salafi movement. Influenced by online propaganda from some Arab countries, but also by Jihadi Salafists from Austria, this radical milieu originated from mosques and Islamic centres in Hamburg, Bonn, and Ulm/Neu-Ulm, to name a few of the important geographical places. As Steinberg has shown in detail, the Salafist scene in Germany has internationalised significantly since 9/11 (Steinberg, 2013).

¹ A nasheed is a piece of vocal music popular in the Islamic world; Salafists make use of this cultural tradition and incorporate their political messages into this cultural work.

In 2013, the Office for the Protection of the Constitution of North Rhine-Westphalia estimated that there were some 1,500 Salafist activists. This marked an increase of 50 percent over the previous year. About ten percent of them belonged to violent Jihadi Salafist structures. As roughly 90 percent of the followers are second, third and fourth generation migrants who grew up in Germany, the language spoken is generally German. The following is a brief overview of groups active and significant in the period relevant for this study. It should be noted however, that forms of organisation vary and organisational development is volatile, i.e. characterised by new foundations, mergers, splits.

In 2007, the Salafist imam Muhamed Seyfudin Ciftci (Abu Anas) established *Invitation to Paradise*, a private Salafi Islamic school in the city of Braunschweig running a curriculum according to the Islamic University in Medina. While he claimed both he and the school had nothing to do with violence, security forces were on alert due to the connections to terrorist activities of some of the visitors to the school. Plans of *Invitation to Paradise* to build a mosque in the city of Mönchengladbach in North-Rhine Westphalia met with protests from the local population. The head of the local initiative *Bürgerinitiative Eicken*, which tried to stop the Salafists' plans, received threats on the phone and prominent Salafist activists such as Sven Lau and Pierre Vogel called him a right-wing radical in Internet videos. In March 2011, *Invitation to Paradise* called its supporters to confront a public rally held by the *Bürgerinitiative Eicken*. Property of the *Invitation to Paradise* had also been vandalised. In August 2011, *Invitation to Paradise* was dissolved after the change of the position of the chairman from Muhamed Seyfudin Ciftci to Sven Lau.

In spring 2012, the 'LIES!' ['READ!'] campaign was organised by the group *The True Religion*. It had been founded in 2005 by Ibrahim Abou-Nagie one of the leading Salafist activists who legitimises violence against unbelievers. Initially created as a German-language Internet portal, *The True Religion's* activities centred on da'wah holding seminars and lectures. As part of the 'LIES!' campaign, the group organised information booths in busy public places and streets and distributed copies of the Quran free of charge. A further purpose of the campaign was to present the group as an active and important player in the Salafist scene. The project was run as a franchise-type system with centrally produced promotion material distributed by local activists. According to Abou-Nagie a total of 3.5 million copies of the Quran had been distributed by mid-2016. On 15 November 2016, the group was banned for advocating armed Jihad and acting as nationwide network of recruitment for jihadist Islamists and for those who wanted to leave for Syria or Iraq for jihadist Islamist reasons.



Plates 4 and 5:

Activist with a portable ad of the READ!-campaign / Logo of The True Religion

Further Salafist organisations active in North-Rhine Westphalia profiled themselves as humanitarian groups, such as *Help in Need* founded 2013 in the city of Neuss. It claimed to support Muslims in need and

ran several charity events to collect money. These events regularly hosted preachers who were well known in the Salafist scene. Founded in 2012, the association *Ansaar Düsseldorf/Ansaar International* is also an aid organisation. It supports aid projects for needy Muslims worldwide and is connected firmly with Salafism in Germany. *Ansarul Aseer* has an Internet presence with a particular focus on Salafist people imprisoned. Most of those portrayed belong to the Jihadi Salafist spectrum.

Tauhid Germany (TG) was established in May 2013, initially as a group posting videos on several web 2.0 channels. Later it ran information booths in North-Rhine Westphalia spreading Jihadi Salafist messages and opposing main principles of democracy such as freedom of religion and the right to physical integrity. Postings and videos by the main preacher were in favour of violent Jihad and glorifying Jihadi Salafists as heroic. Group members encouraged young Muslims to take part in the armed struggle in Syria, preferably on the side of the IS. *Tauhid Germany* portrayed Muslims in Germany as victims of a state oppression and threatened by extermination similar to the persecution of the Jewish population in the Nazi period. In fact, the Syrian theatre and the implementation of the Caliphate was a bigger draw for many Jihadi Salafists than battling some local right-wing extremists – just like the *Bürgerbewegung Pro NRW*.

The German Federal Minister of the Interior banned and dissolved TG on 26 March 2015, not least because it was a successor organisation to the *Millatu Ibrahim* association (MI) which had already been banned in 2012. MI had been founded in autumn 2011 and had its organisational stronghold in the city of Solingen. MI called for action against the rally of the *Bürgerbewegung pro NRW* and their intention to show Mohammed cartoons in Solingen on 1 May 2012 and later justified the violence exercised by Muslims. Soon afterwards, the press spokesman of *Millatu Ibrahim* also legitimized massive violence in a Nasheed (Dantschke, 2014: 105), a kind of cultural-political performance which has been associated with the radicalisation of young people (Senatsverwaltung, 2011). Mohamed Mahmoud, the Austrian founder and leader of MI, left Germany for Egypt in spring 2012 to avoid his deportation; Denis Cuspert, who produced several Nasheeds, followed him shortly after. After the ban of the group 29 May 2012, several leading activists left for Egypt, but some regrouped as the *Tauhid Germany* (TG). In the group's publications, several references were made to the MI and MI leaders. Ideologically, TG was to be assigned to ISIL from at least 2014. In February 2014, followers had published a declaration of solidarity in favour of ISIL; shortly after, Cuspert had publicly sworn an oath of allegiance to ISIL in a video message. In its propaganda, TG regularly defended ISIL and its supporters against criticism. TG also tried to defend the cruel murder of prisoners by ISIL – such as the burning of a Jordanian pilot alive – against criticism. TG was banned in Germany in March 2015.

2.3 The escalation of violence in 2012

On 30 September 2005, the Danish newspaper *Jyllands Posten* published 12 editorial cartoons most of which depicted Muhammed, a principal figure of the religion of Islam. The newspaper argued that publishing the cartoons was a contribution to the debate about criticism of Islam and self-censorship. In Denmark, several Muslim groups complained about what they saw as disrespect and targeted devaluation of the Muslim faith. When the attempts of Danish Muslims, who claimed that *Jyllands Posten* had committed an offence under section 140 and 266b of the Danish Criminal Code, failed to get an official investigation by the public prosecutor, a group of Danish imams started to meet with religious and political leaders in the Middle East (about the dynamics of Muslim mobilisation in Denmark, see Lindekilde, 2008). They had compiled a dossier, which was known as the Akkari-Laban dossier after two leading imams. This group of Danish imams asked the Egyptian government and the *Organization of Islamic Conference* for support. Both subsequently helped publicise this dossier (Olesen, 2007) leading to media coverage in several Muslim-majority countries which resulted in protests in many places in late January and early February 2006.

Some of the protests escalated into violence, resulting in more than 250 reported deaths, attacks on Danish and other European diplomatic missions, attacks on churches and on people of Christian faith. In

Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and some other Middle Eastern countries, a consumer boycott against Denmark was organised. Ayman Al-Zawahiri of *Al Qaeda* called on Muslims to not only boycott Denmark, but also countries such as Norway, France and Germany. In the years following, several violent plots related to the cartoons have been discovered, most of them targeting the culture editor of *Jyllands Posten* Flemming Rose and the cartoonist Kurt Westergaard. For example, on 1 January 2010, police stopped a would-be assassin in Westergaard's home from using firearms.

In the light of widespread experiences of discrimination (see e.g. Hussain, 2000), many Danish Muslims looked at the publication of the cartoons as being the 'straw that broke the camel's back'. Western media and pundits dominated the international media coverage and situated the controversy as essentially an issue of free speech. Drawing upon Samuel Huntington's concept of 'clash of civilizations' the free speech discourse pitches democracy and Western civilisation as being in opposition to 'Islamist' religious fundamentalism, fanaticism and reactionary 'medievalism' (Eide et al., 2008), which, it is argued, contributes to the (re-)codifying of migrants and minorities as the 'Muslim other' on the lines of culture and religion (Miera and Pala, 2009).

The debate around the publication of the cartoons touched on issues like Muslim identity, offence and oppression (Lægaard, 2007; Levey and Modood, 2009; Peetush 2009). One could argue that the Prophet Muhammad cartoons are an ambiguous form and there is no *one* true or correct reading of them (Weaver, 2010), but it has become very evident that anyone interested in inciting hate and confrontation would find an easy trigger using them.

This was the situation, when the *Bürgerbewegung Pro NRW* participated in elections to the state parliament of North Rhine-Westphalia at 13 May 2012. In spring that year, the group had joined the French *Front National*, the Austrian FPÖ and the extreme right *British National Party* in creating an international initiative under the title of "Women against Islamization". At the beginning of the election campaign, the *Bürgerbewegung Pro NRW* called for a cartoon contest on the theme of Islam. The group announced that it would present a selection of cartoons to the public in front of mosques as part of a campaign tour entitled 'Freedom instead of Islam'. The leader of the *Bürgerbewegung Pro NRW* explicitly called for a 'maximum of provocation'. He further emphasised in front of the group's activists: 'We will go to the limit of pain in order to e.g. clarify our critical position on Islam and to bring the issues of alienation and Islamization on the agenda of the election campaign' (quoted in MIK, 2013: 66).

The organiser of the 'Freedom instead of Islam' campaign tour made his view of Islam clear: 'Because Allah is not God, he is an idol [...] Islam is therefore a dangerous superstition and almost a devil's work, as it systematically prevents people from finding true salvation and thus God.' (quoted in MIK, 2013: 62). In the course of the election campaign, the *Bürgerbewegung Pro NRW* organised numerous anti-Islam(ic) demonstrations in front of mosques, where the Mohammed cartoons of Kurt Westergaard from *Jyllands Posten* were shown. In most cases, no public reactions from Muslims were recorded. However on 1 May, Salafists started violent attacks not far from the mosque of the Salafist association *Millatu Ibrahim* in Solingen. Their attempt to attack members of the extreme right *Bürgerbewegung Pro NRW*, who held up signs with Mohammed cartoons, were fended off by the police. Eight police officers were injured that day when Salafists attacked them with iron bars and threw stones.

A few days later, on 5 May Salafists protested against another rally organised by the *Bürgerbewegung Pro NRW* in the city of Bonn, near the King-Fahd-Academy, a Saudi-financed educational institution. Less than 30 followers of the *Bürgerbewegung Pro NRW* took part. When they displayed Mohammed cartoons, several of the 400-strong group of Salafists started throwing stones and bottles and vandalised police vehicles. 29 police officers were injured, two of them seriously with knife wounds. A total of 109 demonstrators were arrested.

Some of the Salafists involved in the Solingen attacks were sentenced to suspended sentences of between one year and 18 months at the Solingen district court. One individual from Hamburg was sentenced to two years suspended (Lotze, 2016). Regarding the violent attacks in Bonn, thirty people were finally charged with dangerous bodily injury, serious breach of the peace, obstructing the police and resisting arrests. In most cases, the defendants received sentences of between eight- and twelve-months' imprisonment, of which, almost all were suspended on probation as there were no previous convictions. The individual who attacked police officers with a knife received six years in prison. During this trial, and also during the following other negotiations before the Bonn District Court, there were no additional security measures and all trials against the Salafists took place without any disruption (Meurer 2014).

3. Field Research

3.1 Data collection

In order to approach and study this case of cumulative radicalisation the main research methods used were those of literature review, archival research, and Internet research. The literature review focused on the academic publications looking into conceptual approaches and empirical research on cumulative/reciprocal radicalisation/extremism (Eatwell, 2006; Bartlett and Birdwell, 2013; Busher and Macklin, 2015; Knott et al., 2018; Carter, 2020), on the development of extreme right groups and movements in North-Rhine Westphalia with the *Bürgerbewegung Pro* in particular (Häusler, 2008a; 2008b, Killguss et al., 2008; Häusler, 2009; Lausberg, 2010), the issue of the Danish Mohammed cartoon affair (Olesen, 2007; Eide et al., 2008; Lindekilde, 2008; Miera and Pala, 2009; Peetush, 2009; Weaver, 2010), and the Salafist movements (Biene et al., 2016; Wiedl, 2017; Käsehage, 2019; Klevesath et al., 2019; Torak and Weitzel, 2019; Zick and Lutterjohann, 2019). This also included the search for and collection of surveys and public opinion polls with regard to the German population's views on Islam and Muslims (Foroutan, 2012; Schneider et al., 2013; Hafez and Schmidt, 2015).

Archival research included the collection of newspaper articles with regard to activities of the Salafist groups and the *Bürgerbewegung Pro* as well as visual material from related webpages. There were also attempts to interview activists from the *Bürgerbewegung Pro NRW* and the Salafist groups involved in the confrontation, but without success.

After an initial review of the literature and the primary sources, the collected material was analysed through the method of classic thematic content analysis (Mayring, 2000; Hsieh and Shannon, 2005; Breuning, 2011). The categories created had to have value and meaning from an analytical point of view and be compatible with the theoretical reasoning of the research, so that they were consistent with the objectives of the particular analysis which was to look for the reasons and triggers of escalating performance of both anti-Muslim racists, on the one hand, and radical and Jihadi Salafists, on the other, regarding their worldview. In addition, it was useful to identify factors that also might have influenced decisions for escalation/de-escalation such as alternative options of reaching one's political aims, rivalry with other groups, gaining media attention.

The first step was to search for, collect and then to sort systematically the literature relevant for this case. In the German content today, anti-Muslim attitudes, hate speech and hate crimes are relevant phenomena. They affect the life of many Muslims and in many cases create a feeling of non-belonging. It was therefore necessary to look at the broader context of anti-Muslim racism in general (Bühl, 2010; Schneiders, 2010; Ciftci, 2012; Spruyt and Elchardus, 2012; Yousuf and Calafell, 2018), but also at the activities of an important protagonist of such action – the *Bürgerbewegung Pro Köln* and the *Bürgerbewegung Pro NRW* (Häusler, 2008a; 2008; 2009; Peters et al., 2008; Lausberg, 2010). As this

research is on cumulative/reciprocal radicalisation, the Salafist groups were also investigated (e.g. Kiefer, 2006; Ceylan and Kiefer, 2013; Logvinov, 2017; Toprak and Weitzel 2017; Kiefer et al., 2018).

Archival and internet research has been conducted in order to find primary sources which give insight into what the conflict parties' underlying worldview was in general, but specifically regarding the opponent. Archival research made particular use of the holdings of the archive of the Research Unit on Right-Wing Extremism at the University of Applied Sciences in Duesseldorf. The archive holds a large number of papers, newsletters and visual material produced by anti-Muslim groups.

4. Key Findings

The key findings of this research are organised along the question of how the radicalisation of the two main protagonists interacting with each other can be explained from the perspective of the actors. In addition, it reflects on the overall perspective of cumulative/reciprocal radicalisation theoretical framework and considers the broader context to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics of such developments.

4.1 Anti-Muslim Provocation as Strategy by Pro NRW

The *Bürgerbewegung Pro Köln* and the *Bürgerbewegung pro NRW* were fundamentally racist. As one ideology of inequality, racism explains the world and offers a narrative who legitimately should belong to the German society and who should have political rights and social rights in the German nation-state. This perspective is absolutely dominant in public statements and in the political strategy of these movements. It is applied to different minorities in German society, most prominent Roma people, but also migrants and those labelled Muslims.

The *Bürgerbewegung Pro Köln* was dissolved in mid-April 2018 and the *Bürgerbewegung pro NRW* gave up its legal status as a political party end of March 2019 as the extreme right party *Alternative for Germany* became the one successful party of that spectrum. Roma people were one of the main targets of its propaganda and campaigning; the two groups had regularly contributed to anti-Romani worldviews and supported long-existing negative stereotypes about this group (Reuss, 2015). Over time, the two groups made anti-Muslim racism their main agenda (Häusler, 2008). The term anti-Muslim racism refers to processes of racialisation in which Muslims are declared a homogenous group other than 'the Germans' and given negative characteristics (Virchow, 2012). In this way, Muslims are made 'into a metaphor of social evil' – by, for example, attaching to them the attributes sexist, homophobic, violent, unwilling to integrate – and thus deconstructing them from the national "we". The "others" are downgraded and "we" are upgraded' (Keskinilic, 2019).

In the worldview of the two *Bürgerbewegungen*, people of Muslim faith are essentialised by attributing 'genuine Islam' characteristics to them. In consequence, no distinction is made between Islam and Islamism, both are considered inherently intolerant and aggressive (MIK, 2013: 60). In addition, the groups made extensive use of the narrative that an 'Islamization' is taking place, in the course of which, the 'German' and 'Christian' character of German society would be replaced by (a fundamentalist) Islam and Sharia law (Kerst, 2020). From the perspective of the group's leadership, the topic of 'Islamization' was chosen carefully as a kind of door-opener: 'The topic of Islamization presses people and it is politically important to us. Therefore, we have chosen it. [...] Especially in big cities you score points with it! We have filled a gap in the market, and we've managed to break into milieus we wouldn't have reached otherwise' (quoted in MIK, 2012: 61).

From the very beginning, provocation and the explicit evocation of scandals were part of the strategy of the *Bürgerbewegung Pro Köln*. This way it followed its predecessor DLVH who once put out 'wanted'-posters to find a Roma woman who was about to be deported. In 2012, for example, The *Bürgerbewegung Deutschland*, another off-spring of the *Bürgerbewegung Pro Köln*, announced that it would show the film

Innocence of Muslims in Berlin and invite the Christian fundamentalist preacher Terry Jones. The movie was assessed by many Muslims as hostile and derogatory (Allen and Isakjee, 2015). When the movie premiered in the U.S.A. a few months earlier, organisations in several Islamic countries had responded with riots and attacks on US facilities and U.S. Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and other officials were killed in Libya.² Hardly surprising therefore, just two days after the announcement of the *Bürgerbewegung Deutschland*, Islamists attempted to storm the German embassy in Sudan. The then Federal Minister of the Interior, Hans-Peter Friedrich (CSU), announced that he wanted to prevent the screening of the film by all legally permissible means, and accused the *Bürgerbewegung*-party chairman Manfred Rouhs of 'provoking the Islamists in Germany as well' and 'pouring oil on the fire' (quoted in Jüttner, 2012).

The state elections in North Rhine-Westphalia in 2010 did not lead to a stable government, so elections were held again in 2012, thus significantly reducing the 5-year legislature. In 2010, the *Bürgerbewegung Pro NRW* got 107,476 votes. With 1.38 percent of the vote, it was far away from entering the state parliament however they were entitled to receive reimbursement of election campaign costs which increased their financial budget significantly (Deutscher Bundestag, 2012: 177-190). The elections in 2012 represented another chance to acquire money and votes. Due to the small number of activists, the party decided to make use of provocative statements again. In doing so, they speculated that the media would pick up the provocations and thus make the association visible to potential voters.

The group's intention to incite reactions from Muslims was commented upon critically in the political arena. The CSU Federal Interior Minister Hans-Peter Friedrich expressed fears of escalations between right-wing extremists and Salafists. The Interior Minister of North Rhine-Westphalia, Ralf Jäger, instructed the police authorities to prevent the demonstrators from entering into the immediate vicinity of mosques. While the first rallies organised by the *Bürgerbewegung Pro NRW* went largely without any public reactions by Salafist groups, the situation escalated on 1 May when public manifestations were held in Solingen, a stronghold of the Jihadi-Salafist *Millatu Ibrahim* association, and in Bonn where Jihadi Muslims from across the country gathered to attack the racists.

In the 13 May 2012 elections, the *Bürgerbewegung Pro NRW* increased their number of voters slightly to 118,326, but again failed to reach the 5-percent-hurdle, obtaining just 1.5 percent of the votes. The group had sought confrontation in order to get media coverage, but the level of violence deterred other voters beyond the core supporters. Nevertheless, it again received taxpayers money to compensate their expenditures during the campaign; in 2014 this was circa 128,400 € (Deutscher Bundestag, 2016: 221-236).

As a reaction to the anti-Muslim rallies organised by the *Bürgerbewegung Pro NRW*, Salafist activists posted death threats on the Internet, such as the 'Death to Pro NRW'-message by the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (Christiansen, 2017). In Germany, four Salafist activists plotted the murder of Markus Beisicht, the long-term leader of the *Bürgerbewegung Pro NRW*. The police arrested two of the activists in the immediate vicinity of the politician's home on 13 March 2013 (Dpa/AZ, 2013).³ Immediately after

² Other interpretations suggest that the attack was coordinated and planned in advance by a regional branch of al-Qaeda. In fact, the attack was led by militias, some of which had previously cooperated with the Americans. In late 2013, New York Times research disproved assumptions about al-Qaeda involvement or systematic planning of the attack (Kirkpatrick, 2013).

³ According to Enea B. (45) who confessed in court to considerations of murdering Beisicht the original idea had been to beat up the leader of the *Bürgerbewegung Pro NRW* or to kidnap him. Together with Marco G. (29), he had considered punishment as a duty of a good Muslim. Both started to find out residential addresses of Pro NRW members. Beisicht was initially not on their list, because they thought his house was too well guarded. But Tayfun S. and Koray D. who were short of money brought up the idea of robberies in December 2012. This finally brought them back to Beisicht, as the four suspected assets with the lawyer. Enea B., increasingly frustrated by the fact that 'all they did was talk but not act', began to consider murdering Beisicht, wanting to 'cut off the head of the snake Pro NRW' and then leave Germany for Turkey. When all four of them met again on March 11, Tayfun S. (23) had serious doubts about the killing. Two days later, Koray D. (24) argued for an assault instead of an assassination attempt on Beisicht, especially if it was to be in front of his children. Enea B. and Marco G. finally went on to explore the house of Markus Beisicht one last time. Once they arrived in Leverkusen, they were picked up by the police and arrested (Hemmelrath, 2016).

the assassination plot become known, The *Bürgerbewegung Pro Köln* and the *Bürgerbewegung Pro NRW* once again equated Islam with Islamism, claiming that security authorities were complicit in the attack because the association regularly appeared as unconstitutional in the reports of the State Office for the Protection of the Constitution. At the same time, it defended its strategy and announced continuation: ‘And no matter what happens, we don’t surrender, we keep going’ (quoted in MIK, 2014: 112).

In view of this considerable threat of violence, the *Bürgerbewegung Pro NRW* made a tactical retreat from the direct provocation of violent Salafists, and instead organised rallies in front of planned or already built mosques. They also turned to target groups that posed less risk of violent reaction, mainly the Roma minority, but also asylum seekers and refugees. However, in most cases, the *Bürgerbewegung Pro NRW* was not able to gather more than some thirty followers.

Despite moderating its tactics, the group continued its online anti-Muslim hate speech. On 19 June 2013, a derogatory statement was published on the Facebook account of the *Bürgerbewegung Pro NRW* according to which Muslims cannot be integrated into Western societies due to their faith and should therefore be marginalised. It also read: ‘Foreigners who want to integrate and live according to liberal values are welcome! But we don’t want these religious morons who worship a paedophile warmonger!’ (MIK, 2014: 84). Several weeks later the group defamed Turkish Muslims as being members of a paedophile culture.

The group also joined forces with other groups such as the youth organisation of the far right party *Die Republikaner* and with the *German Defence League*, modelled after the UK group, to create hate propaganda. Jointly they ran a Facebook page titled ‘Hasta La Vista Salafista!’ to foster cooperation.



Plate 6

During its campaign for the local elections in spring 2014, the *Bürgerbewegung Pro Köln* and the *Bürgerbewegung Pro NRW* distributed posters with slogans such as ‘Rage in the belly, let it out’ and ‘Civil courage stops the flood of asylum seekers’. In answer to several complaints, the Senior Public Prosecutor and head of the department for politically motivated acts of crime argued that these were not necessarily calls for violent action and therefore, they could not be banned. However, local media reported that local citizens started to remove the posters as they found them unacceptable and racist (Damm, 2014). The *Bürgerbewegung Pro NRW* also faced difficulties with a TV commercial for the European elections at the end of May 2014. The public broadcaster ARD refused to screen the advertisement, which depicted ‘foreigners’, especially asylum seekers, Muslims and Roma, as living in the garbage and being criminals *per se*. It was aired only after *Bürgerbewegung Pro NRW* had made significant changes (Gasteiger, 2014).



‘Civil courage stops the flood of asylum seekers’

Plate 7: Pro-NRW poster in spring 2014

To summarise, the analysis of the strategy and performance of the *Bürgerbewegung Pro NRW* made very clear that the group contributed significantly and intentionally to the escalation of violence in May 2012. The group has a long tradition of stirring hate against minorities. It does so in order to gain votes from people holding racist beliefs in general, but anti-Muslim and anti-Roma attitudes in particular. The Danish cartoon affair gave the *Bürgerbewegung Pro NRW* a kind of a blueprint. Its strategy of provocation relied heavily on radical Salafists to answer this provocation with violence instead of taking part in non-violent action. When physical attacks escalated, the group turned away to some extent from provoking the most radical Salafist groups, whose followers did not shy away from violent action. In fact, the *Bürgerbewegung Pro NRW* began to campaign against less powerful and well-organised opponents such as Roma people and asylum seekers their new agenda. Regarding the level and mode of rhetorical escalation by the *Bürgerbewegung Pro NRW*, one could argue that they were able to provoke the Salafists by very simple means. Once physical attacks from the Salafists occurred, they were able to portray themselves as victims citing freedom of speech. The *Bürgerbewegung Pro NRW* itself did not resort to physical violence because, on the one hand because any subsequent criminal proceedings would have endangered the middle-class existence of the activists, several of whom are well-paid lawyers, and because the victim narrative would not have been compatible with this.

4.2 Programmatic Violence and Shifted Escalation by Jihadi Salafists

Jihadi Salafists and – to a certain extent – also radical Salafis accept and praise violence as a necessary means in the fight for their faith. Referencing Peters (2005) from his seminal work on the conceptualisation of Jihad in *Jihad in Classical and Modern Islam* Günther et al. argue that the ‘legitimation of the use of physical force to achieve one’s own goals, in particular, is linked to a very specific interpretation of the Arabic term Jihad, which particularly emphasises the aspect of combat to the disadvantage of other interpretations’ (2016: 8). In Arabic, the term ‘jihad’ means ‘to strive’. Conceptually, the ‘great jihad’ is distinguished from the ‘small jihad’, which refers to armed conflict, while the former refers to the effort of the believer to deepen his/her faith and to fight his ego; militant jihadists reduce the term to ‘small jihad’ (Frindte et al., 2016: 1).

Salafists in general claim to be the guardians of true Islam. Restoring what is presented as the genuine and only acceptable Islam does not just need strict rules on an individual level, but also the ‘liberation’ of ‘Muslim’ countries from oppression by the non-believing ‘West’ through the elimination of ‘apostate’ rulers and by the cleansing of the Muslim religious community from alleged heresy (Abou Taam et al., 2016: 1). In Jihadist thought, these objectives can only be reached with violence. Therefore, Jihadi Salafist thinkers present particular narratives in order to legitimise violence politically, morally and theologically,

even declaring it to be a religious duty (Günther et al., 2016). While some narratives refer to political and military interventions of ‘the West’ in Iraq and Palestine/Israel, others claim that Muslims in Muslim-minority countries of the global North are restricted in being able to practice their faith on an equal footing. This perspective includes criticism that secular laws have priority over the Sharia, but also that existing laws allow denigration of the Prophet Muhammad. In general, violence is framed as an act of self-defence.

In Germany, one of the central Salafist narratives is anti-Muslim racism. In fact, significant parts of the population hold anti-Muslim attitudes, there are constant verbal and physical attacks on Muslims, and structural discrimination towards Muslim communities also exists. Radical and Jihadi Salafist narratives condense and unify such experiences into a picture of total exclusion. In doing so, violence then becomes an obvious option.

Ceylan and Kiefer (2013: 75-82) also argue that the Salafist movement is a revivalist movement, which particularly appeals to young people with experiences of exclusion and discrimination. Being portrayed as discriminated against and as being victimised, however, can also lead to a situation of resignation or attempts of assimilation. Salafist discourse of victimisation refers to the worldwide *umma* as being under attack by the non-believers and ‘the West’, but turns it into an appeal not to avoid this fight (Dantschke, 2017: 67). Accordingly, German Jihadi Salafist and media activists openly called Muslims to violent action.

One of the major Salafist groups involved in the attacks in the cities of Solingen and Bonn early May 2012 was the *Millatu Ibrahim* (MI) association. The name refers to the title of a book written by Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi who many consider an important mentor of *al Qaeda* leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (Abou Tamm, 2016: 16). The group was established in Berlin in autumn 2011, on the initiative of Mohamed Mahmoud (Abu Usama al-Gharieb) and the former rapper Deso Dogg (Abu Talha al-Almani). It was considered the militant wing of the preacher network *The True Religion*, but it acted independently. MI referred to the two UK based preachers Anjem Choudary and Abu Waleed and their organisations *Islam4UK* (declared terrorist and banned in January 2010), *SalafiMedia* and *Tawheed Movement*.

Millatu Ibrahim was an expression of a nationwide pop-Jihadist youth network. According to Abou Tamm et al. (2017: 17), pop-Jihadism is characterised by the fact that the most important speakers are not spiritual authorities but are teenagers and young adults who offer a biographical narrative on why and how they turned to Salafism. This gives them and their (violent) performance a high level of authenticity, not least as it uses media formats with which many young people are very familiar. Such Salafist sites are designed to be especially attractive to young people. They are modern in the presentation, youth-orientated, graphically sophisticated and interactive (Giroux and Evans, 2016).

In numerous videos Abu Talha al-Almani and others framed *Millatu Ibrahim* as the German wing of the global jihad, always ready to fight and die for it. Camouflage clothing and Pashtun cap, cartridge belt and Kalashnikov shaped their attire. They received support and recognition from the preacher network *The True Religion* (Dantschke, 2017: 73). *Millatu Ibrahim*, with approximately 50 members, had been the main organiser of the protests against the *Bürgerbewegung Pro NRW* rallies. They saw their chance to profile themselves as the true and only defenders of Muslims and Islam in Germany. This can be taken as an indication that violent escalation in some cases was also propelled by competitive intra-group escalation within the Salafist/Jihadist milieu. *Millatu Ibrahim* also longed for recognition by Muslims worldwide, as was pointed out by Abu Talha al-Almani in April 2012, talking to researcher Claudia Dantschke, when he argued that, ‘Pro NRW will provide us with the images we need [...] We just need to spread them in appropriate forums and then the answer will come from the Islamic world’ (quoted after Dantschke, 2017: 74).

The attempted attack on the anti-Muslim racists, which led to a massive escalation of the demonstration, led to a series of trials, first at the Solingen court, later at the regional court in Wuppertal. Amongst those

sentenced *in absentia* to two years and seven months in prison, had been the preacher Hasan Keskin (Abu Ibrahim). He was considered one of the masterminds behind the demonstration on 1 May 2012.

On 14 June 2012, police conducted a major raid against the groups *Millatu Ibrahim*, *Dawa FFM* and *The True Religion*. The Federal Minister of the Interior in Germany, Hans-Peter Friedrich, ordered a ban on *Millatu Ibrahim*, the first one against a Salafist group in post-war Germany. The ban was justified on the grounds that the group's activities were against the constitutional order and the idea of peaceful international relations. MI called for violent action, examples of which were the riots at the beginning of May 2012 in Solingen and Bonn. In addition, the leaders of the group had called for further violence in a Nasheed at 12 May 2012 (Reimann, 2012). Several members of *Millatu Ibrahim*, including the prisoners aid *Ansarul Aseer*, which had personal overlaps to *Millatu Ibrahim*, left for Syria and Iraq after the ban and as a reaction to the trials.

In April 2017, the Higher Regional Court in Düsseldorf gave Marco G. life imprisonment. He was found guilty of depositing explosives at Bonn Central Station at 10 December 2012, and also of planning the assassination of leading activists of the *Bürgerbewegung Pro NRW* in 2013. Nine of them were on 'death list', marked with a red pencil. Three co-defendants were sentenced to prison terms of between nine and a half and twelve years for the murder plot (Seng, 2017).

Regarding the exercise of violence of *Millatu Ibrahim* against the *Bürgerbewegung Pro NRW*, it is noticeable that the group had developed a profile of violent action from the very beginning and therefore had attracted individuals who were looking for this type of social and political context. In order to explain MI entering into the confrontation with the police and the *Bürgerbewegung Pro NRW*, several factors seem to be relevant. While generally, MI advocated violence to fight so-called *kuffār* people, there will have been many opportunities for this. It chose to attack *Bürgerbewegung Pro NRW* because of the high symbolic content of (the controversy over) the Mohammed cartoons and because of the demonstrations *Bürgerbewegung Pro NRW* held in the strongholds of the MI. It is also important to consider the perspective of how MI would have been perceived within the radical and Jihadist Salafist scene in Germany if actions like those of the *Bürgerbewegung Pro NRW* had remained unanswered. This is relevant insofar as there are always rivalries amongst groups and individuals and fighting for a cause demonstrates commitment and determination. In German context, this was to some extent relevant for groups associated more closely with *Al Qaeda* on the one hand, and the *Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant* (ISIL) on the other hand (Haykel, 2016, Novenario, 2016).⁴ The intention of MI was to attract radicalised Salafists by producing a militant profile of the group on the basis of a theme that was perceived by many Muslims as hurtful, but also to present itself as a group of dedicated fighters to an international audience. In fact, Yassin Chouka (aka Abu Ibrahim) a former electrical engineering student from Bonn who had become a propagandist for the *Islamic Movement Uzbekistan* (IBU), had produced a seven-minute film in spring 2013, in which he called followers to spy on and murder right-wing extremists and journalists: 'Lurk and seek out individual members of Pro NRW (...), collect enough information about where they live, their daily routes, their jobs. And then after good and sufficient research and a strategic plan: "Strike!"' (quoted in Diehl, 2013).

⁴ Hamming (2020) argues that the increased competition between *Al Qaeda* and *ISIL* – especially after the latter had declared the establishment of its caliphate - did not lead to a dynamic of *competitive escalation* and mutual radicalisation of behaviour. For a different perspective, see Eleftheriadou (2020).



Plate 8: Screenshot of Yassin Chouka (aka Abu Ibrahim) calling for violence against activists of the *Bürgerbewegung Pro NRW*

MI might not have radicalised further through the confrontation with the *Bürgerbewegung Pro NRW*. This conflict was of minor importance compared to developments in global context, especially the military successes of the ISIL and the final declaration of the Caliphate on 29 June 2014. Therefore, global political (and military) trajectories shifted the decision-making significantly. Several of the MI followers and activists, who had been taking part in the rallies in Bonn and Solingen where ISIL-flags had been displayed, now decided to leave Germany in order to join ISIL in Syria. This way, emigrating to a theatre of conflict with a higher level of violence and more directly linked to establishing the Caliphate had a deescalating impact on the conflict with the *Bürgerbewegung Pro NRW*. In a report from the Ministry of Justice of North-Rhine Westphalia to the Legal Affairs Committee of the Landtag of North-Rhine Westphalia, it was argued that the Ministry of the Interior had information on 34 individuals who were believed to have entered into jihad from that group. There are indications that four of these individuals died in conflict whilst eight others had returned to Germany (N.N., 2015). This suggests that fighting anti-Muslim racists like the *Bürgerbewegung Pro NRW* in Germany became less important than being directly involved in fighting for the Caliphate. Subsequent anti-Muslim groups such as *HoGeSa* (Hooligans Against Salafists), which started early 2014 and staged a rally of 5,000 at 26 October 2014 in Cologne, but also the *Pegida* movement (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the West) initiated in autumn 2014, did not meet significant counter-action by Salafist groups.

5. Conclusions

Busher and Macklin (2015) have energetically advocated a complex consideration of possible processes of cumulative radicalisation in order to avoid simplifying explanations. The case under investigation in this report confirms their perspective. The following overview summarises the most important findings:

- a) The particular situation of escalation on the occasion of the two rallies in the cities of Solingen and Bonn is embedded into a setting in which two deeply hostile groups seek direct confrontation, one with the other. The anti-Muslim racist *Bürgerbewegung Pro NRW* not only decided to hold a public manifestation in the strongholds of the Jihadi Salafist *Millatu Ibrahim*, but also made use of derogatory cartoons in order to reach a maximal level of provocation. *Millatu Ibrahim*, on the other hand, did not

generally use violence against anti-Muslim activities whenever possible, but reacted to this particular provocation in an extra-ordinary way: heavily attacking the police in order to break through to attack the racists directly. Those participating in the attacks might have decided beforehand to escalate the situation that way, but others might have been drawn in it by the micro-dynamics of the protest on that day (Nassauer, 2019).

- b) The narrative of ‘Islamisation’ according to which immigration brings in a growing number of Muslim believers which allows Islam to colonise Europe and replace Christian values and traditions is key to anti-Muslim racists like the *Bürgerbewegung Pro NRW*. This group has a long history of racist hate against minorities such as immigrants, refugees, Roma people, and Muslims. There is a long history of referencing activities of different Muslim groups. Contrary to that, Salafist groups in general and *Millatu Ibrahim* in particular, less frequently refer to the organised extreme right though they do have a similarly exclusionary ideology themselves towards non-believers. From their point of view, there are political and societal actors who are more important when it comes to the question of who is hostile to a ‘true Islam’. In order to have situations of escalation the protagonists involved do not have to have the same general level of propensity to violence. But there have to be points of reference through which the two (or more) actors can be placed in a confrontational relationship from their respective perspectives.
- c) While it tried to keep up the image of a reputable group, the *Bürgerbewegung Pro NRW* contributed to a climate of hate systematically. However, its intension was not to have a mutual mass brawl between followers of the two groups. Whilst it could rely on the police to protect them, the *Bürgerbewegung Pro NRW* was interested in images showing themselves as courageous citizens daring to protest against violent Salafists. *Millatu Ibrahim* had been calling more openly for violence and exercised it excessively in Bonn and Solingen. In order to have situations of escalation the protagonists involved do not have to have the same interest in acting out in a violent way in a particular situation.
- d) According to their worldview, both groups presented themselves as victims. Both also had an interest to show up as principled actors. But the *Bürgerbewegung Pro NRW* was interested in winning votes in the upcoming elections, some of them from voters who previously had voted for competing right-wing parties. With few financial resources available, creating some kind of turmoil would lead to relevant media coverage and draw voters from other right-wing groups to the *Bürgerbewegung Pro NRW*. *Millatu Ibrahim* on the contrary, had significant interest in creating the impression of being an active and battle-ready group. It was also in competition to recruit followers with other radical Salafist groups (on competitive escalation see della Porta, 2013: 70-112). This factor might also explain the readiness to step into a dynamic of escalation. Since the extent and intensity of violence in the dispute over the establishment of a caliphate was considerably higher than the level of violence of political conflicts in Germany, MI also had to set the level of violence higher. If they had not, Salafists interested in violent Jihad could have turned to Al Qaeda instead of ISIL. The fact that an *Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan* which had connections to *Millatu Ibrahim* wrote ‘Death to Pro NRW’ (Christiansen, 2017) was about to create the impression of worldwide attention being on the Bonn and Solingen cases.
- e) The escalation between the two groups had been *situational*. There had not been a continuous clash between the two groups. Other factors ensured that the level of violence was not maintained or even increased. These have to be considered when investigating issues of cumulative/reciprocal radicalisation. The case under investigation here presents two factors in particular. One is the security apparatus, which took a tough stance towards this particular Jihadi Salafist group (bans; trials; cancellation of meeting rooms)⁵ which limited its options to organise. Which interventions are carried out by state actors, e.g. bans or the imprisonment of violent individuals, also have a significant impact on the conflict situation. More importantly in this case, however, was the overall global political

⁵ On 13 March 2013, the Federal Ministry of the Interior announced that the Gladbeck-based organisation *An-Nussrah*, as a sub-organisation of *Millatu Ibrahim*, was also banned.

situation. The military successes of ISIL and the establishment of the Caliphate offered much more attractive options to fulfil the 'Jihadist duty' for many young men, than confronting racists in Germany. Another factor which might have influenced decisions to not go on with violent action as was exercised in Bonn and Solingen, might have been that the expected resonance had been much more critical than originally expected: On the day of the demonstration in Solingen, there were photos of policemen beating and tying up Millatu Ibrahim fighters lying on the ground in relevant al-Qaida-related forums, but the knife attacks on policemen in particular isolated *Millatu Ibrahim* definitively within the German Salafist scene. The international response from the Jihadist milieu also remained very limited (Dantschke, 2017: 74).

- f) Investigating just one case of escalation might miss important insights. For example, other actors of the extreme right took up action against Salafists following the confrontations in Solingen and Bonn. This was the case when extreme right activists from *PEGIDA* and from the neo-nazi party *Die Rechte* took part in a rally against a meeting of Salafists in the city of Wuppertal on 14 March 2015. Probably more relevant has been the case of the *Oldschool Society* (OSS) in the second half of 2014 when it radicalised to become a terrorist group planning attacks on mosques and well known Salafist activists. These examples signify the fact that reciprocal/cumulative radicalisation might also be time-delayed, and involve other networks, groups, or individuals who have not been directly involved in the original situation of escalation. Therefore, studies in reciprocal/cumulative radicalisation need a diachronic perspective to determine the dynamics of radicalisation that might take place beyond the immediate conflict.

6. References

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