RADICAL MILIEUS IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Germany

DARE
Dialogue About
Radicalisation & Equality

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Executive Summary:

The case of the terrorist group National Socialist Underground (NSU) has highlighted the danger of right-wing terrorism in post-war Germany. In the period of 2000 to 2007, the NSU killed nine individuals identified as migrants and also a police officer. The group emerged from a much broader neo-Nazi milieu in Thuringia in the 1990s, which had some connections to the right-wing Skinhead scene in the late German Democratic Republic (GDR), also known as East Germany.

The neo-Nazi milieu in Thuringia in the 1990s was not exceptional. Its members organised rallies and concerts, radicalised a number of people, and, as numbers grew, groups were founded and disappeared. The core group of the NSU emerged from neo-Nazi circles in Thuringia; when going into hiding after police found explosives in garages rented by its members, it moved to nearby Saxony where the regional neo-Nazi milieu provided support for several years.

Radicalisation rested on earlier acts of racist violence committed by neo-Nazis and remembered as success stories, as they contributed to a more restricted asylum politics, but also on a fiercely racist worldview longing for action. It could also rely on supporters providing advice for terrorist action and developing infrastructures that allowed access to weapons, IDs and apartments.

Due to a systematic underestimation of right-wing extremism in post-war Germany, the repeated killing of migrants was not identified as racist by the security forces, who instead believed the cases were crime related. This was despite a long tradition of right-wing terrorism, racist and anti-Semitic violence.

This case study examines the case of the NSU to exemplify the conditions and dynamics that contribute to the radicalisation of parts of a radical milieu, in this case the Thuringian neo-Nazi milieu in the 1990s. From a diachronic and in synchronic perspective, several factors can be identified that contributed to this development. Some factors are more related to biographical issues (such as growing up as a peer group and building a high degree of trust), whilst other factors include the response – or lack or response – of state institutions to earlier acts of right-wing violence, thereby supporting the belief that violent action has an impact. Furthermore, support of people going into hiding and 'infrastructural' issues (e.g. money; vehicles; apartments; weapons) are of relevance, as are narratives that legitimise acts of racist violence.

1. Introduction

After the military defeat of National Socialism in early 1945, the far right in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) saw several ups and downs (Saalfeld 1997), however since the mid-1980s far-right electoral parties have held seats in state parliaments, with as much as 15 percent of the votes. The *Republikaner* (Republicans, REP), founded in 1983, has had parliamentary seats in the states of Berlin and Baden-Württemberg in the past, but has faced a severe crisis in the late 1990s that has resulted in a decrease of membership, the disbanding of many of its party structures, and widespread frustration among its remaining followers. The *Deutsche Volksunion* (German People's Union, DVU), which was closely associated with the weekly *National-Zeitung* (*National Paper*) as the most traditional paper of the far right (it recently ceased publication after 70 years), has been represented in the state parliaments of Schleswig-Holstein, Saxony-Anhalt, Bremen, and Brandenburg until the mid 2000s. Despite a long tradition of rivalry and mistrust, the leadership of the DVU signed a 'Pact for Germany' with the more radical *National Democratic Party of Germany* (NPD) in early 2005 and later the two parties merged.

The NPD reorganised itself in the aftermath of state actions that banned several neo-Nazi parties, among them the *Nationalistische Front* (Nationalistic Front), the *Freiheitliche Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (Free German Workers Party), and the *Deutsche Alternative* (German Alternative) after a wave of racist violence in the 1990s. When neo-Nazi leaders concluded that it would be useful to avoid formal organisations for a while, some former members became involved in *groupuscules*, often called 'Kameradschaft', which mushroomed during this period (Virchow 2004). These fit the characteristics that Mario Diani and Donatella della Porta describe as typical for social movements: they were decentralised, segmented, poli-cephalous (multiple leaders with few followers attached to each of them), and reticular (linked autonomous cells) (Della Porta and Diani 1999: 140).

Indeed, large sections of present day German neo-Nazis did not try to build nationwide hierarchical (party) organisations with a definite leadership but instead organised into small groups on a local or regional basis, or in groups dedicated to a specific issue such as supporting like-minded prisoners or promoting an imagined Teutonic heritage. This has given rise to a number of leaders, who at times are rivals, but who also organise joint political campaigns. To avoid being seen as small and isolated and to give their followers a feeling of belonging to a bigger movement, they called themselves 'autonomous nationalists' or 'free nationalists', meaning they are not organised in a political party with a strict set of rules (Jenson 1995). Yet, in the early 2010s, new political parties with a clear neo-Nazi profile were established, most importantly *Die Rechte* (The Right, DR) and *Der III. Weg* (*The Third Way*). Both are at the centre of a huge number of rallies, public meetings, and leafletting activities across the country. Their followers are also involved in threatening people and acting in a violent way (Kopke 2018).

In the former German Democratic Republic (GDR), extreme right groups were not legally permitted. For a long period of time, they did not exist, although racist prejudice did of course remain and some neo-Nazi individuals even found opportunities to present their worldview to the public from time to time. People who were identified as holding racist or Nazi views were sentenced for being enemies of the socialist order. The Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), in negotiations with the GDR, paid money to allow 'political prisoners' to leave East Germany (Wölbern 2014). In the 1980s, however, neo-Nazis established small groups in several East German cities, partly imitating far right skinhead culture. The 17th October 1987 marked a decisive change when the audience of a concert, with the band *Element of Crime* from West-Berlin, held in the Zion Church in East-Berlin was attacked by some 30 skinheads. Police, while present, did not intervene. After severe criticism, even by media, in the GDR, some of the perpetrators were sent to prison; in order to depoliticise what had happened, convictions were made with reference to paragraphs 215 and 220 of the Criminal Code of the GDR, which concern hooliganism and public

vilification. The Stasi staged some serious investigations, which concluded that there was a serious problem with a part of the GDR youth holding neo-Nazi worldview on the one hand while being widely held as role models in regard to work ethos and pre-military training by the population at the same time.

Both German states claimed to have learnt lessons from the Nazi period. In line with an analysis of fascism which mainly saw Nazism as a form of capitalism, the basic narrative in the former GDR was that there could not be fascism (or related phenomena) again because capitalism had been eradicated from Eastern Germany. Bilateral arrangements on migrant workers from Vietnam, North Korea, Angola, and Mozambique in particular were officially framed as acts of international solidarity. The reality, in fact, was much more complicated, with racist prejudice and exoticism coming from the German population (Rabenschlag 2014); with the migrant workers living in their own buildings there was also spatial segregation, as well as further elements to prevent their integration into GDR society. Racially motivated murders also took place during the 1970s and 1980s.

In the pre-1990 FRG, a basic narrative developed that democracy and some institutional decisions (e.g. a very liberal asylum procedure; no general staff at the armed forces), but especially an extended culture of remembrance and civic education (plus banning political groups openly adhering Nazi ideology) would be a barrier to any return of far-right ideology and political protagonists. However, the increasing number of migrant workers who came to the country from the mid 1950s onwards were tolerated at best by ordinary Germans. In the early 2000s, the government officially declared that Germany is a country of immigration by gradually changing the law of citizenship.

Contrary to their particular basic narratives, structural racism and right-wing political violence had in fact been integral parts of historical reality in both German states. However, in hegemonic discourse, these phenomena were either relegated to the past (being a phenomenon of the Nazi past) or dismissed as being outside the nation state, e.g. in the U.S. (Attia 2014) or – in official GDR discourse – in the FRG. Racist violence was either individualist, depoliticised or pathologised (Herz 1996) instead of understanding it as a contemporary expression of racism that was still alive in the two post-war Germanys.

Right-wing violence in Post-War Germany always existed. It took different forms and was aimed at a broad range of target groups, e.g. against Displaced Persons in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, against Roma people, the political left, migrants, members of the Allied forces on duty in Germany, Jews, representatives of the state, and liberal politicians. Yet, when discussing right-wing political violence, many observers forget this long history of violence, thinking instead only of the massive rise of racist violence which took place in the early 1990s when the number of refugees and asylum seekers in Germany rose to an all-time high due to the wars in former Yugoslavia (Dietze 2020). In addition to the physical attacks on people of colour which occurred on a daily basis to their homes or on the streets across the country, locations such as Mölln, Solingen, Hoyerswerda, and Rostock became known worldwide as sites of racist killings or racist mass violence. When a two-third majority of the German parliament substantially limited the fundamental right to asylum in 1993, the level of violence decreased, however the extreme right and other racist groups saw parliament's decision as confirming their successful action models and their campaign of violence (Prenzel 2012; Kleffner and Spangenberg 2016). More than twenty years later, right-wing violence rose to high levels again when racist groups and individuals tried to stop refugees coming to and staying in Germany by using threat, intimidation, and violence.

The extent of the deadly right-wing violence is controversial. While state authorities list the number of people killed by right-wing violence since 1990 as somewhere around 90 cases, watchdog groups and quality newspapers speak of about 200 victims, with a remaining number going unreported. In addition, there are several dozen more victims from the pre-1990 period. On a day-to-day basis, right-wing violence

and threats of physical harming are widespread across the country with soaring numbers in the early 1990s and mid-2010s.

An exceptional case of racist violence was the killing of nine migrants between 2000 to 2006 by a neo-Nazi terror group running by the name of *National-Socialist Underground* (NSU). These murders were identified as acts organised by neo-Nazis only after the group was detected in late 2011. In the wake of the severe political crisis that followed, several parliamentary investigation committees had the task of determining why the security apparatus did not apprehend the perpetrators, despite already being on the security agencies' radar, and also, importantly, to understand the radicalisation processes that enabled these young people become cold-blooded murderers.

This case study was selected instead of the many other cases of (deadly) right-wing violence in post-war Germany due to the wealth of material and data which will allow a deeper understanding of a significant case of radicalisation in the neo-Nazi milieu in the pre-social media period. Results will contribute to the broader interest of the DARE project in the relevance of online radicalisation and the ethnographic study of the extreme-right and anti-Islam(ist) milieu. Although the Internet in general and web 2.0 did not play as big as role as today, this case study might work as a contrast to mechanisms at play in today's online world regarding processes of non/radicalisation. In the time span investigated here, mobile telephones had become important for the coordination of actions, but the web 2.0 was not yet relevant. It might be worth comparing the impact of new technology on the profile of right-wing activities in general, but also on right-wing violence in particular. It would be interesting to find out if there are different patterns of radicalisation depending on the particular biographical context the members of a violent/terrorist group come from, how their embeddedness in a radical milieu had let to a particular kind of activities, and what were the events that triggered radicalisation.

A key findings of this case study is that radicalisation to terrorist action took place after a decision to go into hiding. Yet, systematic violent action was already a regular part of political activities. It appears it is also important to consider how the police and the secret services interact with the extreme right milieu. Do they set clear boundaries and recognisably sanction crimes, or is there protection from prosecution, financial aid and technical support to keep the informants in the scene, sometimes even in top positions?

2. Setting the scene

The emergence of the right-wing terrorist group *Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund* (NSU) can only be understood in the historical context of right-wing terrorism in post-war Germany. This section will give some general insight into the relevance and extent of radical milieus in unified Germany post-1990. During this period, the neo-Nazi scene, found that the use of violence, which went largely unsanctioned by the state, contributed to the realisation of their objectives.

2.1 Dimensions and Dynamics of Right-Wing Terrorism in Post-war Germany

Right-wing violence and the threat of it has a long history in post-war Germany. These threats have ranged from acts of violence against Displaced Persons in the immediate aftermath of WWII, to (threats of) violence towards people protesting against the screening of a film by a director in the early 1950s who had made propaganda films for the Nazis, to anti-Semitic violence and to racist and anti-left violence since the 1960s. In the first decades after WWII, there was no systematic counting of politically motivated violence (Dierbach 2016) and awareness was probably low. Most statistical overviews refer to the numbers from 1990 onwards and show that there was an increase in the early 1990s from 128 (1990) to

1,483 (1991) to 2,584 (1992). In the following years numbers slowly decreased to 2,232 (1993) to 1,498 (1994) to 837 (1995). Thereafter the numbers ranged between 700 and 1,050 per annum, before rising again significantly to 1,408 (2015) and 1,600 (2016). The number of unreported cases is probably much higher, particularly for certain type of victim groups. In addition, categorising a crime as 'right wing' needs particular knowledge, attention, and sensitivity by the investigating police officers. Regarding the number of people killed by right-wing perpetrators after 1990, official figures are significantly lower than those given by NGOs and some quality newspapers, which at approximately 200, is twice as high as the number provided by the state institutions (Feldmann, Kopke and Schultz 2016; Feldmann et al. 2018).

In the two periods of time in which the number of right-wing acts of violence rose sharply – the early 1990s and mid-2010s – German society was faced with an increase in people seeking refuge and/or a better future abroad from their country of origin. Acts of violence were mainly directed against those marked as culturally or religiously *Other*. This violence largely manifested itself as attacks in the street, e.g. assaulting someone defined as not belonging to the national/racial collective, but also as arson attacks against the homes and localities of refugees and migrant people. Not all such acts qualify as terrorist (Faber et al. 1995; Kleffner and Spangenberg 2016)

To determine events and acts of violence as terrorism (as a particular form of violence), one has to determine what is to be considered terrorist. As with many other questions, no uniform and generally accepted definition has been established in the academic debate so far. Definitions differ, for example, in the motivations of the actors or the means used (e.g. cyberterrorism). Some of the now more than 250 definitions of terrorism (Schmid and Jongman 1988; Easson and Schmid 2011) narrow the definition to the use of illegitimate violence by non-state actors and thus systematically exclude the possibility that terrorist violence can also be exercised by state authorities (e.g. by the military dictatorships of South America in the 1960s and 1970s). Others want to classify terrorism as only that which is identifiable as the act of a group. As a result, serious politically motivated violence started by individual perpetrators or attributed to individual perpetrators – in the Federal Republic of Germany, for example, the attack on the Munich Oktoberfest on 26 September 1980 – would not considered as acts of right-wing terrorism (Pfahl-Traughber 2008).

In this paper, terrorism is defined as a planned act of politically motivated violence which is carried out by an individual or a group acting (semi)secretly with the aim of instilling fear and intimidation in a larger number of people and/or of influencing decisions by political actors or social groups (Virchow, 2020). This definition allows for a distinction to be made between acts of right-wing violence acted out primarily on a situational basis, and those perpetrated as part of a comprehensive terrorist strategy. Nevertheless, acts of extreme right-wing street violence also contain a recognisable message that points beyond the immediate victim and leads to insecurity and fear in the groups concerned.

However, some crimes committed by neo-Nazis cannot be clearly designated as 'terrorist' despite this attempt of definition and demarcation. For example of this ambiguity is the incident where Kay Diesner, a neo-Nazi activist prepared for terrorist violence, shot at a bookseller on February 19, 1997 and went on to kill a police officer in a shoot-out a few days later. This was less a premeditated terrorist act than the spontaneous reaction of a convinced neo-Nazi responding to democratic protests that had taken place shortly before against a march of the NPD youth organisation in Berlin-Hellersdorf. In this respect, they were not planned actions. At the same time, however, the perpetrator saw himself as a soldier 'for the freedom of the German people' and there are numerous indications that Diesner was systematically preparing himself to take part in such a 'war' (PDS 1997).

From a historical perspective, the *National Socialist Underground* was not the first extreme right-wing group in Germany's post-war history to prepare or practice terrorist action. This can be illustrated with

selected examples. Firstly, the anti-communist *Bund Deutscher Jugend* (BDJ) and its sub-organisation *Technischer Dienst* (TD), which was founded on June 23, 1950 in Frankfurt/Main. Its aim was to act as a unit trained in guerrilla warfare in the event of a feared invasion by the Red Army. Accordingly, the members were trained in weapons technology periodically, communication took place mainly via messengers who delivered important news directly, and fuel stocks were built up. The TD affiliated with the BDJ maintained its own intelligence service, which collected information about political opponents. In addition to an arsenal of light artillery, machine guns and explosives, subsequent police searches also found lists with the names of forty people – mostly high-ranking politicians from the Social Democratic Party – who were to be 'put out of action' or 'taken out of circulation' on 'Day X' (Schmidt-Eenboom and Stoll 2015).

It should also be highlighted, that during the 1960s, German actors participated in terrorist actions which were intended to force the separation of South Tyrol from Italy or win extensive autonomy rights. One of the groups involved in these actions was the *South Tyrol Liberation Committee* (BAS), founded in the mid-1950s. This committee was responsible, among other things, for the destruction of a statue of Mussolini on horseback in Ponte Gardena/Waidbruck on 31 January 1961 and for a series of bomb attacks on over forty high-voltage pylons in June 1961. The BAS also included former members of the *Brandenburger*, a Wehrmacht unit specialising in sabotage behind enemy lines. These attacks during the 1960s killed 15 Italian customs officers, police officers and military personnel (Steininger 1999).

For large sections of the extreme right in the Federal Republic of Germany, the project of a gathering of nationalist forces had been the central point of reference for activities since the early 1960s. Yet, the attempt to enter into the national parliament with the NPD in 1969 failed. As a result, a fragmentation of the extreme right began. During the course of this process, a part of the extreme right became recognisably radicalised, i.e. either openly confessed to being National Socialists or planned, prepared and used political violence in a systematic manner (Virchow 2010).

Since the late 1960s, a number of small groups, such as the *European Liberation Front* (EBF), the *Gruppe Hengst* (GH) or the *National German Liberation Movement* (NDBB), most of which, in terms of personnel, had emerged from the NPD, acted as anti-communism terrorists, directing this against West German communists, the GDR and the Soviet stationed troops. However, most of these groups were disrupted by the police and intelligence agencies before they could put their plans into action (Rosen, 1989)

At the end of 1976, a terrorist structure formed in Lower Saxony around former Nazis Paul Otte, Wolfgang Sachse and Hans-Dieter Lepzien (who was an informant of the Lower Saxony domestic intelligence service) all of whom came from the NPD. This carried out bomb attacks on the public prosecutor's office in Flensburg and the district court in Hanover in autumn 1977. Further planned attacks, targeting GDR border installations and the synagogue in Hanover, could not be carried out, however, due to the arrest of some members of the group. Peter Naumann was also active as a neo-Nazi terrorist for a considerable time. Having been active in the NPD and its subsidiary organisations for many years, after 1970, two technically complicated explosive charges were found in his possession in 1974. Four years later, he and Heinz Lembke carried out an attack near the Ardeatine Caves, in Italy, on a memorial site which commemorated the murder of 335 civilian Italian hostages by the Waffen-SS in March 1944. On January 18, 1979, Naumann and Lembke carried out bomb attacks on transmission masts to disrupt the broadcast of the four-part film 'Holocaust - The History of the Weiss Family', which, in historical terms, marked the beginning of a readiness on the part of a mass audience to reflect upon the Nazi past. Lembke maintained a network of over thirty underground depots with weapons and explosives in the Lüneburg Heath, where he worked as a district forester, not far from the Munster military training area. In 1988, Peter Naumann was sentenced to several years in prison by the Higher Regional Court of Frankfurt/Main for his involvement in several bomb attacks and for attempting to found a terrorist organisation. After his release

from prison, pipe bombs were again found on his property in early March 1995; Naumann then reported thirteen more weapons and explosives depots to the Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA), where, among other things, 27 kilograms of explosives were found.

Among the terrorist organisations of the extreme right that caused concern with attacks in 1980, were the *German Action Groups* (DA) set up by Manfred Roeder. Roeder, originally a member of the CDU, had increasingly radicalised since the late 1960s and became active in circles of Holocaust deniers. In 1978, he escaped from a criminal case pending before the Higher Regional Court of Frankfurt/Main by fleeing; with false identity papers, he travelled to numerous countries to expand his network. In the Federal Republic of Germany, he moved into an apartment rented under a false name and recruited more people to the group that, in the course of 1980, carried out several fire and bomb attacks, mostly in reference to the Holocaust, but also against refugees. In the arson attack in Hamburg on 20 August 1980, two refugees from Vietnam, Nguyễn Ngọc Châu and Đỗ Anh Lân, died (Ginzel 1981; Strohmaier 1982).

The *Wehrsportgruppe Hoffmann* (WSGH) was founded in 1973 and was also connected with terrorist acts (Fromm, 1998). In 1976, one of their supporters, 19-year-old Bundeswehr corporal Dieter Epplen, planned a bomb attack on the US soldiers' station AFN in Munich, in which he seriously injured himself. Gundolf Köhler, who is blamed for the attack on the Munich Oktoberfest which killed 13 people on 26 September, 1980, also took part in paramilitary exercises of the WSGH. Another WSGH member, Uwe Behrendt, murdered the chairman of the Jewish Community, Shlomo Levin, and his partner, Frida Poeschke, in their house in Erlangen with a submachine gun on 19 December 1980. Since 1975, radicalised NPD supporters had also gathered in the *Volkssozialistische Bewegung Deutschlands/Partei der Arbeit* (VSBD/PdA), which was led by Friedhelm Busse (Chaussy 1984). Busse became a member of the BDJ in the early 1950s and was sentenced to prison in the early 1960s for the unauthorised possession of explosives. VSBD member Frank Schubert shot two Swiss border guards and then himself on 24 December 1980 in an attempt to smuggle weapons from Switzerland into the Federal Republic of Germany. VSBD activists were also members of the *Kommando Omega*, who left Busse's apartment in Munich-Neubiberg on 20 October 1981 in order to rob a bank; the neo-Nazis Nikolaus Uhl and Kurt Wolfgram who died after being shot by police during arrest (PDI 1981).

Finally, the *Hepp-Kexel Group*, whose members all came from groups which were already violent, was active during the early 1980s. Its undertakings included several bank robberies, the renting of conspiratorial apartments using false IDs and the creation of weapons depots in the Rhine-Main area. They went on to carry out bomb attacks on members of the US Armed Forces in several cities in Hesse in the fall of 1982. The explicitly formulated aim of these attacks, in which several US soldiers were injured, some seriously, was to force the withdrawal of the "occupying forces" through indiscriminate terror. Further activities, such as explosives on children's playgrounds in the housing estates of members of the US Army, were not carried out.

With the arrest and conviction of numerous right-wing terrorist perpetrators, this peak phase of right-wing terrorist violence came to an end in the first half of the 1980s. The targets of anti-communist terrorism included the political left or representatives and border installations of the GDR in particular, as well as institutions and actors reminiscent of the Shoah. The arson attacks, carried out by the *German Action Groups* around Manfred Roeder and the bombings of the *Kepp-Kexel-Group*, were intended to create fear and intimidate refugees and migrants. In addition, they aimed to bring about political decisions (withdrawal of the US forces; restrictive migration and asylum policy) which corresponded to the basic principles of an extremely right worldview - the establishment of unlimited sovereignty of the German nation state as well as the 'preservation of the German people' (Blumenau, 2020).

In the 1990s, there were also numerous examples of (preparatory work for) acts of violence in the neo-Nazi spectrum that went beyond street violence and suggested a planned and conspiratorial approach. In 1991, for example, activists prepared for the formation of a so-called *National Operational Command* (NEK) within the framework of the *Nationalist Front*, which was to carry out surprise, centrally conducted actions against the political left, state institutions and migrant groups. In 1993, leading activists of the neo-Nazi *Viking Youth* (WJ) planned to attack the Federal Border Guard and the police with explosives. Several bomb attacks in the late 1990s, such as the attack on the grave of Heinz Galinski, the long-time chairman of the "Central Council of Jews in Germany" on 19 December 1998 in Berlin, the attack on a building in which the exhibition *Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 bis 1944* was shown in Saarbrücken on 9 March 1999, and the bomb attack on the Jewish cemetery in Berlin-Charlottenburg on 16 March 2002 went unsolved by the police.

Between 30 January 2000 and 30 January 2001 - the respective anniversaries of Adolf Hitler's appointment as Reich Chancellor - a neo-Nazi group also carried out several terrorist attacks in the Potsdam area, including arson attacks on food trucks and a Jewish cemetery, under the name *National Movement* (NB). In addition, the Brandenburg Higher Regional Court considered the *Freikorps Havelland*, a group founded in July 2003, to be a terrorist organisation whose aim was to terrorise people it classified as 'foreigners' and to expel them firstly from the Havelland area and later from Germany altogether. Finally, a bomb attack on a Jewish cultural centre in Munich was planned, protesting against the laying of the foundation stone of the centre. Choosing the name *Schutztruppe*, the group primarily recruited from the ranks of the neo-Nazi *Kameradschaft Süd*.

While these examples clearly show that there is a tradition of right-wing terrorist violence through the decades, there was a significant increase in violence and terror from the far right since 1990. There are some factors on the macro- and on the meso-level that can be identified as having contributed to this development. Those are outlined briefly below:

▪ The destruction of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, characterised as 'prisons of nations' in right-wing ideology, and the unification of the two German states were valued by far-right forces in Germany as a global enforcement of the 'principle of peoples' according to which it is people and not nation-states which are the decisive protagonists in history. It has also been postulated that one people should have a single nation-state to live in. Regarding the European landscape, the German far right's vision was a split-up of many of the existing nation-states like France, Italy, and the UK into several independent nation-states. For the UK this would have meant Wales, Scotland, Ireland, and England as four nation-states with their own governments, budgets, etcetera. In the case of France, some regions such as Corsica, Brittany and other regions where movements for independence existed, should become new nation-states. Germany, on the contrary, would have enlarged its territory as 'Germans' and the regions they populated in the past – parts of Poland, Denmark, France – would have come home into the Reich. Such a development would have increased the overall power of Germany making it the leading power and regulatory force in Europe.

▪ The racist mass violence of the early 1990s and election successes in state elections gave the extreme right the feeling of acting as the 'true voice of the people'. Undermining the racist protests and to winning back voters from far right parties were amongst the reasons given by members of the national parliament for voting to curtail the right to asylum (which won a two-thirds majority). According to the principle of action-reaction, neo-Nazi protagonists rated this as a confirmation of their strategy of violent self-empowerment.

▪ In the early 1990s, an increasingly organised and violence-oriented neo-Nazi milieu emerged, which included a much larger number of participants than in the 1970s and 1980s. It was linked by a multitude of legal and non-legal actions, extensive travel, and the outreach to large parts of the youth,

especially in the former GDR territory, through music and lifestyle. In several small towns, neo-Nazi and racist networks dominated everyday life of young people who then often had to decide to join these structures (participating in power), to fight them (confronting power), or to move away to avoid violence targeted at them (evading power).

- Corresponding groups and violent milieus arose in all the Federal States; weapons and explosives were repeatedly confiscated during police raids, and throughout the Federal Republic of Germany these groups were investigated. Neo-Nazis who used armed violence, such as Kay Diesner, were the spectacular manifestations of a scene in which many saw themselves as 'political soldiers' in the final battle against 'the system' and against the manifold 'enemies of the German people'.

- On the basis of extremely right-wing ideology, numerous publications calling for 'self-defence' against the 'genocide officially planned (...) by the state leadership' provided the justification for racist violence; the concepts and fictional stories of 'leaderless resistance' spread through various channels provided suggestions and blueprints for appropriate action (see below).

- In various forms, the planning, preparation and exercise of violence was an everyday and structural component of neo-Nazi scenes and groups. The forms of violence ranged from situational violence against 'foreigners', leftists, state representatives and Jewish life, to planned attacks and assaults. The violent expressions of racism, antisemitism, and anti-Leftism were not sanctioned in many cases, which consequently encouraged the perpetrators to continue.

- In summary, the acts of violence expressed the enormous increase in self-confidence in far right circles, which was fostered even more in the early 1990s when former GDR police personnel, who formed the mass of police officers in the Eastern states of now unified Germany and in the new social system, needed some time to adapt to the new norms and rules and become trained to implement them while on duty. The self-confidence of neo-Nazis during this period extended to assaults on police forces, only a few of which lead to major criminal penalties.

2.2 Context in 1990s Thuringia

In post 1990 Germany, right-wing violence escalated in many places. While every state had its hotspots, the states in East Germany had a higher level of this kind of violence on average. The following paragraphs outline basic findings about the political context of the rise of right-wing violence, give an overview about relevant actors in the field of neo-Nazism, and briefly introduce the *Thüringer Heimatschutz* (THS) as the political structure from which the NSU emerged.

In March 1989, the East German Member of the Board of Action Reconciliation Service for Peace, Konrad Weiß, published a longer paper in the GDR Samizdat bulletin *Kontext* in which he, for the first time reaching a broader East German public, gave an overview on neo-Nazi groups in the GDR (Weiß 1989). His key findings were that the leadership of the state and the ruling party did not keep track of the dynamic radicalisation of right-wing young people during the 1980s. The officials denied the political dimension of violent attacks on punks, migrant workers and members of the alternative scene, and explained the emergence of groups of neo-Nazi skinheads as a kind of spill over from the FRG. The question of the social environment in which these groups emerged and flourished was not be systematically addressed, although some information had become available. Accordingly, young people with a far-right worldview had working-class as well as middle class backgrounds. The two tendencies – right-wing skinheads on the one hand and, more significantly, ideologised fascists on the other – agreed in their rejection of the socialist state, and even of democracy. For larger parts of the population, they embodied disciplined, proper, and hard-working citizens who were also interested in para-military training and soldierly values such as obedience, comradeship, and endurance.

A *Working Group to Combat Right-wing Extremist Crime and Vigilante Justice* set up by the Criminal Investigation Department in East Berlin in the late 1980s recorded more than 1,000 violent neo-Nazis by name and about 6,000 right-wing extremists who came together in loose structures until 1989 (Kinner and Richter, 2000: 273-293). In the 1980s, groups such as the *Lichtenberg Front* and the *Vandalen* in East Berlin, the *Wotansbrüder* in Halberstadt, the *SS-Division Walter Krüger* in Wolgast and the *Weimar Front* in Thuringia already existed.

As already highlighted, the so-called asylum debate in the early 1990s became particularly important for the further development of the extreme right in the Federal Republic of Germany. Since 1986, the Christian Democratic Parties had been using the issue of asylum to win votes in election campaigns; in the 1990 elections to the German Bundestag, they promoted scenarios such as up to 50 million asylum seekers might be coming to Germany from the African continent. In September 1991, the then CDU General Secretary Volker Rühe advocated a broad-based campaign for far-reaching restrictions of the right to claim asylum, portraying asylum seekers as swindlers and emphasising the costs of taking care of them. With the numbers of asylum seekers rising, Chancellor Kohl at one time spoke of the danger of a state collapse (Cremer 2013)

In Thuringia, too, violent attacks on refugees and former contract workers occurred in rapid succession in the early 1990s (Fromm 1993). The violent milieus, particularly in the form of a right-wing skinhead youth culture, which had already been a feature during the GDR period, became increasingly and systematically politicised in the early 1990s. Numerous nationalist and neo-Nazi right-wing rock music groups emerged, several of them in Thuringia (Dornbusch/Raabe 2006). Concerts, barbecues and pub visits contributed to networking and the emergence of a sense of community; collective ritualised violence played a central role in creating group solidarity and in asserting right-wing dominance in youth clubs, restaurants and public places. Faced with the choice of participating in this hegemonic power or becoming victims of this violence, many young people chose to enter right-wing cliques and structures. In view of the widespread racist and ethnic attitudes among the population, the extreme right-wing youth scenes often appeared to be less shocking.

After the opening of the border, all extreme right organisations active in the FRG intensified their efforts to win members and build up structures in the eastern German states (Groffmann 2001). In Thuringia, for example, the following groups played an important role: the *Aktion freies Deutschland* of Wolfgang Juchem, who were repeatedly invited to lecture events in the Gotha district in the early 1990s; the DVU founded its regional association in Thuringia on 15 June 1991. The *Freiheitliche Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (FAP), in which many neo-Nazi cadres of banned neo-Nazi groups gathered, had groups and activists in Erfurt and Gera. The *Nationale Aktivistenbund Thüringen* functioned as a regional branch of the neo-Nazi *Gesinnungsgemeinschaft der Neuen Front* (GdNF). The *National Offensive* was able to gain a foothold in Thuringia, especially in Weimar, where the neo-Nazi group managed to take part in the *Round Table against Violence* for a time in 1991. The neo-Nazi *German Alternative*, founded in 1989, whose leading personnel had been provided by East German neo-Nazis since September 1991, appeared in the Thuringian cities of Weimar, Eisenach, Gera, Jena, Nordhausen and Suhl before being banned by the Federal Minister of the Interior on 10 December 1992 (König and Quent 2012).

After the foundation of its Thuringian state association, the NPD held big meetings on 3 October 1991 and 1992 with 600 (Gera) and 1,000 (Arnstadt) people respectively. At the beginning of 1992, its regional chairman, Thomas Dienel, left the NPD and founded the *German National Party* (DNP) on 19 April 1992. The DNP had an openly NSDAP-oriented program and subsequently carried out anti-Semitic actions and military sports exercises at the military training area in Drosselberg near Erfurt. Dienel was involved in important neo-Nazi demonstrations in Saxony and Thuringia as organiser. Referring to the racist pogrom of Rostock, he called for the killing of more foreigners. After his conviction for sedition, insulting and

disparaging the memory of the deceased in December 1992, the DNP quickly disintegrated (Mecklenburg, 1996: 230-231).

The membership of the Thuringian regional association of the NPD did not exceed sixty people until the mid-1990s. However, after Udo Voigt took over the leadership of the party at the federal level in March 1996 and opened up the party to neo-Nazis, this number increased to over 250 members by the end of the decade. Parallel to the NPD, the *Anti-Antifa Ostthüringen* in particular, made a noticeable appearance from 1994. This party's name referred to activities that had rapidly gained importance in neo-Nazi organisations since 1989 and were systematically propagated in 1992 by the Hamburg neo-Nazi Christian Worch in the *Index*, the newsletter of the *National List*. Under the keyword *'Anti-Antifa'* the neo-Nazis gathered information (name, private address, car, occupation, etc.) at a nationwide level about individuals who they considered to be political opponents. This included supporters of the political left as well as public prosecutors and police officers. In 1993, the nationwide publication *Der Einblick* (Insight) hit the headlines. Its content consisted mainly of about 200 names, addresses and telephone numbers collected in the form of black lists. The *Anti-Antifa Ostthüringen* was one of the numerous neo-Nazi groups of that time that took part in corresponding activities (Antifaschistisches Autorenkollektiv 1996: 60-79). What later became the NSU, centred around Uwe Böhnhardt, Beate Zschäpe and Uwe Mundlos and had its personal and political roots in the *Anti-Antifa Ostthüringen*, which also acted under the name of *Kameradschaft Thüringen*.

3. Field Research

In order to investigate and research the case of the radicalisation Thuringian neo-Nazi milieu towards right-wing terrorism in the 1990s, the main research methods have been literature review, archival research, and internet research. The material collected was organised along particular criteria derived from the overall DARE project and then analysed through a thematic content analysis.

The literature review was focused on the existing publications and research reports on the development of the far right in post-war German context (e.g., Dudek and Jascke, 1984; Virchow, 2010; Botsch, 2012) and on the situation in Thuringia in particular (Fromm, 1993, Dornbusch and Raabe, 2006), on basic literature on right-wing violence (e.g., Wagner, 2014; Dierbach, 2016), and on right-wing terrorism (e.g. Quent, 2016; Koehler, 2017; Virchow, 2020). Of special importance have been several reports produced by the parliamentary investigation committees of the national parliament (Deutscher Bundestag, 2013; 2017) and the state parliaments (see for an early overview Virchow, 2014). In addition, archival research included visiting archives in Berlin, Erfurt, and Munich to find further primary sources for the early 1990s in particular. This included material published by groups and individuals belonging to the far right at that time, but also media reports (analogue and digital) about the issues covered in this report.

Based on 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; Ishiyama and 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; those had been a) ideological profile, b) affinity for violence, c) inspirations and calls, d) societal context, and e) reactions by others.

The first step was to look for, collect and then to systematically sort the literature relevant for this case. As right-wing violence, even far right terrorism, is not a recent and singular phenomenon in Germany, it was therefore necessary to look for trajectories of right-wing violence and far right terrorism in historical perspective (e.g., Rabert, 1995; Manthe, 2020; Schedler, 2020); but also for a broader understanding of

the dynamics of the far right in Germany in general (e.g., Benz and Benz, 2002; Frindte et al., 2016; Gomolla et al., 2018).

Archival and internet research was conducted in order to find primary sources which gave an insight into how the far right discussed the issue of political violence, and documents which might offer information about the factual relationship of particular strands of the far right regarding hate speech (stirring up violence) and hate crime. Archival research made particular use of the holdings of the *a.i.d.a* archive in Munich and the *apabiz* archive in Berlin. Both archives hold large numbers of papers, newsletters, leaflets, stickers, booklets, and books produced by far right individuals, groupuscules (Virchow 2004), and organisations/parties. One important example is the *Zentralorgan* a quarterly magazine published by German neo-Nazis until 2002. In addition, primary sources included papers in which neo-Nazi groups outlined systematic concepts of terrorist violence, including issues of tactics, armament and propaganda.

In addition, archival and internet research was also extended to official documents and to newspaper clippings dealing with particular events related to right-wing violence and right-wing terrorism. These documents contained information on issues, events and developments which triggered right-wing violence and also about state reactions to right-wing violence.

Of particular value were the reports published by the parliamentary investigation committees in the Bundestag but also by numerous state parliaments, which took up their work after the unmasking of the NSU in November 2011. Two committees in successive parliamentary terms had been installed by the national parliament and by state parliaments in Thuringia, Saxonia, and Baden Wurttemberg. In the states of Brandenburg, Bavaria, Hesse, Mecklenburg Pomerania and North Rhine-Westphalia committees worked for one parliamentary period. These bodies not only scrutinised the investigative work of the police and public prosecutors; they also examined the involvement and mistakes of the secret services, and produced a large amount of information on far right structures and activities in the early 1990s based on extensive consultations with experts. Reports of the investigation committees, which had access to restricted and classified documents too, are available through the electronic data management system of the parliaments.

The collected primary sources and the available literature were quite informative. Therefore, the decision was taken that further methods, e.g. interviews with journalists, academics, social workers, and police officers were not necessary, not least because many of them had already testified to the parliamentary investigation committees.

4. Key Findings

On the morning of January 26, 1998, the police searched three garages in Jena where Uwe Böhnhardt was suspected of having manufactured bomb dummies. As nothing was found in the first two garages, he was allowed to leave the place in his car. Four functioning pipe bombs without detonators and 1.4 kg of TNT were later found in a third garage, rented by Beate Zschäpe. By this time however, both had met with Uwe Mundlos and gone into hiding, evaded arrest. After detecting the explosives, the public prosecutor's office ordered the trio's preliminary arrest in the morning, had the apartments of the three searched in the afternoon and went on to search other locations without finding them. The trio stayed in hiding together for more than twelve years and committed ten murders, three explosive attacks and 15 robberies during this time. As the police, and consequently the media, referred to the murders as some kind of criminal activity related to drugs, smuggling, or the gambling mafia hardly anyone – except family members of the killed – thought of the offenders as racists or even organised neo-Nazis.

On 4th November 2011, following a bank robbery, police officers detected a mobile home they assessed as suspicious. When they approached the vehicle, it was set on fire and shots were fired. The policy eventually found Uwe Mundlos and Uwe Böhnhardt in the burnt-out mobile home, having both committed suicide. Beate Zschäpe setting fire to the Zwickau apartment and the distribution of videos created by her, drew attention to the existence of a neo-Nazi terror group, the ideological profile of the group and their relationship with violence and how they were supported by the radical milieu they came from (Aust and Laabs 2014).

4.1 Ideological Profile

To identify the ideological profile of the group and its members, three approaches of analysis were followed:

a) to reconstruct their activities until January 1998 in order to find out which political issues had been seen as relevant and how those issue were examined;

b) to look at written statements or artefacts produced by the group or its members;

c) to analyse the video that was been distributed by Beate Zschäpe after the detection of the group in November 2011.

a) Uwe Mundlos (born 1973), Beate Zschäpe (born 1975), and Uwe Böhnhardt (born 1977) knew each other from the youth club *Winzerclub* in Jena-Winzerla where they regularly met regularly from the early 1990s. When they were not longer welcomed there due to radicalising their statements, they painted swastikas at the walls of the building. Following the idea of the 'nationally-liberated zone,' which had been propagated by the students' organisation of the NPD since summer 1991, Mundlos and Böhnhardt walked through the district in imitation SS uniforms. Zschäpe had been in conflict with the law since 1991 because of minor thefts and Mundlos and Böhnhardt because of assault and stealing cars respectively, their actions turned more political from 1994 onwards. The police were investigating all of them with a view to prosecution when Mundlos took part in a meeting in Bavaria where hate music was played and for producing promotional material of unconstitutional organisations. In summer 1995, Zschäpe and Mundlos attended a KKK-like cross burning in a forest area near Jena. Sometimes together, or in pairs or individually, they travelled across the country to take part in neo-Nazi rallies (e.g. in 1996 in Worms honouring Rudolf Hess) and right-wing music events and meetings. In February 1995, Zschäpe also wanted to hold a rally under the title 'For the preservation of Thuringian identity, against internationalisation by the EC'. Some weeks later, Mundlos and Böhnhardt joined another neo-Nazi in putting up posters reading '8 May 1945 – 8 May 1995. We do not celebrate. Enough with the lie of liberation' (Deutscher Bundestag 2013: 75-81). On 10 September 1995, Böhnhardt openly wore a belt buckle with the inscription 'Blut und Ehre' (Blood and Honour) and an incised swastika. He joined Zschäpe and others throwing flyers on wreaths with the inscription 'Germans, learn to walk upright again. Better to die than to live on your knees. Stop the Holocaust or German will you pay forever?' In addition, Zschäpe threw raw eggs at the memorial site at the place of the victims of fascism in Rudolstadt. On 1st November 1996, Böhnhardt and Mundlos as well as seven other individuals visited the Buchenwald Memorial with Böhnhardt and Mundlos appearing in 'SA uniform'.

In summary, the trio took part in actions typical of the neo-Nazi scene and movement of those days. Their actions reflect their racist and anti-Semitic attitudes, their hostility towards remembering the victims of the Holocaust, their admiration for leading Nazi personnel like Adolf Hitler and Rudolf Hess, as well as their framing of current political developments in terms of the threat posed by globalisation to white identity. Nevertheless, when asked by the secret service of the German Federal Armed Forces on his

political attitudes in March 1995, Mundlos claimed to be just a fun-seeking 'Oi-Skin' not being affiliated to any party or group (Deutscher Bundestag 2013: 85).

b) There are no known systematic statements or longer papers produced by (members of) the group before they went into hiding in late January 1998. Yet, the magazine *White Supremacy* published by the Saxonian Section of *Blood & Honour* early 1998 ran an article which journalists attributed to Uwe Mundlos. The following is a quote from that article:

> But everyone should be aware that concerts alone will not win the battle. Concerts are and will remain a pure leisure activity and have only so much to do with the battle that they are the strengthening us for the further way […] So always remember: Whoever is not ready to participate actively in the struggle and the movement, passively supports everything that is directed against our people and our country and our movement!!! (Deutscher Bundestag 2013: 161-162).

When the police raided the garages in January 1998, they found neo-Nazi fanzines and a disc with racist statements such as 'Turkish pig that dies today – what bad luck' and 'Alidrecksau, we hate you'. During the search of the apartment of Beate Zschäpe on 26 January 1998, a copy of a game called *Pogromly* was found (Thüringer Lamdtag 2014: 1866). It took the very popular game *Monopoly* as a starting point and turned it into a Jew-deriding variant in which the 'players' put themselves in the roles of Stormtroopers and SS-men who had the task to make as many cities 'free of Jews' as possible. Instead of stations, the 'player' can buy the concentration camps Auschwitz, Buchenwald, Dachau and Ravensbrück. The 'game' was later produced to financially support the trio in hiding, though how many copies were produced is unknown.

c) There was no direct confession to the racist killings and bomb attacks until November 2011 when DVDs were distributed in which the NSU claimed responsibility for killing nine people who had migrated to Germany and a female police officer. A police investigation discovered the group had started to produce video recordings from photographs taken at the scene of the crimes and relevant excerpts from newspapers and television programmes from 2001 onwards. Over time, these electronic recordings had been revised again and again (Landtag von Baden-Württemberg 2016: 206-222). In the final version of the DVD, which dates from May 2006, the attacks are incorporated and depicted in cartoons of the comic series 'Pink Panther'. At least 15 copies of this DVD were sent by Beate Zschäpe to political, religious and cultural institutions as well as to the media for propaganda and self-incrimination purposes in the sense of the 'NSU' between 4 and 8 November 2011. The DVD did not make any explicit and specific political requests; it used the character of 'Pink Panther' to present a line-up of the attacks and killings by the group. The video made extensive use of the newspaper clippings and TV footage of these terrorist acts, and also included photos of the victims taken by the killers themselves. The content of the video testifies to the contempt of the right-wing terrorists: the victims have been murdered, then mocked and the offences are celebrated on the video. The 15 minute presentation is framed by a starting sequence which shows a blackboard with the inscription 'The National Socialist Underground is a network of comrades with the principle *deeds not words'* and a final message at the end of the film: 'Today is not every day, I'll be back, no question about it'. Also including sequences about the media coverage and the failure of police investigations, the video demonstrates the belief of the extreme right perpetrators to be superior and unbeatable.

Bringing the different spheres together, it is obvious that the group and its members followed an ideology in which racism, antisemitism, nationalism and the glorification of the Nazi leadership were key. Their political conviction was also reflected in their activities in many ways – the non-violent like taking part in

public rallies, the ones in which they threatened to use violence, and finally those which involved the targeted killing of human beings.

4.2 Affinity for violence and guns

Both an affinity for violence and an obsession with guns is widespread amongst neo-Nazis. Acquiring guns, undergoing training in operating them, and then putting the use of weapons into the political context and strategy is fundamental for a particular strand of extreme right-wing protagonists.

From early on the Mundlos, Zschäpe and Böhnhardt, but also other neo-Nazis around them had a record of threatening and committing acts of violence. In June 1991, Mundlos hit another man, probably to take his money. From July 1992, Böhnhardt began to demand payments, under threat of violence, from a 16-year-old youth. Just one day after the main hearing at the District Court in Gera, Böhnhardt punched the victim in the stomach with his fist and kicked him so hard in the eye area with his steel-capped shoes that the victim suffered concussion and had to be hospitalised for five days. While in pre-trial custody in spring 1993 due to stealing cars and other items, Böhnhardt, who shared his prison cell with an older member of the THS[1], took part in the mistreatment of a fellow prisoner and also damaged inventory by explosives made from fireworks (Deutscher Bundestag, 2013: 77). In September 1995, police raided Böhnhardt's apartment and found a barrel of a 4.5 mm calibre air gun to which a laser device had been fixed. In mid-April 1996, Böhnhardt hung up a puppet torso at a bridge; the puppet torso was equipped with a yellow Jewish star and an explosive and incendiary device. On 9th November that same year the police found balaclava, hand axe, baton, fist knife, gas pistol, air pistol, and two magazines with 15 gas cartridges in Böhnhardt's car. Only five months later, police noticed that Böhnhardt carried an air rifle with a telescopic sight in his car, for which he had no permit. In letters written by Böhnhardt, he admired the many weapons circulating amongst neo-Nazis in Baden Wurttemberg (Deutscher Bundestag, 2013: 848). In January 1997, several letter bomb dummies arrived at public institutions in Jena. On 2nd September 1997, a bomb containing a few grams of TNT, but without an ignition device, was found in another suitcase painted with a swastika in front of the theatre in Jena. Several THS members were investigated and Zschäpe, Böhnhardt and Mundlos were questioned as part of this investigation.

In the mid-1990s, security forces noticed a trend of an increasing level of arming in right-wing extremist circles. An unknown number of neo-Nazis had taken part in the civil wars in former Yugoslavia and either had access to weapons directly or made contacts through which they were able to get hold of weapons. The withdrawal of the Soviet armed forces from the territory of the former GDR also had provided numerous opportunities to buy weapons. While the annual reports of the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution referred to the many 'weapon fetishists' to be found among the neo-Nazis – and had even mentioned the Jena trio – it was noted that no concrete attacks were intended (Bundesministerium des Innern, 1999: 25).

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[1] The *Thüringer Heimatschutz* (THS) was an association of neo-Nazi groups in the state of Thuringia, active since the end of 1996. The THS initially defined itself as a structure of so-called National Socialists from East Thuringia; its forerunner was the Anti-Antifa Ostthüringen, which first appeared in public in 1994. During the 1990s, up to 40 informants of the intelligence services are said to have been among its 140 members, some for weeks, some for years. Between 1999 and 2001, according to estimates of the Thuringian Office for the Protection of the Constitution, the organisation comprised a circle of 120 to 170 persons. The THS was a platform linking the militant neo-Nazi scene with the NPD and the JN (Youth organisation of the NPD). Close personal ties existed with the NPD Thuringia. At times, four of the eleven NPD district chairmen were from the THS. The logistic centre of the THS in 1997/98 was a rented restaurant in Heilsberg near Saalfeld, where police discovered the largest arsenal of weapons uncovered in the state of Thuringia up to that point of time.

During the period of hiding, the NSU had accumulated a large number of weapons. When the police searched the burnt-out mobile home and the apartment set on fire by Beate Zschäpe, they found 20 handguns. Among them, were those used to kill a female police officer on 25th April 2007 and to shoot nine men out of racist motivation between 9th September 2000 and 6th of April 2006 (Deutscher Bundestag, 2017: 144-146; 231-257).

Finally, the visual staging and textual design of the NSU's confessor video expresses contempt for the victims and the propagation of racist violence. The video begins with the line 'deeds not words' and is aimed at supporters of the extreme right. It mocks the investigative work of the police and makes use of the media coverage, which for many years repeated the police's claim linking the death of the victims with their alleged involvement in criminal activities. The fact that the NSU did not claim responsibility for the killings in the 2000s followed the programmatic concept of right-wing terrorism offered in manuals.

4.3 Inspirations and calls

The huge number of racist attacks in the early 1990s did not need much planning and preparation. Right-wing terrorism, in the sense that it is described above, involved more conceptual and strategic approaches. In the German context, this kind of political violence had several important references. An early one had been an 80-page brochure written by Arthur Ehrhardt, who had started to publish on partisan warfare in the mid-1930s and later took part in anti-Partisan warfare as a Waffen-SS officer. The booklet had the title 'Werewolf - Notes for hunting units' and was reprinted in 1970 as a special issue of the extreme right monthly *Nation Europa*, founded and edited by Ehrhardt. In the early 1990s Karl-Heinz Dissberger, who had been running for the NPD and on whose property guns, ammunition and hand grenades filled with TNT explosives were found during a search in 1980, published it again in his *Barett-Verlag*. The neo-Nazi group *White Aryan Resistance* published excerpts in its journal *NS-Denkzettel* in 1992, and the NPD sold it via its distribution unit (Virchow, 2020: 25-26).

The neo-Nazi scene also circulated instructions from US special units on subversive fighting and a manual for sabotage and command actions published by the Swiss NCO Association. In addition to such writings, which focused on technical and organisational aspects, fictional and programmatic writings played a central role in the discussion and realisation of extreme right-wing terrorism. The narration was very simple, but widely agreed on: according to it, the predominance of the 'white race' was threatened by migration movements and 'racial mixing'. This made immediate and decisive action necessary, even if this was currently supported by only a small minority. Every means was justified to ward off the danger.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, a two-volume document written by the neo-Nazis Henry Fiebig and Christian Scholz and distributed under the name *Hans Westmar* (after the NS propaganda film of the same name from 1933) with the title *Eine Bewegung in Waffen* (A Movement in Arms) was distributed. It was also reprinted in numerous episodes in the *NS-Kampfruf*, the illegal newspaper published by the *NSDAP/AO* and smuggled into Germany for many years. The first volume, entitled *Mass Psychology, Propaganda and Revolution*, focuses in particular on how to influence large population groups and on the use of newspapers, as well as with the principles of the intended 'National Socialist Revolution'. Aspiring to completely eliminate democratic structures, it called upon all 'NS fighters' to 'ruthlessly and brutally destroy everything that stands in the way'. The second volume outlines the relationship between legal and illegal struggle, assigning legal political activity the task of recruiting and training new activists and organising rebellious people. Regarding the struggle against the political system, longer passages describe the tasks of small-scale warfare (including 'extermination of the collaborators etc.') and how its phases (preparation phase; covert struggle; open struggle) relate to legal activities. Particular emphasis was placed upon the propaganda task of passing the terrorist acts off as self-defence measures. Sabotage,

destruction, 'expropriation' – de facto meaning bank robbery and theft of weapons and explosives but also hostage-taking and assassination are counted among the means of war - partly in explicit reference to the above mentioned 'Werewolf - Notes for hunting units' publication. Finally, a text also published in 1992 under the title 'A Movement in Weapons', contains numerous instructions on the construction of incendiary and explosive bombs as well as on detonation and blasting techniques (Virchow, 2020: 26-27).

From 1992 onwards, the 'White Resistance Manual' by Louis Beam was circulated, first in the USA, but soon after in Europe. He took up an approach that was developed in the 1950s: to destabilise the Soviet zone of influence. No centrally controlled and thus easily attackable networks of agents were to be used, but cells operating independently of one another without hierarchical leadership. This idea of 'leaderless resistance' had two variants. One possibility was the lone actor, the other was based around small, independently operating cells of a few people who have known each other for many years and therefore trust each other. Most of the pages of the 'White Resistance Manual' are filled with technical instructions for the construction and use of a wide range of weapons and explosives; however, four central objectives are also presented to guide the use of this weapon. These include escalating existing tensions between members of different 'races' to a situation of open conflict between whites and non-whites, destroying Jewish influence around the world, destroying the legitimacy of the current government and offering a legitimate alternative, and finally, punishing those whites who have behaved as traitors to 'their race' (Berger, 2019).

These calls for violence were also located in the type of fiction circulating within the milieu. In 1978, a novel had been published in the USA, in which the author - the US-American Neo-Nazi William Pierce - provided important inspiration for terrorism from the right. Distributed under the pseudonym of Andrew Macdonald, 'The Turner Diaries' argued for the inevitability of a 'race war'. A German translation had been in circulation since the mid-1990s. In the form of a historical retrospective from the year 2099, the diary entries are from the perspective of racist activist, Earl Turner, who forms an underground group called 'The Organization', which carries out acts of sabotage and bomb attacks. It is considered certain that the attack on an FBI building described in the 'Turner Diaries' served as inspiration for the attack on the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma which was carried out on 19th April 1995 by Timothy McVeigh, with the support of Terry Nichols and Michael Fortier. In England, the neo-Nazi David Copeland admitted that the novel inspired him to carry out his nail-bomb attacks on homosexuals, Afro-Caribbean and Bengali communities in London in April 1999. In numerous neo-Nazi publications, the 'Turner Tagebücher' were referred to in a consensual manner; after the NSU was discovered, the writing was also found in house searches of Ralf Wohlleben and André Eminger, who were later convicted for supporting of NSU. In the criminal proceedings for the NSU crimes Wohlleben was convicted by the Bavarian Higher Regional Court to ten years for aiding murder in nine cases; Eminger got thirty months for supporting a terrorist organisation.

Another novel, entitled 'Hunter', was published by William Pierce in the late 1980s. In this novel, the character Oscar Yeager - engineer, Vietnam veteran and working for the US Department of Defence - is portrayed as a cold-blooded and professional killer who murders intercultural couples in order to fight what he considers to be a reprehensible 'racial mixture'. As a serial killer, Yeager acts alone, but at times he acts as the leader of a cell of organised racists or cooperates with the FBI. This novel, too, has been well known in the neo-Nazi scene in Germany, although much less so than the 'Turner Diaries'. 'Thiazi', for many years the most important German-language neo-Nazi Internet forum, ran an advertising

campaign to finance its translation. The serial killer Franklin[2] was portrayed in a neo-Nazi publication, his name was listed on the prisoners' list of a neo-Nazi organisation supporting imprisoned neo-Nazis. Zschäpe, Böhnhardt and Mundlos participated in strategy discussions in the context of this group and supported imprisoned neo-Nazis through visits and letters. Mundlos, at least, was a member of the group (Deutscher Bundestag, 2013: 845, 933).

Finally, of particular importance for understanding racist and anti-Semitic terrorism in the Federal Republic of Germany since the 1990s, are the writings produced in connection with the group *Blood & Honour*. The author of the two writings – 'The Way Forward' and the 'Field Manual' – was the Norwegian neo-Nazi Erik Blücher. Arguing that the downfall of 'white Europeans' was taking place, with 'the Jews' in the background orchestrating this, Blücher advocates the use of political violence to strict usefulness criteria and planning them carefully. Whether the concept of 'leaderless resistance' makes sense must be decided from country to country, according to the respective conditions. According to Blücher, this way of organising and fighting is an absolute necessity in Germany due to the strong state repression. His ideas had been widely discussed in German neo-Nazi circles.

In summary, these fictional, programmatic and technical writings contributed to right-wing terrorist action in several ways:

- They present a worldview, according to which a process of immigration and 'racial mixing' destructive to the 'white race' and 'European peoples' is taking place and a 'racial war' is inevitable or already under way. This is mainly blamed on 'the system', whose representatives are often regarded as Jewish controlled (ZOG = 'Zionist occupied government').
- The description of the current social and political situation culminates in the assertion of an imminent social catastrophe that demands immediate action. This action is organised by an avant-garde understanding of the seriousness of the situation and not shying away from possible negative repercussions for its members (death, imprisonment, social ostracism).
- Authors justify violent action either as a 'natural reaction' against immigration or as a necessity due to the nature and urgency of the problem.
- Terrorist acts of violence are presented as liberating the individual who is exercising the violence by allowing them to take a kind of control over the situation.
- In the texts, strategies of organising such as lone actor and leaderless resistance but also more detailed issues such as using bicycles to escape from the crime scene, not to disseminate letters of confession, particular methods of killing can be found, several of them can be found again at the NSU.
- The writings contain extensive information on the procurement, construction and use of a wide range of weapons and explosives.

4.4 Social context

Between 1994 and 1998 the number of right-wing extremists in Thuringia doubled to 1,200 persons, about half of them organised in political parties, the others in more *groupuscules* structures (Griffin 2003). Beate Zschäpe, Uwe Böhnhardt, and Uwe Mundlos belonged to the *Kameradschaft Jena* of the THS as did Andre Kapke, Ralf Wohlleben and Holger Gerlach. Membership of the THS was 120 in 1998 and around 160 two years later.

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[2] Joseph Paul Franklin, originally born as James Clayton Vaughn Jr. at 13th April 1950, was a U.S. white supremacist who was executed by lethal injection on 20th November 2013. In a murder spree spanning the late 1970s and the early 1980s he killed several people for racist reasons and also firebombed a synagogue.

During the 1990s, an important place for young people to meet in Jena was a youth club in the city district Winzerla. When it opened on 14 September 1991, 18-year-old Uwe Mundlos joined. Mundlos grew up in Jena, his mother was a saleswoman, his father worked as a mathematician and later as a professor in computer sciences at one of the local universities. Mundlos, who attended a Polytechnic High School, had good school grades, particularly in the natural sciences. Mundlos left school after the tenth grade, but later tried to catch up on his Abitur. He had been a right-wing extremist skinhead from 1988 onwards. In the youth club he met those who later became members and supporters of the NSU, in particular Beate Zschäpe and Uwe Böhnhardt, but also Ralf Wohlleben and Holger Gerlach (Aust and Laabs, 2014: 50-56)

Zschäpe never knew her father personally; her mother studied dentistry at the Medical and Pharmaceutical University in Bucharest, but later worked as an accountant at the Kombinat VEB Carl Zeiss near Jena; in 1991, after the transformation, when the GDR had been dissolved, she lost her job. Zschäpe had a modest upbringing and was often in the care of her grandmother, whom she declared to have been the most important person in her life. By the time she was 15 years old she had moved six times in the city of Jena and the surrounding area. After leaving the regular school in the Jena district of Winzerla, she began working as a painter's assistant, but later she switched to an apprenticeship as a gardener, from 1992 to 1996, specialising in vegetable gardening. She belonged to the left-wing punk-scene until 1990 and she later started a relationship with Mundlos, they often met up at the Winzerla youth club.[3]

In 1994, Uwe Böhnhardt joined them at the club. He was the son of a teacher and an engineer and grew up in a prefabricated housing estate in Jena-Lobeda. According to his parents, he was severely traumatised as an 11-year-old boy, when his older brother died following a fall while climbing a castle ruin. After the unification of the two German states, Böhnhardt became a right-wing extremist skinhead and was close to the NPD. He had to repeat the seventh grade and was taught in a special education school for the school year 1992/1993. There he was caught stealing computers and expelled from school, which he left without a degree. After attending the Winzerla youth club, he met the NPD activist Ralf Wohlleben, and also Mundlos and Zschäpe. Böhnhardt and Mundlos were banned from the youth club after making radical right-wing statements.

The unification of the two German states resulted in the adoption of the FRG's economic and political system and its rationale of action. In summer 1990, the Treuhandanstalt led the process of restructuring the economy. Companies were restructured, privatised or closed down either in part or in whole. The post-1990 situation in the former GDR in general, but in large parts of Thuringia in particular, was such that industrial production fell about two-fifths in 1990 and fell even further in 1991 after the introduction of the Deutsche Mark. For many people, the restructuring process meant, first, temporary contracts, job creation measures, training and retraining measures, retirement pension or early retirement pension, or unemployment. The result of this was that millions of people became unemployed across the former GDR, their professional biographies and experience devalued, often even discriminated against as second-class citizens. In Thuringia, the unemployment rate quickly rose to more than 16 percent, remaining this high until 2005 (Thüringer Landesamt für Statistik, 2013: 35). This experience had a long-standing impact on people affected by these developments. Even by 2004, almost 60 percent of Thuringians complained of the devaluing treatment by West Germans. Regarding the issue of socioeconomic status and justice, 38

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[3] In the early 1990s, the concept of 'appreciative youth work' gained ground in social work in Germany. The approach centred on working with young people holding right-wing attitudes by focussing on addressing their personal problems, rather the issues they may cause. Therefore, social workers focussed addressing on poor socialisation conditions, lack of professional qualifications, unemployment and frustrations rather than their political beliefs. In order to continue contact, some youth workers tolerated the young racists and Neo-Nazis listening to white power music and taking temporary control over youth clubs (Scherr 1992, Krafeld 1993). In such cases, the places became a kind of 'free spaces' (Polletta 1999) which enabled neo-Nazis to recruit followers.

percent of the Thuringians argued that they were deprived (Edinger et al. 2005), despite the average income having doubled since 1990. In the early 1990s, the high-level of unemployment had often been discussed as a temporary phenomenon which was part of the process to the flourishing landscapes Chancellor Helmut Kohl had promised.

In GDR times, Jena's district of Winzerla had grown significantly due to the growth of VEB Carl Zeiss Jena.[4] Therefore, in the 1970s and 1980s some 5,500 new apartments were built. People moved into prefabricated concrete slab buildings from the inner cities and old towns. The new apartment blocks attracted young middle class families, academics, and managers alike. Possibly, in the post-reunification period, in which a great number of adults had to reorganise themselves professionally, politically and in everyday life in such a district, for some, far right milieus will have offered some orientation. Furthermore, the structures and organisations of the GDR which had given a feeling of belonging and security, had now ceased to exist and new structures had either not yet been built or accepted as a substitute for the GDR.

While the Soviet Red Army was still stationed in the centre of Jena, their loss of power became publicly visible, for example, when Soviet officers offered vodka and cigarettes for sale. Violent attacks against the Soviet Army such as throwing stones went unsanctioned, as did attacks against Vietnamese street traders who tried to make their living by selling cigarettes after employment contracts from the time of the German-Vietnamese cooperation were terminated. Even attacks on the police were not consistently pursued. The majority of police officers in the new united Germany had previously been police officers in the GDR, but having transferred into the new system, were not always sure what powers they now had. Interestingly, it was not until 1992 that 148 judges and public prosecutors were appointed in Thuringia and even this was on a probationary basis. Due to the growing use of violence on the streets and a power vacuum caused by background checks and other changes, a very limited number of judges had to manage a growing number of cases. Discourse around acts of racist violence was usually downplayed, attributed to too much alcohol and the interpretation that the young men did not really have coherent right-wing worldviews. It was not until the deadly arson attacks on Turkish families in the cities of Moelln and Solingen on 23 November 1992 and 29 May 1993 respectively, in which a total of eight people were killed, that public prosecutors charged the nightly fire attacks on apartment buildings as (attempted) murder.

Once, the structures of the security apparatus had been established, some procedures even supported the capacity of the Thuringian extreme right to act. For example, this is significant regarding the selection of unqualified personnel for the Thuringian Institution for the Protection of the Constitution (Renner and Wellsow, 2012), but even more so regarding the huge amount of money transferred to neo-Nazis when paid for their work as secret service informants. While there is a long tradition of using such sources in right-wing milieus ready to use violence (Virchow 2020: 67-76), the case of Tino Brandt is particularly striking in the Thuringian context. Brandt (born 1975) grew up in Rudolstadt, another hotspot of THS activities in Thuringia (König, 2012). In 1992, he started to organise neo-Nazi rallies; in 1994 he was recruited as an informant and became the leader of the neo-Nazi movement in Thuringia, this included the THS and later the NPD, whose leadership he was promoted to in 1999. It was only in 2001 that a regional newspaper uncovered his status as an informant. By this time, the regional secret service had paid Brandt some 200,000 Deutsche Mark (Thüringer Landtag, 2014: 512-562, 1392-1400).

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[4] VEB = Volkseigener Betrieb (= Publicly Owned Enterprise). The Publicly Owned Enterprise was the main legal form of industrial enterprise in the GDR.

5. Conclusions

The emergence of a terrorist group – the NSU – from a radical neo-Nazi milieu in Thuringia rests on several factors outlined in this report. During in the 1980s, a milieu of right-wing extremism had already developed in the former GDR, with its proponents fiercely anti-communist, nationalist and racist. In the societal situation, after the unification of the two German states in which a new normative system and the related institutions had to be anchored while still being built up, neo-Nazism – in its organisational forms, but also as a youth culture – gained ground and become dominant in some places. This was accompanied by a corresponding self-confidence, within the radical milieu when the rising number of asylum seekers, and a political climate predominantly hostile towards them, gave racist and extreme right protagonists many opportunities to act out their racist hate.

Pogrom-like actions of violence which took place in Hoyerswerda and Rostock in 1991 and 1992, in which racist violence had been applauded by a large number of bystanders and which was barely sanctioned by the state, continue to be remembered today as a success in neo-Nazi circles. Fighting for a racially pure Germany is a key part of neo-Nazi ideology. Access to weapons, but also narratives and manuals about how to systematically use violence for political purposes has triggered terrorist activity. It is evident that there were serious discussions on this subject in the 1990s. In many parts of Germany neo-Nazi activists stockpiled explosives, acquired guns, and thought about turning to more organised violence than what was exercised on the streets.

The case of the THS is informative insofar as this was a very active and relevant political structure whose members took part in neo-Nazi activities nationwide but also organised rallies and other events which attracted neo-Nazis from places outside of Thuringia. Members of the THS had good connections to other neo-Nazi groups such as Blood & Honour. In the case of the later NSU, it proved to be beneficial that its members and supporters had known each other for many years and had shared common experiences from several actions. When the decision was taken to go into hiding, there was immediate support in place. This continued during the following twelve years, in which neo-Nazis supported the group by providing IDs, collecting money and delivering a gun.

The neo-Nazi milieu in Thuringia from which the NSU emerged was not singular in its actions and its level of violence. There were other acts of right-wing terrorism in the 1990s and 2000s. Yet, compared to the number of neo-Nazis who agreed on the necessity to act out violently in order to racially purify Germany only a small number turned into terrorist action. Why a particular group eventually resorts to terrorism when others do not, is beyond the scope of this report and needs further systematic comparative analysis.

Finally, regarding the question of reciprocal or cumulative extremism/radicalisation, no real evidence was found that this dynamic played out in a significant way. This is partly due to the non-existence of relevant Salafist or migrant communities in 1990s Thuringia. There was some fighting between neo-Nazis and left-wing young people, however the latter rarely actively sought out confrontation. At the same time, it is obvious that right-wing violence – even in its terrorist form of systematically killing individuals labelled as migrants – is driven by racist ideology which does not need any kind of hostile action by those groups but is triggered by the mere presence of these individuals.

In a broader perspective, the study is an indication to the need to widen the interactionist perspective: not only political opponents, but also the media and the state apparatus are relevant factors which can influence the strategy and tactics of actors from radical milieus. In the case of the THS, it was a paradoxical situation insofar as there were a significant number of active informants, some of them even in leading positions; on the other hand, THS members also aggressively attacked police forces. However, the main targets of the THS were migrants and refugees, and also people labelled as 'left'. Regarding the NSU, nine

of their victims were killed for racist reason and the murder of a female police officer in 2007 remains unknown, if it was not to acquire police weapons (Landtag von Baden-Württemberg 2016).

In general, this interaction opens up complex issues, e.g. a ban of a group by the state may lead to further radicalisation or it intimidate the actors to refrain from their actions. In the case of the later NSU, a process of radicalisation is evident in the period until January 1998; however, whether the murders would have been committed if the group had not been formed or Mundlos, Böhnhardt and Zschäpe had not gone into hiding, remains speculation. Going into hiding was influenced by the imminent threat of Böhnhardt's imprisonment. Of course, it cannot be an option to stop law enforcement in order to avoid radicalisation.

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