



Bundeskriminalamt

Saskia Lützing

The Other Side of the Story

**A qualitative study of the biographies of
extremists and terrorists**

Final project report with supplementary information on field research

The original in German, which was published in 2010 as volume 40 of the BKA series *Polizei+Forschung (Police+Research)* by the Luchterhand-Verlag publishers, originally consists of three contributions. For the version available at our end, only two of the contributions were translated - the actual final project report and the supplementary information on field research.

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Editors:

Manfred Lohrmann

Project idea:

Uwe E. Kemmesies

Project manager:

Saskia Lützing

Translation work:

Doris Mann

Dieter Bromberg

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Prologue

The events that happened in the last few years in conjunction with the international phenomenon of Islamist-jihadist terrorism once again have shifted the focus of attention more strongly to the motives behind terrorist acts, i.e. to the question, “Why?”. The fact that international terrorism seems to be thriving in Germany, too, has been obvious at least since the conviction of the members of the so-called ‘Sauerland Group’. There is no doubt that under certain circumstances even individuals who have been brought up in Germany are ready and willing to embrace Islamist/jihadist interpretation options; but it is not only an Islamist or religiously - in the broadest sense of the word - motivated kind of extremism that arouses our interest: Considering the broad spectrum of politically motivated extremism and terrorism, it is society as a whole that is challenged. Before we can take up these challenges, we must first of all answer the crucial question, ‘What are the motives that lead terrorists to commit their brutal acts’? Only if we shed light on their deeper motivation will we be able not only to react more appropriately but, above all, act in an adequately pro-active and pre-emptive manner.

This study entitled “Extremism – a biographical perspective” is based on a biographical approach to understanding its subjects’ life histories with a focus on the motives behind radicalisation and the corresponding use of extremist-motivated violence: Are some distinct biographical constellations and/or motivations - whatever their ideological origin - more likely than others to lead an individual towards extremism? What kind of lifeworlds do we see if we try to look at them from the extremists’ or terrorists’ own points of view?

The results presented in the book at hand are manifold, and if we want to tackle this phenomenon with a focus on crime prevention, the key finding is a challenging one as the psycho-social dynamics of the radicalisation careers of offenders with different extremist or terrorist backgrounds seem to have more in common than the respective ideological backgrounds of the different milieus would suggest. Or, in other words: We did not find any *fundamental* differences. In fact, the similarities between the individuals’ key motivational impetuses and trigger factors outnumber all visible manifestations that the various types of extremism can take.

This publication of the project results intends to inform the broad expert public of the inspiring and stimulating findings obtained by the researchers of the Institute of Law Enforcement Studies and Training of the Bundeskriminalamt, thus initiating preventative approaches and potential follow-up research.

Jörg Ziercke

President, Bundeskriminalamt

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1 Introduction

“They played cricket, taught children, and went on kayak trips. Their parents and friends were hardly aware that they had been radicalised. So, why this mass murder?”
Musharbash 2006a

Incidents like the terrorist bombing on Munich’s Oktoberfest¹ or the attacks planned by the *Sauerländer Terrorzelle*² have invariably caused great terror and raised numerous questions about the underlying causes.

In the last years, many attempts have been made to ascertain why human beings perpetrate such deeds and to trace an individual’s transformation into a terrorist or extremist. One recurring surprise was that even socially well integrated individuals who led inconspicuous lives sometimes turned to extremist views and environments. One case in point is 30-year-old Fritz Gelowicz, for instance, whom “Der Spiegel” weekly (Kaiser et al., 37/2007, 23) describes as an ordinary student with an odd job; the son of an entrepreneur and a physician converted to Islam even in his teenage years. The “Süddeutsche Zeitung” daily (Dörries/Ramelsberger 2007) quoted a Muslim fellow student as saying that he was “a highly likeable fellow”, while the “Frankfurter Rundschau” daily characterised Fritz Gelowicz and his accomplices as “inconspicuous and friendly, but immensely dangerous”.

Although the phenomena of terrorism and extremism attract great public interest and are widely covered by the media, relevant empirical research work is still demonstrably sketchy. One reason may well be that it is extremely difficult to gain access to these groups, given that both extremists and terrorists strive to remain in hiding. Most studies conducted so far are therefore based on media analyses or, at best, on second-hand data (e. g. filed documents) supplied by security services, but almost never on data collected for the sole purpose of research. While a “re”-utilisation of the available material offers many advantages like, for instance, more economical research practices, such data can hardly provide answers to the aforementioned questions about personal motives and individual development: The risk of reconstructing the context of meaning differently or misinterpreting it compared to the offender’s point of view is definitely too high. The same is more or less true for data collected from the personal environment of the individuals concerned: While these may be more telling and more closely related to the lifeworld of the alleged extremist or terrorist, the interpretation patterns they supply only marginally reflect the self-perception of the terrorists and/or extremists.

The qualitative-empirical study at hand carries the project title *Extremism - a biographical perspective (EbiP)* and was conducted between December 2004 and December 2008 as a cooperation project between the Rhein-Ruhr-Institut für Sozialforschung und Politikberatung an der Universität Duisburg-Essen (RISP, Rhine-Ruhr Institute for Social Research and Policy Advice of Duisburg-Essen University) and the Forschungsstelle Terrorismus/Extremismus (FTE, Terrorism/Extremism Research Unit) of the Bundeskriminalamt. It specifically aimed to gain an understanding of the phenomena of “terrorism” and “extremism” from the protagonists’ own point of view, an objective the researchers

¹ On 26 September 1980 a bomb exploded in a rubbish bin at the Munich Oktoberfest, killing 13 people and leaving 200 injured. Student of geology Gundolf Köhler, who had exploded the bomb, also died in this attack. Köhler had been a member of the right wing extremist “Wehrsportgruppe Hoffmann” (Hoffmann Military-Sport Group).

² In September 2007, converts to Islam Fritz Gelowicz and Martin Schneider as well as the Germany-based Turkish national Adem Yilmaz were arrested in a holiday house in the Sauerland region, preparing explosives. The group, that is affiliated to the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU), intended to attack various US army bases in Germany and the Rhine-Main airport in Frankfurt, among other targets.

tried to attain by conducting and analysing 39 interviews with male protagonists who entertained links with terrorist and/or extremist groups.

Our study intended to shed light on the protagonists' specific personal circumstances in their lives that induced them to seek ties with ideologically oriented circles embracing right wing, left wing and Islamist extremism and commit offences categorised as *politically motivated crimes*³.

Our working hypothesis was based on the assumption that the psycho-social dynamics of the radicalisation processes and/or the protagonists' biographical histories that were observed in the various extremist milieus are characterised mainly by commonalities.

The following four aspects were of particular interest:

- How do individuals socialise into the scene and what influences this process?
- Why does the scene appeal so strongly to an individual?
- Why and how do individuals' attitudes associated with extremism change in the course of their lives (e. g. regarding the use of violence)?
- Do the biographies of protagonists from different ideological milieus show any parallels?

The study at hand is subdivided as follows: The introductory part acquaints the reader with the subject (Chapter 1) and presents a concise overview of the research subject (Chapter 2). Chapter 3 describes the methodology and the empirical (sampling, data collection) and analytical (data preparation and analysis) approach; Chapters 4 and 5 present the results of the study or, to be more precise, general information about the interviewees and preliminary findings by the police (Chapter 4.1) as well as the actual centrepiece of the study, i.e. the analyses of the interviewees' biographies (Chapter 4.2). The subchapters that describe the biographical analyses follow in the process an imagined chronological sequence based on the following phases of development: Life before joining the scene (Chapter 4.2.1), development within the scene (Chapter 4.2.2) and the motives for renouncing its ideology and terminating the relationship to it (Chapter 4.2.3). The last part of the study provides a succinct summary of the findings and observations (Chapter 5) and offers an outlook on what these imply for hands-on action, especially from a crime-prevention point of view (Chapter 6).

At this juncture, we would like to state by way of conclusion that we would not be able to conduct studies like the one at hand without the involved individuals' willingness to support the cause of research and talk candidly about their lives and personal experiences. The diversity of their extremely turbulent life histories and their frank narratives left us deeply impressed and were a constant source of

³ According to the police system of definitions that is regulated uniformly throughout the Federal Republic, offences are categorised as *politically motivated crimes (PMC)* "if the circumstances under which the crime was committed and/or the perpetrator's attitude indicate that the offences

- (1) intend to influence the democratic decision-making process, serve to attain or to prevent attaining political objectives or are aimed against the implementation of political decisions,
- (2) are aimed against the free and democratic constitutional order and/or one of its constituent characteristics, against the existence or safety of the Federal Republic or of one of the Laender or at unlawful interference with the performance of the duties of the members of the constitutional organs of the Federal or Laender governments,
- (3) jeopardise through the exertion of violence or the preparation of acts of violence foreign interests of the Federal Republic of Germany,
- (4) are aimed against an individual because of his/her political attitude, nationality, citizenship, race, skin colour, religion, world-view, ethnic origin or because of his/her external appearance, disability, sexual orientation or social status and that the offence is causally connected to one of these aspects and/or aimed against an institution/property or object in this context.

Beyond this, the system also includes offences pursuant to Sections 80-83, 84-86a, 87-91, 94-100a, 102-104a, 105-108e, 109-109h, 129a, 129b, 234a or 241a StGB (German Penal Code) because these count as crimes against the security of the state even if no evidence can be established that the offence was politically motivated." (*Bundeskriminalamt 2007*)

motivation throughout our research work. We therefore would like, first of all, to express our sincere gratitude to our interviewees, who enabled us to carry through this study in the first place.

Appendix C – Biographical histories of interviewees is a compilation of the individual biographies which, by the way, makes perfect reading for anyone wishing to get into the right mood to study the findings of our work and acquaint themselves with this field of research. It offers the interested reader a most revealing and vivid insight into the lives of others and a glance beyond the veil of the unknown, which is definitely worth its while.

2 Who becomes a terrorist?

Whereas older theories mainly blame psycho-pathological anomalies or socialisation damage sustained in early childhood for pursuing extremist and/or terrorist careers, a discourse originated in the early 1980s that eventually gave rise to new career and process-oriented theories revolving around the assumed interaction between individuals and their environment (cf. e. g. Daase 2001, 68 et seq.). It was initiated by a finding that Schmidtchen (1981, 15) put into the following words: “Even though we do detect anomalies in terrorists, we can always argue at the same time that there are so many more people who do not draw identical consequences from identical situations.” Against the backdrop of this finding, developments in terrorism/extremism were, until the early 2000s, mainly explained by three theoretical psychological approaches (cf. Hudson 1999, 19 et seq.):

- (1) **The frustration-aggression hypothesis**
The underlying assumption is that a frustration (e. g. being denied a wish with respect to political, personal or economic expectations or needs) triggers aggressive behaviour manifesting itself as a verbal or physical attack (cf. e. g. Lin 2002, 1).
- (2) **The “negative identity” hypothesis**
This hypothesis refers to the development of an identity whose essential structure is diametrically opposed to the expectations an individual is confronted with by his/her social environment and society. It is believed that a negative identity is caused primarily by a lack of recognition and appreciation – especially from important psychological parents – experienced by an individual in his/her personal environment, although the individual has tried very hard to live up to expectations (cf. Fend 2003, 402 et seq.).
- (3) **The narcissistic rage hypothesis**
The term “narcissistic rage” describes an “extreme reaction to a perceived attack on the individual’s self-worth” (cf. Triller 2003, 9), reflected in a form of aggression that differs from other forms of aggression mainly in that it is accompanied by a compulsive thirst for revenge directed toward the person that the individual feels has slighted them. This thirst for revenge may even take the extreme form of wishing to annihilate the “attacker” (cf. Wirth 2002).

Whereas, in accordance with their psychology background, the main focus of these three theories revolves around the individual as well as his/her subjective perceptions and action patterns, newer explanation approaches oriented to development processes (e. g. Hess/Scheerer 2003; Taarnby 2003; Hess 2006; Böllinger 2006; Heitmeyer et al. 1992) rest on a multi-disciplinary basis and essentially

link sociological explanation attempts with psychological and action-theoretical approaches. These newer models conceive of an individual's development into a terrorist and/or extremist as an interactive process. Apart from the underlying theory that this development is triggered by a structure of multiple causes and conditions, they introduce the innovative feature of attributing to each individual a conscious decision-making ability (fully within the meaning of the rational-choice approach) from the beginning right through to the extremist/terrorist end of their radicalisation process. Moreover, they more strongly consider environmental aspects such as, for instance, social and societal factors, but also group dynamics.

In view of the interesting findings of the study at hand, we would like to briefly focus on research activities pursuing a biographical approach to the phenomenon of terrorism. Quite a long time ago, two studies were published in the German-speaking countries whose methodological and empirical approach has made them role models until this very day: In a then-unprecedented study commissioned by the Bundesinnenministerium (Federal Ministry of the Interior), Jäger and Böllinger (1981) conducted a comparative analysis, for the first time based on information gained from interviews, of the biographical histories of imprisoned left wing and right wing extremists, the objective being to identify the causes that had turned them into terrorists⁴. While Jäger/Böllinger did indeed find a significantly greater number of specific psycho-social characteristics in the biographies of terrorists (original milieu, age and gender structure of the scene, etc.), they however failed to produce evidence of a single defining event or profile causing the individuals to pursue a terrorist career. About ten years later, a group of researchers headed by Waldmann (1993) again tried to identify individual socio-psychological factors prompting individuals to take up a terrorist career. The authors adopted a sociological approach characterised especially by its international comparative nature: In addition to German terrorists, their study covered also activists from terrorist associations in Spain, Ireland, Argentina, Canada and Italy. Again, the authors failed to identify a single, universal causative factor but instead detected a great diversity of terrorist careers and personality types.

The findings from the above-mentioned studies also correlate with more recent and international analyses focussing on so-called religiously motivated terrorism (e. g. Taarnby 2003, more generally also Horgan 2003 and Ben Slama/Kemmesies 2007) and have gradually brought about a change of view: The current focus of terrorist/extremist research is no longer on trying to identify the kind of individual likely to be radicalised and become a terrorist; rather, the researchers now attempt to comprehend the diverse developments and processes involved so as to gain an understanding of when and how to use preventative measures and/or intervene in a sensible way.

While studies based on primary data sources are still few and far between, there is a conspicuous absence of comparative studies that – like the one at hand – cover different ideological areas of politically and/or religiously motivated extremism/terrorism. The study at hand addresses the research gaps outlined above and attempts to reveal the fundamental psychosocial patterns behind radicalisation processes by systematically comparing biographical histories – always bearing in mind that according to the current state of research, explanatory approaches based on monocausal explanations or unidimensional typologies obviously do not reflect everyday reality.

⁴ These studies are complemented by multiple new empirical analyses from research on right wing extremism (for an overview, cf. Kraus/Mathes 2008).

3 Methodology – design of the study

Field research in extremist milieus requires exceptional sensitivity, given the fear of state prosecution that prevails in these social settings. This research project was carried out in cooperation with the *Rhine-Ruhr-Institute e. V. (RISP, a registered association) of Duisburg-Essen University* so as to nip in the bud any problems that might have prevented us from accessing the field in our capacity as security service representatives. In addition to brokering contact with potential interviewees, the tasks of the RISP included conducting the actual interviews, transcribing them and anonymising the collected material. The contribution by Thomas Schweer in the present volume offers some glimpses into our fieldwork and the special challenges accompanying it. The interviews were evaluated by the *Forschungsstelle Terrorismus/Extremismus (FTE) of the Bundeskriminalamt*.

The design of the research project was influenced by two crucial factors: While it is well nigh impossible to fall back on experience in and findings from biographical research approaches dealing with terrorism/extremism on the one hand, our intention was to chronologically reconstruct the biographical histories of extremist individuals and, moreover, capture each individual's underlying personal dynamism and subjectivity on the other.

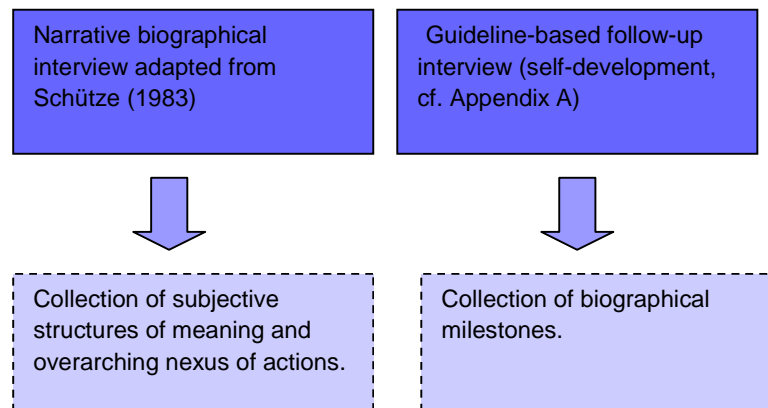
Living up to these ambitions required an unbiased approach to the subject matter, with a mind largely free from theoretical preconceptions. Qualitative research methods therefore suggested themselves as an ideal starting point as they offered not only the necessary quantum of openness but also permitted the inductive and in-depth exploration of the available data (cf. Mayring 2002, 27 et seq.).

We decided to employ as a data collection tool the narrative interview method devised by Schütze (1977). This method enables the interviewer to capture subjective structures of meaning and the overarching nexus of actions in the context of biographical histories, and offers the advantage of leaving it to the interviewees themselves to structure the context and convey as many details as they wish to divulge. At the same time, the narrative interview method provided the degree of openness required in dealing with this problem thanks to its inherent lack of a predefined structure and moderation (cf. Schütze 1983, 285; Mayring 2002, 72 et seq.). The appropriateness of our survey tool became apparent even during a test run: as this technique allows interviewees to autonomously structure the contents and details of their narratives, we succeeded in motivating all subjects – including those meeting us with initial scepticism – to participate in the survey, and were thus able to gather extensive data from the interviews. Another positive effect was achieved by putting the focus of the interviews mainly on the individuals' experiences and subjective feelings, and because "the biographical interpretation patterns and interpretations of the subject are (were) of interest only in the context of his reconstructed life history" (Schütze 1983, 284). We must remember at this point that recalled knowledge rendered in narrative biographical interviews invariably is a retroactive recollection of memories that in the course of time may have undergone some interpretational change (e. g. Welzer 2005). The key interest of the research study at hand however was exactly on these interpreted (re-)constructions of reality for, in keeping with *Thomas' theorem* and regardless of whether or not or to what extent fading may have occurred, they are deemed impressions experienced in real life and serve as a basis for all kinds of decisions: "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (cf. Thomas/Thomas 1928, 572).

As stories told through biographical interviews typically lack a clearly defined chronological structure, evaluating the first five test interviews proved to be very time-consuming indeed. Moreover, we did not have any additional information about the interviewees. For this reason, the design of the study was extended to include a follow-up, guideline-based collection of data complementing the narrative

interview method and asking specifically for biographical milestone events after the interview had been terminated (cf. Appendix A).

Fig. 1: Design of the study



3.1 Data collection

3.1.1 Sampling

Potential interviewees were identified on the basis of four consecutive procedures, as follows:

(1) *Searching the centrally managed police information system (INPOL)*

At four different points in time between 2005 and 2008, the INPOL-Fall⁵ database, which is run by the police, was searched for male persons⁶ who were in custody at the point of time of the interview and listed for politically motivated violent crimes against foreigners (AUMO), or as offenders belonging to a militant organisation prohibited by law (VEMO), or as offenders motivated by left wing (LIMO) or right wing (REMO) extremism. The RISP then contacted the identified persons through a randomised procedure, sending them a covering letter that explained the objectives and structure of the study and encouraged them to participate.

Although the INPOL-Fall proved to be the most efficient method for identifying interviewees belonging to the left wing and right wing extremist groups, some initial problems occurred even before the first interview could be conducted as the personalised notes on the convicts' political background shown in the INPOL-Fall turned out to be substantially unreliable. For example, offenders categorised as "motivated by left wing ideology" emerged to be right wing oriented when interviewed on site, and vice-versa. A few convicts even called the Kriminalistische Institut (Institute of Law Enforcement Studies and Training) and asked if it was possible to have their supposed entry revised. Some interviewees did not even understand why they were listed as *politically motivated offenders* (cf. also Fn. 5 in this context).

⁵ It is one of the four pillars of the centrally managed police information system (INPOL) that stores, updates and forwards information supporting the police in their law enforcement tasks. INPOL-Fall contains data on CID-related investigations.

⁶ There were two reasons for choosing only male individuals: At the time, females in extremist environments did not feature highly on the political agenda on the one hand, while a lack of resources made it impossible to interview representatives of both genders on the other.

(2) *Cues from media coverage*

With a view to identifying potential interviewees, we sporadically searched newspaper reports and press releases related to respective incidents that were published by the judicial authorities. The RISP established contact with the individuals concerned in cooperation with the FTE.

(3) *Snowball sampling*

By means of reference chains and based on contacts initiated by the team of interviewers, we tried to identify individuals meeting the selection criteria for potential interviewees (cf. for example Biernacki/Waldorf 1981, 141 on *snowball sampling*). Initial contacts were made e. g. in students' hostels, at neighbourhood street festivals or in mosques. Persons who were members of the so-called "radical communities"⁷ of the respective scenes but who had not yet committed a criminal offence were deemed of special interest.

(4) *Direct contact with political organisations*

Various relevant parties and political organisations were asked in writing whether some of their members would be available for an interview. This however elicited only a few responses, and none of the individuals who were initially interested could be interviewed at the end of the day.

If the request for participation was answered in the affirmative, the RISP fixed an appointment with the potential interviewees and proceeded to conduct the interview, to which end a team of five interviewers (staffs and free-lancers, i.e. graduates, post-graduates and undergraduates) was set up that also comprised members close to Islamic circles who spoke Arabic. As far as the left wing extremist milieu was concerned, we were also supported by persons who had e. g. job-related contacts in the field and were thus able to liaise between the interviewers and the scene [for more extensive information about the fieldwork done in the course of this study cf. Schweer 2010 (in the volume at hand)].

A total of 40 interviews with male persons having links with either terrorist or extremist milieus were submitted to the Forschungsstelle Extremismus/Terrorismus. Out of these, 39 were eventually evaluated. One interview was rejected because the interviewee's age (16 years) and stage of development rendered a comparison with the other interviewees – who were markedly older – impossible. The sample of interviewees included both convicts (31) and persons who had not (yet) come to the notice of the police nor appeared in court (8). A breakdown by ideological orientation yielded the following distribution of interviewees: 24 were categorised as belonging to the "right wing spectrum" (all in custody); nine interviewees (four in custody) entertained relations with the left wing scene, and the remaining six (one in custody) were close to Islamist circles.

⁷ The pedigree of this approach by Waldmann (2004) goes back to Burton (1978) and is based on the assumption that the exploration of terrorist/extremist lifeworlds should not focus solely on violent protagonists but also include sympathisers from their environment as these can be regarded as positive reference groups usually supporting the ideological pillars of the milieu under investigation.

Fig. 2: Overview of interviewees

Right wing oriented		Left wing oriented*		Islamist-oriented	
Total:	24	Total:	9	Total:	6
In Custody:	24	In Custody:	5	In Custody:	1
Unreported:	0	Unreported:	4	Unreported:	5

*) One of the individuals classified as motivated by left wing ideology unambiguously displays right wing views and also views himself as “rather right wing” (Li03, militant radical). This was taken into account in the subsequent analyses.

3.1.2 Interview conduction

The actual interview began after the interviewer and interviewee had briefly acquainted themselves with one other. Each interview was recorded on tape and subsequently transcribed and anonymised before it was handed over to the Kriminalistische Institut. Following Schütze’s (1977) approach, the interviewer asked an opening question to encourage the interviewee to start talking and refrained from interrupting him while he was delivering his story. Due to the varying ability of the interviewees to speak freely about themselves, however, some interviews had to be conducted question-and-answer style instead of in the form of a narrative. This, consequently, had a major impact on the quality of the interviews and in particular the level of detail, which rendered comparability more difficult.

3.2 Evaluation

3.2.1 Individual case approach

After the individual biographical histories had been chronologically reconstructed, the data thus gained were analysed with a particular focus on how the interviewees had been coping with development problems (cf. e. g. Dreher & Dreher 1985; Havighurst 1967) and critical events in their lives⁸ (cf. Filipp 1990). To this end, the radicalisation process of each interviewee was reconstructed on the basis of subjective interpretation, with special attention being paid to its integration into his biographical history (cf. Appendix B for an evaluation example). The extremely heterogeneous storytelling abilities of the individual interviewees presented a particular challenge to us in this context.

⁸ While the term *critical* carries a rather negative connotation, we interpret *critical life events*, according to Filipp (1990), to be events requiring some adaptation following a clash of external circumstances and one’s individual world-view. This approach furthermore provides the option that different individuals experience one and the same event differently and cope with it in different ways.

3.2.2 Clustering of interviewees across ideological boundaries and comparative evaluation

Preliminary remark:

The police definition system of politically motivated crimes, which is regulated uniformly throughout the Federal Republic, also includes crimes against the security of the state that are not necessarily based on political motives (cf. Fn. 5). For this reason, the study at hand uses the expressions “ideologically motivated offences” or “ideologically motivated offenders” only if the crime was actually committed on grounds of ideology.

After they had been individually interviewed, the interviewees were assigned to one of the four inductively formed categories listed below regardless of their respective ideology, the intention being to make a contrasting comparison:

- (1) Terrorists (n = 3),
- (2) Extremists (n = 23),
- (3) Militant radicals (n = 7),
- (4) Persons with extremist inclinations (n = 6).

Assignment to one of these categories that will be explained in greater detail further on was based on the following criteria:

- Ideological penetration,
- motives behind an offence and/or act of violence, and
- degree of organisation.

The interviewees' personal experiences with protagonists of their respective *enemy images* did not constitute a powerful criterion as all groups comprised individuals with positive and negative or sometimes even no such personal experience at all.

As some of the interviewees had in the meantime lost all contact with the scene or had dissociated themselves from the respective ideology, their assignment to one of the four categories was determined by the time when they had entertained the closest ties with the scene or been most actively involved in an extremist environment. The decision to choose this point in time as a relevant criterion was consistent with the root idea of focusing on the developments that would culminate in the individuals' most extreme defining biographical moment.

Our categorisation shall not be construed to be a process or career model. Assigning a person to the category of “terrorist”, for example, does not necessarily imply that this person had had a previous allegiance to other groups such as, for instance, “persons with extremist inclinations”.

Before we proceed to discuss the individual groups in more detail, presenting cases in point (anchor examples) for each group, we kindly ask the reader to observe the following note on our interview sources: All interview details are based on three pieces of information, as follows: (1) Assignment to one of the scenes, i.e. R(ight-wing scene), L(eft-wing scene) and I(slamistic scene); (2) a person's status, i.e. either imprisoned [i] or an unreported case [u], and (3) a serial number. “Lu02”

consequently denotes an interviewee who belongs to the left wing scene and has not been prosecuted so far.

Terrorist

The term “terrorist” describes a person imbued with a certain ideology who is integrated into a rigidly organised structure based on a division of labour that operates covertly as a matter of principle and strives to topple the established system by consistently and violently fighting it.

Example:

A left wing oriented person born in 1966 who, having conducted some primarily “*militant actions*” at first, carried through several jointly organised bomb attacks requiring considerable conspiratorial and logistic effort. (Lu01)

Extremist

Extremists include all persons who

- (a) aspire to topple the established system, turning on the free and democratic constitutional order and accepting the use of violence to reach their aims;
- (b) unlike terrorists are not (yet) part of a rigidly organised, consistent structure based on a division of labour. Attempts at getting organised or contacts with organised structures may exist, however;
- (c) (may) already have committed *politically motivated offences* or generally support them or create the impression to outsiders that they have acted with extremist intentions.

On the basis of this assignment, we grouped our sample into the following three sub-categories:

- (1) *Active extremists*:
Interviewees who had already committed ideologically motivated offences.
- (2) *Inactive extremists*
Interviewees who had not (yet) committed any ideologically motivated offences but exhibited an extremist attitude. While this group comprised mainly unreported cases, it also included one interviewee who was in custody for fraud.
- (3) *Pseudo-extremists*⁹
Moreover, the group of imprisoned offenders who were labelled “right wing” obviously included a considerable number of persons who may appear to be extremists because of their social integration with right wing groups but who were not ideologically penetrated to any

⁹ *Pseudo-extremists* remind us first of all of “the aggressive” type defined by Heitmeyer (1995, 23 and 55 et seq.) (in this case leaning towards Type 2) and the “criminal youth (thug)” described by Willems et al. (1993, 148 et seq.). As Krüger (2008) has already stated, the “apparently ‘right wing type of violence’” (especially when exerted by pseudo-extremists) “[...] generally is a misanthropic and inhuman type of violence which cannot be described as right wing extremist and, consequently, political violence” (ibid., 214).

greater extent. Rather, their political attitude was at best extremely simplistic and superficial. The term “pseudo-extremist” shall not conceal, however, that this group perpetrated extremely serious crimes, including arson attacks and murder. The motives behind these offences will be investigated in greater detail further on (cf. Chapter 4.2.2.6).

Examples:

(1) *Active extremist:*

Person born in 1983, who believed in the comeback of the fourth Reich and committed offences in line with a hard “*terror catching the attention of the media*”. His range of crimes includes countless assaults causing bodily harm, attempts to set fire to an asylum seekers’ home and the defilement of a Jewish cemetery. (Ri08)

(2a) *Inactive extremist:*

Person born in Morocco in 1979 with no criminal record as yet who displays a pronounced hatred of the US as well as an anti-Semitic attitude and perceives himself as a “*jihadist*”. He believes in having to “*wage a holy jihad*” and, “*if it doesn’t work using peaceful means, it can’t be done by prayers alone but only by using force and spreading fear.*” (Iu04)

(2b) *Inactive extremist:*

Hammerskin¹⁰, born in 1973, who rejects violence but strives to attain a national-socialist world-view and maintains contact through the hammerskins with the US-based NSDAP/AO¹¹. The interviewee is currently in custody for fraud and has not yet committed any *politically motivated crimes*. (Ri20)

(3) *Pseudo-extremist:*

1985-born hip hopper and drug user, whose father and siblings entertain relations with the local right wing scene and/or groupings. Whenever the interviewee “*doesn’t feel like seeing*” his own friends, he mingles with his brother and his brother’s right wing friends. He claims, however, that he cannot identify with this group, mainly because they do not tolerate his drug-consumption habit. The interviewee had often been involved in fights with punks, mentioning as a reason that these “*hurled abuse*” at him because of his right wing family. He admitted to having “*shouted Sieg Heil when drunk*” when together with his brother and his brother’s friends and having handed out right wing extremist CDs or flyers brought home by his father or brother. The interviewee appears to be rather simple-minded and reveals some highly provocative racist traits here and there which he cannot explain. (Ri14)

¹⁰ “The right wing extremist hammerskins organisation was founded in the USA in 1986. What used to be a regional group has in the meantime turned into a globally active movement within the skinhead scene, craving elitist ambitions. According to the group’s own statement, it has been active in Germany since 1991. [...] Hammerskins embrace a racist world-view not quite free from national-socialist ideas. Their aim is to unite the white skinheads of the world in a nation of hammerskins” (cf. the Internet presence of 05 May 2009 of the Hesse Land Office for the Protection of the Constitution).

¹¹ Party founded in the USA in 1972 by Gary Lauck and “German expatriates” that perceives itself as the “action group and community of faith of the spearheads of the national-socialist ideology” and aims at “supporting the NS underground movement in Germany” by e. g. advocating the readmittance of the NSDAP in Germany. According to the group’s own statement, the NSDAP/AO publishes NS newspapers in more than ten languages in addition to issuing propaganda material such as flags, music, etc. (cf. <http://www.Nazi-lauck-nsdapao.co>; 05 May 2009).

Militant radical¹²

A typical militant radical is characterised by his uncompromising and principally critical view of the state which he also displays in public and usually by violent means. The latter may include acts of violence or criminal damage to property both during demonstrations and in his personal social environment (e. g. disputes with neighbours).

We observed a distinct difference between radical right wing oriented and radical left wing oriented militants in that the latter had a clearly more differentiated view of politics, their critical attitude towards the state mostly being due to personal experiences, whereas the individuals leaning toward right wing ideologies displayed a rather superficial attitude based on prejudices often taken over from others without giving them a second thought (“cracker-barrel radicals”). The two groups also differed markedly as to the way in which they were organised and the aims they were striving for, the left wing oriented social structure being more scene-like, i.e. freely accessible and pursuing rather clearly defined objectives, whereas the right wing oriented groups were dominated by clan-type structures based merely on a fuzzy membership concept and pursued only roughly defined and sometimes contradictory targets. The two groups also differed with regard to their political views, the left wing oriented individuals focussing mainly on state-related issues, which they criticised, while their right wing oriented counterparts concentrated more strongly on their own social environment and, within this context, especially on immigration issues.

The ‘militant radicals’ group did not include any Islamist-oriented individuals.

Examples:

(1) Left wing oriented militant radical:

Punk born in 1961 who, after fate had dealt him several blows and after many years of drug consumption, had been living among homeless punks where he became increasingly interested in politics. His everyday life however revolved around surviving on the street among squatters. From time to time, subsistence problems occurred when he and his peers were expelled from their domiciles, on which occasions he again and again clashed with the police. (Li05)

(2) Right wing oriented militant radical:

Individual born in 1964, who even in his adolescence had had brief contacts with a rather right wing oriented milieu. After the disintegration of his family and a long history of drug consumption, he had been living on the streets before he teamed up with “*right wing skinheads*” at the age of 30. His clique’s routine revolved around “*the occasional picnic*” and “*boozing*” interspersed with the “*occasional passing fight*”. By and large, he has a strong antipathy to foreigners that had already sparked conflicts with Turks living in the neighbourhood. There is no obvious reason for this xenophobia, and even the interviewee himself cannot explain it. (Ri07)

¹² Quite in line with the original meaning of the word, militancy is understood to mean “combative” in this context. The term “radical” that is used here goes back to Drechsler et al. (2003) who interpret radicalism as “staunch political attitudes aiming to achieve fundamental societal changes” so that, consequently, “radical political theories [...] do not always entail radical facts”. Even though violence is frequently employed by radical groups, they do not consider violence to be a typical characteristic of radicalism (cf. Drechsler et al 2003).

Person with extremist inclinations

For the purpose of this study, persons *with extremist inclinations* are only those who have never actually identified with the attitudes of political, militant radical or even extremist milieus even though they had clearly been close to these in the course of their lives. Our study segments this group into (a) persons maintaining *direct* contact with but not firmly rooted in the different scenes associated with political activism, and (b) persons having *indirect* contact with these political milieus e. g. through their families or youth group meetings.

Examples:

(1) *Nomad with extremist inclinations:*

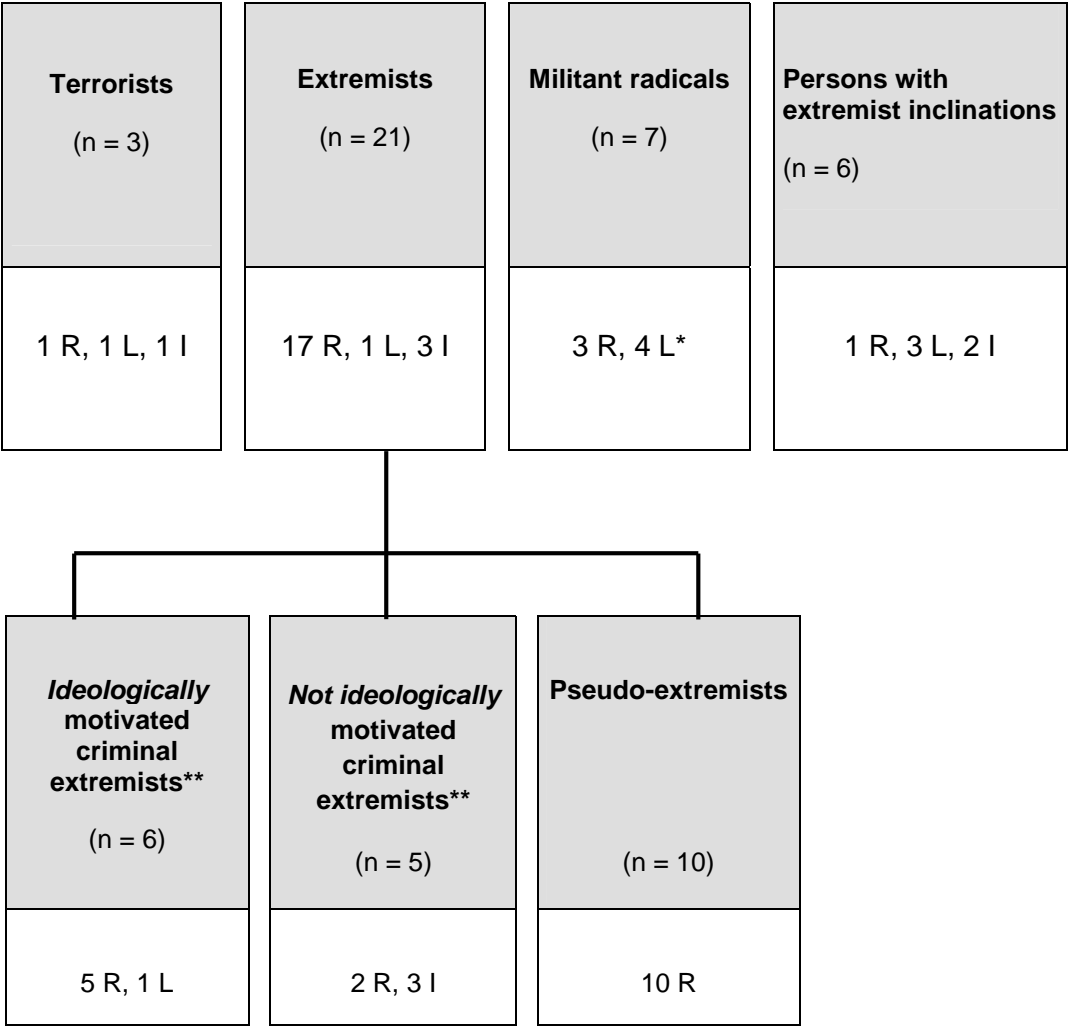
Individual born to radical left wing parents in 1982 in Germany who during his adolescence passed through a series of left wing organisations: starting out his “political career” as a communist, he later joined the punk scene and spent some time with anti-fascist groups, the PDS (a left wing party), then sympathised with the FAU¹³ and the movement against nuclear power before he became a vegan and eventually turned into an “*anti-German*”. Although he had “*had enough of the term ‘left wing’*”, and living as an “*autonomist*” or anarchist “*in the meantime feels somewhat stupid, too*”, he is currently again flirting with the open anti-fascist group. (Lu02)

(2) *Other persons with extremist inclinations:*

The interviewee was born in Germany in 1978 and brought up in a strictly religious family. At around age 10, he became involved through his parents with the Milli Görüs Islamic Community (MGIC) after it had built a mosque near his family’s home. He spent most of his free time with the adolescents of the mosque and participated in a variety of events that culminated in a pilgrimage. He broke contact with the MGIC when he took up university studies in his early 20s. His attitudes e. g. toward females became more moderate, and he married a “*less religious*” woman against his parents’ will. (Iu01)

¹³ The FAU is an anarchist-syndicalist trade union federation consisting of local syndicates and groups (cf. Moreau/Lang 1996, 314).

Fig. 3: Sampling composition by groups



*) The individuals classified as left wing motivated include an unambiguously right wing prisoner who also perceives himself as “rather right wing” (Li03, militant radical).

***) For the sake of simplicity, we will hereinafter use the short term “active extremist” or “inactive extremist”, respectively, when referring to offenders who perpetrated or did not perpetrate ideologically motivated crimes.

Fig. 4: Overview of the typical characteristics of the different groups

	Ideological penetration	Motives behind crimes	Degree of organisation
Terrorist		Ideologically motivated.	Small, extremely conspiratorial groups closed to outsiders. Strong group coherence.
Active extremist	High degree of ideological penetration.	Ideologically motivated.	Small to medium-sized groups, spontaneous actions requiring rather little organisational effort.
Inactive extremist	High degree of ideological penetration.	No ideologically motivated offences or crimes associated with any ideology so far.	Small to medium-sized groups, very open towards new members and highly committed to (or actively) recruiting new members.
Pseudo-extremist	Low degree of ideological penetration. Frequently simplistic, superficial political attitudes.	Personally motivated (frequently seeking adventures). Linked to political motives by outsiders.	Clannish groups or loner. Frequently lacking group loyalty: group chosen by the criterion of adventure/entertainment, with violent actions being an important relevant criterion.
Militant radical	Medium degree of ideological penetration: though interested and knowledgeable, ideological aspects are not all-pervasive.	Right wing oriented individuals: rather personally motivated.	Right wing oriented individuals: strongly coherent clannish groups. Sometimes selective in choosing new members.
		Left wing oriented individuals: rather ideologically motivated.	Left wing oriented individuals: rather open, scene-like structures or groups.
Person with extremist inclinations	Rather low degree of ideological penetration: familiar with ideological aspects but not primarily interested in them. No identification with the ideology so far. Main focus on personal relationships.	No ideologically motivated offences or crimes associated with any ideology so far.	Persons are close to extremist structures (e. g. parties, associations) but deliberately refrain from (fully) integrating with them.

4 Results

4.1 Information and preliminary findings by the police about the interviewees

At the time of the interview, the 39 interviewees were between 20 and 49 years of age, 50% of the group being younger than 28 years. All but four study participants were born in Germany¹⁴.

The majority of the interviewees came from a so-called “working-class background”. The fathers especially of the left wing oriented individuals had either enjoyed a higher education or were executives, and about a quarter of the mothers were not in gainful employment (housewives). The rate of housewives was highest among the Islamist group (five out of six mothers; right wingers: three out of 24 [two not specified]; left wingers: two out of nine). The working mothers were mainly employed in the health and social services industries, but also in business; mothers in executive positions were found almost exclusively among the left wing oriented individuals. An exception was the mother of a right winger, who was an independent entrepreneur.

Almost 50% of the interviewees (17) were brought up in families with at least four children with a tendency toward five or even more siblings (9)¹⁵, while about one third (18) had one or two siblings¹⁶. Four interviewees were only children.

Only a small number (5) said that they were brought up in a politically active and/or radical family. In three cases, elder siblings provided contact with radical milieus.

Only about one third of the interviewees (14) were fully qualified for a job¹⁷. Regardless of whether or not they had a degree, the interviewees mostly made a living as unskilled workers, or they were sporadically employed or worked illicitly.

Most interviewees (28) were single but had a partner. Roughly half of them (16) had already children of their own at the time of being interviewed.

The range of criminal offences encompassed the entire spectrum of crimes, the main offences being assault causing bodily harm as well as property and acquisitive crimes. Crimes associated with political motives included primarily assault causing bodily harm and damage to property, partly afflicted by exploding bombs. This included e. g. attacks against asylum seekers’ homes, participation in the Hoyerswerda riots, arson attacks against public services or homicides. Some interviewees had perpetrated ill-famous attacks¹⁸ which had been widely covered by the media.

Surprisingly, half of the interviewees who were not in custody admitted – sometimes only after further inquiry – to having committed at least one offence (e. g. drug trafficking, assault causing bodily harm, violation of the public peace, resistance to public authority).

Cf. Appendix D for an overview of the interviewees’ self-attributions and/or their self-assignment to the different political milieus or organisations.

¹⁴ 28 interviewees were born in West Germany, seven in the former GDR, two in Turkey and one each in Morocco and Palestine.

¹⁵ 50% right wing and Islamist oriented interviewees each.

¹⁶ The siblings of two interviewees had died.

¹⁷ For a more detailed overview of their educational and vocational training and other demographic data, cf. Appendix D.

¹⁸ No further details will be given for the sake of identity protection.

4.2 Biographical reconstructions

Following the overview of the interviewees' social backgrounds, we will devote the next chapters to a reconstruction of their biographies: the first subchapter studies the individuals' lives before joining and/or outside the scene (Chapter 4.2.1); the next two subchapters specifically revolve around the individuals' development inside the scene (Chapter 4.2.2) and the motives inducing them to renounce the ideology and/or terminating their relationship to the scene (Chapter 4.2.3).

Appendix C provides a brief overview of each interviewee's biographical history.

4.2.1 *"I was quite an ordinary boy"* – life outside the scene and before joining it

4.2.1.1 The family milieu

Our interviewees' family environments were characterised by multiple problems coupled with perfunctory communication between family members. All interviewees had suffered much developmental stress even at an early age (e. g. changing psychological parents, loss of a relative) that their families had failed to adequately cope with for lack of suitable coping strategies. We detected in them a pronounced propensity for suppression expressed primarily through dysfunctional coping strategies like, for instance, drug consumption or the use of violence. In some cases, family members had evaded their problems by e. g. leaving their families *"overnight"* or preferring to dedicate their attention to other social environments (e. g. friends, work). All families shared the common habit of not communicating and coping with problems jointly and constructively but at best by reproaching or blaming others, thus further complicating the handling of difficult situations so that ultimately each family member was left to his/her own devices. We observed a general failure to reach sustainable and constructive solutions, on the contrary, problems were aggravated as family members sometimes worked against one another. Whereas their parents' main concern was to care for themselves and reduce stress and problems, for example, the interviewees primarily tried to (re)gain their parents' attention, recognition and care, thus increasing the pressure on their parents. In most cases, unresolved conflicts were merely aggravated this way, eventually culminating in chaos that proved nearly impossible to contain even with the assistance from authorities or others.

The impression that their parents had left them to their own devices instilled in our interviewees not only a feeling of abandonment but also the notion that they were unable to control their environment or whatever happened to them. They were therefore characterised by coping patterns employed to control one's environment, including the desire to refuse to give in to heteronomy in order to regain control of their own lives and emotions. As one interviewee described his then attitude towards school, for instance:

"There are some guys who want to control you, and if they control you they can do to you whatever they like. But they can't do this to me, so I just don't surrender to their control, I stay away from it." (Ri01, pseudo-extremist)

Others, in turn, lived along the lines of *"don't put up with anything"* (Ri19, pseudo-extremist), *"doing my own thing"* (Ri05, pseudo-extremist) or *"being extreme through and through"* (Li02, militant radical). One of the interviewees described at length how he developed his self-concept according to which he *"thinks himself superior to others"*, living in *"a world of my own"* where *"everything that's different [...] [is] a fault in the system and can be eliminated"*. All he was interested in was his own personal well-being: *"All's well if I'm well!"* (Ri08, active extremist). He said about his relationships:

“A: I like violence. Love is, well, don’t really think that I could somehow love someone at the moment.

I: Do you think that one day you will be able to love again?

A: I don’t hope so.

I: You don’t hope so?

A: Nope.

I: Why not, why don’t you want to love again?

A: Because, as I said, I think it’s a kind of weakness. Because simply, if I love somebody I am attached to something. And if somebody takes this away from you, it hurts.”

This brief paragraph drives home the consequences dysfunctional strategies entail when used to cope with family problems.

The desire to be better able to control the circumstances and structure of one’s life resulted in the cutting off of all emotional ties and frequently went along with behavioural changes which, in their turn, did not only generate problems within the family but also affected the wider social environment if dysfunctional coping mechanisms were applied throughout (cf. also Chapters 4.2.1.2 and 4.2.1.3), whether the individuals became extremely defiant or started to consider violence as an option. If existing family problems were accompanied by problems at school, for example, it was even harder to handle one’s parents. Many interviewees said that eventually they had slipped into the role of the family’s problem child, which in consequence gradually eroded the mutual trust between them and their parents so that they ultimately dissociated themselves from their families.

We were surprised to learn that disruptions – sometimes entailing a complete loss of family ties – were common among virtually all interviewees, including those from families where they had either suffered almost no developmental stress or at least none with a lasting impact (5). As for the latter group, typical parent-adolescent conflicts or unexpected and uncontrollable events like, for instance, the death of both parents, or having to live with family relatives abroad, were crucial factors. Dissociation from one’s family was expressed in different ways, i.e. both in the form of feeling emotionally abandoned by it and – in most cases – by moving out as well.

The trend of young people staying at their parental home longer than has been observed for quite some time (cf. Papastefanou 2004) was not confirmed by our interviewees: most had left their homes either at a rather young age – and sometimes even before coming of age – or had been uprooted in some way or another.

Conclusively, the following three case studies explain by way of example the journey leading to a complete breakdown of all family ties. Please note that while the case studies described below may seem to be very exclusive and extreme in nature, they are not at all exceptions but rather three typical biographical histories also echoed by the other narratives.

Case study # 1:

“I can make do without them.”

Martin¹⁹ grew up with a sister, a step-brother and a half-brother in a bi-national patchwork family. He claims that his stepfather’s culture left a major mark on his character because he *“consorted and comported a lot with foreigners”*, *“went to Turkey every year and used to be with Turks all the time”*. Martin’s mother left her Turkish husband shortly after she had developed cancer, taking her children with her. The interviewee mentioned domestic abuse as a reason in this context. His mother died about one year after they had moved house, and the children were separated: Martin’s sister was placed under the care of a legal guardian at her own request, while the younger half-brother went to live with the stepfather. Martin himself moved in with his biological father whom he perceived as his “left wing mentor”, and who eventually became Martin’s most important psychological parent. Martin’s father also died about two years later. Martin, being unable to cope with this loss, gradually turned into a drug addict. After Martin’s older stepbrother forbade him to keep in touch with his younger half-brother, and because Martin also fell out with his sister over their younger brother, he has not seen his siblings and stepfather to this very day. (Lu04, person with extremist inclinations)

Case study # 2:

“I then used to see my parents only when on holiday.”

Morocco-born Adil was about eight years old when his uncle, who lived in France, told his father during a family visit about the opportunities and options existing in Europe, persuading his father to send Adil with him to France. When Adil and his brother eventually lived in France with their uncle, the family suffered various blows of fate: first, one of the sons died in a fatal accident; the second son then became seriously involved with drugs. When the mother (Adil’s aunt) developed severe psychological problems, Adil’s uncle decided to send Adil to relatives in Germany, while Adil’s brother remained in France. Even though Adil says that he gets on well with his biological parents he suffers strongly from the fact that his father *“hasn’t seen much of this world, and where he lives he doesn’t have a clue what they do to us [i.e. the Muslims; author’s note].”* (Iu04, inactive extremist)

Case study # 3:

“When in custody pending trial [...] she looked at me and said, well, I’m going to Italy, and she left, and was gone.”

Ronny’s mother left his biological father when Ronny was approximately two years old on grounds of occasional domestic violence to the children. Taking along Ronny and his two sisters, she moved in with a new partner who Ronny in the interview referred to as his “daddy”. He *“first broke up with my mother”* when she - to Ronny’s utter surprise - abandoned the family shortly after the wall came down in order to build a new life for herself in the west, leaving the then six-year-old with his stepfather. At the same time, Ronny’s then 12-year-old sister also *“did a bunk”* – nothing is known of her whereabouts. Ronny describes the time when he was living alone with his stepfather as *“the best time”* of his life, which came to an end when his mother took him to the west to live with her and her

¹⁹ All names changed to protect identities.

Lebanese life partner, uprooting him from his familiar environment. Ronny still has a grudge against her for this. When Ronny lived with his mother and her new life partner, she – apparently successfully – tried to spoil his relationship with his stepfather by deliberately casting the step-father in a negative light.

Yet Ronny's mother revived her former relationship with his stepfather after she had split up with her Lebanese life partner. The stepfather then moved to the west to again live with Ronny and Ronny's mother. Although Ronny had realised that his mother had painted a wrong picture of his stepfather he was unable to restore their formerly good relationship.

When Ronny started drinking and stealing at age nine, the atmosphere at home turned from bad to worse, escalating into severe occasional fights between Ronny and his mother. At the age of ten, Ronny was sent to a foster home at his own request. Ronny sometimes did get briefly in touch with his mother, but he describes their relationship – his mother now lives in Italy with a new partner – as follows:

“We never really liked each other because my mother always used to say she had done everything she could for me and I didn't share this view at all.” When asked if he had ever seen his mother again, he answered, *“Oh yes, see her I did, but [...] how to put it, it's when she's in Germany and I happen to have the bad luck to meet her, it's more like talking to you [meaning the interviewer; author's note], totally strange.”* (Ri08, active extremist)

We can conclude this chapter by stating that the problematic situations that had developed over time overtaxed the interviewees' families, who were unable to solve their problems jointly. Because of their different needs and desires, family members actually worked against one another, thereby aggravating the smouldering conflicts and adversely affecting the atmosphere at home, which in turn favoured the development of psycho-social processes carrying in their wake the loss of mutual trust (mainly between the parents and the interviewees). This vicious circle made up of helplessness, loneliness and the wish for closeness eventually culminated in the marginalisation of those family members who were considered particularly problematical or causing the most stress. We detected a (temporary) loss either of family ties or of a close psychological parent among almost all interviewees. The fact that the majority of the parent-child conflicts mentioned above had not been resolved at the time of the interview illustrates their significance; moreover, these conflicts were frequently deemed the root cause for joining radical milieus.

4.2.1.2 The impact and role of peer groups

The search for peers offering the social support, understanding and recognition they frequently did not receive (any longer) from their families was considered of paramount importance by all interviewees. The transition from family to peer relationships typically took place abruptly rather gradually and smoothly after the interviewees had lost their social support system, i.e. their parents (or important psychological parents).

Many interviewees had considerable problems socialising into their respective peer groups because of their personal situation and circumstances. Islamists, for example, had little or no contact at all with their peers, either because they did not attend school or owing to language problems:

“I had a difficult time during my adolescence, and especially so in Germany [...], many of my compatriots in Germany weren't even able to speak Arabic [...], I couldn't even talk to my younger family members. All this made life very difficult for me, so initially I only consorted

with those who were older than I. The other guys didn't like this at all, nor did they like my praying with the elders." (Iu04, inactive extremist)

"I hardly spoke any German in the beginning, for the year I spent with my mother I didn't go to school at all, and at home we only spoke Turkish. It was really boring there, mind you. Most of the time I would hang around with my mother's new and useless man and had to endure his moods." (Iu05, inactive extremist)

We identified severe socialisation problems also among the right- and left wing oriented individuals because it was more difficult for them to make contact with peers, e. g. because they had dropped out of school. Many of the interviewees described themselves as "loners" or "lone wolves"; they felt either marginalised or found themselves in the role of outsiders; immigrants and refugees also blamed cultural and religious factors in addition to others:

"I immediately jumped up when the teacher came in – 'Now get down, you're new, aren't you, he's from the east'. [...] Well, and I feel absolutely alien at this school. And this on my very first day at school, of course some will talk to you and treat you like, well, I felt like a stranger, like 'So what is it like there and what kind of jargon do you speak? Well, go ahead and speak, say something!' And I still spoke a bit of a dialect at the time, Saxon [...] I somehow felt like an ape somehow, that is, totally, not exactly great." (Ri05, person with extremist inclinations)

Their lack of social competencies and their experiences with a family background based on dysfunctional relationships made social interaction with peers and the integration into adequate standard groups even more difficult. On the contrary, these factors even furthered their integration into more problematical groups that either tolerated or even enhanced the individuals' own "imperfections".

Depending on a peer group and simultaneously trying to socialise into it under difficult conditions proved to be the root cause of the individuals' vulnerability to problematic group dynamics. They simply suppressed or cut out any negative impact the group had for the added value that group membership offered. The following example serves to illustrate this point:

"I felt bad, left alone [by his parents; author's note] and this is why - I think – the techno scene and, later on, the skinhead scene became my surrogate families [...] and because I didn't want to be rejected by them, too, I of course did whatever they did. When they said, 'Let's go downtown', I went along, and whenever rows occurred I of course immediately helped them and didn't realise at all the kind of trouble I was getting myself into at that moment." (Ri17, active extremist)

It was striking to see how often the inner circle of their clique was referred to as "family", an association that is even more logical if we consider the fact that almost all interviewees had either lost all family connections or that the basis of trust between the parents and the interviewees had been vigorously disrupted. The clique was a surrogate family in the truest sense of the word.

All study groups displayed a pronounced fixation – up to self-abandonment – on and strong emotional ties with their circle of friends. The clique and/or scene was their main personal, spiritual and frequently also financial support system, which they sometimes even put above their own needs and desires. The great commitment and strong group coherence hardly allowed them to meet and mingle with female peers (groups); the right wing oriented subjects in particular said that they "basically couldn't reconcile anything [...] with the group" (Ri01, pseudo-extremist) – neither a partner nor a

regular job. Only the left wing oriented subjects described cliques consisting of both male and female members.

The interviewees' socialisation into cliques with a rather perfunctory communications structure that was none too different from that of their family environment and characterised by rituals (like, for instance, drinking and partying but also praying and doing political work) in most cases negatively affected their social lives outside the group and their performance at school. This was true especially if they entertained contact with criminals or if their lifestyle made them unable to cope with the requirements of their daily lives.

4.2.1.3 Education, work and military service

Almost all biographical histories that we studied were typically characterised by disrupted educational careers:

“Well, I attended grammar school A., and then I attended grammar school W. until they expelled me from that one, too, so enrolled in [...] secondary school [Realschule, translator’s note] W., and then I just moved away to live with my father [...], attending secondary school in J. at first [...] and, er, yeah, then at the end, my last year, I attended lower secondary school [Hauptschule, translator’s note].” (Li02, militant radical)

“I had to do my A levels again [...] I wanted to study medicine but didn’t make it for various reasons, so I studied natural sciences, one year, I guess, and then I dropped out of university and went [...] to an East European country in order to study medicine there [...] but for a number of reasons including financial and personal problems I dropped out of university.” (Ii01, terrorist)

The interviewees' educational career was anything but straightforward even before they joined the respective scenes. In those cases where the situation had escalated and the individuals dropped out of school (only left and right wing oriented persons), the first problems had surfaced even at kindergarten age, generally in the form of aggressive behaviour toward other children or the kindergarten teachers, sometimes even leading up to expulsion from kindergarten. One interviewee constituted an exception in that he encountered problems because he came from national-socialist oriented family and brought along propaganda material. After only one year, he was expelled from kindergarten, ...

“... because [...] I had brought along my granddad’s book ‘Der kleine Jud’ [‘The little Jew’, translator’s note] which contained caricatures of the gynaecologist who rapes the women and [...] as a child you talk a lot without knowing anything, but knowing that you can raise your voice or even hit another person [and I] liked watching this or even feeling it I hit the kindergarten teacher because she wanted to burn the book or throw it away, whatever. My mother was aghast, of course, but my father, who was normally very strict, even praised me for doing that.” (Ri22, active extremist)

The right wing oriented subjects frequently displayed deviant behaviour even at the primary school stage whereas the left wing oriented persons and Islamists rather went unnoticed. Trouble in primary school caused the first interruptions in the educational careers of about a fifth of all interviewees who invariably had a problematic family background with e. g. parents addicted to alcohol or drugs,

experiences of loss or the most extreme domestic abuse. Not a single interviewee came from an intact family.

Three individuals²⁰ had been unable to advance in school after their immigration into or relocation to Germany. Four had been either expelled from school or made to repeat a school-year or interrupted school on grounds of deviant behaviour like aggressiveness, playing truant and/or a decline in performance. The previously mentioned interviewee who had encountered problems with Turkish classmates even in primary school once again was an exception:

“... also attended two or three different primary schools, making a bad impression because I used to spit at Turkish classmates in school: ‘You stink!’ [...] I calmed down somewhat only in third or fourth grade, when I attended the umpteenth primary school and [we had] moved from R. to B.” (Ri22, active extremist)

With respect to secondary education, the right and left wing oriented interviewees in particular stood out thanks to their constantly declining performance, frequently including repeated school-years, early school leaving and school changes:

“I was then enrolled in grammar school where I was also considered something of a nuisance because, well yeah, somehow everything else seemed to be more interesting, girls, taking the piss out of teachers and so on. I was expelled and enrolled in middle school [Realschule, translator’s note]. Well, of course I thought, coming from grammar school I am king, I’m more intelligent than you. [Then] of course I had to repeat the year because I wasn’t more intelligent than the others after all. I just carried on after that, had to repeat the sixth grade, stayed on in middle school.” (Ri08, active extremist)

It was striking that the Islamist-oriented interviewees succeeded most frequently and best in compensating their initially difficult starting points at school, improving their performance continually. Unlike their extreme right- and left wing oriented counterparts, none of them reported going to school extremely reluctantly or playing truant. On the contrary, they seemed to study rather passionately:

“... and was one of the best in class ...” (Iu03, inactive extremist)

“On top of this, few schoolmates – especially the foreigners – were just as ambitious as I was. I used to study four, five, six hours a day there, sometimes even more, and I also read a lot ...” (Iu04, inactive extremist)

A considerably large number of the interviewees described the character they displayed at school as impulsive, playing tricks on others and/or behaving “*coolly*” and even performing humorous sketches (“*class clown*”). In the majority of cases, this also served to explain their role as outsiders or the budding social problems that eventually made them change or drop out of school (cf. Chapter 4.2.1.2). Deviant behaviour both caused and was caused by problems with classmates or teachers:

“... I preferred acting the class clown, with absolutely no discipline, but wreaking havoc. And then at grammar school they thought that I was nervous and that I had better go to another school.” (Ri08, active extremist)

²⁰ One of the interviewees migrated from Morocco via France (where as an 8-year-old he had been living with his uncle for a prolonged period of time) to Germany. The other two were *refugees’ children* whose families had fled to West Germany at the time of the GDR.

“... always played the fool [...], always made a bad impression [...] at school [...] drunk at higher grades’ farewell parties that I, being the form captain, had to attend. And sprayed CS gas into someone’s eyes at school and such stuff.” (Li02, militant radical)

Most of the interviewees were distinctly older than their classmates due to repeated school years and downgrading, which again made them stand out at school. One interviewee graduated from standard grammar school at the age of 21, for example.

All study groups had only had vague ideas about what vocational career to follow after graduating from school. Most subjects had picked their apprenticeships haphazardly, just basing their decisions on pragmatic criteria like e.g. closeness to home or financial independence from their parents, continuing the tradition of flawed and interrupted careers also in their vocational training. To our surprise, however, only very few interviewees explained that they had dropped out of vocational training because they did not feel like pursuing their respective careers. Rather, the most frequently mentioned reasons for *“not feeling at all like working”*, eventually resulting in their dropping out of or losing their apprenticeship or employment contract, were conflicts with colleagues and superiors and neglect of their work due to drug consumption and excessive partying.

All study groups closely associated work with an occupation that structured their daily lives, and although most of the interviewees said that they had *“a job and an income”*, a closer look revealed that these occupations rather consisted of changing activities, seasonal jobs or *“moonlighting”* than jobs securing their livelihoods.

Only a few interviewees broached the subject of the *Bundeswehr* (Federal Armed Forces) on their own initiative. As a general rule, they only told us about what it had meant to them upon further enquiry. The Federal Armed Forces were mentioned especially by those individuals who themselves had actively brought about the termination of service (5), or who had realised that they liked the Federal Armed Forces in spite of themselves (1), or whose wish to join the Federal Armed Forces could not be fulfilled despite their most intense efforts (2). We would like to emphasise the fact that none of the ideologically imbued “extremists” in our sample did or could do their military service because the Federal Armed Forces had rejected them for various reasons. Beyond this, the Federal Armed Forces apparently did not play any part at all in promoting a radical attitude in any of the interviewees. Still, the question arises whether and to what extent other paramilitary training alternatives fascinated them as a consequence of their having been denied their (basic) military service. One interviewee for example said that he found participating in war games camps attractive because of their *“military touch”*. *“The Federal Armed Forces rejected me so I’ll join them instead”* (Ri12, militant radical). We can conclusively state that none of the interviewees linked or connected their journey to radicalism to or with the Federal Armed Forces. If radicalisation took place at all during their military service, it was due to other social environments.

4.2.1.4 Violence

By and large, the right- and left wing oriented individuals spoke more freely about violence than their Islamist-oriented counterparts, whose comments were distinctly more restrained. Yet the latter also reported *“brawls with Nazis and rockers”* (Iu05, inactive extremist) and domestic abuse. One interviewee, for instance, had to say the following about his stepfather:

“... he was beating me constantly. This started especially after I had caught him red-handed with another woman. He threatened to kill me if I reported him. To make sure I understood that he meant it, he picked whichever reason to beat me.”

(Iu05, inactive extremist)

Most biographies showed that violence and oppression played a major role even when the interviewees were still children. About half of the interviewees reported domestic violence at home, and some had had to face serious clashes and maltreatment. The most severe cases were reported by the right wing oriented interviewees.

Violence was not exclusively directed against the children but also occurred between the parents: One interviewee for instance told us that he had found his own mother unconscious, lying in a pool of blood. Others described the most extreme ill-treatment, from wantonly afflicted burns through to attempted murder (by throwing an axe, or afflicting skull injuries causing lasting damage).

We did not detect any differences between the persons with extremist inclinations, militant radicals and extremists groups; however, terrorists were the only group not reporting domestic abuse. Furthermore, the interviewees who used violence later in life did not differ in any way from those who did not. The only difference between prisoners and free persons was the degree of violence these groups had experienced, with the prisoners reporting considerably more extreme incidents (cf. Appendix D).

Most interviewees conceived of violence as a means to establish a balance of power and humiliate others, strongly associating it with masculinity. Some of the hooligans and offenders who had committed acts of violence used violence in order to “*satisfy themselves*” and pass time (cf. Chapter 4.2.2.6). The pseudo-extremists in particular applied double standards to violence: while they did criticise and renounce acts of violence exerted by their parents, they played down or suppressed their own bouts of violence. One interviewee, for example, sugar-coats his victim’s condition by laying the blame for the patient’s comatose status on the attending physicians:

“He was lying there for a few days, being comatose or so. Two or three days. But they made him comatose or else he would have suffered too much pain.”

(Ri19, pseudo-extremist)

Apart from those interviewees who had used violence from an early age onward, there was another group who started having aggressive outbursts only in their adolescence, frequently when with their clique and/or only temporarily. As a general rule, these were pent-up aggressions let out. However, not all of the interviewees committed acts of violence: some (4) strictly rejected the use of violence and acted accordingly, while others (4) claimed not to use force but displayed a latent tolerance of violence, e. g. the use of violence to defend friends and family members.

4.2.1.5 Alcohol and drug consumption

Alcohol

The majority of the interviewees – the sole exception being the Islamist-oriented group – admitted to having had severe active or passive alcohol problems already for a prolonged period of time, the most problematic alcohol consumption occurring among the prisoners and their families. Their alcohol abuse frequently entailed negative consequences such as, for instance, problems at school, the loss of

apprenticeships and jobs, the breaking up of relationships and acquisitive crime. Many of the subjects reported having exerted violence under the influence of alcohol, for example when they had “*a lot of stress at home [...] occasionally [...] a good spanking*” (Ri12, militant radical) or things escalated so far “*that I immediately hit them. This was mostly because of this schnapps*” (Ri24, militant radical). Only one interviewee labelled himself as an “*alcoholic*” (Ri07, militant radical) whereas all the others preferred paraphrasing their condition as “*a minor alcohol problem*” (Ri18, person with extremist inclinations) even when conceding that their alcohol consumption dominated their everyday lives:

“I came back home in the morning, right. I turned in and slept until two or three p.m., had a bite, tidied my flat. [...] Maybe went shopping. I didn’t drink right then, it wasn’t like that, [...] that was somewhere between three, five, six p.m. and then I would start again [...] then the drinking started as usual until there was no money left or you couldn’t take it no more or so. Drinking, drinking, and then the fighting went on no end, [...] every day, [...] well, I sure got into brawls five, six times a day.” (Ri19, pseudo-extremist)

Almost none of the interviewees considered their alcohol consumption a problem. If they talked about alcohol-related problems at all, they usually referred to the penal consequences (e. g. the legal consequences entailed by acquisitive crime or violent offences). Dysfunctional coping strategies ensued: Instead of trying to reduce their alcohol consumption and actively tackle its causes they preferred employing conflict-evasion methods like e. g. steering clear of potential victims of violence or conflict-prone spots.

What is more, it became evident that the right wing oriented individuals were also likely to start drinking at a very young age. Some of them had begun to consume alcohol and cigarettes even at primary school age. Negligence and a lack of parental control frequently played a role in this context, as one interviewee reported who had suffered his first alcohol poisoning at the age of nine: He “*was in a drunken stupor for the first time at the age of two*” (Ri08, active extremist) when after a New Year’s Eve party he had drained the glasses of remaining alcoholic drinks. Another interviewee said that every day he and his schoolmates “*went to school nicely pissed*” even at the age of seven (Ri21, active extremist). Excessive alcohol consumption resulting in addiction mostly started at the age of 13 or 14 years. Most interviewees subjectively saw a close connection between taking up drinking – with the subsequent escalation – and their cliques, as heavy drinking and “*partying*” affirmed and consolidated their belonging within the group. We did not discover a comparably excessive consumption of alcohol among the left wing oriented group.

Alcohol was an issue of importance also for the Islamist-oriented individuals, two thirds of whom (4) reported never having consumed any alcohol at all. Almost all said that their abstinence had led to conflicts between them and their peers or that these had teased them (5). One interviewee even said that he had been forced by his classmates to drink a sip of alcohol.

The Islamist-oriented group perceived the disputes over alcohol with their peers as *religious discrimination*. This is small wonder if we remember that their abstinence was principally motivated by religious, not personal concerns. If they reported alcohol consumption at all, they said they had been drinking it before (re-) discovering Islam, (re-) interpreting it as a temptation by the devil.

We need to remember by way of conclusion that the presence of a Muslim interviewer – consciously or subconsciously – induced the Islamist-oriented group to authentically and vigorously act the *perfect Muslim*, overemphasising in this context their compliance with religious rules (like e. g. the ban on alcohol) even though they may in fact have consumed/consume alcohol. This, however, may very likely be nothing more than a pattern of argumentation that they used to enhance their self-worth, for

they primarily mentioned alcohol consumption in connection with classifying Muslims as “good” or “bad” because “*only [...] a true Muslim is able to resist these temptations*” (Iu04, inactive extremist).

Illicit drugs

All study groups mentioned illicit drugs in addition to legal drugs. Both consuming and dealing in narcotics played a role in this context and included the entire range from hard drugs to so-called soft drugs like e. g. tetrahydrocannabinol (THC, “smoking pot”). Consumption patterns ranged from abstinence to testing and experimental consumption through to daily consumption controlling everyday life. In some cases acquisitive crime was a concomitant of the consumption especially of illicit drugs.

The interviewees also reported committing acts of violence under the influence of drugs. This was especially true for members of the hooligan scene. A total of six prisoners (three left and three right wing oriented individuals each) admitted to having been heroin addicts, and many others – in particular left and right wing individuals – described a pattern of drug abuse involving a variety of drugs which they used regularly and purposefully in order to structure and cope with their everyday lives, taking different kinds of drugs in the daytime to “get high” and consuming sedatives to neutralise this effect before going to bed. While the consumption of so-called “soft” (e. g. cannabis) and party drugs (e. g. ecstasy) which – like alcohol – were well “established” in the groups (social drugs) was encouraged mainly by group dynamics, personal problems – which the addicts obviously hoped to be able to overcome by consuming drugs – invariably were at the root of heroin consumption. Such problems included family issues as well as to apprenticeship or job-related problems.

It was striking that – comparable to this group’s alcohol consumption habits – all prisoners had consumed their first drugs at a very young age. Some individuals had taken their first drugs in their later primary school years, but the majority of the prisoners concerned had started consuming illicit drugs approximately at the age of 13 years. By and large, the right wing oriented group had started taking drugs earlier than the other groups.

In addition to taking drugs themselves, the individuals also mentioned drug consumption by family members. We detected drug addiction problems in the (foster) families across all study groups, finding the most severe proportions among the left and right wing oriented individuals. The general question is whether there were indeed fewer drug-related problems in Muslim environments, or whether the Muslims merely had not mentioned them to the Muslim interviewers, preferring to give socially correct answers (cf. in this context the note on Muslims’ responses to questions regarding alcohol, p. 38). They also frequently refused to discuss in greater detail any hints on family-related problems.

The drug-dealing situation was different: All study groups reported drug dealing, regardless of their respective ideologies or status as prisoners or unreported cases. Above all the Islamist-oriented subjects conspicuously dated their experience with drugs (“*possessed by the devil*”) back to a time before they had been radicalised. While the right- and left wingers also started taking illicit drugs before joining the scene, they frequently did not stop afterwards but rather encountered social settings and strategies conducive to further consumption.

4.2.1.6 Religion and politics

Religion and politics did not explicitly matter to most interviewees before their joining the scene (Islamists) or before studying in a typically adolescent manner socio-critical subjects or politics (all study groups), but were described as having been experienced as rooted in their culture, forming part and parcel of everyday life. The Islamist-oriented individuals with a foreign immigrant background for example regarded the religious practices prevailing in their home countries as an ordinary and normal part of their lives; only upon specific inquiry did they associate e. g. praying or attending Friday prayers to religion.

An exception was the interviewee brought up in the Gaza strip, who reported that politics had always mattered a great deal to him and that he had “*experienced*” it in his native home.

While in comparison to the left and right wing oriented individuals the Islamist-oriented group practised their religion more fervently due to their cultural upbringing, we cannot generally speak of exaggerated piety. The right wing oriented group also included a few individuals who temporarily attached importance to religion or the church (3), and who in this respect mentioned especially conflicts of faith or problems with their intrapersonal or interpersonal roles. One interviewee, for example, quit his long-standing function of a server when his personal (criminal) social environment and his lifestyle ceased to be compatible with this role.

Whereas Islam had been almost always omnipresent in the daily lives of the families of the Islamist-oriented individuals and was even described as some kind of “central thread” by the three immigrants in the group, the three Islamists who were born and raised in Germany began to embrace it mainly from their adolescence onward. One interviewee for instance described that when looking for an apprenticeship he time and again discovered to his utter surprise that all that was noticed about him was the immigrant background of his family. This made him realise for the first time that there was a rather dramatic discrepancy between his self-perception and his perception by others.

During their childhood years, the interviewees from politically active families accepted their parents’ political attitudes as something “normal”, without probing more deeply, as is typical of that age. Yet their upbringing firmly engrained this attitude in their childhood patterns of interpretation, and/or some individuals even spread it without giving it second thoughts.

Summing up, we can state that both politics and religion were perceived by our study group to be firmly integrated into their everyday lives but of little relevance to their personal lives. Politics and religion were studied more critically only at the onset of adolescence or when joining the scene, sometimes gaining a special status in the process. Noticeably the argumentation patterns and attitudes of the Islamist-oriented group were focused more on politics than religion, employing religion solely as a means to distinguish between “good” and “evil”.

4.2.1.7 Personal factors

In addition to the family, school, vocational training and peer group-related problems mentioned above, we identified the following personal factors across all ideological groups as the driving forces in the subjects' biographical histories and their radicalisation process:

The heteronomy / autonomy problem

Many of the interviewees said they felt that their lives had been controlled by their families and school as well as unpredictable critical life events. The vast majority of them consequently developed a strong desire to ward off ills and gain command of social incidents and situations (e. g. by showing denial or putting up resistance), and in pursuit of this goal responded mostly by demonstrating impetuous and intrinsically motivated behaviour, which sometimes even changed their situation for the worse.

“Class tests, this is a control instrument somehow, I’m not gonna have them fob this off on me [...], there are some guys who want to control you, and if they want to control you they can do to you whatever they like. I won’t let them, though, so I don’t accept this control in the first place, I’m keeping away from it.” (Ri01, pseudo-extremist of the impetuous-active type)

In contrast to the above, three interviewees exhibited a way of coping that could be more adequately described as being of the depressed, resigned type:

“... since I’ve been born, let me put it this way more or less, that is whenever, some shit happens somewhere, it hits me.” (Ri09, pseudo-extremist of the depressed, resigned type)

Sometimes the environment was perceived not only as being controlled by others but also as hostile, described by the interviewees as an impression of being labelled unfairly or unfavourably prejudged and sort of victimised, for instance.

The search for order and structure

Many of the interviewees reported a sometimes single-minded search for order and structure as well as a desire to be looked after, for which they blamed their changing social environments, like e. g. having to live away from their families, and other irregularities in their biographical histories. While in some cases this desire could be attributed first and foremost to their shying away from self-responsibility, the opportunity to wield power thanks to a special position was the main reason in others.

“... my girl-friend doing time, me in a strange city, no one to relate to, nothing, my mother dead [...], then back to it again [meaning drugs; author’s note] [...] And then I had thought, come on, go ahead and get jailed, now do something so that they get you into jail so that you can manage all right. Well, and then I, er, mugged someone.” (Li02, militant radical)

“In jail you have this straightforward structure. This is what I missed most of all out there. I didn’t know where to go and what to do with myself [...], so the door-to-door sales force came in quite handy. Because, I had a house then and I knew I had to get up and go there. And this and that is my job, so once again a clear-cut structure [...], OK, so I succeeded in getting promoted rather swiftly, to put it this way. [...] but then I became deputy head of the sales force.”

[...] We had to give seminars in the evening, and in these evening seminars we were allowed to be somewhat more rudeish. [...] but not giving people a black eye or something like that, but if at all, boxing them in their stomach or shaking them or just shouting at them.” (Ri08, active extremist)

Adventure-seeking and risk-taking

Those interviewees who in the course of their lives had been members of the hooligan scene or had become notorious for repeatedly committing severe acts of violence in other contexts all displayed the traits of a *sensation seeking personality* in the sense of having a distinct urge to seek adventure, with the concomitant reduced ability to feel fear (cf. Amelang et al. 2006; Zuckerman, 1984; Zuckerman et al. 1978). For example, one interviewee told us that he had run away from home when he was eight years old, “going out in search of adventure. I wanted to capture a child abuser [...] I wasn’t afraid, no, actually I wanted to find out why everybody was afraid of this person” (Ri08, active extremist).

Those interviewees who had not been involved in physical attacks causing bodily harm also reported with different intensity the four primary factors of the *sensation seeking* construct (thrill and adventure seeking, experience seeking, disinhibition and boredom susceptibility)^{21,22}. They differed from the former group, however, in that they did at least feel latent fear and acted out their thirst for adventure in a much more cognitive manner, e. g. through their role as jihadists, terrorists etc., including the concomitant conflicts and moral distress.

The following figure (Fig. 5) shows some biographical milestones of one right wing, one left wing and one Islamist-oriented interviewee that clearly indicate sensation-seeking tendencies. Interviewee Ri10, for example, a pseudo-extremist, in general showed a great willingness to take risks with little fear of the unknown. He had a preference for eventful jobs, intense music (e. g. gabber) and physical experiences, smoking regularly and excessively consuming drugs and alcohol. He purposefully sought out opportunities to exert violence, which he “enjoyed” and on which he “got high”.

While our qualitative study is unable to provide a definitive answer to the question of whether the power and intensity of *sensation seeking* traits may possibly indicate the course of direction of the development of a radicalised person, our observations do give us reason to believe that those interviewees who displayed a considerably reduced feeling of fear felt at ease in different social environments (more spontaneous, confrontative, open and variegated settings) and developed differently from the interviewees who had at least a latent feeling of fear (rather manageable, structured and easier-to-control environments). The latter group also reported a distinctly higher frequency of intellectual conflicts (e. g. legitimacy of an attack or political assassination). These findings, if confirmed by further studies, may serve as an interesting point of departure with respect to de-radicalisation processes.

²¹ Describing (1) the inclination to create thrill through risky, exciting actions [thrill and adventure seeking]; (2) the need to gain new impressions [experience seeking]; (3) the inclination to create stimulation through social activities, shedding inhibitions through alcohol or through sexual contacts [disinhibition]; (4) the susceptibility to boredom when experiences repeat themselves [boredom susceptibility] (cf. Zuckerman et al. 1978).

²² This property can be found to a greater or lesser extent in all human beings; its actual degree of intensity however does not permit conclusions as to abnormal psycho-social or pathological behaviour.

Discrimination experiences

On top of the previously described experiences of being marginalised or rejected (cf. Chapters 4.2.1.1 - 4.2.1.3), those interviewees who were born in the former GDR or abroad also faced the challenge of having to socialise into a new culture and society. We identified in this group societal exclusion processes which rendered the integration processes the individuals had to undergo considerably more difficult, e. g. they had never been able to integrate into a peer group because they did not attend school or were locally excluded due to their accommodation in refugee camps. Above and beyond this, the interviewees concerned reported having been discriminated against, subjectively blaming their religion or ethnic origin for this experience; however, upon closer scrutiny their personal (character) traits or discrepancies in the attitudes held by themselves and their social environment turned out to be the main reason. Factors mentioned included e. g. a stammer and shyness but also a passion for learning in lower secondary school (Hauptschule). Some situations nevertheless clearly showed that it was indeed either the interviewees' immigrant or religious background that mattered:

“... during police checks [...] if there's chaos in your boot or whatever. A policeman once said: 'Is this how you live at home?' [...] not referring to my private home, my car, or my place of residence, my residential address but meaning 'at home' in the sense of: where you come from.” (Iu03, inactive extremist)

“There was a barbecue, and being a Muslim I don't eat pork, which made them, well – yes, one can actually say, almost angry, so they came after me and grabbed me, holding me up, beating me a little, and then they pried open my mouth und put the pork sausage into it and forced me to drink a sip of alcohol. And this wasn't the end of it; they then spat at me and wrote 'gay Muhammad' on my forehead. Luckily they got the spelling of our prophet's name wrong. The worst thing was that a Turk – even though he was only half-Turkish –, that is, someone who should respect Islam [...] joined in and participated [...] in this obscenity.” (Iu04, inactive extremist)

The latter example illustrates another aspect of importance to the Islamist-oriented group, i.e. that they suffered most from being disadvantaged and discriminated against if other Muslims or foreigners were involved from whom they expected most solidarity in the first place.

Fig. 5 – Comparison of the urge to seek adventure and take risks of different interviewees

	Ri10 Pseudo-extremist	Li01 Terrorist	Iu04 Inactive extremist
Thrill and adventure seeking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisation of and participation in brawls; • weapons trading; • theft; • regular drug consumption. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conspiracy; • playing “cops and robbers”; • role conflict: terrorist vs. son (is still living with his parents). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeks thrill in his “jihadist” role; • looks for extremes (e. g. militant Islam).
Experience seeking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excessive travelling to away matches (football); • consorts with fringe groups (hooligans). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consorts with fringe groups (militant leftists, leftist link-up with collaborator, interested in Islam); • arranges with collaborator to convert jointly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhances his knowledge of Islam and Islam-related global politics; • travels abroad; • consorts with fringe groups (Islamists).
Disinhibition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stimulation through social activities (e. g. communal watching of football games, “<i>hanging around</i>”); • disinhibition through social drinking. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stimulation through “militant” and political activities pursued jointly with a schoolmate; stimulation through social activities like e. g. practising religion or jointly pursuing political aims. 	
Boredom susceptibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not tolerate recurring experiences (breaks off education and training courses, changes jobs frequently). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bored by “normality”, fascinated by the extraordinary (e. g. the leftists’ interest in Islam, rejection of “normal” hobbies). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desire and strong urge to change the world.
General	<p>Markedly reduced feeling of fear and distinct willingness to take risks (in spite of his criminal record and knowing about the penalty, the interviewee is purposefully looking for a “kick out of violence”).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rather fears the unknown and penalty but is willing to take risks (carrying out of attacks). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rather fears penalty but has a latent willingness to take risks (advocates and legitimises attacks and violence but is self-disciplined with regard to his own ideas of violence).

4.2.2 “Fully involved” – development within the scene

4.2.2.1 First contact and joining the scene

First contact with members of the scene was usually established via peers (33), predominantly at school; or through private contacts outside school or peers belonging to the (extended) family (e. g. brothers and sisters, cousins), and only rarely through adults or parents (4).

Sometimes several years passed between first contact with representatives of a scene and actually joining the scene, so it is crucial that we differentiate between these two events. For the purpose of the present study, the term *joining the scene* refers to the point in time in an interviewee’s biographical history when formerly loose contacts with the scene and a distant acquaintance with its members become closer and more frequent to such an extent that we can speak of a certain degree of continuity (e. g. when the same persons meet regularly). In this context, the contact frequency was considered less important than the quality or depth of these contacts.

The phase between first contact and actually joining the scene was particularly prolonged in those cases in which first contact with scene members was established through the interviewees’ parents – they had generally reached adolescence before they actually joined the scene. The left wing oriented individuals often strove to attain a standpoint diametrically opposed to that of their parents – as is typical for adolescents –, e. g. by deliberately flirting with the punk scene in contrast to their parents’ communist beliefs because they “*didn’t feel like [doing] what I knew from home*” (Lu02, person with extremist inclinations – nomad). The right wing oriented group who socialised particularly into skinhead cliques²³ – but less so into political parties etc. – displayed a similar inclination, whereas the Islamists rebelled by politicising Islam to the extreme, unlike their parents, who entertained a more traditional, religious attitude toward it. Joining the scene was often an attempt to induce dialogue with one’s parents, a cry for help to draw attention to one’s own situation or plight. When talking about their decision to join the scene, many of the interviewees explicitly or implicitly mentioned grudges against their parents, a great number citing external causes for joining, i.e. blaming their parents or society etc. It is interesting and noteworthy that many interviewees mentioned their fathers in this context – by joining the scene they hoped to regain their fathers’ attention and recognition. Their mothers tended to play a minor role in their narratives and were usually mentioned only if direct and serious conflicts or rows had occurred between an interviewee and his mother.

There were essentially four routes to joining and/or socialising into the radical/extremist milieu, as follows:

- (1) The active route, which requires a *forced approach* to contacting a (radical) group. The crucial factor here was to identify with the external appearance and lifestyle of the group members rather than with their ideological stance. Moreover, the study subjects often mentioned that they had wished that a group with a “*martial*” appearance would protect them against others. In some cases, peers served as catalysts in joining as they had already established contact with the relevant groups, which facilitated getting acquainted. Only one individual used the internet for the explicit purpose of meeting like-minded persons.²⁴

²³ Whenever we mention skinheads in this study at hand, we first and foremost refer to the outfit and the manners typically exhibited by representatives of this culture. Although the cases we studied revealed rather rightist sympathies, we hereby expressly state that we do not put right wing extremists on a level with skinheads, and that we do not consider the skinhead culture *per se* to be radical or extremist right wing in nature.

²⁴ We need to note in this context that the radicalisation of the majority of the persons described in this study took place before the advent of the so-called age of the Internet. While the study at hand cannot answer the question, “To what extent is the Internet currently used for making contact with the relevant groups?”, the overall increasing importance and ongoing integration of the Internet into daily life do suggest that contact with like-minded individuals is also specifically sought through online communities.

- (2) *Radicalisation of an existing clique*: We need to note in this respect that radical tendencies within a group (or groups) generally resulted in the splitting up of the clique and the formation of smaller groups that later on developed into new, autonomous groups. The decision in favour of one subgroup or another was influenced mainly by individual persons belonging to it and less so by their political orientation.
- (3) Contact with like-minded individuals produced by *an interest in politics*: This type was predominant among the Islamists and the left wing oriented subjects. In view of our sample however, we assume that the number of persons within the socially rather inconspicuous rightist milieu who socialised into the respective scene through their interest in politics is considerably higher.
- (4) (Deliberate) *recruitment* by radical cliques or political parties: This occurred in any environment imaginable – on camping grounds, in village pubs, in parks etc. – without always being based on purely ideological motives; a mutual liking between recruiter and recruitee being far more important. In all cases, meeting a likeable person who defied the media-projected image of a scene member (surprise effect) did play a certain role, but a favourable coincidence of point in time, place and personal situation also determined whether or not an individual would later identify with the ideology. First contact did not always result in successful identification.

A catalytic biographical event with a devastating impact on the individuals' emotional or social stability or feeling of identity, like e. g. the unexpected move to a foreign country or the loss of a parent or sibling usually preceded their joining the scene. In nine out of ten cases, such events happened during middle childhood or early adolescence, tending to occur during childhood in the right wing oriented group and during adolescence in the left wing and Islamist-oriented groups. It is necessary to mention in this context that critical life events such as, for instance, moving house, getting divorced or losing a beloved one do not *per se* act as triggers but should rather be considered obvious, objective clues indicating a chain of events and processes which eventually resulted in the individuals' joining the respective milieu. The concrete significance of such an event cannot be appropriately assessed without considering of the individual's subjective interpretation and perception.

The individual age of joining depended on the kind of scene: while right wing oriented group members usually joined the scene either between 12 and 14 or between 21 and 24 years of age, the left wing oriented individuals joined between 14 and 15 and the Islamists between 16 and 19 years of age. Only a fraction of the interviewees joined the scene after they had completed their 28th year of life, regardless of ideology. It is noticeable that all individuals who had joined the scene at this later age had entertained relationships or loose long-term contacts to extremist scenes even in their adolescence. Two individuals changed their ideological orientation when they re-joined the extremist milieu: Committed left wing oriented individuals with an interest in or connections with Islam, they later on socialised into Islamism. We must not assume, however, that adolescents who cultivate contacts with a certain type of scene will inevitably rejoin the same or another extremist scene at a later point in time. But, what is the difference between those who rejoin the scene and those who stay away from it? Bearing in mind the fact that we are here dealing with an extremely small number of cases, we noticed that the formerly left wing oriented individuals mentioned above were particularly interested in Islam even at the time of being active leftists, provoking the tendency within their scene to marginalise them ("*desolidarisation*", "*discrimination*"). Neither did their scene support their personal intentions and goals, nor did their powerful focus on Islamic concerns appeal to the scene in either case. One

individual became a reborn Muslim after enrolling in university and meeting other ethnic Arab Muslims, while the other converted after he had been arrested by the police.

The different ideology-dependent age spans during which the various scenes were joined are easier to understand if we take a look at the motivation for joining: The left wing oriented individuals were driven mainly by an interest in politics and the wish to become independent from their parents, i.e. by tasks or processes typical of a developmental phase that has to be dealt with anyway during adolescence (cf. e. g. Preiser 2003, 177 et seq.; Fend 2003, 210 et seq.; Oerter/Montada 2002, 268 et seq.), the objective being to find one's "own way" between the extremes of leaving one's home and integrating into society in the course of the personal maturing process and within an emerging individual system of values and norms. Furthermore, a critical study of political issues presupposes formal operative and cognitive abilities that do not manifest themselves before adolescence (cf. Preiser 2003, 178). In addition to abstract and hypothetical thinking, these also include the capability to put oneself in somebody else's shoes and relate to their viewpoint from their perspective, for instance.

The right wing oriented individuals were predominantly motivated by social aspects, setting great store by establishing social networks that offered emotional and social protection. The point in time that we found to be critical for joining was the moment when the emotional and social support from their families was at risk of being compromised, e. g. at the onset of puberty when conflicts with parents typically occur, or the breaking up of the family they had founded themselves, e. g. through divorce.

The Islamist-oriented individuals' relatively later age of joining the scene was mainly due to identity crises and marginalisation experiences that had occurred in the course of their adolescence. Their perception by others as "foreigners" in society also played a major role in addition to their experiences at school, which they said included e. g. being denied access to discotheques, being regarded nothing but a migrant when checked by the police, being perceived as "social parasites" by members of the more educated social milieus (which they had hoped would accept them) and being disadvantaged in their educational training as well as on the job. If we study these aspects further we realise that they constitute social experiences that primarily occur during the transition from adolescence to early adulthood. In all these cases, the pivotal point was the process of becoming aware of the discrepancy between self-perception and the perception by others. Beyond this, our Islamist interviewees also expressed their wish to be better understood by their parents and/or family:

"My second brother is a devout but naïve person, just like my father. [...] He very much [...] reminds me of my father who hasn't seen much of this world, either, and where he lives he doesn't have a clue what they do to us. [...] But my brother only knows Morocco and doesn't have a clue what's going on in this world. How they give it to us." (Iu04, inactive extremist)

All interviewees attached special importance to mutual understanding and recognition when choosing a certain group or teaming up with a like-minded clique, therefore generally socialising into groups whose members more or less shared their experiences (e. g. at home or with respect to *enemy images*), understood their individual situation and projected a certain image through the way they looked or behaved, e. g. appearing to be inviolable or more mature. In all cases, the motives that had induced them to choose one group over another correlated with the qualities that later formed the basis of their strong loyalty to their group and clique. If an identity crisis was the motive for joining a group, the scene offered a new identity concept, helping to enhance one's self-esteem and self-confidence in a new social environment; if social or emotional distress were the deciding factors in joining a clique, the interviewees emphasised the feeling of togetherness and the understanding of their situation. In a

nutshell: The strong attraction of a scene or specific group can be explained by the fact that the interviewees were finding exactly what they were looking for.

Considering the ideological aspects, we must assume that most interviewees joined in a rather unreflective, adventure-seeking mood. For example, one became a communist “*because this sounded the coolest*” (Lu02, person with extremist inclinations), another had “*not really thought a lot about it [...], that it doesn’t make sense and serves no purpose, all this*” (Ri05, pseudo-extremist).

4.2.2.2 Factors influencing development

The individuals’ attitude toward alcohol, drugs and violence played a none-too-insignificant role in their further development and placing within the scene, as did their ability to subordinate and discipline themselves and their pronounced susceptibility to the processes of group-dynamics. By and large, we observed the following basic tendency: The more politicised the group, the more strongly it rejected partying, consumerism and “meaningless” leitmotifs revolving mainly around fun and “action”, for instance. Ultimately, the group’s ideology was the sole legitimising factor. We shall later come back to the fact that the reasons the interviewees supplied were not always following rational lines of thinking but sometimes rather paradoxical explanations.

The pressure for conformity with the group played a major role in addition to lifestyle and attitude. The interviewees often put up with things adversely affecting their own lives for the sake of being accepted by the group, including, among others things, dropping out of school and participating in criminal activities in order to emphasise their loyalty with the group, elicit recognition and strengthen their own position within the group. The feeling of belonging within the cliques was very much predicated on accepting the group’s specific culture (group standards), identifying with it and mutually appreciating one another. While some interviewees complained that individual problems were not appreciated within the group due to an (implicit) commitment to certain rituals, most of them in contrast more than welcomed the fact that personal problems and deficiencies could be relegated to the background, preferring instead to address the problem of how to obtain fresh money to buy alcohol or how to become the perfect Muslim. This way, personal difficulties were quickly accompanied by new group-related problems - an ideal excuse to neglect one’s own problems and devote one’s energy to coping with the frequently banal group-related problems.

Conformity was also achieved by e. g. by gradually neglecting school because the other group members did not pursue regular activities either or, alternatively, by trying to attain a higher degree because the others served as role models in this respect. As a matter of fact, even the pursuit of an at first glance worthy objective like obtaining a higher school-leaving qualification, for example, quickly loses its meaning if it only serves the purpose of ideology – for instance, if someone is motivated to complete his A levels not in order to improve his opportunities in life but only to be able to assume a high-ranking influential position in society so as to “*serve our cause*” [i.e. the jihad; author’s note] (Iu03, inactive extremist). Putting it simply, we might say that the (radical) clique offered a social space that provided more or less constructive solutions to cope with (or suppress) personal problems.

The culture of communication within the groups/cliques resembled that within the interviewees’ families in that it was rather superficial in nature. The feeling of belonging and togetherness was rooted less in communication and discourse than in joint activities (e. g. drinking, partying, praying, actions, participating in demonstrations). We also noted that the group members often did not know very much about one another.

Communication seemed to become more superficial as the degree of organisation increased: The more systematically and matter-of-factly activities and events were planned, the more strongly they were influenced by the envisaged objective, e. g. provoking a fight or carrying out an attack. As one interviewee said about his time within the autonomous leftist scene:

“... basically it is the powers-that-be that are deemed immoral, and we are the ones who [lay] sole claim to morality. However, we never discussed what type of morality; whatever principles existed and what you were allowed to do didn't matter, carrying through something was all that counted.” (Li01, terrorist)

We should mention in passing that even though a powerful feeling of fellowship pervaded most groups some interviewees nevertheless described themselves as loners and reported not having fully integrated into their group. These individuals however used to make double efforts to remain tolerated by the group, time and again ostentatiously demonstrating that they did belong by e. g. excessively consuming alcohol or showing special commitment and striving to assume outstanding roles during joint activities.

In addition to personal factors, events outside the interviewees' control also influenced their individual development within the scene, including e. g. events of a global political nature that were addressed within the scene but also events that happened within the scene (e. g. a police raid at a friend's, contacts with the police during demonstrations), and were discussed and ideologically re-interpreted by the scene members.

As the individuals increasingly centred their lives around the scene or clique, with the ensuing withdrawal from other social environments (e. g. school, clubs, work), their horizon quickly narrowed and the significance of their role as a member of the scene grew. The situation turned critical as soon as the previously multiple social roles (e. g. being a father, the head of the local football club, a skilled worker) were reduced and ideologically “tainted”, e. g. if a club member exploited his role to prevent the admission of foreigners, or if the role of parenthood merely meant bringing up a *jihadist*.

Emerging conflicts or not meeting the expectations going along with a certain role, e. g. that of being a parent or sports mate, inevitably lead to problems with the respective reference groups (e. g. Esser 2000, 141 et seq.). From a preventative angle, the point in time at which conflicts with one's personal environment are most likely to occur therefore coincides with the point in time at which one's social milieu assumes the extra function of an early warning system, for persons imbued with ideology only gradually develop strategies designed to alleviate such conflicts. Insufferable conditions were rendered tolerable by e. g. avoiding contact with foreigners or places associated with them and instead increasing contact with like-minded persons, or by resorting to cognitive strategies designed to legitimise one's behaviour. The quote below illustrates, by way of example, a cognitive strategy employed to re-interpret the function of the (unbearable) social milieu:

“It is a disgrace, isn't it, that there are no Muslim professors and that I have to accept being taught by an infidel, but that's part of the jihad. We must absorb the infidels' knowledge in full so as to be able to use it against them in our jihad, and this also includes political power and high positions.” (Iu05, inactive extremist)

In this case, the individual compensated his contact with non-Muslim teachers by asserting that attending university was merely a tactical measure in the wider strategic context of warfare. Many interviewees described similar strategies. One interviewee, for instance, who was arrested for the first time at the age of 16 years, characterised his time in prison as some kind of further education: *“At the*

time I saw things this way, it was kind of a learning process [...] and if you fight over petty things every day, and then you're released, you're an even bigger hero" (Ri11, pseudo-extremist).

The interviewees quickly succeeded in getting beyond the control of others by making themselves unattainable to members of their own milieu, re-appraising situations and idealising their own position. As a general rule, it was therefore unnecessary to explicitly downgrade this milieu, and after a while they felt they were living in a world of their own and according to their own laws, a world in which they were "*the king himself*" (Ri08, active extremist).

4.2.2.3 Studying the ideology

In general, there were neither defining moments nor a kind of "revelation" that could have been identified as the root causes of radical thinking. Most interviewees said that their mindsets had changed rather slowly and frequently over prolonged periods of time, the majority reporting that this development had been influenced by the combined effect of exchanging ideas with others, media coverage and personal experiences. All these processes had been set in motion before their joining the scene, with the exception of those interviewees who had joined the scene even in middle childhood.

As a general rule, a rather negative bias against the scene's typical "enemy images" existed even before the scene was joined, which in most cases could be attributed to a family disposition or to conflicts with peers at school or in the social (living) milieu. Lower secondary school seemed to be a particular hot spot compared to other types of schools: While the Muslim interviewees felt degraded and socially denigrated when assigned to lower secondary school, where all the pupils came from "*broken [...] homes*" (Iu05, inactive extremist), their right wing oriented counterparts were bothered primarily by the large number of foreign classmates. Notwithstanding this, all interviewees, in particular the Muslims, reported the subjective feeling of being disadvantaged or marginalised at other types of schools as well.

Two right wing oriented interviewees said that their contact with small-time criminals and their having been "*taken to the cleaners*" by foreigners had sparked their subsequent hatred of foreigners. Only one of the interviewees (right wing oriented) said that he had been radicalised by propaganda material (pamphlets).

First contact with the original clique was often described as a *revelation* or turning point as the individual felt that he was respected and his attitude backed by the group members. Upon closer study, however, it turned out that in most cases the group rather functioned as some sort of "catalyst" where previously unorganised and fuzzy ideas and emotions like hatred, anger and rage but also envy and fear were ideologically paraphrased. On top of everything else, the individuals felt supported by the solidarity of like-minded peers who also know these emotions too well.

One interviewee reported that his radical inclinations took firmer roots especially by his attending military camps where they "*train[ed] you to get this hatred of foreigners into your system*" (Ri21, active extremist). In all other cases, however, the motivation behind attending military camps was associated with these camps' bellicose rather than their ideological contents. We must note by way of conclusion that none of the Islamist-oriented interviewees mentioned having attended a terrorist training camp. It seems plausible to infer that similar socio-psychological processes also occur in terrorist training camps, even though the data at hand does not substantiate this assumption.

4.2.2.4 Involvement in politics

About half of the interviewees had at least temporarily been members of a political party or organisation²⁵. While none had been a member before they became integrated into the scene, some did have contacts with or were close to organisations/political parties (especially through their siblings or parents). Their degree of commitment within and on behalf of the political parties or organisations differed widely; it was striking that membership as such did not permit us to draw conclusions on the actual level of commitment of the person concerned. Frequently, persons consorting (without being members) with the relevant (illegal) organisations showed an even stronger political commitment than those who were official members of a party or organisation.

The three case studies below shall illustrate the point:

“I attended meetings, demos, and sometimes they even sponsored concerts [...]. If we wanted to go somewhere, they sometimes even splashed the money about. We only had to distribute stickers and flyers in return.” (Ri11, pseudo-extremist, non-member)

“... there’s not a single day without contact [...] we have experts here [...], our activities are confined to analysing our environment, meaning who could be an interesting contact, how to spread our faith, how to win friends and fellow believers, and, also quite interesting: how to gain financial resources? There are also contacts with donors. There are people who attend to their duties and give alms, which we then use accordingly. We send money abroad. I’m not going to mention any names, associations and countries, but we do support our brothers abroad.” (Iu03, inactive extremist, non-member)

“... I applied for membership with FAP in 1994, and did so only because I had been urged on by my then best friend, otherwise I would never have got it, to utilise membership, let alone a party membership ID, I never even so much as collected it. Went there once and that was it.” (Ri01, pseudo-extremist, member)

The last quote conveys yet another aspect, i.e. that only a minority of the interviewees who were party members (3) had actually believed in the party manifesto at the time of joining. By and large, it was mainly the right wing oriented individuals who joined a political party out of affinity to other persons – e. g. friends who were already members – without having thought it through. As for the leftists and Islamists, not all of them had weighed the pros and cons or thoroughly pondered the consequences before joining, either. Notwithstanding that, their political orientation played an important role in joining, and across the board, membership of an Islamist or leftist grouping generally permits us to draw inferences about an individual’s political attitude at the time of joining the party.

Party-political commitment after attaining membership often resulted in alienation from the party once some insight had been gained into inner-party processes and procedures. This alienation was above all due to a rigid party hierarchy leaving little room for individual thinking and activities, but also to contradictions between what the party officially proclaimed and the “reality” within the party:

“I was 28 at the time and perceived myself to have grown up almost, and I found it too daft really to have some rather dim-witted and more or less stupid people explain to me what makes the world go round, until I resigned from the DKP.” (Lu01, person with extremist inclinations – others)

²⁵ The right wing oriented individuals primarily joined political parties and “fellowships”, while the left wing and Islamist-oriented interviewees preferred political organisations such as campaign groups or associations.

Especially the right wing oriented individuals reported serious conflicts with party executives or over nonsensical guidelines that they opposed. We do not know if this could be taken for an indication that the interviewees' ideological attitudes were probably too extreme to permit perfect agreement with party lines. The narratives lead us to believe that both reasons most probably apply.

The Islamist-oriented individuals typically displayed a very high degree of ideological congruence with their chosen political milieus. They usually terminated their relationship to the group if they did not feel properly integrated or objected to the way policies were put into practice, e. g. if they did not agree with the group's promotion and use of violence, but also if they deemed a group *not extreme enough*:

“Later on you realised that these solution approaches [referring to leftist approaches; author's note] were also hypocritical ones. So at the end of the day none of them would have actually taken the plunge and done all they could to support Islamic traditions and states.” (Iu03, inactive extremist)

“The imam was the first one to teach us and tell us about the infidels' war crimes. However, I and some other young guys in the mosque thought he was being too soft. But I met some very good Muslims there who were on my wavelength and who also shared my political views. These contacts helped me to prove my loyalty and get admitted into other like-minded Muslim communities who shared my opinions and ideas.” (Iu04, inactive extremist)

“... some of them however wanted to pursue this path [...] and use more violence. [...] Our discussions grew more and more extreme and we talked more intensely about violence, i.e. [...] what can we do, [...] they just wanted to exert more violence. [...] This eventually motivated me to get out of there after a while.” (Iu02, person with extremist inclinations)

We can state for all study groups that their resignation or withdrawal from a political party or some other political organisation did not always entail the breaking off of social contacts; some individuals continued to keep in touch with party etc. members. Across the board, only three individuals found their ideas to be compatible with those endorsed by a political party or organisation, and put down roots there.

4.2.2.5 Criminal career development

In respect to their own offences, most interviewees deemed their personal motives more important than the fact that they violated the law of the land, the prisoners in particular showing a strong tendency to neutralise their offence responsibility or legitimise or doubt that they committed an offence.

General criminal offences by far outweighed those belonging to the *politically motivated crimes* (cf. Fn. 3) category and encompassed almost the full scope of delinquencies. Some offences had been committed spontaneously – in particular by the prisoners – and without any specific underlying motives, for example, *“we pinched a car, [...] packed it with people and then drove to the concert. Dropped the car somewhere and that was it”* (Ri06, active extremist), or a robbery was committed *“simply”* because *“we didn't have any money left, wanted to buy alcohol or something like that and actually wanted to keep on getting drunk”* (Li04, militant radical). One of the left wing oriented prisoners declared that he committed a theft because he was in despair about his chaotic life and wanted to be arrested again so that he could get back to the routine of prison life, quite in keeping with the literary model of *“Who Once Eats Out of the Tin Bowl”* (Fallada 2004). In most cases, however,

crimes were committed in order to improve one's financial situation or attain a special status within a social structure. This was also true for those of our interviewees who went unreported.

In addition to general criminal offences, we recorded a large number of offences that at first glance seemed to have been committed for political reasons, but that when studied more closely frequently turned out to have been motivated not by ideological but personal issues. One interviewee, for example, who had been sentenced for inflicting assault causing bodily harm on a punk explained his motive as follows:

"I was drunk and he obviously somehow asked me what time it was. [...] I then somehow [told] him to leave me alone. And he then replied 'Pooh, you bloody bastard, I'll take the stuffing out of you', like that. And when he said bloody bastard I snapped, like. Otherwise it wouldn't have happened, I guess. [...] I can take a lot [...] but as soon as somebody criticises [...] the way you dress, the way you look or my family or something like that, if you try to impress something on me I lose it, y' know." (Ri05, pseudo-extremist)

Often "fun" and "action" were the prime motivators, the individual initially pushing the consequences of these "fun actions" to the back of his mind:

"My level of violence was [...] very much a 'cops and robbers' level. [...] You could combine so many things, after all. You could combine whatever was on your mind with adolescent ideas of being a big shot, being somebody, everything ideologically charged, and it was big fun even and the girls also liked it. Honestly, this was just the perfect thing for a 17-year-old; [...] it was just so tempting." (Lu03, active extremist)

"... first we threw a stone into the window, then all the [quarter sticks and firecrackers; author's note] followed. It all could have exploded and started to cause a fire. But we never thought about that, everything was illuminated, green, red, all sorts of colours. And then they all came out [...] and we [...] were hiding in the shrubs and found it all very funny. OK, it is funny somehow but come to think of it, it could have backfired. [...] At the time it was just great fun." (Ri05, pseudo-extremist)

It is well nigh impossible to make sweeping predictions about what kind of offences will be committed in conjunction with the scene – changes in both quality and quantity are cogitable. Offences frequently played a role in the interviewees' life histories even before their joining the scene.

Across the board, the Islamists were the only ones who usually stopped committing (general criminal) offences after socialising into their scene as such behaviour was deemed diametrically opposed to what constituted a "good Muslim". Offences were things of the past to them; like smoking and drinking, they belonged to a time before joining the scene, "a time when one wasn't in one's right mind, when one was obsessed by the devil" (Iu03, inactive extremist).

It was notable that criminal offences featured as a constant in the life histories of the prisoners, regardless of whether or not they were affiliated to a scene. In some cases, the type or quality of the offences changed for the better or worse²⁶ after the offenders had been firmly integrated into the scene. Some individuals also changed "industry", e. g. a former violent felon turned into a drug dealer, or a drug dealer turned into a car burglar.

²⁶ Cf. Sutherland's *Differential Association Theory* (1968) and the *Differential Association-Reinforcement Theory of Criminal Behaviour* by Burgess and Akers (1966) on the development of group-typical (criminal) behavioural patterns and the reinforcement of criminal behaviour within groups.

We found distinct differences between the various types of offenders with respect to their (“politically associated”) criminal career development: Whereas most terrorists began to commit criminal offences only after they had been scene members for a prolonged period of time, the other offender types frequently had diverse criminal records, or had committed offences either even before or shortly after joining the scene.

Roughly speaking, we found three different general criminal career patterns:

- (1) Consistent delinquent behaviour throughout the individual’s biography (mainly prisoners and violent felons);
- (2) a shift in criminal activity to other areas of delinquency in conjunction with joining the scene (mainly Islamists);
- (3) criminal offences committed exclusively in connection with the scene (mainly leftists but also Islamists and rightists).

Some individuals, however, had not committed any offences at all (one left wing oriented and two Islamist-oriented individuals, all unrecorded).

As for politically motivated crimes, we must point out once more that not all criminal offences had actually been perpetrated for ideological reasons²⁷.

When asked about violent crimes, the interviewees said that they had often picked their victims at random, their prime objective frequently being to exert violence and the type of victim being of secondary importance:

“It then wasn’t like I wanted to get a message across with my fists but like ‘I am beating you now just because you gave me this zany look.’”

(Ri01, pseudo-extremist)

“... on the bus and the next one to get in gets a severe drubbing.” (Ri12, militant radical)

“... what they all liked best were the brawls with Nazis and rockers. To us they all were Nazis back then; we didn’t make a difference between them. [...] For example, after what the Nazis had done [...] we beat up everybody who seemed to be a racist, full of rage.” (Iu05, inactive extremist)

The last quote referred to a time before the interviewee had joined the (Islamist) scene and once again illustrates – as already shown in Chapter 4.2.2.3 – that the attitude entertained by an individual before his joining the scene did indeed indicate the ideology which he was to embrace later on.

²⁷ This is not stipulated in the police definition system, either (cf. Fn. 3).

4.2.2.6 Exertion of violence²⁸

The interviewees can be subdivided into three groups, depending on the pattern of violence that had evolved over time:

- Interviewees committing acts of violence throughout their life histories who can be described as violent felons rather than ideologically motivated offenders.
- Interviewees committing acts of violence mainly in connection with extremist milieus.
- Interviewees who have never exerted violence.

While all interviewees broached the subject of *violence* in their biographical narratives, they did not generally emphasise their actions, save for those with a prime focus on violence, like e. g. hooligans or persons who enjoyed being violent. They instead placed more emphasis on processes cognitively associated with violence like e. g. studying the question of whether it is *legitimate to use violence* in order to attain political goals.

Turning our attention on the extremely violent offenders among our study participants, we cannot but state that this group consisted almost exclusively of right wing oriented individuals, primarily members of the skinhead scene, who on the basis of our sub-categories (cf. 3.2.2) fell into the *pseudo-extremist* group. In full agreement with what Frindte (2001) and Schumacher/Möller (2007) noted about mainly right wing oriented skinheads, their aggressive behaviour did indeed intensify in the scene setting (cf. Schumacher/Möller 2007, 144), or evolved into “[...] a specific type of aggressive xenophobia on account of ideologisation by right wing oriented scenes and cliques” (Frindte 2001, 93); but this was above all a conflict-resolving strategy that had been existing since childhood age (ibid). Unfortunately, our study has been unable to answer the question of whether similar phenomena arise in the left wing and Islamist-oriented milieus. While we do assume that people of an extremely violent disposition are also found throughout the leftist and Islamist spectrums, we cannot make any inferences on the prevalence of this phenomenon in that domain. The behavioural pattern of the subjects we studied rather showed a change in coping strategies after their joining the scene; at least this applied to the Islamists, who from that point in time onward substituted or legitimised a behaviour they retrospectively perceived as “*devilish*” or “*negative*” – like consuming drugs or alcohol – with cognitive strategies or ideological themes. We can say more or less the same about the exertion of violence: They stopped their previously violent behaviour that had been most prevalent during their years of adolescence, maintaining at the same time their violence-favouring attitudes. At the time of the interview, notably the three Islamists who fell into the *inactive extremist* category intensely addressed the question of whether it was legitimate to use violence in order to attain political goals, as is vividly illustrated by the following statement:

“Violence is necessary only if and when required. [...] Should the day arrive we will be ready for it but we have other tasks to fulfil. To us, Germany is but a small place that doesn’t really matter, our main mission is to liberate our holy earth from all the tyrants and infidels, and we’d leave no stone unturned to achieve this goal. There are no innocents in this respect. Everyone who collaborates with the tyrants is himself a tyrant. Everyone who works for them supports them, and is our enemy. Everybody who sells his dignity solely for the sake of money and who

²⁸ In this context, the term “violence” is meant to be understood in its broadest sense and to include all actions immediately or indirectly jeopardising the integrity of other individuals or objects.

betrays Islam is our enemy. Everyone who opposes us will be annihilated, and Allah will punish them for their deeds." (Iu05, inactive extremist)

The other *inactive extremists* and *terrorists* who had not previously exerted violence in scene-related offences also attached importance to the problem of the legitimacy of violence²⁹. Almost all interviewees had had to resolve inner conflicts regarding their attitudes:

"[...] at some time they said: 'Well yes, but when we have to get at it [the explosives; author's note], I mean, we must not hide it too well because we need to be able to get it whenever we need it', and well, I didn't like this so much to begin with, especially because it was the, how to put it, head of the companionship, so I grabbed the bag and hid it at my workplace. They knew that I had it at my workplace but nobody knew where that was." (Ri23, terrorist)

One Islamist interviewee revealed his inner conflict with his latently positive attitude toward violence especially clearly. Constantly repeating that he rejected violence on the one hand, he also kept saying that it was indispensable for catching the world's attention on the other:

"We reject violence but nobody can be bothered if we're not violent, and this is why there are some groups – but not ours – that try to catch attention with acts of violence, and this is the only way to elicit a response, for it is fear and power that produce responses, not merely talking, this is what our enemies have taught us and we practice what they preach. [...] While our group would never conduct an attack because our political purpose is more important, this does not imply that we don't approve of attacks like 9/11 or attacks against the infidel American occupiers or against the world power Zionists who stole their country by theft [sic!]." (Iu04, inactive extremist)

He continued to legitimise violence by blaming the enemy for causing acts of violence or making Allah responsible for it. He tried to emphasise his own position of power by repeatedly and almost menacingly pointing out that personally, he had rather the Germans would see the light themselves but that he "[couldn't] *guarantee that some Muslim brothers will not tolerate further acts of war against us* [the Muslims; author's note]" (Iu04, inactive extremist). By contrast, another interviewee from the same group displayed a more unambiguous attitude toward violence and unlawful acts, which he summed up spot on:

"There is no such thing as a criminal offence to us if we act on behalf of our group and our faith. What others judge as criminal remains to be seen." (Iu03, inactive extremist)

Both the *extremists* and the *terrorists* addressed the legitimacy of using violence at a time when they already were so firmly rooted within their extremist clique and so strongly influenced by its group dynamics that renunciation had ceased to be an option after weighing the pros and cons. Several interviewees emphasised that they put up with personal negative consequences because e. g. they *"didn't want to raise doubts about my loyalty or wholehearted lack of reservation"* which he *"actually did have, save for one or two aspects"* (Ri23, terrorist). The powerful influence of group dynamics is perfectly illustrated by the fact that even individuals who originally rejected the use of violence eventually did partake in attacks and acts of violence of the sometimes severest nature.

If by way of conclusion we take a look at the quality of the acts of violence that were actually committed, we can distinguish between two types of violence, as follows:

²⁹ Interviewee Ii01 who was brought up in the Gaza strip is an exception in that he reported having committed acts of violence in the course of skirmishes and street riots.

- (1) Violent acts committed on the spur of the moment;
- (2) Violent acts requiring a minimum of organisation.

Ad (1):

Violent acts committed on the spur of the moment primarily include the infliction of assault causing bodily harm, perpetrated for the most part automatically and spontaneously by individuals or groups. The interviewees' cliques largely tolerated and sometimes even promoted the violent excesses of their individual members. Violence was regarded as a constituent component of group culture and consequently perceived as something normal – *“it's just part of it”* (Ri10, pseudo-extremist). By individually or jointly exerting violence the group members created a crucial binding element that served to further reinforce the already strong cohesion within the group.

While initially victims were frequently selected by superficial criteria borrowed from ideological categories such as *“Nazi”*, *“drugs dealer”* or *“foreigner”*, the criteria became more and more non-selective over time until anyone could eventually be a potential victim, violence breaking free in the course of time:

“Yes, we acted on purpose and sometimes even hunted people down, [...] on the bus, and the next one to get in gets a severe drubbing. And yes, I don't know, almost every day we assaulted people, causing bodily harm.” (Ri12, militant radical)

In the final analysis, violence became an end in itself; most interviewees were by then unable to define a concrete objective or specific purpose, their main priorities being self-satisfaction and to dispel boredom. Those individuals who mentioned *“fun”* as a leitmotif frequently displayed a lack of empathy with their victims:

“You didn't really think about it, is someone burning to death here or dying in the process or whatever. You saw the riots and said: Geez, if I were on holiday now I'd be there, too.” (Ri09, pseudo-extremist)

Quite often – though not in general – the sometimes excessive consumption of drugs and alcohol also played a role in this context (cf. Chapter 4.2.1.5).

Many interviewees reported having been influenced by the culture the clique conveyed and practised and said that the loyalty and solidarity they enjoyed as clique members meant more to them than upholding their own attitudes, which might clash with the group's norms. This being so, they ultimately ended up participating in the severest acts of violence in spite of themselves.

Organisational activities related to acts of impulsive violence were limited to maintaining one's mobility so as to be able to *“do a city tour”* at the weekend, for instance, and get to interesting *“events”* on the spur of the moment. Sometimes third parties strategically organised these events, although not necessarily so. One interviewee, for example, described his experience with an *“illegal party's”* organised *“gang of thugs”* as follows:

A: “They used to call me regularly then, if I could go to this place or the other, that is, sometimes I didn't even know what it was all about. [...] We just had to put up a fight, most of the time in some kebab shops. [...] We would go inside, and then we'd break them up. We smashed everything to pieces.”

I: “But you acted upon instructions to do so?”

A: “Yes, right. Personally I didn’t have a problem with this shop. But yes, I liked it.”
(Ri19, pseudo-extremist)

This interviewee was eventually expelled from the “illegal party” because his pattern of violence (*solo acts*) gradually became incompatible with the rules of the group.

Ad (2):

Organised acts of violence only included planned and deliberate mass rioting (hooliganism), strategically organised damage to property and organised attacks. For instance:

“The explosives made the whole thing more professional, we basically met every weekend. Either I went down or he came up, [...] met constantly and exercised rather great care in everything we did. Eventually we noticed that we were kept under surveillance quite a lot of time, that we were being followed, so we needed more time in order to give them the slip and would go shopping later, for example, or tinker around.” (Li01, terrorist)

Alternatively, the motivation that Germany and one’s own lot should “*be better off again*” (Ri08, active extremist) led them to emulate the “*terror attracting the media’s attention*” (ibid.) of the NSDAP:

“I once lived in a street with asylum seekers’ homes, which I tried to set fire to at regular intervals. Because this is part of the game, and I found it OK. But I also desecrated a Jewish cemetery with them, I mean, I turned over tombstones, so I went on the rampage quite a bit, whenever possible, whatever would attract the media’s attention or so.” (Ri08, active extremist)

We must state by way of conclusion that we observed distinctly homogeneous patterns and habits of violence across all groups. In other words: Those groups that excelled in making extreme strategic and organisational efforts did not include any members who committed acts of impulsive violence. Likewise, groupings of perpetrators of impulsive acts never included individuals with a reflective and strategic mindset. Corroborating Sutherland’s theory of differential association (1968), the group members did not only borrow the techniques relevant for committing “their” type of offence (i.e. violent offences in this case) but also adopted the motives, proclivities, rationalisations and attitudes of the individual groups, which explains the groups’ homogeneity. There was some sporadic contact between – exclusively right wing oriented – groups, e. g. one of the right wing oriented interviewees categorised as an offender committing acts of impulsive violence was given jobs by his brother, who moved in right wing circles.

4.2.2.7 Participation in attacks

While we do concede that the four interviewees involved in the preparation of attacks constitute a rather small number, we will nevertheless try to portray the factors that induced them to participate in attacks or to prematurely abandon planned attacks. Three of the four interviewees who had been using explosives (1 rightist, 2 leftists) extensively reported on their experiences, whereas the fourth one, an Islamist convicted of membership in a terrorist organisation, flatly denied having been involved in the offence of which he was accused. The following statements therefore refer exclusively to individuals from rightist and leftist milieus.

We must state first of all that none of the three interviewees had formed concrete plans for an attack prior to procuring or producing explosives; rather, it was the possession of these explosives that caused them to contrive plans for future action. With the exception of one individual (Li01, terrorist), who envisaged producing explosives for terrorist purposes, they were mainly induced by curiosity and a kind of competitive drive to acquire explosives on a whim³⁰.

Case 1 – home-made explosives:

The interviewee's group started to *professionalise* right after the first press coverage of their “*political actions*”, referring primarily to a letter explaining their attitude and political goals:

“I was pretty scared somehow, I remember my parents being on holiday and I was driving around in the car, their car, buying newspapers, always three at a time at the newsstand, and then somehow there were fifteen newspapers in the car and they all wrote about it and I was a trembling a little: Now you're the one they're all after. If they find you out you get jailed, and somehow this was as if this was the end of the world, somehow probably.” (Li01, terrorist)

The interviewee and his comrade-in-arms apparently tried to conform to the image projected by the media, i.e. the image of professionals posing a serious threat. Eventually it occurred to the interviewee who had been assigned by his group to look after “*the technical issues*” that “*I [could] pry open New Year's Eve bangers [...] and make a bomb out of them*” (ibid.).

After his collaborator had hit on the idea to “*obtain firearms and probably injure or kill somebody*” (ibid.) they debated “*whether or not you may kill somebody*” (ibid.). The interviewee himself evidently held “*that one should not kill for a political cause*”, his opinion remaining an unresolved conflict between him and his collaborator. The interviewee eventually did produce explosives, and they carried through a series of bomb attacks that were also covered by the media.

“The bomb attacks were always brought up in the newspapers. You got used to this media coverage and it was like getting a mark at school or university, just like that. I guess being in the newspapers was the success, the goal we were after. And we were always keen to see the media's response. And afraid that someday there'd be a news blackout and we'd probably do something that wouldn't elicit any response at all. So we kept staring at the media [...], we just considered it a political success to get media coverage.” (Li01, terrorist)

Case 2 – procuring a pipe bomb:

Contact with a chemist helped procure a pipe bomb that, however, was not required in the end:

“We acquired a pipe bomb but didn't dare to explode it. And it was kept by one of our colleagues in his room, but he was afraid of his mother throwing it down when she cleaned the room as it would detonate on shock or percussion. [...] On the one hand it felt sexy to have something like this, but on the other we didn't have the faintest idea what to do with it. When you'd say, and this is the point, where to throw it at, at a school? At this bloody local court where they hear some bloody junkies who trade a few car radios?” (Lu03, active extremist)

They later on “disposed of” the acquired pipe bomb:

³⁰ We must note, however, that we cannot eliminate the possibility that some individual members of the respective groups may have tried much harder to procure explosives than perceived and reported by the interviewees.

“So we eventually drove to a gravel pit, at freezing temperatures, and detonated it [the pipe bomb; author’s note]. It produced a crater in the frozen ground. So, it was quite a beast. But then we also realised that we had been fairly big-mouthed.” (Lu03, active extremist)

Case 3 – procuring WW2 explosives:

The procurement of explosives from an adjacent country reads like an adventure story:

“... so we partied a bit and one thing led to another, and then he said, and it wasn’t too far away from the border: ‘On the other side there’s a place with umpteen old mines etc. still lying around’. ‘Course I wanted to see that. And [...] the others wanted to see it, too, of course, and so we went there.” (Ri23, terrorist)

“Out of sheer madness” (ibid.) they took with them a bazooka:

“So it contained these 1.5 kilograms [...] of TNT. [...] Again sitting together in the evening, partying and [...] drinking a lot and then: ‘So what we’re gonna do with it?’ And then we had [...] these debates like, well, ‘let’s blow up something’, and this was all still a joke more or less. Well OK, some of those who said that may not have meant it as a joke at all but really meant it, and the others only thought they were joking at that time. And we didn’t really think about it, [...] gym bag, we took it with us on the train, without thinking about it, [...] come to think of it now, what could have happened theoretically – never gave it the slightest thought, just went off with it.” (ibid.)

As described above, the possession of explosives triggered further strategic deliberations on what to do with them also in the following case:

“... we talked about it but we hadn’t formed any concrete plans, like saying, now OK, let’s do something, or we plan to do something, but it was more like ‘wow, we could do something with it’. I mean, there was no doubt we were going to do something with it, that was obvious, even I myself wanted to do something, blow up a tree in the woods or something like that, like let’s see how powerful the blast is etc., because we never had handled anything like this before.” (Ri23, terrorist)

Although all three interviewees claimed that they had been opposed to planning an attack or killing somebody, only one of them had actually abandoned these plans (case 2). This was due mainly to the comparably candid exchange of views between group members and the opportunity to freely discuss one’s apprehensions and concerns. *“Voicing one’s fear of course is a bit like, you know, you’re not fearful”* (ibid.). This is how the case 3 interviewee described how his group handled fear. *“After all, you’re also a role model [...] for the others [referring to persons not belonging to the inner circle; author’s note] [...] now if you gain the reputation of being a chicken or something disreputable, too bad really”* (ibid.). Like in the other two cases, the group members had been knowing one another for quite a long time, had been *“very close”* (ibid.), taken *“up loans on behalf of the other”* (ibid.) and *“devoted themselves to one another”* (ibid.); yet the interviewee complained that *“the most important thing, i.e. talking between one another and revealing one’s fears and concerns, is something you don’t do”* (ibid.). While budding doubts were mentioned within the group, they were not addressed in public:

“They [doubts; author’s note] did arise. And they did exchange their doubts, too – that is, this is what became known afterwards – between one another, however always only between the two of them, but each one would discuss his doubts with somebody else again so that at the end of the

day they did all discuss it with each other only nobody ever really knew it. That was an almost strange feeling afterwards, why we didn't sit down right away, declaring our doubts.” (Ri23, terrorist)

Opting out was no alternative for the case 1 interviewee, either, due to his excessively strong emotional ties with the collaborator whom he considered a “*surrogate brother*”³¹ (Li01, terrorist). Moreover, he felt too much enticed by the power ascribed to him by the media.

It was interesting that the case 1 and case 3 interviewees reported having tried to undermine the further proceedings; this is probably a biographical reconstruction designed to neutralise their feelings of guilt:

“Each time we left the scene after depositing the bomb I hoped that no-one would be injured, that the news would report “no injured”. And I strove to achieve this aim, that there wouldn't be any injured persons [...], trying to keep the level low. And, relatively speaking, I succeeded in preventing injuries.” (Li01, terrorist)

We can state, by way of summary, that none of the three cases we studied had formed concrete plans to carry out a bomb attack prior to procuring or producing explosives. On the contrary, only the actual possession of explosives sparked off discussions on what to do next with them. The cases we studied did not show a fundamental restructuring of the groups (e. g. members opting out) but revealed that group members instead tended to sabotage their group, e. g. by deliberately taking care of the explosives and depositing them somewhere hard to reach, or by intentionally organising attacks so that nobody would be killed. Even though group dynamics make it considerably more difficult to leave the group at such a delicate moment, we do not assume that this is on principle impossible. Our analysis however tends to indicate that group consensus, while not endorsed by each individual member, is indeed reached and maintained by the group as a whole. We also noticed that clear role constraints and an overall atmosphere not conducive to promoting a change of attitude typically prevailed in those groups that did not abandon their idea of carrying through bomb attacks (cf. Marmet 1999, 34 et seq.). These groups were extremely cohesive, with a very high degree of groupthink – “A way of thinking that attaches more priority to maintaining cohesion and group solidarity than to a clear-headed assessment of facts” (Aronson et al. 2004, 336 et seq.). Dealing fairly and squarely with one another, not subjecting other group members to self-censorship and encouraging them to voice their individual fears and doubts turned out to be an all-important prerequisite for quitting this process in due time.

Our study clearly showed that strategic and logistics activities quickly became the prime driving force behind all further developments once an attack had been contemplated: Eventually, the only thing that mattered was the – possibly perfect – realisation of the plan, whereas rules of conduct based on ideology or, if applicable, potential disapproval of the plan receded into the background. In the course of events, the process developed its own momentum which was almost impossible to stop, not least thanks to the atmosphere prevailing within the groups.

³¹ His biological brother had died when the interviewee was about 15 years old.

4.2.3 Life “hereafter” – motives for renouncing the ideology and terminating the relationship to the scene

Any study of the processes inducing an individual to eventually opt out of extremist milieus must roughly distinguish between attitude-related renunciation, which may be described as a gradual process of dissociation culminating in the renunciation of the promoted ideology (*deradicalisation*), and behavioural withdrawal, which implies the breaking-off of contacts with the milieu and/or the discontinuation of offences committed on ideological grounds (*disengagement*) (cf. Schmidt 2009).

At the time of being interviewed, between about one third and half of the interviewees from each study group already dissociated themselves from the previously endorsed ideology; some had either left the extremist milieus or were undergoing the slow process of renouncing the respective ideology and/or untying of group links. Several had already tried to get out of the scene; the detainees in particular had frequently tried – often unsuccessfully, however, for lack of alternatives – to avoid returning to their old environments after their release from jail.

In most cases, external circumstances had caused the interviewees to reconsider the logic behind their respective ideologies, eventually inducing them to dissociate themselves from these ideologies.

One left wing interviewee described a two-step dissociation process, as follows:

Step 1: Questioning the ideology

“... I tried very hard to imagine what kind of society we’d have after the revolution. [...] Again and again, I kept coming back to the funny thought of, How do I get a physician to work as a doctor when in fact he feels more like writing books? [...] And you quickly realise that there must be some motivation after all, a big house, or money. [Then you realise], if you think it through, it won’t work. [...] There are a few things that are OK; that you want to keep state involvement as low as possible and ensure a lot of personal freedom, granted, but it won’t work the way it is described in the books. I realised this more and more. But, accepting this was painful indeed. I kept thinking about it, trying to find a solution after all. But I haven’t found one until this very day that I could say, now this is the one that will work, that’ll do the trick.” (Lu03, active extremist)

Step 2: Renouncing the ideology

“The final event that got me thinking properly, well, at that point I had already stopped doing anything, [...] there were two attacks by the RAF, no, one RAF attack. [...] And of course I could perfectly justify this attack [...] in full solidarity with the comrades in battle. [...] Then it was the next one’s turn, he got killed in a similar fashion, this was again justified and it was no problem at all, only that this time it was right wing radicals who claimed responsibility for the attack. So I thought to myself, what crap are you talking, justifying attacks committed by right wing radicals? [...] It then dawned on me that something’s wrong here, [...] you can’t get it right in your head [...] you keep on talking about it but you don’t actually believe your own words anymore. There you go, justifying attacks by people you consider your worst enemies? There must be something wrong with you if you can automatically justify everything.” (Lu03, active extremist)

In the case described above, irrationality (“*it won’t work*”) and also paradoxicality (justifying attacks committed by the political enemy) induced the interviewee to dissociate himself from his ideology.

Other interviewees mentioned the same aspects, reflected by a subjective feeling of disorientation, antipathy or meaninglessness.

The two processes of renouncing the ideology on the one hand and breaking off contact with the radical milieu on the other frequently did not unfold simultaneously. Often social contact with the radical milieu continued even after the ideology had been renounced, or else the individuals adhered to their views even after they had broken off contact.

Discrepancies between the interviewees' attitudes and their respective groups' norms and ways of coping were a critical factor in tipping the scales in favour of getting out of a group, the two alternatives being that the interviewees deemed the group's approach either *"too soft"* (Iu04, inactive extremist) or *"too extreme"* (Ri07, militant radical). They were generally looking for new like-minded contacts, and also quickly formed ties with a new group if they had been marginalised or excluded because their behaviour had been diametrically opposed to the previous group's attitude or norms. Drug-consuming rightists, for example, often migrated in droves into the so-called gabber scene (cf. Appendix D, Fn. 2).

Those individuals who chose of their own accord to get out of a clique or scene were mostly driven by rather simple motives, their decision triggered considerably more often by a concrete event compared to those cases where they had renounced the group's ideology³². In this latter case, they more often than not also ceased to identify with those persons who fully subscribed to the ideology they now perceived as irrational or "nonsensical". Moreover, they broke off with the scene or clique in particular if contradictions arose, e. g. if the group did not practice what it preached or if the cohesion of the scene had been exposed as a *"lie"* or illusion, regardless of whether or not they had also – simultaneously or successively – dissociated themselves from the promoted ideology. Severe personal disappointment was another frequent reason for quitting.

Other experiences, like having to face the victims or one's own appearance, also induced some of the interviewees to get out of the scene – like, for example, the skinhead who endorsed a rather right wing type of ideology:

"...I realised for the first time that it [...] had such an extreme effect, I was [...] arrested at the away match because [...] [there] was a fire on the ground, I took it up and brandished it, and they arrested me five minutes later and took me to the police and the patrol and then they showed me the Polaroids, [...] that clearly showed me with the thing. [...] I saw myself on this photograph with my bomber jacket and bald head, brandishing this thing, [...] and then I thought, hell, OK, if [somebody] feels provoked by me I shouldn't be surprised really." (Li03, militant radical, cf. the note under Fig. 3)

Only very rarely did the interviewees choose to abandon life within the scene and terminate the relationship to a group for the sake of their own – e. g. personal or professional – development.

³² Cf. Appendix D for a summarised overview.

5 Summary and discussion

The study at hand compared the biographies of 39 individuals who can be assigned to the extreme left- and right wing and the Islamist scene³³. Our profound qualitative analysis of the extensive biographical data collected by the narrative interview method highlighted some distinctive features that will be trenchantly presented further down below. By and large and in accordance with the working hypothesis of the research project we realised that the interviewees, despite their different orientations, shared a great number of commonalities. Viewed from a more abstract angle and leaving aside concrete ideological contents it became clear that the ideologies and in particular the groups embracing them offer the individuals concerned a sense of support and orientation in their everyday lives. So it is small wonder that the biographical histories of our subjects presented identical basic psycho-social patterns of development, regardless of their endorsement of or affiliation to the respective ideologies or extremist groups.

Our most striking finding was that – regardless of their ideological orientation or whether or not they had committed offences associated with or motivated by any ideology – all interviewees had suffered from unstable familial conditions and tremendous stress throughout their development. As the coping strategies adopted by their families were usually dysfunctional, the interviewees had no choice but to fend for themselves most of the time, resorting largely to individually created solutions and coping strategies³⁴.

The interviewees later on employed in their social environment the dysfunctional strategies they had been taught by or copied from their families, thus often generating new conflicts like problems at school or social marginalisation. As their families, who were under much strain in the first place, were (mostly) unable to deal with their problems, the interplay between intra- and extra-familial conflicts frequently culminated in their (emotionally) withdrawing or separating from their family. For this reason, all interviewees attached particular importance to joining alternative social groups (mainly peer groups, outside of school) that matched their individual needs and coping patterns. Thanks to a lack of warmth and security at home and a concomitant sense of disorientation, the only social support the interviewees could find was within their inner clique. If nothing else, this turned out to be the root cause behind their susceptibility to group dynamics and the extremely close ties with their clique. From a functional point of view these cliques frequently doubled as surrogate families, as is reflected also in their common parlance: The interviewees generally called their clique their “*family*”.

The (new) social identity – e. g. as *skinhead* or *jihadist* – that the interviewees assumed in their cliques quickly relegated their personal identity, including their problems, to the background, which proved favourable for the radicalisation process within or with the group. Even though the interviewees’ familial circumstances differed drastically in nature compared to those of the average population, they did not inevitably produce the specific conditions leading up to terrorism or extremism. Rather, the familial constellations that we identified closely resembled those of other delinquent adolescents who in spite of their situation do not socialise into terrorist or extremist milieus (cf. Göppinger 1997, 464; Stelly/Thomas 2005, 257 et seq.; Kraus/Mathes 2010). The same is true for the interviewees’ perforated educational and sporadic employment careers (cf. Göppinger 1997, 459 et seq.). We deem

³³ In order to be able to compare the different milieus, we subdivided the interviewees regardless of their ideology into the four inductively formed categories of *terrorist*, *extremist*, *radical* and *person with extremist inclinations*. This categorisation is not based on the police definition system of *politically motivated crimes* (PMC), which is regulated uniformly throughout the Federal Republic; rather, it is the result of our qualitative analysis of the interviewees’ biographical histories (cf. for more information Chapter 3.2.2).

³⁴ They were not necessarily wilfully neglected by their parents; rather, their parents’ focus on improving the family situation was frequently so strong that their efforts to re-establish a stress-free atmosphere made them overlook the interviewees’ needs or caused them even more stress.

it noteworthy that, compared to the right and left wing oriented individuals, the Islamists in general succeeded considerably more often in completing school and advancing professionally, which is probably due to a need to compensate their perceived downward social movement in association with their immigrant background.

Across the board, we noticed a general inclination among the interviewees to associate violence with the establishment of power relationships and the manifestation of their masculinity, going hand in hand with denigrating others as e. g. “infidels” or “lazy bums”. As for the interviewees’ attitudes toward and judgement of acts of violence or offences which they themselves had committed, they employed a highly flexible system of standards: While they principally denounced and rejected violence exerted by others like, for instance, terrorist attacks or the use of violence by their parents, they tended to vindicate or trivialise their own acts of violence by somehow neutralising them (cf. in this context *techniques of neutralization* according to Sykes/Matza 1957). The detainees in particular had a distinctly warped perception of the degree of severity of violence, especially regarding violent acts which they themselves had committed.

In addition to the use of violence, alcohol and drug consumption were the most frequently pursued dysfunctional, intra-familial coping strategies that were usually continued outside the family milieu within the groups joined later on. While all study group subjects had, in equal measure, consumed and dealt in illicit drugs, we found major differences in alcohol consumption, the left wing and right wing oriented interviewees frequently reporting (excessive) alcohol consumption, in contrast to the Islamists who made a point of being abstinent. It was this abstinence that had often sparked off conflicts with their peers, which the interviewees interpreted as religious discrimination.

In addition to the above-mentioned biographical and socialisation aspects, *violence* and *drugs* were the topics most frequently mentioned and most intensely discussed by the interviewees. In keeping with the classical theories of learning (e. g. Sutherland 1968), the interviewees learned through contact with other group members how a specific group behaved and what attitude it had toward the exertion of violence as well as toward drug and alcohol consumption, constant contact reinforcing these attitudes throughout the group (cf. Burgess/Akers 1966). The group’s clearly defined rules on attitude, behaviour and identity concepts represented palpable guidance for the interviewees and exerted a strong attraction to them, which can be explained by the desire for order and predefined structures that so many of them had expressed. On top of this, these groups – as is typical of adolescent scene/cliques – offered the individuals an opportunity to make up for their own subjectively perceived shortcomings by e. g. wearing clothes typically worn by that scene and/or behaving accordingly, a phenomenon Gollwitzer/Wicklund described by the term or theoretical concept of ‘*Symbolic Self-Completion*’ (cf. Gollwitzer/Wicklund 1985, 62 et seq.).

Talking about their journey to radicalisation, the interviewees mentioned personal in addition to environmental aspects, revealing a strong penchant for adventure and risk-taking and a distinct proclivity for self-fashioning. Some interviewees described how they drew attention to themselves by acts of denial or aggressive behaviour, for example, or by putting on humorous or “*macho*” allures (*class clown*), thus moving themselves into the focus of interest in different spheres of life. This compensatory behaviour, which was perceived by those around them as problematical and against the rules, was usually fully accepted within their clique. This is not surprising if we consider that we are talking about the link-ups of primarily young people with similar experiences and social deficits.

Most interviewees began to study the habitus of the relevant scene before joining it as their social milieu or peer group had already set typical examples and confronted them with representatives of the scene (e. g. on the way to school, at school, in social or religious clubs and associations, in the media).

Mostly this process was not triggered by a singular special key event but evolved over a prolonged period of time. Our study illustrates that *lower secondary school* in particular seems to be “pooling the children from the lower social strata, from problem families and especially from immigrant and foreign families” (Hurrelmann 1991) and thus is a particularly conflict-laden social hot spot characterised by a diverse range of simple-minded, highly polarising attitudes and behavioural patterns based on stereotypes revolving around enhanced self-worth and the simultaneous denigration of others (who are different, e. g. *foreigners, Turks, antisocial elements, Nazis*). As usual, this is accompanied by a strong perception of out-group homogeneity (cf. Aronson et al. 2004, 493).

As a general rule, the interviewees linked up with a clique or scene representative (joining the scene) on a long-term basis during a phase in their lives that they described as one of loneliness and disorientation. This phase could not always be attributed to concrete (critical) life events in the individuals’ biographies, but more often was incurred by psychological processes and emotions triggered by several incidents (chain of events) that did not necessarily seem to be of an inherently critical nature when watched from the sidelines. An analytical reconstruction and portrayal of these development processes is impossible without resorting to the interviewees’ subjective interpretations and perceptions. For example, moving to another town was interpreted as something positive by one individual to whom this meant a new beginning, whereas another one experienced the same thing as a negative interruption of his life because it entailed the loss of his friends. The original clique had a very special function in that it offered the individuals prefabricated interpretation and reasoning patterns which helped them to structure and perfectly sum up their own, still chaotic, attitudes and emotions (“catalytic” function). Their attitudes toward alcohol, drugs and violence as well as their capability to subordinate and control themselves played a major role for their integration into and further career within the scene. Extremely violent interviewees, for instance, did not remain party members for very long, and those persons whose alcohol consumption did not chime with the *party culture* mindset rather kept their distance from skinhead groups. Next to these personal factors, intra-scene occurrences (frequently also myths about the scene) and global political events also determined the way the individuals and/or a clique or group developed.

The interviewees’ interest in the scene or its representatives was based not necessarily on ideology but mainly on the scene members’ appearance, dress codes and the respective image of the scene, clique or person. Beyond this, it sometimes happened that several members of a previously low-profile clique became radicalised, which invariably entailed a restructuring of the group (split-up due to individual members’ termination of relationship to the group).

In addition to purposeful recruiting (passive joining) we also observed that individuals were actively pushed to join by e. g. deliberately approaching a person that looked promising³⁵. According to our data, the *deliberate approach* is the most frequently described kind of making contact.

In summary, we can state that (orientation) models within the closer social environment of an individual were of paramount importance (cf. also Bandura 1976 in this context) and that the decision in favour of a certain extremist milieu is determined by accident and – along the lines of supply and demand – the availability of such models.

Religion and *politics* were of rather secondary importance typically increasing in the course of adolescence and frequently only in conjunction with the scene, if at all. When joining the respective scene, the individuals usually did not properly analyse the political aspects, their main focus being on

³⁵ It is possible in this context, however, that the person/group of interest sent out “advertising” signals that the interviewees did not consciously perceive or interpret as such.

social and emotional points of reference. The individuals' chief motive for joining extreme (extremist) cliques was their search for social support, understanding and order, with the exception of those interviewees who socialised into the respective scenes only after they had completed their 28th year of age and who by all means displayed clearly defined (political) concepts or intentions when they made contact with the respective milieus. Accordingly, adolescents and young adults seemed to join rather for emotional and adventure-seeking than political motives, yet over time assumed patterns of politically associated lines of reasoning and legitimisation.

The Islamist interviewees, too, displayed political rather than religious patterns of reasoning, but we must remember in this context that many Muslims see religion and politics as closely intertwined and difficult to separate from one another. While the six interviewees of our study do not constitute an extensive body of data on the Islamist scene, our findings nevertheless raise the question, "To what extent are Islamist players driven by political more than religious motives?". While it is true that they set high store by religion if they want to create a feeling of belonging and justify their behaviour, their prime objectives are political in nature, like e. g. changing global politics and promoting their own lifestyle (based on their religion) around the globe.

Many interviewees had committed offences even before joining the scene, with general criminal offences far outweighing the number of those perpetrated for *political motives*³⁶. Moreover, not all offences at first glance seemingly associated with political motives had actually been committed for ideological reasons. Frequently, motives turned out to be of a purely personal nature as individuals often gave priority to honour, group recognition or personal satisfaction. This was observed in all subgroups that we had formed, regardless of their ideologies (cf. Chapter 3.2.2), and emphasises the interviewees' adventure-seeking and spur-of-the-moment mindedness when committing offences. Above and beyond this, the interviewees subjectively did not perceive the crimes they committed as crimes thanks to the legitimisation mechanisms they had learned from the group.

Contrary to what we had expected, the transition from being an extremist willing to commit a crime to becoming a terrorist was an unplanned and unpredictable process, driven mainly by group-dynamics (e. g. a kind of competition culture within the group or distinct role constraints) or unpredictable events (accidentally obtaining explosives, meeting war-damaged persons from the Gaza strip, intra-scene events). As for the terrorists, we noticed that a potentially critical personal situation, their joining the scene and their identification with the scene's ideology all happened within a brief period of time, which indicates a more dynamic radicalisation process; however, members of these extremist-terrorist scenes committed actual offences only after a certain time span had elapsed. Procuring or producing explosives was not planned in advance but mainly happened accidentally, taking the form of a "self-fulfilling prophecy" with a lot of media coverage, for example: Two individuals reported having obtained explosives thanks to favourable contingencies, with no concrete prior plans or intentions; in a third case, media coverage, presenting the interviewee and his collaborator as well-versed professionals, resulted in their preparing previously "*poorly organised activities*" "*more professionally*" later on, with the consequence that they started to deliberately set their minds on finding ways to procure explosives, and eventually successfully so. Moreover, we noted that participating in planning an attack was not necessarily tantamount to approving of it. The individuals frequently refrained from leaving the group because of their personal ties with another group member/other group members, group loyalty and the social pressure exerted by the group being the main drivers behind their activities that relegated to the background any potential second thoughts.

³⁶ Cf. Fn. 3

Those interviewees who did mention their intentions to terminate their relationship to the group and took concrete steps to this end did not always simultaneously renounce the ideology and withdraw from the social scene-related setting. They frequently continued to maintain contact even after their “abandoning” of the ideology. This observation indicates the important social role the groups played - in comparison to ideology -, which also showed during the process of joining. While the few withdrawal processes that we observed do not permit us to draw any reliable conclusions on the factors influencing a successful termination of relationship to extremist milieus, we clearly realised that the motives for joining were different from those for leaving: Before joining, the individuals were spurred by motives like finding social contacts (feeling of belonging, support) and systems capable of helping them cope with developments typical of that age and phase (especially: establishing reliable relationships outside of the family, finding one’s identity) and coming to terms with critical situations, whereas those terminating their relationships to the scene gave distinctly more priority to their personal identity (individual) and personal goals.

We can state by way of conclusion that

- (1) The **psycho-social dynamics** of the protagonists of milieus of different ideologies share some **commonalities**.
- (2) The **scene offers blueprints for solutions** that help to compensate individual deficits and connect with others. Assuming a new “scene identity” (social identity, collective identity) relegates to the background one’s personal identity and the “old problems” associated with it.
- (3) Terrorists and extremists **frequently do not exhibit a distinct fundamental interest in politics or religion** but nevertheless emulate the lines of reasoning and views that typically go along with the respective ideologies and which they are exposed to in their (extremist) social milieus.
- (4) The social characteristics of terrorists and extremists **do not fundamentally differ from those of other perpetrators**.
- (5) Terrorist or extremist careers are **often determined by accidental events** (choice of scene, transition from extremist to terrorist).

A comparison of our research findings on extremism/terrorism with other research results reveals much congruence. Our analyses prove, for example, that an extremist/terrorist career is not instigated by a single key event (cf. e. g. Jäger/Böllinger 1981, 217; Schmidtchen 1981, 15). Our interviewees did not display any pathological features, either (cf. Jäger/Böllinger 1981, 235; Waldmann 1993, 7 et seq.; Daase 2001, 68; Taarnby 2003, 36 et seq.). All individuals of our group had experienced the same irregular developments and shown the same deviant behaviour during the first and second socialisation instances (family and school) as other offenders who did not necessarily become extremists or terrorists [cf. Göppinger 1997³⁷ and Kraus/Mathes 2010].

³⁷ In particular: The *Syndrom familiärer Belastungen* [syndrome of familial stress] (Göppinger 1997, 464), the *Socioscolare Syndrom* (ibid., 459), the *Syndrom mangelnder beruflicher Anpasstheit* [syndrome of lacking professional conformism] (ibid., 460), and the *Freizeit Syndrom* [recreational syndrome] (ibid., 461).

It is interesting to note that certain findings about left wing, right wing or Islamist extremism are also true for both the two other fields of study. We realised that seemingly *politically motivated violence* (in particular assault causing bodily harm) was more often than not induced by personal rather than ideological motives (e. g. Heitmeyer/Müller 1995; Frindte 2001; Schumacher/Möller 2007), and that social aspects and identity-related factors distinctly dominated ideological aspects at the time of joining the scene (e. g. Willems 1993). Across the board, the interviewees had already exerted (physical) violence before they had become ideologised (cf. Frindte et al. 2001).

We were surprised to find that both arson attacks and sometimes also (planned) bomb attacks resulted from a “combination of accidents and spur-of-the-moment ideas on the one hand and strategic planning and organisation on the other” (Willems 1993, 184).

6 Outlook

Our attempt at a comparative study of different terrorist and/or extremist milieus and groups viewed against the backdrop of the protagonists’ (in particular convicts’) biographies proved reliable and has promoted our understanding of the underlying processes. The 39 profoundly analysed biographies of individuals from the extremist right wing, left wing and Islamist milieus corroborated our working hypothesis that formed the basis of our research project, i.e. that all types of extremism and terrorism were predicated on identical situational conditions and processes, the different ideologies embraced by the various milieus notwithstanding. We found in the diverse terrorist and extremist milieus the same psycho-social mechanisms that can be observed in other milieus or scenes and that typically determine group (formation) processes. A terrorist or extremist therefore does not present himself as a psychopath withdrawn from earthly concerns even though he – at least temporarily – decides to embrace the extreme fringes out of all societal association types. These findings are also confirmed by the results of previous and recent studies (e. g. Jäger/Böllinger 1981; Baeyer-Katte et al. 1982; Waldmann 1993; Taarnby 2003).

The radicalisation and ideologisation processes that we studied did not occur as isolated, independent processes cut off from developments in other areas of life (crucial: school, family, spare time) but constituted an integral part of the protagonists’ biographies. These processes developed extremely slowly and usually started before the individuals’ joining the respective extremist scene: formative experiences within the individuals’ inner social circle as well as critical events in life that their existing psycho-social support system was unable to adequately cope with gave rise to attitudes already indicating a penchant for one or another ideology. Meeting and mingling with like-minded peers was generally perceived as an “Aha!” experience, apparently summarising and structuring the chaotic emotions and thoughts that had already existed previously; beyond this, they were accepted and their ego boosted by the group. Formerly unrecognised or at best only vaguely associated relations and aspects suddenly seemed to be perfectly understandable. All three study groups, however, based their long-term relationships with the scene not only on spiritual but above all social aspects, as many publications on right wing extremism have already described (e. g. Willems et al. 1993; Frindte/Neumann 2002).

In summary, we can state that all biographies studied describe persons who were severely hampered in their development and who, lacking a functioning family ensuring a healthy and successful psycho-social development, made extremely risky social contacts. The respective extremist-terrorist milieu and/or what the group had to offer were perceived as a welcome substitute for the functionally and

structurally unstable home, and the individuals concerned accepted – more subconsciously than consciously but always out of necessity – the concomitant problems and conditions impeding their general personal development. All analysed biographical histories showed a most desperate search for order and structure accompanied by both a delayed maturing and growing-up process or the inability to cope with development tasks typically occurring at this adolescent age. These observations also echo the expert opinions of the psychologists appointed in connection with the *Sauerländer Terrorprozess* (cf. Fn. 2), who concluded that “the [...] radicalisation was driven by [...] family crises and conflicts” (cf. Die Welt of 23/12/2009).

Analysing our results in the light of preventive measures and looking at the global picture, we see a need to devise and implement measures based on a holistic approach to preventing extremism. In this context, a holistic approach to dealing with this phenomenon above all implies a shift of focus from the ideologies conveyed by the extremist milieus to the obvious needs (e. g. broken family structures, experiencing social isolation, disturbed development) of those concerned.

Translating our research findings into potential preventative action and implementation strategies, the resulting need is to step up measures designed to help adolescents living in psychosocially distressed families and promote the personal and social competencies of children and adolescents, working in this context as closely and continually as possible with the individuals concerned. Even though the number of radicalised individuals is relatively small, the necessary preventive measures do not require any specific, target-group related concepts; it may suffice to sensibly combine conventional support measures like e. g. violence prevention measures and programmes designed to enhance their self-worth etc. Likewise, we must exploit the existing infrastructure of available support measures adequately so as to help with a tailored approach those children and adolescents who are at risk of becoming delinquents. Creating a stronger awareness for penalties among adolescents and promoting the early involvement of social supervisory authorities, the latter with the thought in mind to positively influence and, if possible, prevent the consolidation of highly cohesive structures in groups defiantly resisting change, could also be a sensible strategy.

Forensics – biographies of members of extremist milieus

Field study in the context of the study on “Extremism – a biographical perspective”³⁸

1 Introduction

Thanks to the tremendous media coverage attained by the subject of Islamist terrorism in the aftermath of the 9/11/2001 events, recruiting suitable interviewees with an Islamic background proved difficult even many years later. The Muslim population in particular viewed the researchers’ work with a lot of suspicion and was consequently hesitant to lend support, which was due not least to the fact that in the wake of the attacks on the World Trade Center the Muslim community had come under some sort of general suspicion – also in Germany. It was therefore easy to understand that anyone sympathising with radical groups was little inclined to give an interview.³⁹

Recruiting study participants from the leftist and rightist milieus proved also difficult because many potential interviewees were concerned that the interviews would be used not only for research purposes but also for investigations by the police and therefore frequently declined to participate in the project. The reply given by a lawyer when asked if we could interview his client is a typical example illustrating the point: His client *“does not wish to be in contact with the BKA”*, and he saw no chance to *“dispel his concerns that his comments would get there”*, adding that from his personal point of view *“considering who commissioned you, you [referring to the group of researchers; author’s note] stand little chances of successfully carrying through this project”*.

2 Conducting the interviews

The first step consisted in obtaining from the local authorities in charge of the penal institutions – usually the Ministry of Justice of the respective federal state – a permit to conduct the interviews. All federal states save one agreed to support the research project⁴⁰.

The next step was to establish contact with the penal institutions in question, which the researchers did either under their own steam or through the local authorities. If the penal institution did not object to the plan of conducting an interview, the potential interviewees were sent a letter describing the project and the interview conditions (cf. Appendix A), explaining that the undertaking was a research project based on voluntary participation and that the results would be used for scientific purposes only.

³⁸ This contribution reflects the field experience and personal opinion of the author. The BKA does not necessarily share this view.

³⁹ It should be noted again in this context that, regardless of their milieu’s ideological orientation, the willingness of potential interviewees to participate in a project can be markedly influenced by short-term political factors. For instance, if the public’s or the security agencies’ attention is attracted by attacks or other publicly discussed offences perpetrated by a certain milieu, this is having a highly adverse effect on the motivation of the members of that milieu to engage in conversation with outsiders.

⁴⁰ More than forty penal institutions were contacted all over Germany. Interviews were conducted in a total of 22 penal institutions located in the five federal states of Bavaria, Brandenburg, North Rhine-Westphalia, Schleswig-Holstein and the city state of Berlin. The large majority were penal institutions for adults. The distribution across the above-mentioned federal states was a coincidence caused by the fact that the subjects who had been selected as study participants served their sentences in the above-mentioned federal states.

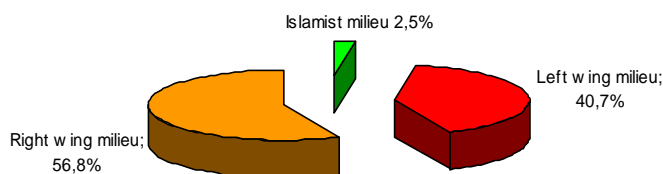
Furthermore, it was stated in the letter that the project leaders of both the Bundeskriminalamt and the Rhein-Ruhr-Institut e. V. would be available for questions by telephone.

Having received the letter, the potential interviewee was asked by an enforcement officer or social worker whether or not he was interested in participating in the project. One penal institution stipulated – for reasons inherent in the penal service system – the presence of a staff member during the interviews; other prisons emphasised that the cost of calling the project managers had to be borne by either the detainees or the research institute.

In most cases, the detainees' affirmative or negative answers were forwarded by the individual penal institutions or Ministries of Justice; only rarely did a detainee or his lawyer contact the project group by phone or in writing. If the feedback was positive, the general conditions governing the interview were discussed with the responsible security officers, and an appointment made.

During the first phase of the research project, the researchers had at their disposal the contact data of 162 potential interviewees, with 92 persons belonging to the *right wing*, 66 persons belonging to the *left wing* and four persons belonging to the *Islamist milieu*.

Figure 1: Potential interviewees broken down by type of milieu in the 1st phase of the research project



N = 162

Source: In-house analyses based on proprietary data

It quickly emerged in the course of the research process that the majority of the original number of 162 individuals could not be contacted due to a variety of reasons. Some had in the meantime been released from prison; others were held in custody pending trial or embroiled in an ongoing court case or had lodged an appeal on a question of law and were therefore not eligible for an interview, while others again had been fined or given a probation order, or their court case had been stayed⁴¹. One prisoner had been moved to another penal institution in the meanwhile.

⁴¹ The research design envisaged to involve only convicted offenders in the study. For this reason, individuals who in the period covered by the study were still in custody pending trial or in an ongoing court case were ineligible.

As for the remaining 28 detainees still eligible, the request for an interview was denied in 21 cases, i.e. in 17 cases on the part of the detainees, and in four cases on the part of the responsible ministry or penal institution. One attempt at making contact failed as the potential interviewee only spoke French. Eventually only six persons declared themselves willing and/or able to participate in the project, i.e. five right wing extremists and one left wing extremist.

In order to recruit more interviewees, the executives of both the cooperating ministries and penal institutions were asked to help in finding suitable study subjects. Penal institution staff are well able to assess an individual's eligibility for a study of this kind thanks to their everyday contact with their clientele. While this method proved indeed useful for recruiting further interviewees, in particular from the rightist milieu, it had the inherent drawback that the researchers were unable to control potential selection effects that may have influenced the selection process.

As recruiting the desired number of interviewees exclusively by the method originally envisaged – i. e. interviewing detainees who had come to the notice of the police for politically motivated offences – proved impossible, the researchers decided in agreement with their client to recruit sympathisers with extremist milieus who were not imprisoned. This was generally realised through key individuals who maintained contact with extremist groups because their very job required them to do so, e. g. journalists or employees of social institutions (e. g. social workers)⁴².

The key individuals explained to the potential study participants the intention of the research project and the interview conditions, and disclosed to them that the study had been commissioned by the Bundeskriminalamt. If the contacted person then agreed to be interviewed, the go-between established contact with the researchers and fixed an appointment, respecting the interviewees' requests regarding the time and place. Some of them did not mind being interviewed at the institute, while others preferred a neutral venue. Beyond this, there were some interested individuals from the Islamist milieu who were prepared to give an interview and agreed to have it taped only with the proviso that they could keep the tapes and that these were transcribed only in their presence.

Working with key individuals offered the advantage of being able to access milieus that outsiders normally have difficulty in reaching. The drawback, however, was that the heterogeneity of the extremist milieu could probably not be presented in full because of the general risk of participants referring persons who corresponded to their own subcultural ideas or, in other words, were similar to them (punks know punks, anti-Germans point out anti-Germans etc.).

The following remarks illustrate how difficult the problem of recruiting interviewees proved. For example, 15 individuals from the Islamist milieu, who were not in custody, were asked to participate in the project. In order to reach these 15 individuals, around 50 persons had to be contacted over a period of several months. Eventually, only five persons agreed to be interviewed. In addition to the rather considerable amount of time required, the fact that the Islamist milieu accepts only those persons who dispose of the respective cultural background and language skills made the job even more difficult.

Next to milieu members refusing to be interviewed, the researchers, too, encountered situations forcing them to desist from conducting an interview. In one case, for instance, members of the Islamist milieu insisted on blindfolding the interviewer and taking him to a place unknown to him to conduct the interview. The project managers categorically refused to oblige. In another case, members of the

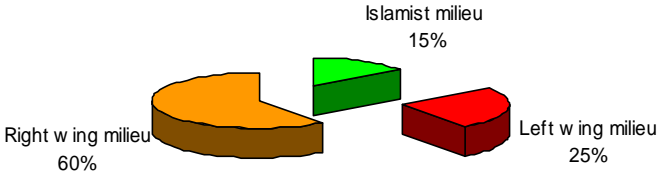
⁴² Cf. Kemmesies (2000, 268) on employing key individuals in field research and in preparing the field of research.

rightist milieu responded to a female researcher’s request with such aggressiveness that the researcher had to withdraw from the group’s environment.

In addition to the methods described above, some more attempts were made at getting in touch with political parties, associations and clubs as well as so-called exit programme managers so as to recruit interviewees this way. This approach, however, turned out not to be very efficient as precisely those parties and organisations that the security services or the majority of the population perceived as *extreme (extremist)* were not at all interested in participating in the study. This was also owed to the fact that the study had been commissioned by a security service. While some potential study subjects did not reply at all to the researchers’ request, others politely but emphatically rejected it. One party even asked a solicitor’s office to inform them about the objective of the study but refused to cooperate even after members of the research group in a personal meeting with the commissioned lawyers had explicitly stressed that the interviews would be used for scientific purposes only and that the highest priority was given to protecting the interviewees’ identity. Involving the state security offices of various *Landeskriminalämter* (Land Offices of Criminal Investigation) and police headquarters in the search for suitable interviewees and presenting the project at a technical meeting on “Islamists” attended by representatives of the various police authorities did not yield the success the researchers had been hoping for, either.

40 out of the 45 interviews conducted were suitable for analysis, with 24 interviewees belonging to the right wing, 10 to the left wing and six to the Islamist milieu.

Figure 2: Interviews suitable for analysis by milieu



N = 40
Source: In-house analyses based on proprietary data collection

Participants from the right wing milieu thus constituted the lion’s share of the interviewees. Five interviews proved unsuitable for analysis: Two persons did not have an extremist background, another two were PKK activists or members of leftist Kurdish though not Islamist groups, and yet another interviewee felt overtaxed by the interview situation so that the interview had to be aborted.

The great majority of the interviews were conducted in penal institutions, with no enforcement officers attending as a general rule. There was a single instance when an enforcement officer was present

throughout the interview with the express consent of the interviewee. As he was one of the persons who did not fit the research profile, the interview of course was not analysed.

3 The pros and cons of participating in the project

The following is a more detailed analysis of the motivators that induced the subjects either to participate or deny the request for participation in the research project.

One of the reasons for participating in the project was that the interview was perceived as a welcome *change* in the everyday/prison routine, or that the interviewee perceived the visit of a scientist interested in his life history as a boost to his self-esteem. *Enhanced self-esteem* may have been a motive also because it made the interviewee feel that he belonged to an *elite group* the Bundeskriminalamt had selected for a scientifically “important” project on the subject of *extremism*. Alternatively, another potential motive, especially for detainees, for agreeing to participate was the perceived opportunity to demonstrate to the state institutions that their *resocialisation process* was proceeding *positively*. Perhaps they hoped to gain concrete *advantages* (e. g. remission of the remaining sentence) from participating, although the prisoners had been told in advance that their participation or non-participation would in no way affect their prison sentence.

In narrating their story to the scientists, the prisoners also had the chance to *come to terms with their offences*. Some perpetrators showed genuine remorse for their criminal acts. Perhaps the participants saw this project as an opportunity to reduce, to a certain extent, their personal guilt by helping to prevent future politically motivated offences. Some interviewees however, by contrast, used the interview as a means to protest their “*innocence*”.

All this goes to show that each prisoner was inspired by different motives. Some even predicated their participation on receiving concrete rewards. As one Islamist who was contacted but saw no inducement to participate wrote, for instance:

“I don’t benefit from participating, and it is doubtful that science will gain added value from this. But surely the BKA will thus obtain fresh data, and it is quite obvious what they want to do with it. So it would take a very attractive incentive indeed to induce me to participate in your study, and even money couldn’t tempt me enough.”

The individual eventually submitted an “*offer*” to the effect that he would agree to be interviewed only if, as a quid pro quo, the researchers would help him participate in a study on *genetic doping* – he said he was a heavy athlete. His request was denied.

One of the key reasons for the negative attitude exhibited by milieu members and sympathisers was that they did not want to cooperate with a security service perceived as *belonging to the state system* that they rejected and actively tried to fight by committing politically motivated crimes. Some detainees probably considered the research group an “extension” of the security services and the research project a “hearing in scientific clothing”⁴³. For instance, the researchers received a letter sent

⁴³ A typical case in point is the approach taken by a neo-Nazi grouping that in its publications denigrated the project as a measure designed by the state executive to “spy on” “kindred spirits”, the objective obviously being to exert psychological pressure on potential interviewees and/or boycott the research project.

by a prisoner from the Islamist milieu in which he very politely declared that religious reasons unfortunately prevented him from partaking in this interview. Asked what exactly he meant by religious reasons it emerged that he believed that participating in this project was tantamount to supporting his enemies. A prisoner from the left wing milieu said something similar in his letter:

“I have been thinking about your request for a long time, weighing the pros and cons of participating in an interview. I have however arrived at the conclusion to turn down your offer. If your research project had been a “normal” one conducted solely by your university, I certainly would have agreed to cooperate. Since the BKA is the father of this project, however, I cannot partake in any interview of whatever kind. My experience of past years with government prosecuting agencies is so bad that I can’t imagine playing into these people’s hands even if my identity is protected as best as possible.

I am deeply sorry that I cannot commit myself to participating but I cannot and do not want to square it with my conscience.”

This sheds light on a grave predicament: Political activists will be less prepared than former milieu members or fellow travellers to talk about their lives and criminal activities, especially if an interview of this kind has been commissioned by a security service.

Another motivator preventing participation in an interview could probably be a *fear of reprisals* from fellow prisoners, in particular the fear of being attacked by kindred spirits or former like-minded individuals. A prison is largely a closed system, suffering the drawback of word getting around quickly if somebody participates in a research project of this kind. The prisoners, too, know that being in prison does not protect them from being attacked.

It is highly probable that one prisoner who had been contacted was denied participation in this project because *neither did he consider his offence to be politically motivated* nor himself genuinely political motives: one case in point was a person allocated by the relevant state security service to the right wing spectrum on account of a brawl with foreign fellow citizens; another that of a drugs dealer whose biographical history revealed that he was a completely apolitical person. In a third case, the interviewer found himself in the bizarre situation of talking to a subject categorised as leftist by the security services but who turned out to actually belong to the rightist milieu. The interviewee explained that this misjudgement was owed to the fact that in a past confrontation with the police he had called an officer a “Nazi”.

Prison executives, too, frequently asked the researchers to refrain from conducting interviews as from their point of view the profiles of the detainees entrusted to them *did not display* extremist backgrounds. The researchers also received letters from prisoners voicing their surprise at having been selected for participation in a study of this kind, e. g.:

“In July of last year I was sentenced to four years in prison on grounds of a breach of the narcotics act⁴⁴. In all my life, I participated in 5 demonstrations; three of these took place on the

⁴⁴ Offence in connection with an infringement of the Narcotics Act.

1st of May and the other two were closely related to this date. I was arrested at the last demonstration I attended on the charge of having thrown three eggs toward the police. The trial was stayed. I was accompanied by fellow students most of the time. I have never joined an extremist association and participated in the demonstrations mainly out of curiosity.”

Intervention by their social milieu may have been another reason causing potential interviewees not to cooperate, e. g. after they had talked to lawyers, family members, fellow prisoners or political companions, even though the individual parties may have been pursuing different interests. Lawyers, for example, may have been concerned about their clients incriminating themselves further in the course of an interview, while political friends probably rather feared that the detainee might reveal some information about the structures and methods employed by extremist groupings.

Some subjects refused to give an interview because at the time the request was made they had – from their point of view – been suffering from reprisals by the state, like e. g. the *penalty of deportation*. Others made it known to the researchers that while it was true that they had been collaborating with extremist organisations, they had only been odd-job men acting *without any political motivation whatsoever* but purely on the basis of criminal motives. Another – rather elusive – reason for detainees to accept or refuse participation could have been the way *the employees of the respective* penal institution *addressed* them. Although the detainees had been contacted in writing, the extent to which the relevant enforcement officers or overseers might have influenced their decision is unclear.

4 The interview situation

The research team comprised six interviewers, i. e. two females and four males. Four interviewers had already obtained their academic degrees, i. e. there were two properly trained social scientists, one social worker and one female psychologist who were supported by one female and one male undergraduate in social sciences. Two colleagues were of ethnic Arab origin and spoke German and Arabic.

The female interviewers conducted interviews with members of both the right wing and left wing milieus but not with persons involved with the Islamist scene, respecting the fact that many Islamists refuse to consider women as equals in conversation. The right wingers were almost exclusively interviewed by the German interviewers so as to nip in the bud any xenophobic bias the interviewees might have against interviewers with an immigrant background.

Only the interviewers with immigrant backgrounds succeeded in recruiting non-imprisoned interviewees from the Islamist milieu, their cultural background definitely being a great help in this context. Trust played an equally important role, i. e. the kind of trust the German interviewers were not granted but that was indispensable for persuading the interviewees to cooperate.

Many interviewees – especially from the right wing scene – were (young) adults who were socially excluded and looked back on rocky educational and vocational careers; they were frequently brought up in desolate family conditions. Violence was a constituent element of their biographies, and their language and conduct were often belligerent. Other interviewees, however, displayed an impressive level of intellectual and communications skills and had profound political knowledge. The latter came mainly from leftist and Islamist backgrounds.

All interviewers had to be capable of a high degree of empathy with the interviewees so as to be able to relate to the different characters and respect (sub-)cultural conventions. Some of the interviewees

had already been imprisoned several times and for many years, while others only served their first prison sentence. It is noteworthy in this context that quite a large number of the prisoners had already frequently discussed their lives and criminal careers with psychologists and social workers, but the extent to which this may have influenced the narrative and/or response behaviour of these interviewees is difficult to estimate. One may assume, though, that this induced the interviewees to think twice about their personal opinions and attitudes and change them, something they might not have done had they not talked to these psychologists and social workers.

Most of the interviewees responded positively to the methodological toolkit offered by the narrative interview. They were allowed to turn into storytellers and narrate their lives without any major interruptions. Some interviewees however found this method problematical, like the interviewee who opposed this form of narrative interviewing as follows, explaining:

“I’ve had this many times before. The child protective services and the juvenile court services, they wanted to know, ‘come on, get started’, er, I can’t do this, I can’t start talking about something spontaneously.”

Some interviewees caused problems because they would only talk about key biographical events like e. g. criminal offences, courses of events or political activities if the researchers stopped tape-recording, which made it impossible to satisfactorily record important details. One subject from the right wing scene described in great detail the killing of a homeless person, an act in which he collaborated, thus providing authentic evidence of the spirals of violence and group dynamics that should be addressed in all criminology textbooks. This example illustrates that the interviewees did not distrust the interviewers per se but were obviously concerned about potential disadvantages to be imposed by government authorities. One should note in this context that the subjects time and again insisted on that the interviews should not permit anybody to draw conclusions as to who they were.

The researchers encountered numerous situations in the course of the project that contained a hint of the bizarre. On one occasion, for instance, the interviewer was shown to a room in a separate wing where he was supposed to interview the prisoner undisturbed. The enforcement officer in charge made the interviewer aware of a bell to be rung in an emergency or after the end of the interview so that the prisoner could be taken to his cell and the interviewer could leave the penal institution. After terminating the interview, the interviewer rang the bell in question. Nothing happened, so both the interviewer and the interviewee went out into the corridor, only to find it completely deserted. It took 20 minutes and several bell-rings for an enforcement officer to finally appear and walk the prisoner back to his cell.

On another occasion, the subject was not even prepared to be interviewed but had agreed to meet a member of the research group for the sole reason of trying to convince the researcher that he was not a politically motivated offender. In a briefing, the researcher succeeded in persuading the individual to agree to be interviewed after all. It emerged in the course of the interview that the interviewee could be categorised as a right winger and had probably been confused by the label “political”. Some offenders from the right wing skinhead milieu in particular conveyed the impression that they did not really regard their offences as politically motivated.

But there were also a few cases in which subjects later on revoked their original agreement to participate. One prisoner who indicated that he would like to participate was detained in a penal institution near the Polish border. While already on his way to being interviewed, the subject withdrew his consent at short notice even though the researchers had undertaken a several-hour journey and were already waiting in the interview room they had been shown to, preparing for the interview. As

they were not in contact with the prisoner, it was impossible to ascertain the reason for this out-of-the-blue decision. Another interview appointment in a major German city was even more bizarre: After the interviewer had arrived at the penal institution, the subject declined to be interviewed, offering the excuse that he preferred attending a fellow inmate's birthday party. He had it made known to the researcher (who again had travelled several hundreds of kilometres to get there) that he would be available for the interview on another day.

5 Review

One can state in retrospect that biographical research is a suitable method for examining extremist milieus from a criminological perspective. The narrative-focused interview methodology constitutes an effective means for capturing the lifeworlds and points of view of politically motivated offenders from the protagonists' own subjective angles as it reduces the risk of subconsciously allowing established milieu stereotypes to influence the way the interview is being conducted. One must however qualify this statement by admitting that this conversation technique is not suitable for everyone because it requires a certain degree of openness and even rhetorical skills, which may have been one of the reasons inducing some individuals to refuse to participate in the project. On the other hand, the interviewers, too, need be skilled enough not only to adequately handle this kind of conversation technique but also to professionally cope with their special clientele and the sometimes extreme biographies.

Moreover, it must be remembered that biographical research is always exclusively exploratory in nature – the personal experiences narrated by the interviewees offer only a mere glimpse of the respective milieu, so one should be careful not to generalise. Seen from the point of view of research economics, this approach carries the additional drawback of requiring considerable material and human resources.

One drawback was the fact that the Bundeskriminalamt had commissioned the study. As explained elsewhere, this caused a rather large number of potential participants to opt out of the project and proved to be a major obstacle in the search for interviewees close to extremist milieus, i. e. subjects not serving a prison sentence. It was difficult to establish with the radical groups and milieus the amount and kind of trust so indispensable for the success of the project, even though they were promised the highest possible degree of anonymity. By way of conclusion, however, one may state that notwithstanding the fact that the research topic of *extremism* is a highly delicate field of study, it is indeed possible to motivate sympathisers with and activists from radical milieus to participate in scientific studies of their lifeworlds. This has been impressively demonstrated by the study *Extremism – a biographical perspective*.

Appendix A

Methodology and organisation

Letter to a potential interviewee

Duisburg, XX-YY-ZZZZ

Dear Mr X.,

The *Rhein-Ruhr-Institut für Sozialforschung und Politikberatung* at the University of Duisburg-Essen is currently conducting a study on the subject of “Extremism – a biographical perspective”, commissioned by the Social Science Research Centre of the German Federal Criminal Police Office (*Bundeskriminalamt – BKA*). The purpose of the research project is to document the life histories of prisoners convicted of politically motivated crimes, and find out more about their personal perspective, including the circumstances surrounding their criminal act and the motives for their political activities, in the course of an interview. Our objective is to gain a better understanding of a world that is largely unknown to us. We believe that the best way to achieve this is to conduct a direct, personal interview with the person concerned.

To this end, we are adopting a methodology referred to as the **narrative interview**. The special characteristic of this particular approach is that, to the extent possible, it encourages simple narration, without engaging in evaluation or argumentation. This allows the interviewer to step back from common stereotypes (including his own), and in turn enables the interviewee to present his personal perspective. It follows that the interviewee should not be interrupted during the interview, with the interviewer keeping any interventions to a minimum.

To be able to conduct this study, we therefore rely on your support. Participation in this research project is **absolutely voluntary**. The duration of the interviews is normally between two and three hours. You and the interviewer (an employee of our Institute) will be the only persons attending the interview. The interviews will be recorded on MiniDisc. An **anonymised transcript** of the recorded interview will be sent to the research centre at the German Federal Criminal Police Office. To emphasise once again: the study focuses purely on research, and the interview will be evaluated for research purposes **only**.

Should you have any questions regarding the way the interview will be conducted, or in relation to the content of the research project, you can contact the Project Manager at the Federal Criminal Police Office or the scientist in charge of the project at the Rhein-Ruhr Institute, in writing or by telephone.

[Contact details for these persons]

We would be delighted if you were to decide in favour of participating in our research project. Hoping that we can persuade you to collaborate with us, we remain with our best wishes and

kind regards,

[Signature of Project Manager at the Rhein-Ruhr Institute]

Letter from a prisoner in a correctional facility, December 2006

To the

Bundeskriminalamt Wiesbaden

Bism-i-Allah Al-Rahman Al-Rahim

[In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful; standard religious greeting in Arabic script; author's note]

Re: Your "solicitation" for the purpose of an "interview".

I am sorry to have to tell you that you appear to have sent this to the wrong address.

I am not an "extremist".

However, so that you can still complete your collection of data, I refer you to the following terrorists known to me:

[A list of four leading western political figures at that time follows; author's note]

Maybe you will strike it lucky and get your interview?

Maybe, if you ask them, they will tell you why they want to force me to go to Afghanistan, to risk my life and my health, to kill my own brothers, in order to allow the Jewish boss of Exxon Mobil and Chevron to gain illegal pecuniary advantages in the form of crude oil? Why should Germans and Arabs die in order to make the Jews even wealthier?

How much money does Exxon Mobil/Chevron pay into the private accounts of [names of three leading western political figures at that time; author's note] so that they are prepared to sacrifice me?

Does [name of a German (female) politician; author's note] receive a small contribution if I lose an arm or a leg, or are the Jews too stingy for that?

Why are [names of three leading western political figures at that time; author's note] also prepared to send masses of cannon fodder or scavenging crusaders to the Congo/Africa, to install a president who was not elected by the Congolese people but who sells the rights to the country's numerous gold and diamond mines to the Jewish mining companies?

And indeed, why should I pay the Jews exorbitant prices for oil, gasoline, gold, diamonds, etc., when I have just risked by life to make it possible for them to steal these products?

In Iraq/Afghanistan, the focus is on oil, with the cities where civilians live being bombed. In Africa, the interest is in gold, diamonds, and they are "paid" for with electoral fraud and the dispersing of western toxic waste in the meadows and steppes there.

And I am the slave of the Jews.

I have to fight in their army, or I will be arrested on the spot as a conscientious objector.

I pay the Jews exorbitant prices for stolen products and commodities.

If I say something, I will be locked up for years ("sedition") and then terrorised by the state. The "honour" of a Jew is worth more than the life/health of a non-Jew.

But God is not ignorant of their deeds; for He is the Hearer, the Seer, in sha Allah [God willing; author's note]!

On September 11, 2001, He dispatched his servants, an honour guard of the Mujahideen, to cast over 3000 Jews into the Tongues of Hellfire according to the order of God.

Some of the Jews thought they could outsmart God and escape their just punishment. Some ran out of the burning towers and into the street; but there they killed by falling rocks, like in the Qur'anic story of the sinner from the city of the Prophet Lot. Other Jews thought they could jump out of the window. But they smashed into the ground, and today they are still burning in hell, in sha Allah [God willing; author's note]. For a long time the Jews saw themselves as equal to God. But the test with the fire brought the truth to light.

The Jews were no gods, they could not withstand the flames. Like the Golden Calf, they disintegrated in the fire, wholly and forever.

The revelation of the Prophet Mohammed (ibid.) [salla Ilahu alayhi wa-sal-lam(a); God bless him and grant him salvation; author's note] came true: La illaha ill Allah! [There is no God but Allah; author's note]. Maybe the Jews in hell will grant you an interview. I certainly won't!

Signature of sender

Letter from a prisoner in a correctional facility, July 2005

To the

Bundeskriminalamt Wiesbaden

Dear Sirs,

It is with great interest that I read an article about your fundamental research into the “phenomenon” (Islamic terror). I am very pleased that at long last, there will be an attempt to understand these young men. In order to understand these people, one must be aware that in the world of Islam, there is this unwritten law: The elder, no matter whether educated or uneducated, knows everything and is allowed to do anything, and one must always treat him with respect. Every older person must be regarded like a father figure. The people who turn or indoctrinate young people operate with the “guilt” principle. Feelings of guilt exert pressure.

They feel strong in a group, but it also puts them under pressure. The police distinguish between 2 groups.

Group 1: students and refugees.

Group 2: descendants of immigrants, who have never come to the attention of police and have a good reputation.

Unfortunately there is also a third group which can become much more dangerous. I will personally explain to you who this third group is, and how the principle of guilt works.

Naturally I also have some ideas about how all manner of societal forces could be employed to deprive potentially violent terrorists in Germany of fertile ground. I am Moroccan by birth, have been in the FRG for 27 years, attended a day-care nursery and have a secondary school certificate. Islam has shaped my life, but so has Germany. When I was 25 years old, in 1995, my father demanded that I kill my two sisters. Of course I refused, because it is against the law and against Islam; as a thanks, with the aid of my parents the police put me in jail even though I am innocent; all of this has been documented in official records. Since that time, I have detested preachers of hate; I and many others have indirectly become victims of preachers of hatred. I am still a Muslim, and I pray five times a day. I know what it is like for a Muslim to grow up in Germany. Since you have been unable to find candidates for your research, I am prepared to speak with you and tell you about my experiences. My only reason for doing so is so that there will be fewer victims, and that these young people are looked after before it is too late. I invite you, in about 2¹/₂ years I will be deported. If you come, then only on Mondays, Wednesday and Fridays, the remaining days are for visits. Do you know at what point a young foreigner realises that he will always remain a foreigner?

Best regards,

Signature of sender

Guidelines for interview about biographical history

Note: The interview guidelines were not actively consulted during the interview; they were intended to be memorised by the interviewer prior to conducting the interview.

Family circumstances

- Parents (age, profession, social class, relationship with the interviewee)
- Siblings (number, gender, relationship with the interviewee)
- Problems within the family (violence, addiction, unemployment, divorce, etc.)
- Political activities/delinquent behaviour of individual family members

Scholastic achievements (chronological sequence)

- Which *types of schools were attended when* (reasons for any changes in schools)?
- Problems at school/nature of the problems

Vocational training (chronological sequence)

- Which *course(s) of training* was (were) commenced/completed *when*?
- Were there any problems at the training workplace, and if so, of what kind?

Professional career (chronological sequence)

- What jobs did the interviewee have?
- Has the interviewee been unemployed (several times)?

Political activities (chronological sequence)

- Political persuasion
- In what form was the interviewee active politically?
- Was the interviewee part of a political party or informal group (e.g., skinheads)?
- Can the interviewee understand or sympathise with the motivation/actions of members of other extremist groups?
- Common features/differences compared to other extremist groups
- Opinion about September 11; is the interviewee able to empathise with the motives/actions of the assassins?

Criminal history (chronological sequence)

- When was the first instance of delinquent behaviour?
- When did he first come to the attention of the police?
- When was the first conviction?

- How many convictions were there?
- Prison terms (when imprisoned for the first time)?
- Types of delinquent behaviour

Social deprivation

- Addiction problems
- Attitude in relation to violence

Friends and acquaintances

- Role/influence of the circle of friends/acquaintances in relation to the interviewee's criminal or political activities
- Leisure pursuits

Follow-up questionnaire

Date of the interview:

Duration of the interview:

Political rating:

Currently imprisoned?

What is your year of birth?

Where were you born?

What is/are your nationality/nationalities?

If you have German citizenship, was it acquired by birth or were you naturalised?

What religious communities are you a member of?

Are you a practising believer?

What is your current marital status?

Do you have your own children?

With whom did you live, from when until when?

Where did you live, from when until when?

Did you serve in the armed forces?

What is the current marital status of your parents?

What level of education does(did) your father have?

What is (was) your father's profession?

What level of education does(did) your mother have?

What is (was) your mother's profession?

Do you have siblings?

Details of siblings:

Were your parents politically active?

Did you attend a kindergarten/a child day-care centre? (indicate years of attendance)

Who mainly looked after you when you were a child?

During what period did you attend primary school? (indicate years of attendance)

Did you repeat any school years?

During what period did you attend secondary school? (indicate years of attendance)

Did you repeat any school years?

Did you change schools?

What educational qualification did you attain?

Did you commence formal vocational training? (what kind of training, from when to when; training completed or incomplete)

Did you complete a course of tertiary study? (what course of study, from when to when; completed or incomplete)

What kind of jobs have you had to date? (which, from when to when)

Were you ever unemployed (registered)? (indicate years)

Were you ever the recipient of welfare payments (ongoing assistance with the cost of living)? (indicate years)

Do you smoke?

Do you consume alcohol, or did you consume alcohol before being sent to prison?

Have you ever taken any of the following drugs?

	yes/no	first time at the age of...	1 x	2 x	3-5 x	6-9 x	10- 19 x	20- 39 x	40- 59 x	60 x or more
Type of drug										
Cannabis										
Heroin										
Cocaine										
Amphetamines										
LSD										
Mushrooms/biogenic drugs										

Did you ever contact a counselling service for personal or health reasons (debt counselling, addiction counselling, psychological or psychiatric treatment, etc.)? (which counselling services, from when to when)

Were you ever a victim of violence within your family?

In the course of your life, were you ever part of a subcultural scene such as punks or skinheads?

Were you ever a member of a political party or a (prohibited) political organisation? (if yes, which, and during what period?)

What was your first criminal offence? (year/criminal offence)

What criminal offences have you committed to date? (please list)

Were you ever sentenced to a prison term? (year/for what criminal offences)

Appendix B

Evaluation example: biographical history of R_i_05

Born in East Germany in 1977, wears skinhead outfit, currently in jail following a breach of parole, as a consequence of an assault causing bodily injury against a punk. There is contact with the right-wing scene, which the interviewee does not consider himself to be fully part of, however. Some highly differentiated opinions, but generally a rather negative attitude towards foreigners, even though some foreign individuals are among his inner circle of friends. Primarily offences in relation to the sale of drugs. Drug user.

“Day-care age” (0-2 yrs):	no data
Kindergarten age (3-6 yrs):	Kindergarten for <i>athletically gifted children</i> . Father imprisoned several times in East Germany (also for “ <i>political</i> ” issues); domestic violence a distinct feature both quantitatively and qualitatively, especially by the father against the mother. → The interviewee is temporarily placed with the grandparents.
Primary school age (approx. 6-10 yrs):	1984, 7 yrs: death of the younger sister (leukaemia). → Mother admitted to psychiatric institution for an extended period; interviewee is placed with the grandparents. → During his childhood, the interviewee was prohibited from visiting his sister's grave; when he was older he often visited the grave (and still does today) and talks to his sister about his problems. 1985/1986, 8/9 yrs: The interviewee finds his mother in a pool of blood after a violent attack by the father. 1986, approx. 9 yrs: Repeats grade 4. → “ <i>opposes the system</i> ” from then on. 1986, 9 yrs: Removes the <i>Pionierzeichen</i> [GDR insignia; translator’s note] → Together with a friend, fantasises about what it might be like “over there”, and that “when they are old” they could “drive over there and have a look”.
Middle childhood years (approx. 10-12 yrs):	1989, 12 yrs: Escape to West Germany. → Culture shock, great difficulties integrating into the new system, <i>longing</i> for GDR until today. → Accommodation in a home for refugees. → Strong bond with the mother: experiences the mother as the only “ <i>memory</i> ” from the GDR, considers his younger sisters to be “ <i>Wessis</i> ” (<i>west Germans</i>). End of his career as a martial arts athlete: prohibited by the mother for fear that with the boxing coach, the son could “ <i>turn out like his father</i> ”.
Adolescence (13-18 yrs):	1990, 13 yrs: Father relocates to West Germany. → The interviewee and his family hope that <i>everything will get better; after a short period together, the parents separate again; relocation to another city</i> .

→ Accommodation in a “*social housing suburb*”.

→ Change of school – the interviewee meets A., who is also an outsider and who has an interest in weapons; comes into contact with drugs through A. In a court case at a later date, A. testifies against the interviewee, who then terminates contact between them.

→ Successfully uses his identity as someone from the *GDR* to surreptitiously gain advantages at school.

→ Frequently plays truant at school: “*because I thought I could easily afford to*”, “*didn't realise at that time [...] that it's not such a great thing for the future*”.

1993, 16 yrs: First girlfriend:

→ The relationship fails, like most of his relationships, over his “*fits of jealousy*”.

1995, 18 yrs: Lower secondary school-leaving certificate.

Initial contacts to rightist youths.

1995, 18 yrs: Apprenticed as a painter/varnisher; terminated due to lack of motivation (“*apathy*”)

1995, 18 yrs: Parents divorce.

1995, 18 yrs: Moves out of the parental home.

Early adult years

(18-21 yrs):

1996, 19 yrs: Interview signs up with the armed forces voluntarily because he has no idea what else he could be doing. Aims for a career with the *Kommando Spezialkräfte (KSK)*, an elite unit: “That was THE thing to do, of course.”

1997, 20 yrs: Leaves the armed forces following completion of basic military service. Due to the interviewee’s criminal past (trial in connection with narcotics), a career in the armed forces is not an option:

→ “*Of course I was pissed off with myself, about why I did that, and I thought: ‘OK, that's bad, from now on you stay on the straight and narrow’.*”

New relationship with a woman.

1997, 20 yrs: Starts an apprenticeship as a roofer.

Moves into the gabber scene:

→ Comes into contact with right-wing individuals and with drugs (joints at first, then consumption of party drugs and dealing in illegal drugs). 1998, from approx. 21 yrs: Drives to the “*old home country*” (in East Germany) with the new girlfriend and establishes contacts within right-wing circles:

→ Conflicts erupt because the gabber scene and the right-wing scene cannot “*stand*” each other due to differing attitudes towards drugs.

→ “*And that was the exact crunch. In the right-wing scene I could never mention that I like to listen to gabber, listen to the music and also drive to parties, and vice versa. In other words, I always had my own opinions, my own way of thinking, but was never really aware now, meaning, I neither fully approved of the right-wing scene, to the point where I could say, ‘OK, I support this to the hilt’, or of the gabber scene. [...] Because, in the end, both of them will break my neck sooner or later.*”

→ Resolution of the conflict: The interviewee mixes with the gabbers when he feels the need to talk, but when he wants to control or limit the level of his drug-taking, he spends more time in right-wing circles.

1999, 22 yrs: Termination of the apprenticeship as roofer due to his own drug consumption.

1998, 21 yrs: Meets an Iranian medical student in the gabber scene.

→ The student takes him along to an event (anatomy) and this stimulates an interest in medicine in the interviewee.

2000, 23 yrs: Commences a traineeship as a carer for people with special needs, because a course of tertiary study is not an option for him (2001: traineeship terminated because, due to his history of drug use, he is not permitted to work as a carer for people with special needs).

Relationship with a woman: “*It lasted three-and-a-half years, broke up because she was constantly celebrating, and I sometimes joined in, and she also kept starting again with the stuff, and sometimes dragged me into it as well, but then I said: ‘Right, that’s it – end of story’.*”

Adult years

(from 22 yrs onwards):

The current girlfriend is/was part of the scene herself: “*Now I have one who shares my opinion, OK, maybe not quite like that. While she was deep into the scene herself, right now she is trying a little bit, she now has a child and everything, in other words, it’s not like that anymore.*”

Development within the scene (“radicalisation”)

Event	Subjective interpretation	Consequences/strategies for coping
1989, 12 yrs: Sees punks for the first time (after the escape to the FRG)	“... <i>a real shock at first [...] because I had never seen all that. Because, for me [...] these were not normal people for a start.</i> ”	
1989, 12 yrs: New class at school:	“ <i>They are all lounging around, feet up and behaving</i>	→ Disorientation: “ <i>at first I couldn't understand why</i>

Event	Subjective interpretation	Consequences/strategies for coping
<p><i>“Where there was a fairly high proportion of foreigners, at least that’s what it looked like to me.”</i></p>	<p><i>really badly.”</i></p>	<p><i>they do that; after all, we are in a school here.”</i></p> <p>→ Associates behaviour he cannot understand with foreigners.</p> <p>→ <i>“I never really got on well with foreigners, right from the start.”</i></p>
	<p><i>“... I also had to cop quite a bit [...] because I must have looked a bit weird or something to them.”</i></p>	<p>→ Feels alienated and excluded: <i>“I felt like a foreigner”</i> (because of the way he looked and talked).</p> <p>→ Adapts to his situation: <i>“Somehow I thought, yeah well, OK, if that’s how it is, then I’ll just have to work things out somehow.”</i></p> <p>→ Rejects the Germans and bonds with other <i>“Ossis”</i> [East Germans] at the refugee camp, <i>“these Germans”</i> were not really to his liking.</p> <p>→ Uses his identity as a <i>“someone from the GDR”</i> in a targeted fashion to surreptitiously gain advantages at school (for example, he would insist that he did not do his homework because he was not familiar with the concept from the GDR).</p>
<p>1990, 13 yrs: Relocation and accommodation in social housing.</p>		<p>→ Meets A., <i>“also a kind of outsider somehow”</i> who is interested in weapons and who talks to him during recess.</p>
<p>1990, 13 yrs: Contact with A. intensifies</p>		<p>→ Their friendship becomes stronger; both of them are involved in weapons, gunpowder and in building <i>“little bombs”</i>. Together they explore things like underground bunkers. In doing so, they are caught by the police.</p> <p>→ They commit their first crimes: <i>“That guy wanted to do bigger and bigger things, make them really perfect, like, whatever, the perfect robbery or some shit like that, and I didn’t think that was so great.”</i></p> <p>→ Later he comes into contact with the drug scene (gabber scene) through A. and also starts to peddle drugs himself. When the two are caught, A. testifies against him,</p>

Event	Subjective interpretation	Consequences/strategies for coping
		after which the interviewee ends the friendship.
<p>1991/1992, 14/15 yrs:</p> <p>The mother is threatened with a knife by a foreigner in the laundry of the social housing estate.</p>		<p>→ Protects the mother (also using violence) until the police arrive; court proceedings against the interviewee are initiated.</p> <p>→ Joins up with class mates (“colleagues”) who have had similar experiences. <i>“Listening to music”, drinking beer, but “never got too involved”</i> (at concerts or the like) – he was the youngest, and he also exploited this fact, provoked a great deal, and <i>“they then sorted it all out”</i>.</p>
<p>1993/1994, 16/17 yrs:</p> <p>Prank: Throwing home-made fireworks into a container at a home for asylum seekers.</p>	<p><i>“... didn’t think too much about it, who cares, just to be cool.”</i></p> <p><i>„... everything could have exploded and started to burn. But we didn’t worry about that, everything glowed brightly, in green, red, all kinds of colours. And then they came outside [...] and we [...] just sat in the bushes and thought it was funny.”</i></p> <p><i>“... again, I didn't really think about it, that it didn't make sense or have any purpose.”</i></p>	
<p>1995/1996, 18/19 yrs: Contact with rightist circles via the gabber scene.</p>	<p><i>“So if you happen to be someone who has problems and just doesn’t quite fit the norm, then you just go and join these groups everywhere, see? It’s kind of an automatic thing, not that you first think, well, I’ll simply go there now, I have to go there, or anything.”</i></p>	<p>→ Starts to use drugs, commits drug-related offences; he later controls his drug-taking by spending more time in <i>“anti-drugs”</i> right-wing circles.</p> <p>External attribution: <i>“Life controls you that way, doesn’t it.”</i></p>
<p>1998, 21 yrs:</p> <p>He travels with his girlfriend to his old home country in East Germany.</p> <p><i>“There are the kinds of pubs there where you can listen to my kind of music. Where the boys</i></p>	<p><i>“You hang out together. It’s relaxed. That’s what draws me there.”</i></p> <p><i>“These are boys just like any boy next door.”</i></p>	<p>→ Establishes contacts in the right-wing scene in his old home town; contact is maintained mainly over the Internet, and intensifies over time (from about the year 2000, regular visits).</p> <p>→ Becomes entrenched in the scene <i>“because I realised pretty</i></p>

Event	Subjective interpretation	Consequences/strategies for coping
<p><i>hang out together, where the girls keep themselves separate, and the boys too. Decent songs are played there, bands that are prohibited, but you can hear them there, those are the songs being played.</i></p>		<p><i>quickly that I wasn't going to go far with the other stuff [drugs; author's note], relationships go bust, and also for me it creates too many problems and criminal offences, and so on.</i> / <i>"that's another reason why I retreat more into the scene, because there I'm definitely safe from drugs."</i></p> <p>→ gives in to peer pressure:</p> <p><i>"when I hang out with several people, I laugh along with them. But myself, I am really thinking: 'this didn't go well'. And when I look at these pictures [from the time of the NS regime; author's note] [...] then I don't feel connected with that, absolutely not."</i></p> <p>→ Confrontation with comradeships and "extreme people" or violence: <i>"But it is always up to you whether you take part or not."</i> (Interviewee apparently does not participate)</p>
<p>unclear, Sister marries a Turkish national</p>	<p>"family row"</p>	<p>→ Softening up of prejudices. The family of the brother-in-law tolerates his opinions and "gear", the brother-in-law becomes a social support system: <i>"Yeah well, I get on relatively well with him. Because whenever I was having a tough time, he was somehow there for me."</i></p>
<p>unclear, "Skinhead" verbally abuses the mother</p>	<p>→ <i>"ultimately he was the one who started it. He came to my place with a few people and dragged my mother into it [...] If I hadn't done something about it, I think he would have thought that he can get away with it."</i></p>	<p>→ The interviewee calls his friends and "visits" the perpetrator at home. There he and his friends run riot in the house and egg each other on: <i>"We immediately went in and smashed up the whole house, the mother then jumped out of the window with the child in her arms, then we beat up the father, him and the whole house, smashed everything." [. . .] "I couldn't stop it anymore, it was done, see? It was done, it felt like being in a frenzy."</i></p>
<p>unclear, Girlfriend is molested and</p>		<p>→ a violent brawl ensues.</p>

Event	Subjective interpretation	Consequences/strategies for coping
verbally abused by foreigners		
“Violent phase”	Frequently gets into fights if someone gives him a <i>stupid look</i> (especially with foreign nationals). The interviewee himself dresses up in a skinhead outfit.	
Fight with a punk during carnival	<p>“When he called me a <i>whippersnapper</i>, something just snapped in me. Otherwise that wouldn't have happened, I don't think.”</p> <p>“I think it also has something to do with the past. I can take a lot [...], but as soon it's about how you dress, how you look, or against my family or something, when you try to put me down, that's when I clink out.”</p>	<p>→ wants to apologise to the victim, but “it didn't work out like that, well, he still looked quite deformed, I'd say. That's when I knew that this would get me into serious trouble.”</p> <p>→ hires a lawyer and is convicted (suspended on probation); begins drug therapy and retraining.</p>
Listens to anti-constitutional music with the window open, when the police arrive (CD is confiscated)	“... that's when I knew for a fact that it's over, that my parole was up.”	→ Resignation: “Unfortunately I then stuck my head in the sand.”
Receives a letter from the court , with a request for a statement		→ Resignation: “I figured, what does it matter now, it's all over anyway.”
Parole is revoked (Penal Code § 86a) and he is imprisoned	<p>“I think it's ridiculous.”</p> <p>“... don't understand a single word of what they are singing” [referring to the music he was listening to; author's note]</p> <p>“Now I am in here. And yet I have to say I am actually quite glad that I stayed here, because somehow, things do change quite a bit, see? It's not as bad as I thought.”</p>	<p>→ The grandfather, who had always given him emotional support, no longer acts as a support system: “My granddad doesn't want to know about me right now, because I am in here and everything, there's just no way.”</p> <p>→ Experiences a change.</p>
Positive experiences with foreign nationals (in prison) “Experiences with foreigners [...] it turns out I suddenly get on quite well with them.”	“On many issues they have views that I share.”	→ Identification/change in thinking: “I get on quite well with them, you know ... really quite strange.”

Event	Subjective interpretation	Consequences/strategies for coping
<p>Current situation:</p> <p>Frequent tension in dealing with foreign nationals who – he suspects – provoke him in particular during outings because they know that he is a prisoner.</p> <p>“Disputes within the scene” also still remain “open”.</p> <p>The interviewee today recognises the seriousness of earlier childish or rash actions.</p>		

Biographical observations

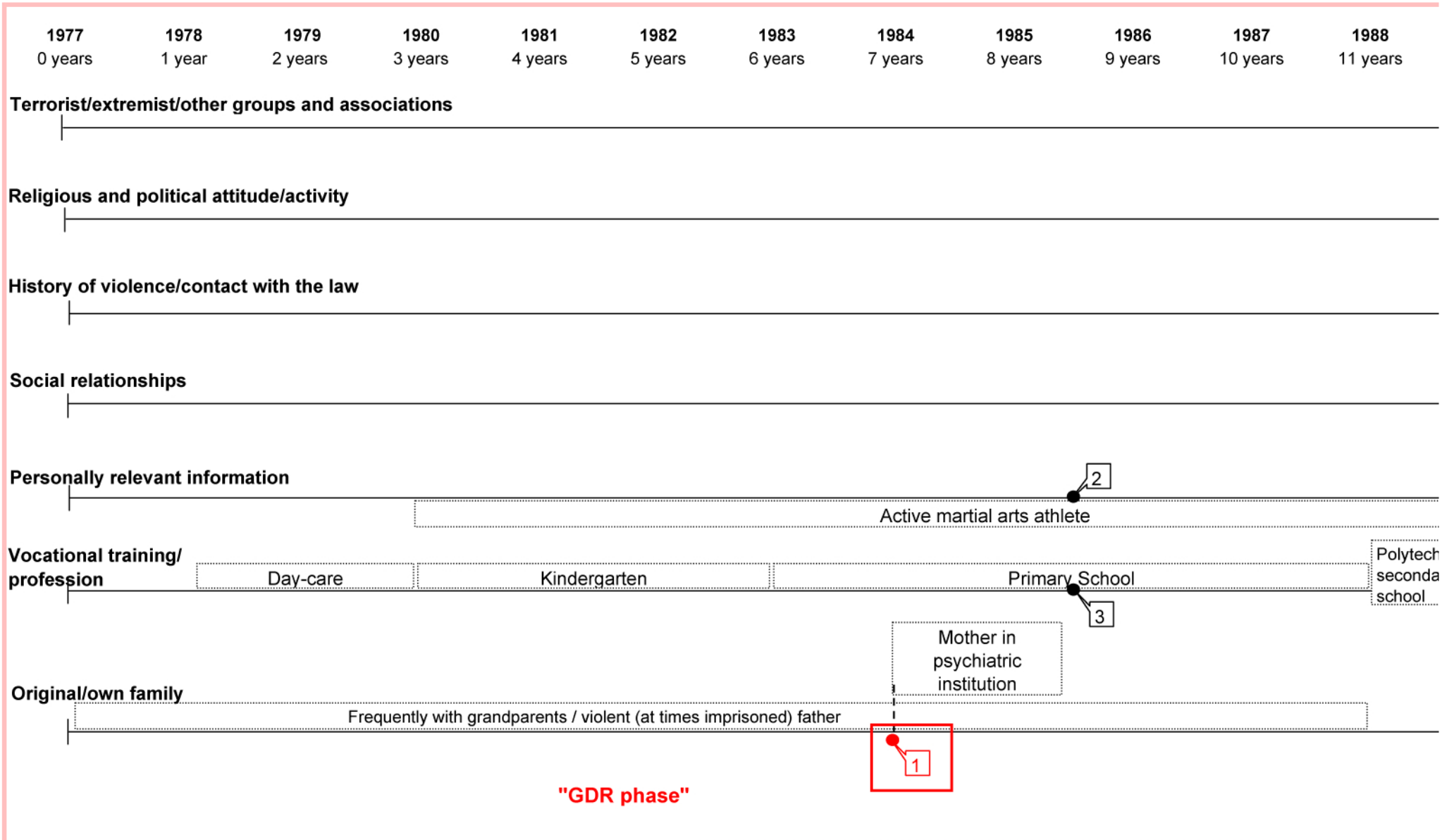
1. The interviewee develops a total of four central themes in his biography: Problems of identity, which primarily relate to a **“culture shock”** associated with the escape (from the GDR to West Germany), **drugs, violence** within the family and also perpetrated by himself, and **uncertainties relating to the family**.
2. The escape to West Germany represents the single most disruptive event in the interviewee’s biographical history. It leads to a kind of disorientation, generally referred to as **“culture shock”**. The interviewee experiences the new environment as alienating and threatening, and he reports having felt – mainly due to difficulties communicating because of language differences – like a **“foreigner”**, or like a **“monkey”** at the zoo, and he eventually becomes the victim of teasing. He associates the negative impressions he gains of the new environment primarily with foreigners and punks. He does not like *“the Germans”* and the people in West Germany overall, and he eventually seeks the company of other refugees.
3. The role of acting as a social support system for coping with the experience of the escape falls to his mother who, unlike people his own age or even his siblings, is perceived as **“genuine GDR”**. A highly distinctive fixation and bond with the mother develops (emotional dependency). Even the interviewee himself describes himself as a **“mother’s boy”** and says he **“can’t [function]”** without his mother. There is marked tendency to protect the mother against hostile attacks. It goes so far that criminal offences are also committed for the purpose of defending the mother. It is highly likely that the strong domestic violence (especially against the mother) experienced during the interviewee’s childhood plays a role in this context. The interviewee indicates that his father was violent towards the mother and sisters, but only as long as he (the interviewee) was not present.
4. The interviewee’s biography can be broadly divided into four phases. The first phase (0 to 12 years), during which the most serious instances of violence within the family occur, the interviewee’s sister dies while still a child and he experiences problems at school, draws to a close with the escape to the FRG. What follows is a phase of reorientation (12 to 14 years), which can be described as highly eventful overall, and which brings contact with right-wing circles and the perpetration of acts of violence. Feelings of inferiority (because of the status as a refugee) and poverty, which leads to envy and hatred towards foreigners, serve to encourage these processes. There is also the fact that the interviewee is not allowed to continue practising his sport because the mother, fearing he may turn out **“like his father”**, forbids it. In the subsequent third phase (15 to 23 years) the interviewee finally comes into contact with drugs (dealing) through a friend and becomes a delinquent. His own drug-taking, which starts at the age of 19, increasingly causes developmental tasks, such as the completion of vocational training, not be resolved successfully. There are numerous obstacles preventing him from achieving his goals, such as the fact that a career with the armed forces is not possible for him, or that his traineeship is terminated because practising the desired profession is not possible because of the interviewee’s criminal record. Characteristic of this phase is a strong

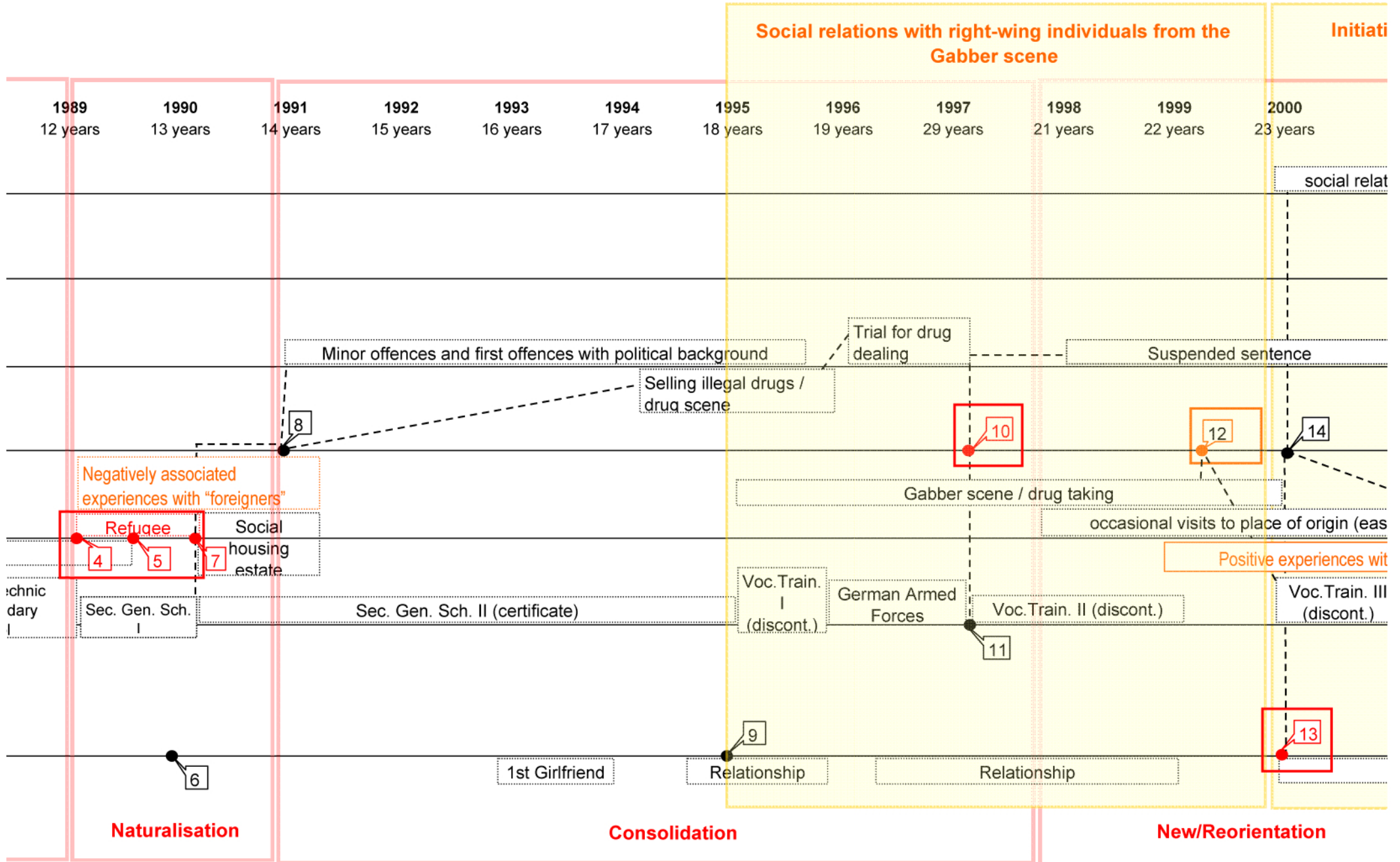
orientation towards other individuals, even though the interviewee feels that while he may have “hung out in all the different [subcultural] scenes”, he does not feel at home in any of them. What matters most to him are the companionship, and a sense of community and of being understood and accepted. In this context, he foregrounds his own set of values (protecting women, clearly defined roles for men and women, loyalty, honesty). There are also the first visits in the old town, where he makes new (right-wing) friends. During the fourth and final phase (from about 24 years onward) these contacts become closer.

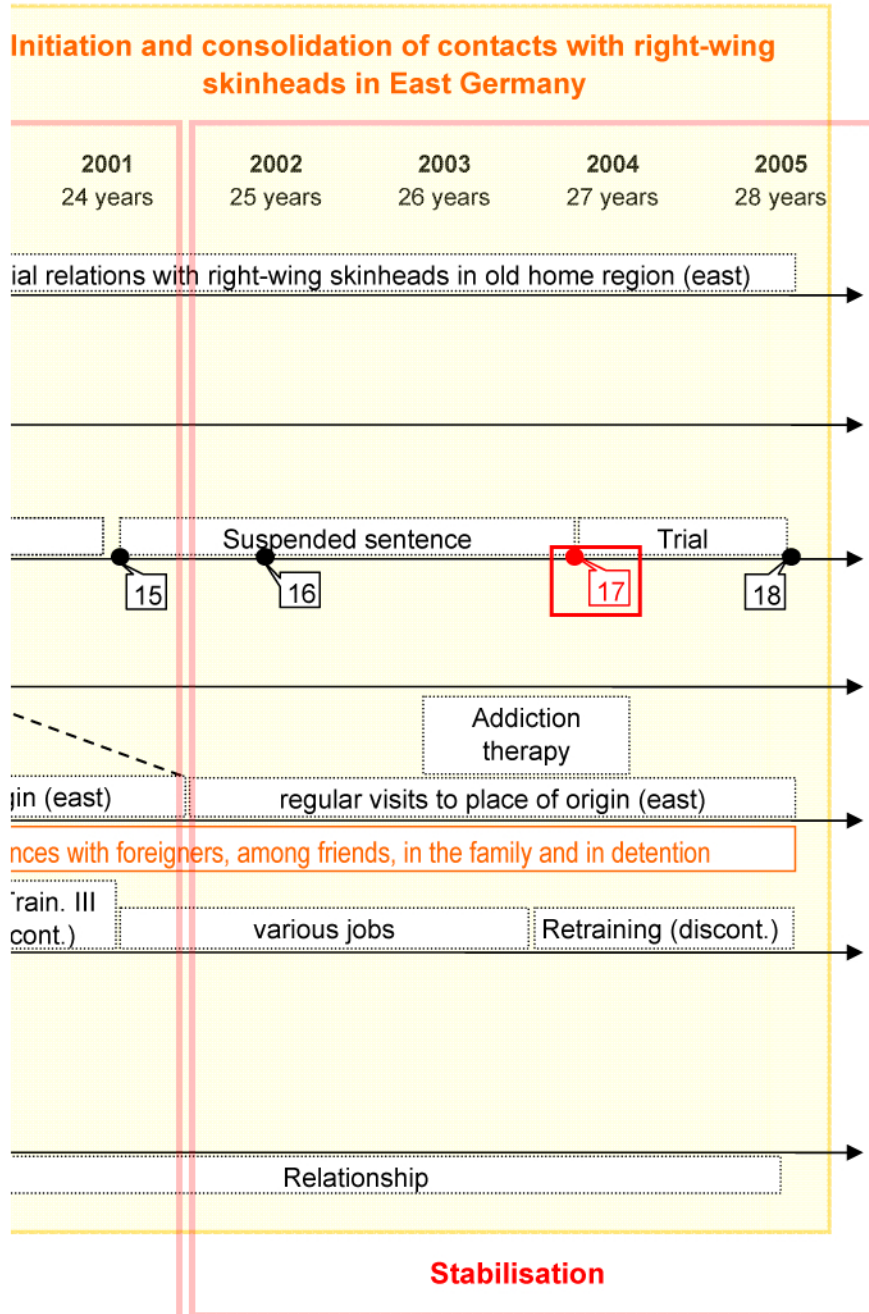
5. Overall, the interviewee’s criminal record features mainly drug-related offences, with one exception (a street fight with a punk). The right-wing scene fulfils two separate functions in his biography: on the one hand he uses it in a targeted manner to control his drug-taking, because drugs are not tolerated in those circles. On the other, he maintains social links with circles his old home town (in East Germany) in an attempt to establish a connection with his past. Yet he still feels homeless and, in his own words, he feels empathy towards migrants. He does not consider relocating to the east to be a viable option, since he cannot envisage a professional future for himself there, and he also does not see East Germany as the “GDR”, but as a kind of “*compromise*”.
6. The stories give the impression that experiences and events lived through during childhood cannot be properly processed because the past appears “erased” as a result of the dissolution of the GDR. A strong drive to revive the past is evident in the frequent visits to former East Germany and the fact that, as a young adult, the interviewee starts to visit the grave of his sister (in the old home town) to talk to her about his problems.

Interview R_I_05

Born 1977 in East Germany, REMO, father: qualified painter/decorator, unemployed since 1998 (multiple prison terms); mother: qualified catering specialist, unemployed since 2004. Younger sister deceased.







GDR phase

- 1 Death of the younger sister **CL**
- 2 Extreme violence perpetrated by the father against the mother
- 3 Removal of Pioneer badge

Naturalisation

- 4 Escape to West Germany (father imprisoned) **CL**
- 5 Martial arts training prohibited by the mother **CL**
- 6 Father follows
- 7 Relocation from M. to S. **CL**

Consolidation

- 8 Meets A. ("best friend")
- 9 Parents divorce
- 10 Contact with A. ceases **CL**
- 11 Discontinuation of service in Armed Forces due to drug-related trial

New/Reorientation

- 12 Meets Iranian medical student
- 13 Meets T. (partner) **CL**
- 14 Establishes contact with like-minded people in East Germany (old home)
- 15 Brawl with a punk

Stabilisation

- 16 Escalation of disputes within the scene
- 17 Parole breach (§ 86a) **CL**
- 18 Incarceration

Appendix C

Biographical histories of interviewees

Ri01

“Then I joined this group directly, without giving it another thought.”

The interviewee was born in West Germany in 1977. He was the family's second child. His younger sister died in 2001. His father was a career soldier in the army, the mother a housewife. When he was about ten years old, the parents separated, and eventually divorced. The interviewee, who suffered greatly from these events, initially lived with his mother, who imposed strict discipline (sometimes using violence) and had difficulty handling him. At his own request, he therefore moved in with his father, who initially took good care of his son but gradually paid less and less attention to him due to work pressures. The boy spent more and more time going out, and at the comprehensive school he attended at the time, he actively joined a group of “cool” youths who also met in the private sphere as part of a “music club”. The group eventually split up due to differences. Right-wing music played a prominent role in that setting. The interviewee aligned himself with his rightist friends and with his cousin (who was also right-wing) and joined that part of the group.

Due to his deteriorating performance at school, the interviewee had to change from the comprehensive to a secondary school, which he completed successfully.

In the mid-1990s, the greater intensity of the “political activities” within the rightist group (right-wing skinheads) led to irreconcilable differences between his vocational training, the relationship with the interviewee's girlfriend and the activities of the group. Due to increasing absenteeism, his apprenticeship is terminated. Around the same time, the relationship with the girlfriend broke down: *“The girlfriend didn't want to go along with it any longer either, and so I just said: ‘OK, let's finish this, from now on I'll just enjoy myself within the group.’”*

The [political] attitude was increasingly demonstrated more openly (the interviewee refers to “outing”). This is the period when initial contacts with party members occurred. In 1994, the interviewee applied for membership of the FAP (Freiheitliche Deutsche Arbeiterpartei = Free German Workers Party), but only *“to be able to demonstrate: Look, boys, I'm doing something, too”, and “it only came about as a result of pressure from what was my best friend at the time, otherwise it would never have occurred to me to make use of a membership, let alone the party ID, which I didn't even bother picking up. I showed up there once, and never again.”*

The first criminal offences were committed, mostly under the influence of alcohol. The interviewee first came to the attention of the police when he carried a bayonet while attending a football game. A short time later he was arrested for the first time and convicted for his role in the killing of a homeless person. The sentence was two years on probation.

After he was released from custody, he immediately joined another right-wing group. Further criminal offences followed: damage to property, disturbing the peace, use of prohibited insignia, assault causing bodily harm, thefts. In 1998 he was imprisoned for breach of his parole conditions, and he was released in June 1999.

Following his release, the interviewee commenced a new traineeship. His social contacts at that time focused on a person he knew through his former right-wing associations and that person's girlfriend. Over time, this group was joined by another two persons. In mid-2000, closer contacts with members of the party were established once again. The group travelled throughout the Federal Republic and went to concerts and public events. This resulted in a wider network of contacts, some of which involved prominent figures within the far-right scene.

During this time, there were regular visits to a pub known even outside Germany as a meeting place for the extreme right; the interviewee was less interested in political action but more in *“drinking, partying and having fun”*. He refused to do any political work for the party. The establishment in question was kept under constant surveillance by the security services. When it was closed down, meetings took place more frequently at the homes of friends and acquaintances, especially in X.,

where intensive contacts with other right-wing persons had been developed. X. was also the place where the arson attack was committed, for which the interviewee is currently in prison.

Ri02

“Prowled around alone for a while [...] then came across this group of right-wingers.”

The interviewee was born in 1969 in West Germany. He has a brother, ten years older, contact with whom has largely ceased. The family belongs to the so-called working class. The father comes from the former eastern regions of Germany. The mother died in 1990. The interviewee describes his childhood as *quite normal*: *“Yes, I do think I would describe it as quite normal. Let me put it this way, I grew up leading quite a sheltered life somewhere.”* The parents, like their son, had *“few contacts, they didn’t really seek to establish contact with other people.”*

After primary school, the interviewee initially attended a secondary modern school, where he assumed the role of an outsider. He attributes this to his style of dress: *“The clothes I wore at the beginning weren’t always the latest fashion, and it’s easy to become an outsider that way.”* After having had to repeat a year twice, and due to *“poor performance, I was just lazy back then”*, the interviewee changed to a secondary general school.

Just before he changed schools, the interviewee met a group of people who shared his interest in heavy metal music. Within this group, right-wing ideology was not a factor, *“...so one was a bit more inclined to say: right-wing – no thanks.”*

At 19 years of age, the interviewee gained his secondary school leaving certificate, which qualified him for entry to grammar school. After he finished school, he was unable to find an apprenticeship, not least because, according to his own words, he did not try very hard, because he *“was a bit lazy, and not all that keen to get a job.”* Because of his situation, he applied for welfare, which he was granted.

During his time of unemployment, contact with his *“heavy-metal gang”* became less frequent over time. More or less by accident, at the age of 20/21, he came into *“contact with people, some of whom a bit younger, and who referred to themselves as right-wing.”* To begin with, music was the common link between them, whereas *“right-wing ideas”* played no part for him at all. As time went by, this changed to the extent that he was now also listening to music with an unambiguously political message (e.g. Störkraft or Werwolf) and *„then did end up endorsing the contents of these lyrics from right-wing bands after all.“* Moreover, he said that experiences with violent acts perpetrated by foreign nationals were a further trigger for *“leaping onto this right-wing bandwagon, yes”*.

In early 1992, the interviewee was conscripted into the army. He found this situation difficult to cope with, *“first of all, there was this commanding tone, I don’t like that kind of thing and really don’t need it.”* In the army, he was once again an outsider, which he attributes to the fact that, *“they realised, more or less, that I wasn’t very good at asserting myself.”*

He did not complete his military service, due to being discharged on account of a psychological report. The reason given by the interviewee [at the time], in addition to his father’s alcoholism, was the death of his mother, which he claims to have been unable to cope with: *“Yes, initially that was what I said, my mother had died in 1990, that is what I gave as one of the reasons, though in hindsight, by then that really wasn’t a factor for me anymore, I do think that in the year 1992, I had left that behind.”*

After he left the army, the interviewee quickly found work, but then became unemployed again. Receiving welfare payments and supported by the father, the interviewee still lived in the parental home. His life at that time revolved around getting together with members of the right-wing group and to get drunk. *“Well, we got together, got drunk in the end, and that was more or less it.”* According to the interviewee, the group did not initiate any violent actions. The personal involvement with right-wing ideology consisted of reading the right-wing press (*“Deutsche Nationalzeitung, Wochenzeitung”*). In addition, he applied for membership of the DVU (Deutsche Volksunion = German People’s Union). He says the reason for doing so was the conviction that, *“one wants to achieve something by stating one’s opinion.”* He was not active in party politics, however.

Because of the way he dressed (skinhead) and his demeanour, the interviewee's ideological stance was well known within his family. The father was of the opinion that he was old enough to know what he was doing, but he warned his son about becoming a member of the DVU, as "*this could continually lead to trouble*".

Until he was arrested, the interviewee had never come to the attention of the police: "*No, until I went to jail I did not have a criminal record.*" He abandoned the right-wing ideology following the confrontation with the victims during his trial, yet he maintains that he is innocent – he had nothing to do with the criminal offence, he "*got caught up in this through others*".

Given the very long prison sentence, it must be assumed that it was a particularly serious offence.

Ri03

“Well, there was this group of five or six youths, they were bored and egged each other on during these acts, and it wasn’t thought through in any way.”

Note:

During a short preliminary conversation, the interviewee wanted to know why he had been selected for this research project, since he did not see himself as a right-wing extremist. He said he did not consider the offence that ultimately led to his conviction as a politically motivated criminal offence. According to the interviewee, a forensic-psychiatric report had also come to the conclusion that his former gang had not displayed any kind of political ideology.

In the end, he agreed to do the interview, having said that he would not be able to contribute anything substantial towards the research topic. He indicated that his reason for agreeing to participate was that the interview would provide a welcome break from the boring prison routine, especially since he was usually only allowed two visits by two people for a period of one-and-a-half hours per month. He added that his release was imminent and that he wanted to earn a few plus points for good behaviour.

The interviewee was born in East Germany in 1980. He grew up there, attended a day-care centre, kindergarten and day care, and he also went to primary school there. He has a sister, three years younger, who has never come to the attention of the police.

Reunification took place during his primary school years. After primary school, he went to a secondary modern school, which he completed at the normal rate, being an average pupil. Immediately after school, he started an apprenticeship as a power electronics technician, which he abandoned after one year, however, because he had realised that *“this is not what I want to be doing for the rest of my life.”*

At the time of reunification, the interviewee was nine years old. He reports having not only negative experiences, like *“Stasi” [East German Bureau of State Security]* and *“lack of freedom to travel”*, but also positive aspects, such as job security. He says his memories from his time with the *Jungpioniere* (Young Pioneers) were mainly positive.

According to him, he did not care about anything to do with politics during his youth, he was more interested in his girlfriend and in cars. As he got older, he tended more towards the PDS, i.e. to the left of the political spectrum. He says he was never a member of a party or any other political organisation. He indicates that he is not interested in engaging in politics. He keeps informed about political issues only through newspapers and television. He says he would never vote *“right-wing”*. He puts his dislike of *“right-wing ideologies”* down to history lessons in the GDR and stories he heard from his grandparents about the Nazi years. He says his family and his friends are apolitical, *“they don’t go to vote”*.

The interviewee committed his first criminal offence at the age of 17. This was an assault causing bodily harm. His second criminal offence, robbery and extortion, followed shortly after. The third offence he committed was abduction and extortion. In all three cases, the victims were not members of ethnic minorities or marginalised social groups. The fourth criminal offence, homicide, was the offence that was considered politically motivated.

The interviewee was remanded in custody in 1999, and released again in the year 2000. Following his detention in remand, he commenced a three-year training course in geriatric care in West Germany. He says the choice of location for this training course was coincidental, the result of having been accepted there. Because the interviewee was attending this training course, he was not sent to prison immediately following his conviction. As the sentence was not yet final and the matter came before the Federal Supreme Court, he was given a reprieve by the Ministry in order to be able to complete his training. The Federal Supreme Court changed the ruling handed down by the Regional Court from

“manslaughter” to “assault causing bodily harm resulting in death”. The sentence, which ran concurrently for all four criminal offences, was two years and eight months. During the trial, he said it went against him that he was considered to be the leader of the group, and that, in the opinion of the court, he would have been able to prevent the death of the victim.

All the offences took place after he abandoned his apprenticeship, during a period of only one year. He attributes his criminal activities to boredom. His clique (some 15 youths) were idle and had no idea of what to do, especially those who were unemployed. In those days he spent a great deal of time with these youths who, like him, were unemployed. They would “*meet up quite early, and the others just casually joined them in the evenings*”.

Even before his sentencing, the interviewee had left his old circle of friends behind since he no longer wanted anything to do “*with these people*”, because during the trial everybody had tried to “*kick the others’ arses*” (i.e. blame the others). He says that he had established a new circle of acquaintances since then, and that his relationship with his family had become closer since he was convicted, because he was not spending so much time with his “*friends*” anymore.

At the time of the interview, the interviewee had to serve the remainder of his sentence, 23 days. He said after his release from prison, he would be working in nursing care, and that he had already received a firm commitment for a job. He was also planning a future together with his girlfriend, whom he met after his release from custody (prior to his trial). He said he had broken off the relationship with her before he went to prison to serve the remainder of this sentence, assuming that the relationship would not last as a result of the separation (his previous partner had left him while he was remanded in custody). Because his girlfriend had stood by him, however, he had resumed the relationship.

Ri04

"I went to find out about it, because I had read at some point that in Germany there are no political prisoners any longer. Yes, and that is the problem, that after six years I am still being pigeonholed in this way. I had really intended to close this chapter while I am in here, and now you come along and want to conduct a survey or write a biography or some such thing."

The interviewee was born in East Germany in 1980. The mother was a geriatric nurse, and the father a construction manager. He has a sister who is ten years older than him.

After attending kindergarten and primary school, still in the former GDR, the interviewee went to a comprehensive school. His scholastic achievements were below average, *"of 22 people in the class, I think 20 gained their high school leaving certificate. And me and somebody else were not part of that group."*

The interviewee left school after grade ten. At first he was unable to find an apprenticeship and instead completed a preparatory year. An acquaintance then helped him find an apprenticeship as a painter/varnisher. In 1997, at the beginning of his apprenticeship and just before he reached maturity, the interviewee came to the attention of the police for the first time, for assault causing bodily harm and robbery. During the following two years, he repeatedly drew attention to himself by getting involved in violent altercations. He says these criminal offences were prompted by *"pure boredom"*. They (his clique) had met in the evenings and *"aimlessly driven around town, and then, if there was a victim, then he really did become a victim"*.

He was never convicted: *"At that time I really did do a lot of bad things. But the problem was that there was never a court case anyway. I think that is what was missing, that nothing ever came to trial. Because, we ended up thinking, oh well, that's all been put on ice."*

In the year 1999, while the interviewee was still an apprentice, the criminal offence occurred for which he was ultimately convicted. As a consequence of a criminal offence committed as a group, the victim died. For this offence (conviction for manslaughter), incl. the offences committed earlier, the interviewee was sentenced to three years in prison in collective proceedings.

During the trial, he met his second girlfriend, with whom he has a child. He did not complete his apprenticeship successfully, however, *"because my girlfriend gave birth, I think it was two days before my examination. And that meant I had other things to worry about than my apprenticeship examination."* After his apprenticeship, he worked casually as a labourer in building construction, mainly working away in the old federal states.

A year and a half prior to commencing his term of imprisonment (2002), the interviewee increased his consumption of alcohol, mainly drinking alone, *"because I was unemployed. I said, leave me alone. So I simply had a beer for breakfast every now and again."* At this time, he was still in a relationship with his girlfriend. In the meantime the two have separated.

The interviewee did not come to the attention of the police between 1999 and 2002 because his girlfriend at the time *"watched out like a hawk that I didn't get into trouble."* At the time of the interview, the interviewee had to serve six months of his sentence. He hopes to have successfully completed the training he recommenced in prison by that time. Once he is released, he wants to move to the west, saying *"there's nothing keeping me here, apart from my child and my parents. No, I don't have any friends anymore either, that's the problem. Yes, because all my mates have moved across to the new [he means 'old', author's note] federal states. All of them. [...] Only a single one has remained here"*. The reason his friends moved away is the lack of work prospects in his home region.

The interviewee has never been a member of a political organisation or group.

Ri05

“Yet another reason why I withdraw farther into my scene, because there I am certain to be safe from drugs.”

The interviewee was born in East Germany in 1977, the first of a total of five children. In 1989 he moved to the west with his mother – who was heavily pregnant at the time – and his sister. The father followed later. The parents divorced in 1995. The reasons for the divorce were probably excessive alcohol consumption and violence on the part of the husband. The husband has served multiple prison sentence in the former GDR for brawling and theft.

The interviewee has (had) four younger siblings, two sisters and two brothers. The eldest sister died of leukaemia at the age of four: *“I remember exactly how it was back then [...] my mum was screaming like crazy. Held her in her arm, because she was already dead. Yeah, somehow, [...] I don’t know. Then the doctor came, somehow everything, and they then tore her out of her arms and my mother then went into a psychiatric institution for a year or two. Because she could not cope with it at all.”*

The youngest sister was born in 1984 and is today married to a Turkish national. The brother born in 1989 attends a school for children with learning difficulties. He is hyperactive (ADHD) has already come to the attention of the police for *“loitering”* and for drinking alcohol. He is still living with his mother. His other brother, a half brother (a child of the interviewee’s biological mother and another man) was born in 1963. He lives with his girlfriend and child and works as an industrial cleaner. He has also come to the attention of the police over assault causing bodily harm. The interviewee says his mother had two more children, but they were taken away by the State Security authorities. He does not know what happened to these two, as the events happened long before he was born.

After attending day-care and kindergarten, the interviewee started school in 1983. Due to poor scholastic performance, he had to repeat grade 4. As a result of the move to West Germany, the interviewee was enrolled in a secondary general school in 1989. Due to the change from the polytechnic high school to the secondary general school, he also had to repeat fifth grade. He completed secondary general school without qualification in 1995.

After leaving school, the interviewee began an apprenticeship as a painter/varnisher, which he gave up due to *“apathy”*. In 1996 he went to the army, where he had intended to sign up for a special unit, but this was not possible as his record reflected an offence under the Narcotics Act. The interviewee was not only a drug addict; he was also a drug dealer.

He left the army in 1997 and started a new apprenticeship, this time as a roofer. He did not complete this apprenticeship either. In the year 2000 he made a third attempt, this time as a carer for people with special needs, and again he was unsuccessful due to his previous convictions for drug offences: *“Then there was another trial, and well, you’re not allowed to continue working in this profession if you have a previous conviction under the Narcotics Act. And so that was that, yet again.”* He had to break off a course to retrain as a painter/varnisher that he had started in 2004 because he had to start his prison sentence. Between various training courses, he worked as an unskilled worker on construction sites and was employed by a temporary work company.

The interviewee came into contact with the far-right scene at the age of 14 to 15 years. He belonged to both the gabber and the skinhead scene. In 1990, the interviewee threatened a family of foreign nationals with a knife. At that time, the interviewee’s family lived in social housing complex also shared by many foreign nationals. The argument started after the interviewee’s mother had allegedly been insulted by members of the family of foreigners. In the years that followed, the interviewee came to the attention of the police in connection with burglary, theft, threatening and offensive behaviour, possession of and dealing in narcotics, assault causing grievous bodily harm and the use of insignia of unconstitutional organisations. He was convicted three times, with two of the convictions suspended on probation. There were additional instances of personal injury and property damage on homes for asylum seekers’ hostels (smashing of windows, throwing fireworks into buildings) of which the police had no knowledge.

Ri06

“We are at war, it’s the so-called race war, race struggle and class struggle.”

The interviewee was born in West Germany in 1978. He grew up with his parents for the first eleven years of his life. He has three sisters, one older and two younger than him. He is still in contact with his elder sister today; he broke off ties with his younger sisters and his parents.

The relationship with his parents was problematic. According to the interviewee, both the father and the mother consumed a great deal of alcohol. In addition, the boy regularly suffered physical abuse at the hands of his father. The excessive violence started when the child was only six years old. This was one of the main reasons by the interviewee moved in with his grandfather – the only person he really trusted – when he was eleven years old. The grandfather did not criticise his grandson for his right-wing views, except perhaps for his outfit (“bald head”).

The interviewee started attending kindergarten in 1981. His time at kindergarten was more or less normal. Problems only surfaced at primary school, which he attended from 1984 to 1988. When he was only nine years old, the interviewee came into contact with far-right skinheads through his sister. Because he openly acknowledged his views at school, there were frequent (verbal) arguments with teachers and fellow pupils of foreign origin. He had his first physical fight at primary school. He fought with a Turkish boy who had allegedly insulted him.

After primary school, the interviewee attended a secondary general school, which he left after completing the eighth grade without graduating. Due to the fact that he had to repeat two years of secondary general school, he spent a total of ten years at school. He often played truant at school because he already met up with other members of the scene in the mornings. The group perpetrated thefts and burglaries, damaged property and beat up members of ethnic minorities and marginalised social groups, mainly *foreigners, punks, dealers, homosexuals* and *homeless people*. They also attacked asylum seekers’ hostels. The interviewee first came to the attention of the police for a shoplifting offence when he was 14 years old. For this offence he was sentenced to community service. The interviewee received his first custodial sentence in 1997, for assault causing bodily harm (weekend detention). The same year he received a second custodial sentence, also for assault causing bodily harm (youth detention).

After he left school, he earned money by doing casual jobs. For example, he worked on construction sites and did gardening. He did not enter into an apprenticeship during this time. He was not permitted to join the army because he was a member of the NPD.

As mentioned earlier, the interviewee came into contact with the far-right scene quite early in his life. He was fascinated by the *“comradeship, what they did together, I was really impressed by that. And then there was all that story-telling by my granddad, about the Second World War. Somehow all that fit together. Well, let me put it this way: What I didn’t get from my parents, I looked for, and found, with my comrades.”* He was a supporter of the FAP, which was outlawed in 1993, from an early age. In 1996 he joined the JN, and in 1998 the NPD. During the time he belonged to the far-right scene, he participated in demonstrations, attended comradeship evenings and training courses and distributed propaganda materials.

The interviewee started to feel increasingly uneasy as a member of the party because *“more and more people joined who didn’t have a clue, weren’t interested in politics and just wanted to drink alcohol.”* He resigned from the party in the year 2000. In the same year, he was convicted and sentenced to four years in prison for assault causing bodily harm and for menacing behaviour. After a short period of freedom, he was again convicted and sentenced to three years in prison for a violent offence in 2005.

Ri07

“Well, one or two people did get bashed, for instance, when we go to the local park and there are 10-15 baldies with their women and children and everything, so there will be a few arguments...”

The interviewee was born in West Germany in 1964. He was the oldest of six siblings. The father worked in an underground mine, and the mother *“looked after the children”* as a housewife. Both parents are described as apolitical in outlook. There is virtually no contact with the siblings, three girls and two boys, with the exception of the youngest sister and the brother who is one year younger and suffers from cerebral palsy. The interviewee occasionally visits this brother in home where he has been since childhood. The family also includes a half-sister from an earlier relationship of the father; however, he has *“never had contact”* with her.

The first few years in the life of the interviewee were unremarkable. After attending kindergarten, he started school in 1971, when he was six years old. He attended secondary school from 1975. He found the time at secondary school stressful because *“there was far too much to learn”*. An aggravating factor was that he was not a good pupil and had to repeat seventh grade. Apart from that, he was inconspicuous at school, someone who *“kept in the background”*. There were minor fistfights among the pupils, *“but never anything serious”*. Neither was he short of friends. In 1975, at the request of his father, he gained a Certificate of Secondary Education, *“so that one has at least something and have a decent trade.”*

He describes his relationship with his mother, with whom he still maintains regular contact, as very good. *“She is the best, as far as I’m concerned.”* According to the interviewee, the father was a *“rather brutal type”* who always resorted to violence to sort things out. There were *“often beatings if something was not right with the schoolwork”*, not infrequently so severe *“that the body was black and blue”*. Even though he cannot forget this even today, he describes the relationship with his father as good, because *“at some time [the father’s strictness] did pay off”*.

In 1981, the interviewee decides to start an apprenticeship as a mining mechanic, an occupation in which both his father and grandfather worked. The father was a major influence on his coming to this decision. The interviewee agreed not least because he *“earned really good money there”*. Taking up an apprenticeship was the only option he could see to *“leave home at an early stage”* and escape the beatings from his father.

Once he started his apprenticeship, the interviewee’s social relationships diminished. From then on *“[he] had hardly any friends”* because contacts with people he knew from school ceased. He characterises relations with work colleagues during the apprenticeship as casual acquaintances.

After his apprenticeship, he continued to work as a mining mechanic, until he no longer enjoyed the work: *“Working in an underground mine in the long run, that wasn’t really my thing.”* He started to neglect his work and finally lost his job.

The interviewee then decided to join the army as a regular soldier for a period of four years and is stationed with a tank unit where there were *“only cleaning duties”* and he had to spend all day *“sitting around in the barracks”*. This was also the period during which he started to use hard drugs on a regular basis, mainly heroin. He says the drugs created *“an desire for freedom, and then [he] couldn’t stand it there anymore”*. After only 21 months in the army, he deserted in 1986, for which he was later sentenced to two years on probation. At this point the father breaks off contact with the interviewee – *“since then he didn’t want to see me anymore”* – so that from then on, the mother had to meet him in secret, *“so that he [the father; author’s note] wasn’t aware of it”*.

In the years that followed, he tried to stay afloat doing casual jobs. He worked as a roofer and as a scaffolder, amongst other things. He is unemployed repeatedly, and according to him he spends those periods *“just hanging around”*, taking drugs and drinking alcohol. He has been an alcoholic since his time at school, where he already consumed large amounts of alcohol regularly, i.e., on a daily basis. *“I just can’t keep my hands off it.”* While he manages to pull himself together in the first years after his

desertion and accepts minor jobs on the side, in 1989, due to the high level of his drug taking, physical withdrawal symptoms and drug-related criminal offences, he starts *“to steal, to get some dough”*, and is forced to stop working altogether. A period of 10 years follows, during which he *“lives from one day to the next, letting everything slide [and losing] all the money”* he has.

About a year after his first wedding (1989), his son is born. After five years of marriage, which according to the interviewee failed primarily because of drugs, he is divorced in 1994, and afterwards he spends a long period of time living on the streets. After he had *“the first real contact with the far-right scene”* at the age of about 26, as a result of the divorce he now slips *“more towards the right wing”*, where he *“found support and comrades who stick [by him]”*. He has since been integrated into the scene. Within the group, he listens to right-wing music, buys right-wing clothing or plays football. Football for him is liberating, *“a chance to let off steam”*, so that in between he joins a group of hooligans where there are violent altercations before and after the games, which he says he enjoys – *“it was really only the third half that mattered”*. He sees himself as a skinhead with a right-wing attitude. According to the interviewee, he has always tried to not get involved with people who are too extreme, *“because that always ends up in trouble with the police and state security”*. At demonstrations and conferences he participated in, he tends to hold back: *“When there was trouble, I was one of the first people to disappear.”* He never became a member of an extremist right-wing party, partly because he finds that *“a bit too extreme”* and because he would rather not stand out too much. Despite strong xenophobic tendencies, he says he is not an *“ultra racist, I don’t swear at foreigners on the street, I am not one of those who is against everyone”*, and he has contacts with foreign nationals himself. The most important aspect for him is not the politics (*“I want to keep out of politics, because that doesn’t lead anywhere”*), but it is the camaraderie and the drinking sessions that he finds fascinating about the far-right scene.

He marries a second time in 2001, and he himself describes this as a turning point in his life. His second wife, herself a former alcoholic and drug addict, has three stepchildren. She persuaded him to undergo drug therapy. That same year he embarks on the methadone programme, which helps him break his heroin addiction and *“[get] a bit of grip on his life”*.

The interviewee has been in prison since 2004. He was sentenced to 39 months’ jail for a series of thefts and assaults causing bodily harm. It is his first custodial sentence, which *“is not easy [for him]”* because the prison doctor suspended the methadone programme at the start of his prison term, which meant he suffered several physical withdrawal symptoms. Moreover, his wife relapsed during this period and stopped visiting him in prison. Prior to his incarceration, the interviewee had repeatedly had run-ins with the police, but all those sentences were suspended on parole. He was never convicted of a drug-related offence or for *“right-wing stuff”*. A nine-month suspended sentence for assault causing grievous bodily harm in 1983 was his first prior conviction. This was followed by a two-year suspended sentence for desertion in 1986. In subsequent years there were repeated instances of criminal offences involving violence as well as a series of thefts.

The interviewee describes himself as highly prone to violence because *“among the far-right crowd and with plenty of alcohol, the inhibition threshold is fairly low.”* For him violence is the order of the day, especially since he is no longer taking drugs. Aside from the far-right scene, his social relationships are limited to his mother and his children and stepchildren. He still maintains contact with his son, who lives with this first wife, *“even though he doesn’t think”* like him. He also gets along well with the stepchildren, two girls and a boy aged between 13 and 17 years. He is keen to ensure *“that they don’t have too much contact with foreigners, because that isn’t really necessary.”*

Ri08

“For me, it was always about having power, [...] control others, so that they’d say: ‘Bloody hell, that’s quite a guy’, and politics never had a permanent place in my life anyway. It was always about toughness and violence, really.”

The interviewee was born in East Germany in 1983. He has two older sisters. The younger of the two sisters “*ran away*” together with older friends when she was 12 years old, still in the GDR – there is no contact with this sister. The father is a qualified printer, the mother a qualified specialist head nurse. Because the mother had relatives living in West Germany, she was under surveillance from the state security service in the GDR.

Even in early childhood, there was already excessive violence perpetrated by the father: “*got beaten from the day I was born until the second year of my life, when my mother and father got a divorce because my father, he must have been sick somehow, mentally disturbed or something.*” A new life partner of his mother took on the father role, “*because I had known him since I was a baby, and so I called him Dad*”. The interviewee went to a crèche between 1983 and 1987, and to kindergarten from 1987 to 1989. Here the interviewee already has the first violent outbursts.

Until he is six years old, he lives with his mother and her partner in East Germany. When the wall comes down, the mother moves to West Germany and leaves the six-year-old boy in the east with her partner, “*it was wonderful. I did well at school – we knew each other on the block, the kids knew each other. [...] If I had stayed there, with my stepfather, I would not be here today [he means in prison; author’s note]. I am convinced of that.*”

During this period (1989 to 1994) he attended primary school. It was also the period when the interviewee moved from East Germany to West Germany. The interviewee was seven-and-a-half years old at that time, “*[...] the first break with the mother, I would say; first up, I couldn’t comprehend it, where did my mother go? Then she was back and ripped me right out of my own environment, despite the fact that I didn’t want that [...] from one day to the next.*” The “stepfather” remained in the east because the interviewee’s mother had started a new relationship in the west with a man of Lebanese origin. This new relationship does not last long, however. It is during this time that the interviewee takes up smoking. A difficult period ensues in terms of schooling at the new primary school in the west, being relegated from third grade to second grade, the perception “*having arrived as an ‘Ossi’*”. The interviewee frequently ran away from home when he was only eight years old. During this period (around 1991), he joined some older youths who “*hung around*” at the playground, “*not necessarily right-wing youths, they went to secondary school, they lived in other suburbs, [...] I joined them because I thought, hey – then I’ll be somebody, they drank, and I thought that was cool, that I could go stealing for them, because I was still under-age at that time*”. And so it came about that the interviewee suffered his first case of alcohol poisoning when he was only nine years old and committed theft; however, for him “*the first charge still [was] harmless, stealing bicycles*”. He describes the contact with the police at the police station as follows: “*It was interesting, yes. But that it would somehow have deterred me, no way.*”

When he was about ten, the interviewee moves to a home at his own request, also because he had a friend who also lived there. He does this to try to escape the control exerted by the mother; the old structures are maintained, however, because the home is located near his mother’s flat. He describes the situation “*[...] like other children growing up with Grandma because the mother goes out to work, I just happened to be at a home*”; at the same time he continued to experience the physical proximity to the mother as problematic. Out of boredom, and because of the prevailing structures at the home – “*that other people wanted to try and decide what my day should look like*” – he moves back in with his mother. In the meantime, the mother has resumed her relationship with her former partner (the “stepfather” of the interviewee), who then also moves in with her. During the time that follows (from age 11 to age 13), the interviewee repeatedly runs away from home and lives with friends, with comrades, and in between also with his uncle, “*so that I sometimes didn’t come home for two or three weeks at a time*”. This was also the time he joined the skinhead scene, to which he belonged for seven years, until 2001. He was part of the hooligan scene from 1997 to 2002.

From the age of 12, the interviewee worked in various part-time jobs (*“stacking shelves at REWE”, sweeping the warehouse at stainless-steel manufacturer, and helping the janitor at the housing complex*).

He was forced to leave grammar school (1994 to 1995): *“I was a little troublemaker, because, well, I somehow found everything else more interesting, girls, winding up the teachers, etc. I was thrown out of school, and then went to a secondary modern school.”*

“Because she [the mother] thought I was a dimwit”, he was in therapy with a child psychologist, “that was at the time when I [...] from grammar school, that’s when my mother was told that I had problems with nerves or something, so they just sent me there.”

Between the ages of 15 and 16, he again lived in a home, the last half year in an “assisted living” facility, *“that was the worst drug house in the entire city. Nothing but drug addicts, and me in amongst them as a skinhead. I listened to my right-wing ‘Oy’ pop music, and out the front were four asylum seekers’ homes, and me in the midst of punks, skaters and everything else. That was great. That was absolutely great. The asylum seeker’s homes, I regularly tried to set those alight. Because that’s part of it, and I thought that was okay. I also took part in vandalising a Jewish cemetery, knocking over gravestones, all up I caused quite a bit of havoc. Wherever I could, anything that would attract media attention, and all that. And it was great, it came in the newspapers and what not. I collected the newspaper articles.”* Also during this period, he participated in an anti-aggression training course ordered by a judge. *“He [the instructor; author’s note] was an educator, did martial arts. I learnt how to box.”* During the time from 15 to 16, the interviewee drank excessive amounts of alcohol.

At the secondary modern school, *“I thought that because I come from grammar school, I am someone, I am smarter than you lot, and of course I had to repeat sixth grade, because obviously I wasn’t more intelligent than the others”*. He was unable to finish secondary modern school because in 1999, in grade nine and at the age of 16, he had to go to prison for 18 months. He eventually graduated from secondary modern school during his time in prison.

The relationship with his mother is and remains problematic: *“I went in at 16, then she came to visit me, in remand custody, then she looked at me and said, right, I’m moving to Italy, went outside and was gone.”* In response to the question as to whether he never saw her again, he answers: *“Yes, I have seen her, but [...] how can I put that, it’s, whenever she is in Germany and I am unfortunate enough to bump into her, and then it’s more like when I am talking to you, complete strangers”*.

After his term of imprisonment, the interviewee lived with his sister initially, and with his uncle and with the girlfriend *“who tried to make me think I was the father of her child [...] but no way, I don’t think so, it’s not mine”*. During the period from 2001 to 2003, he serves another term of imprisonment. Afterwards the interviewee moves to another city and joins a group of door-to-door salespeople, and becomes team leader. Here he once again encounters clearly defined structures, just like in prison, and he can live out his fantasies of power and perpetrate certain types of violence. *“... we had to do seminar evenings, and at these seminar evenings it was okay to be a bit more forceful, too, real hands-on stuff, not like giving people a black eye or anything, but perhaps like a punch in the stomach, or shake them or yell at them [...] one could get some recognition again.”*

He again commits violent crimes and is sent to prison again for 15 months, from 2004 to 2006.

His criminal record is very long, ranging from disturbing the peace and use of unconstitutional insignia and theft to innumerable violent crimes, *“which I couldn’t list for you because I don’t remember anymore what I’ve been accused of and what I haven’t.”*

At the time the interview took place, the interviewee was again participating in an anti-violence training course: *“I am back at school, that’s how I look at it. But it will be difficult for me. To put it plainly, if I don’t manage to find something that gives me some prospects, where I can say that’s something I would enjoy, get some order back into my life once again, then I’ll be back in here in no time.”*

Ri09

“Yeah, go to concerts, drink a little bit, and a few horny women [...] – Yes, and so I went along with that.”

The interviewee was born in Turkey in 1976. He has never met his father. He spent the first two years of his life with his mother in Turkey, after which time both of them returned to Germany.

Until he was 13 years old, the interviewee was raised in a foster family, *“because my mother didn’t have the time, no idea”*. The kindergarten (1979 to 1982) and primary school years (1982 to 1985) passed without any notable events, yet the interviewee never felt at ease while with this foster family. Having spent several weeks with his mother (1989), an employee of the Youth Welfare Office presented him with the choice of returning to his foster parents or staying with his mother. He decided to continue to living with his mother. For the interviewee, who at that time attended secondary school, the relocation also involved changing schools.

In his new environment, the interviewee initially had virtually no contact with people in his own age group. *“I didn’t know anyone in L., I had only just arrived there.”* At the age of 14 (1990), he came into contact with the far-right scene through a fellow pupil. They went to a concert together. In 1990, he came to the attention of the police for the first time, for displaying the Hitler [Nazi] salute and being involved in a number of brawls, among other things. He had to repeat ninth grade, not least due to his activities in the far-right scene – *“I was already caught up in that, and well, come one, don’t go to school today for a change, go on, go out with the colleagues. Or, you can do it tomorrow, you’ll go to school tomorrow. Didn’t do any homework anymore, and, yes.”* He still completed secondary school successfully.

After he finished school (1992), the interviewee tried to find an apprenticeship as a chef or as an automotive spray painter, but could only find an apprenticeship as a roofer, which he completed in 1995. At 16, he met his first girlfriend, also a roofer, and they moved in together. They stayed together until he was 21 years old. The interviewee is the father of a boy born in 2003. At the time of the interview, he was no longer in a relationship with the boy’s mother.

His *“political activities”* consisted of brawls involving members of the left-wing scene (punks) and foreigners, participating in street demonstrations, and distributing propaganda materials, *“...I am, quite normal, uh..., did my work, and uhm, when I came home I looked after the other things. So, well, let’s say, at home nobody really was aware of that. Yes, and in the evenings, as soon as it got dark, that’s when it really got started.”* Between 1990 and 2000, the interviewee committed countless offences, mainly violent crimes. He reports that during this period, he received a total of 13 juvenile sentences (community service, two weekend detentions, three suspended sentences) for assault causing (grievous) bodily harm, sedition and display of unconstitutional insignia. The interviewee and the other members of the group also displayed enormous potential for violence in their *“campaigns”*, and did not even refrain from using loaded guns.

Despite his affinity with far-right ideology, the interviewee was never a member of a political party. This was not least due to the fact that he was born in Turkey, a fact which he always tried to conceal from others, especially members of the far-right scene. The interviewee feared that official acceptance into a political party would necessarily have brought up the issue of the place of birth as a formality. *“If someone were to realise that, well, I don’t know, there are some who, how can I put it, in the olden days, early on the boys, they were carved from a different wood. And if there’s one of these guys, there, who says what’s this Turk doing here, then things can happen very quickly.”* To this day the interviewee feels that the Turkish origin of his father is a stigma, as a result of which he fears he could be discredited at any time. *“For me this was always the thing, it still is today, for me it is always something that, well, if I could, I would get rid of it.”*

In 1999, the interviewee, like other friends of his, switched from the skinhead scene to the gabber scene, where he came into contact with illegal drugs (amphetamines) for the first time. He quickly became involved in dealing with drugs. Even though the interviewee earned quite substantial sums of money by selling drugs, he continued to work in his regular trade, *“because I also still had to pay court costs, and compensation to the people I had bashed back then, to the health insurance funds, for the teeth and all that, I still had to pay for all that, which I did, on the side.”*

His inclination to resort to violence did not change in his new role as a drug dealer, *“nah, it got worse. Because, let me put it this way, you sell the stuff, you gave the stuff on credit, which means, I give it you to now, and you give me the money tomorrow. Yes, and then the guy didn’t pay the next day, and if you, let’s say, uhm, if I say, listen, tomorrow I’ll get my money, or I tell someone, tomorrow you turn up, you will get your money then, then that is how it is. So, when I hang out in that scene and allow myself to get done over two, three times, then no one will be ever believe me again, and then they will of course try to get the better of you. And so I said, listen, the money will be here tomorrow, and if the money didn’t arrive, there would be some pain right away.”*

In the year 2000, the interviewee was sentenced to three years jail for assault causing bodily harm as well as for robbery and extortion. While still in prison, he once again got involved in dealing drugs. Three days after his release, the interviewee was again involved in a public brawl, and two months later he was arrested again (an accomplice had betrayed him to the police) and sentenced to eight-and-a-half years in prison for dealing in narcotics. He has been imprisoned since 2003.

Ri10

"I would definitely not describe myself as extreme, I mean, I do have a 'nationalist' attitude."

The interviewee was born in West Germany in 1979. He describes himself as a conspicuous and fairly nervous, fidgety child. Until he was aged four, he lived with his biological parents. After his parents separated in 1983, the interviewee stayed with his mother. He does not have any siblings.

After kindergarten, the interviewee went to primary school from 1986 until 1990. His aggressive behaviour and his habit of wagging school already made a negative impression even back then. In 1990, the interviewee started going to secondary school, and the problems at school continued: absences, violent crimes, drug-taking. He had to repeat sixth and seventh grades, and after eighth grade he left school without earning a certificate. The interviewee first came into contact with alcohol at age 11, and contact with illegal drugs first occurred at the age of 12.

After leaving school, the interviewee attended a vocational college, "*What do you mean, attended? I went there once a month, to collect my monthly pass,*" and participated in a vocational training and integration course organised by the employment office, which he did not complete. At the age of 18, he was sentenced to four years in prison for robbery and extortion. A decisive factor for the severity of the sentence may have been his established criminal career, which included, for example, an earlier sentence of six months, suspended on parole for two years, also for robbery and extortion.

After his release in 2002, the interviewee moved in with his girlfriend and worked for six months for temporary labour firms. Even after his term of imprisonment, he again became involved in numerous brawls with punks, *foreigners*, and homosexuals. This resulted in his being remanded in custody for four months. In 2004 he was convicted again and sentenced to three years for assault causing bodily harm.

The interviewee came into contact with the skinhead scene at the age of 16 through other pupils from the same neighbourhood. Today he feels a greater affinity with the gabber scene. When he was only 13 years old, he had his first physical altercation, in the hooligan scene. The interviewee is an NPD sympathiser, but he is not a member of any political party.

Ri11

“Whether they were punks, foreigners, techno freaks, hip-hoppers, it just didn’t matter. Nationality was totally irrelevant. As long as there was trouble.”

The interviewee was born in West Germany in 1982. His mother died when he was two years old. The father looked after the three children from then on. To do so, he gave up his job as a roofer for a number of years. The interviewee has two older brothers, the younger of whom also had contacts within the far-right scene. While the eldest brother leads a normal life and has never come to the attention of the police, the interviewee describes the second eldest brother as a “career criminal”.

The interviewee went to kindergarten from 1985 to 1988. Even then he drew attention to himself through his aggressive behaviour, so that he had to be removed from kindergarten at an earlier age than is the norm. *“Took toys away from other children, if someone took something away from me, I hit them immediately. Well, I don’t remember exactly, I can only tell you what I’ve been told. I don’t have any clear memories anymore today.”* In 1988 he went to primary school, and from there he went on to grammar school in 1992. He only stayed there just under a year, however, because the standards were too high, and he did not get on well with the other pupils. He therefore switched to a secondary modern school in 1993, but again lasted only a year. In 1994 he went to a secondary school, until 1997, when he was put in prison. He was not allowed to complete school because he was under a law enforcement order. He failed to complete an apprenticeship as a painter/varnisher which he began during his second term of imprisonment. The interviewee says that during his periods of freedom, he always worked as a painter/varnisher and on construction sites, among other things.

At the age of eleven (1993), the interviewee first came into contact with the far-right scene (the skinhead movement). *“We kind of, people knew each other. I had always been spending time with older people, met some guy at some point who then also [...] used to hang out with us, he then took me along at some point, and that’s how we got to know each other.”* Later he came into contact with the Viking Youth organisation and with [extremist right-wing organisations] *Wehrsportgruppen* [“Military sports groups”]. The interviewee participated a number of times in exercises run by *Wehrsportgruppen*, including some in neighbouring countries. In addition, the interviewee also had contact with the NPD, but was never a member of the party. *“I went to events, demonstrations, and sometimes they also sponsored concerts. Sometimes people had a birthday, and they also gave some money for that. Then, if we wanted to travel somewhere, they sometimes gave us money. All we had to do then was distribute stickers and flyers. And that was that.”*

Apart from maintaining contacts to the far-right scene, the interviewee was also involved in the techno scene. Here he regularly took drugs such as cannabis, cocaine and amphetamines. His first experiences involving drugs were in prison.

The interviewee was involved in brawls several times. These altercations were primarily with members of other subcultural movements. *“Everything. Whether they were punks, foreigners, techno freaks, hip-hoppers, it didn’t matter. Nationality was totally irrelevant.”* At the age of 14, he was sent to a closed facility for three months. At 15, he was convicted for the first time for a series of assaults causing bodily harm and was given a nine-month prison sentence.

After he had served his time in prison, he was free for two months before he was convicted of assault causing bodily harm and aggravated robbery in 1998 and sentenced to three years and six months in prison. The interviewee also served this term in full. After eight months of freedom, he was again convicted of assault causing grievous bodily harm and sentenced to two years in prison. He served 18 months of this sentence in an “open prison” [a special kind of detention allowing convicts to be temporarily released to work or study – translator’s note]. He was released in 2003, but arrested again two months later and sentenced to three years and six months in prison for robbery. The interviewee is currently serving time for this offence. To date, he has completed several anti-aggression training sessions while serving time in correctional facilities.

Ri12

“They could just as easily have been punks, [...] then I, too, would be a punk today.”

The interviewee was born in West Germany in 1982. This is where he went to kindergarten. At the age of six, he moved to the Ruhr region because his father thought his career prospects would be better there (1988). This was the same year the interviewee started primary school, which he attended until 1992. The first problems at school started at an early stage. After the interviewee had already had to repeat fifth and sixth grade and also failed to pass seventh grade, he changed from the secondary modern school to ordinary secondary school.

When the interviewee was 13 years old (1995), the father left the family. The interviewee remained with the mother. In the same year, he came into contact with the far-right scene through fellow pupils. From this point onward, the interviewee stopped attending school regularly and instead met up in the park with friends, consumed alcohol and provoked fights with *foreigners* and punks.

The parents divorced in 1997. Also in 1997, the interviewee first came to the attention of the police. He was convicted of burglary and sentenced to 50 hours of community service and given an admonition. In 1998, he was convicted again and initially sentenced to 18 months without parole, which was later suspended on parole. 1998 was also the year in which the interviewee was for the first time remanded in custody for two-and-a-half months. At the beginning of 1999, he was sent to a home at the behest of the Youth Welfare Office. He was thrown out of there after four months, and two months later he was arrested again for assault causing grievous bodily harm. For this and other offences, (collective proceedings), he was sentenced to 30 months without parole and was sent to prison until 2001. While in juvenile detention, he completed his Certificate of Secondary Education. He also completed an anti-aggression training course while in custody. After serving his prison term, he enrolled in a social therapy programme but dropped out after only two months. Due to his alcohol problems, he was a member of Alcoholics Anonymous.

After he was released from prison, the interviewee once again lived with his mother. In 2001, he met his girlfriend. Through her brother, he found a job in a demolition firm. He worked there from 2001 until the beginning of 2002, but he ended up in trouble with his superior due to his alcohol consumption; he was initially released from duty and then did not turn up for work anymore. In 2003 the interviewee briefly worked as a temporary replacement in roof tiling. In the same year, he served the remainder of a custodial sentence of 77 days.

Between 2002 and 2004, the interviewee did not have regular employment. He lived on government welfare (unemployment benefits, social security). His mother and friends supported him. He also covered the cost of living by committing small-scale thefts. During this time, the interviewee spend most of his time *“hanging out”* in the park with friends. In the year 2005, he turned himself in as he still had to serve nine months for burglary. His current sentence, which takes into account other offences such as extortion and robbery, aggravated theft and resisting arrest, is three-and-a-half years.

Ri13

“Their demeanour, they are proud, stand up for themselves and don’t take shit from anybody. I found this appealing somehow.”

The interviewee was born in West Germany in 1981. His parents were not married, and the interviewee never met his father. The mother, an alcoholic, had no vocational training qualifications. She occasionally worked as a cleaner; apart from that, she was unemployed and lived on social security or received support from her parents.

Until he was 17 years old, the interviewee lived with his mother in the house of his grandparents. He had an elder stepsister who is now married and has her own business in the catering industry. From 1984 to 1987, the interviewee went to kindergarten, and from 1987 to 1991 he attended primary school. In 1991, he changed to a comprehensive school, which he was forced to leave, however, due to his aggressive behaviour. He was sent to a school for children with learning difficulties for one year, but then returned to his old comprehensive school. In 1996, he finished school in ninth grade without gaining a certificate. After he left school, the interviewee participated in two years of preparatory school, yet he often did not attend lessons. He did not start an apprenticeship after he left school, and instead worked occasionally for a temporary employment firm. Other than that, he received support from his family, or lived on government hand-outs, respectively.

In 1998, he moved in with his ex-girlfriend. The relationship came to an end in the year 2000. With his new girlfriend, with whom he lived from 2001 until 2002, he has a daughter, born in 2002. However, this relationship also ended the year the daughter was born, due to the interviewee’s excessive consumption of alcohol and drugs, among other reasons. He then went back to his mother and grandparents for one year.

The interviewee drew attention to himself from an early age due to his deviant behaviour: wagging school, driving without a licence, driving under the influence of alcohol, drug-taking and repeated involvement in brawls, often with foreign nationals and punks, *“Well, punks actually always were our biggest enemies.”* Under the influence of alcohol, especially, the interviewee tends towards using excessive violence. He was arrested in 2003. He was sentenced to three years and three months in prison for a range of different offences. He is currently doing an apprenticeship as a toolmaker while in prison.

The interviewee came into contact with the skinhead scene through a fellow pupil, who introduced him into the far-right scene. He felt quite comfortable in those circles to begin with. He started to have problems in the far-right scene when he started to use drugs more frequently.

“People in the far-right scene are dead against drugs; I wasn’t really concerned about that, I said I am able to voice my opinions even if I do take drugs. They always say that drugs are something for blacks and the like, stupid. I don’t have anything to do anymore with people from the far right, with real right-wingers; on the contrary, there would probably be trouble between them and me. Because I, I don’t want anything to do with them anymore. With that scene, and then I also started with taking drugs and as I said, they really have a problem with drugs. So I kept away from them, and then they called me, well, a traitor and, yes, you hang out with foreigners and so on.” The differences of opinion about his drug-taking eventually prompt the interviewee to spend more time in the gabber scene.

The interviewee’s political commitment was limited, in spite of his participation in demonstrations organised by far-right groups and his membership in the NPD. The experience of solidarity and the opportunity to act out his lust for power, coupled with a diffuse sense of xenophobia and a propensity for violence, are the likely driving forces behind his drifting into the far-right scene. *“Yes, as I said, at the beginning, I never really liked foreigners. And then, well, I don’t know, they [he means people in the far-right scene; author’s note] have a certain way about them. For a start, they were well presented. The thing about well presented is that many people see it as garbage, but I think it looks good. And then their demeanour; they’re proud, stand up for themselves and don’t take shit from anybody. That appealed to me somehow, and so I went there, just went along with it. One is directly accepted, as long as one isn’t exactly, I don’t know, some idiot who carries on and spouts slogans, as*

long as one behaves in a normal manner, let's say. And somehow, I don't know, this entire presentation, exactly what it is, I don't know how to describe it exactly."

Ri14

„If somebody gets on my nerves a bit too much, then I just clink out, either I withdraw or, at some point, even if he only acts that way, then he just stops moving and that’s when I stop, when I walk away.”

The interviewee was born in West Germany in 1985. The parents, a truck driver and a cleaner, have three children altogether – two sons and a daughter. The interviewee is their second child. The parents are not married. From the time he was born until he was arrested, the interviewee always lived with his parents. The father beat the boy frequently, *“because I never did as I was told, not properly, [...], it was full on, with fists, and kicks.”*

The interviewee went to kindergarten from 1989 to 1991, and he attended primary school from 1991 to 1995. As early as his primary school days, the boy drew attention to himself through his aggressive and antisocial behaviour. His behaviour did not change when he entered secondary school. *“Getting up in the morning, then meeting them [he means his friends from school; author’s note] in the courtyard, then grabbed just anyone, beat them up, went to school, caused a bit of a ruckus, got thrown out of class. Started to drink at age twelve, and then back home to sleep, the same thing, day after day. [In response to the question: Who was beaten up? author’s note] Whoever was seen as inferior.”*

During eighth grade, the problems at school escalated, and the interviewee had to repeat the year. In the end he left school in the year 2000 without a certificate. He gained his certificate at a later stage, while in a correctional facility. After he left school, he made two attempts at learning a trade, but they both failed. He worked as a warehouse assistant for six months, and about eight months as a pizza maker. His service with the armed forces was deferred until 2008.

The interviewee grew up in a family characterised by extreme right-wing views. The younger brother has contact with far-right skinheads, the father is a member of the NPD. The interviewee was introduced into the far-right scene by his younger brother, but did not really *“feel at home”* there. *I couldn’t really identify with them, the clothes, the look, and I don’t know what, about this constant aggression or so, because they certainly don’t want anything to do with drugs. I preferred the company of hip-hoppers or skaters.”* While he often spent time in the more general far-right scene, participated in demonstrations and distributed propaganda materials, for example, his main contacts were in the techno scene. He nevertheless holds extreme right-wing views: *“Well, for example genocide, I didn’t find that all that terrible, I really didn’t.”* The interviewee first came to the attention of the police at the age of 12 in connection with shoplifting, and his first conviction came when he was 14 years old, for assault causing bodily harm (20 hours’ community service). At the age of 12 he also took illegal drugs for the first time.

The interviewee was frequently involved in fights, mainly with members of the punk scene, who taunted him over his far-right family. In the year 2000, the interviewee received his first conviction for assault causing bodily harm and damage to property and was sentenced to four weeks’ juvenile detention. In 2001, he was sentenced to two years and six months, suspended on parole, this time for assault causing grievous bodily harm. In 2003, he was sentenced to 51 months in prison for burglary, theft, assault and attempted manslaughter. Still pending are proceedings involving charges of theft, burglary, motor vehicle theft, offences under the Narcotics Act, fuel fraud and insurance fraud. Including the time spent under arrest, the interviewee has been incarcerated twice to date. The interviewee also came to attention for sedition: *“At some point, drunk, I shouted ‘Sieg Heil’ or something.”*

Ri15

“They said: [...] you are now one of us, we all go together [...], that’s how it started.”

The interviewee was born in West Germany in 1986, the second of five children (three brothers, one sister). His father was a garden and landscape designer and the mother a baker. His brothers are also in jail, the elder one for assault causing bodily harm and drug-related offences, the younger ones for burglary and theft.

As early as kindergarten, the interviewee became violent towards other children and was forced to change to another kindergarten. He also was unable to integrate well at school, so that when he was eight years old he was sent to a closed facility for children with behavioural problems. He stayed here until 1996, then returned to his family. At primary school he had to repeat one year. In 1997, the interviewee went to secondary school; his first criminal offence, a theft, also occurred during this period. Arguments at home and at school continued to escalate, until the family reacted by expelling him – *“...life is just not possible any longer with you.”* He tried to live *“on the streets”* with friends (from school). Daily consumption of alcohol, dealing in drugs and wagging school were part of the everyday routine during this time. However, he continued to try to return to his parents. These attempts failed ultimately because his parents refused to accept his new right-wing friends. Eventually, the interviewee stopped going home and *“drifted”* on the streets. He left secondary school without gaining his certificate.

From the age of 15, he was sent to various homes and youth support facilities, and there was a great deal of *“drifting about”* (vagrancy). Via a project, attempts are made to pull him out of the scene, but the interviewee did not want to cooperate. During this period, he started an apprenticeship as a painter/varnisher. He was forced to break it off in 2003 when he was dismissed. There were also problems at the vocational school because he did not want anything to do with foreign nationals.

The interviewee was first confronted with right-wing ideology through his brother. In a park, he happened to make the acquaintance of a skinhead, eight years older than him; they became friends and he identified with him. *“I was drinking with some mates and this guy arrived with a bald head, and I asked: ‘Why are you bald?’ And he answered: ‘Doesn’t matter, doesn’t matter.’ And I said: ‘That’s OK then.’ Yes, and then I was with him, listening to music, against foreigners, so I started to listen to music too. So I asked him: ‘What kind of people listen to this?’ He said: ‘Nazis. I like to listen to this music too.’ So I started to listen to music myself, and I saw how they looked, the boots and all that, bootlaces, so I did that too, dressed like them. OK, I started with cigarettes, and my friend said: ‘Let’s go to the service station.’ I went to the service station, got to meet these people. From then on I was right in the middle of it.”* New problems surfaced once the interviewee became a member of the scene himself: *“... painting walls, yelling at people and all that, abusing foreigners, [...], started walking around with a knife, started to just beat up on foreigners, abuse them..., graffiti in corridors [...], always running off [into the] city and all that, abusing other people, going along to demos.”* Violence was justified as follows: *“Taking drugs or beating women, that’s an absolute no-no.”* Usually it was the interviewee who did the provoking. As a result, he was reported and came into contact with the police.

The interviewee was convicted of assault causing grievous bodily harm, a hold-up/robbery, burglary and dealing with illegal drugs. In 2004 he was convicted of assault causing grievous bodily harm and robbery and sentenced to three years’ jail, of which he served two years and six months. As parole was revoked in 2006, he was serving the six-month remainder of his sentence during the time of the interview.

Ri16

“I got involved more or less through my brothers.”

The interviewee was born in West Germany in 1980, the third of seven children. His father, who is now unemployed, worked as a miner and his mother was a sales assistant. The parents divorced in the year 2000.

The interviewee went to kindergarten from 1983 to 1986, and attended primary school from 1986 to 1990. Problems in the family and at school surfaced at a very early age. The boy drew attention to himself at primary school due to his unruly behaviour: *“I rebelled against pretty much anything and anyone. I didn’t listen to anyone, and yes, that was that, that’s when the problems really started. I didn’t care about what the teachers had to say. I didn’t care what the other pupils had to say, and yes, if it was necessary, any fights, I was quite happy to get involved back then. Of course I continued in this way until I turned 16, no problem.”*

The father reacted to his son’s behaviour with excessive force. The interviewee suffered severe physical abuse at the hands of the father for years. *“I was burned with a soldering iron, for hours with, for hours, bashed with rubber slippers, regardless of whether fingers were almost broken or not. The physical abuse only came to an end when the interviewee started to fight back, at the age of 13. “Once I hit my father in the head, he realised that he couldn’t do that anymore.”* During the same year, the interviewee was removed from the family by the Youth Welfare Office, and he lived in a home and, later, in a residential group until 1996. He absconded on a regular basis and went to live with *“comrades”*.

This was also the period during which he went from primary school to secondary school, *“[...] the last half of the year [...] I didn’t go to school anymore, and then I changed to secondary school because I chose the easier route, I figured it wouldn’t be so difficult there.”* He was unable to finish secondary school because he was arrested while still at school (1996).

In 1994, the interviewee received his first conviction for theft and was sentenced to weekend detention. There were four more instances of weekend detention in 1995, for aggravated theft and burglary. There was also a six-month suspended sentence for two instances of assault causing bodily harm. Due to his behavioural problems, he was twice treated as an in-patient in a psychiatric institution (1994 and 1995), with little success, according to the interviewee: *“They just threw me out, because they couldn’t see any point in continuing with me.”*

In 1996, the interviewee was sentenced to two-and-a-half years in juvenile detention for multiple instances of aggravated theft, a sentence which he served in full. While in detention, he started an apprenticeship as a bricklayer, which he had to break off in 1998 for health reasons. He also failed to finish a second apprenticeship as a power electronics technician because he was released from detention in 1999. After his release, he lived with his ex-girlfriend, the mother of his only child, until 2002. During this time, he worked as a fitter and, as part of a job-creation scheme, as a high-rise construction specialist. From 2001 until 2002, the interviewee was registered as unemployed. His son was born in 2001 and today lives with the biological mother.

The interviewee drifted into the far-right scene at the age of 12. Contact was first established through his two older brothers, also part of the right-wing spectrum, whom the interviewee refers to as neo-nazis. *“I got involved more or less through my brothers, because my two older brothers, they also belong to the far-right scene, and so one gradually gets to know all the comrades.”* The father also *“had a leftist tendency”*, whereas the mother was apolitical. The interviewee sees himself as part of the *“White Power scene”*, with which he still has an affinity today. He was never a member of a political party or belonged to any form of comradeship. His *“political commitment”* stretched as far as distributing flyers and attending events and concerts. He did not participate in political demonstrations. The interviewee describes himself as *“simply nationalistic”*.

In 2002, the interviewee was convicted of arson and sentenced to four years’ imprisonment. He refused to give details during the interview but insisted that the offence had not been politically motivated.

Ri17

“So that I wouldn’t be excluded, I naturally just went along with everything.”

The interviewee was born in West Germany in 1978. Problems started as soon as he was born: because he was a premature baby, he had to be resuscitated three times. His childhood, on the other hand, *“had been quite normal, I can’t remember any bad things.”* He went to kindergarten from 1981 to 1984, and to primary school from 1984 to 1988. In 1988, the interviewee switched to secondary school, even though according to him, based on the level of his performance he would have been able to go to grammar school. He opted for secondary school because *“it was close to where we lived and, yes, because of my friends I wanted to go to secondary school, of course.”*

The interviewee was conspicuous for his aggressive behaviour as early as fifth and sixth grade. *“I was actually quite a good pupil, really [...] that started around fifth and sixth grade, that’s when it already started. First my mother was always summoned to the school because I didn’t distinguish between boys and girls, I really didn’t care, no idea why that was so. I did stop doing that at some point. Afterwards I never got into fights again.”* Having been the perpetrator before, the interviewee found himself in the role of victim not long after. For almost three years, he was bullied by a foreign youth almost on daily basis. *“Well, that guy usually hung around somewhere, that is, waiting for me, and usually not alone, but with several others also standing around. Yes, [...] yes, there was abuse, punches were thrown, pushing, kicking, really all kinds of things. At some point he would let go of me and I would go home, thinking, well, that was that, and then I took out my frustration on my parents, and because of that it started at home as well, and it kept getting worse.”* Only when the interviewee started to fight back against his attackers did the bullying stop.

The interviewee finished secondary school at the age of 16 and then went to a commercial college. He only stayed there for one year, however, because he was unable to meet the requirements due to a lack of motivation. He then commenced an apprenticeship as an industrial mechanic in the mining sector. He did not complete this apprenticeship either because he was dismissed prematurely due to his frequent absences. He then worked occasionally as a painter/varnisher, sometimes under a job-creation scheme. The interviewee became unemployed in 2001.

There were frequent, and sometimes violent, altercations between the interviewee and his parents, a technical employee and a retail saleswoman. *“At some point my mother hit me over the head with a bottle of water, and I left with my head bleeding, and then I, afterwards I yelled into the house: ‘Well, if I bleed to death, then you’ll know what you did.’ And I went outside, with my head bleeding, [...] a friend then took me to the hospital. At some point she also made a kind of comment, like: ‘I wish you’d died when you were born!’, that’s she thrown in my face [...] and that hurt quite a lot, obviously, and from then on I just did not want anything more to do with my family.”*

At age 17, the interviewee was *“thrown out”* of the parental home. A kind of vagabond life style ensued. Between the years of 1995 and 1998, he lived alternately with his grandmother, his godmother, with neighbours and friends, then by himself or with his girlfriend. Through the latter, he came into intense contact with the far-right scene. Prior to that, the interviewee had virtually no links to the far-right scene; he felt more drawn to the techno crowd. But *“when I met the girlfriend here in X. and more to B., and she knew some people from the NPD, and through that, it started with me as well.”*

The interviewee increasingly identified with the skinhead scene. *“It was a matter of keeping up with the others, you didn’t want to be seen as an ‘also-ran’.”* Criminal offences ensue almost as a matter of course: assault causing grievous bodily harm, damage to property and incitement. The victims were usually citizens of foreign origin. For the interviewee, the far-right scene acted as a kind of *“substitute family”*: *“I felt bad, abandoned, that’s why, so I assume, the techno scene and then the skinhead scene became a substitute for family, that’s how I see it today. And to make sure I would not be excluded here as well, I naturally went along with everything. When they said, let’s go out, into the city, then I went along with them. And if there was a fight of some kind, I was into it straightaway, to help these people.”*

In the 2002, the interviewee became a member of the NPD for short time. His attitude and behaviour were considered too radical even by party leadership. *“I was supposed to persuade people to join the party, not scare or deter them.”* The same year, the interviewee was arrested and convicted of multiple charges of assault causing bodily harm, damage to property, sedition. His parole was revoked, and he was sentenced to seven years’ jail.

Ri18

“I wasn’t going to be oppressed by anyone, and I have been sticking to that all my life, and I will continue to do so.”

The interviewee was born in West Germany in 1983 and is a German citizen. Apart from a six-month internship in Scandinavia, which was initiated by his sports club, he has lived in Germany for his entire life. For the first 18 years of his life (1983 to 2001), the interviewee lived with his parents. Because of family disputes, he moved out for three years. For two of those years (2001 to 2003) he lived with his ex-fiancée, and one year he lived by himself. In 2004 he returned to his family and has been living with them ever since.

The parents divorced when the interviewee was one year old, but they re-united after four years’ separation. For the interviewee, the return of the father was a very significant and positive event. A self-employed floor layer, the father ran his own business, and the mother, a qualified seamstress, worked as a communications electronics technician for a mobile communications manufacturer. Both finished school with a university entrance qualification. The interviewee’s older brother (born in 1976) is a dental technician, and the two younger brothers (born in 1990 and 1993, respectively) still go to school. There is no contact with the 16-year-old half-sister from an earlier relationship the father had with another woman during the time his parents were separated. Despite the temporary separation of his parents, during which the father had moved out, the interviewee describes his family life as intact, with family members maintaining close relationships with each other. This also applies to the relationship between the brothers, with the interviewee showing greater concern for his younger brothers than the older brother does for him.

Due to the fact that his parents were separated and his mother went out to work, the interviewee was mostly looked after by the grandparents during his childhood. He went to kindergarten from 1986 until 1989, and in 1989 the interviewee was enrolled at school but had to repeat second grade. Five years later (1994) he went to comprehensive school, which he left in 2000 with a qualified secondary school certificate. After he left school, the interviewee worked a number of different part-time jobs. For example, he had temporary work as a carpenter and roofer from 2000 to 2001, was a programmer from 2001 until 2002, and between 2002 and 2004 he worked as a floor layer in his father’s business. Since 2004, he has been apprenticed to become a parquet layer.

Until he was 14, there were no major problems in the interviewee’s life (*“I had a very beautiful childhood”*). Outside school, he was enthusiastic about sports, which he pursued intensively from the time he was five and until he was 18. His father encouraged and supported him in this, so that sport became the most important aspect of his youth. At the age of 14, the interviewee started to take an interest in the far-right skinhead scene. One of the reasons for this was that his elder brother was no longer willing to look after him. The interviewee and his clique became members of the JN; the membership fees were paid by the father. This new circle of friends appeared in the kind of outfit characteristic of that scene (bomber jacket, boots, bald heads). In this environment, he also met his ex-fiancée. She was also a member of the far-right scene. With this relationship, problems started to emerge: due to the fact that the parents were highly achievement-oriented and strict, and furthermore, because they did not accept their son’s new girlfriend due to her *“low social status”*, there was an increasing number of disputes, and ultimately a falling-out. The interviewee no longer pursued sports and moved away from home in order to live with his fiancée. Despite having moved out, however, the interviewee still received support from the family.

The shared apartment became the scene for excessive partying, including extreme right-wing music, anti-constitutional symbols and conversations about extreme right-wing ideology. At the age of 18, the interviewee joined the NPD, where he climbed the ladder to become committee chairman. He was a member of the NPD for four years, a period spent without undergoing any training or being in regular employment. Despite his right-wing ideology and his political commitment, the interviewee claims never to have participated in violent attacks on citizens of foreign origin. However, he was convicted on the charge of sedition and displaying anti-constitutional symbols and insignia and sentenced to two weeks’ detention.

Following the separation from his fiancée, contact with his family intensified once more. During this time, he also came into contact with two neighbours with a criminal history who were not part of the far-right scene, and he began to consume excessive amounts of alcohol and drugs. At the age of 20, he committed further offences (assault causing bodily harm, theft and sedition), for which he was indicted. The interviewee was subsequently sentenced to two-and-a-half years, to be served in an open prison. He describes this period as the high point of his problematic youth, a time during which his parents, his friends in the far-right scene and his new girlfriend, also of the far-right persuasion, all supported him. On his own initiative, he attended Alcoholics Anonymous sessions, moved back to his parents with his new partner and her child, and severed links with his non-politically motivated accomplices. He started an apprenticeship as a parquet layer and eventually began to serve his prison sentence, which will end in 2007. He continues to maintain contact to his friends in the radical right-wing scene because he considers them to be real friends whose ideological stance he shares. The interviewee continues to live according to his convictions, yet he is critical of the dissemination of extreme right-wing ideology and considers his membership in the NPD to be a mistake. With the support of his parents, who share their son's [political] convictions to some extent, and that of his girlfriend and of his friends, the interviewee wants to live a life free of crime, yet without distancing himself from his right-wing ideology.

Ri19***“I went fighting like other people go fishing.”***

The interviewee was born in 1983 in East Germany, where he lived until 2003. His father, meanwhile divorced from the mother, worked as a painter, and his mother was a sales assistant in an ice-cream parlour. The interviewee has five half-brothers from his father's first marriage, and one biological sister.

From 1986 to 1990, the interviewee went to kindergarten, and from 1990 to 1996 he attended primary school. After primary school, he attended a secondary general school, which he left in seventh grade without graduating. He was 14 years old at the time. After leaving school, the interviewee did not start an apprenticeship but engaged in moonlighting jobs instead. He worked for a demolition company and at an ice-cream parlour, as a kind of janitor. He was forced to give up an apprenticeship as a bricklayer, which he had commenced in 2000 during a period of detention, because he was involved in a fight.

At the age of 14, the interviewee came into contact with the far-right scene. In a public square where he often went skateboarding, he was approached by a member of a far-right organisation. The contact intensified over time, and the interviewee spent increasing amounts of time with the group. After while, he was asked whether he was interesting in attending a gathering of comrades. *“I went along to that and listened. For weeks, I really only listened, I didn't contribute anything, I just found it great and all that.”* From then on, the interviewee regularly attended at these gatherings of comrades. He was subsequently asked whether he wanted to join an *“illegal party”*. The interviewee once again agreed, and from this point on, he took part in the organised violent actions of this *“illegal party”*. *“They phoned me on a regular basis and asked whether I would come to one place or another, and well, sometimes I had no idea what it was all about. Some people, we just had to fight with them, just that, usually they were just some kebab shops. We went, we went in there and took the place apart. Trashed everything.”* As he was regularly involved in fights that were not connected to these planned actions, the interviewee was excluded from the party. *“We were told that under no circumstances should we take part in any pointless individual actions, like, just beating up people or something. And I didn't stick to that, I beat up people anytime I felt like it because it became fun sometime. I continued to get into fights, and then, at some point I was excluded.”*

The interviewee remained close to the skinhead scene even after his involuntary expulsion. His violent behaviour continued to escalate, to the point where he was involved in fights almost on a daily basis, usually fighting foreign nationals and members of the leftist scene. *“Really, at least five or six times a day I was involved in a fight. Sometimes it was only three times.”* Usually he was heavily intoxicated on these occasions after drinking alcohol. In 1999, with 13 charges of assault causing grievous bodily harm against him, the interviewee was detained and placed in remand. However, he was released from detention by the judge on condition that he would go into care (*“supervised housing”*) and not drink any alcohol. The interviewee breached these conditions, which ultimately led to his incarceration. The interviewee was subsequently convicted of assault causing grievous bodily harm and driving without a licence and sentenced to two-and-a-half years in prison. The interviewee was 16 years old at the time.

After serving his time, the interviewee, now aged 18, moved to E. to join his girlfriend, who had moved to West Germany for work reasons in the meantime. The interviewee was exempt from military service due to his criminal record. In E. he quickly came into contact with the far-right scene. In 2002, he set out one evening in the company of two acquaintances to organise some alcohol. Initially there was a verbal altercation with some citizens of Turkish origin who had provoked the interviewee. As the interviewee was restrained by his acquaintances, the argument did not escalate. After the three had moved on and bought alcohol from a vending stall, a dispute erupted between the interviewee and a citizen of Indian origin, and this escalated into brawl. During the fight, the interviewee injured his opponent as a result of using a knife, among other things. For this offence, he was convicted and sentenced to four years in juvenile detention, which he is currently serving. During his detention, he completed a course of social therapy and a course of anti-violence training. He has resolved to control his aggression in future because he is under threat of preventive detention in the event of a relapse.

Ri20

“I met a guy with the Hammer Skins [...], whether I was interested to join this organisation, because they also needed people [...] who can move around in the world without trashing everything.”

The interviewee was born in West Germany in 1973 as the eldest of four children of a miner and a housewife. He went to kindergarten from 1976 to 1979, and to primary school from 1979 to 1983. After primary school, he went to secondary modern school and completed it in 1989 with the Secondary School Certificate.

In 1989, the interviewee commenced an apprenticeship as a painter/varnisher, which he also completed successfully in 1992. During his military service (1992 to 1993) and while working in his trade, he completed an evening course gaining him a qualification as a technical draftsman. Until the time of his arrest, the interviewee worked continuously in his trade as a painter/varnisher. Since he turned 17, he has been living with his partner, whom he met when he was eleven years old. They have a 14-year-old daughter. Until he turned 17, he lived with his parents.

When he was 14 years old (1987), the interviewee came into contact with the skinhead scene, through his cousin, among others. About 13 years later, he joined the *Hammerskins*. This contact was established through an acquaintance in the skinhead scene. In the early 1990s, the interviewee was a member of the FAP, but he resigned after one year, due to differences: *“I realised then that this was a crooked organisation, in a manner of speaking, because I argued about ideological matters with some of them, read once again, with SS Siggie, etc.”* The interviewee is currently a member of the NSDAP-AO.

According to the interviewee, his father, meanwhile deceased, was also of a right-wing persuasion. *“He had a nationalistic outlook, in a minor way, but these extreme views that I’ve got, I didn’t get those from my father. They are, as I said, something I acquired myself, because I was very interested in this scene.”* His sisters and his mother were “apolitical”, according to the interviewee. The interviewee sees the Hammerskins as an elite group within the skinhead scene (*“not just anybody can get in with them, in the scene”*), a group which more or less rejects uncontrolled violence – *“there these things are done objectively and with style, let me put it this way, no, because, one needs to bear in mind that if, when I see so many, and you can see that, for example, they show some brain-dead skin, beer bottle in hand and yelling and ‘Sieg Heil’ and all that, and two floors up sits some old woman who might have gone through all that during the war, and she thinks to herself, why should I vote for such idiots, because, one needs to think of that, and I’d say the NPD has also learnt something in this respect. They used to, in the past, I don’t know, for decades and, I don’t know, promoted violence, I don’t know, sent a few idiots, go make some..., I mean, in this regard they did learn something in, let’s say, let’s say the last fifteen years, they did learn something in that regard.”*

The interviewee is in prison for the first time. He was convicted of fraud in 2005 and sentenced to 14 months imprisonment. He is serving his sentence because parole was revoked. He had been given six months on probation on two previous occasions. To date the interviewee has never come to the attention of the police for violent crimes.

Ri21

“That’s when it started with the extreme right-wing ideology [...], because I grew up in a housing complex where foreigners were foreigners, and Germans were Germans.”

The interviewee was born in West Germany in 1975. At the age of two, he and his two brothers (the elder brother was born in 1970, the younger one in 1976) were removed from the parents. At that time the biological father served time in prison, and the mother was unable to cope with rearing the children. The three then spent a year and a half in a children’s village, and in 1978 the interviewee and the younger brother were adopted by a married couple.

The adoptive father was a teacher at a vocational school, the mother worked as a social pedagogue until the time of the adoption. While the father is described as rather apolitical, the interviewee rates the mother as being on the “*extreme left*”. The relationship between the interviewee and his adoptive parents remained distant, right until he grew to adulthood.

After kindergarten, the interviewee attended primary school. He started smoking, drinking alcohol and taking illegal drugs (cannabis) as early as his primary school years. As a result of having problems at school, the interviewee had to repeat fourth grade. After primary school, the interviewee went to a comprehensive school. Problems at school became more frequent, and in 1988 he was expelled from school. He then went to a secondary school for one more year, but he was expelled from there as well. He ended his school career in 1989 without qualifying.

After leaving school, he first started an apprenticeship as a bricklayer, and then switched to an apprenticeship as a painter/varnisher. The interviewee gave up both of these apprenticeships. He subsequently, from 1992 to 1995, took part in various reintegration measures, such as a job creation scheme measures and a vocational preparation programme for youths. In the latter programme, he was supposed to once again be trained as a painter/varnisher. This attempt at learning a trade also failed because the interviewee was dismissed on the grounds of this extreme right-wing ideology. During the years that followed, the interviewee live on government support, primarily on social security. Whenever he did any work, it was of the “*moonlighting*” kind.

At the age of 13, the interviewee came into contact with the far-right scene. It was at that time when he was already involved in the riots at Hoyerswerda, but he did not come to the attention of the police then. He started to adapt his appearance gradually to fit in with the [far-right] scene. He remained loyal to the far-right end of the spectrum until he was arrested in 2003. While he briefly came into contact with other subcultural movements (the punk, psycho, gothic and Satanist scenes), he never distanced himself from the far-right crowd.

It can safely be assumed that the interviewee became addicted to alcohol and drugs at a very early age. Aside from cannabis, he also regularly took amphetamines, LSD and biogenic drugs. He drank alcohol on a daily basis. In spite of his excessive consumption of illegal drugs, he did not encounter problems within the far-right scene. He reports that he felt welcome and accepted there.

The interviewee became a father for the first time at the age of 20 (1995). Four more children followed in quick succession. In 1996, he established a shared household together with the mother of the children. However, having a family did not affect his activities within the far-right skinhead movement. His partner left him in 2002.

During the time he was part of the far-right scene, there were repeated altercations with other groups in society, primarily with foreign nationals. In addition, the interviewee took part in demonstrations and participated in *Wehrsport* [paramilitary] exercises. He was never a member of a political party, however.

The interviewee came to the attention of the police at a rather early age as a result of offences involving theft. After two convictions for stealing from motor vehicles in the year 1988, he was convicted for sedition in the year 2000, and for assault causing grievous bodily harm in 2001. Both sentences were suspended on parole. In 2003, the interviewee was convicted for robbing a service station (extortion in combination with robbery) and sentenced to five-and-a-half years’ imprisonment. Including the earlier suspended sentences, he is now serving a prison sentence of nine-and-a-half years. He has since distanced himself from the far-right scene, and he also changed his attitude towards foreign nationals while in prison (“*this is where I learned about the world for the first time;*

on the outside, I hated them all, and in here I have began to love them”); yet he still remains of the right-wing persuasion.

Ri22

“These were actions [attack on an asylum seeker’s hostel using Molotov cocktails and steel ball bearings; author’s note], we didn’t talk about it, we did that, I said, OK, I’ll handle the entire organisation, and I did that, and we went through with it.”

The interviewee was born in West Germany in 1975, the youngest child of a working-class family of seven. The father was a miner, the mother a housewife. The father had a propensity towards violence, which may be the reason why the parents were divorced. The interviewee himself is single but has two extramarital children. The son, born in 1994, lives with the biological mother, the daughter, who was born in 1999, lives with the mother’s parents. The interviewee has been suffering from cancer since 1999.

During his childhood, the interviewee was taken care of mainly by the mother and the grandfather. He says he *“was raised in a rather German fashion, that tradition and culture were valued highly in his family”*. The father was a *“proud former member of the HJ”* [Hitler Youth, translator’s note], the grandfather a war veteran. Prejudices against minorities were conveyed to the interviewee at a very early age: *“I can remember one instance, because it’s been in my head for rather a long time. Our neighbours’ boy, he was slightly, slightly mentally handicapped, and in the yard, he played with cars, plastic soldiers, and my father came home from work and he saw me sitting in the yard with the handicapped boy. I got such a beating afterwards that I really had to spend three weeks in hospital. My father was a strong supporter of euthanasia, of taking away handicapped people’s right to live, the same as with homosexuals, and I adopted his opinion.”*

The interviewee’s intolerant attitude towards other groups in society was also fostered by the grandfather. There was quite an incident during his kindergarten years (1978 to 1981), for example, when granddad gave him the book *“The little Jew”* to take to school. When the kindergarten teacher wanted to take the book away from him, the interviewee hit her. *“My mother was aghast, of course, but my father, who was normally very strict, even praised me for doing that.”*

The interviewee also drew attention to himself at primary school (1981 to 1985) as a result of his aggressive behaviour towards teachers and fellow pupils, *“because I spat at Turks, ‘you stink’, I did stand out from the crowd”*. He was forced to change primary schools several times. The interviewee only became calmer when the family moved from R. to B. What is unusual is that, despite his antisocial behaviour manifesting at a very early stage, the interviewee managed to complete his schooling and vocational training in a relatively straightforward manner. From 1985 to 1991, he attended secondary school: a secondary general school until eighth grade, then a secondary modern school, which he completed with a secondary school leaving certificate. He then successfully completed an apprenticeship as a welder in the field of pipeline and structural engineering (1991 to 1993). After his apprenticeship, he did 14 months’ military service. He was forced to leave the army early, however, when he was indicted on an attempted murder charge, *“was then put on sick leave until the end of his period of military service to avoid him being given a dishonourable discharge”*. The interviewee has never been in a normal employment relationship; he has only ever worked as part of job creation schemes.

As a result of his primary socialisation, the interviewee established himself within the far-right scene. Presumably the move to B., where his contacts with the far-right scene became more intense, was a further step along this path. *“The boys from the east, they really were extremely into it.”* In addition to his contacts with the skinhead scene, he joined the NF in 1992, and the NPD in 1994. He was also a supporter of *Standarte Sächsische Schweiz* (SSS) [an extreme right-wing organisation in Germany, translator’s note]. The interviewee dissociates himself from skinheads; he describes himself as a *“nationalistic proud nationalist. And a national socialist.”*

The first criminal offence was assault causing bodily harm, which he committed at the age of 13 to 14 years, against a police officer. Innumerable other offences followed: assault causing bodily harm, assault causing grievous bodily harm, assault causing grievous bodily harm acting in concert with others, attempted manslaughter, theft, robbery and extortion, human trafficking and living off prostitution. The interviewee has been imprisoned several times already; by now time he spent in prison is almost ten years.

Beyond this, the interviewee seems to have a certain affinity with Islam: *“For me personally, Islam is the religion of the future that is yet to happen.”* In response to the question as to whether he could imagine himself converting, the interviewee said: *“Yes I could, but I won’t, [...] I don’t want to fraternise with these guys, [...] my skin’s white, not brown.”*

It is worth mentioning that he is the only one out of the five children who slipped into the far-right scene. The siblings had no affinity with the right-wing scene. On the other hand, two of his brothers also appear to have had a serious involvement in criminal activities. Not only did both of them serve time in jail; they also died a violent death: the eldest in 2001, the second eldest in 1996.

Ri23

“The comradeship, the foundation [...], we were more than comrades [...], we were [...] brothers and sisters [...], that was more like a family.”

The interviewee was born in East Germany in 1976. His father was a heating engineer, his mother a school secretary. He reports that there were no problems in his childhood. He went to a crèche and a kindergarten, and entered lower primary school when he was aged seven. After completing the lower grades, he went to a polytechnic secondary school. Like most children his age, he was a member of the *Jungpioniere* [Young Pioneers] at that time.

After Germany's reunification, the parents moved to west, to southern Germany. The interviewee initially found it difficult to adapt to the new environment. Among other things, these difficulties resulted in his having to repeat eighth grade (he was now at a secondary general school).

While he was still in the GDR, the interviewee came into contact with the far-right scene through friends at school, but were rather superficial. Once he moved to West Germany, his interest in the scene declined rapidly. The interviewee did not come to notice during his youth as a result of political activities or politically motivated crimes. His first offence was theft, which he committed at the age of 13. He was not reported to the police for this offence, however. Still at the age of 13, he came to the attention of the police because he was driving without a licence. When he was 16, he was involved in a brawl, but there was no political element involved. Overall, these were the kind of episodic offences typical of youths. At age 15, he had some experiences with illegal drugs (cannabis), but he soon stopped using them.

In 1992, the interviewee finished secondary general school and then completed a one-year course at a vocational college. It was during this time that he met his future wife at a discotheque. After the vocational college, he began an apprenticeship as a carpenter in 1993, which he successfully completed in 1995. When his wish to marry his then-girlfriend met with rejection from his parents, he moved out of the parental home at the age of 17 and got married shortly after, when he was 18 years old. His first son was born in 1995, and the second son in 1996. In the year 2000, he separated from his wife, and they were divorced in 2003. One likely reason for the separation were the interviewee's frequent work-related absences, as well as the infidelity of his partner.

After the separation from his wife, the interviewee continued to live in the same village. The contact with his children decreased over time, however. The interviewee spent more and more of his weekends in a big city in southern Germany. Here he came into contact with the skinhead scene, and the “Oy movement”. He also met his new girlfriend in this city. In 2002, the interviewee moved there and from then on lived with his new partner in a shared household.

During that time, contact with his family was rather sporadic. The interviewee last saw his children in the year 2002, and the relationship with his parents remained fraught with difficulties. The interviewee last saw his parents after he had already moved to southern Germany. This “attempted reconciliation” failed, however, mainly because of the difficult relationship the interviewee has with his father. The interviewee hinted at events that occurred within the family, which are likely to concern sexual abuse involving his half-sister. He has not seen his half-sister since re-unification. There is no contact with his half-brother, either.

In southern Germany, the interviewee came into contact with a comradeship. He quickly rose through the ranks of this organisation and became a deputy. The interviewee became deeply involved in this political work (lectures, etc.) and always tried to meet the expectations placed in him. During this period, members of the comradeship happened to find the tip of a bazooka, from which they removed 1.5 kg of explosives. The interviewee hid these explosives at his workplace. According to the interviewee, no concrete plans for an attack were ever made until the time of his arrest in the year 2003. At his trial, he was convicted of the offence of forming a terrorist organisation and for violating the Arms Act and sentenced to five years and nine months' detention.

Ri24

“That just happens. Because, if that is how you are [...], then you automatically come into contact with such people.”

The interviewee was born in West Germany in 1984. The father was an architect, the mother a self-employed hairdresser. The interviewee has two sisters. The eldest, born in 1976, is married, with one child. The younger sister, born in 1982, is single and still undergoing vocational training. Due to the parents' work commitments, the interviewee was mainly looked after by the housekeeper.

From 1987 to 1990, the interviewee went to kindergarten, before going to primary school. After completing primary school, the interviewee attended a comprehensive school from 1994 to 1998. He had to leave this school because of his aggressive behaviour. *“I was there for about three years, and then, because of a few incidents, I was given class conferences, school conferences, because of altercations with fellow pupils. My parents then took me out of school.”* The interviewee then attended a secondary general school.

In 1998, at the age of 14, he came into contact with the far-right scene. *“I knew a guy at school, actually I knew him from before, and he more or less had his opinions, same as me, even back then. And apart from that, well, in the village where I lived there was a pub, it was virtually a rocker pub, there were, there were right-wing people there, rockers. I often went there on weekends, and so I also met people there. And from then on it continued, you got to know these people, and it just continued, on and on.”* The parents were unable to cope with this situation and contacted the Youth Welfare Office for assistance. This did not result in any consequences for the interviewee, however.

The interviewee did not fit in at the secondary general school either, and he left school in the year 2000 without gaining his school leaving certificate. *“Because, I had, that was the time when I had lost interest in school.”* Shortly after, he started an apprenticeship as a roofer, which he was unable to complete, however, because he was dismissed without cause after three months, for reasons he could not understand.

Following the termination of the apprenticeship, the interviewee did not seek regular employment but instead spent his time mainly in the company of friends from the far-right scene. He increasingly became involved in physical confrontations, all of them involving offences the interviewee committed alone. *“It was a regular thing at that time, around 14, 15, 16, at that age. That's when most of the brawls and fights happened.”* At age 16 he was convicted for assault causing grievous bodily harm for the first time, but the sentence was suspended on parole.

More fights followed. *“Then I was reported several times, one after the other, and at some point they said at the police that if I was brought in one more time, if I was reported one more time, I would go inside. One week later, that's what happened. Assault causing bodily harm, before the magistrate, off to X. I had just turned 17.”* The interviewee was remanded for four months, but was released again on condition that he would go and live in a supervised facility and stop drinking alcohol. He did not observe these rules, however, and was placed back in remand. He was convicted on a charge of assault causing bodily harm and was sentenced to two years and three months' imprisonment.

After he had served his time and was released, he was only out for eleven months before he was arrested again and charged with attempted murder. He was involved in an altercation with a Polish fellow citizen, during which he stabbed his opponent three times. The interviewee was heavily intoxicated by alcohol when the altercation took place. For this offence, he was sentenced to five years' prison for assault causing grievous bodily harm. He is currently serving this sentence.

In 2004, while in the correctional facility, he started an apprenticeship as a baker, but he had to break it off after becoming involved in a brawl. *“That's when I said, what's with this nonsense, now, in May, I would have had my journeyman's examination, I'd be finished. To which they said, it's because of the imminent risk involved. You three are not allowed to work together in the bakery, something could happen. Well, bad luck, that was two-and-a-half years that I worked there, for nothing.”*

Lu01

“I was, to put it somewhat provocatively, never simply a communist who is still a bit of a socialist in his own head; no, I am also a kind of nationalist, but not of the radical rightist persuasion, I am not a radical rightist at all, quite the contrary.”

The interviewee was born in West Germany in 1957, the youngest of four children. The parents divorced during the first year of his life, and the interviewee was raised by his mother who worked as paediatric nurse, and who is now deceased. The interviewee only met his father when he was 49 years old; the contact remained superficial, however. According to the interviewee, the parents were apolitical. What is notable is that all four children are also divorced.

From 1960 to 1963, the interviewee went to kindergarten, before going to elementary school, which he completed in 1971. He attended business school from 1971 to 1973 and gained his leaving certificate, and then went to commercial college from 1973 to 1975, where he gained his university entrance qualification.

In 1975, the interviewee started a traineeship with Deutsche Bank, which he completed successfully in 1977. From 1977 to 1978, he served with the armed forces. After his military service, he returned to work at the bank. He commenced a course of social sciences study in the winter semester 1979/80, which he completed in 1985. From 1985 until 1987, he was a homemaker and worked as a lecturer. In 1987, he started work for a management consultancy firm, where he stayed for two years. Since 1989, the interviewee has been self-employed, working as a management consultant and executive coach. He is in his second marriage and has two sons aged 22 and 18 from his first marriage.

The interviewee's political commitment goes back to his school days, where he served on the school council, among other things. At that time, he was close to the SPD, and he was a member of the party from 1975 to 1977. In 1979, the interviewee joined the Marxist *Spartakusbund* [Spartacus League], and in 1980 he joined the DKP, the German Communist Party. He embarked on a career in politics and rose to the rank of group leader and became a member of the national board of the *Spartakusbund*. In the early 1980s, he took part in an ideological training course run by the SED in East Germany. The State Security Service rated him as an attentive and interested but also “critical” comrade. In 1985 he resigned from both the DKP and the *Spartakusbund* because of ideological differences. In 1990 he joined the FDP, and he remained a member until 1999.

To date, the interviewee has never come to the attention of the police, with the exception of an incident during his school years when he, along with some fellow pupils, barricaded his school as part of a protest. He had to answer to the administration of schools for this action.

Lu02

“We threw rocks or batteries and things like that, hopefully didn’t hit anyone who was part of the demo, definitely not the Nazis either, [...] I don’t know either, it’s somehow like an adventure playground.”

The interviewee was born in a city in the Ruhr region in the early 1980s. The parents, who separated very soon after the birth of their son, were both academics. The father was Head of Department at an adult education centre, and the mother a teacher. Prior to that, she worked in adult education. A younger, paternal stepbrother is also part of the family. The mother re-married, the father is divorced for the second time.

The interviewee does not belong to a religious community and is an agnostic. He is single and does not have any children of his own. His parents have a strong political commitment. The mother was a member of the Greens and the ÖTV [workers’ union] for a time, and the father, while not a member of a party, participates in political events and in working groups. In addition, the mother had in the past endorsed the position of communist parties. According to the interviewee, the parental home was of the *“left-German” persuasion*.

The interviewee lived with his parents until he was 18 years old and was raised primarily by his mother. Following the early separation of his parents, he spent four days a week with the mother, and three days with his father. From age three until he was six years old, he went to a child day-care centre, and from 1992 on he attended primary school. He then went to secondary school, which he completed in 2001, earning a higher education entrance certificate. The interviewee did not undergo any vocational training; instead, he commenced a course of study in education in 2003, which he has not yet completed. From 2002 to 2003, he worked as a geriatric nursing assistant. The interviewee did not serve in the military.

According to the interviewee, his relationship with his parents was always quite good, but the relationship between the parents was *“catastrophic [...], which was not always nice for me either.”* This was presumably the reason why he often spent time with both his paternal and maternal grandmothers. One of the grandmothers grew up in a parental home characterised by social-democratic views. At an early age, the boy became acquainted with the ideals of the workers’ movement: *“From her I learnt, I think, concepts like the working class. Even in my childhood these were fantastic images somehow, and for me, somehow, the heroes, the workers were always the good guys. When I started going to kindergarten I could already sing the Internationale [communist anthem], which is really, a traditional left-wing hoo-ha.”* The paternal grandmother, on the other hand, was a *“committed national socialist”*.

The conflicting political views within the family led to heated discussions, *“which also created divisions among the children, something for which my father and one of my aunts resented her for a long time. There was always something bubbling away, under the surface, in the family.”* The interviewee’s father only started to have closer contact with the mother once again through his son *“because he simply needed someone to keep an eye on me, when he needed to keep an eye on me.”*

Dealing with the life history of his *“Nazi grandma”* was not easy for the interviewee: *“that was very early on, it was something that got me down too somehow, because I, when I thought about the fact that she, well, she had been one of the bad guys who oppressed the family of my other grandmother and all that, and to deal with that, that is, with her person and, and the bad things she had done. She had been in charge of some horrible training farms in Silesia or something. She died a few years ago, and we cleared out her stuff, and there was the truncheon that she used to hit the people who had been pressed into forced labour, that was a really mean-looking thing.”*

Dealing with the life histories of his grandmothers was an important part of his political socialisation. A further influential factor were his parents. They regularly attended demonstrations, such as Easter marches. Until he was 13 years old, they used to take the boy along to these events; after that, he *“no longer felt like it”*. His left-wing view, says the interviewee, were shaped by the family, *“I did develop those myself, not at all.”* When he was 14 years old, a woman friend of his mother gave him a biography of Ché Guevara as a present, *“something I found really cool back then. Because that was also a very heroic thing, I got really excited about that.”* It was also during this time that the

interviewee came into contact with the punk scene, “*hung about*” in inner cities and took drugs. As well as using cannabinoids, he experimented with biogenic drugs for a brief period. His mother’s friend tried to get him interested in the work of left-wing organisations, but he preferred to remain a “*Stumppunk*” aficionado. At age 15, the interviewee attended his first anti-fascist demonstration. He regularly participated at demonstrations until he turned 23. He was arrested several times, and was also interviewed by State Security. However, these arrests did not have serious consequences. The interviewee remembers his first arrest as “*a very, very bad experience. There happened to be these Nazi demos against an exhibition of crimes committed by the Wehrmacht, and we threw rocks or batteries and things.*” In addition to taking part in demonstrations, the interviewee also went to punk concerts and come into contact with an autonomous centre. There he was one of the co-founders of an anti-fascist group, which did not remain in existence for long, however. “*We didn’t even get as far as giving it a name. We published a flyer, which we even distributed, twice I think, in which we recommended to boycott some insignificant, ridiculous kiosk because it stocked the Nationalzeitung or die deutsche Stimme [The German Voice]; in the second edition we put the address of the autonomous centre, because we couldn’t come up with anything else, and this provoked threatening letters. After that we were frustrated and also the subject of ridicule, didn’t feel like continuing.*” During his “*punk-anarcho phase*” the interviewee was involved in damage to property, expressing threats and violent altercations with members of the right-wing scene. However, he was never charged or convicted of any crime. Aside from his activities within the anti-fascist group, the interviewee also had contact with the PDS, which “*was quite terrible, and that was my experience with party politics.*” Today, the interviewee sees himself as being part of the anti-German spectrum within the left-wing scene, which also implies an anti-Islamic stance.

Lu03

“I noticed that that was all pretty much rubbish, in K. [major demonstration against a planned nuclear power station; author’s note], where something very funny happened. There were really a lot of us. We tear down this little hut and throw it over the fence, and the cops shoot back using gas, and you could tell that both sides were having fun. Until a group of peace demonstrators placed themselves between us and the cops, and the cops chased them away with water cannons and we applauded. And then we carried on. And the whole evening ended with a helicopter passing low overhead, with a loudspeaker, and said: ‘Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for the afternoon today, and we wish you a pleasant return home, until the next time.’ I thought that was cool.”

The interviewee was born in West Germany in 1964 as the extramarital child of a Greek father and a German mother. The parents never married. The interviewee met his father four or five times; the last time when he was 16 years old. The father lives in Greece, and the interviewee is no longer in contact with him. He has two brothers from his father’s side, but he has never met them in person.

The interviewee was mainly raised by his grandparents and has spent his entire life to date living in West Germany.

From 1967 to 1970, he went to kindergarten, before going to primary school. In 1974, he entered grammar school, which he left in 1981 without qualifying. He was in ninth grade at that time. Because of problems at school, he had to go to a secondary modern school for six weeks, followed by a secondary general school, where he gained his technical college qualification. In 1982, he returned to the grammar school and earned his university entrance qualification. The interviewee had to repeat a total of three grades. He did not complete any vocational training. In 1988, he started studying for a degree in communications sciences, which he abandoned in 1999 without qualifying. Since 1994, the interviewee has been working as a freelance journalist, and as an editor since 1996. He is the father of a six-year-old son.

When he was 12 to 13 years old, the interviewee developed an interest in politics. In doing so, he was inspired to a significant extent by his mother and her partner. Both were working for the nuclear industry, yet were part of in the left-wing scene and actively opposed nuclear power. According to the interviewee, there was a “*climate of fear*” in the home because the parents provided opponents of nuclear power with information about nuclear power stations. “*And what was absolutely forbidden, a ‘NUCLEAR POWER – NO THANKS’ sticker [...]. I would say we lived in a highly paranoid atmosphere.*”

For his 13th birthday, he was given a copy of the book “*Philosophy of Action*”, and in June 1978 he participated in a demonstration for the first time. Together with a friend, he was watching what was happening and was prompted by left-wing demonstrators to help erect barricades. This event triggered a certain fascination with the left-wing scene in him. “*Some of the impressions were of the kind that the people who I thought were nice were the ones who got beaten [by the police; author’s note] and at the same time, that it was actually loads of fun.*”

During this time, the politicization of society was all-pervading. At school, the interviewee participated in two working groups, the “*Anti-fascist Working Group*” and the “*Working Group Democratic People*”. He also distributed flyers for the Greens. However, he did not find the “*radical left-wing rubbish*” his stepfather talked to be of any interest to him. The interviewee did not have any sympathies for the communist movement, either: “*it was obvious that they were useless*”. He did support the anarchists, however, the members of the “*Schwarzer Block*” [“*Black Block*”]. “*One demonstration followed another. They were all violent.*”

The interviewee was a member of a group called “*Bewegung 9. Mai*” [“*Movement 9th of May*”], the name being based on the day Ulrike Meinhof died. The members saw themselves as anarchists and advocated violence; apart from that they were not particularly sympathetic to members of the RAF. Those were seen as “*nutters, even back then, and as strict Marxists and Leninists. One did not think that Schleyer was bad. Whereas Marxism, Leninism was bad. That was the difference.*”

His scholastic performance deteriorated steadily. However, says the interviewee, this had less to do with his political activities than with the fact that he and his friend often wagged school: “*the friend smoked, often wagged school [...] and so I also often played truant.*” In addition, there were problems

at home. The [mother's] partner one day said something disrespectful about the interviewee's girlfriend at the time: *"That's something one shouldn't really say to a 15-year-old who has only been with his girlfriend for two days. I went for his throat, screwdriver in hand. He, much fitter and agile than me, knocked me out, and I was thrown out of the home."*

The differences within the family and his poor performance at school led to plans to send the interviewee to boarding school. However, he managed to convince the grandparents to allow him to live with them. In his new environment, the interviewee was still politically active, and also used violence. The night Christian Klar was arrested, he committed an arson attack on the district court building. *"Threw the incendiary device forward. Totally clueless, the door burned, nothing else. And then a Molotov cocktail leaked in the car of a colleague, and we all stank of gasoline and could barely breathe. Then things became more serious. We got ourselves a pipe bomb. But we were afraid to throw it. And yet, we had such a pipe bomb and would have to throw it at some point, and so we drove to a quarry and threw it there. It made a crater in the frozen ground. It was quite a capable device. But then we also realised that we had a giant big mouth."*

The interviewee had meanwhile come to the notice of the State Security. As a result of a conversation in pub, he was suspected of planning an attack on the President of the United States. *"Really without any intent to really do it. Really only went through it in theory, how it might be possible to attack Bush. Only went through it as a theoretical exercise. Without really wanting to do it."* The conversation was reported, which led to the interviewee being investigated. A few days later, he turned himself in to the police and cleared up the matter. The investigation was closed.

The *"last big street battle"* of his life, which he refers to as the *"culmination of my creative activity"* was a demonstration against the Vice President of the United States. *"I mean, we attacked an American convoy [using rocks; author's note] and what else could we achieve out in the field. Either they continue on their way or we somehow didn't want either, throwing rocks is just not on any more in the long run. That was simply the culmination of my career."* This turning point, together with the experiences the interviewee had in his encounters with security forces, started him thinking: *"The arrest at Startbahn West, for insulting an officer, where I then realised that the cops were really very fair and very nice, quite normal people, really. Maybe not overly friendly, but correct. And I felt quite certain that: if we had got our hands on one of them, we would not have been so correct in turn. It was the kind of thing, it made me think, in a different direction."* The third point was that the interviewee, in studying anarchist ideology, gradually came to the conclusion that a society based on one of these theories would not be able to function properly. Moreover, society as a whole was changing in the eighties, in terms of fundamentals. *"It was simply a matter of something coming to an end, and so it ended for me as well."* This combination of changes in his personal life and in society resulted in the interviewee withdrawing from the scene where violence was prevalent. He remained politically active, however. Among other things, he was active in [the student organisation] ASTA, and in 1989 he became a member of the Greens. He became chairman of the local branch and a member of the council. For a long time, the interviewee earned his livelihood working for the Greens. *"It was not so much a matter of passion, it was more like being a mercenary. You are good at talking because you spent time in leftist groups, and the Greens paid well."* He resigned from the party in 1996. Ever since 1994, he was working as a freelance journalist. After an internship with a newspaper, he changed jobs and worked for a scene magazine, where he rose to the position of editor. He had started writing short stories even as a child, and he enjoyed reading them. He still works as a journalist and is interested in social issues.

According to the interviewee, he committed a range of different offences: assault causing bodily harm, property damage, insulting an officer, arson, violation of the Arms Act. He was arrested once and has one conviction. He was sentenced to ten hours' community work for insulting an officer. He committed his first crime at the age of 15. This was an assault causing bodily harm against a police officer, during a demonstration.

In 1983, his mother separated from her partner. However, the interviewee still has contact with him, *"he is the only male role model that ever turned up in my life. There won't be many more, and so one looks after the ones that are there."* He summarises the radical phase of this life thus: *"It was a way to combine the things that went through one's mind with a youthful megalomania, with big-noting oneself, the whole thing was ideologically charged, and it was fun, and it also went down well with the girls. Quite honestly, for a 17-year-old, it was perfect."*

Lu04

“In the 1990s, being leftist just happened to be en vogue once again.”

The interviewee was born in West Germany in 1980. His parents, a road construction worker and a secretary, separated when he was three years old. He has an elder sister, a stepbrother and a half-brother. The half-brother is from a relationship his mother had with a Turkish national. The sister, born in 1979, today lives in northern Germany. The interviewee is no longer in contact with her. He also no longer has contact with his half-brother, as this was prohibited by the stepbrother on account of his drug-taking. In 1991, the mother separated from her Turkish partner because of domestic violence, and in 1994, she died from cancer. After her death, the interviewee moved in with his biological father, until he died in 1997.

The interviewee went to kindergarten from 1983 to 1986, and attended primary school from 1986 to 1990. He entered grammar school in 1990. The interviewee had to repeat seventh and ninth grade. After the death of his father, the interviewee began to consume excessive amounts of drugs, and he also started dealing drugs. When he failed tenth grade as well, he was expelled from school. His failure at school was ultimately related to his drug-taking. From 1997 until 2002, he lived on social welfare, and presumably from the proceeds from dealing drugs. Due to his drug consumption, he lost his apartment in 1999, and for a period he was homeless. In 2002, he went into rehab. The same year, he started studying for his secondary school certificate at an adult education centre, which he completed in 2004. He then went to an adult education college and gained his university entrance qualification. His application to study social pedagogy was unsuccessful. The interviewee has been unemployed since 2005 and works on a temporary basis helping with homework at a youth centre, where he also completed his internship year.

The interviewee came into contact with the leftist scene at the age of 14, through fellow pupils at his grammar school and through his father, whom he refers to as his “mentor”. *“In the 90s, being leftist just happened to be en vogue once again.”* He was part of the punk scene and became a member of the SDAJ, the youth organisation of the German Communist Party. *“I was fairly committed there, but then they suggested I resign from the party, because I voiced too much criticism.”* He went to his first demonstration in the mid-nineties, accompanied by his father. Other demonstrations followed. At these events, there were occasional altercations with representatives of law and order. The interviewee also became involved frequently in violent altercations with members of the rightist scene. As his drug consumption increased, however, the interviewee lost interest in political activity, and he consequently became alienated from friends and acquaintances in the leftist scene. For some time now, he has once more been taking an interest in political issues and wants to become active once again.

The interviewee came to the attention of the police as a result of property damage, assault causing bodily harm and offences under the Narcotics Act. He has never been arrested, however.

Li01

“Basically, the immoral position was assigned those in power, which left one in the moral position. But what kind of moral position it was, that was never discussed. What one was allowed to do, or any kind principles, didn’t play a part; all that mattered was to stage actions.”

The interviewee was born in the early seventies in northern Germany as the second child of a construction engineer and a seamstress. His family belonged to the middle class. Both parents are described as apolitical and non-religious. He had a brother, seven years older, who died aged 22 from leukaemia. After the death of the eldest child, the mother started to have problems with alcohol, which then also led to a deterioration in the relationship between the couple.

The first years of the interviewee’s life were unremarkable. The mother *“stayed at home and raised the children, it was just a normal family.”* The interviewee describes his relationship with his parents as *“terribly sober”*, not very emotional. *“We simply lived together.”* The interviewee did not go to kindergarten. He completed primary school without any problems and then went to grammar school. There, his performance declined somewhat because he concentrated more on his hobby, which was to play chess. *“It cost me a great deal of time, I also had great ambition to become somebody as a chess player, but it didn’t turn out that well in the end.”*

In grade ten, he befriended his fellow pupil A., who was top of the class and of the entire school, and who was an outsider like himself, *“because he also kept his distance from the others somehow, meaning, he didn’t participate in the usual juvenile stuff, like dancing and things like that. That wasn’t my thing either.”* It was during this time that the interviewee’s brother died, and A. took on the role of *“big brother”* and became a role model: *“When you spend time with a person like this, you do things that might please him, and so I took a greater interest in politics, because that is what he did.”*

His school grades improved once again, and A. engendered an interest in politics in the interviewee. There was much discussion *“about whether people could be coerced into happiness, and happiness for us essentially meant communism.”* While A. was a *“committed Marxist”*, neither of the two friends belonged to any political group or party at that time.

The interviewee and A. both achieved above-average results in the leaving certificate (with average grades of 1.8 and 0.7, respectively). They parted company after that. The interviewee did his military service. He did not consider becoming a conscientious objector, not so much for moral but for pragmatic reasons, because he wanted to start studying physics in the winter semester, and as a conscientious objector he would have been forced to service an additional three months in the alternative civilian service. This would have delayed his studies for at least one semester.

After military service, he enrolled at a university. Six months after he began his course of study, he was called up for an exercise with the armed forces, which prompted him to retrospectively refuse to do military service, this time for moral and political reasons. During his undergraduate studies, there were some initial political activities (participation in demonstrations). Up until that time, the interviewee had never come to the attention of the police.

The interviewee completed his intermediate diploma with a grade of 1.8. While he was a student his relationship with A., with whom he had maintained contact by letter or telephone in the past, also intensified once again. Together they committed *“autonomous actions”*, which took the form of damage to property (tipping out garbage cans, graffiti, slitting the hoses at service stations, etc.). As a result of these actions against service stations, the interviewee came to the attention of the police for the first time and was sentenced to one year on probation.

The political content changed over time. While the interviewee had earlier protested against the *“threat of nuclear weapons”* and focused on *“hunger in the third world”*, now more *“leftist issues were adopted and embraced”* (the fate of the RAF prisoners, the problems experienced by the Kurds, Marxism, Islam). Political activities gradually took up more and more space in the interviewee’s life, and his studies suffered as a result. At home (the interviewee lived with his parents until the time of his arrest) he still gave the impression of being committed to his studies.

In response to a statement by the RAF, which proclaimed their intention to cease their lethal actions, the interviewee and A. composed a letter which stated that *“the fight will continue, together.”* In the media, the *“group of two”* was *“promoted”* to a successor or splinter group of the RAF. The echo in the media was not insignificant for the interviewee: *“When you get a grade at school or at varsity,*

then that was a success; being in the newspaper, that was the goal we wanted to reach, I think, and we were always keen to find out how the media would react.”

The actions became more militant. This development proceeded alongside the discussion between the interviewee and A. *“whether one can or cannot kill”*. The interviewee *“was of the opinion that one should not kill for a political idea”*. He, responsible for *“technical matters”*, claims to have worked towards ensuring *“that there would be no casualties”* and *“tried to keep the level down. And I was relatively successful, in that there were no injuries.”*

During the period that followed, there were attacks using explosives against party offices and against individual politicians. This resulted in greater pressure as they were being pursued by the security services. To finance their actions, the interviewee took a job as a packer at a parcel service. After a while, he worked freelance as a courier. The mother of his accomplice gave him the money to buy a car. This vehicle was then used in the preparation of the attacks.

In 1996, the interviewee was arrested. Around this time, he became interested in and converted to Islam, as did A. After his arrest, the interviewee spent two years in remand. Then came the main trial, which lasted another two years. During his period of detention, the interviewee committed assault causing grievous bodily harm by attacking with a knife and injuring a fellow prisoner, whom he suspected of being a spy.

In the course of the trial, his relationship with A. deteriorated as a result of the interviewee distancing himself from his crimes, which he had come to regard as mistakes. In the end, the interviewee was convicted and sentenced to a total of ten years in prison. Right from the beginning of his period of detention, the interviewee befriended a right-wing extremist: *“We somehow got along well, that is kind of difficult to understand. Especially for the left-wingers, it was difficult to understand. When I yelled out that he was my best friend here during this crisis, they threw up their hands and distanced themselves from me, and in some cases even broke off any contact with me. So that was a very bad reaction.”* After the trial, the interviewee spent three years in a psychiatric institution from the beginning of the year 2000 because of, in his own words, *“excessive religious convictions”*. He then returned to the correctional facility, where he still was when this interview was conducted.

Aside from his parents, the interviewee’s social relationships became limited to A., A.’s mother and brother. The interviewee never had an intimate relationship with a woman (*“Well, I had a girlfriend once, a left-winger. But that wasn’t anything deep, somehow we just didn’t get close. That was merely an acquaintance”*). Even within the leftist scene, there were hardly any close contacts. His relationships with his fellow students were never very close either: *“Well, there were some student friends, one or two. We did homework together, back then, when I was still studying. We also went for a beer together, but rarely. No, they did not have a great influence.”*

Li02

“Well, I didn’t think about it, it was just fun, with friends and like-minded people.”

Note:

The interviewee was somewhat reluctant to comment on certain points of his biography. This may not least be due to the fact that at the time of the interview, he is in remand and waiting for his trial come up. To maintain anonymity, certain passages of the interview were not recorded on tape.

The interviewee was born in West Germany in 1979. For the first five years of his life he was raised by his grandparents, as his mother was only 16 when she fell pregnant and could not cope with the demands of raising her child. When he was five, the interviewee moved in with his biological parents. The father worked in an office at a mine site, the mother was a housewife. In 1985, his sister was born. In 1989, when he was ten, the parents divorced. The son and daughter stayed with their mother.

Until the end of primary school, his development was relatively unproblematic (one instance of shoplifting, one instance of stealing money from the parents). More serious problems only started to occur after the divorce. The separation of the parents also marked the beginning of problems at school. At grammar school, the interviewee already had to repeat the first year. In 1991, he switched to secondary modern school, where he again had to repeat eighth grade. He repeated this grade at a secondary general school, which he completed in 1996 after ninth grade. Due to various circumstances (change of place of residence, poor scholastic performance, etc.), the interviewee was ultimately forced to change schools several times. Overall, he attended one primary school, two grammar schools, two secondary modern schools and one secondary general school.

The mother compensated for the separation, and for being in the role of sole parent, by consuming excessive amounts of alcohol and drugs. Her parenting was characterised by arbitrariness. During this period, the interviewee often suffered severe physical abuse at the hands of his mother. This was a primary reason for the sustained difficulties in the relationship with his mother: *“I hated her, really hated her.”* This was unlike the relationship with his stepfather, whom the mother had married after the separation from his biological father. With the stepfather, the interviewee maintained a good relationship. According to the interviewee, the stepfather was not aware of the physical abuse.

As a result of the problems with his mother, the interviewee moved in with his father in 1993, when he was 14 years old, and he lived with him until 1997. During his time at the secondary modern school, the interviewee came into contact with the punk movement in 1994 through a fellow pupil. The interviewee became inspired by leftist ideas very quickly, not least because of the stories told by his maternal grandfather, who had been active in the resistance against national socialists. He gradually found his way into the scene and increasingly participated in protest activities. It was during this period that he became involved in brawls with members of the rightist scene. At the age of 15, he first came into contact with illegal drugs such as hashish and ecstasy. This was also the time when the interviewee first came to the attention of the police. A charge of wilful destruction of other persons’ property was dropped, however.

In 1995, he came into contact with a counselling service for the first time. At the initiative of his father’s partner, a family psychologist was consulted. However, after two visits, counselling was discontinued, *“after that I didn’t feel like it anymore.”*

After the secondary general school, the interviewee attended vocational technical college for one year. There he came into contact with hard drugs (heroin, cocaine) and *“felt even less like doing anything.”* He paid for his drug consumption through thefts, among other things. He discontinued the vocational technical college and signed up with the armed forces voluntarily, but was not recruited because he did not have a secondary school leaving certificate. At his father’s insistence, the interviewee took a job at a motorway restaurant as a dishwasher and cleaner in 1997. He remained part of the leftist scene until 1998. In 1998, he participated in the “Chaos Days” in Hanover. This was the *“high point”* of his *“political activities”*. He was never a member of a political party, yet he sympathised with the APPD (Anarchistische Pogo Partei Deutschlands [= Anarchist Pogo Party of Germany]).

In 1999, the interviewee began an apprenticeship as an office communications clerk, which he completed in 2002. For the interviewee, starting this apprenticeship meant *“a new beginning”*, which also led to him distancing himself even more from the leftist scene. With his entry into the techno/hip-hop scene (through colleagues from the volunteer fire brigade) the pattern of his drug consumption

changed as well. He now regularly consumed hard drugs like heroin and cocaine in greater quantities. As early as a year and a half prior to completing his apprenticeship, he was already addicted to drugs, but he still completed his apprenticeship successfully. This was also the time when his grandfather passed away. The interviewee relates his excessive drug consumption not least to this loss, *“because I react very emotionally, and taking heroin flattened the emotions.”*

In 2002, after completing the apprenticeship, the interviewee could not find a job. This made it harder for him to fund his drug consumption. The fact that he was unemployed and also his *“second life as a junkie”*, with all the lies associated that entailed, were the reasons for the separation from his then-partner and his escape to A., where he was living on the streets for a time: *“The first period was rough, more like a crash. I slept in a tent.”*

In A. the interviewee met his new girlfriend, also a drug addict, with whom he then moved to M. where she had to serve the remainder of a sentence as a result of discontinuing a course of therapy. At that time, the interviewee was clean and had casual work as a waiter and at a call centre. In 2004 his mother, who was also a drug addict and with whom he had since reconciled, died from a drug overdose. The death of his mother and his social isolation, *“my girlfriend in jail, I am in a new city, no one to relate to, nothing, the mother dead”*, led him back into the drug scene: *“I went back into the scene, took something, and so I was back taking drugs, and yes, well, I was soon back on it.”*

Several (armed) robberies followed, through which the interviewee funded his drug habit. He states that he committed his first robbery because he wanted to be arrested: *“I thought, now do something for which they will put you in jail, to get yourself sorted. In other words, I wanted to get caught. Yes, it was self-preservation.”* At the time the interview was conducted, the interviewee was in remand, waiting for his trial. In the time leading up to this point, he had also completed a six-month course of therapy.

Crimes committed to date: property damage, cultivation, buying, importation and dealing of or with narcotics, robbery, presumably breach of the public peace (the interviewee declined to discuss this in detail; according to him, the charge was dropped, however).

Li03

“On the photo, I saw myself stand there in my bomber jacket and the shaved head, waving this item, and I thought, well, if you feel provoked by that, you shouldn’t be surprised.”

The interviewee was born in West Germany in 1978, the oldest of four children. Both his father and mother were teachers. When he was aged two, the parents moved to B., where they built a single-family house in 1984. From 1981 to 1984, the interviewee went to kindergarten and then to a Catholic primary school. From there, he went to a Catholic grammar school, which he completed in 1994 with a secondary school leaving certificate. The interviewee had initially intended to study for a technical high school diploma but was unable to do so because of his criminal record.

At the age of 14, the interviewee came into contact with illegal drugs (cocaine) for the first time. When he was 16, he took cannabis, and at 17 amphetamines, LSD and biogenic drugs. The intensity of his drug-taking suggests that he was addicted, yet he was never convicted for possession or dealing drugs. The same goes for the offences in relation to the procurement of drugs. Since the interviewee is reluctant to talk about the period between 1995 and 1997, we can assume that he may have been involved in criminal activities during that time about which he did not want to comment in detail. This conclusion is based following interview passages:

“Yes, brawls that are not related to football tend to have to do with drugs, not with procurement or anything, meaning, I was never really involved in drug-related crime.”

“Yes well, it’s a fact that I have done things for which I was never convicted, because the things for which I am in here, I can honestly say I never made a cent from them. These are things where I did not make any money, they are the kind of things that are more or less against the constitution, kind of because overall I more or less don’t agree with the constitution. And well, and just violent crimes, but capital crimes and all that, I was never convicted for that kind of thing, we never, because of a car, and really I made my living from that.”

“No, the problem is that the relationship with my parents, from the time I was 16 until, say [counts] from 16 to 22, until I, well, until I got together with my now ex-girlfriend, until that time it really deteriorated, because I didn’t have a concrete plan. And I didn’t give a damn where I lived, I’ve got mates, I can live there. He’s got a three-bedroom flat and lives there by himself, so I pay half the rent, we live there together and, well, work that way. Right on the street, make a bundle of money, doesn’t matter, that’s how I figured it, insurance-wise making money in other ways, and these are things that, I don’t know, at some point the trust of my parents was gone because [...] for me it was, well, they knew from the beginning about my [unintelligible] notification with the same first name and everything, but these are matters I should really be talking about here.”

It is worth noting in this context that during this phase, the parents left the interviewee, who was still under-age at that time, to his own devices. For example, from 1994 until 1996 he lived with a friend, and from 1996 until 1997 he lived alone. The interviewee did not receive any government support during this period.

The interviewee first came to the attention of the police in 1994 for offensive behaviour. However, he was not convicted of this offence. In the same year he was charged for attempted assault causing bodily harm and sentenced to 20 hours’ community service. This was followed by a conviction for robbery in 1997, with a nine-month sentence suspended on parole, and in 1998, a conviction for assault causing bodily harm.

It was not until 1998 (the year in which he met his girlfriend, with whom he then lived from 2000 to 2003) that a degree of stability returned to his life, probably not least due to the influence of his girlfriend. In 1998, he did his military service, and in 1999 he started an apprenticeship in office administration, which he broke off in 2000, however. After the failed apprenticeship, he worked as an (unskilled) motor mechanic from 2001 to 2003. For four years, the interviewee did not come to the attention of the police. Not until 2002 was he convicted once again for offensive behaviour and for giving false testimony and sentenced to nine months on probation. When he was charged with offensive behaviour again in 2003, the court revoked the probation for the earlier conviction and sentenced him to a total of two years and ten months in prison.

It is difficult to categorise the interviewee as being part of the “extremist spectrum”. The security services list him under the “LEMO” category, yet he describes himself as tending more to the right than to the left, and that he had been a member of the skinhead movement from 1997 until 2000. The interviewee came into contact with the right-wing scene via the hooligan scene. It is likely that the right-wing scene appealed to the interviewee primarily as a means to compensate for the powerlessness he experienced in his young, especially in conflicts with youths of foreign origin.

Li04

“I grew up in a town in the east where there were quite a lot of right-wing extremists. Well, essentially I was confronted with something or other right from the start, either there were shaved heads, or people with colourful hair, it was a bit of an extreme place.”

The interviewee was born in East Germany in 1985. The biological parents split up a long time ago. While the father is known to the interviewee, he does not remember him. He spent the first thirteen years of his life with his mother, his stepfather and his sister. He then lived with his girlfriend for two years. From the year 2000 to 2004, he was in a home, and from 2004 to 2005, he lived with his wife. He has one child, who at the time of the interviewee was nine months old. The wife has another child from an earlier relationship.

The interviewee’s mother has since separated from the stepfather. She works as a bookbinder. The stepfather – prior to becoming self-employed – worked as a roofer and kitchen salesman. At the time of the interview, the 18-year-old sister was attending a sports grammar school. Unlike her brother, she is entirely apolitical.

During his childhood, the interviewee was mainly looked after by his mother, even though the mother, like the stepfather, was working throughout this period. He was, said the interviewee, “*often home alone*”. He went to kindergarten from 1988 to 1989. Due to his problems with reading and writing, he was then sent to a special school for children with learning disabilities. The first four years of school were unremarkable, but from then on alcohol consumption, wagging school and altercations with teachers led to an increasing numbers of conflicts not only at school, but also at home. The interviewee ran away from home or was “*thrown out*” more and more frequently. The conflicts escalated to the extent that there were violent altercations between him and his stepfather. “*Well, he slapped me, I slapped him back, and then we really got stuck into each other, had a real fight.*”

As early as aged 12 and 13, the interviewee regularly drank alcohol, at 15 years of age he began to consume cannabis, and at 16 amphetamines. In 1999, the interviewee left the special school without gaining a leaving certificate. In 2001, he broke off an apprenticeship as a painter/varnisher started a year after he left school because he “*didn’t feel like it*” anymore. It was during this time that he met the woman who was later to become his wife. After he broke off the apprenticeship, the interviewee earned a living doing various short-term casual jobs, among other in his stepfather’s business. There was never a time where he had regular employment, but there were periods of unemployment. The interviewee was not called up to do military service, nor did he do any alternative civilian service.

At the age between 14 and 15, the interviewee came into contact with the punk movement. He describes himself as a hanger-on initially, and it was only later that he also identified with the left-wing content. He took part in demonstrations, went to the concerts typical in that scene, put up posters for the “*Antifa*” and distributed flyers. At the age of 18, he joined the “*Anarchistische Pogo Partei Deutschlands*” (APPD). However, he considered the concept endorsed by the APPD to be too extreme and entirely impractical: “*One must remain realist at least at some level.*”

As a result of his contacts within the left-wing scene, there were the typical altercations with members of the right-wing spectrum, as well as with members of the law enforcement officers. The interviewee has come to the attention of the police multiple times, including for property damage, assault causing bodily harm, resistance against the power of the state or against officers of the law, armed robbery, offensive behaviour, theft and endangering road traffic. In 2005, the time his son was born, he was arrested for the first time and convicted of armed robbery and other offences and sentenced to three years in prison without parole. The interviewee points out that his custodial sentence is not related to a politically motivated crime, adding that the armed robbery had been committed because he needed money to buy alcohol.

Li05

“I got two-and-a-half years for six rocks thrown against a water cannon.”

The interviewee was born in West Germany in 1961 and is a German citizen. His biological father was a long-distance truck driver; he died from lung cancer in 1985. His mother completed a course for housewives in domestic science. The parents separated very soon after he was born. The interviewee has a younger brother who committed suicide while in custody at the age of 20. After her divorce, the mother married a second time. The stepfather was a fitter by trade. He was an alcoholic and regularly beat up family members. The interviewee's half-sister, born in 1996, was the result of this relationship. This marriage also ended in divorce.

During his childhood, the interviewee was mainly looked after by his maternal grandparents. He did not go to kindergarten. He started school in 1967 and completed primary school without any problems. He went on to a secondary general school, where he had to repeat sixth grade. He gained his certificate of secondary education in 1977 and then started an apprenticeship as a bricklayer, which he broke off in 1979, after the intermediate examination. From then on, he only worked occasionally in casual jobs, as a “dock worker”, or for a “courier service”. He covered the cost of living through social benefits in the form of unemployment benefits, unemployment assistance and social welfare payments.

Until he was 17 years old, the interviewee lived with his family, first with the grandparents, then with his mother and stepfather. He came into contact with illegal drugs at a very early age. At 16 he consumed cannabis and heroin. LSD, cocaine, amphetamines and biogenic drugs followed. Due to differences among family members, the interviewee left home aged 17 and subsequently lived in various cities, usually in squats or on the street. He had a permanent residence for a short period in the mid-80s when he lived with his biological father, and again between 1992 and 1996, when he lived with his then-partner and their three children. The interviewee has three sons aged 10, 12 and 14. There was never a close relationship with the children.

The interviewee has been living in Germany for most of his life, but he did spend almost three years living abroad. For example, he lived in Denmark for four months when he was 17, and in the early 80s he spent six months in France. When he was 20 years old, he went to the Netherlands for two years. The interviewee was exempt from military service as he was rejected when he was 18 years old.

At the age of 16, he came into contact with the left-wing scene for the first time. At that time, he was part of the punk movement. According to the interviewee, over the years there were an increasing number of confrontations with the police and with members of the right-wing scene. At the age of 17, the interviewee was placed in custody for the first time (weekend detention), and at 18 years of age, he was sentenced to juvenile detention for the first time. He has since been convicted of numerous offences, including property offences, property damage, unlawful entry/trespassing, offences under the Narcotics Act, disturbing the peace, threatening behaviour, violating the Arms act and insulting behaviour, for which he has served a total of 13 years in prison. The interviewee has been serving another custodial sentence since 2004.

He indicates that he is unable to live his subcultural lifestyle in Germany, whereas it was different in other countries. There one would be accepted, and everyone was granted a certain degree of freedom to live. He sees opposition to right-wing extremism as an essential element of his political activities.

Iu01

“Well, there was widespread anger [in the community; author’s note] against the people responsible for the war.”

The interviewee was born in West Germany in 1978. He is a Turkish citizen. He has spent his entire life in Germany. He lived with his parents until 1998, then spent five years living in a students’ residence. He is now married and has been living with his wife since 2005. The parents – the father was an unskilled labourer and is now a pensioner, the mother a housewife – have two other sons. The brothers, both of whom are older than the interviewee, are married and work as general practitioners.

The mother, who gained her university entrance qualification but never undertook any vocational or professional training, displayed great commitment in relation to the family’s integration into German society. This commitment was evident not only in attending a language school, but also in that she maintained close contacts within the neighbourhood, especially with Germans, i.e., non-Muslims. The interviewee claims to have had a liberal-minded, religious upbringing. He went to kindergarten from 1981 to 1984, and to primary school from 1984 to 1988. He then went to grammar school, and gained his university entrance qualification in 1997. The interviewee then trained as a nurse and completed his training successfully in the year 2000. He started studying for a degree in medicine, which he has not yet completed. While he was still a student, the interviewee married his girlfriend. There are no children to date.

During his school years, the interviewee was an outsider. This was due not least to his Islamic upbringing, for which he often faced rejection on the part of his fellow pupils. *“At school they could not accept or tolerate that I did not eat pork, did not drink alcohol, that the wives of relatives or Turkish people in general were wearing head scarves, there was frequent taunting. I often found it offensive, that I had to keep defending myself, and even fasting was made more difficult because many people made jokes about it.”*

The interviewee found acceptance within the religious community, *“really, the best friends I had were people at the mosque.”* In addition to his school education, the interviewee also received an Islamic education, which focused on learning to write in Arabic and reading the Koran. Until he was 10 years old, he was looked after at a mosque sponsored and run by the Turkish government every Saturday and Sunday. Lessons concentrated more on studying the Koran than on political education. When a mosque for the Milli Görüs Islamic community was built near the interviewee’s family home in 1988, the parents chose to attend this mosque – located in their immediate neighbourhood – from then on. Here again, instruction focused on the study of the Koran, as well as on conveying the kinds of values that distinguish a good Muslim. The organisation also offered a range of different leisure activities; for example, the interviewee took part in a pilgrimage organised by Milli Görüs. In addition, there were discussions on political issues, including the Bosnian and Chechen wars, *“Well, there was widespread anger against the people responsible for the war.”*

The interviewee describes the structures of Milli Görüs as very rigid. He said it had been difficult to conform to their rules, which also made it more difficult to integrate into German society. He gave the examples of the separation of the sexes, the importance of appearance (beard, head scarf), and the prohibition on *“shaking hands”*. Unlike the time when he was taught at the government-run mosque, political orientation played a much more significant role at Milli Görüs.

When started studying medicine, the interviewee increasingly distanced himself from his earlier circle of friends and acquaintances, *“who by then only hung around games parlours or even committed thefts”*, and established a more mixed and liberal-minded circle of friends. The decisive factor in his withdrawal from the organisation was not only the intolerance that prevailed at Milli Görüs, however, but also the geographical distance between the place where he studied and his home town, and the relationship with his partner who, while a Muslim, was not a devout believer. *“This was of course quite a blow for my parents and my siblings, as they had always been part of that community, and it created some very serious difficulties for them, and they were also afraid I might abandon my religion and my faith – it really is still very difficult [for them] to understand.”*

In the year 2000, the interviewee resigned from the organisation. Today he no longer attends facilities or events run by Milli Görüs. The parents are still members of the organisation, however, even though they are not particularly active politically. The interviewee never came into contact with extremist “figureheads”. However, in the course of his Islamic education he did encounter a number of teachers

who were highly committed politically. Yet he stressed that the dialogue between different religions was promoted consistently.

The interviewee remains a practising Muslim. While he does not attend the mosque on a daily basis, he goes there several times a month. In addition, he occasionally visits the Allevite Cultural Centre as well as German-Kurdish clubs. He is not a member of a political party. He strongly distances himself and rejects any extremist stance as well as the September 11, 2001 attacks. In this context, he quotes from the Koran: "*Killing an innocent person is like killing all of humanity.*" The interviewee claims never to have committed an offence to date.

Iu02

“When I heard that there was such an association [Al-Aqsa e.V.; author’s note] I was very pleased, because you [...] sit in front of the television at home and just get agitated. And if you have several people who all think the same way, like me, well, that you get agitated and then start an association, I find that terrific.”

The interviewee was born in West Germany in 1977. He is of Moroccan origin and has been a German citizen since 2004. The parents come from an educationally underprivileged background. The father went to a village school in Morocco and came to Germany as a guest worker. Here he worked in a factory for two years, before he became a self-employed retailer. Today the father is a pensioner. The mother, who has had no formal education, was always at home and looked after the household and the children. The couple have four boys and two girls. The interviewee is the youngest child. The eldest brother, who is 40 years old, is a motor mechanic, the second-eldest, 38, is a businessman, and the third-eldest, 36, is a baker. The eldest sister, 35, works as a medical assistant, the youngest sister, 33, is an industrial clerk.

The interviewee, a devout Muslim, lived with his parents until the time he married in 2002. He did not go to kindergarten, and started school in 1984. At primary school he had to repeat one year. From primary school he went to a secondary general school and gained his secondary school leaving certificate. From 1995 to 1996, he attended a commercial college, and from 1996 to 1997 he was enrolled in an advanced vocational training course in business and administration. He did not complete the course, however. In 1997 he started an apprenticeship in office administration, which he completed successfully in the year 2000. However, he was unable to find work in his chosen profession. Since the year 2000, he has been working as a storeman for a company in the media industry.

Through friends, he came into contact with Al-Aqsa e.V. association at the age of 16. There the situation in the Middle East, especially in relation to Palestine and Israel, and what could be done about it was discussed on a daily basis. The interviewee was very enthusiastic about this organisation. At the association, he mainly interacted with the younger members. Many of them were not to be taken seriously, however, he said. The interviewee described the majority of them as ‘*big talkers*’. According to him, only a few of them were really prepared to contribute to the welfare of the Palestinian population, be it by collecting donations, initiating demonstrations or some other activities. He left the association for a number of different reasons: One was that the actions discussed at the association were becoming more and more extreme: “*There was more violence [...], instead of peaceful solutions, they were working more towards or proposed violent solutions.*” The interviewee reports that the attitude of glorifying violence increasingly deterred him, and he eventually resigned from the Al-Aqsa e.V. association. He does not know what his acquaintances from his time in the association are doing these days. He occasionally sees one of them in the city and they exchange some meaningless chat. Asked whether he could understand the September 11 terrorists, he says yes, but adds that he would never say so openly. In his opinion, the Americans simply had to be “*taught a lesson*” for the political stance they take in their dealings with the outside world. He only regrets that there were innocent victims, but it bothers him that when Muslims die, nobody is interested, but as soon as Jews or Americans die, there is a big “*hoo-hah*”. He says many of his friends would think the same way, but few would dare say so openly, because they would immediately be portrayed as terrorists.

In 2000, the interviewee met his present wife, a Moroccan citizen who comes from a very religious family. The interviewee’s family, who are also very religious, endorsed this relationship because the parents were strongly opposed a friendship with a German woman. In 2003, the couple married, and in 2004, their son was born. The interviewee intensified and practised the Islamic faith only after he got married. Today he no longer drinks alcohol or eat pork, and he stopped smoking. He recognised that Islam is the one true faith and that “*those who talk nonsense and the small-time criminals*”, with whom he wants nothing to do these days, only cause trouble for oneself. In addition to going to the mosque, the interviewee participates in seminars on a regular basis: “*These are, well, seminars, they are about, there are various subjects, about terrorism, about Muslims themselves, about Islam or*

Palestine in Israel, these are, well, there is talk and discussion throughout an entire weekend. Yes, well, that's the kind of thing I do."

Iu03

“For us there is no criminal act which we could [not] commit for the sake of our group and our faith. What others may see as criminal is neither here nor there. Our way is the right way, and we will choose our way in any manner or form we consider necessary.”

The interviewee was born in West Germany in 1972. He comes from a migrant background and holds German citizenship. He has spent his entire life in Germany. For the first 25 years, he lived with his parents, and then spent one year living with his then-girlfriend. He has been living alone since 1998.

The father, a process engineer due to retire shortly, and the mother, a housewife not in paid employment, have six children. The interviewee is the eldest of the children. One of his brothers, born in 1974, works as a communications engineer, and the eldest sister, born in 1980, is an industrial clerk. The fourth child, a daughter born in 1982, is studying to become a teacher, and the two youngest children are still at school.

During his childhood, the interviewee was mainly raised by the parents. He did not go to kindergarten. He started school in 1978 and his primary school years passed without any significant problems. In 1982, he went to secondary general school, which he completed in 1988 with a secondary school leaving certificate. He was not only a good pupil; he was also capable of asserting himself physically. Having left the secondary general school, he failed in his attempt to pass at technical secondary school. However, he managed to obtain his university entrance qualification two years later by studying at an evening grammar school. In 1997, he successfully completed his training as a wholesale and import/export merchant, which he had started in 1994. In 1999, he commenced studying for a degree in economics, which he has not yet completed.

The interviewee has been earning a living by doing a range of (part-time) jobs, including almost five years in the hospitality sector, two years on building sites, one year with a car hire company, three-and-a-half years in a warehouse, and another three-and-a-half years as a skilled physiotherapy worker. In addition, the interviewee also worked at a call centre and at McDonald's. He never registered for unemployment or received welfare.

The interviewee initially sympathised with left-wing ideas, but today he is a devout Muslim. He came into contact with Islamist circles while he was a student, as well as through interaction in chat rooms. The interviewee considers the September 11 assassins as martyrs, and sees himself as a jihadist fighting for Islam. He describes his political activities as follows: collecting donations to fund activities abroad, recruiting fellow believers, political analysis. To date the interviewee has never come to the attention of the police.

He does not try to disguise his radical position: *“For me there is only one group, and that is that of Jihad; everything else to me is unworthy of acceptance and should be fought. No political orientation deserves to be accepted.”*

Iu04

“We see ourselves as the elite, the real force of Islam, whose task it is to work underground in order to make Islam the most powerful force.”

The interviewee was born in Morocco in 1979. His father, now retired, worked as a government official in Morocco, and his mother is a housewife. The interviewee has five siblings: four brothers and one sister. Aside from him and one other brother, the entire family still lives in Morocco.

From 1979 until 1987, the interviewee was raised by his parents in Morocco. Hoping for a better life, he then went to France with his uncle. Because the uncle was of frail health and the aunt was unable to cope with the demands of raising the child, the boy was sent to another uncle in Germany in 1989. In Germany, he went to primary school for a year and had to repeat the year due to language difficulties.

In 1991, the interviewee went to a secondary general school, which he completed in 1997 with a secondary school leaving certificate. He reports that he was always an outsider at the secondary general school, which he attributes to the fact that, among other things, he fasted, did not drink alcohol or eat pork even back then. At the grammar school, which he attended from 1997 to 2000, he had virtually no friends either: *“there were those party people whose lives consisted of nothing but sin, alcohol, drugs, easy women, people who no longer had any pride and also dressed accordingly, I kept at a distance from these people.”* In the year 2000, the interviewee gained his university entrance qualification. He then *“went travelling for a while”* and *“visited his brothers and sisters”*.

In 2000, the interviewee commenced a course of study in information science, which he hopes to complete shortly. When he first became a student, he met his wife, a devout Muslim, whom he married in 2004. Today they have two children. In his years at school and as a student, the interviewee regularly worked in a wide range of casual jobs, including as a janitor, as a labourer at an engineering works or in a temporary position in retail. In addition he also taught German and Arabic language courses at the mosque.

The interviewee was a smoker for only a short period, has never consumed alcohol, not to mention illegal drugs, and he has never come the attention of the police to date. He supports “Jihad”. He and his long-term friend from school came into contact with political activists through attending a mosque. His group, which the interviewee describes as a *“religious community”*, is made up exclusively of men aged between 16 and 40. The aim was, he says, to make *“contact with our brothers and sisters in every possible location, in mosques, associations”* via the Internet, in order to find *“like-minded people who support our cause”*.

Iu05

“The discussion we held there [at the mosque/association; author’s note] opened our eyes.”

The interviewee was born in Turkey in 1978. He lived in the land where he was born from 1978 until 1990, and has been in Germany since. Today the interviewee has German citizenship. The father was a businessman and is now retired, and the mother works as a cleaner. The interviewee has seven siblings: one biological brother, three half-sisters and three half-brothers.

The parents, who have since divorced, both worked in Germany. For this reason, the interviewee was raised by his grandparents in Turkey for the first twelve years of his life. When he was 12, the mother brought the boy to Germany. Until he was 13, he lived with her and his stepfather. Because he was beaten by his mother’s partner on a regular basis, he moved to his biological father, who had also remarried, when he was 13 years old. However, the interviewee did not get on with his stepmother either because she constantly made him aware that he was not welcome in the family.

The interviewee completed primary school in Turkey. When he first came to Germany, he was kept at home because of his lack of language skills in German. He then went to secondary general school, which he completed in 1996 with his secondary school leaving certificate. He then began a three-year apprenticeship as an industrial mechanic. He worked in this trade from 1996 to 1999. In 2002, the interviewee started at technical college, which he completed successfully in 2005, which also earned him his university entrance qualification. He has been studying electrical engineering since 2005.

In his youth, the interviewee was more of a “go-getter”, frequently “roaming the streets” with his friend at that time, a Moroccan. He knew how to assert himself in the street culture. There were many fights, including some against right-wing people. During that time, the interviewee consumed alcohol, tobacco, cannabis and cocaine, enjoyed the company of women and went to discotheques. He “*didn’t care much*” about religion. “*But of course, I occasionally attended festivities at the mosque, and I undertook a fast now and then. But I wasn’t a real believer.*” At the end of his vocational training, the interviewee came into contact with devout Muslims via fellow student. “*We were made very welcome there, were often invited, and everyone was always very friendly. That especially is something I enjoyed very much. The discussions we held there opened our eyes. We knew now that until now we had lived in world of falsehoods, a world that wants to turn us into sinners and blind us to the truth. The unbeliever is like a snake that gradually coils itself around you and blinds you.*”

As time went by, the interviewee dedicated himself increasingly to his faith. He stopped drinking and smoking and no longer consumed illegal drugs. When he was 20 years old, he established a shared residence with one of “*his brothers*”. He lived with him until he was 27 years old. The interviewee does not want to provide information about his current living arrangements.

The interviewee is not married and does not have any children. Despite having committed a number of criminal offences in his youth (assault causing bodily harm, possession of and dealing drugs), he was never taken into custody or convicted. He is a “Jihad” sympathiser.

ii01

“This is a process, it developed in this way, I didn’t control that myself, or it somehow just crystallised in this way. It turned out this way.”

The interviewee was born in 1960 in the Gaza Strip/Palestine. He grew up with six brothers and three sisters. His father was a businessman, the mother a housewife. The interviewee started school when he was six years old and completed the preparatory level, the intermediate level and secondary school. The interviewee describes his childhood as living through a time of occupation under the control of the Israeli military. He was confronted with the political situation in the Middle East at an early age. *“When you see army vehicles driving all over the place, or if somebody gets arrested in the neighbourhood, when you’re a child, you start asking questions, what is going on, why, and we also had professors at school who thought that the children should have a political orientation; there was the entire spectrum at the school, from the far left, that is, socialists, right through to Islamists, they were all represented at school, that was nothing special, let me put it this way, at the school. We were playing war games, I can remember that. We played war games, constantly. From tree trunks and things, we made weapons, things similar to weapons, and that’s how we played war.”*

Even as a youth the interviewee took part in demonstrations and violent altercations with the Israeli army. During one of these actions, he witnessed the death of a friend from school. At the age of 14, the interviewee was taken into custody because he participated in a demonstration and was interrogated by the Israeli armed forces. He suffered physical abuse while in detention.

Just before he turned 18, he gained his university entrance qualification and won a scholarship to study natural science in Libya. Leaving his family was very problematic for the then 17-year-old: *“And that was difficult for me, very difficult, because we, in the Arab region there more so, let me put it this way, had been raised so that we were like a family, strong and all that, and all of a sudden you are all alone and so on, and then it’s, that was difficult.”* As well as being apart from his family, the interviewee also worried constantly about the welfare of his family. He only studied in Libya for one year and then discontinued his studies. From Libya, the interviewee then went to Romania in order to realise his intention to become a doctor. *“Well, in our society, the doctor is a figure of respect, let me put it this way, and ever since I was a child this has shaped my character, I had to become a doctor.”* He would have liked to have gone to Germany, because *“Germany, at that time was a highly developed country, so to speak, and then there many Palestinians [...], particularly because I had an uncle, here in Germany, an aunt, etc., meaning acquaintances, or relatives.”* He was not given the opportunity to study medicine in Germany, however, because *“we Palestinians are treated differently, we are, let me put it this way, considered troublemakers and avoided by certain countries. Romania was the only country offering me a visa. That is why I accepted that offer. Meaning, not that, let me say, that I wanted it that way.”*

In Romania, the interviewee again funded his medical studies by means of a scholarship. His economic situation became more dire when, in the early nineties, political detente and the collapse of communism led to Palestinian students being forced to cover the cost of tuition themselves. Because he could no longer afford to pay his tuition fees, he ended his studies prematurely and without gaining a qualification.

In addition to the economic situation, he also had personal problems. At the age of 22, and following Islamic custom, the interviewee had married a Romanian woman he had met at the students’ residence. He left Romania after three years and spent the period from 1992 to 1994 in various countries (the interviewee did not provide any additional details about this). The interviewee really wanted to return to this homeland, but he was unsuccessful in his attempt because he was unable to obtain the documents required to return to the Gaza Strip from the relevant authorities. A plan to emigrate to Switzerland failed also, because it is very difficult for Romanian citizens to obtain a visa to that country. In 1994, he travelled to the Federal Republic of Germany and applied for asylum. While his

application was refused, he was granted temporary residential status. His wife, whom he brought to Germany a short time later, was refused a visa, however.

The marriage only lasted four years. In the mid-nineties, their child was born, a son. As the living circumstances of the couple were extremely precarious at that time – among other things, he did not have a flat and his wife was staying in Germany illegally – he sent mother and child back to Romania. The couple have since divorced, the son is living with the ex-wife.

The interviewee is reluctant to talk about the years he spent in Germany until the time of his arrest. For a while he lived in a hostel for asylum seekers, or underground. He earned a living by working for an industrial cleaning company and as a car dealer, among other things. He says he had not been very active politically in the period between 1994 and 2000. A turning point for him in terms of his political commitment was an encounter with injured Palestinian children who had been sent to Germany to receive medical care in the year 2000. *“The suffering of these people reopened many wounds in me, let me say. That was the turning point, where I said to myself that for a long time I have, for a long time I haven’t been part of what is happening.”* He now became more active politically once again, for example in the context of demonstrations. In 2002, he was arrested and charged with being a member of a terrorist organisation, and sentenced to seven-and-a-half years in prison. The interviewee claims that he is innocent, however, and that his conviction was politically motivated.

Appendix D

Demographic data about the interviewees

Ideological orientation	
Interviewees, total	39
Right-wing	24
Left-wing	9
Islamist	6

Age of the interviewees	
Minimum	20
Maximum	49
Median	28
Mode	27

Country of origin/birth	Total	Right-wing	Left-wing	Islamist
Germany	35	23	9	3
- West Germany	28	17	8	3
- East Germany	7	6	1	0
Marocco	1	0	0	1
Palestine	1	0	0	1
Turkey	2	1	0	1

Marital Status	Total	Right-wing	Left-wing	Islamist
Single (partially in partnership)	30	22	6	2
Married	7	1	3	3
In divorce (or separated)	2	1	0	1
Have own children	14	6	5	3

School education	Total	Right-wing	Left-wing	Islamist
Secondary general school	13	11	2	0
Secondary modern school/commercial college	9	7	1	1
Technical college entrance qualification	2	0	2	0
University entrance qualification	8	0	3	5
Studies	1	0	1	0
No qualification	6	6	0	0

Family of origin	Total	Right-wing	Left-wing	Islamist
Raised as only child	4	4	0	0
One or two siblings*	18	10	7	1
Three siblings*	8	6	2	0
Four or more siblings*	9	4	0	5

* including half-siblings

Self-categorisation or self-assignment to a scene or organisation

(multiple choices are allowed)

Right-wing

“Skinheads”	20
“Hammerskins” ¹	1
“Hooligans”	4
“Gabber scene” ²	4
“White-Power movement”	1
“Scheitelträger [“Hair-parters”]	1

¹ „The right-wing extremist organisation Hammerskins, established in the United States in 1986, started out as a regional movement, but has since developed into an internationally active movement within the skinhead scene and aspires to elitist status. In Germany, the organisation claims to have been active since 1991. „(...) Hammerskins represent a racist world view, partially associated with a National-Socialist ideology. Their goal is to unite all white skinheads around the world in a Hammerskins Nation' ” (see website of the Office for the Protection of the Constitution of the German federal state of Hesse, dated 5 May 2009).

² Gabber is a sub-segment of the *Hardcore Techno music scene*, characterised by loud, synthetic sounds and sampling. This music subculture does not represent a political movement in itself. As a result of the symbols associated with the scene, it gradually acquired a racist image in the eyes of the wider public, similar to the skinhead scene.

“Hip-Hop scene”	1
NSDAP/AO ³	1
No links to the right-wing scene	2
Former member of a party/comradeship group	9

Left-wing

“Punk scene”	4
“Militant left”	1
“Anarchist”	2
“Social democrat”	2
“a bit more extreme than others”	1
“Anti-fascist”	3
“MSB-Spartakus Bund” ⁴	1
“Free Workers Union (FAU)” ⁵	1
Member of a party in the past	5

Islamist

“Jihadist”	3
“Radical Muslim”	1
“Muslim”	2
“Al-Aqsa e.V.” ⁶	1

3 A party established in 1972 in the United States by Gary Lauck and „Germans abroad” that sees itself as an „action community of fellow believers spearheading Nationalist-Socialist ideology”, and whose goal it is to “support the NS underground movement in Germany”, for example by advocating the reinstatement of the legal status of the NSDAP in Germany. In addition to propaganda materials such as flags, music, etc., the NSDAP/AO also publishes NS magazines – in over ten languages, the organisation claims – (see <http://www.Nazi-lauck-nsdapao.com>; 5 May 2009).

4 „The Marxistische Studentenbund Spartakus (MSB) [„Marxist Student Association”] has its roots in the student movement of the 1960s. At the time, a Marxist core group formed within the Sozialistischen Deutschen Studentenbundes (SDS) [„German Socialist Student Association”] which split from anti-authoritarian stream within the SDS in 1969. On 12 January 1969, members of SDS minority factions in all parts of the Federal Republic, but predominantly in North Rhine-Westphalia, and especially at the universities of Cologne and Bonn, established the Association of Marxist Students - Spartakus (AMS) in Westhofen. [...] A rather loose grouping of the AMS initially, the MSB was established as a nationwide organisation on 22 May 1971. The MSB was closely associated with the DKP and over the years became a dominant force in local student associations and their umbrella organisation VDS – not least thanks to its solid action alliance with the Sozialistischen Hochschulbund (SHB) [Socialist Association of Tertiary Institutions]. However, since the end of the 1970s, the MSB and SHB have increasingly been losing votes to *Juso* [young socialist] university groups close to the SPD and to green-alternative grassroots groups” (source: http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marxistischer_Studentenbund_Spartakus, dated 17 March 2010).

5 The FAU is an anarcho-syndicalist union federation consisting of local syndicates and groups (see Moreau/Lang 1996, 314).

“Fatah” ⁷	1
“prohibited party” (no information)	1

Occupation of the father

Right-wing

Tradesman	13
Unskilled labourer	1
Labourer	2
Construction manager	1
Civil servant	
- professional soldier	1
- Railways	1
- Teacher	1
Self-employed	
- floor layer	1
- Architect	1
No information	2

Left-wing

Tradesman	1
Construction engineer	1
Long-distance truck driver	1
Employee	1

6 “The association Al-Aqsa e.V was established in 1991. According to its mission statement, the organisation gave financial support to social welfare projects in Palestine (hospitals, educational facilities, distribution of food to people in need) as well as to relatives of martyrs, i.e., including suicide attackers. On 5 August 2002, the German Federal Ministry of the Interior outlawed the association on the basis of the new Association Act, which made it possible to declare as illegal any association supporting violent or terrorist associations, including those abroad. In addition, the German Federal Ministry of the Interior also made reference to the UN Resolution 1373, dated 28 Sept. 2001, which obliges member states to prevent the direct or indirect support of terrorist organisations. The Al-Aqsa association was accused of supporting terrorist organisations (specifically, the Hamas movement in Palestine, which is responsible for numerous attacks in Israel and in Palestine). It was claimed that donations collected in Germany were forwarded to social welfare facilities that were considered to be associated with the terrorist Hamas movement. In addition, the violent actions of Hamas were supported indirectly since family members need not be concerned about their future welfare if a member of the family could no longer provide for the family as a result of a suicide attack” (source: Religion-Online.info, dated 11 Jan. 2010).

7 “The Fatah organisation (...) is a political party in the Palestinian Autonomous Territories. According to its constitution from 1964, the organisation’s goals are the complete liberation of Palestine, the establishment of an independent democratic state with full sovereignty over the Palestinian territories and with Jerusalem as its capital, and the eradication of the economic, political, military and cultural basis for the existence of Zionism. The same constitution describes the Israeli presence in the Palestine as a Zionist invasion with a colonial expansionary base. In the past, Fatah also used terrorist means to achieve these goals. Within the framework of the Oslo Peace Process, Fatah under its chairman Yasser Arafat recognised Israel’s right to exist in 1993 and pledged to support the peace process and renounced terrorism as a political tool” (Source: “Fatah” on Wikipedia, dated 11 Jan. 2010).

Businessman and naturopath	1
Civil servant	
- Teacher	2
Self-employed	1
No information	1

Islamist

Tradesman	2
Unskilled labourer	1
Civil servant	1
Self-employed	
- Businessman	2

Occupation of the mother

Right-wing

Housewife	5
Tradeswoman	
- Seamstress	1
- Baker	1
- Self-employed hairdresser	1
Social sector	
- Geriatric nurse	2
- Nurse	2
Businesswoman	1
Sales assistant	2
Gastronomy	3
No vocational qualification (cleaner)	2
No information	4

Left-wing

Housewife	3
Tradeswoman	1
- bookbinder	
Secretary	1

Social sector	
- educator	1
Civil servant	
- teacher	2
No information	1

Islamist	
Housewife	4
Labourer/cleaner	1
No information	1

<i>Starting points/Developmental route in the process of radicalisation</i>	
Right-wing	
Through family	5
- Uncle in hooligan movement	1
- Sister in skinhead movement	1
- two older brothers are Neo-Nazis	1
- other	2
Through girlfriend	1
Through contacts at school	5
Through an individual	2
Through a group	10
- in connection with right-wing music	5
- casual acquaintances and music, techno scene and drug taking	1
- through other leisure activities (football, pub)	2
Unclear (at an early stage)	1

Left-wing	
Through family	5
Through contacts at school	2
Through group (other leisure activities)	1
Unclear (at an early stage)	1

Islamist	
Through contacts at school	1
Visits to the mosque (Milli Görüş)	1
Visits to mosques and associations	1
Trigger Palestine conflict	1
Experiences of war in Palestine	1
Online contacts to Islamist scene (previously left-wing scene)	1

Religion	Right-wing	Left-wing	Islamist
Denomination			
Roman Catholic	10	2	0
Protestant	6	1	0
Muslim	0	1	6
Non-denominational	2	2	0
No information	6	3	0
Devout			
Yes	2	1	6
No	12	4	0
No information	10	4	0

Vocational training	Right-wing	Left-wing	Islamist
Trade	5	0	0
Social sector	1	0	1
Commercial	0	1	2
In training	1	1	0
No training as yet	0	0	0
Training discontinued	6	3	0
Training incomplete, no qualification	6	0	0
Training in correctional facility (ongoing)	3	0	0
Training in correctional facility not completed	1	0	0

Completed training in correctional facility	1	0	0
Course of study not yet completed	0	1	2
Course of study completed	0	1	0
Course of study discontinued	0	2	1

Experienced intra-family violence	Prisoner right-wing	Prisoner left-wing	Prisoner Islamist	Unreported left-wing	Unreported Islamist
Aggravated violence (may involve risk of or actual permanent injury)	8	2	0	0	0
Extent unclear	8	2	0	2	0
No experience	3	0	0	1	0
No information	5	1	1	1	5

Exit (Working paper)

Interview No.	Time of exit	Trigger event/situation	Sequence of exit process	Brief summary
Ri01	while in custody	death of the sister	Reflection and break with ideology	traumatic event within the family leads to a change of heart
Ri02	during the trial	confrontation with victim during the trial	<p><i>“It was just some group, right-wing, but not something special, like for instance organised, or with contacts elsewhere or anything – just a group of like-minded people.”</i></p> <p>The interviewee (essentially of the right-wing persuasion) thinks that he <i>“slipped into something”</i> that he now finds repulsive (not least after having looked more closely at history (fascism, 2nd World War). The rejection started while still in his right-wing period.</p>	Being confronted with the victims during the trial led to a change in thinking while in custody.
Ri03				never felt part of the scene at any time
Ri04				never felt part of the scene at any time
Ri05	while in custody	confrontation and identification with foreigners	learning process	positive experiences with foreign nationals while in custody
Ri06	while in custody	while in the correctional facility, takes responsibility for his actions (participation in anti-aggression training and exit programme for right-wing extremists)	<p>following several custodial sentences, he returns to his former “apolitical” life;</p> <p>problems with political parties (NPD, DVU) and individuals; thinks that he encountered the wrong people; new relationship offers a chance for</p>	disappointed with individuals and the political party (NPD) as a result of paradoxical statements; new social environment and personal resources

Interview No.	Time of exit	Trigger event/situation	Sequence of exit process	Brief summary
			reorientation	
Ri07	while in custody	critical analysis of the meaning of the ideology while in the correctional facility	“... <i>still on a right-wing course today, and I won't let anyone interfere too much with that.</i> ” plans to be somewhat more reticent in future.	Remains part of the scene; intends not to inflict any more self-harm (by committing crimes) in future
Ri08	process of distancing himself already in the lead-up to incarceration	conflicts (unclear which) with members of the scene: “... <i>they are all set against me.</i> ”	Distance increases while in custody: realises that solidarity within the scene is illusory when no-one contacts him	disappointment at the personal level leads to distancing
Ri09		Change of domicile and different environment (gabber scene)		alternative to the right-wing scene
Ri10			“... <i>I would definitely not describe myself as extreme, I mean, I do have a nationalist attitude.</i> ”	resistant to therapy and sanctions
Ri11				still part of the scene socially; no interest in the ideology
Ri12		“ <i>Political education in the correctional facility</i> ”; “ <i>I have now met people here, they are 37 and have spent 15 years inside. That's a damn long time. I don't need that, no way.</i> ”	distance to the (hard-core) scene: politics did not play a major role until he was arrested when he was 17 years old. Once in the correctional facility, the interviewee looked more closely at the issues (incl. views on foreigners), also is in contact with other right-wing detainees, (“ <i>Also people that have been here a bit longer, Solinger arsonists, he was there.</i> ”) and feels	revises his stance (distance to the hard-core scene) within the correctional facility, but essentially no exit [from the scene]

Interview No.	Time of exit	Trigger event/situation	Sequence of exit process	Brief summary
			validated in his right-wing, nationalist thinking and strengthened in this attitude.	
Ri13		non-acceptance of his drug-taking within the NPD/alternative offer (contact to the gabber scene)	Smooth transition from the right-wing scene into the gabber scene; the current view about the right-wing scene: <i>“I mean, looking back, they’re all arseholes. I don’t have contact with a single one of them anymore, there is really only my family, and the mother of my [...] and an ex-girlfriend of mine.”</i>	The scene’s rejection of his drug-taking leads to his defection to the gabber scene
Ri14			cannot identify with the skinhead friends of the brother and does not feel at ease among them; is subjected to criticism for taking drugs	contact to the scene through family (brother, father); never really active within the scene himself, allows himself to be used (distributing flyers given to him by the father); distances himself from the skinheads; see himself as a “Hip Hopper” and as a victim of the left as a result of the political attitude of his family
Ri15	while in custody		refuses offer of assistance with exit → sentence suspended on parole: insists on being incarcerated, wants to learn from mistakes → <i>“screwed up”</i> again → first period of detention → free on parole → parole revoked <i>“everything is going</i>	disappointed by the scene and distance to skinheads

Interview No.	Time of exit	Trigger event/situation	Sequence of exit process	Brief summary
			<i>off the rails again</i> → second period of detention “ <i>I want to make a life for myself</i> ” – wants to be free to have his own opinions, but does not want to have anything to do with the skinheads anymore.	
Ri16				no distancing – remains part of the scene
Ri17	while in custody	confrontation and identification with foreigners	attitude towards foreigners (sole social support system in the correctional facility) changes because his right-wing friends want nothing to do with him anymore and the girlfriend also broke off contact. Foreigners accept him the way he is; removes all utensils related to right-wing matters from his cell and hands his sound storage media to prison guards; plans to move away from X., “ <i>where everything started</i> ” after his period of detention.	“Being left high and dry” by the right-wing friends and experiences with foreigners inside the correctional facility lead to a different way of thinking
Ri18		Resigns from party due to feeling patronised		rather moderate attitude overall
Ri19	in the aftermath of the court case, while in custody	confrontation with photographs of victims and under threat of preventive detention	thinking about his own crime (aggravated assault causing bodily harm); resulting from that: the desire to get a grip on his own behaviour	confrontation with the consequences of his own behaviour leads to a change in thinking
Ri20				still active with the Hammerskins; distances himself from the

Interview No.	Time of exit	Trigger event/situation	Sequence of exit process	Brief summary
				"shaven-headed thugs" because "they are stupid"
Ri21	while in custody	Being charged, convicted and condition imposed: removal of tattoos, relocation from the "right-wing" to a more "left-wing" suburb; confrontation and identification with foreigners	learns to appreciate foreigners while in custody	Experiences inside the correctional facility: learns to appreciate and value foreigners
Ri22	while in custody	birth of the daughter and illness (cancer and hepatitis "from a whore") are pivotal factors in the decision to work thought the exit programme; at the same time, he feels he has run out of options in his life and has "nothing to lose".		still in the process of exiting
Ri23	while in custody		"I have worked through stuff, issues that still make me shake my head [in disbelief] in retrospect."	studying history, discovering contradictions
Ri24	while serving the current, second custodial sentence			wants to be free to have his own views, but does not want to have anything more to do with the skinheads
Li01	arrangement with accomplice to convert/plead guilty in court in the event of incarceration	arrest and incarceration	conversion to Islam (already in the lead-up to the incarceration increasing focus on Islamist issues); interacting socially with Muslim fellow prisoners	Converting to Islam leads to involvement with alternative (Muslim) social environment while in custody; "...I consider my own attacks to be mistakes, and to that extent, also those of others."

Interview No.	Time of exit	Trigger event/situation	Sequence of exit process	Brief summary
Li02	during the trial and while in custody	restriction of own drug use, because <i>“did not even realise what I have been getting myself into, otherwise I would have stopped much sooner.”</i>	distancing from <i>“negative behaviour”</i> of people within the scene	cautious criticism of own behaviour; shows insight
Li03		considers the demeanour of his own clique as too extreme		currently: questioning his own clique
Li04				currently: shows insight
Li05		lack of perspective and fear of the future		unclear
Lu01				highly pragmatic in conceptualising his own political activities; educational career
Lu02			moves through all left-wing theories and scenes	no exit from left-wing scene, still a “searcher”
Lu03		greater appreciation of his professional activity	in the end, decides in favour of his occupation, rather than political activity	pragmatic exit in favour of his occupation
Lu04				<i>“I keep telling myself that I am a social democrat, at the same time as I want to distance myself from the SPD.”</i>
Iu01		relocation to another city and commencement of tertiary study	perceives the values imparted by Milli Görüs is incompatible with everyday living (while studying)	by moving in new social environments, the interviewee is distancing himself from the ideology
Iu02		comes to perceive the advocacy of violence within the Al Aqsa association as too extreme		distances himself from violence and extremist friends from the past (Al-Aqsa); resigns from Al-Aqsa association
Iu03				continued commitment to Islamist cause; jihadist group

Interview No.	Time of exit	Trigger event/situation	Sequence of exit process	Brief summary
Iu04				continued commitment to Islamist cause; jihadist group
Iu05				continued commitment to Islamist cause; jihadist group
Ii01				unclear; no clear distancing

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Dipl.-Päd. Saskia Lützing (Educational Scientist)

Scientific Assistant at the *Terrorism/Extremism Research Unit* at the Federal Criminal Police Office.
Focal points of research: Qualitative social research, biography research, terrorism/extremism, radicalisation research.

Contact:

Bundeskriminalamt
Forschungsstelle Terrorismus/Extremismus (KI11)
D-65173 Wiesbaden
Germany
Saskia.Luetzinger@bka.bund.de
Ki11@bka.bund.de

Dr. Thomas Schweer (PhD)

Head of the Project Group on *Deviant Behaviour and Social Control* at the organisation *Rhein-Ruhr-Institut für Sozialforschung und Politikberatung e. V.*

Focal points of research: Empirical police research, violence research, organised crime, extremism/terrorism, narcotic crimes.

Contact:

Rhein Ruhr Institut für Sozialforschung und Politikberatung e. V.
Heinrich-Lersch-Str. 15
D-47057 Duisburg
Germany
Thomas.Schweer@uni-duisburg-essen.de
thomas.schweer@uni-duisburg-essen.de