



## CHAPTER 2

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# Situating Trajectories of 'Extreme-Right' (Non)Radicalisation

## *The Role of the Radical Milieu*

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### Introduction

In light of the critical approach to the concept of radicalisation outlined in the Introduction to this volume, in this chapter we employ the notion of trajectories through 'extreme-right' milieus to explore the complexity, diversity and evolving nature of young people's engagement with radical(ising) forces, messages and agents. The milieu approach firmly roots individual trajectories in their social context by envisaging milieus (and the social networks and communication channels they host) as 'micromobilization-settings' (Malthaner 2017a: 376). This is not to suggest that wider structural factors are not important; the role of grievances that arise from social structural factors, and are instrumentalised by extremist movements and influencers, are central to shaping young people's ideas and actions. However, we find no direct and consistent relationship between structural condition and violent extremism response (see Franc, Poli and Pavlović, this volume) but a dynamic process in which a range of individual, movement and institutional interactions are critical in shaping outcomes. In this sense, 'structure becomes a structure of relations' (Alimi, Bosi and Demetriou 2012: 8). Thus, in line with recent 'ecological' approaches (see Dawson 2017: 3; Bouhana 2019), we understand turns to extremism as the result of the intersection of people and context whose study, therefore, must integrate the role of social structural factors, the search for ontological security or 'significance' that

such conditions evoke and the role of extremist narratives to which people are exposed (Dawson 2017: 3).

While recognising the importance of social and spatial environments of radical milieus in themselves (Malthaner and Waldmann 2014; Malthaner 2017a: 389), our primary concern is with *individual trajectories* through those milieus. Our focus on young people means we are not able to capture the whole 'career' (see Fillieule 2010: 11) of activists in radical milieus, but through ethnographic research that follows individuals moving in radical(ising) milieus over an extended period of time, we can provide insight, in particular, into two factors shaping those trajectories. This relates, first, to the reflexive capacity and agency of young people in shaping their own pathways. This agency is observable in how they understand the world around them, how they interpret their experiences in it, the decisions they take about becoming active in voicing or acting upon grievances they hold and their choices at critical moments about the directions their pathways take. Secondly, the approach taken captures how participation in radical milieus sits within the broader, largely 'normal', lives of young research participants who simultaneously engage in multiple groups, which may intersect through 'communication interlocks' (Fine and Kleinman 1979: 10) or which may collide, leading to conflict with, or exclusion from, former circles or relationships. These factors – agency (often expressed as the will to 'do something') and social connectedness – we argue, are crucial factors in bringing young people into radical milieus but also in shaping their trajectory through them towards outcomes of partial, stalled or non-radicalisation.

### **Context and Agency in (Non)Radicalisation Trajectories: Theoretical Starting Points**

The theoretical framework employed to illuminate the findings from this empirical study starts from the premise that radicalisation is a process that is non-linear, complex and situational. It builds on four main interventions in the literature to date: the turn to the study of 'routes' (trajectories) rather than 'roots' of radicalisation; the importance of situating those trajectories in context (milieus) and the interactions that take place therein; the recognition that outcomes of these journeys can be non-radicalisation as well as radicalisation; and the suggestion that these outcomes are shaped by the choices young people make (agency) and carry a strongly affective dimension.

In efforts to understand the relative importance of, and relationship between, societal, group and individual drivers of extremism, John Hor-

gan's (2008) call to move away from a search for 'profiles' of terrorists (focusing on 'root' causes) to pathways (or 'routes') to violent extremism has been pivotal. It allows a switch of focus to the study of the process of radicalisation itself (the 'how?'), to individual journeys (rather than patterns in socio-demographic or psychological variables shared by individuals) and to the meaning, for the individual, of engagement with that process (ibid.: 92). Notwithstanding the significance of Horgan's intervention, the retention of focus on case histories of terrorists has led to the characterisation of radicalisation pathways as the progression of individuals through 'incrementally experienced stages' (ibid.). While Horgan sees disengagement also as a potential phase in this pathway, his model does not capture the more fluid and multi-directional movements to and from milieus identified in our studies where individuals participate in radical milieus but, in most cases, have not crossed the threshold into violent extremism. Nor does it capture the potential for others, including organisations and movements, within that milieu to act not only to socialise individuals towards violent extremism, but also constrain their radicalisation or encourage a movement away from extremism.

While following Horgan's call to focus on pathways not profiles, therefore, this study traces trajectories not to violent extremism but *through radical(ising) milieus*. Here we draw in particular on the work of Malthaner (2017a, 2017b) and Malthaner and Waldmann (2014) in understanding a radical milieu as an evolving relational and emotional field of activity through which collective identities and solidarities are constructed (Malthaner and Waldmann 2014: 983). These radical milieus, and the networks that constitute them, link individual trajectories to social context by acting as 'micromobilization-settings' (Malthaner 2017a: 376). They can be religious, ethnic or political (or a combination of these) and form the supportive and sustaining social 'environments' in which 'grievance' narratives and 'stigmatised' knowledge are disseminated and from within which those engaged in violent activity can gain affirmation for their actions (Malthaner 2017a: 389).

However, radical milieus are not simply 'hotbeds' of radicalisation but social environments in which individuals can also criticise, challenge or confront the messages encountered there (Malthaner and Waldmann 2014: 994). This understanding of the milieu, as not only inciting and escalating violence but potentially inhibiting and constraining it, underpins the design of the study we draw on here, which is interested in individuals' trajectories through milieus, their encounters with radical(ising) forces, agents and messages and how they respond to them. This means that we anticipate, and seek to understand, a range of outcomes of these journeys. Understanding why individuals do not become involved in po-

litical violence is reflected in the work of Cragin (2014), who sets out a conceptual model of non-radicalisation and tests it through an empirical study (on the West Bank of Palestine) designed to explain why some people remain non-radicalised in such violence-laden contexts (Cragin et al. 2015). More recently, Schuurman (2020: 16) has pointed also to the need to investigate what might explain non-involvement in terrorist violence by disaggregating multiple possible outcomes of radicalisation rather than drawing conclusions about what propels people towards terrorism by studying the pathways of only those who end up committing terrorist acts. Cragin (2014: 342) identifies various factors whose presence or absence may encourage or discourage individuals from joining violent extremist causes and conceptualises non-radicalisation as ‘resistance to violent extremism’. In contrast, our study is concerned with the process of encounter and response of young people to radical(ising) forces, agents and messages in the milieus in which they engage and aims to capture some of the complexity of (non)radicalisation trajectories and work towards conceptualising the role of situation, interaction, affect and agency in shaping those pathways.

Recent developments in situational and interactional approaches to understanding radicalisation have brought significant new insight to the field and are explored in more detail in the chapters by Pilkington and Kerst in this volume. In this chapter, we use the narratives of actors in nine radical milieus, rather, to provide an overview of what drives trajectories towards extremism, drawing attention to the importance of the affective dimension of ostensibly ideological drivers (grievances) towards extremism. We also seek to redress the tendency in the study of ‘extreme-right’ activism and radicalisation literature to adopt a largely instrumental view of agency, which envisages radicalisation as something ‘done to’ an individual (Pilkington 2016: 3, 8; McDonald 2018: 10).<sup>1</sup> In so doing, we recognise the risk of over-privileging the actor’s interpretation of their own pathway, by giving too much weight, for example, to a life-changing moment, which an individual may deploy to narrate their journey but may be no more significant than structural factors that often go unarticulated. We are also cautious about taking at face value assertions of actors that ‘I’ve always made my own choices’ (Sieckelinck et al. 2019: 669). Rather, we use an ethnographic method to approach radicalisation as an embodied communicative practice (McDonald 2018: 189–90) that takes different forms, produces different kinds of affect and does not exist discretely in ideologically, or communicatively, exclusive groups but is diffused through ‘communication interlocks’ (Fine and Kleinman 1979: 10). By this we mean that ostensibly discrete milieus – of the ‘radicalised’ and ‘non-radicalised’ – may be connected through shared commu-

nificative practices (xenophobic and racist talk, 'standing up for oneself' through fighting and violence), developed while growing up in the same neighbourhood, attending the same schools or sharing social spaces (Pilkington 2014: 24–26), and are not exclusive or exclusively ideological. Individuals often participate in several groups simultaneously and maintain acquaintance relationships outside their main communication group requiring conformity to different norms in different situations (Fillieule 2010: 4). This would lead us to expect not only trajectories of both radicalisation and partial, stalled and non-radicalisation to co-exist within any radical milieu but also for individual pathways to combine radical and non-radical elements.

## Method and Milieus

In this chapter, we draw on the synthesis of research findings from the study of 'extreme-right' milieus in nine countries – France, Germany, Greece, Malta, Poland, Norway, Russia, the Netherlands and the UK.

### *Introducing the Milieus*

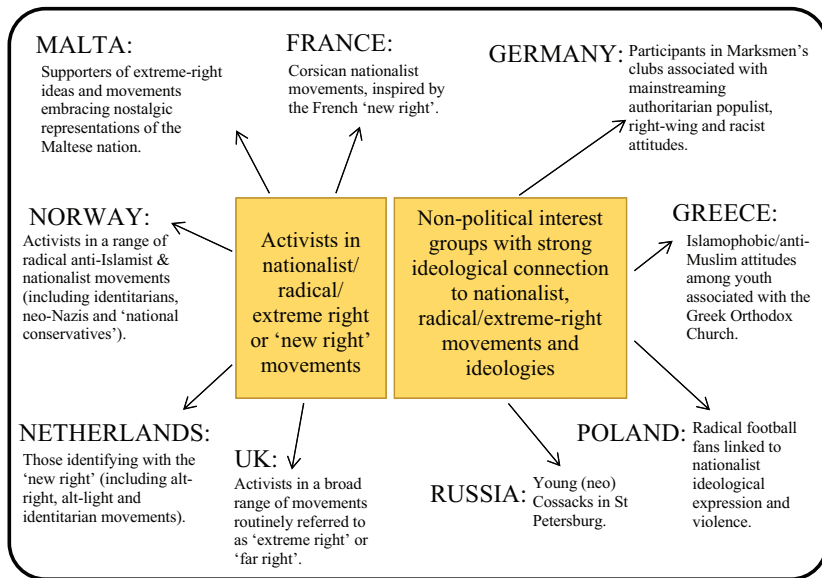
Our conceptual understanding of 'milieu' was outlined in the previous section and was operationalised for the selection of cases by understanding it as the people, the physical and the social conditions and events and networks and communications in which someone acts or lives and which shape that person's subjectivity, choices and trajectory through life. An eligible milieu was thus not necessarily territorially fixed or even physically manifest; it was anticipated that milieus would likely have both online and offline forms. However, to constitute a milieu, there should be an evident connection (human, material, communicative, ideological) between individuals interviewed and observations conducted. An appropriate milieu for selection should also be a space of encounter with radical or extreme messages (via the presence in the milieu of recruiters, high receptivity to radical messages and so on) and these should be of an 'extreme-right' or 'anti-Islamist' character.

What is meant by these terms requires some contextualisation in the academic literature on what constitutes 'right-wing extremism'. In a review of the literature, Mudde (2000: 11) identifies twenty-six different definitions of the phenomenon including fifty-eight characteristics, of which only five were mentioned by at least half the authors. Among attempts to bring taxonomic clarification and systematisation to the field, Mudde (2007: 25) distinguishes between 'populist radical right' parties

and movements that are nominally democratic (although oppose some fundamental values of liberal democracy) whilst upholding a core ideology combining nativism, authoritarianism and populism and movements of the 'extreme right', which are inherently anti-democratic (ibid.: 31). Carter's (2018) 'minimal' definition of 'right-wing extremism' also positions it as an ideology that encompasses authoritarianism, anti-democracy and exclusionary and/or holistic nationalism. Bjørge and Ravndal (2019: 3) maintain a distinction between 'radical' and 'extreme' right actors whilst seeing both the radical right and the extreme right as sub-sets of the broader 'far right'. They distinguish between three types of 'nationalism' – cultural (primarily anti-Muslim and concerned with so-called Islamisation of western societies), ethnic (often expressing itself through anti-immigration attitudes and critiques of multiculturalism) and racial (expressed through white supremacism, antisemitism and 'white genocide') – and view radical right movements as embracing cultural and ethnic nationalism while extreme-right movements deploy ideologies of racial and ethnic nationalism (ibid.). Thus, it seems there is agreement within academic discourse that both right-wing radicals and right-wing extremists are characterised by ideologies incorporating some form of exclusionary nationalism and intolerance (especially, although not exclusively, in relation to ethnicity, race and religion), but that right-wing extremism differs from right-wing radicalism in its opposition to democracy and legitimisation of violence as well as a higher degree of cognitive 'closedness' demonstrated in characteristics such as in-group preference, dogmatism and intolerance of ambiguity (on the latter, see Schmid 2013: 9–10).

Based on these categorisations, the milieus studied in the DARE project generally fall within the 'radical'- as opposed to the 'extreme'-right camp due to the support for democratic governance among the majority of those participating in the study. However, mapping these broad characteristics onto the current ideological spectrum and organisational actors across Europe is not straightforward. Movements, still more the looser milieus that are the object of the current study, are characterised by significant internal differentiation; individuals may belong to a range of movements (or none) and subscribe to a wide range of views, often consciously assembling their own distinct way of seeing the world, critical of established positions both inside and outside the milieu. Moreover, these etic descriptors are rarely used by actors themselves, more often being consciously rejected.

At the stage of selection of milieus for study, therefore, explicit differentiation between 'radical' and 'extreme' right was not deployed. Rather, the umbrella term 'extreme right' was understood broadly as a political ideology characterised by opposition to democracy, racial, ethnic or cul-



**Figure 2.1.** Overview of 'extreme-right' milieus studied. Created by Hilary Pilkington.

tural racism and/or antisemitism while 'anti-Islamism' was understood as active opposition to what its proponents refer to as 'radical Islam' or the 'Islamification' of western societies but that often includes a general antipathy towards Islam or all Muslims and is thus often characterised by Islamophobia or cultural racism. Anticipating the high degree of dissonance between how movements and ideologies are described exogenously and endogenously, it was not a requirement that participants in selected milieus thought of the milieu as 'extreme-right' or Islamophobic; if the milieu, movements or participants in them were considered as such in public discourse, then it was considered a potential site of study.

While no formal criterion for 'clustering' of cases was employed, a constant process of discussion of cases being considered for selection ensured that all cases had some point of connection with other cases. Two clusters of cases emerged: those where the milieu consists of activists in nationalist, radical or extreme-right or 'new right' movements (France, Malta, Norway, Netherlands, UK); and those where the milieu is focused around a non-political interest (e.g. football, shooting or religion) but there are strong ideological connections between this milieu and nationalist, radical or extreme-right movements and ideologies (Germany, Greece, Poland, Russia) (see Figure 2.1).

Post-hoc analysis of views and behaviours confirmed the anticipated heterogeneity within and across milieus. Some milieus, for example, include actors who hold strong antisemitic views as well as those with pro-Israeli views, while others include those with pro-authoritarian or anti-democratic views and political strategies alongside those who consistently oppose violence or other non-democratic forms of achieving one's aims. This diversity is explored within each milieu in the country-level reports (see Appendix for details). Below, we identify five ideological frameworks referenced across the milieus and in accordance with which, or against which, individuals articulate their personal positions.

The first is associated with classic national socialist, neo-Nazi or fascist organisations represented in our milieus by the Nordic Resistance Movement in Norway, National Action in the UK, Golden Dawn in Greece, the National-Radical Camp (Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny or ONR) in Poland and Imperium Europa in Malta. Such movements are the most likely to espouse antisemitism. While such groups and ideas are encountered and referenced frequently across the milieus studied, most research participants in our study rejected their ideologies. Second, movements that uphold racist or white supremacist ideologies are also referenced and mainly rejected by milieu actors participating in this study. However, this is true where racism is understood as biological racism (believing someone is inferior because of their 'race'); anti-migrant and anti-Muslim sentiments are often excluded from the category of 'racist' by research participants and understood and justified on other grounds (such as cultural 'incompatibility'). Individuals within milieus may also see 'race' as a 'natural' differentiating factor and express the belief that people prefer to live with others who are racially similar rather than different to them. The most frequent reference to 'race' relates to the belief that white people are subject to racism (being discriminated against because they are white) or made to feel guilty for being so. The third type of ideological framework is identitarianism, also referred to as ethnopluralism. This ideological framework also underpins, or grew out of, what is often simply called the 'new right' (in France or the Netherlands) and underpins (although often unconsciously) more routine criticisms of globalisation or multiculturalism. Identitarian ideology is rooted in the ideas of French new right thinkers such as Alain de Benoist, which support distinct and strong identities in the face of what is seen as 'the unprecedented menace of homogenisation' wrongly imposed by the West through religious crusades, colonialism, economic and social development models and moral principles rooted in human rights (de Benoist and Champetier 2012: 28–32). To counterpose multiculturalism, European new right theory proposes ethnopluralism, which promotes the recognition of the



rights and equality of all ethnic groups but also their difference and thus the desirability of their separate territorial existence. Where identitarianism itself is not supported – because it is not known or because it is viewed as too extreme – milieu actors often nevertheless reject multiculturalism – as an ideology ‘forced on’ people by elites who benefit from the globalising project – and support monocultures. These views are thus often linked to the rejection of liberal hegemonic elites seen to be imposing multiculturalism for their own ideological reasons and facilitating the ‘Great Replacement’ of the native, white European population with non-European immigrant populations. Participants in a number of milieus were members of, or had contacts with, the Generation Identity movement (see Zúquete 2018), which is a key proponent of this ideology. Although sharing much in common with identitarianism, alt-right – referring to individuals, platforms and alternative media promoting a wide range of white nationalist views but most closely associated with Richard Spencer’s Alternative Right online blog and a number of widely shared memes such as Pepe the frog – is considered here as a fourth ideological framework. Its central tenet is that ‘white identity’ is threatened by multiculturalism and left-wing political correctness, egalitarianism and universalism. In some of the countries studied here, such as the Netherlands, there is a strong sense of a national alt-right movement distinct from (if largely imitating) American alt-right discourse. However, in other countries, alt-right is used largely to refer to American milieus and influencers. While ‘white’ identity is not referenced so explicitly in European identitarianism as in alt-right discourse, ‘European identity’ is assumed to be white European identity. Finally, milieu members mobilise a range of anti-Muslim, anti-Islam and anti-migrant ideological frameworks, which are mostly articulated as ‘defensive’, that is, designed to protect ‘own’ (European or national) culture from the threat of Islamic culture or Muslim immigrants. In some milieus studied here (e.g. the Greek, Russian and Polish milieus), Christianity or Christian identity of the country or region is a key reference point because the milieu is closely aligned with religious institutions or feels it is defending a ‘national’ faith (Catholicism in Poland and Malta, Orthodoxy in Greece and Russia). However, in other cases, Christianity is used more loosely as a signifier of European identity/civilisation in relation to ‘Eastern’ or ‘Muslim’ others. In other milieus (e.g. Germany, the Netherlands, the UK, France and Norway), hostility towards Islam is mainly framed as rejection of a backward, misogynistic and expansionist force that threatens European or national culture. Sometimes conspiracies of an Islamic takeover facilitated by political leaders (along the lines of the Great Replacement) are expounded. Sometimes anti-immigration and anti-Muslim views are intertwined, either because

Muslims are seen as making up most incoming refugees or migrants or because of the association of Muslim incomers with terrorism. In other cases, an end to all immigration is called for on grounds that the flows are too large to allow 'integration' and/or based on grievances over the perceived privileged treatment afforded to those arriving in the country over existing inhabitants.

By focusing the study broadly, on milieus in which young people encountered 'extreme-right' or 'anti-Islam(ist)' messages rather than individuals convicted of terrorism or hate-crime offences, we were able to select milieus with high relevance to the national or regional context and to maximise the potential for ethnographic access. However, this decision had consequences for both generalisation within the country and comparison across cases. Selected milieus were internally heterogeneous and not necessarily 'typical' of the wider national scene, especially in countries with large populations (such as the Russian Federation) or with wide-ranging and regionally differentiated extreme-right scenes (such as Germany and France). While national representativeness of the milieu studied was not an objective of the study – only national relevance – we did seek to study milieus that were sufficiently similar to one another to allow the transnational analysis of cases. The choice of a synthesis, rather than comparative, method for transnational analysis was made also in expectation that there would be significant variation between milieus and to allow differences to be accounted for, rather than excluded.

Full details of each case, including an overview of the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents and discussion of the research process (access, ethical issues, researcher positionality) can be found in the individual case study reports (see Appendix for details), while an overview of the differences between milieus with regard to degree of 'radicalism' (cognitive and behavioural) can be found in Pilkington and Vestel 2021: 17–19.

### ***Data and Data Analysis***

The data used for the transnational synthesis emanate from the nine case studies conducted by the national teams of DARE project researchers and include a total of 188 interviews with 184 research participants. The research participants were active members of the milieus selected and are referred to using pseudonyms or respondent number<sup>2</sup> and country code (see Table 2.1).

Most research participants were aged between eighteen and thirty years, although a small number of interviews were conducted with important milieu members outside this age range.<sup>3</sup> Interviews with a range of community members and professionals engaged in countering extremism

**Table 2.1.** Data set on 'extreme-right' milieus by case study.

	Country code	No. of interviewees	Audio/video* interviews	Field diary entries	Other materials
France	FR	17	17	32	Several hundred Facebook posts
Germany	DE	23	23	15	Approx. 50 documents (flyers, leaflets, press statements, advertisements), 230 still images (photos) and 77 short videos from fieldwork
Greece	GR	21	17	15	24 photos
Malta	MT	15	15	6	YouTube videos and forums linked to extreme-right figures. Anti-immigrant Facebook group pages
Netherlands	NL	20	24	9	Text documents
Norway	NO	13	23	4	A large number of YouTube videos created by or related to milieu actors
Poland	PL	26	17	15	Printed newsletters, photos and (limited edition) books for fans
Russia	RU	22	22	2	57 photos and 8 videos shot during fieldwork
UK	UK	21	30	61	Approx. 300 photos and short videos from fieldwork, 9 documents (flyers, manifestos, leaflets received during fieldwork)
Total		184	188	159	

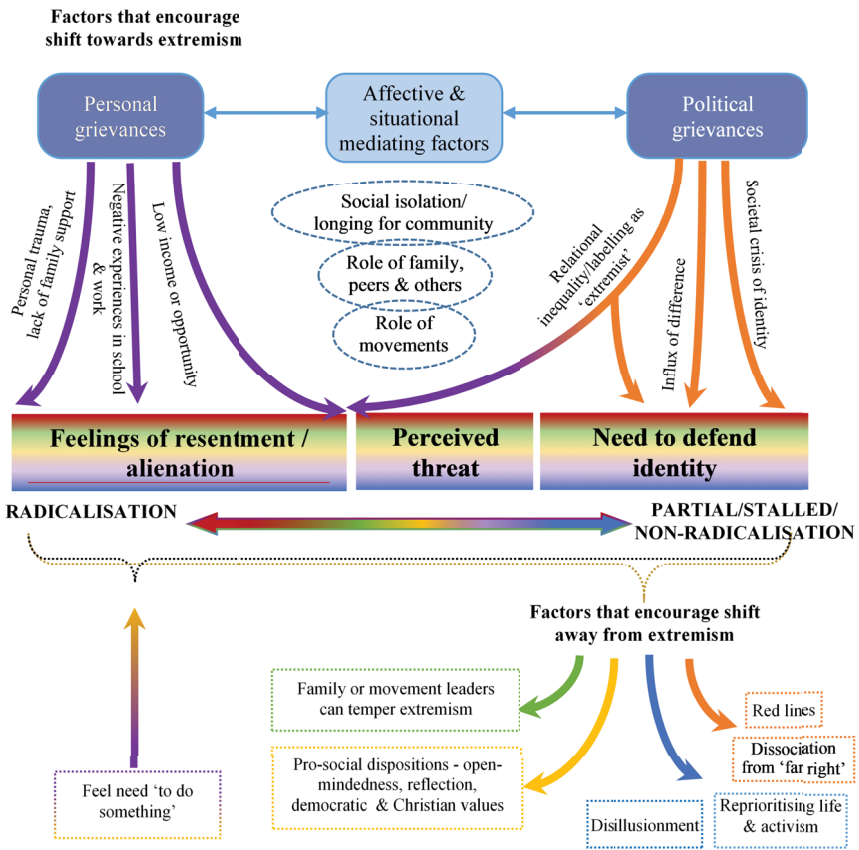
Note: \* Five interviews were video recorded (all in the UK case), all others were audio recorded.

and promoting social cohesion were conducted in most cases also but are not included in the formal data set for analysis. The number of interviewees per case varied from thirteen to twenty-six and the number of interviews conducted ranged from fifteen to thirty. Ethnographic observation was undertaken in all case studies although the number of observations varied depending on the nature of the milieu and access to milieu events.

The data from these nine cases were analysed using an approach that adapts the classic meta-ethnographic synthesis method (see Noblit and Hare 1988; Britten et al. 2002) to allow for the synthesis of transnational qualitative empirical data (rather than published studies) (Pilkington 2018). This method, and the five research questions explored, are outlined in the Introduction to the volume (see also Pilkington and Vestel 2021). Of those, the question addressed in this chapter is: How do milieu actors recount their trajectories towards and away from extremism? As is evident from the framing of this question, we are conscious that the data we capture represent the understandings among research participants of the forces, agents and messages that propel them (and others in their milieu) along trajectories towards, and away from, extremism. In analysing the data, we therefore draw on wider findings from existing literature to critically interpret these narratives but also discern what new insight they bring to our understanding of trajectories of radicalisation, including partial, stalled or non-radicalisation.

## Trajectories Towards and Away from Extremism

The synthesis of findings from the milieus studied illustrates the complex interweaving of grievances and affective and situational factors that shape individual pathways of milieu actors. McCauley and Moskalenko (2008: 417–19) distinguish between *political* and *personal* grievances in radicalisation pathways; in the case of the latter, a personal experience of victimisation moves an individual to radical action, while in the former this is a response to political trends or events. However, in practice the two are deeply intertwined (see Figure 2.2). Political grievances – here represented by three themes from the data, ‘influx of difference’, ‘societal crisis of identity’ and ‘relational inequality’ – motivate actors and frame what they ‘stand against’ and what they seek to change through their action. However, they are not purely ideological but profoundly emotionally inflected and often recounted through personal experiences of feeling angry or humiliated, being treated unfairly or inappropriately (Berger 2018: 127–31) or exposure to societal changes which appear to threaten values, ways of life and the state of ‘what is’.



**Figure 2.2.** Factors encouraging shifts towards and away from extremism. Created by Hilary Pilkington.

Personal grievances – captured in Figure 2.2 as personal trauma, lack of family support, negative experiences in work or school and low income or lack of opportunity – on the other hand, are unlikely to motivate to radical action unless the personal is framed and interpreted as representative of a group grievance (McCauley and Moskalenko 2008: 419). This is in line with Honneth’s (1995: 163–64) argument that collective resistance can emerge only if subjects are able to articulate the feelings of disrespect endured personally within an intersubjective framework of interpretation that captures the experience of an entire group. Thus, while for some research participants, particular events or experiences may radically shift their perspectives or motivate them to action – akin to the tra-

jectories of 'converts' identified by Linden and Klandermans (2007) – for most, external events or personal experiences release a deeper, simmering anger or pre-existing resentment or grievance (Pilkington 2016: 76). Similarly, those who take radical action – such as joining an illegal rally or march – may well be deterred from further action if met with sanctions or repression; those who act out of personal grievance are less likely to view the costs as too high and to continue or even escalate their action (McCauley and Moskalenko 2008: 425).

The process by which personal grievances become political grievances and political grievances take on profoundly personal meaning is shaped by a range of situational or affective factors such as feelings of isolation, dislocation and frustration which, for some, contribute to a sense of collective existential insecurity and the perception of the need for radical action. These are discussed below in relation to three such factors – social isolation (and longing for community), role of movements and role of family, peers and others – in bringing research participants into radical milieus. However, these affective and situational dimensions of participation in radical milieus, it is argued, may also work to constrain engagement; family members, friends and movement leaders or influencers may temper extremism or steer individuals away from more extreme movements.

Alongside these mediating factors, research participants also talk about experiences of life developments which halt their movement or cause them to pull back from radical positions. They recount these shifts as a result of disappointment or disillusionment but also as conscious acts of agency in which they establish their own 'red lines' – thresholds they would not cross – or reprioritise the role of political activism in their lives.

Whilst emphasising the interwoven natures of these three dimensions of young people's (non)radicalisation pathways, below we present the empirical findings of the study in three sections, which consider: salient political grievances; affective and situational factors; and factors encouraging young people away from extremism. The role of personal grievances is discussed in all three sections and highlighted in two vignettes capturing the individual trajectories of Arne and Alice (see Vignette 1 and 2).

### ***Political Grievances: Difference, Identity and Relational Inequality***

The influx of difference – in beliefs, values, attitudes, culture, gender relations and ways of being – which research participants associate with the arrival and presence of immigrants and refugees, and perceive as threatening to existing culture, economies or even core civilisational values of the West, is found across almost all milieus. For respondents

in France, Greece, the Netherlands, Norway and the UK, resentment and alienation is exacerbated by the belief that governments and elites support unrestrained immigration and conceal the benefits they reap from it.

I therefore blame the government and the European Union. That is why many people hate it so much, because they have not intervened all this time and have not said, 'Okay, we are going to stop this immigration flow and we are going to sort our own people first'. ... People here also have rights. People live here and they don't want so many foreigners here. (21, NL)

This fuels a narrative in which 'they' (elites) are viewed as ignoring the experiences and difficulties faced by 'us' (Ulf, NO).

Such resentments have been mobilised by movements and parties across Europe from new mass political parties like the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) in Germany, through pan-European youth movements such as Generation Identity to openly neo-Nazi formations such as Golden Dawn in Greece or the Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM) in Norway. For example, Gunnar (NO), who had stepped back from activism after a neo-Nazi group he had been associated with was disbanded, re-engaged in 2015 when he became aware of Generation Identity and its message that immigration in Europe would lead to so-called cultural replacement and relegation of the native population to minority status. Generation Identity's ethnopluralist claims about the uniqueness and territorial rootedness of cultures (de Benoist and Champetier 2012; Sellner 2018; Camus 2019: 76–78) is reflected in Bobby's (FR) views also: 'We're clearly being replaced, we're disappearing little by little through migration, through interbreeding'. Bobby's aim is to achieve a Corsica, France and Europe 'without Arabs' and 'without Islam' whilst arguing, likewise, that 'the Whites have nothing to do in Africa either ... each population has its own land...'. Others, like Dan (UK), talk about demographic change, including their fear that 'we are becoming a minority in our own country' whilst rejecting theories of the Great Replacement that attribute this to a plan to replace White European populations.

Muslim communities and Islam are singled out by research participants as being particularly hostile and culturally threatening. This is often referred to as a process of the 'Islamisation of Europe' (Mikaël, FR) through the (territorial) imposition of Islam in non-Islamic countries or the (cultural) transfer of values, traditions and practices related to Islam through their increasing accommodation. Respondents point to the rising proportion of the population in cities across Europe who are Muslim, which they understand as constituting a gradual 'colonisation':

We have to understand that a lot of the Muslim population are colonising; they're not integrating with the rest of us ... they are pushing people out of their homes. ... Phoning the police every time they hear music, because it's against their culture ... so the police come and tell them that they're causing offence – they need to turn their music off. ... I believe that that is to try and push that neighbour out of that house, in order to have a Muslim family move in. (Cara, UK)

Islamist-inspired terror attacks also feature in respondents' narratives as a source of grievance inflected with fear. Arina (RU) and Marlene (DE) connect their feelings of being 'terrified' to use the metro or go out at night with the 'flow of people' arriving in their cities and reported terrorist attacks. Billy (UK) believes such fear drives people to seek out anti-Islam(ist) groups, suggesting: 'A lot of people went to Generation [Identity] because of the actual Manchester arena bombings'. For Paul (UK), the example of the 7/7 bombers is indicative of an intrinsic problem with, and the power of, Islam:

The 7/7 bombers were all British-born Muslims who we were told would have integrated. And you're not gonna buy these people off, like they're white people. ... Because they have something deeper, which is what politicians don't understand. The depth of their faith and their belief system is greater, deeper and stronger than young white lads'.

In this way, Islam is exceptionalised, that is, it is seen as not just another element in a twenty-first-century societal mix but uniquely incompatible with other faiths and cultures.

For many milieu actors, the influx of difference is indicative of a deeper societal crisis of identity. Moghaddam and Love (2012: 249) suggest extremism can be understood as a (dysfunctional) defence mechanism adopted 'when the in-group is facing an uncertain future, and there is a real possibility of serious in-group decline and even extinction'. While Moghaddam and Love (*ibid.*) are writing about collective existential uncertainty and Islamic fundamentalism, a similar perception of existential crisis is apparent among the 'extreme-right' milieus studied here. This is encapsulated in Christopher's (FR) stark statement that France as a country and identity 'is dead' but also in Anita's (NO) more nuanced sense that, in a time of flux, people 'have a stronger need to find a way back to our own identity, to who we are, to be able to hold on to something...'. The sense that this identity is slipping away is found also among Dutch, British, French and German respondents as they describe feeling displaced and alienated in city spaces that, to them, no longer resemble their home country:



When you see it, you think, 'Is this really the Netherlands?' For example, [names street], a beautiful street with old houses, but almost every shop is Arabic – kebab shops, shops with Arabic fashion such as headscarves and Arabic texts ... People who just don't speak Dutch. Then I think, 'Where are the Dutch? Where have I ended up?' (14, NL)

Greek and Russian respondents – whose milieus were closely tied to Greek and Russian Orthodox churches respectively – see the underlying societal crisis as having strongly moral and spiritual roots. Alexey (RU) views the world as characterised by 'an ideological, spiritual degeneracy', while Father Gabriel (GR) asserts that Greek society is 'in a state of decay' that can only be addressed by a return to spirituality. Even in less religious milieus, there is a sense that religion provides an important counterforce to 'progressive ideas' by maintaining traditional values and ideas – something 'to hold on to' as Anita (NO) puts it above – as crisis threatens to engulf society.

For some milieu actors, it is this 'uncertain' future – imagined as ending in the 'replacement' or 'extinction' of white Europeans – that leads people to become 'more extreme' (14, NL) and feel the need to physically defend 'their' country or 'their' people. This is expressed most consistently in the UK, Dutch, French, Norwegian, Greek and Russian milieus through a narrative of the imminent threat of destructive civil conflict. For Sauveur (FR), civil conflict is the only way to achieve 'change': 'Until there's a war, a real civil war, until the French move to get them out of the country, things won't change. It will get worse and worse. You think the Arabs should be moved out of the country ... I think the French should take up arms and get them out'. Dan (UK) refers to the possibility of civil war several times, emphasising that some people are actively preparing for it: 'I don't mean like preparing for it like the militias and all that. But they're saying, "Look. Demo-ing is not the way to go now. You know, there's a civil war coming here. We need to prepare"'. However, militias are exactly what Thomas (GR) is organising when he describes how his paramilitary organisation had taken direct action in a local town hosting a refugee camp: 'They took down the ISIS flag and then they wrote on the wall the slogan "THIS IS GREECE. ISLAM WILL NOT PREVAIL. VICTORY OR DEATH"' (Field diary, GR). Even research participants who expressed fear of civil war and sought non-violent resolutions to the perceived crisis – such as Dan and Mikey (UK) and Per and Gunnar (NO) – worried that civil conflict was now inevitable.

In contrast, grievances of a socio-economic nature are less salient. Personal grievances about material circumstances are articulated relatively infrequently with greatest dissatisfaction expressed by actors in the

Greek and Polish milieus, where there is a high level of pessimism about future employment and income; 'there is no prospect, we feel it and we know it' (Melpo, GR). However, in other country contexts, experiences of poor housing or neighbourhoods and unemployment can feature in individuals' development of hostility towards others who are perceived as, unjustly, having more; such perceived horizontal inequality in relation to immigrant families is discussed in Arne's trajectory below (see Vignette 1). In other cases, relational inequality is experienced as vertical inequality, expressed as the injustice that 'people like us' live in poverty while 'they' ('the elites') are 'living in complete luxury' (DT, UK).

While milieu actors often accept inequality as rooted in naturalised difference and view the fight for equality as the misguided folly of 'social justice warriors', in some instances perceived and experienced inequalities are articulated by research participants as injustices. These relate primarily to the unfair treatment of milieu actors due to their political views and activism and is often expressed in relation to the perceived indiscriminate labelling of right-wing activists as 'extremist' by institutions – the state, the media, the police – with the power to do so. In some cases, personal experiences are recounted of being sacked or refused employment when their political positions or activities become known. Will (UK), for example, explains how he was first suspended and then asked to resign after his movement affiliation became publicised; when he refused, he was fired. Trying to get a new job in his line of work became impossible, since, he said, 'part of your application is an adverse media check. You type my name into Google, it's, "Fascist, fascist, fascist, fascist"' (Will, UK).

Such experiences are seen as indicative of a wider socio-political inequality whereby the views of those on the Right are rejected out of hand because they run counter to 'accepted' opinion. This sense of being *silenced* often forms as a personal grievance early in research participants' political development. Tonya (UK) had been reprimanded in college about an essay she had written, which was deemed to express 'radical' views on Islam and, during work experience, felt 'beaten into submission, like, "Your opinion is not accepted here. Do not say a damn thing." So I didn't'. Peter (DE) also notes that many people 'don't want to speak out' because they fear the consequences of being immediately tarred with the 'Nazi' brush. Jason's (UK) political awareness and activism had also started from a moment when he had objected to his teacher comparing Tommy Robinson to Hitler: 'That day's the day I just lost it. I stood up and started saying my views. ... And so many people had told me privately that they agreed, but were too scared to speak out...' (Jason, UK). The narrative of being 'silenced' was found most frequently in the UK milieu



**Figure 2.3.** 'We will not be silenced' flags at Democratic Football Lads Alliance demonstration, 2018. © Hilary Pilkington.

(see also Pilkington 2016: 203–21) and publicly demonstrated at milieu events attended (see Figure 2.3).

Research participants note that what they experience as attempts to delegitimise, and silence, political views may in fact propel people towards more radical views or movements. As Craig (UK) elaborates, 'if a political voice and a political analysis is not allowed, because it's deemed to be too extreme or whatever, where do those people go and what do they do if they're not allowed a political voice?' An answer is provided by Norwegian respondents who recount routes into 'extreme-right' milieus as often being through participation in gaming communities or 4chan (Espen, NO), a reminder that Norwegian terrorist Anders Breivik also developed his ideas drawing on transnational right-wing channels on the Internet (Borchgrevink 2012; Bangstad 2014; Sætre 2013). However, the space afforded by social media was also experienced as being under threat through the imposition of temporary and permanent bans from platforms. For Dan (UK), this ran the risk of pushing people down a radicalisation pathway since 'social media and marches do help people get

their anger out'. It is to this role of emotions and collective activism (see also Beck 2015: 36; McCauley and Moskaleiko 2017: 214; Jasper 2018) in shaping radicalisation and non-radicalisation outcomes of milieu actors' journeys that we turn next.

### ***Affective and Situational Factors: Social Ties, the Longing for Community and the Role of Movements***

Pre-existing social ties have been identified consistently as a key factor in initiating participation in radical movements while socialisation within movements is viewed as central to radicalisation into violent extremism (see, *inter alia*, Linden and Klandermans 2007: 185; Christmann 2012: 27; Malthaner 2017a: 376–77). In this study, however, we identified the *absence* of social ties – a sense of social isolation and longing for community – as a factor also pulling individuals towards 'extreme-right' movements. Moreover, pre-existing social ties (family, friends) as well as influential figures encountered within movements were found to play a more ambiguous role – not only bringing research participants into radical milieus but, in some cases, constraining engagement or steering individuals away from more extreme movements or actions.

Family – mostly parents or siblings but sometimes grandparents and uncles – were mentioned as influencing research participants' trajectories both towards and away from extremism. Several respondents in France, Germany, Poland and the UK said that their parents held values sympathetic to extreme-right views. Brandon (FR) says the fact that his mother (who had been left-wing in her own youth) was also 'seduced' by the Front National 'reinforced my choice' while Mona and Lena (DE) described how their parents had instilled in them that they should not bring home, or marry, a Muslim. Dan and Robbie (UK) had both been introduced to the milieu by their fathers, who were already active there, while Peter (DE) and Sandra (PL) had been brought into radical milieus by siblings. Peter's elder brother belonged to a neo-Nazi group, which had led him to 'develop opinions in that direction', and Sandra followed her elder brothers into football-related fighting. However, respondents in Germany, Norway, the Netherlands, France and the UK also mentioned having had left-wing family members who influenced their upbringing and trajectories. Redford (FR) credits his grandfather's and parents' leftist ideologies for holding him back from adopting more extreme right-wing views, while Brandon (FR) feels that he resisted the everyday cultural racism that was rife in his school because his parents had brought him up to be 'open-minded' and never 'consciously, ideologically, racist'.

It is important to recognise young people's agency in these relationships too. We encountered a number of cases of generational role reversal

in which respondents influenced their parents or older family members. Paul's (UK) parents followed him into the extreme-right party in which he was active and Anita (NO) initially inspired her father to become active, alongside her, in Stop Islamisation of Norway (SIAN). However, the relationship between activist parents and their activist children was also one of mutual care and respect; experience was shared by parents who wanted to keep their children safe and vice versa. Thus, Robbie and Dan (UK) talk about how their fathers had played important roles in steering them away from engaging in violent action, whilst Robbie and Tonya monitor their dads' use of social media because they worry that they have become too involved or shared too much online. Young people are thus not 'victims' of parental socialisation but may also shape the political contours of their immediate environment.

Friends act as influencers both towards and away from extremism. Three participants in the French case, who had been friends from childhood, formed a Corsican nationalist movement together, while Jonathan (MT) had become involved with the Imperium Europa party after making a new friend at university who was a member. However, once he had read more, and been at university longer, Jonathan realised those initial friends were 'not the ones I would have chosen' and he started to 'make my own choices'. This confirms other narratives from the data set that qualify the relationship between friendship and radicalisation. Dan (UK) said friends from the English Defence League (EDL) were now moving in the direction of Generation Identity but he would not follow them because he felt the movement was too extreme. As a teenager, Robbie (UK) had consciously decided that he did not want to follow his, older, friends into the EDL: 'They were going on these marches, and they told me what they'd seen, what they'd heard, what they'd said. And . . . even at thirteen, I thought, "That's not the right way to go about it"'. These examples illustrate how friends moving in a more radical direction are not necessarily followed. Rather, such encounters may act as moments of reflection when research participants draw their own lines in terms of what they believe or how they want to act.

Acknowledging young people's agency in their radicalisation journeys, rather than focusing on their vulnerability to radicalisers or radicalising messages, is not to suggest that the particular social-emotional (Sieckelinck et al. 2019) and cognitive (Costanza 2015) developmental challenges faced by young people do not play a role. Qualitative studies of young activists in extremist movements have found families rarely appear as stable, strong and protective environments but often as sites of trauma and resilience (Pilkington 2016: 80–83; Sieckelinck et al. 2019: 668). In our study, where individuals lacked supportive or bonding relationships with family and/or peers, this was often reflected in low self-esteem, a

sense of social isolation and a longing for community or belonging. In such cases, activist groups could provide a positive sense of 'family' or 'community' that helped to build their self-esteem and self-worth. Arne's (NO) trajectory exemplifies the intersection of complex social problems, feelings of social isolation and longing for 'the unity, the community' that activism offered (see Vignette 1), but this is also present in the trajectories narrated by others. One Dutch respondent associated 'real' family with those in the milieu rather than blood family (18, NL). Jason (UK), who was still living at home and studying at college, also felt unsupported by his parents in dealing with mental health issues and had received an intervention from social services. Jason's political activist community appears in his narrative as the family he craved during what he describes as a 'terrible' childhood:

It's like a family to me. It's like my chairman, she's like that really wild, stubborn member of the family, I'd say. And then you've got another ... youth member there, he's like the brother type of guy ... showing you all these funny things on his phone – memes, all that stuff. You have family like that, and then you got [names colleague in the organisation] is like that really proud parent ... 'This is Jason', and all that, 'look what he's done'.

Although his activism had helped build self-confidence and self-esteem, Jason still suffers from mental health problems and, like Arne, describes himself as 'very lonely at the moment' (Field diary, 16 March 2020).

Arne's story (see Vignette 1) not only exemplifies how personal grievance (lack of familial support, material insecurity and loneliness) is translated into political grievance in the context of perceived relational inequality ('foreigners who get ... help with this and that' while he is told 'no, no, no'), but also illustrates the affective dimension of how research participants encounter and respond to radical messages. Arne's social isolation makes the community and brotherhood offered by the NRM attractive, but their willingness to engage in political violence is a moral 'red line' that he cannot cross: 'I wanted to become part of them', he says, but could not because he had 'too much love for other people' to engage in violence. Similar situations in which they encountered those they considered 'too extreme' were recounted by Billy, Dan and Lee (UK); all three had experienced recruitment attempts by more extreme movements but had resisted pressure to join. For others, resistance was expressed by not applauding speeches that were 'derogatory of Muslims' (Robbie, UK) or not carrying a placard carrying a message they did not approve (Jason, UK).

## VIGNETTE 1. Arne's Trajectory

Arne is twenty-six, unemployed and living on disability benefit. His childhood felt shaped by his parents' divorce. He had few friends growing up, felt excluded, developed mental health problems and dropped out of school. He retains contact with his mother but feels she is not interested in him. His anti-immigrant views developed after the family moved from a prosperous and 'Norwegian' area of one city to another city where there was an asylum centre in the neighbourhood. This magnified Arne's sense of exclusion, especially as he struggled to survive financially while perceiving that asylum seekers received more state support:

It started quite slowly when I got those disability benefits. I had very little income and when you're in town and encounter many different cultures and become perhaps a little aggressive because others have a better car and so on, you feel envious. Then I went into some right-wing extreme milieus, read about foreigners who get a free driver's licence, help with this and that, money here and there. Then I go on the dole and try to get a bit of furniture. And you get 'no, no, no' from them.

He was living in social housing where he was the only resident with a purely Norwegian background. The area suffered from drugs and crime problems and he felt unsafe. The combination of these issues, and a sense of profound loneliness, led him into petty crime (for which he served two years in prison) and what he describes as 'right-wing extreme milieus'. Despite being unsure about the politics of the movement, and not endorsing the use of violence, the NRM offered the community he longed for:

What is tempting with the NRM is the unity, the community, being in a group where everyone knows everyone, and where everyone feels a deep hatred for people outside the Nordic race and that it is that race that is right. That unity feels very exciting. But when it comes to violence? I see that as meaningless. Like I have said many times, I want them [immigrants] out of Norway but I don't want to kill them.

Arne's story is strongly shaped by personal grievance but, especially at moments where he is strongly attracted to the NRM, they are expressed as political grievances. He articulates the NRM position that anyone who is not a true Norwegian – who does not descend from at least three Norwegian-born generations – has no place in Norwegian society. The country should be 'cleansed' of such immigrants and the culture they bring with them. At this point, Arne identified as a Nazi, expressed antisemitic conspiracy narratives and an 'understanding' of, although not support for,

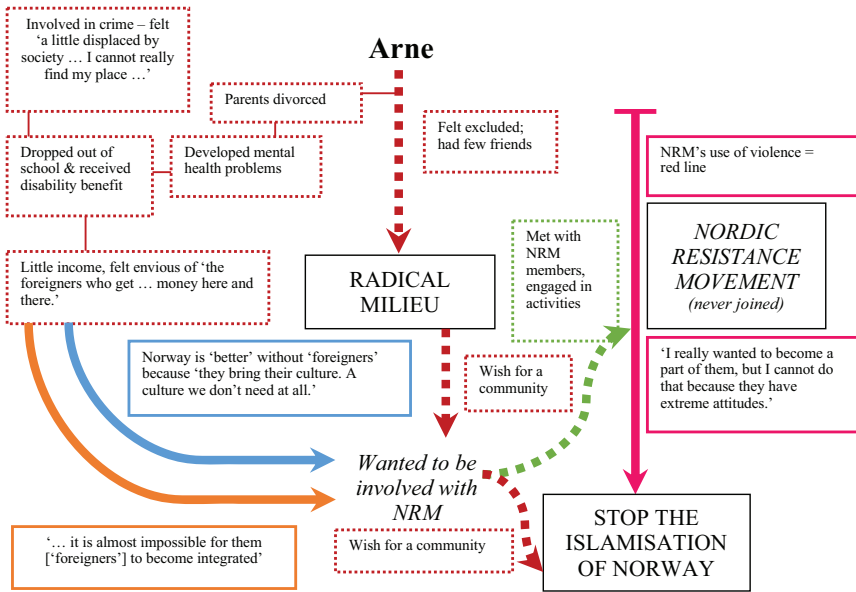


Figure 2.4. Arne’s trajectory. Created by Hilary Pilkington.

the actions of Anders Breivik. He moved closer to acceptance into the NRM and participated in their stickering campaigns.

However, Arne’s own reflection on his dislike of violence as well as his disapproval of the NRM’s anti-LGBT stance (he describes himself as bisexual) halts his trajectory towards violent extremism. He abandons the idea of joining the organisation because they wanted ‘to make people use violence’ and he starts to associate himself with SIAN. While those around him, including the police and his own father, suggest he resembles Breivik and might be capable of committing similar terrorist atrocities, he reflects: ‘I have too much love for other people to be able to do such a thing’.



Some milieu actors saw themselves as consciously steering others, especially younger members, away from ‘extremist’ elements in the milieu. Espen (NO) talks about a group of youngsters on social media channels, whom he tries to ‘keep ... on the straight and narrow’, that is, away from the extremist Nordic Resistance Movement and the glorification of right-wing terrorist acts and actors. Paul (UK), similarly, describes how his efforts to persuade young activists to stay away from National Action had



helped prevent extremism. A Dutch respondent recounted how milieu actors with whom he had previously spent a lot of time had attacked a mosque but, he argued, labelling them 'Nazis' and excluding them from movements would just increase the likelihood of radical action (3, NL). This view is found in the UK milieu too, where some movements considered 'extremist' in public discourse were felt to be trying hard 'to keep a lid on things' (Craig, UK). Of course, where the line is drawn regarding what is tolerable, and can be addressed by channelling anger and grievances, and when individuals need to be ejected from the movement or even reported to the authorities, is – like extremism itself – relative. This is exemplified by the case of Paul (UK), who saw himself as stopping younger actors becoming extremist but was described by others in the milieu as promoting precisely the kind of extremism that they were trying to prevent people moving towards.

### *Shifts away from Extremism*

#### *Disillusionment, Priorities and Marking Red Lines*

High expectations of the emotional dimensions of the new community bring potential disillusionment when political goals, friendship or a sense of belonging and purpose are left unfulfilled (Bjørge 2011: 284). In our study, when the support or purpose sought was not forthcoming, it resulted in feelings of disappointment, disillusionment and sometimes hurt or betrayal. This was most clearly articulated by respondents who had made the decision to move away from activism. At the time of interview, Lee (UK) had recently been released from prison where he had experienced a growing sense that he had wrongly prioritised activism over family in the past. This was reinforced when others in the movement failed to assist his girlfriend and children financially whilst he was in prison even though he himself had established a hardship fund for this purpose and helped others convicted before him.

## **VIGNETTE 2. Alice's Trajectory**

Alice, a 28-year-old graduate with a secure socio-economic background and supportive family, began her activism in movements on the Left. She became disillusioned when she felt her contribution was not valued and left Black Lives Matter because 'everyone was bickering with each other, and I got called something because I was white and that pissed me off'. Listening to podcasts, especially by conspiracy theorist Alex Jones, she felt increasingly 'wound up'

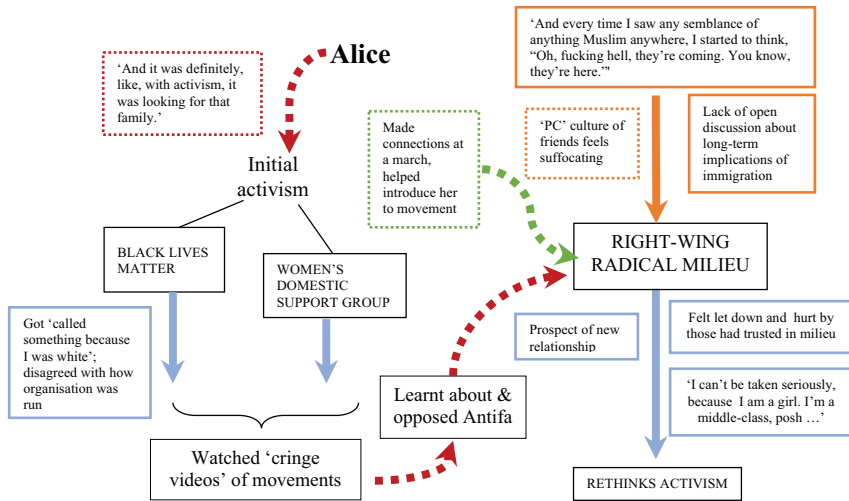


Figure 2.5. Alice's trajectory. Created by Hilary Pilkington.

but also displaced. The 'culture shock' she felt when she first moved to the city now seemed threatening; '...every single time I saw a hijab, I started getting really annoyed'. She criticises the lack of open discussion about the long-term implications of immigration and, although she is not sure she believes alt-right theory about 'a plan' to outbreed white people, she thinks, 'if the population is going to change to such an extent that we're no longer a majority white ... country ... well I don't know if I want that, to be honest'.

Alice's period of deep engagement in the milieu is recounted as situational; a chance meeting led her, rapidly, into the inner circle around a prominent 'extreme-right' milieu figure. She felt part of a grand cause and, comparing the process to that of being an 'ISIS bride', she made the decision to 'pack up and leave' her old life and move into a house with others working for the movement. However, after a dispute with the milieu figure, Alice was sacked and suffered a torrent of online abuse including accusations that she was an infiltrator. Without income or a place to live, she moved back in with her parents. She was shunned by her former circle but the revelation that she had only ever been partially accepted was most hurtful. At first she saw this as a deep personal betrayal but later as a wider problem in the movement, in which there was little space for someone with her gender and class background: 'I do feel like I'm on the right side, but ... in a way, I can't be taken seriously, because yeah, I am a girl. I'm a middle-class, posh...'.

Although communication was re-established a year later, Alice remained damaged by her earlier treatment in the milieu. Her disappointment was

less with the causes the movement promoted than feeling let down and hurt by those she had trusted. Whilst connections had been reforged, she is no longer deeply engaged and plans to write a book about her experience. She also links this reprioritisation of activism in her life to the prospect of a new relationship. Having met somebody in whom she was interested, she started to anticipate the shame she would feel if they had seen her previous participation in live-streamed shows in which she had been effectively 'nodding along' to antisemitic remarks. She sees the future as one in which she keeps her political, work and private life separate from one another: 'I think it's better to think of it as the job. ... And then you come back and you're worried about like tea and what we're doing tonight and shall we go and see this film. And I think it's nice to keep it separate'.



Female respondents expressed criticism of milieus in which they were left feeling they did not 'fit'. Tina (NO) concludes that the Alliance party, to which she had been affiliated, is 'macho at root' after her own approach to gender and sexual freedom clashed with their highly conservative views on gender. This was a key factor in Tina's decision to leave; she states: 'It is really impossible to be a female in that movement'. This disillusionment is illustrated in Alice's (UK) trajectory (see Vignette 2) in which a personal grievance, when she feels her experience and contribution are dismissed by left-oriented groups in which she is initially active, feeds her curiosity about the Right, whose messages appear to confirm a broader dislocation she feels after moving (from a rural area) to a major city. She narrates her movement into the heart of the 'extreme-right' milieu as strongly situational, but embraces what she sees as a 'noble cause' until betrayed by those around her who, she concludes, never really accepted her.

As Alice seeks to re-balance her life, she notes the importance of intimate and family relationships, but also social life and future prospects in general, in individual decisions to step away from extremism. Paolo (UK) also points to the change in priorities among his football-related milieu when they become involved in serious relationships:

I know a lot of lads who've got kids and that now, and they're not the same. I mean, I know lads that would have put you through a phone box two years ago, now, need to ask the missus' permission to come to the pub. Completely different.

Paolo thought he was heading in that direction himself when he became engaged to his girlfriend and they were expecting a baby. He took

a step back from the football milieu to focus on taking responsibility for his family – as he put it, ‘I settled myself down. And I didn’t want to risk losing that’. However, after he and his partner lost the baby and subsequently separated, he was ‘straight back’ to the milieu.

Lee’s disillusionment with his movement when they failed to support his girlfriend and family during his imprisonment was noted above and reinforced a growing sense that he had wrongly prioritised activism over family. The decisive moment came when, just before his release, social workers warned him that if he returned to activism after release, he risked losing access to his own and his partner’s children, and he remembers, ‘Straight away that gripped me, the switch went, and I thought, “That’s it. I can’t do it anymore. I can’t, I can’t run the risk of my kids and [names girlfriend]’s kids being taken away”’ (Lee, UK). Samuel (MT) had also been compelled to rethink his direction after getting to know a colleague of immigrant background better:

I had never spoken to a black person before in my life. So it was, you know, because it was a collegial relationship, I didn’t have much choice in the matter, and then I remember this person offered me to go and have drinks with him, and I said OK. ... And you know, after repeatedly working together and having drinks, I started to realise that this person is like everybody else ... And then obviously I started to feel this internal conflict within me, I was like ‘What the fuck am I doing man? What is this crap?’ ... Life’s too short, for hating, and all this stuff, and this guy, changed my mind.

Samuel’s realisation is reflected in other journeys in moments when individuals become aware that to continue would mean crossing a line ideologically or in terms of personal morality that made them uncomfortable. These red lines vary significantly, as they are drawn relative to the individual and the milieu they inhabit. However, the way they are narrated by research participants illustrates how recognising what they find *too extreme* can clarify those lines and propel them away from extremism. This was evident in Alice’s anticipated shame at being seen ‘nodding along’ to antisemitic statements of others while, within the Dutch milieu, a research participant (2, NL) recalls encounters on Facebook with an individual sympathising with Breivik, which they found ‘disgusting’. Being compared to Breivik by his schoolmates was also a wake-up call for Espen from the Norwegian milieu. Initially drawn to the Norwegian Defence League (NDL) at the age of just thirteen, Espen had begun to feel disappointed with the movement: ‘It was a typical echo chamber. And I liked to discuss things. So I did not get much out of it after a while’. The terrorist acts committed by Breivik on 22 July 2011 brought things to a

head as he found himself confronted by comparisons of his own ideological attitudes with those of Breivik: 'The 22 July thing inflamed everything. I thought about what it could mean for my future. And my whole social life. I did not want to lose that because of me being in the NDL...' (Espen, NO). Dan (UK) describes making a last-minute decision not to attend an event organised by a regional Infidels group because he was worried by something he had seen online which he felt was a 'bit too racist, like they were a bit white pride'. Similarly, SIAN member Anita (NO) draws her own 'limit' with reference to the Nordic Resistance Movement's ambition to create a 'white Scandinavia': 'They [NRM] are concerned with race and they want to have a white Scandinavia and that is something that I am not concerned with at all ... I feel that crosses a limit'.

## Conclusion

The study of radicalisation directs almost exclusive attention to the least likely outcome of engagement with radical ideas – their pursuit through violent extremism. By studying young people's activism in a wide range of 'extreme-right' milieus, we make visible, and open to analysis, more frequent trajectories in which young people encounter and engage with radical(ising) forces, messages and agents but do not cross the threshold into violent extremism. By focusing on the radical milieu, we are able to root individual trajectories in their social context, including the social networks and communication channels they host, the interactions that take place and the affect that is generated there.

In this chapter, we have provided a brief sketch of the detailed and complex trajectories identified across very different milieus, themselves internally heterogeneous, in nine European countries. The themes extracted from the synthesis of the data reflect milieu actors' own narratives of what propels people towards and away from more radical positions. These include a range of political grievances, of which the most salient relate to the perceived threat to self and own group emanating from racialised 'others' ('immigrants', 'Muslims') and those who are perceived to promote their interests (liberal elites, self-serving politicians, global networks of conspirators and so on). Such grievances are forged out of the interaction between individual experiences (of economic and social dislocation, population movement, urban change) and political messages encountered which, once shared with others and endorsed through the narratives of authoritative figures, come to be understood as the experience of the group (see Honneth 1995: 163). They are articulated, first and foremost, in the context of the experience of the influx of difference and

the perception of such difference as representing a threat – sometimes a security threat but more often a threat to existing values, attitudes, beliefs, ways of living and cultural practices. For many milieu actors this threat is interpreted as indicative of a profound societal crisis reflected in visions of the future that are almost universally pessimistic, sometimes apocalyptic, as they imagine the physical ‘replacement’ of white European populations through immigration and demographic change and the subsequent loss of unique national and regional identities.

This sense of crisis, we find, is underpinned by feelings of uncertainty at individual and group levels and is augmented through mediating affective factors such as feelings of isolation, dislocation and frustration into a sense of collective existential insecurity and impending violent conflict (expressed in the expectation of an imminent civil war). These environmental conditions of ‘normative threat’ are demonstrated by Stenner (2005: 80–81) to be a crucial factor in activating individual predispositions to authoritarianism resulting in the heightened expression of intolerance. Thus, while political grievances tend to dominate milieu actors’ narratives of trajectories, they far from determine a path towards violent extremism. Personal grievances such as negative experiences in school or employment, low income as well as adverse childhood experiences, personal trauma and mental health issues (related or unrelated to these experiences) play an important role in how young people narrate their journeys. Moreover, we identify a number of vital – affective and situational – factors including the role of family and peers, as well as situations of isolation, social and health problems, loneliness and desire for community, that play a crucial part in understanding how our research participants came to be where they were.

However, it is important not to see the milieu as static (Malthaner 2017a: 393) or as somehow disconnected from the other communication circles in which young people are simultaneously engaged. By employing the notion of ‘trajectories’, we signal the dynamic nature of young people’s engagements within the milieu and their movement towards more radical positions but also away from them in response to their encounters there as well as their wider changing life circumstances and cognitive and emotional development. Exploring themes around the role of movements, family and peer influences and a longing for community, we find that these factors are important not only in bringing research participants into radical milieus but also in constraining their engagement or encouraging them to establish their own ‘red lines’ in terms of how much, and what forms of, engagement they have. Families may provide a form of socialisation into ‘extreme-right’ activism, but even where siblings acknowledge the same ‘incentive’ for participation ensuing from

close relatives' positions in such movements, their paths may take very different courses (Pilkington 2016: 78). Finding a welcoming community and gaining in self-esteem through activism may sustain participation in radical milieus. However, it can also facilitate the development of skills, self-belief and identity that reduces ontological insecurity and allows participants to see ways to pursue the change they desire without recourse to violent action. Moreover, the disappointment with the emotional support or solidarity anticipated may be crucial in decisions to disengage or reprioritise activism within wider lives.

It is essential to recognise that as young people move through these milieus they make choices, and that these choices are informed not only by interactions within the radical milieu but by the multiple environments in which they engage in their everyday lives. This social connectedness may be the source of their original desire to politically engage – a feeling of wanting to 'make a difference' – but also what pulls them back from crossing the threshold into violent extremism. Understanding radicalisation as practices of embodied communication that generate different kinds of affect (McDonald 2018) allows us to see the meaning that is attached to activism, to the bonds forged with other milieu actors and the causes to which these are tied. These practices are not confined to one group of 'predisposed' individuals but infused in narratives resident in the social structures in which young people are embedded (Costanza 2015) and diffused in radical milieus, through interactions both within the milieu and with external forces and discourses beyond, through the 'communicative interlocks' that connect milieu actors with everyday worlds.

## Acknowledgements

The research drawn on in this chapter is part of the Dialogue about Radicalisation and Equality (DARE) project, which received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under Grant Agreement No 725349. This article reflects only the views of the authors; the European Commission and Research Executive Agency are not responsible for any information it contains.

The nine case studies of 'extreme-right' milieus drawn on in this analysis were conducted by members of the DARE project. These case studies are published as individual reports, details of which can be found in the Appendix to this volume. This synthesis of findings could not have been written without the commitment to research and the analytic insight of all the researchers and authors involved in these case studies and we are

deeply indebted to them. We thank Rosie Mutton also for her contribution to the development of Figures 2.2, 2.4 and 2.5. We want to thank, especially, all the research participants who agreed to take part in the individual case studies for their time, but also for their willingness to put their trust in the researchers and the research process.

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**NOTES**

1. Attention to individual agency in shaping pathways of right-wing extremist activism emerges primarily in empirical studies, especially those which draw on life history or ethnographic approaches (see Ezekiel 1995; Blee 2002; Linden and Klandermans 2007; Simi and Futrell 2015; Pilkington 2016).
2. The procedures and practices implemented to ensure the ethical collection and storage of research material are detailed in each report as well as in the Introduction to case study reports (see Pilkington and Vestel 2020). In most cases the identity of research participants was protected by assigning a pseudonym, but where even this was felt to present a potential risk, numbers were assigned.
3. Research participants cited here who are aged over forty are: Christopher (FR); Father Gabriel and Thomas (GR); and Craig (UK).



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