
What's in a name? Asymmetries in the evaluation of religiously motivated terrorism and right-wing motivated violence in the context of the "refugee crisis"**By: Noreen van Elk¹****Abstract**

In the course of 2015, Germany was confronted with ever increasing immigration flows which resulted in the so-called "refugee crisis". This sudden political and societal challenge brought about feelings of fear, anxiety and insecurity in many people. As a result, the right-wing Populist Party AfD² and the populist movement PEGIDA³ steadily gained more support. Furthermore, the number of right-wing motivated crimes reached a total of 13 846 by the end of December 2015, of which 4183 were declared as motivated by "anti-migrant" or xenophobic sentiments⁴. However, it appears as if the German government has difficulties reacting appropriately to those developments. This paper argues that the asymmetry between the moral and political evaluation of transnational religiously motivated terrorist violence and domestic right-wing extremist violence is untenable. Consequently, the emphasis on safeguarding national security against the risk of this kind of terrorist violence denies the importance of dealing with the right-wing risk "from within". It is argued, that the increasing right-wing motivated violence shares certain dynamics with religiously motivated terrorism, even though both phenomena differ in fatality. The choice to call one form of violence terrorism and another form, in this case right-wing extremist violence, is not considered as terrorism, is not as neutral as is often presumed and is certainly not exclusively attributable to the differing character or fatality of the violence. It will be shown that instead, it reveals a lot about certain prejudices, *a priori* assumptions about the nature of terrorism, prevailing resentment and political interest.

Keywords:*refugee crisis, terrorism, right-wing violence, xenophobia, radicalization*

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⁴ http://www.petrapau.de/18_bundestag/dok/down/2015_zf-rechtsextreme-straftaten.pdf (access: 13.04.2016)

Introduction

Terrorism studies have been an issue of interest already since the late 1950's. However, only after the attacks on the World Trade Center on the 11th of September 2001, it steadily developed into a more distinct research field since the importance of understanding the terrorism phenomenon gained more political interest. The establishment of the research field of terrorism studies, which also include the study of counterterrorism and its repercussions, was, as a result of the 9/11 attacks, to a large extent influenced by the need to delegitimize terrorism and those responsible for bringing religiously motivated terrorism to "the West". Consequently, a lot of research on terrorism in the direct aftermath of the 9/11 attacks also aimed at supporting the "Global War on Terrorism" (GWOT) discourse and tried to defend the claim that coercive measures were necessary and effective in the fight against terrorism. However, in the course of the GWOT and because of the growing awareness that this war appeared not to have the intended results, more critical studies were published, pointing at the structural problems of the GWOT and of military counterterrorism measures in general as well as focusing more on the "inner" dynamics of terrorism, on its generation processes, on its root causes, etc. Those studies argued that counterterrorism cannot be exclusively coercive but should integrate awareness for those aspects of the terrorist phenomenon. On a meta-level, those dynamics and developments within the field of terrorism studies were analyzed by certain researchers who observed a necessity of revealing prevailing assumptions about terrorism in the domain of terrorism studies itself. They established a distinct research field called critical terrorism studies. The main aim of critical terrorism studies is to show that a lot of things that are perceived as common knowledge within the study of terrorism are the result of a particular ontology or epistemology. Critical terrorism studies try to deconstruct those knowledge structures and point at the fact that "the discourse [of terrorism studies] is deeply ideological in the way in which its core assumptions, narratives and knowledge-producing practices function to legitimize existing power structures and particular hegemonic political practices in society" (Jackson, 2009, p.78).

The critical terrorism studies approach is to a certain extent the main perspective of this paper as it will be based on the idea that a lot of perceived common knowledge about terrorism is the result of particular assumptions and perceptions about the phenomenon rather

than the result of concrete features of terrorism. In a first part of this paper some attention will be given to the problems of defining terrorism and to the question to what extent certain (ontological) assumptions play a role in the process of defining and understanding the terrorist phenomenon. In a second part of this paper it will then be shown how this has concrete consequences for the way in which different forms of radicalized (political) violence are dealt with. This will be shown through the example of how in Germany, in the context of the so-called refugee crisis, the public opinion about as well as political action against both Islamist terrorism and right-wing motivated violence against refugees differ substantially, even though there are decisive similarities between both phenomena.

Defining terrorism

The 9/11 attacks have decisively changed public and political perception and understanding of terrorism. Although the attacks arguably constituted a very specific form of terrorism, it has furthered an understanding of terrorism as a monolithic and distinct phenomenon. As a result, it has become very common to talk about “terrorism” in general and about “the terrorist” without paying attention to the actual complexity of both concepts. However, it is important to note, that there is no consensus on the question how to define “terrorism” and a “terrorist”. In academic research today, scholars also do not pay enough attention to basic definitional and conceptual questions of terrorism studies anymore. Although there is awareness for the problems arising from unsolved issues within the debate on terrorism definitions, it is often taken for granted and presumed that it might just constitute an unsolvable quarrel.

Since one of the main arguments of this paper is that defining certain forms of political violence as terrorism and other similar forms of violent differently is a rather ambiguous issue, it is important to look at the definition problem before proceeding. Contrary to what is often presumed about terrorism, terrorism does not constitute a singular phenomenon. Instead, terrorism comes in many forms and the history of terrorist violence shows, that terrorism has been used by many different actors with many different goals and motivations. Although in the research on terrorism, until today, a lot of effort has been done on trying to define terrorism on the basis of its characteristics, this project remains rather unsuccessful. Although there are some typical characteristics of terrorism, the differences between different particular

instances of terrorist violence are too big to make a definition, which is based on those characteristics, a fit-for-all definition.

Therefore, by means of trying to circumvent the definition problem of terrorism, the debate on defining terrorism has partially shifted towards defining “typologies” of terrorism and political violence. Typologies of terrorism differ from definitions of terrorism to the extent that typologies of terrorism tend to classify different forms of terrorism according to certain “bases for classification”. They focus on specific, non-generalizable features of particular forms of terrorism in order to contribute to a better understanding of terrorism. There are various bases for classifying forms of terrorism, for example victim-based, environment-based, etc.⁵. The importance of typecasting particular forms of terrorism instead of trying to define the general phenomenon is that, according to Ezzat A. Fattah:

“Typologies of terrorism are...useful in differentiating and categorizing terrorism, in understanding its “causes”, manifestations and impact; in controlling its incidence; and in minimizing its effects.” (Fattah, 1981, p.11)

Typologies of terrorism and political violence try to put particular instances of terrorism and political violence in a matrix in order to better understand the variety of actors, causal mechanisms etc. Typologies base on the assumption that neither terrorism nor right-wing violence should be “treated as a monolithic phenomenon and that different actor types must be studied independently.” (Ravndal, 2015, p.31). As such, contrary to what definitions can offer, typologies “could [therefore] potentially prove useful for analyzing [other forms of] terrorism and political violence, considering the universal nature of its constitutive variables, strategy and organization.” (Ravndal, 2015. P.31).

Those examples should have shown that there are some important issues complicating the possibility of defining terrorism. There are many more issues obstructing the definition process of terrorism, which has been discussed in length by Schmid (cf. Schmid, 2011, pp. 43-44). The examples given here should have given a first insight in the complex issue of defining terrorism and using the categories “terrorism” and “terrorist”. This is important

⁵ For a complete overview see: Schmid A.P., Jongman & A.J. (2005). Political Terrorism. A New Guide to Actors, Authors, Concepts, Data Bases, Theories and Literature. P.40.

because it allows us to show that the common use of the categories “terrorism” and “terrorist” as if they would describe a clear-cut phenomenon, is not tenable and should always be treated critically.

Beyond definitions

Because of the problems with defining terrorism, there are many different definitions in use, dependent on the position of the one who frames the definition. Different definitions result in different evaluations of the phenomenon. Certain definitions for example can perceive of terrorism as a legitimate use of violence against oppression, whereas other definitions focus on the illegitimate use of massive violence. The way in which terrorism is perceived appears to be not exclusively dependent on its functional or structural characteristics, such as the use of indiscriminate or disproportional violence. Definitions of terrorism in use are very often based on those features but appear not to explain why different cases of terrorism are evaluated differently, especially not if those different cases of terrorism are structurally akin. The assessment of terrorism or terrorism-like forms of political violence are both time- and context-dependent. The perception of political violence is in other words not only dependent on its concrete appearance but also on the particular ontology of the observer. Ontology can be described as the set of ideas one has about the nature of things, reality and existence, etc. Ontology therefore continuously influences judgments about reality, including political reality. Assumptions arising from a particular ontology lead to unquestioned, respectively taken-for-granted, evaluations of this reality. In the context of modern terrorism and counter-terrorism, certain ontological assumptions about political reality inevitably influence the assessment and evaluation of political violence and terrorism accordingly. What forms of political violence are perceived as terrorism and what forms not is thus not necessarily the result of structural facts but is also dependent on other beliefs about reality. Although it is often argued that the lack of accurate evaluation of different forms of (political) violence, especially concerning the current wave of right-wing motivated violence in Germany, is due to the fact that the country’s politics is “blind to the right eye” (Lehr, 2013), this would be a too simplistic understanding of the situation. Germany’s historical experiences with right-wing extremism might have indeed contributed to a lack of awareness

for the political reality of right-wing extremism. Especially in the context of the so-called NSU-incident⁶, Germany was accused of not willing to seriously engage with its right-wing extremist problem. However, there are many more reasons than sole ignorance or inability for this lacking political awareness. Not the least, German legislation has a rather “outdated” terrorism definition. The way in which terrorist organizations are defined in the criminal code, is the result of the time period in which Germany was confronted with a wave of left-wing terrorism. This definition of terrorist includes elements such as terrorist organizations being clearly organized. In many cases of terrorism, this understanding of a terrorist organization might not apply. However, the reason for the fact that the German state as well as the public tends to overreact to certain forms of political violence, such as Islamist terrorism and occasionally left-wing motivated terrorism, and seems to “ignore” the graveness of right-wing motivated violence, cannot only be explained by neither the country’s history, by legal loopholes, nor by the claim that right-wing motivated violence is just being tolerated. Instead, “it is also a matter of state and public perceptions and understanding of terrorism” (Lehr, p.206). In other words, how to deal with and perceive of different forms of political violence, in this case Islamist, religiously motivated terrorism and right-wing motivated violence, is not only a matter of conscious political decision, but also of certain ontological assumptions about political reality and paramount perceptions and understandings of terrorism.

Preliminary findings

The discussion above should have shown that the definition of terrorism and consequently its evaluation appears to be highly dependent on the *a priori* assumptions one has about political reality in general and about terrorism in particular and its causality, on its viewpoint, etc. For example, whether terrorists and their goals are perceived as “irrational” or as potential discussion partners is dependent on the ontological assumptions and interests of who is judging. „Of course, whether a terrorist group is seen as “corrigible” or “incorrigible“ and whether it aims are perceived as attainable, tangible and, hence, negotiable or not,

⁶ The National Socialist Underground was a right-wing extremist terrorist organization responsible for a series of murders during the period 1999-2007. The existence of this group only became public in 2011 and indicated the scandalous inability of the German State to deal and effectively persecute right-wing terrorism for almost a decade.

depends on the actor defining them.” (Lehr, p.190). Although, in the aftermath of 9/11, terrorism was depicted as absolutely morally reprehensible, incorrigible, this judgment was only applicable to a specific form of terrorism and the history of terrorism shows many occasions in which terrorist actors were perceived as “corrigible” and efforts were made in order to make their claims heard. One can thus not argue that the current way of dealing with the Islamist terrorist phenomenon is historically consistent and a logic result of the inherent characteristics of terrorism itself. Instead, the way in which this specific form of terrorism is perceived nowadays and is perceived as incorrigible or absolutely morally reprehensible is to a very large extent the result of the interests, assumptions and anxieties of those who are responsible for defining violence and making political decisions. In the next sections, it will be shown how this has direct implications on the way in which political decisions are taken in dealing with different forms of political violence.

The refugee crisis and Islamist terrorism

In the media as well as in the political discourse, the migration flows with which Germany was confronted in the course of 2015 are often described as “the refugee crisis”. This terminology points at two important aspects of the situation. The increasing number of refugees seeking asylum in Germany was perceived as crisis because state institutions were unable of adequately adapting to this sudden increase and cities were confronted with severe infrastructural and bureaucratic limits. In the beginning it appeared as if civil society managed to deal very well with the situation and many initiatives were taken in order to support the state, for example by collecting clothes, shoes, blankets, etc. and distributing those collected goods as well as food and drinks to the refugees. In the beginning this civil willingness was celebrated as “German welcome culture”. In a later stage however, this initial enthusiasm decreased because there was no observable improvement in the political reaction to the critical situation, people felt frustrated and not satisfyingly rewarded for their engagement.⁷

In the course of the next months, the public opinion about the migration flows shifted towards a more moderate position and critique towards state (re)action started to increase day

⁷ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/refugee-crisis-germanys-welcome-culture-fades-as-thousands-continue-to-arrive-a6685361.html> (access: 27.05.2016)

by day. Furthermore, the positive perception of the asylum seeking people decreased and suspicion started to spread. More and more doubts were uttered that terrorist, religiously motivated organizations were using the migration flows to “infiltrate” Europe in order to plan terrorist attacks. Especially the terrorist attacks in Paris on the 13th of November 2015 were widely perceived as a proof of this argument, even though a direct link between the perpetrators and current migration flows could not be confirmed. Nevertheless, existing fear for terrorist violence and the increasing appearance of terrorist violence claimed by ISIS were inevitably connected to the rapidly changing social situation in Europe. For many people, the possibility that among the refugees there could be a substantial amount of (potential) terrorist perpetrators, became increasingly “real”, not the least because of the way in which the media dealt with this issue.⁸ Also politicians, such as Hans-Georg Maassen⁹ and Thomas de Maziere¹⁰ argued that the risk of a terrorist attack clearly increases with the increase of migration flows to Germany. Although the assumption that there are certain links between terrorism and migration might be right to some extent, the way in which this issue has been portrayed might have decisively contributed to the growing skepticism of many people towards the well-disposed intentions of many refugees.

In a research paper with the title *links between terrorism and migration*, Alex P. Schmid argues that there are indeed links between terrorism and migration in a two-folded way. Terrorism itself is the main cause of current migration flows. Terrorism, as well as military counter-terrorism measures, is causal for displacement. The other way around, although “historically, the number of criminals and terrorists in mass migration movements has been low” (Schmid. 2016, p.4), terrorist can be among mass migration movements. Schmid argues that terrorist can be migrants and migrants can be terrorists in manifold ways and that, if a state is not able to properly deal with migration flows, this might indeed increase the risk of terrorist attacks in a country. However, he is also aware of the fact that the exaggerated interlinking of migration and terrorism bears a lot of risks. “It might hurt bona fide migrants and legal foreign residents more than mala fide terrorists. It fosters xenophobia and deprives host countries, where and when it has the effect of reducing migration and

⁸ http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/06/world/europe/germany-refugees-isis.html?_r=0 (access: 25.07.2016)

⁹ Head of intelligence service

¹⁰ Federal Minister of the interior

hospitality to foreigners, of the many positive contributions (some types of) migrants can make to a society.” (Schmid, 2016, p.5).

In another study from researchers of the University of Warwick *Does Immigration induce Terrorism?* (Bove & Böhmelt, 2016) it is argued that, based on quantitative findings, there is no general causal relation between migration and terrorism and migration might instead contribute to reducing the risk of a terrorist attack. The paper points out that only a very small percentage of migrants, and only if they are coming from states that are prone to terrorism, can be linked to an increase of terrorist attacks in the host country and can spread extremism through migration.

Concluding, the perceived strong link between terrorism and current migration flows is not proven to be a direct causal link, although states should be aware of the fact that, in a minority of cases, migration flows from countries where terrorism is flourishing and extremism is ubiquitous, migration flows can be a vehicle for passing terrorism and extremist thoughts to the host country. By giving this small risk to much weight, as might be the case in the context of the current refugee crisis, immigration laws run the risk of becoming to discriminate and might thereby both ignore the humanitarian duty to provide asylum to those who are in need and reduce the positive effects of migration for the host country. Furthermore, an exaggerated linking of migration and the terrorist risk on a political level and in the media fuels xenophobic fears amongst the citizens of the host country and induces false perceptions and should therefore be reduced to a minimum.

The refugee crisis, populism and right-wing violence

In the last section it was argued that in the course of the refugee crisis the fear for (Islamist) terrorism increasingly became connected to the new social and political reality of mass immigration. Furthermore, the lack of political vigor in regulating the migration flows and the way in which the refugee crisis has been depicted by the media arguably fueled a lot of existing fears and anxieties among the people. Both the increase of fear for terrorist attacks because of mass migration and the frustration about the apparent lack of political vigor of the state in dealing with the immigration flows created a niche for popular movements and

populist parties to gain support. In this respect, two developments in Germany need to be discussed.

First, a movement called PEGIDA¹¹, which started organizing first demonstrations already by the end of 2014 gained a sudden larger amount of support in the course of 2015. Thousands of people started to gather on Monday evenings in different cities to utter a variety of opinions and frustrations. The group of PEGIDA supporters consists of a complex variety of people. A substantial part of the group is openly xenophobic or even racist, motivated by right-wing thoughts and engaged to fight the presumed “Islamisation” of the “Occident”. It has been shown in recent studies, that PEGIDA sympathizers are to a substantial part motivated by right-wing extremist ideas (Decker, Kies & Brähler, 2016). They are motivated by a diffuse fear for the loss of certain cultural values and growing presence of Islamic religion and culture in Western countries. They fear an “Islamisation” of the “Occident”. The concept of the “Occident” is reified as opposed to the “Orient” and is symbolic for a diffuse concept of “Western” values. The value-based nationalism and culturalism as a core ideological element of PEGIDA has been comprehensively studied by Thran and Boehnke in their paper on the value-based nationalism of PEGIDA. (Thran&Boehnke, 2015). They argue, that the xenophobic resentment of many PEGIDA sympathizers results from the fact that foreigners are perceived as coming from a different nation with different, and incompatible, values and therefore threaten the preservation of the “own” cultural values. “The foreigner comes into perspective as someone who lives in a different, ergo, “wrong” nation” (Thran&Boehnke, 2015, p.203). In order not to “lose” the cultural values of the own community, foreigners are supposed to assimilate to the core cultural values of this community and would, in case of non-assimilation, need to be sanctioned. Another group of people attending the Monday demonstrations are people who argue that their interests and worries are not taken serious by the state. By demonstrating with PEGIDA they turn their back to official political parties because they feel that none of the parties is able of articulating their interests in an adequate way. As such, PEGIDA thus becomes a popular movement which by many is perceived as an alternative to non-functioning party politics. It was also shown in the current study on radicalization in

¹¹ *Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes* (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident).

Germany, that indeed, feelings of “political deprivation” are the main motivation of a large group of PEGIDA members (Decker, Kies & Brähler, 2016). A third group of people that feels attracted to the demonstrations of PEGIDA are those people that for manifold reasons perceive those demonstrations as a most needed occasion to utter their fears, frustrations and insecurities. Important to note however, is that, even though it is often presumed to be the case, people who feel disadvantaged by the state and fear that mass immigration might even further increase their socio-economic disadvantage, only represent a non-substantial percentage of PEGIDA members. No causal link can be demonstrated between socio-economic deprivation and sympathization with PEGIDA's thoughts. (Decker, Kies & Brähler, 2016). Instead often, PEGIDA members appear to be well-educated and generally have well-paid jobs. (Patzelt, 2016).

From the beginning PEGIDA did neither have a clear-cut program, a paramount political statement nor a unified audience. This is the main reason therefore that the support for this movement could grow as large as it became in the course of 2015. As the movement refrained from calling itself explicitly xenophobic or racist, the threshold for supporting the movement for many became very low. Nevertheless, PEGIDA statements were clearly right-wing and it was also proven that amongst the PEGIDA demonstrations there was a substantial percentage of NPD (right-wing extremist) electorate. In Dresden, the NPD president even clearly allied with the PEGIDA president.¹² Nevertheless, intelligence services argued not to see the need to further observe those developing affiliation between right-wing extremist parties and the PEGIDA movement.

The niche that was created by the insecurities arising from the changing social and political environment by the refugee crisis was not only occupied by popular movements with a diffuse support group, but was off course also the opportunity for new political parties to establish. As was argued before, among the PEGIDA demonstrators there are many people who feel that democracy has failed since democracy have not been able to secure the representation of interests of a substantial group of people. Although the NPD offers a political party in which people with explicit right-wing, xenophobic and racist thoughts might see a solution, for this other group of people, explicitly right-wing extremist parties are not an

¹² <http://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/rechte-allianz-in-sachsen-npd-und-pegida-naehern-sich-an/11789080.html>
(access: 25.05.2016)

attractive option because they prefer to refrain from calling their thoughts right-wing. Those conditions were the perfect breeding ground for populist party politics that, despite claiming not to be right-wing motivated, emphasizes the importance of the nation and the wealth of the own nation prior to the wealth and health of others. The AFD, die Alternative für Deutschland (the alternative for Germany), was able to use the instable social environment for steadily gaining electoral support. They even openly argued that for them, the refugee crisis and resulting insecurities were a perfect occasion to broaden their sphere of influence. Until today there is a lot of turmoil about the rise of this party, which represents a clear right-wing motivated, xenophobic and partially racist set of ideas but continues to dispute similarities between their party and right-wing extremist party politics. It was shown by Decker, Kies & Brähler that AFD was indeed the scapegoat for right-wing extremist thinkers within the political party system. They furthermore convincingly demonstrated that for many voters that support right-extremist thoughts, the AFD was the alternative for otherwise voting for parties within the political centre, such as CDU¹³ and SPD¹⁴ (Decker, Kies & Brähler, 2016).

Both developments show a change in public opinion which has been clearly induced by the refugee crisis. This change however did not exclusively become visible through popular movements and the rise of populist politics but also resulted in an alarming rise of right-wing, racist and xenophobic violence. In 2015, violence and hate crimes motivated by right-wing opinions increased massively and authorities counted a total of 1485 violent crimes and 10373 hate crimes by the end of 2015. This is an increase of 77 percent compared to 2014. This number indicates a clear increase of xenophobic sentiments. The most obvious crimes were those directed against planned refugee shelters. Since January 2015, 1419 attacks against refugee shelters were reported of which 204 cases of incendiary. Other crimes included setting fires, attacks with smoke-bombs, bottles, paint bombs, stones, graffiti with right-wing propaganda, etc.¹⁵

The increase in right-wing and xenophobic attacks in the course of 2015 cannot be denied and is continuing until today. Despite the fact that the attacks were clearly reported,

¹³ *Christlich demokratische Union* (Christian democratic union)

¹⁴ *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (Socialdemocratic Party of Germany)

¹⁵ Those numbers as well as a list of attacks since the 1st of January 2015 was provided by Amadeus Antonio Stiftung und PRO ASYL and is available at the following website: [http://www.mut-gegen-rechte-gewalt.de/service/chronik-vorfaelle?&&field_date_value\[value\]&page=198](http://www.mut-gegen-rechte-gewalt.de/service/chronik-vorfaelle?&&field_date_value[value]&page=198) (access: 25.05.2016)

most of the crimes were not persecuted as such, mostly because of the fact that the perpetrators were not known. In many other cases it was argued that it could not be proven that those attacks were indeed motivated by right-wing opinions but were, for example, mainly the result of “impulsive decisions” and alcohol abuse. One of the reasons therefore could be that not centralized and less organized forms of right-wing terrorism and violence are difficult to properly detect and prosecute because those types of violence “tend[s] to fall beneath the government radar, and is often reported as hate crime rather than terrorism” (Ravndal, 2015, p.30). According to Ravndal, the low number of reported right-wing incidents in Europol’s annual terrorism report is “an indicator of this problem.” (Ravndal, 2015, p.30). It might therefore only be partially true that the “neglect” of right-wing violence and the unwillingness to call it terrorism is a conscious decision, but merely the result of the fact that they fall “beneath the government radar” (Ravndal, 2015, p.30). Despite that, a lot of incidents in which no people were harmed were trivialized and it became a commonplace phrase to point at the fact that one should try to “understand the worries of the people” instead of only condemning and persecuting those actions. Consequently, according to this argumentation the state should try to react to the causes of those worries or actively try to delegitimize those worries. Although it might be true that there are legitimate worries and anxieties that lead to the use of violence, this should off course not lead to trivializing the use of violence for expressing those worries and fear, no matter how “harmless” this violence might be.

The fact that many of those crimes were not persecuted and the perpetrators could come off with their actions is not only a result of such prevailing argumentations. It furthermore indicates the inability of the state to correctly classify and react to the obvious increase of right-wing motivated violence and reveals a lot about the prevailing beliefs, assumptions about both terrorism and other forms of political violence. In the next section it will therefore be shown that there are substantial similarities between religiously motivated terrorism and right-wing motivated violence, even if they differ in fatality. In this regard, the asymmetries in the evaluation of both phenomena are not tenable.

Right-wing (extremist) violence and terrorism – differences and similarities

In the first part of this paper it was shown that there are many different definitions of terrorism in use, which is the result of different factors but mainly results from the fact that terrorism cannot be perceived as a single phenomenon. This leaves us with a big question mark concerning the question how to determine which forms of intentional, political violence are terrorism and which are not. Although it has been pointed at the difficulties of trying to define terrorism as a singular phenomenon based on its structural characteristics, both on a legal and academic level there are many such definitions in use. There are some general characteristics that are part of those common terrorism definitions:

Terrorism implies or may imply

- (1) The killing or injuring of innocents/non-combatants/uninvolved parties
- (2) The conscious spreading or instrumentalisation of fear
- (3) The aim of changing the behavior of a non-victim group of people
- (4) The destruction of state property
- (5) The destabilization of a political and/or societal order
- (6) The violent enforcement of particular ideas or political goals
- (7) The disproportional use of force
- (8) Violent acts conducted by non-state individuals

It is often argued that, on the basis of the etymology of terrorism (deriving from the Latin word terror), the most central characteristic of terrorism is the use of fear as a coercive instrument. Yet, just the instrumentalisation of fear cannot be the only characteristic which distinguishes terrorist violence from other forms of violence, war and armed conflict. It can be argued that “general” warfare or for example forms of organized criminality might generate the same amount of fear among a larger group of people as terrorism intends to. The distinguishing characteristics of terrorism arguably derive from the interplay of the different elements enlisted above. However, what might have become apparent from the list above is the fact that many elements can and are also being characteristic for other forms of political violence. There is lot of important research done on the question how terrorism and right-

wing extremism relate. This discussion is mainly determined by the question whether hate crimes (resulting from right-wing radicalism) and terrorism are “close cousins” or “distant relatives”. Deloughery, King & Asal show that hate crimes cannot be perceived as an “antecedent” of terrorism or to be “a form of radicalization that signified an escalation to terrorism” (Deloughery, King & Asal, 2012, p.680). The other way around though, they could demonstrate a causal relation between terror attacks and future hate crimes. They argue that this finding is “entirely driven by right-wing hate crimes perpetrated in response to terror attacks carried out by non-right-wing terrorist groups.” (Deloughery, King & Asal, 2012, p.680). Furthermore, Mills, Freilich & Chermak also argue that the relation between right-wing motivated is a complex one since they appear to “differ in important ways” but “their similarities warrant further investigation into the relationship between the two phenomena.” (Mills, Freilich & Chermak, 2015, p.24). Mills, Freilich and Chermak indeed show that an increase in non-right-wing terrorism and general hate crime relates to an increase in far-right hate crime and far-right terrorism. This research shows, that there is a general interest in how different instances of political violence, far-right and non-far-right, might relate. This is important in order to show that both phenomena share similarities that make them akin and that there are certain shared and determinable dynamics in both phenomena. For this paper, the most important finding of this research is the fact that both right-wing hate crimes or right-wing extremist terrorism is akin to non-right-wing crimes and terrorism. In the following part of this paper, it will be looked at some structural similarities instead of “causal” similarities in order to show, that structural similarities between right-wing motivated crimes in the context of the refugee crisis and non-right-wing motivated terrorist acts do not legitimize the distinct political and public reaction to both phenomena.

If we take as an example the manifold right-wing motivated attacks against refugee shelters, refugees, politicians, etc. in the course of 2015-2016, most of the characteristics can also be applied to this violence in the following way:

(1) The killing or injuring of innocents/non-combatants/uninvolved parties

Although one can argue that the fatality of right-wing violence in the context of the refugee crisis is not comparable to the way in which “terrorism” is fatal, people have also

been injured by right-wing violence in the last 1.5 years. Those people were, in a classical sense, non-combatants, private, non-state persons and chosen randomly as victims.

(2) The conscious spreading or instrumentalisation of fear

It can be argued that one of the main characteristics of right-wing violence in the context of the refugee crisis is its “symbolic” use violence. Despite its low degree of fatality, the right-wing motivated attacks are indisputably an instrument to induce fear amongst refugees, politicians who are responsible for planning refugee shelters and amongst those people who are actively engaged in supporting the government by working or volunteering in refugee aid organizations, etc. Thus, in other words: “If a central criterion of terror[ism] consists in placing people in a permanent state of fear so that they must expect an attack at any time, then the attacks by groups of right-wing youths should be included in the analysis.” (Lehr, p.205)

(3) The aim of changing the behavior of a non-victim group of people

Again, the main aim of right-wing violence in the context of the refugee crisis is to force the government to change their actions, to enforce different political decisions and also to fuel suspicion and hatred of residents towards asylum seekers. Therefore, this particular form of right-wing violence definitely aims at changing the behavior of a larger group of people through the use of fear.

(4) The destruction of state property

As the largest amount of attacks were direct against refugee shelters and less against persons, right-wing motivated violence in the context of the refugee crisis implies for a decisive part the destruction of state property.

(5) The destabilization of a political and/or societal order

The destabilization of the political or societal order is arguably not a direct aim of right-wing violence in the context of the refugee crisis. However, the threat of increasing radicalization and polarization within society and on a political level as a result of increasing right-wing violence contributes substantially to the destabilization of the political and societal order.

(6) The violent enforcement of particular ideas or political goals

As with Islamist, religiously motivated or political terrorism, right-wing violence in the context of the refugee crisis is motivated by a particular set of ideas and, via the use of violence, tries to enforce different political decisions and course of political action. It violently enforces the acceptance of this set of ideas as legitimate.

(7) The disproportional use of force

It is generally difficult to determine whether the use of force is proportional or disproportional. The use of violence is only proportional, when, as an *ultima ratio*, is absolutely necessary to attain a certain goal. This goal however should, in the best case, be a legitimate goal. Those responsible for the violence against refugees and refugee shelters would probably argue that the use of violence is their only possibility to make their interests and opinions heard, as democracy, according to their opinion, does not allow the representations of those “legitimate” interests. In a liberal democracy, the use of force as an instrument of demonstrating assumed underrepresented thoughts and ideas is always illegitimate and disproportional. The destruction of state property, attacks on politicians and refugee cannot be perceived as proportional to the fears, anxieties, worries, etc. from which this violence results.

(8) Violent acts conducted by non-state individuals

Right-wing motivated violence in the context of the refugee crisis is non-state violence and in no other way clearly organized. Perpetrators are mostly individuals.

This section aimed to show that, if based on certain fundamental elements of common terrorism definitions, it is difficult to determine the exact difference between terrorism and current waves of right-wing motivated violence. The commonalities and similarities are larger than many people would like to accept. Nevertheless, both forms of violence result from certain frustrations, worries, ideas and are the result of radicalized thoughts. The main argument against comparing Islamist terrorism with right-wing motivated violence is the degree to which both radicalized phenomena differ in fatality, their differing degree of organization of the violence, etc. The discussion here should have shown that the reprehensibility might indeed be to some degree dependent on the fatality of the violence, but that this should not imply that other structural commonalities should be ignored. From a structural perspective and based on the concrete appearance and consequences of both phenomena, it was shown that there are good reasons to call right-wing motivated violence in the context of the refugee crisis “terrorism” or at least a “very close cousin” of terrorism. Simi argues that: “dramatic events like 9/11 help generate “moral panics” (Cohen, 1972), which refers to the intense feelings that are directed toward a group who are perceived as a significant threat.” (Simi, 2010, p. 254). He furthermore argues that not every group is equally likely to be perceived as such a threat, for example in-group vs. out-group, and that therefore, right-wing motivated violence, hate crimes and terrorism might often be trivialized and “forgotten about”. Simi concludes that there are no legitimate reasons for trivializing one form of terrorism or violence and overreacting to another, very similar, form of terrorism or violence. Instead, terrorism should be perceived as political strategy that can be adopted by different groups and can thus appear in many different forms. Therefore, analysis of terrorism should not be directed by presumptions about a certain form of terrorism, but by an understanding of terrorism as a general political strategy. (Simi, 2010) Although this paper does not want to make the strong argument that in the case of the right-wing extremist violence in the context of the refugee crisis, Germany is being confronted with a wave of

right-wing terrorism in a strict sense (similar to the NSU), through this analysis it however wanted to point at the underexposed relation between right-wing extremism and terrorism as a violent strategy, on the undefined nature of right-wing terrorism and on the lack of awareness about the danger and presence of right-wing terrorism. There is an urgent need for more research on this topic and although a more in-depth discussion of the current state of the art does not fall within the scope of this article, some important contributions to the further development of this field of study, by for example Koehler and McGowan needs to be mentioned here. (Koehler, 2014a, 2014b, 2015; McGowan 2006, 2014).

Concluding, in this section it was argued that “extremely dangerous” Islamist terrorism and “we need to try to understand it” right-wing motivated violence in the context of the refugee crisis are nothing more but branches of the same tree. Being aware of their commonalities instead of their differences is a first necessary step in the direction of dealing more consistently, less biased and thus more effectively with both challenges, as will be further discussed in the next section.

Toward a more consistent evaluation of radicalized (political) violence

The last sections tried to show that there are a lot of prevalent perceptions and opinions in the context of the “refugee crisis” that relate to a rather biased interpretation of current social and political reality. It was shown that, for example, Islamist, religiously motivated terrorism is perceived as an excessive threat to national security whereas the obvious increase of right-wing motivated violence is trivialized. At this point it should however also be pointed out that the situation is off course not black-and-white and there are some concrete examples of a growing awareness for the serious nature of right-wing violence in the context of the refugee crisis.¹⁶ Nevertheless, most important current debates on national security include discussions on the prohibition of the Niqqab and Burka or on civil defence in case of terrorist attacks and not on how to contain right-wing extremist violence. This clearly

¹⁶ In April 2016 the “Gruppe Freital” (Freital) group was arrested and was openly depicted as “right-wing terrorist” group. (<http://www.spiegel.de/panorama/justiz/sachsen-buergerwehr-aus-freital-unter-terrorverdacht-a-1085006.html>) and Minister of Justice Heiko Maas demanded a revision of the criminal code regarding the prosecution of right-wing violence. (<http://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/justizgipfel-mit-heiko-maas-laender-fordern-schaerferes-strafrecht-gegen-rechtsextremisten/13009788.html>)

shows that there is an unbalanced understanding of risk springing from both threats. The exaggerated attention that is given to the issue of transnational, religiously motivated terrorism has, according to this paper, negative effects on other urgent problems in a two-folded way. First, it further fuels existing worries, fears and xenophobic thoughts amongst the citizenry and secondly, it distracts a lot of most needed attention from domestic problems that arguably pose a larger risk to political and societal stability. Although the rise right-wing political thought and right-wing motivated violence in the context of the refugee crisis has been the most visible and most medialized in Germany, this paper will end by pointing out that one should be careful to perceive it as a typically German problem, as is often willingly argued. In the whole of Europe one can observe the tendency that right-wing political thoughts become more and more socially and politically acceptable. Certain perceptions and opinions that would have been perceived as unquestionably right-wing years ago are now often seen as representing reality and expressing the comprehensible worries and fears of the common man. The diffuse and “invisible” radicalization within all levels of society and throughout the political spectrum and the lack of adequate reaction to counter this development is also not a typically German problem.

The inability of treating different forms of political violence in a consistent way is, in the context of the refugee crisis turning into a European problem. The main reason therefore is the sole fact that moral evaluation of political reality is always inevitably dependent on certain assumptions about the nature and causality of things. In the current context, the moral panic concerning Islamist terrorism has shifted the focus towards potential threats to national stability from the outside, thereby ignoring the threat from within. The threat from within is the diffuse radicalization and the increasing acceptance of clearly xenophobic, racist, discriminating and other right-wing phrases, opinions and even actions. This threat increases the likeability of different forms of radicalization to induce each other reciprocally. Reciprocal radicalization, in the sense that an increased presence of right-wing, xenophobic thoughts also fuels extremism amongst the main target group of current right-wing violence is a real danger that should be taken serious. Reciprocal or cumulative radicalization might arguably lead to a growing social and political instability if the state is not able to react properly and acts actively in trying to contain this dynamic. This dynamic in particular might pose a more serious threat to national security than the diffuse threat of Islamist terrorist

attacks. The societal polarization resulting from the inconsistent reaction to different forms of political violence furthers a dynamic of reciprocal radicalization.

“Competition between groups [...] can also encourage extremist positioning as groups and activists struggle to make their voice heard. Responses to Islamist violent extremism, moreover, could prompt (and increase support for) greater and more organized use of violence by far-right activists as individuals and groups seek to demonstrate their ability to respond to the perceived threat of Islamism through escalating the use of violence they themselves seek to display.” (Holbrook, 2013, p.234)

The last sections have shown that the differing evaluation and perception of both Islamist terrorism and right-wing motivated violence in Germany in particular, and in Europe in general, in the context of the refugee crisis can and should not only be explained by the degree in which both phenomena differ in fatality, organization, methods or goals. Instead, it was argued that both evaluation and perception are influenced by certain assumptions about both phenomena. This asymmetry bears important risks and dangers for the political stability in Germany as well as in other European countries in which those dynamics or on the rise. The differing evaluation of different forms of extremist violence and thus the differing reactions contribute to a dynamic of reciprocal radicalization, in which different groups of people try to compete in order to make their (political) statements heard.

Concluding, Europe, not only Germany, is being “blind on the right eye” although the rise of xenophobic, right-wing violence has been the largest in Germany in the course of 2015-2016. Germany indisputably shows decisive structural problems in dealing with the challenge of right-wing radicalization and right-wing motivated violence. Although on the one hand, this might be the result of many years of ignoring the ongoing problem of right-wing extremism, because of outdated legislation or past experiences, this inability is furthermore decisively the result of manifold other assumptions and presumptions about political reality and risks. This unbalanced evaluation of both phenomena obstructs effective action against the right-wing threat from “within” and instead fosters, fuels and induces further radicalization, polarization and excessive coercive action against “the terrorist threat”.

Conclusion

In the context of the current refugee crisis, Germany is confronted with a challenge from within. This challenge is the rise of right-wing, nationalist and xenophobic thought and violence. By emphasizing the risk of Islamist, transnational, religiously motivated terrorism as number one national security threat, the German government appears to have, because of multiple reasons, difficulties in dealing with current developing dynamics within society which results in tolerating or at least not reacting appropriately to the rise of right-wing motivated violence. This paper tried to show that there are some important structural commonalities between both the source and the occurrence of Islamist terrorism and right-wing motivated violence. Consequently, it was argued that what forms of violence are called terrorism is, after all, more a result of assumptions about the nature of things than a result of structural differences between those different forms of political violence. The labeling of a specific form of violence as terrorism is thus ultimately dependent on one's point of view, on specific interests and perceptions of risk and security. Based on basic features of both religiously motivated terrorism and right-wing motivated violence in the context of the refugee crisis, the latter could be called "terrorism" as well. This paper showed that, the choice not to call this particular form of political violence "terrorism" is not self-evident but reveals a disconcerting *Salonfähigkeit*¹⁷ of and tolerance towards right-wing, xenophobic and discriminatory thoughts in German, and European, politics today.

¹⁷ A general acceptance in political and public discourse

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