Intellectual Side-Switchers, Historical Case Studies and Court Cases

A Bonus Chapter for *From Traitor to Zealot: Exploring the Phenomenon of Side-Switching in Extremism and Terrorism*[1]

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B1 Intellectual Far-Left Renegades in the Extreme Right

On June 17, 1953, a wave of strikes, protests, and demonstrations by workers across the socialist German Democratic Republic (GDR), the East German satellite state of Soviet Russia, had reached its culmination point. Just a little more than one month after the death of Soviet dictator Josef Stalin on March 5, 1953, an increasingly forced acceleration of the establishment of socialism in East Germany coupled with raised production goals for workers and an overall failure to improve the living standards, led to countrywide uprisings. Soviet army troops brutally struck down the upheaval, killing 34 protestors and bystanders (Baring, 1972).

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This first anti-Stalinist revolution in the Soviet bloc of states had significant consequences and implications not just for Germany, but also for other Soviet-style nations in terms of the potential of popular revolutions against their system.

Among the many people shocked by the events and disillusioned from communism's promises was Hans-Dietrich Sander (1928–2017), who had moved to the GDR just one year prior, in 1952. Sander had first studied protestant theology in Berlin but switched to theatre, Germanic studies, and philosophy between 1949 and 1952. Fortunate enough to have received a high-level recommendation, he was able to do an internship in the Berlin ensemble under the famous left-wing playwright Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956), who influenced him to become a committed communist. This fact even resulted in the revocation of his university scholarship and finally caused Sander to seek a professional and ideological future in the socialist GDR. The events of June 1953 and the general situation in the East German state made him reconsider his worldviews and return to West Germany in 1957, disillusioned with communism. This experience did not, however, lead to an embracement of democracy. On the contrary, Sander drew inspiration for his goal to cause the collapse of both German states out of his ideological criticism against Marxism, which he began to develop into a PhD thesis (completed in 1969).

In addition to reaching out to far-right intellectuals, he started to write articles and books in favor of reestablishing the German Reich and revitalizing the German people's sense of nationalism. Over the course of his ideological career and activism, Hans-Dietrich Sander became an influential and outspoken far-right extremist, who was even flagged several times by the German intelligence services for his committed hatred against the democratic system. Sander gathered around him other renegades from the far left who had become active in the extreme right, some of which I will discuss in this chapter. Why did he not turn toward liberalism and democracy after leaving communism? In the words of fellow renegade Günter Maschke (see a detailed profile shortly):

> Sander is one of our best guys … In contrast to the renegades from the liberal-bourgeois camp, the right-wing coming from Marxism is immune against all recidivism into "liberalism" and against any small hope in the "system". He already has gotten a vaccine, which is complemented rather than renewed when he turns to the right. The distance from the ex-Marxist to the existing order is larger and chronologically longer in the past. (original in German, translated by author, Maschke, 2011, p. 135)

The phenomenon of ex-communists who turn to the right-wing side of the political spectrum and become influential intellectual figures or even high-ranking political leaders is well known. In the Anglo-American world, the 1949 seminal collection of six essays written by former communists under the title *The God That Failed* (Crossman, 2001) established the term "Kronstadt moment," referring to the 1921 rebellion of Soviet sailors, soldiers, and

civilians in the port city of Kronstadt, Russia. Many of the authors in this collection had become famous writers, politicians, and artists using their own experience for decidedly anti-communist activism. The editor of the book, member of the British Parliament Richard Crossman (1907–1974), found that every ex-communist needed to have his or her personal "Kronstadt moment," in which disillusionment with the far-left ideological conviction materialized.

Acts of violent suppression of working-class resistance led many adherents of communism to turn against it, just as Hans-Dietrich Sander did. There are many more cases of such influential intellectual defection from left to right (for a collection and analysis see Oppenheimer, 2016), to name only a few: writer-editor, *Time* magazine journalist, and former Soviet spy Whittaker Chambers (1901–1961) or the philosophers and writers James Burnham (1905–1987) and Christopher Hitchens (1949–2011). In many cases, these ex-communists invigorated conservative or right-wing movements, parties, and intellectual discourses, bringing their inside accounts from the ideological enemy to the table. However, they also oftentimes (albeit not always) remained within the parliamentary and democratic political system in order to express and advance their anti-communism. In that sense, communist defectors had important roles in building and developing the American and British anti-communist conservative and radical right, as well as infusing it with new concepts and ideas. There are also those intellectuals such as Sander, who do not contend with countering their former in-group within the realm of radical right (but still basically democratic) means. These side-switchers remain equally committed to the full-scale destruction of liberalism, democracy, and their former in-group, but now from the extreme right-wing side.

This means, that extremist side-switching as a phenomenon is not confined to those actively engaging in violent acts and other crimes, but also to those intellectuals providing the reasoning and ideological basis for such milieus. In particular, the German left-wing socialist student movement of the late 1960s has not only produced militant extremists, such as the RAF, from which some later defected (see, for example, Horst Mahler, Section 2.1), but curiously, many cases of individuals arguing in favor of two opposing extremist ideologies in writings and philosophies over the course of their lives. In this chapter I will look at some of those early socialists, Marxists, and communists who expressed their ideological commitment mainly through intellectual activities and ended up pleading the case for the extreme right. Conflict with the law has not been the dominant feature of their storylines, even though run-ins with the authorities were inevitable. Still, the individuals discussed here have made a full ideological turnaround and oftentimes discussed the reasons for that in their publications or interviews.

It is important to highlight again the importance of being careful not to confuse extremist ideological convictions with extremist violence or criminal

behavior in general. Publicly supporting an extremist ideology and arguing in its favor through (mostly) theoretical statements is clearly protected as expression of opinion and freedom of speech in most Western democracies. When and how extremist views might lead to illegal extremist criminal acts like violence are much debated issues in radicalization and terrorism research (e.g., Bartlett & Miller, 2012; Jaskoski et al., 2017; Reidy, 2018). Here, it suffices to reiterate that discussing side-switchers as extremists does not equal labeling their actions as illegal and criminal per se. Theoretically defending extremist positions, for example, in publications, is clearly one form of extremist behavior in general. On the contrary, however morally repugnant we might find the opinions and positions of the persons discussed here, nonviolent and legal means of expressing one's thoughts and opinions are always preferable to the alternative of violence. With that being said, I do not aim to justify or relativize the danger and toxicity of the positions they spread and as we will see, the transition to aiding and abetting criminal extremist milieus is fluent, especially through providing ideological foundations for their deeds. It is even more surprising, that some of the intellectual renegades I will present in the following section have managed to achieve academic acclaim for their scholarship. In any case, I deem the following case studies to be about extremist intellectual side-switchers because they began their ideological career in the far left and ended up in the extreme right. On both sides of their defection, they (mostly) worked to spread ideologies built upon the fundamental devaluation of other human beings outside of their contemporary in-group. They never (or only very briefly while in between camps) came to tolerate ambiguity in political positions.

B1.1 Armin Mohler

Armin Mohler was born in Basel, Switzerland, in 1920 and died at age 83 in Munich in the year 2003. His life and career were dominated by political-philosophical publications and journalistic activities. Mohler is widely seen as a defendant of the German "Conservative Revolution" movement (1918–1933), which created the intellectual basis for National Socialism through its dedicated rejection of liberalism, democracy, and egalitarianism (Woods, 1996). It was Mohler's 1949 doctoral dissertation about the Conservative Revolution that created a broad academic and political debate in Germany and resulted in a wider public association with certain Weimar-era intellectuals as members of a coherent movement under this term. The work is still regarded as a standard publication in this far-right intellectual milieu (Spiegel, 2003), even though Mohler's goal to distance the movement from National Socialism was obvious and heavily biased it (Weiß, 2017, pp. 44–48).

As will become evident throughout this section, some key thinkers of the Conservative Revolution, for example, Ernst Jünger (1895–1998) or Carl Schmitt (1888–1985), continued to influence many intellectual side-switchers through their works far beyond the time of their main activities in Weimar Germany. Mohler is also regarded as a key philosophical pioneer of the "New Right," which has gained significant influence since the early 1980s (e.g., Minkenberg, 1992; Minkenberg, 1993, 1998). The German domestic intelligence service (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, or BfV) even saw him as the "spiritual father" (BMI, 2004, p. 88) of the German New Right. Going much further than that, Mohler described himself as "fascist" (David, 1995) in a 1995 interview, albeit only for a short time; his first experiences with political ideologies were rooted in Marxism and communism.

Mohler grew up in Switzerland, where he started his university education in art history, Germanic studies, and philosophy in 1938. At the age of 20 he was drafted into the Swiss military but deserted in February 1942 and illegally crossed the border into Germany to join the elite Nazi military formation of the Waffen-SS. It was there that Mohler received a formal ideological education and indoctrination from the SS in one of its cadet schools for foreign recruits. As he was not permitted to join the war on Germany's side and was rejected by the SS (Spiegel, 2003), he returned to Switzerland in the same year after studying art history for a couple of months in Berlin. Upon his arrival in Switzerland, Mohler was arrested and sentenced to one year in prison for desertion and illegal border crossings but was able to continue his philosophy and art history studies soon after being released. Stunningly, Mohler developed a friendship with the Jewish philosopher and sociologist of religion Jacob Taubes (1923–1987). Taubes later described the relationship between the two as: "in a manner of speaking, he was the right-wing extremist and I was the left-wing extremist" (Taubes, 1987, p. 67). In 1946, Mohler published a positive article about Ernst Jünger, who had become a pariah in post–Second World War Germany due to his outspoken opposition against the Weimar Republic and romanticization of wartime violence in his 1920 autobiography *Storm of Steel*. Jünger took note of Mohler's piece and established contact with him. In the following years, Mohler even became Jünger's personal secretary, from 1949 to 1953.

In the early 1950s, Mohler began working as a journalist and transferred to Paris as a French correspondent for a Swiss daily newspaper and later for the German weekly *Die Zeit*. Beginning in 1964, Mohler wrote for the much more conservative German paper *Die Welt*, which is the flagship publication of the Axel Springer publication house. Mohler also was one of the first contributors of the right-wing conservative magazine *Criticón*, which was founded in 1970 and existed until 2007. His publication trajectory clearly displayed a continuous move toward the radical right, including the newspaper *Junge*

Freiheit and, using a pseudonym, the extreme right-wing *Deutsche National Zeitung*. Academically, Mohler completed his postdoctoral teaching qualification (habilitation) at the University of Innsbruck, Austria, and became the manager of the Carl Friedrich von Siemens Foundation in Munich in 1964.

Using the foundation to advance his own philosophies, Mohler effectively turned the institution into a New Right think tank until he left his position in 1985. Politically, however, he was close to the center-right conservative "Christian Social Union" (Christlich Soziale Union, or CSU) in Bavaria in the 1970s but also to the extreme right-wing Republican party under former NSDAP member and SS soldier Franz Schönhuber (1923–2005). Mohler played a critical role in drafting the Republican party's political program and ideological manifesto published in 1985 (Jaschke, 1993, p. 113) and has supported the leading thinker of the French "Nouvelle Droite" Alain de Benoist since the 1970s (Mohler, 2001, p. 68). Among his own intellectual role models and most important influencers were Carl Schmitt, former right-wing terrorist and member of the Organization Consul during the Weimar Republic (for a background on the organization see Stern, 1963), Ernst von Salomon (1902–1972), and national-Bolshevist Ernst Niekisch (1889–1967), in addition to Oswald Spengler (1880–1936) and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) (Mohler, 2001, p. 40). Toward the early 1990s, Mohler moved further to the extreme right by focusing his attention on advocating for the removal of the criminalization of denying the Holocaust. In his perspective, the goal of this criminalization was to silence research that could "exonerate" Germany (Mohler, 1989). He also began using the term "Auschwitz-lie" in 1994, which resulted in Mohler's increasing isolation and exclusion from most mainstream publications (Harwardt, 2019, p. 314). Extreme-right publishers, however, welcomed him with open arms and swiftly republished his works, placing a particular emphasis on his statements about the Holocaust (Weiß, 2017).

According to his own statements, Armin Mohler began his ideological career on the side of communism at the end of the 1930s, with a special focus on anti-militarism. As a prolific writer and interviewee, there are naturally countless sources to trace the development of his political thoughts and side-switching storyline. The main document used here, however, is a conversation between Armin Mohler and Petra Müller from March 1988. Müller interviewed Mohler for her diploma thesis in social science and openly came from a left-wing perspective with curiosity about his intellectual development. The transcript of the interview was published by a far-right publishing house in 2001 under the telling title *The Conversation about Leftists, Rightists and the Boring* (*Das Gespräch über Linke, Rechte und Langweiler*). In the discussion with Müller, Mohler aims to create a coherently logical albeit not chronological narrative of his philosophical and political development. A key

moment in his youth, according to the interview, was the sudden discovery of a national identity. During a phase of major escalation in the Second World War, Mohler experienced something like an epiphany. The following psychological tension between the concepts of "homeland" (Heimat) and "nation" came to define his later life. In his words:

> Homeland is that, which I can grasp. Basel and the surrounding, the landscape around Basel … About nation: as long as I was a leftist, nation did not exist for me. One moment has changed this, however, during the war in 1941, when my mother came into my room and told me, the anti-fascist and left-wing student, that the Germans invaded Russia. This had nothing to do with anti-communism. I simply had the feeling "now or never" and "you somehow belong there". My biggest identity, which went far beyond the mere homeland, that was Germany. And this is when I began reading Jünger. (original in German, translated by author, Mohler, 2001, pp. 25–26)

For Mohler's storyline, the fundamental nature of war as such, posing both an existential threat and the opportunity for sweeping political and social change, enticed him. Feeling "bored" (original in German, translated by author, Mohler, 2001, p. 26) in Switzerland, the teenage Mohler was looking for action and adventure. On the other hand, the war also made him realize and emotionally experience the identity-creating effect of the nationhood concept. Forced to reflect about his own situation by external political events, Mohler found:

> Switzerland is not a nation in the classical sense, she encompasses completely different people. A third speaks French and is oriented towards France. The Ticino residents, those people who speak Italian, are a very small part and don't even count. Then there is this weird fourth language, that actually shouldn't exist anymore … I never have felt that Switzerland is a nation, because in reality she is only held together by common benefit and a security-patriotism. Switzerland was always a country for me where it was about more or less and not about to be or not to be. One has not even taken the war seriously until the campaign against Russia. Then one felt: now it is a fight for life and death. The meaning of anti-fascism and so on? Who cares, who cares. This is not the important thing. As I said, it is a bundle of different problems, private ones, which I wanted to solve and on the other hand I was captivated by the wave of history. So, it is a mixture. One cannot split it up. It was a very strong emotional thing, so that even now I have not fully understood what happened back then. (original in German, translated by author, Mohler, 2001, p. 27)

Very clearly, Armin Mohler establishes a differentiation between moral values of his juvenile left-wing worldviews and the discovery of ethnically as well as culturally homogenous nationalism. While the former only served to solve personal problems without a deeper philosophical or political meaning in his storyline, the latter touched his very sense of belonging, identity, and existence. This specific duality between homeland and nation aligned with personal limitation and existential identity is the key legend of origin for

Mohler's ideological transition. Switzerland, his home, was the small, petty (in his view), and narrow element in his life, while the German empire and the war took over the role as the entry portal into the world for him. During his teenage years, Mohler remembers adolescent curiosity and the appeal of those opinions, and groups contrary to the mainstream in his immediate environment were also important. In one instance, Mohler and his father went on a short trip to Germany and met a group of Nazi storm troopers. While the young Mohler found the group to be highly fascinating, his father harshly intervened and called him away: "For my whole environment[,] Germany was always the big evil in the north at the border" (original in German, translated by author, Mohler, 2001, p. 28). This sensation increased during the time of his military conscription, which he rejected on principle as a left-wing anti-militarist. However, Mohler was deployed to the Swiss-German border and had to monitor German troop movements for months:

> Yes, I was still a leftist then. I was still an anti-militarist. I didn't want to become an officer. And the officers didn't get it: an academic who doesn't want to be a lieutenant! In a class state like Switzerland it was self-evident that an academic becomes an officer. So, I didn't want to become an officer. I was a bad soldier too. I was lying around at the border then and knew that over there, there is the evil one of which everyone says: is he coming or not? You know, when something is so systematically demonized, then it gets a tempting allure. It tempted me. For a long time, I have ideologically predominated it. (original in German, translated by author, Mohler, 2001, pp. 28–29)

As with many other side-switching storylines, Mohler also credits special personal interactions in shaping his political mindset. Stationed at the border to Germany, he often met German emigrants to Switzerland who made up the majority of his social network at that time. Interestingly, Mohler makes sure to point out that many of those emigrants were Jews. Somewhat echoing his statements relativizing the Holocaust elsewhere, he attempts to paint a picture of the Third Reich in which Jews were able to live and work. Strikingly, Mohler contrasts this with experiences of anti-Semitism in Switzerland and France:

> Back then, I almost completely surrounded myself with German emigrants. In Basel there were mostly Trotskyists and the communists were in Zurich. I myself was a salon-communist. One was simply left. The emigrants were mostly Jews. And their girls were often very pretty and lively. This is why my mother was afraid and said: "Don't you ever come back home with a Jewish girl!" You can't even imagine this today. But I think Switzerland has remained that way until today. It is even the same thing with the French. They don't placard this. But this is how it is. This was the other; mentally it was a selection. It was a foreign world, all these Jews and they very much interested [in] me and I have learned a lot from their intellect . . . Yes, the Third Reich was made up of chieftains called Gauleiter or Reichsleiter. Everyone had his personal clientele. Hitler was able to skilfully play them out against each other. None was allowed to grow too

powerful. One simply had to find the right one who had something to gain, maybe because one had a name already, so that this one could say "he is under my protection". I know many people who went through the Third Reich like that and later acted like the big resistance fighters. I don't think much of all these big resistance legends. I realized that the Jews were different in so many things. But this is what fascinates me, the other. (original in German, translated by author, Mohler, 2001, pp. 29–30)

Alluding that Jewish intellectuals could have easily survived in Germany with the protection of leading Nazis is of course preposterous and, together with pointing out other countries' anti-Semitism to this day, only serves to "redeem" Nazi Germany to a certain degree. In Mohler's storyline, the Jews are simply the fascinating other, people he found curious and different. It was this strategy of relativizing the Holocaust and anti-Semitism that became a major characteristic of his later extreme right-wing worldviews and statements. In the following narrative, Mohler describes how he experienced the swift dissociation from Germany after the war on the side of those emigrants he had come to know. Mixing autobiographical perspectives with the ideological goal of rescuing Germany's reputation again, he explains having had a very positive and good time there with a lot of intellectual freedom:

All in all, I had good experiences in the Third Reich. And there, I soon understood that there was a large and a small consensus. The small consensus was the one in the party, which you can imagine like this: it was the one [consensus] of those people, who represented National Socialism. On the other side, there was the large consensus, into which you had to fit. Once one had accepted three postulates (and not being a Jew, this was added of course), one had a lot of free space in Germany. He had to accept three things: First: Versailles must go away [meaning the Versailles peace treaty of 1919, a major source of humiliation in the eyes of the German population and key mobilization issue for the Nazi movement, author's note], second: the enemy is liberalism and third: the war has to be won . . . Then I have made a very important experience in the Third Reich: getting to know the second generation of National Socialists. The old fighters were partially already used up . . . Oftentimes, they were not very cultivated . . . But a new generation was necessary. The Third Reich and the war were run by a generation of young Nazis that were very different – they were they type of the Helmut Schmidts [1918–2015, the later German chancellor, social democrat and former Wehrmacht officer], real doers. I still know that I was quite fanatical back then and so I told a story among a group of such young National Socialists of the second generation: "imagine that I saw a copy of a Book by Thomas Mann [1875–1955, a famous Jewish-German writer and philosopher, whose books were banned by the Nazis] in a Berlin book store." They looked at me and replied: "look what kind of problems this boy has." It was war and it was completely irrelevant if there was still a book by Thomas Mann in the store. But back then I was pretty stubborn. You know, I came here and thought now I will find a national socialist Germany. What I then saw was the same bourgeois as back home . . . And it was a pretty relaxed thing, not at all tense. In the rural parts, one maybe still found such old fighters, who partially had only a weird role left to play and were walking around with their old medals. Today it should be the same in Russia. The group

of the doers was a class you could rely on. A truly infectious solidarity coined their lifestyle . . . One simply had the feeling that the Germans are a people showing showing what they can achieve when they suffer. (original in German, translated by author, Mohler, 2001, pp. 31–33)

This longer excerpt from the interviews includes several striking and noteworthy elements of Mohler's storyline. Naturally, working as an intellectual and journalist in Germany, his past affiliation with the Nazis and the Third Reich was the biggest risk to his professional career. Rhetorically splitting up the Nazi movement into the old guard as representatives of a bourgeoise Germany and the young, pragmatic, and loyal second-generation Nazis shifts the focus away from those who brought down the Weimar Republic out of fanaticism. Instead, the young generation that inherited the war simply took care of it in Mohler's eyes.

It is stunning that he still chose to present himself as an even more fanatically National Socialist than the young German Nazis. Furthermore, this part of the narrative also includes indications of an ideological bridge of some sort. Associating the later social democratic chancellor Helmut Schmidt, who was a fierce opponent of the Nazis and was even supposed to be executed for his public criticism of the regime, is yet again a tool to dissolve political and personal boundaries between the camps. If someone like Schmidt, in Mohler's perspective, was exactly like the young generation of Nazi doers, then either the Nazis were not so bad after all or the social democrats were closer to the Nazis than they cared to admit. Finally, critical tones regarding class differences and snobbishness also shine through, which is something his former communist positions clearly supported. Mohler immediately follows this point in the storyline with accounts of racial impurity in Germany, which surprised him, and the important function of the NSDAP to provide alternative ways of status improvement for unemployed workers (Mohler, 2001, p. 34). All of this aims to remove some of the aura of evilness from Nazi Germany in his account, while at the same time establishes many small details of the alleged day-to-day reality in the Third Reich that aligned with many of his previous and later ideological positions. In fact, Mohler clearly named the most consistent political position in his life as anti-liberalism and not anti-communism. Rejecting liberalism together with capitalism, for Mohler the enemy of imperialism, class societies, and the bourgeoisie provided the perfect ideological bridge from the far-left to the far-right and helped to avoid any criticism for his former values:

Communism is not a direct threat for countries like Germany. If at all, it can only be introduced here through external political pressure or war. Or when liberalism has crippled us so much that we are easy prey. I have never seen communism as the enemy. I have known too many communists to be afraid of it. I simply never liked the petty

bourgeois for whom money is the god. And god knows the communists weren't like that. In fact I never was an anti-communist. (original in German, translated by author, Mohler, 2001, p. 35)

Anti-liberalism in Mohler's storyline inevitably develops into anti-Americanism and a subtly transported but not so hidden anti-Semitism: "The Americans are even more dislikable to me. I felt better in Russia than in America. Even though I had humanly enjoyable meetings in America too, of course not with those Americans from the East Coast but from the West Coast, where the Americans still were among themselves" (original in German, translated by author, Mohler, 2001, p. 35). The term "East Coast" is a well-established anti-Semitic code among German neo-Nazis and right-wing extremists, which alludes to New York City as the center of an alleged Jewish financial global domination on the one hand, and to Washington DC as the place of Jewish interest groups trying to assert political control on the US government on the other (Gießelmann, Richterich, Kerst, Suermann & Virchow, 2016, p. 168).

Positive personal experiences with nationalist identities as a key to solving conflicts further enriches Mohler's storyline and helps to accentuate the anti-liberalist continuity in his political pathway (Mohler, 2001, pp. 36–37). The consequences of his outspoken opposition against liberal democracy, however, were numerous "witch hunts" (original in German, translated by author, Mohler, 2001, p. 43). These backlashes continued to follow him with each more extreme statement expressing his contempt for liberalism, which allows Mohler to integrate various thinkers from both sides (right and left) into his storyline. Revealingly, the committed French Marxist and founder of revolutionary syndicalism, George Sorel (1847–1922), who also was a major influence on Benito Mussolini in his political development from socialism to Fascism (see Section B2.1), belongs to Mohler's idols too: "Liberalism above all is mostly the faith that it is enough if one says what he wants. I am not at all interested [in] what someone wants. Sorel is so important to me because he is against this ideal decomposition that I call liberalism. I am only interested in what a man does, everything else is arbitrary" (original in German, translated by author, Mohler, 2001, p. 70).

Finally, Mohler combines the classical Marxist revolutionary concept in the version of Sorel with the extreme right's political agenda: "I don't like the word 'conservative'. I like 'right' a lot more … Everyone wants to conserve something. The right cannot conserve anything. Because she doesn't like anything that currently exists. It really is about creating situations, to create something new, which is worthy of preservation … But what currently is there really is not worth[y] of conservation" (original in German, translated by author, Mohler, 2001, p. 85). With that statement, Mohler positions himself

into full-fledged national revolutionism, which is also indicated by his admiration for Ernst Niekisch. Many defectors from the far left to the far right took the same ideological route as it allowed them to unite socialist themes of anti-capitalism, collective solidarity, and anti-imperialism with right-wing nationalism, anti-Semitism, and cultural or biological superiority. Mohler's side-switching storyline is strikingly straightforward in its anti-liberalist core theme and open embrace of elements from both sides of the ideological spectrum. Presenting his ideological development as a simple matter of intellectual maturation seasoned with personal experiences and interactions, Mohler aims to negate differences between right or left as far as possible. Asked what he would understand to be Fascism in the 1995 interview in which he used the term for himself, Mohler answered: "Fascism for me is when disappointed liberals and disappointed socialists come together to create something new" (original in German, translated by author, David, 1995).

B1.2 Matthias Matussek

Matthias Matussek once was one of the "most important journalists" (Henk, 2018) in Germany. Today, he is an author and publisher associated with the far right. Matussek was born in 1954 and in his teenage years and young adulthood, he was a convinced Marxist and later on even lived in an apartment shared by Maoists. By the age of 65, he had become an outspoken supporter of the far-right Identitarian Movement (IdM), which is classified as right-wing extremist by the German domestic intelligence service (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, OR BfV) (BMI, 2020, p. 90). Matussek's sympathizing with the IdM not only became visible in his public statements and ideological shift toward the extreme right, but also through public displays of friendship, for example, by inviting a leader of the IdM to his birthday celebration in 2019 (Dillmann, 2019). Like all the other intellectual renegades here, Matussek is also a prolific writer and commentator. In 2017, the German mainstream and highly influential newspaper *Die Zeit* asked Matussek to write an article about the 1968 student movement and to explain his own ideological transition from left to right. In a document entitled "How I Reached the Right from the Left" (Wie ich von rechts nach links gelangte), he delivered a detailed and pointed self-reflection and condensed side-switching narrative (declaring himself a supporter of the IdM), which provides the basis for the following assessment of his narrative.

Matthias Matussek experienced a strongly Catholic education in his youth, attending a Jesuit-led school for three years. After completing his high school degree (Abitur), he went on to the Free University Berlin for a degree in Germanic, American, and comparative literature studies. However, he quit halfway and transferred to the German journalism school in Munich, where

he finished his training as a journalist in 1977. Ten years later in 1987, he began working for the German news magazine *Der Spiegel* and won a prestigious award for his coverage of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the German reunification. In 1992, he took over the *Spiegel* correspondence bureau in New York; then Rio de Janeiro in 1999 and London in 2003. From 2005 to 2008, Matussek was the head of the arts and entertainment section of *Der Spiegel*. In 2013, he moved to the conservative Axel Springer publishing corporation, where he wrote for its flagship newspaper *Die Welt* until he was fired in 2015 due to public backlash over Islamophobic and xenophobic views he expressed via social media in the context of the Paris terror attacks (dpa, 2015).

Matussek authored several best-selling books, in which he mostly focused on contested societal questions with a conservative Christian position. In 2009 he began voicing criticism against mainstream German conservatism, calling it a "conservatism that has degenerated to a dull lifestyle and belated reckoning with the old enemy on the left" (original in German, translated by author, Matussek, 2009). In the same article, a more value-oriented understanding of conservatism shines through, which serves Matussek to attack conservative parties for willingly and unwillingly destroying such values in a more radical fashion that the far left ever had. In those years, an increasing interest in issues of national and cultural identity became visible through his writings and statements, which defended theories of demographic, cultural, and educational German extermination (Matussek, 2010). It seems that on his intellectual pathway toward the far right, rediscovering the Catholic faith of his family background played an important bridging role for him: "I am as passionately Catholic as I was a Marxist forty years ago. Why? Because my club is being attacked" (original in German, translated by author, as cited in Wallasch, 2011). Again, Matussek voiced criticism against institutions while defending certain core conservative values. Another milestone for his long side-switching process was the addition of homophobia to his ideological portfolio. In 2014, he declared homosexuality to be an "error of nature" (original in German, translated by author, Matussek, 2014) and likened it to deafness and hereditary diseases, thereby moving swiftly toward eugenically and racist positions. Just a few days after his firing in November 2015, he gave a speech at an award ceremony hosted by a newspaper of the "New Right" in Germany. Since then, his publicly expressed support for the extreme-right IdM has led to further integration into the far-right milieu in Germany; he speaks at rallies and writes for openly right-wing extremist and conspiracist outlets.

Matussek's 2017 side-switching storyline follows one main thread: how he always remained loyal to himself – a standard theme of most defector narratives as shown throughout this book. The subheading of his article already sets the tone for the story: "Formerly a Marxist, now a sympathizer of the Identitarians – and yet I have remained true to myself. About my experience

with the 68s and the transformation to today's Matussek" (original in German, translated by author, Matussek, 2017). Right at the beginning of the narrative, Matussek points out the coherent element in his ideological development: anti-authoritarianism. Indeed, every life stage he describes is dominated by some form of a struggle against a hierarchy or authority, beginning with rebelling against his parents over decisions about his leisure activities. Being left, for the young Matussek, mostly meant liberty and lightheartedness:

> . . .we were left, and at that time that meant: pure desire and disorder and freedom and the good feeling of liberating humanity from the old people who had obviously driven the cart into the mud. So for me, '68 et seq. was initially hippie culture, West Coast underground, lust. Intoxications were as important as ideology, both promised the completely different, yes, they mostly fell into each other, and I actually had an insatiable hunger for theory. (original in German, translated by author, Matussek, 2017)

At the age of 16, Matussek joined a Marxist-Leninist student organization and began writing for far-left publications. It is noteworthy that even at his young age, he claims to have had a somewhat leading position, displaying a deep ideological conviction: "I wrote for the 'Rote Signal', our central organ, I agitated, I conducted training courses . . . and it was clear to me that the misfortune of alienation, exploitation, wars, all this had its cause in the system of capitalism" (original in German, translated by author, Matussek, 2017). Matussek moved into a shared apartment of Maoist teachers after his parents relocated to Hamburg. There, he further increased his activism for the far-left milieu, for example, through participation in early morning demonstrations before his classes started. In terms of collective identities, Matussek shifted from altar boy to Marxist, indicating his Catholic roots before entering the extreme left. In the following years, he experienced "wonderful days of anarchy" (original in German, translated by author, Matussek, 2017), including petty criminal activities born out of an ideology encouraging any act of resistance against the capitalist system and its state authorities.

However, Matussek realized that he could not buy endless freedom with his political engagement: "I learned very early that the leftist history of ideas was full of prohibitions" (original in German, translated by author, Matussek, 2017). Intimate relationships in the milieu deepened his commitment to a point at which he was at least somewhat seriously claiming a willingness to sacrifice his life for the cause and "die on the barricades" (original in German, translated by author, Matussek, 2017). Throughout the 1970s, moral superiority and following his every desire was, according to his storyline, the main reason for his left-wing involvement. Still, an interest in opposite positions was present: "I was always curious about the other side, I was eager to get to know it, the immanence bored me, maybe it was possible to experience heaven even before death" (original in German, translated by author, Matussek, 2017).

Matussek did encounter the militant far left in the form of RAF terrorism's periphery. He recounts an incident in his apartment community, which resulted in his repulsion of that particular group: "This time, a heroin-addicted and deserted GI who had no desire for Vietnam and a few confused 16-year-old RAF sympathizers moved in; the matter was quickly over for me, and I decided to travel to India with the core group in a VW bus to expand my consciousness" (original in German, translated by author, Matussek, 2017).

In the ensuing trip to India, Matussek more or less drifted from day to day, tested a lot of drugs, and finally earned a two-month prison sentence. During his incarceration, he witnessed shocking brutality and anarchy among the fellow prisoners, as well as torture and executions. He also met and got to know convicted terrorists, who comforted him. It appears that his time in an Indian prison somewhat disillusioned Matussek in terms of his desire for anarchy and left-wing revolution. After his release, Matussek moved to Berlin to finish his education: "Now I just wanted my peace and quiet and to get my studies behind me as quickly as possible" (original in German, translated by author, Matussek, 2017). Matussek still considered himself to be ideologically left wing at that time, even though he was in a deep personal crisis:

> I was left, but homeless, the German autumn [a reference to the era of RAF terrorism, author's note] was cold and hard in Berlin, I was severely depressed, isolated, completely lonely. The RAF murders, the heroin deaths. Yes, I took the obligatory two-semester Marx "Das Kapital" course at the FU [Free University] in Berlin . . . For me Adorno/Horkheimer's dialectic of enlightenment was a revelation. It then offered me the most illuminating critique of the system in a fascinating mixture of Marxism and mythology, anthropology and cultural criticism. In my copy almost every line was highlighted. The self-enlightenment of the enlightenment, that was now called for. Of course I was left, but when the slobs caused the Emmerich lecture on Kafka to be stopped in order to interest us in the liberation struggle in Mozambique, in bad German with many exclamation marks, every sentence a shot in the dark, I was bored. A completely stupid, mystery-free attitude toward the world was expressed there, I, on the other hand, loved the secret, the art, the night side . . . I liked Walter Benjamin's messianic concept of revolution, which includes the rescue of the dead, and Max Horkheimer's thoughtful, deep turn at the end of his life, back to his Jewish roots, and then I discovered familiar vibrations, all of which left the flat revolutionary idiots far behind. (original in German, translated by author, Matussek, 2017)

Matussek expresses boredom and lack of excitement as important sources of disillusionment with parts of the far-left milieu. Their intellectual insufficiency in his eyes appals him. His main theme, the deep-rooted critique of authorities and institutions, fueled engagement with left-wing philosophers but also created distance from the provocative activism and militancy of other parts of the milieu. In a subsequent incident during a music festival in 1974, Matussek decided to play the German national anthem using some kind of

accordion under the influence of drugs. The immediate backlash became a moment of reckoning for him:

> That was the greatest imaginable provocation at the time: the national anthem. It was part of good manners, even a matter of self-evidence among intellectuals, to hate Germany and American avant-garde artists found this strange self-hate interesting and played with it. That was a very bad start for this trip. I ran out into the night and felt as if I had been spit out, ran into the two or three Kreuzberg [a district of Berlin, author's note] bars that were nearby, looking for friends, for human faces, but I couldn't find any, I flipped a little, but the crocodiles on the pinball machine moved and snapped at the ball, I was on fire, ran outside again and walked across the moon, across a karstified, empty wasteland in space – I have never felt more alone. My personal end of Flower-Power. The flowers were trampled. The "one world" flower dreams were over. (original in German, translated by author, Matussek, 2017)

The personal crisis deepened and Matussek shifted from using drugs to alcoholism at the same time he moved from Berlin to Munich to complete his journalism education. In his storyline, he points out that he not only shifted cities but to some degree also milieus: "Compared to Berlin, Munich was a sanatorium full of satisfied people without any aggression. Instead of taking drugs, they drank" (original in German, translated by author, Matussek, 2017). This particular note indicates that for him the far-left milieu was much too centered on solving personal problems and continuous criticism and wasn't moving forward. Nevertheless, Matussek was clearly not getting better psychologically and ended up in a psychiatric ward after a failed suicide attempt. In this moment of hitting rock bottom, his father came to take care of him and Matussek found a new perspective and emotional stability when he discovered the concept of homeland (Heimat) and by extension his religious roots:

> When I woke up there, there was – my father. He visited me, it was just before Easter, he was full of love and without any reproach and he awakened in me anew the faith of my childhood, the faith in a resurrection, also my own. It was, as Bloch writes at the end of his [book] *Principle Hope*, a homecoming, precisely this hope that something would arise in the world "which shines in all of our childhood and in which none of us have been yet": homeland [Heimat]. (original in German, translated by author, Matussek, 2017)

Professionally, Matussek (at the age of 24) moved into the arts and entertainment field, where he began engaging with many different intellectual influences. It was here he started to leave behind the left-wing ideology: "Was I still left in those days? Surely not, when it was about art" (original in German, translated by author, Matussek, 2017). More importantly, Matthias Matussek was exposed to the far left emotionally and morally: "It spoke from my heart, at that time, because I had lost faith in a left-wing utopia and all sympathy for it, however distant, in the face of the moral crash landing of the RAF murderers, and this had thus set a first piece of the puzzle for 'today's Matussek'" (original in German, translated by author, Matussek, 2017).

Through his involvement in partially heated political debates among artists and intellectuals as an observing but still very much engaged and passionate journalist, Matussek increasingly perceived a form of moral authoritarianism within the far left. This of course, he explains, created a natural reactance on his part, especially since rebellion against authority is presented as the main underlying theme of his ideological life: "but I was getting tired of the moralizing imperative. Yes, in the meantime I had ceased to be a reliable, self-evident ally of the left. Criticism of authority at any time, but now the authority had changed, because now the leftist discourse had taken over" (original in German, translated by author, Matussek, 2017). We can clearly see how Matussek tells a storyline built upon his personal continuity of convictions, while claiming on the other side that the ideological dominance within the cultural discourse had changed instead of him. Staying in the logic of this narrative, Matussek was now forced to direct his anti-authoritarian intellectualism against what he presents as left-wing-controlled political and cultural correctness. It seems, that this mechanism also resulted in a more comprehensive adaption of specific political views on his part: "And gradually the doubt came, not only whether I would succeed in defeating capitalism, but whether I wanted this at all" (original in German, translated by author, Matussek, 2017). A slowly increasing perception of moral indignation and resistance against the left-wing milieu and the way it asserted power on various societal discourses is the precursor for a fundamental epiphany in Matussek's storyline. After the highly polarizing time of the RAF murders (the so-called German Autumn in late 1977), he now experienced the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 firsthand. The lesson he drew out of this event was a complete disillusionment with the far left:

> Two years later, after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, I experienced the collapse of leftist theory, more generally: the oath of disclosure of a system that was made of lies and collapsed like a rotten theatre backdrop. There I was, probably, after political arithmetic, on the right, another piece in the mosaic of the "Matussek of today", because I drove through the country and talked to the victims … It's really a jumble of perpetrator and victim biographies, a lot of patching up. The system of evil old stubborn men had wreaked havoc, created endless suffering. Above all: through the lies in language. There were these two areas: in public, people kept to the required language rules; in the kitchen, on the other hand, truth was spoken. The psychiatrist Maaß spoke of the "emotional congestion" that arises when a politically "wrong" statement leads to social ostracism, to a ban from the profession and possibly to imprisonment. Don't we know this again today, in the invocations of the "fight against the right" and "anti-fascism" as civil religion and "One World" (i.e., The International, which of course existed only as a phrase) and "people are a gift to us"? The cancer of lies ate its way through everything, all these phrases from "friendship among nations" and "solidarity" and "better future" … But it was the moral phrases that outraged me because they euphemized the sheer immorality, the jails, the naked and brutal domination over dissenters. (original in German, translated by author, Matussek, 2017)

Matussek's storyline includes personal interactions with victims and perpetrators of injustice in the GDR system as part of journalistic coverage of German reunification and the downfall of the socialist Eastern state. It is quite obvious that he also aims to compare the oppression of political dissent and subsequent social ostracism in the GDR with his own current situation. Today, Matussek claims, it is mandated opposition to right-wing extremism that has become a way to silence any opinions critical of the powerful left-wing-controlled mainstream. Like many other defectors from the left to the right, portraying himself as a victim of some form of cultural-ideological dictatorship serves to create a protective argument and to evoke sympathy from the audience of the narratives. It also forms the fundamental basis of many far-right conspiracy theories, for example, the "Great Replacement," which is reminiscent in some of Matussek's articles as well. Not surprisingly, views like these made him an ideal supportor of the extreme-right Identitarian Movement. Consequently, Matussek puts blame on the government when talking about far-right violence against refugees and voices understanding for the perpetrators, who are, in his perspective, also victims of the system:

> My topic was criticism of power, my plea was the individual's right to dissent. Figures on the cliff. For me, dear friends and despisers of Matussek, that has always been and remains the most exciting thing … When stones were thrown against Vietnamese and Mozambicans in Hoyerswerda in 1991, I was the first to arrive and drove through the night with frightened Vietnamese in a bus with broken windows, and I wrote a *Spiegel* cover story about the pogrom against those who were brought here as part of "international solidarity" without ever having any real contact with "those who had lived there for a long time". But I also wrote about the helpless, dull perpetrators in their joyless silos, many young ones among them, who had black pop idols like Michael Jackson hanging on the walls of their children's rooms and no language for their contradictions, that is, victims in their own way. (original in German, translated by author, Matussek, 2017)

With such statements, Matussek unites his childhood anti-authoritarian motivations with support for the extreme right, even in its violent form, through a sweeping charge against the "system." Obviously, the meaning of authority has changed significantly from the anti-government and anti-hierarchy activism of the 1968 left-wing student protests to the far right's own culture wars against the so-called political correctness of today. The latter is called "meta-politics" (Sedgwick, 2019) by far-right intellectuals and forms a basic component of Matussek's storyline, however it is not named as such directly. Talking about his experiences in the USA, he incorporates anti-feminism into the struggle against discourse domination by the left:

> How I loved this country! At the beginning of the nineties I wrote about the political correctness that was just breaking out at the universities there, with an astonishment like I wrote about Martians … After my experience with GDR victims, I had not experienced the power of publicly permitted discourse in this pure tyranny again …

I am anti-authority out of reflex, and the feminist witch hunts on campus were a terrible form of domination . . . Was I left or right? I was a journalist with a hunger for stories. (original in German, translated by author, Matussek, 2017)

Framing anti-feminism as a form of anti-authoritarian resistance allows Mattusek to link his storyline with his relationship with his father and his family's Catholic roots. Consequently, he focused some of his journalistic attention on writing about unfairly denying fathers access to their children. But Matussek does not only fight against what he perceives as injustice against men. For him, a completely new form of feminist rule was established, calling him yet again to rebel and resist:

My title *The Fatherless Society* was a furious polemic against the omnipotence of women in government agencies, courts, public offices, in the consultancy and divorce industry and a warning against excluding fathers after a divorce. I traveled the country with my book of the same name as a "missionary of the men's movement" . . . and received the label "pasha of the month" from the magazine *Emma*. Now I was the misogynist. I was only concerned with justice for men and the salvation of the family demonised by the 68ers. (original in German, translated by author, Matussek, 2017)

Victimization and fighting with the underdogs are themes Matussek uses to characterize himself in his side-switching storyline. Somewhat enigmatically he claims: "In short: I have stayed the same, only my opinion about the protagonists have changed, which is because they have changed" (original in German, translated by author, Matussek, 2017). The final piece in the puzzle of "today's Matussek" is the discovery of nationalism. This is attributed to his years spent outside of Germany during which he realized a strong neurotic attitude of Germans regarding their own sense of nationality. Another book he wrote in 2006 was "happily patriotic" in his eyes and turned him into a "right-wing nationalist who sympathizes with the more intelligent Identitarians" (original in German, translated by author, Matussek, 2017). Together with his reinvigorated Catholicism, he increasingly wrote against the mainstream discourse and suddenly found himself labeled as "misogynist, nationalist, dark Catholic, in one word uncool – and all just because I had remained loyal to my spirit of opposition" (original in German, translated by author, Matussek, 2017). The final act of ultimate victimization in Matussek's storyline is the firing that followed his Islamophobic and xenophobic social media posts in the context of the Paris attacks. With a claim that he never got the chance to defend himself personally before being jettisoned out, Matussek ends his narrative by giving the impression that he has become a martyr because of his lifelong conviction to stand up against authority.

B1.3 Günter Maschke

Born in 1943, Günter Maschke is a German writer and philosopher of the "New Right" who, like the other intellectual renegades discussed here, has

begun his ideological pathway in the far-left milieu. Maschke was adopted at the age of four and his father was a conservative Catholic businessman in the textile sector who had been imprisoned in a Nazi concentration camp during the war for supporting the social democrats (Seitenbecher, 2013, p. 59). His father also supplied the newfound German military in the 1950s. During his vocational training as insurance salesman, Maschke got in touch with older communists and befriended them (W. Winkler, 1998). He became a member of the (then) illegal Communist Party of Germany (Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands, or KPD) in 1960 (Seitenbecher, 2013, p. 59). While attending a technical college in Stuttgart, he met the sister of later RAF member Gudrun Ensslin, Johanna, and married her in 1965. The couple then moved to the small university town of Tübingen. There, Maschke, who could not formally enroll in a university degree program (Seitenbecher, 2013, p. 60), attended philosophy classes, some of which were taught by the Marxist scholar Ernst Bloch (1885–1977).

In 1964, he had become involved in the left-wing "Subversive Action" group, which was an early hub for later militant left-wing activists. Starting in 1966, Maschke also became a member of the far-left Socialist German Student Union (Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund, or SDS), which was the leading milieu of the extra-parliamentary left-wing opposition and a key platform for far-left protest. In 1965, Maschke received his draft notice for mandatory military service, at a time he already called himself a "ringleader of organized disobedience" (original in German, translated by author, W. Winkler, 1998). An initial attempt to infiltrate the German army together with other far-left activists failed, and after nine months of active service he deserted to Vienna, Austria in 1966 with an international arrest warrant placed on him. The young far-left milieu celebrated him as one of their first martyrs and even the intellectual godfather of the movement, Theodor Adorno (1903–1969), reportedly called him a "brilliant boy" (original in German, translated by author, Winkler, 1998).

Maschke was arrested in October 1967 and threatened with deportation to Germany. Since he was an influential figure in the Austrian far left, protests supporting him resulted in his release and Maschke used the opportunity to escape to Cuba. The Cuban ambassador had offered asylum and he was subsequently welcomed as a political refugee in early 1968. In Castro's socialist republic, Maschke taught German, served in a militia, and worked as an editor. Spending about two years in Cuba between 1968 and 1969, this time would become the most important phase for his ideological change; the many negative experiences with real life socialism remained most influential throughout the following decades. In Cuba, Maschke befriended the poet Heberto Padilla (1932–2000) and translated his works into German. Padilla had increasingly been at odds with the socialist regime and was arrested in

1971 along with his wife, and charged with subversive activities (Yglesias, 1971). Forced to publicly read out an admission of guilt, the incident caused international outrage and backlash.

Maschke himself was implicated in an alleged plot to assassinate Fidel Castro, experienced brutal interrogation by the authorities, and was deported back to Germany in 1969. In addition to violent oppression of dissent, he also saw the dire economic consequences of socialist rule, even though much of the situation in Cuba was caused by the US-led embargo, and what he deemed to be a deeply hypocritical position of visiting German far-leftists. Back in Germany, he was arrested for deserting from the military and sentenced to 13 months in prison. Even though Maschke had returned from Cuba deeply disillusioned with some aspects of far-left governance, the milieu still regarded him as one of their own. In February 1970, the left-wing terrorist group "Tupamaros Berlin" conducted arson attacks against the court building where his trial was conducted and against the judge sentencing him (Kraushaar, 2013).

Upon his release, Maschke at first attempted to educate the German far-left milieu about his experiences in Cuba and published works describing the regime as a dictatorship over the proletariat, based on "hunger, fear, disorganization, terror and lies" (original in German, translated by author, as cited in Seitenbecher, 2013, p. 262) and comparing Fidel Castro to Mussolini. He had not fully broken with left-wing ideology yet, describing a somewhat painful process of disengagement with his old milieu starting in prison:

> Occasionally, painful feelings of loss began – the difficulties with my crumbling political faith started … As a communist you need some time to say goodbye, it is very excruciating and brings many feelings of guilt with it. For a while I was even some kind of "hyper-communist": communism hast to look exactly in this and that way. Then you want to stay in the left, wandering around between some small groups or sects, small groups or sects, whose teachings are very, very pure … In addition to that, everyday life mostly proves the truth of Marxism. But it didn't go far enough anymore. (original in German, translated by author, Maschke, 2011, pp. 46–47)

Very much in line with the premises of Social Identity Theory (SIT) and the other concepts introduced in Chapter 1, Maschke desperately (according to his storyline) tried to remain a fully committed Marxist and even moved between the most obscure and orthodox sects in the milieu just to find the perfect truth. In his mind, being a Marxist renegade automatically produces prolonged pain and in a stunningly clear reflection, Maschke points out the key threat of disengagement to the individual identity as posited through SIT or the sacred values theory: "The 'Marxist' oftentimes suffers for years when his faith dissolves – and he suffers especially, when he was a member of the Communist Party: he had sworn, now he disavows. He used his whole existence [for it] so that in consequence losing his faith risks losing himself" (original in German, translated by author, Maschke, 2011, p. 50).

Nevertheless, his personal experiences had made him deeply critical of the forms of government in socialist or communist states. Maschke had identified state rule as a source of alienation for the proletariat and advocated for the removal of any governmental order to achieve the full liberation of the working class (Seitenbecher, 2013, p. 263). Via a short-lived and disappointing membership in the Social Democrat Party, he eventually began working as a journalist for the conservative newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ). There he met other renegades, such as Armin Mohler, who helped him to develop a consciousness of ideological defection and developed a mental disengagement from the the "republic of repentance and accomplishment" (original in German, translated by author, as cited in Seitenbecher, 2013, p. 263). Most importantly, however, Maschke began his personal friendship with Carl Schmitt, the legal scholar fallen to disgrace who was now banned from teaching because of his legitimization of the Nazi rise to power using his legal philosophy of emergency legislation. As was the case with Armin Mohler, his teachings and personality had great influence on Maschke, and he was swiftly integrated into a small circle of admirers who met regularly at Schmitt's private home. Maschke's Schmitt obituary was so diametrically opposed to the generally accepted view on Schmitt that the FAZ decided to annul their writing contract with him (Seitenbecher, 2013, p. 264).

Still, Maschke still counts as one of the leading experts on Carl Schmitt's work and thoughts, having had access to his private archives and having published detailed editions and commentaries of his scholarship. In 1990, Maschke left Germany for Peru, where he taught philosophy with a focus on counterinsurgency theory and Carl Schmitt's theories at the Peruvian naval academy La Punta, in a country still very much affected by a civil war that had begun in 1980. It is noteworthy that Maschke closely associated with the government and the military while the opposing party in the internal conflict was a Maoist and Marxist-Leninist guerrilla group named "Shining Path" (Sendero Luminoso). Hence, Maschke had begun to intellectually support a political entity that engaged in directly violent conflict with an opponent that was ideologically close to his own former milieu.

After his return to Germany in 1992, he increasingly gravitated to the extreme right, began publishing most of his articles in far-right outlets, and finally expressed opinions classified as openly extremist by the German intelligence services. He called himself an "enemy of the constitution," which he regarded as nothing more than a "jail" and deemed democratic values "cannibal humanity and gipsy liberalism" (original in German, translated by author, as cited in BMI, 2004, p. 87). Together with other former left-wing activists, such as Horst Mahler (see Section 2.1) and Reinhold Oberlercher (see Section B1.5), Maschke published a "canonical declaration about the movement of 1968" on an extreme right-wing webpage in December 1998. In it, the group

of left-wing renegades argued the that the far-left movement of the late 1960s was neither left nor right, but in fact a national revolutionary attempt to free the German people from oppression. With such statements and associations, Günter Maschke had become an intellectual clearly positioning himself in the extreme right and providing theoretical legitimacy through his work.

Maschke's juvenile engagement with the far left was, above all, an expression of rebellion and anti-establishment sentiments: "Being a communist was the best option for enjoying the delights of the provocateur in conservative Trier back then" (original in German, translated by author, as cited in Seitenbecher, 2013, p. 59). Compared to other fellow far-left activists, Maschke was less interested in creating an ideal society than using the movement as a form of revenge against the ruling authority he might have associated with those Nazis responsible for the suffering of his father: "Back then, I simply wanted these people [to be] massacred or at least silenced, that they were kicked in the ass" (original in German, translated by author, as cited in Seitenbecher, 2013, p. 59). His thirst for political power earned him the nickname "Maschkiavelli" within the left-wing milieu, a reference to the Italian diplomat and philosopher Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) (Seitenbecher, 2013, p. 60).

The major turning point in his life and ideological career came with his stay in Cuba, a political system he would later describe as "authoritarian anarchy" (original in German, translated by author, Maschke, 2011, p. 34). As briefly mentioned earlier, Maschke experienced authoritarian suppression of any dissenting opinions, torture, and economic misery, which he saw as the result of the Castro dictatorship and its detachment from the actual needs of the people (Seitenbecher, 2013, p. 262). Next to being persecuted himself for his friendship with Padilla, another event had a lasting impact on him. In summer 1968, a German student delegation from the SDS was invited to Cuba by Fidel Castro. The group was completely ignorant of any criticism Maschke tried to convey that was based on his own experiences living in the country. In a 2011 autobiographical interview published as a book, Maschke describes the incident as a complete shock:

> In addition to my more and more increasing disappointment about Cuba, came a second, almost deeper disappointment. In summer 1968 an SDS delegation visited Cuba and I gasped of relief, finally I would be able to speak about all that what was confusing and depressing me. But those people who weren't able tell "Si" from "No" knew everything about the sugar island, in contrast to me: that here something of a "protestant ethic" had to be enforced for some time, that all those things I deemed to be serious signs of decay where nothing but inevitable symptoms of a society in transition, and finally that I was only a soft child of the consumerist world and should get it together . . . Soon, they talked with me like the Cuban leadership did. What shocked me back then was, that you only had to scratch at one SDS fellow and right away something

of a "tropical Apparatchik" was looming out of him, who justified almost any repressive action without a real test, because one was in the same situation. Even a tentative attempt at testing these assumptions was almost hysterically rejected. (original in German, translated by author, Maschke, 2011, pp. 35–36)

This and other experiences in Cuba made him realize, that "the human needs order, prohibitions, authority, not liberty" (original in German, translated by author, W. Winkler, 1998). Even though Maschke has rebelled against authority and order his whole life, it was instead that order currently taking power over him instead of a general rejection of authority per se that determined his ideological pathways. A certain ambiguous relationship with an authoritarian state and unlimited power is the key thread running through Maschke's side-switching storyline and provides his own fundament of continuity. In 1998, he explained: "And this is why I moved to the right, because it appeared to be the only authentic way to move against this system" (original in German, translated by author, as cited in Seitenbecher, 2013, p. 264). Indeed, for him the appeal of a truly effective totalitarian state lies in the possibility of providing stable order for its people. After his return from Cuba, Maschke experienced the fascist Franco dictatorship in Spain for a brief time and came to respect it. Asked why and when he came to sympathize with that regime, Maschke replied:

Sometime in the early 1970s [I began to sympathize with the regime] after I completed my turnaround and after a long reflection on the Spanish civil war. Back then, through his actions Franco managed to end an unimaginable chaos and a system completely devastating for the county and he built a modernization and development dictatorship, which today's Spain owes much more than it realizes. Out of his own power, Franco defeated communism, the illusory and dishonest humanism of the Azaña regime too, and, using a buzzword, turned Spain into a barrier against modernism by modernizing it with a sense of proportion, while at the same time using authoritarian methods, totalitarian but disdaining. (original in German, translated by author, Maschke, 2011, p. 44)

As this open avowal for a fascist dictatorship clearly demonstrates, Maschke regards modernity with all its political manifestations as the bitter enemy. A totalitarian form of government appears to be the only effective way to stop this and since communism has failed to be successful, in his perspective, the far right is the only alternative. The democratic and liberal society had been his enemy as a communist and still remained the evil foe after he had shifted to the extreme right. A short attempt to enter mainstream society failed and so he was left with the far right as the only viable option to continue his struggle. Consequently, Maschke also remained hostile toward the USA, capitalism, and pacifism. The latter point is somewhat unusual for the left-wing milieu, which overwhelmingly opposed imperialism and war as a form of military-industrial control over the working class. Maschke, in contrast, claims in his

narrative to have always had a warrior ethos and an idealized understanding of war as such. Even in retrospective talking about his time in the German army before his desertion, he says: "The Bundeswehr was more like an army in those days, there were officers and noncommissioned officers who had experienced the war. The drill was pretty tough, and I liked that . . . I liked the way it operated but I was too much fixated [on] political ideologically and didn't even see a chance of let's say subversion" (original in German, translated by author, Maschke, 2011, p. 27). He claims to have rebelled against the military out of fear of admitting the truth to himself: "Yes. In reality I feel quite well within hierarchies but the anxiety and thoughtfulness was too strong back then" (original in German, translated by author, Maschke, 2011, p. 29)

Once he had entered the extreme right intellectually, Maschke began applying his own revolutionary philosophy and became one of the leading founding figures of the German sovereign citizen movement (Reichsbürgerbewegung) together with Horst Mahler (see Section 2.1) and Reinhold Oberlecher (see Section B1.5). This particular extremist current shares much with the traditional extreme right on an ideological level. Focusing on the alleged lack of legal legitimacy of the German government and all of its facets (e.g., police, judiciary, tax collection), Maschke and others claim that the country has been under occupation since the end of the Second World War without a truly binding peace treaty and the de facto unbroken effective rule of the German Reich.

Following Carl Schmitt's legal and philosophical concepts, Maschke became an admirer of an authoritarian and totalitarian state concept as the opponent of parliamentarism (Seitenbecher, 2013, pp. 267–268). Western democracy is only regarded as pathetic and weak by Maschke, both in his left-wing and right-wing life. The value of violent actions are judged as far as they are effective against the hated enemy and because of that particular continued ideological conviction, Maschke can voice respect for left-wing terrorism: "I used to see the RAF as a completely hopeless endeavour, at the beginning I even thought it was not worth a mention. But I was wrong! Because despite its weakness – just compare it with the Brigate Rosse in Italy! – It was strong enough to create fear and panic within the state apparatus and large swaths of people and so it demonstrated how poor the legitimacy of a pseudo state without courage and honor was" (original in German, translated by author, Maschke, 2011, p. 17). In this line of storytelling, Maschke is adamant about having remained loyal to his core ideals throughout his life: "These people accuse me of treason and become government ministers in cold blood [a reference to former members of the 1968 student protests who reached leading government positions in their later life, such as former German Foreign Minister and Vice-Chancellor Joschka Fischer, author's note]," even though he is the only one who "remained loyal to the communist

ideals" of his youth (original in German, translated by author, Winkler, 1998). This is also why Maschke expressed deep sadness about the reactions of the far left when he moved into a different direction: "I have suffered like a dog. And then these people ... who did not want anything anymore" (original in German, translated by author, W. Winkler, 1998). For him, the passionate struggle against the ruling system defines the nature of the true revolutionary and since large parts of the far left decided to integrate into mainstream society and even participate in the government, Maschke was disappointed both because of their personal reactions to his development and because of their renunciation of the revolution. However, he also did discover new ideological components over time, especially the role and meaning of the nation. Asked if he at all thought about the national question during his left-wing time in retrospect, he says: "No, this was far away still. I saw that we were living in some form of colony but I couldn't imagine a national solution" (original in German, translated by author, Maschke, 2011, p. 25). In short, Maschke's side-switching storyline is condensed into one key statement: "I am the last nonconformist human being" (original in German, translated by author, Winkler, 1998).

How did the far right receive Maschke? In his own narrative, with a lot of skepticism and even criticism. At the beginning, later friends and supporters such as Armin Mohler, published articles questioning Maschke's ideological shift to the right (Maschke, 2011, p. 58). In his recollection of a particular incident with Mohler, Maschke explains that he handled the situation effectively by ignoring the critique and publishing a most positive review article about one of Mohler's books. This, he remembers, earned him respect: "Mohler was overwhelmed and said to me on the phone: 'you are a noble person!' Our contact now flourished more and more and we became friends. On my path to the right, which was quite arduous, Mohler helped me a lot" (original in German, translated by author, Maschke, 2011, p. 59). Günter Maschke's storyline equals so many others in several key elements, such as the personal disillusionment with the ideology behind the in-group, hypocrisy of fellow milieu members, or the failure to remain committed through a struggle to find the perfect truth. Maschke's uncompromising hostility toward liberalism and democracy in any form are indeed a continuity throughout his life, with only a brief potential chance to break out during his membership in the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD). However, the search for a legitimate ideological framework providing a political and philosophical ladder to unrestricted power is also one of the features of his narrative. Maschke does not discount ideological change and development at all, especially regarding the national question. Still, he is adamant about having stayed loyal to a core set of ideals throughout.

B1.4 Bernd Rabehl

Bernd Rabehl, born 1938 in Germany, was one of the most prominent former members of the far-left milieu in the late 1960s and 1970s. Rabehl, like many other SDS activists at the time, grew up without his father, who had left the family before the end of the war (Seitenbecher, 2013, p. 48). He also experienced strong influences on his childhood by the forced anti-fascist doctrine in the socialist GDR, which he escaped by going to West Berlin. Rabehl studied sociology and philosophy in the 1960s at the Free University Berlin, located in the Allied sector and a hotspot of the far-left milieu.

With the construction of the Berlin Wall separating East and West Berlin in 1961 and solidifying the Cold War split of Germany, Rabehl increasingly directed his frustration against US and Western European governments. In his view, they had tolerated and thereby made possible the forced German separation (Seitenbecher, 2013, p. 54). The question of German reunification and the ideological confrontation between the Eastern and the Western bloc would become a major focus of ideological radicalization in the far-left protest movement. Bernd Rabehl was a close friend of left-wing student protest leader Rudi Dutschke. In 1962, Rabehl and Dutschke joined the group "Subversive Action," which began to use provocative and disruptive actions to raise public awareness for their political themes and ideas. Three years later in 1965, they joined the SDS, and Rabehl became a member of the national steering committee in 1967/1968.

As with many other renegades from the far-left movement, the question of nationalism or the nation as such became a key issue for Rabehl and a particularly sensitive issue for the left-wing movement. While many foreign militant left-wing groups centered on decidedly national liberation struggles, the terms "nation" and "nationalism" were essentially toxic in Germany due to the country's recent history (Seitenbecher, 2013, p. 172). Nevertheless, the far left never managed to escape the national question, especially since the issue of reunification and ideological confrontation between two separate German states loomed over almost every political theme and discussion at that time. It is important to point out that within the far-left spectrum, ideological differences and even hostilities existed (and continue to exist) between the socialist and the communist currents. This conflict involves disagreements about the most effective strategy for removing capitalist societies and ending class struggles, but also the question of nationalism. While the socialist-oriented stream of the far left typically focuses on internationalist coalitions of the working class and anti-nationalism, orthodox communists, at least those close to a Stalinist or Marxist-Leninist interpretation, favor a national solution and focus.

In 1973, Rabehl finished his PhD degree, which caused some conflict with his former friend Dutschke over a question of whom certain core ideas in the thesis should be attributed to (Seitenbecher, 2013, p. 230). In contrast to many of his fellow left-wing peers, Rabehl did not escalate his involvement to terrorist or other militant actions. Instead, he continued an academic career, mostly at the Free University Berlin. Between 1984 and 1991 Rabehl taught at a Brazilian university before returning to Berlin. Even while clearly belonging to the intellectual far-left academic environment, some of his work remained focused on the national question, especially in the ideology of Rudi Dutschke. This aspect would later become a corner stone of his side-switching storyline.

Rabehl's gradual drift toward the extreme right began around 1992, when he was involved in the reestablishment of the so-called Hofgeismar Circle (Hofgeismarer Kreis). The group had originally existed between 1923 and 1926 as an ultra-nationalist network within the SPD (Rudloff, 1995). In April 1992, a group of nationalist–oriented social democrats sought to revive this network, attracting not only fellow members of the left-wing party but also those from the extreme right. Many Social Democrats who were active in the Hofgeismar Circle later quit the left-wing milieu and eventually moved toward the extreme right. On December 6, 1998, Rabehl gave a speech at a gathering of the extreme right-wing student fraternity "Danubia" in Munich. In it, he claimed that immigration and foreign infiltration are the main reasons for terrorism and violence in Germany and Europe, as well as the deliberate ignorance of this fact by the "antifa-left" (Seitenbecher, 2013, pp. 315–316).

Also sitting on the podium was Horst Mahler (see Section 2.1), who recorded the speech, had it transcribed, and then – with substantial redactions – published it in the right-wing conservative newspaper *Junge Freiheit* (Seitenbecher, 2013, p. 316). Naturally, Rabehl reacted harshly and criticized the unauthorized publication and changes. However, he did not dispute the speech's content and theses. The following backlash from within the left-wing milieu and the wider academic environment was not surprising. The context of his speech alone, a gathering of a widely known far-right fraternity, was enough to publicly deem the incident as Rabehl's coming out as right-wing extremist. First calls to remove him from his teaching position began to appear, but were unsuccessful. The speech, however, merely provided the far-left environment with a reason to openly attack Rabehl, who had engaged in internal critical debates and disputes for decades. He was therefore already quite isolated within the left-wing milieu at the time of the Danubia talk. Many of the positions he presented there were not entirely new but mostly much exaggerated. Nevertheless, he did claim for the first time explicitly that Rudi Dutschke and himself have always been national revolutionaries and that the national question should be the complete focus of any sociopolitical change (Seitenbecher, 2013, p. 325). Following the public outrage and backlash,

Rabehl started to author several articles for the same newspaper that had published his Danubia speech and he also began to further develop his theory of Rudi Dutschke's national revolutionary ideas. Even though Rabehl never explicitly developed any openly anti-Semitic viewpoints in his subsequent speeches and publications (Seitenbecher, 2013, pp. 368–369), he was still criticized for (secondary) anti-Semitism (e.g., for using terms like "Holocaust cudgel" in his writings to suggest the silencing of opposing viewpoints).

After the Danubia speech, Rabehl remained in limbo for a while. Many of his academic colleagues had supported him during the first backlash and calls for his removal from the university. In practice, however, the left-wing environment had begun to publicly ostracize him, leading to an increasing move toward the right. For example, one of Rabehl's major later works, a biography of Rudi Dutschke, was published by an extreme right-wing publishing house in 2002. Most of his articles and statements were being published by outlets in the far-right political spectrum. The decisive break with the public and his left-wing academic life happened in March 2005, when Rabehl gave an interview to the newspaper *Deutsche Stimme* (German Voice), the main propaganda outlet for the extreme-right National Democratic Party of Germany (Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands, or NPD) party, which was fittingly titled "Befreiung" (liberation). This interview provided the peak and essence of Rabehl's side-switching narrative, namely that he had not changed his positions but the far left did, and resulted in his definitive relocation into the extreme right:

> The question of being a renegade must be addressed by anyone who changes fronts. In the final analysis, I have remained true to my thinking of that time, only that in the meantime the political positions have shifted. What was once considered "left" is now considered "right". Decades ago, when independent left-wing fighters danced through the streets shouting "Ho Chi Minh" and "national liberation" it was considered a role model against Anglo-American imperialism in Vietnam, China, Cuba or Algeria and today the nationalized left considers every national retrospective as a disgrace if not sedition. These "leftists" accept the preparation for new wars or even, as in Kosovo, Albania or Afghanistan, they are responsible for them. They act pro-imperialist and pro-capitalist like the "green" tribal leaders who, together with the international mafia, destabilize the pro-Russian powers in the interest of the USA. With such a change of opinion, it is not surprising that the "state left" now hates its own people. This hatred is transferred to those who remind us of national interests. So today I find an attentive audience among the so-called Right and am suspected of being an enemy among the left turncoats. That's life. (original in German, translated by author, Rabehl in Schimmer, 2005)

Rabehl also used his side-switching storyline to connect his previous pro-nationalist thoughts in the early days of his left-wing activism with a bitter critique of the left's implosion:

> Any remembrance of the people [in German "Volk," a biologically based concept, author's note] or the nation in the context of self-assertion or self-determination is therefore suspected of racism or sedition. Every interjection is disturbing … The

emergence of the Green Party after 1977, after the death of the first generation of the RAF and after the failure of the many Leninist parties, must be understood as a sequence of many "coups d'état". The collapse of socialism did not leave any room for other revolutionary upheavals, which is why the Western left, and here the Marxist-Leninist "order parties", were included in a programme of "re-purposing" … Today, one will look in vain for the political fronts of radical democrats, ecologists, socialists, anarchists and feminists who shaped this party at the beginning. It was streamlined as an apparatus of power for the existing state … For me, this party was blocked simply because too many "commanders" rightly saw in me an opponent. Such "parties of leaders" had no room for doubt about their "general lines" … My appearance and my speech at the Munich fraternity Danubia in 1998 were the reason for the GDR and MfS-related circles [hinting at a Stasi-infiltrated left, author's note] in the DGB [Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund, a German umbrella association for unions, author's note] to give me a kick. They did not like the location of my performance and acted as if I had spoken in front of an SS unit. But the subject was not accepted either … There was hardly any discussion, no recognition of the work done so far, but an apparatus eliminated a troublemaker. When it turned out almost two years later that my theses could not have been so wrong, there was no correction or excuse. (original in German, translated by author, Rabehl in Schimmer, 2005)

As with many other defectors, Rabehl also included personal feelings of betrayal and sadness about his former milieu's development in the narrative, but also integrated a rhetorical bridge to the far left by openly declaring the left-wing movement to be an active aggressor against the German people:

I was horrified by the change of the Greens and the Left, who in the government camp had adapted within seconds to the habitus and lifestyle of the super rich. Suddenly, there were wars in the Balkans for which they were responsible, or their secretaries of state used advice and support from the mafia in private business. I was horrified above all by their hatred of the German people and by the hectic pace with which they carried out the reconstruction of the German state. The building of the Tower of Babel as a multicultural event turned out to be the deliberate destruction of German culture and tradition. Forgotten were the achievements of German conservatism and liberalism or of the German labor movement, and no thought was given to bringing together the national cultures of Europe and emphasizing their intrinsic value. The Greens seemed to be stooges in the establishment of a minority dictatorship in which democracy was only a facade. (original in German, translated by author, Rabehl in Schimmer, 2005)

The conclusion of his defection storyline naturally contains praise and appreciation for the extreme-right NPD party, which of course was providing him with a platform in its main newspaper. It is nevertheless noteworthy, that Rabehl clearly points out the need for the NPD to effectively distance itself from extremism, racism, and national socialism to become a true opposition movement. Of course, this statement appears rather naive and indeed Rabehl swung around to avoid any backlash from the far right by tying any such extremist tendencies to governmental infiltrators who as agents provocateurs would be responsible for it. With that argument, Rabehl effectively provided

external support for the far right's conspiracy defense strategy, seeing all forms of extremism simply as the result of governmental influence to discredit them:

> Whether the DVU [Deutsche Volksunion, another extreme right-wing party at the time, author's note] or NPD can form a right-wing radical opposition that somehow follows on from the APO [Außerparlamentarische Opposition, the umbrella term for the far-left extra parliamentary opposition movement, author's note] of the 1960s depends on the extent to which they can keep themselves free of national socialist and racist positions and to what extent they link the rebirth of a nation to the important historical virtues of the Germans: solidarity, responsibility, diligence, self-assertion and tolerance. It will also be important to keep these parties free from the "extremism" of the state executive, which would like to create its own "Nazi enemy" through agents and provocateurs. (original in German, translated by author, Rabehl in Schimmer, 2005)

Rabehl finally closes by expressing sympathy and understanding for the attraction many teenagers felt toward the extreme right:

> According to my observations, the NPD preserves the spontaneity and autonomy of these youth, who continue to organize themselves in "comradeships" [here Rabehl directly refers to right-wing skinhead groups, author's note], but today oppose the media instrumentalization of youth and the manipulated temptations to drive active parts of the youth into alcoholism, drug consumption, prostitution and neglect. The accusation of fascism or threats of prohibition can only strengthen such opposition. The prerequisite, however, is that it can resist the many police-led provocateurs and find distance from an immanent "fascism". Just as "Stalinism" as a form of terrorism and contempt for humanity is a burden for the left and often constrains it, so is the detachment from an immanent "fascism" within the "Right" very difficult, but must be accomplished if the NPD wants to "inherit" the existing party system. But this will be difficult, because the ruling power groups ultimately do nothing against uncontrolled immigration to achieve a paralysis of the European peoples. Uprooted masses are easier to instrumentalize than national or social interest organizations. Spontaneous resistance to this will develop and slogans will emerge that are radically opposed to immigrants. (original in German, translated by author, Rabehl in Schimmer, 2005)

With statements like these, as well as with his conspirational anti-governmentalism, Rabehl sealed his ejection from any remaining mainstream milieus he was part of. Even though the university was legally not able to remove his professorship, he had lost all support and was completely isolated. Rabehl taught his last university course in the winter term of 2005/2006 before retiring. In the following years he gave talks at extreme right-wing events, hosted, for example, by the NPD. In many of his statements, a perceived denunciation and prosecution from the far left mixed with the assessment of the NPD as a revolutionary party (Seitenbecher, 2013, p. 330). The peak of Rabehl's involvement came in 2009, when the NPD suggested him as their candidate for the German presidency. After he initially agreed to be listed, Rabehl withdrew shortly before the election. Even though in some statements political differences with the NPD were cited as a reason, he continued to

author several articles for extreme right-wing outlets. In an interview from April 2019, Rabehl declared that his cooperation with the extreme right was nothing more than an "experiment" out of scholarly interest in a milieu he planned to write about in academic publications. Bernd Rabehl did reduce his activities with the NPD after the 2009 botched candidacy. It is unclear, however, if this also resulted in yet another ideological shift. In a 2011 interview with a German mainstream newspaper, he stated: "For me, it was a game . . . I am right-wing because there are no left-wingers left" (original in German, translated by author, Herwig, 2011).

Summing up Bernd Rabehl's side-switching storyline, it is important to note that he did indeed discuss pro-nationalist positions during his time in the far left (Seitenbecher, 2013). Of course, at that time, this particular standpoint was very controversial and more or less isolated. Rabehl did not declare the national question to be at the center of any social revolution but rather to be one out of many matters of debate. Nevertheless, with a strong exaggeration of his nationalist positions during the far-left involvement in his side-switching narrative, Rabehl was able to claim ideological consistency and argue that the milieu changed instead of him. A second important ideological bridge connecting the two camps in Rabehl's storyline is the strong opposition against the government and its security agencies. Reaching the level of openly expressed conspiracy theories focusing on intelligence infiltration and the alleged creation of extremism as a reason to supress the milieu, he could easily use the widely spread hostility against the government (and especially against police or intelligence) in the far left as a common ground. Finally, Rabehl did not shy away from openly legitimizing the NPD by praising its revolutionary qualities. The fact that he did point out the need to overcome racism and Nazi ideology appears to be a rather shallow attempt to retain some form of distance with the extreme-right ideology. In short, Bernd Rabehl's storyline mainly functions because of a strategic overemphasis of previous opinions (i.e., nationalism) and a mutually shared hatred of the government and its security agencies.

B1.5 Reinhold Oberlercher

Reinhold Oberlercher, born 1943 in Dresden, is also a former member of the far-left SDS and 1968 student protest movement who turned toward the extreme right in his later life. Today, Oberlercher describes himself as a "National Marxist," claiming to have completed Karl Marx's opus magnum *The Capital* and Marxism as an ideology. Like many of the leading far-left students, Oberlecher is a refugee from the socialist East German GDR, having moved to Hamburg in 1959/1960, only a few years before the Berlin Wall was built and the borders between the two German states were mostly closed off. It is noteworthy, that he already had once attempted to flee from the GDR alone,

but was caught and imprisoned in the same facility his father had died in during the war (Seitenbecher, 2013, pp. 106–107). This means that the questions of national borders and German reunification were an early and important influence on his life, as was the case for many other leading left-wing activists at the time. In personal documents, Seitenbecher (2013, p. 107) argues that Oberlercher had started very early to develop a rejection of the differentiation between left and right, a notion that would later form a key feature of his side-switching storyline. In addition, he too grew up without his father, who had died in a Nazi prison charged with listening to Allied radio and having contacts in a communist cell (Seitenbecher, 2013, p. 106).

At the age of 18, in 1961, Oberlercher became a member of the SPD for a short time and in retrospective explained this with the influence of his "favorite uncle" (original in German, translated by author, Seitenbecher, 2013, p. 107). Shortly before beginning his university education in 1965, studying education, philosophy, and sociology at the University of Hamburg until 1971, he became a member of the SDS. Since the SPD had issued a decree ruling out parallel membership in the SDS, Oberlercher left the social democrat milieu in 1967/1968. His activism and provocative confrontations with professors, many of whom had a Nazi past, and other authorities during that time earned him the nickname "the Rudi Dutschke of Hamburg" (Spiegel, 1967) in the press, a reference to the famous leader of the protest movement in West Berlin who was born in 1940 and died in 1979 due to long-term injuries from an assassination attempt by a neo-Nazi in April 1968. Oberlercher still speaks with pride about this time, claiming that he himself was the "trigger of the Hamburg student protests" (original in German, translated by author, as cited in Seitenbecher, 2013, p. 110). This statement indicates in important characteristic of Oberlercher's personality and storyline: the claim that history and society have not rewarded him with the recognition he deserves. This becomes especially clear when looking at the most impactful career failure in his life.

Even though many of the leaders in the student protests later advanced into an academic career and obtained doctorates or professorship positions, Oberlercher struggled and ultimately failed to do so as well. He was able to obtain a PhD scholarship in 1973 and complete the degree in 1975. Moving on to a habilitation (a specific German advanced degree that builds on a PhD in order to qualify for professorship), however, was not possible. Oberlercher himself still uses this episode as a major source of grievance and frustration, voicing feelings of betrayal and anger about being blocked from the academic path on the basis of political and personal discrimination. Not being allowed to become a full professor, in his view, formed the fundamental breaking point between him and academia, which for him was the main connection to mainstream society. However, even around 1977 his positions where so

controversial that Oberlercher found himself mostly isolated in the far left. In retrospect he feels he was boycotted from the left and the right Seitenbecher, 2013, p. 347). Regarding the ideological focus in these years, the national question and xenophobia only played a minor role, in contrast to some other left-wing renegades to the far right. It appears that before his ultimate arrival in the far right, Oberlercher went through through a brief period of searching for ideological orientation. In 1981, he published a "manifesto of the German anarchists," which already included elements of racism. However, the reaction to the manifesto from his new found anarchist group was to expel him (Seitenbecher, 2013, p. 349).

It is important, that he made a transition from postulating the use of the unemployed working masses to bring about the revolution (in a classic Marxist notion) to declaring immigrants to be the predominant threat for those workers and the cause for their unemployment (in a classic extreme-right notion). In addition, nationalist themes increased and by the mid-1980s he had openly moved to the extreme right in his publication venues and positions. Oberlercher began to praise discrimination as a "cardinal virtue" (original in German, translated by author, as cited in Seitenbecher, 2013, p. 350) and attack Jewish professors with open anti-Semitic statements. Through involvement in far-right student fraternities and by establishing contact (as well as a friendship) with another left-wing renegade who had already completed his transition to the extreme right, Hans-Dietrich Sander (see the opening of this chapter), Oberlercher was finally able to find his ideological place and purpose.

Together with Sander, he started to work on the project to reestablish the German Reich. He helped to create the extreme-right sovereign citizen-oriented publication series *State Letters* (Staatsbriefe), published a new Reich constitution, and propagated the creation of the Fourth Reich as a glorious future vision after the downfall of the Federal Republic. In 1993, during widespread right-wing riots in Germany directed at refuges after the reunification three years earlier, Oberlercher published a "100-day program" containing a step-by-step guide for the far-right milieu to take over governmental power. This program includes points such as the prohibition of pacifism and the "ideology of humanism" or the execution of drug dealers (Oberlercher, 1993). In 1998, he became the coauthor of the "canonical declaration about the 68 movement" together with two other leading left-wing renegades to the far right: Horst Mahler (see Section 2.1), for whom Oberlercher was an important mentor, and Günter Maschke. Finally, in 2005, he ran as candidate for the extreme-right NPD party during the national elections, making his defection to the far right complete.

Although mostly active intellectually and in legal, albeit extreme, politics, Oberlercher did get into conflict with the law. In 2004, for example, together with Horst Mahler and another codefendant, he was charged with incitement of

violence against minorities. Up until this point, Oberlercher had formed a close strategic alliance with Mahler through their collaboration establishing a new far-right and openly neo-Nazi think tank focusing on the illegitimacy of the German government and the restoration of the Reich: the "German Lecture House" (Deutsches Kolleg, founded in 1994). However, in the 2004 trial, Mahler's and Oberlercher's legal defense strategies were diametrically opposed. Mahler aimed to use the courtroom as a platform to expose the state authorities through endless provocations and openly committed crimes (i.e., denying the Holocaust), thereby slowing the process down as much as he could. Oberlercher on the other hand was following a more conservative approach to achieve the lowest sentence possible. This difference in strategy should not be mistaken for a difference in hostility against the democratic state and commitment to bringing it down. Oberlercher had been writing against liberal democracy for decades before this trial. Already in 1967 during his far-left activism, he justified the use of violence, the creation of clandestine cells, and "selective terror" (original in German, translated by author, as cited in Seitenbecher, 2013, p. 116). Sometimes, Oberlercher got violent himself, for example, in December 2018, when he hit a left-wing student and was found guilty of physical assault in summer 2018 (Speit, 2018).

His later far-right publications focused on the natural relationship between community (Gemeinschaft) and society (Gesellschaft). This key theme still runs through most of his statements and publications, postulating that the healthy progression from community (e.g., being born into a family) into the society (e.g., through achieving adulthood, profession) and back into a community (e.g., through founding an own family) is the most fundamental mechanism behind a functioning nation. This healthy core of societal reproduction, so he claims, is deliberately destroyed by evil conspirators, such as the Jewish people, as a form of warfare. Virulent anti-Semitism are key aspects of his views and statements, using a Marxist version of analyzing different modes of managing and accumulating capital to differentiate between a productive and destructive variant. Not surprisingly, Oberlercher assigns the latter to the "American–Jewish" way of thinking. Together with Horst Mahler, he also regularly states that a US–Jewish conspiracy to destroy the German people is the most existential threat faced by the country and should be fought with all means necessary (Seitenbecher, 2013, pp. 365–367).

What are the key components of Reinhold Oberlercher's side-switching storyline and how can his quick turn toward the extreme right be explained? Based on his own interviews with Oberlercher, Seitenbecher finds that "the rapid rotation to nationalist and racist argumentation can be explained only through Oberlercher's own situation: politically isolated, disappointed with the SPD [the Social Democrat Party] and most importantly without any professional perspective for steady academic occupation" (original in German,

translated by author, Seitenbecher, 2013, pp. 349–350). Oberlercher himself develops his narrative around his failure to achieve a professor position at the University of Hamburg, for example, during a presentation at an event held by the extreme-right NPD party in 2015:

Then in 1975, I did my doctorate with a pedagogical topic and was not allowed to habilitate, which I had planned to do, because of my activity in the 68er movement and so I did not become a private lecturer at the Hamburg university, which was actually my career plan, but I was a private scholar there. A very peaceful life as a private scholar in Hamburg lies behind me today. My activity since the mid-1970s has been to carry out the theory program that the movement of 1968 had. And this I did after 18 years, I had carried it out and published it in 1986 under the title *The Modern Society: A System of Social Science*. I will briefly explain what this is. This is the conclusion of the theory of Karl Marx, the systematic theory of Karl Marx, which is presented in *The Capital* … You have to imagine the 1968 movement, it was a movement of mainly sociology students. By people who were theoretically interested in a fundamentally philosophical, sociological, political way and who understood the whole existence of communism that still existed at that time as a theoretical challenge. There was a leading faction around Rudie Dutschke, Bernd Rabehl and Hans Jürgen Krahl … who saw themselves as Marxists and leftists and revolutionary but also as anti-communists because they had experienced communism and saw it as a counter-revolution against capitalism and not as a revolution. That is the motivation why one has made such a program, to refute and destroy communism theoretically by taking its theoretical approach in so far as it is valid, namely the analysis of capital, and to finish it … That is, by actually doing something good for communism, making it also superfluous. That was the ambitious project. It was of course supposed to end in a practice, in practical political action. But there was a lot of theoretical groundwork to be done. And as I said, the people who were suspected of pursuing this program quickly got a professorship … and then they had so much to do at the university … that they no longer had the time to carry out and fulfill the 68 theory program. Only I was forgotten. I was not allowed to habilitate myself. Because it was considered dangerous. And so, I had the peace to do it. That has actually been my life … Of course, I continued to work after 1986 when I discovered the alliance with the national right. I was [a] left-wing nationalist and national-Marxist. That was my self-designation. And national-Marxism does not mean a certain sect of Marxism of course, but only a theoretically perfected theory of Marx, which is based on the German philosopher Hegel. That is, so to speak, the intellectual-historical background. Yes, that's where I was after 1986, when I was active in the national movement. 1985 exactly, I joined it and sought the alliance. Because, of course, every politically and historically astute person felt that German reunification was imminent. That was the only thing the Russians could still save themselves with, by offering reunification. And they did. Yes, and since then I have of course continued to work theoretically beyond the 1968 theory program … So that's how I ended my life last year by writing the *System of Philosophy* where this whole dialectic of community and society and the results of Western philosophy, especially German philosophy, are summarized. This is the conclusion of this phase, which is based on the core concept of community. That is finished. And now I am a pensioner. There is no need to say more

about me. This is, so to speak, the quiet life of a theorist who has only worked as a private scholar. (original in German, translated by author, NPD-Niedersachsen, 2015)

It is hardly possible to overlook Oberlercher's bitter disappointment over his failure to achieve a professorship position in the narrative. Even though he points out that this very fact provided him with the peace and calm to carry out the actual theoretical goals of the 1968 movement, envy and regret are also strongly present. His old left-wing companions betrayed the cause by aligning with the mainstream academia, even though Oberlercher himself had initially followed that plan as well. Repeatedly saying that he is "just a private scholar" instead of a professional academic, however, does not diminish the ambitious claim to single-handedly have completed Karl Marx's theories and Marxism as a whole. This does not fall very short of Hegel's claim to have definitively interpreted all of reality. Clearly, Oberlercher wants to present himself as an equal philosophical giant next to Hegel and Marx, despite the fact that he did not even achieve a formal professorship qualification. The latter, in his view, was caused by the "danger" his thoughts allegedly pose for society. Directly trying to face potential scepticism in his far-right audience by using a strongly Marxist language, he states that being a national Marxist has nothing to do with Marxism, but is actually the consequence of the "German philosopher" Hegel. Ideologically, this argument can also be found in Horst Mahler's storyline (see Section 2.1), even though Mahler would not use the term national Marxist to describe himself. Furthermore, Oberlercher keeps pointing out that the differentiation between left and right is somewhat useless in his eyes, attempting to position himself in the middle and thereby retaining elements and biographical influences from both sides. In a 2019 interview with an extreme right-wing activist, he stated:

Q : What is your career from left to right?
OBERLERCHER : It consists in the fact that I have supplemented all my left positions with all my right positions and finally arrived at the only true one, namely the middle and this is the mediation through the extremes, quote, unquote, "Hegel."
Q : [S]o one can really not say you are a rightist?
OBERLERCHER : I am the whole and this is the true one.
Q : We started the conversation earlier with the question, how you came from left to right. You curled a little there. I suppose that this labeling left-right is not as simple, as I have used it a bit provocatively now. Can you explain your concept of left and right?
OBERLERCHER : Left in the political sense is used when I strive for a right, when I demand one or even just wish for one. So, a children's wish list is left . . . That is the desire to get something. And the right is when I have achieved it, have earned it or have been given it.
Q : Where does this definition come from?

OBERLERCHER : From me of course.

Q : Then I would assume that you are a leftist, right? After this definition you will surely still wish for things?

OBERLERCHER : Well, I don't like to be outflanked on the left wing nor on the right wing. My ideal is being like the ancient Greeks, to be the whole and to understand the whole and as my teacher Hegel said, the whole is the true. And one is untrue or halved or one-legged if one can only stand on the left or right leg . . . National Socialism is the German fulfillment of the demand for the dictatorship of the proletariat as described by Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto* and they [the National Socialists] are different from Marx and Engels, so they were of course anti-Marxist because they understood it that way because they only knew SPD Marxism and even worse the one from the KPD [the Communist party] and did not bother to finish reading *The Capital* . . . I made a draft of the Reich Constitution in 93, just a draft, a proposal. Of course, you are immediately persecuted (original in German, translated by author, Volkslehrer, 2019).

Oberlercher's side-switching storyline attempts to locate the extreme right within a developmental relationship with the extreme left, by declaring the latter to be a childish, premature but nevertheless legitimate, personal desire for material benefits. The far right, however, is portrayed as the mature end stage of having achieved what one has wished for. In a sense, such a narrative serves the purpose of aligning his ideological defection as the simple outcome of a successful process for realizing juvenile dreams and reaching the stage of responsible adulthood. In the most basic sense of the storyline approach laid out in Section 1.5, this rhetorical and theoretical strategy allows Oberlercher to dissolve his initial frustration and failure to become a professor. In the end, he was ultimately victorious via his left–right conceptualization, despite that initial exclusion from the career path he had hoped for. Since Oberlercher claims to have theoretically finished Marxism and Karl Marx's *The Capital*, while at the same time openly stating that National Socialism is in essence the German fulfillment of Marxism's goals, he not only takes credit for perfecting far-left ideology but also the far-right one. Regarding the actual impact of his philosophies on German politics, however, Oberlercher takes over the position of the prophet who is being ignored by the masses: "My effect on parties, associations and the like was zero. The real historical development, however, is following me closely and I am struggling not to be caught up and overtaken by it in its radicalism and extremism, in its deepest roots and most far-reaching effect" (original in German, translated by author, Jürgen, 2016).

B1.6 Jürgen Elsässer

Born in 1957, Jürgen Elsässer is a German journalist and publisher who worked for left-wing outlets between 1975 and 2008. During the 1990s, Elsässer had strongly anti-German and anti-imperialist positions as a member of the far-left milieu. Since then, he has gradually become one of the leading media voices and producers for the extreme right, traveling to this ideological camp via the New Right and right-wing populist activities. Since 2010 he has been the editor in chief of the monthly magazine *Compact*, which was classified as a suspected case of right-wing extremism by the German domestic intelligence service in March 2020 (Petter, 2020). Since 2016 Elsässer has used the *Compact* magazine as an election platform for the far-right party "Alternative for Germany" (Alternative für Deutschland, or AfD) and opines racist, anti-American, nationalist, homophobic, positions and conspiracy theories. However, one of his aims, he claims, is to unite right-wing and left-wing ideologies to form a joint front against the democratic state.

Elsässer first worked as a teacher and in 1980 became a member of the Communist Federation (Kommunistischer Bund, or KB) after his first contacts with the far left during his own school education. Both the rebellion against the conservative background of his father and his local surroundings attracted him to the regime (Amann, 2018). Writing for the KB's main newspaper, he was influential in creating a current within the German far left called "anti-Germans" (Antideutsche), who define themselves as having an uncompromising opposition against the German nation and people (Bigalke, 2015). In this form of left-wing ideology, German nationalism is seen as the root cause for militarism and wars, which is why imperialism, in particular the American domination of Europe, is supported. Somewhat unusual for the wider far left, Israel is seen positively and political Islam, anti-Americanism, anti-imperialism, as well as some forms of anti-capitalism are usually rejected. Not surprisingly, this variant of the extreme left was highly controversial and contested within the left-wing milieu. Some side-switchers even saw this particular movement as their main reason to leave the left-wing environment (e.g., Julian Fritsch, see Section 2.3). During the German reunification process of 1990, the anti-German milieu feared a recurring German empire and relapse into pre-democratic forms. In a 1990 article, Elsässer postulated the increasing fascist transformation of Germany and with that opinion produced one of the key texts for this milieu (Lang, 2016, p. 226).

However, Elsässer and his faction within the KB, calling itself "group K," caused significant internal tensions and the eventual split of the group. This was facilitated by external events such as the 1991 Gulf War. As will be seen in Elsässer's side-switching storyline, his own positions regarding support and

opposition toward various military conflicts around the world were a key issue, not unlike Mussolini's confrontation with the Italian socialist party leading to his expulsion (see Section B2.1). Parts of group K saw the war positively and others condemned it, creating further conflict within the direct milieu surrounding Elsässer, who opposed the US-led military action against Iraq but still supported Israel (which was seen as threatened by Saddam Hussein and used as one argument within the anti-German movement to support the conflict). Based on his own publications of that time, Elsässer defended many arguments from the anti-German movement but appears to have not been in line with the pro-American viewpoints in there (Lang, 2016, p. 227).

During the 1990s, he worked for various far-left German publications as author and journalist, of which the most important stage for his narrative was the newspaper *Konkret*. With the beginning of the Yugoslavia wars in 1991 and the disintegration of the Yugoslavian state, Elsässer was yet again confronted with a highly polarizing conflict in Europe along ethnic, religious, and political lines. In his publications, he painted the picture of an aggressive Germany, which had dragged NATO and the USA into the war. As a convinced anti-German, he naturally took the side of Serbia, who he saw invaded by fascist powers (Lang, 2016, p. 227). Within the anti-German movement, complete support for Israel was justified by preventing another Holocaust and any other genocide. However, once German mainstream politicians argued that the massacre of Srebrenica in July 1995 (in which over 8,000 Muslim Bosnians were killed by Serbian militias and regular army units) was a second Auschwitz and warranted a moral imperative for a military intervention of NATO, Elsässer experienced how one of his key ideological arguments linking the opposition against the German state and wars with an alleged genocidal and anti-Semitic nature of Western states quickly lost credibility. His response was to fiercely criticize what he deemed to be "Nazi-revisionism" (original in German, translated by author, as cited in Lang, 2016, p. 228), which means in essence the relativization of the Holocaust's uniqueness by applying terms like Auschwitz to other forms of genocide. Almost a decade earlier in 1986/1987, Germany had experienced what became known as the "Historians' Dispute," in which some scholars had taken up the position to explain the Jewish genocide by the Nazis as a form of reaction to external threats. Especially conservative historians (e.g., Ernst Nolte) argued that the Holocaust was not unique and was predetermined by the Soviet Gulag system (Baldwin, 1990). Elsässer openly called for violence against those revisionists in the mid-1990s (Amann, 2018).

Again, pushed in his ideological development by external events, the 9/11 attacks, and the ensuing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq accelerated Elsässer's distancing from the pro-American anti-German milieu. In his articles, he now expressed mainly anti-capitalist sentiments and suspected that economic

interests were behind the US invasion of Iraq. Together with an increasing role of anti-imperialism in his worldview, he began criticizing the American military-industrial complex, likening the US president George W. Bush Jr. and Chairman of the Federal Reserve Bank Alan Greenspan to Adolf Hitler and Hjalmar Schacht (1877–1970, president of the German Reich Bank and German minister of the economy between 1934 and 1937) in a 2002 article (Lang, 2016, p. 228). This publication resulted in him being fired from the *Konkret* newspaper's pool of writers.

In the following years, Elsässer began attacking the anti-German milieu and based his ideological positions on more classic Marxist-Leninist anti-imperialism coupled with strongly expressed anti-Americanism. Visible in several books he wrote between 2002 and 2009 is his developing conspiracy mindset, blaming US intelligence agencies for the import of jihadist terrorism to Europe via immigration, for example (Lang, 2016, p. 229). In this phase, his hostility toward the USA led him to support Islamic extremist organizations, such as Hezbollah. Out of that logic, he criticized Islamophobia, migration, and multiculturalism, and gradually developed nationalist positions. Until January 2009, he had been moving between various left-wing newspapers with the most prestigious being the *Neues Deutschland*, the former official outlet of the GDR's socialist party. His work there ended abruptly, when the extreme right NPD party started to express sympathy for an initiative founded by Elsässer called the "People's Initiative against the Finance Capital" (Volksinitiative gegen das Finanzkapital). In this activist platform, he had called for the formation of a joint resistance front against the "Anglo-American finance capital" and expressively asked the "national and old-European oriented capital" (original in German, translated by author, as cited in Lang, 2016, p. 229) to join. This barely masked attempt to form an alliance with the far right (called "Querfront" in German) met complete resistance from the far left. However, this was not the first time he had expressed ideological positions bringing left and right together. In a 1998 book, for example, he aimed to highlight the socialist components within fascism and National Socialism (Elsässer, 1998). Nevertheless, Elsässer's career as a journalist in the far-left milieu was over.

From now on, Elsässer placed most of his focus on propagating an alliance between right and left against American imperialism, now with decidedly nationalist standpoints. The far right was quick to accept a renegade and expressed support for his positions, while the left almost completely ignored his overtures (Lang, 2016, p. 230). In late 2010, he founded the magazine *Compact*, for which he could find many right-wing contributors but none from the left spectrum, which only increased his integration into the far right and nurtured anti-left conspiracy theories. Nevertheless, as will be seen through his storyline, Elsässer still claims a middle position between left and right on the

outside. Behind the joint front (Querfront) rhetoric, however, more contacts in the extreme right became evident, such as Russian neo-fascist Alexander Dugin. Elsässer also met with Iranian Prime Minister Ahmadinejad in 2012, creating significant public backlash. It was pointed out by Lang (2016, p. 231) that the only consistent enemy Elsässer had throughout his ideological journey is arguably the left-wing 1968 student protest movement, which he had already attacked during his time as an anti-German communist.

How does Elsässer explain his own ideological development from pro-violent anti-German communism to patriotic nationalism with open integration of even more extreme positions including Islamophobia, xenophobia, and flirtations with biological racism? In a 2019 interview with his own television channel Compact TV, entitled "Jürgen Elsässer: From Anti-German to Patriot" (Jürgen Elsässer: Vom Antideutschen zum Patrioten), he laid out his storyline in detail. The main line of argumentation for him is still the negation of the poles "left" and "right" but also personal negative experiences within the far-left milieu, and pointing out the continuity of his pacifist positions. One of the rather unique elements when compared with other side-switching stories discussed in this book is the open expression of shame regarding the previously held opinions:

> The proverb says who is not left with 20 has no heart and who is still left at 40 has no mind, so some people become wiser in the course of their lives and I am not the first who has gone this way. Yes, we also have the famous Horst Mahler [see Section 2.1, author's note], who was the RAF lawyer and [was] later with the NPD and then even more extreme, with whom I don't want to compare myself in detail, [as] he represents things that I would never support; or we also have some people in the NSDAP who used to be in the KPD, especially at the base and so on. So, it is not really unusual what happened to me . . . I was like many in my generation, I was born in 1957, like many of my generation I was of course left in the 1970s and became a communist and out of this socialization, I was in the Communist Federation at that time . . . I was then an opponent of the reunification, because I said this is an enlargement of the capitalist system, a capitalist megastate in the heart of the [European] continent is about to be created here, perhaps even a fourth Reich develops, so I have stated such things at that time under the flag "never again Germany" [the main slogan of the anti-German movement] and I must say, however, as embarrassing as I find this position of mine at that time in retrospect, I have never gone through some excesses of this [political] direction, the anti-Germans have turned very quickly to war fanatics, already in 1991, the anti-Germans had the position to support the American war in Iraq, but I have always said "No Way" you cannot get me to support the war and when some have started to shout "Bomber-Harris [a reference to the Marshal of the Royal Airforce Sir Arthur Travers Harris, 1892–1984, who was the leading figure behind Allied-area bombing campaigns against Nazi Germany) do it again", I said: "People, how stupid can you be, we are communists, we can't have our base, that is to say the workers, be bombed by a foreign imperialist power"; and I was there but then I started to doubt my comrades-in-arms a little bit and what finally happened was a very long-term change. So, it didn't happen from one day

to the other, but it was a process of I would say 15 years. It started in 1995, largely completed in 2010. (original in German, translated by author, Grell, 2019)

Like many other defectors, Elsässer presents his side-switching as a form of maturation and intellectual development from an emotionally based left-wing starting point. He also presents himself as someone voicing in-group criticism against milieu-specific majority opinions and thereby conflicting with the collective identity. The left milieu is portrayed as a collection of warmongers without rational reflection about the consequences of their own political bases. Claiming a transition like this is not unusual and by referencing Horst Mahler or "many" NSDAP members, Elsässer sets the context of the "rational" and "adult" far right, even including the Nazi movement. In addition to his standpoints on wars, he also recalls an important period in which he for the first time had direct interactions with nationalist-oriented guest workers in Germany:

In the mid-1990s, I was an author of the magazine *Konkret* and already an editor at the *Junge Welt* [another left-wing newspaper, author's note] and in this function I was very much involved with the war in Yugoslavia. During this [time], I published many books on the subject, was also very often in Yugoslavia and many events were held in Germany with Yugoslavian guest workers, that is, these were Yugoslavian clubs or Serbian Orthodox churches and so on. For the first time, I had an audience of workers there, guest workers. Before, there were only students and I had to learn to express myself in such a way that the workers, especially the guest worker who does not speak German so well, understands me. And then I noticed in my dealings with these simple people that they all think nationally, that is, Serbian nationally. And for me as an anti-national, that was a bit strange, but with time these people have become more and more sympathetic to me, because I noticed that it is about the people [Volk, author's note], it is about the survival of the people. At that time, Milošević [Slobodan Milošević, 1941–2006, who was the president of Serbia during the Yugoslavian wars and charged with war crimes in 1999, author's note] also defended the country in Yugoslavia with a left-right joint front government. And then I noticed that this left-right demarcation, it doesn't fit properly, so not everyone on the right is bad, but when it comes to the whole thing, that is, the survival of the people, you have to work together, who is against the foreign powers. Such a thinking process was set in motion and I tried to let it flow into my writings at that time, but the German leftists didn't get it at all, they still thought that socialist Yugoslavia was defended and this was of course all nonsense. So, this was the first station, I went from being an anti-nationalist to a Serbian nationalist, so to speak. That was the first development of my thinking. (original in German, translated by author, Grell, 2019)

However important his interactions with Serbian guest workers truly were, Elsässer's pathway was determined through is professional journalism work and conflicts with the outlets he was writing for. The Yugoslavian wars pitched him against the editorial board of the *Konkret* paper:

At that time, the constellation was still such that *Konkret*, the monthly newspaper, and *Junge Welt*, the daily newspaper, they were against the attack on Yugoslavia, but it was already

happening outside the newspapers, that the left wing was already forming, the so-called autonomists, who at that time already said, yes, we cannot defend Yugoslavia, we cannot defend Serbia, because we are against the nation and the nation-states. And also at that time, it already started, the aggressor on the ground was the Albanians and the aggressor of the air was NATO with its bombing but the aggressor on the ground was the Albanians, so the Muslims, and there it already started, that large parts of the left discovered their heart for the Muslims. (original in German, translated by author, Grell, 2019)

Elsässer recounts that during his time at *Konkret*, the far left was split regarding the question of whether to sympathize with Islam or not. In quite drastic terms, he remembers that the editorial board of *Konkret* allegedly planned to run a paper issue with an anti-Islam front cover. Highlighting ideological elements in the old milieu that are typically considered to be part of the new one (here: Islamophobia in the far left), is a common element in side-switching narratives and aims to make the group left behind look as bad as they usually portray their opponents to be. After his expulsion from *Konkret* and during his work for the *Junge Welt*, the next global escalation of conflict happened with 9/11 and the Afghanistan and Iraq invasions. In Elsässer's storyline, history repeated itself and his opposition to the wars led to his dismissal once more, facilitating his disengagement from the far left:

I continued to feel as a leftist but had already come to the impression through the conflicts of the last few years that a large part of these left-wingers do not examine facts, for example, the fact that Hussein had nothing to do with 9/11 and therefore there can be no reason to attack Iraq . . . so with Iraq in 2003 it became blatant, so I have always sought the truth in the facts and they [the leftists] have always made ideology. And there I already noticed that this left-wing scene is somehow becoming more and more unrealistic. (original in German, translated by author, Grell, 2019)

The next big breaking point in his commitment to the far left was the development of nationalism as a mode of responding to global economic imperialism, which later becomes the international finance capital in his rhetoric: "and the only way to protect our economy, which really means our workers in left-wing language, is to use the nation state against this globalist development. I said that and I could justify it with Marx and Engels and Lenin and so on, but even then it didn't interest anybody in the *Junge Welt*, where I was in the editorial office" (original in German, translated by author, Grell, 2019). Again, we can see the familiar theme of being the disdained genius, which is a quite common element in far-left to far-right side-switching narratives. His firing after earning acclamation from the extreme-right NPD party for the creation of the "people's initiative against finance capital" is presented as a conscious decision to cross ideological boundaries:

In January 2009 . . . I founded the "people's initiative against finance capital", in response to the recent stock market mishap worldwide, in the wake of the American

implosion of the real estate bubble, I said you have to protect national capital from these developments … When the NPD then also liked this idea and supported this … although I never asked the NPD … they turned it all upside down for me and … within hours I was fired, yes and I said now you can have me, now I am getting out of the left cosmos and am setting off for new shores. And the slogan was not left, not right, but in the front, so you go away from ideologies and pragmatically take what are good solutions, no matter what the background is … and from that I developed a theory of resistance, that I said OK in the resistance against the bloodline nobility in the Middle Ages, there was also no left or right, you can't say Störtebecker [Klaus Störtebecker, 1361–1401, a German pirate and popular hero, author's note], William Tell or Robin Hood, these were left or right and these were simply representatives of the people against the authority. And so today the resistance must again look like the resistance against this financial aristocracy that is concentrated in the City of London and in Wall Street, we need a resistance that doesn't care about the old categories of the industrial age that has gone down, but which orientates itself more to the model of the Middle Ages, because the constellations are similar, 1 percent are against 99 percent. (original in German, translated by author, Grell, 2019)

It is of course overly ambitious grandeur for Elsässer to compare himself with popular heroes who fought against brutal totalitarian regimes in the Middle Ages, such as Robin Hood or William Tell. Nevertheless, he continuous to build his image as a supra-ideological resistance fighter for the people against the oppressors, who are now defined as international capitalist and financial invaders. This vehement denial by Elsässer of having actually shifted to the right has led to some disagreement among scholars and observers about how to classify him ideologically. However, in his own discussion of the terms left and right, it becomes clear that in his understanding of the joint front against international financial imperialism only the right is active and positive, while the left is portrayed as the one responsible for boycotting a unified opposition:

The difficulty is that, as I explained, the terms are actually from yesterday. But the echo in the heads and hearts of these terms is still there. That means we can't argue away that people today still refer to themselves as left or right. That also creates the difficulty a little bit for this concept of "not left, not right, but in the front". The fact is simply that 95 percent of the left-wing functionaries, that is, in the SPD party, in the Green party, in the DIE LINKE [the far-left party, author's note] party, 95 percent of them refer to themselves as left. At the grassroots level with the voters, things look a little different. After all, we have very strong transitions from former left-wing voters in East Germany, in Central Germany, to today's AFD voters, which basically means that this joint front, that you have, so to speak, the best minds from the left and from the right who want to defend the state and the people, each on their own ideological basis, this correct idea has not prevailed in practice because left-wing functionaries prevent everything … Now the joint front is being realized within the framework of the AFD, because basically in the AFD we have a socialist wing or social democratic wing in terms of economic policy, which is concentrated around Höcke [Björn Höcke, chairman of the AFD section in

> Thuringia and leader of the extreme-right faction in the party, author's note] in East Germany and we have an economic liberal wing which is stronger in West Germany and which is concentrated around Meuthen [Jörg Meuthen, one the chairmen of the national AFD faction, author's note], for example. (original in German, translated by author, Grell, 2019)

Again, Elsässer aims to present the organized far left ("functionaries") as a backward and outdated milieu clinging to concepts of left and right that the voters on the parties' bases allegedly have already mostly dismissed. Surprising and highly noteworthy is also the statement calling Björn Höcke and his followers within the AFD party "socialist" and "social democrat." In March 2015, Höcke founded the faction "The Wing" (Der Flügel), which was classified as "proven right-wing extremist" (Tagesschau, 2020) and declared an object of intelligence surveillance in early 2020. Höcke's own speeches are widely seen as infused with racism, anti-Semitism, and National Socialist rhetoric to a degree that a German court in 2019 found it evident that the label "fascist" could be correctly applied to him (Spiegel, 2019). Elsässer obviously regards the fascist and National Socialist tradition Höcke and his followers are part of as the true form of socialism and even, quite provocatively, social democracy. One must also not leave aside the fact that Elsässer's statements and publications have radicalized toward the extreme right with an ever-increasing isolation in all other milieus. One likely driving force behind his side-switching can be seen in his attempt to adapt his rhetoric to the group most likely to form his support bases, meaning those eventually willing to pay for his propaganda products. Seen from that perspective, Elsässer now caters to the far right and the overall anti-establishment conspiracy milieu. He makes clear that for him, biological nationalism, that is, racism, is the essential solution to Germany's problems and he is now allegedly being vilified by "constitution patriots" (i.e., the democrats) for this position:

> Well, I am not afraid of the term nationalism, because the nation is the frame of reference . . . within which the defence of social rights, cultural traditions, family values takes place, so I have no problem with the term nationalist, although I prefer the term patriot or patriotism. In fact, the old left was completely painless there, that is to say, they all presented themselves as patriots, the French Communists, Italian Communists anyway . . . so you have to say anyway that the GDR [the German Democratic Republic, the socialist East German state, author's note] was not the better German state but in any case the more German German state, because there the German traditions and values were held high. They were painted in communist style and all that, but that didn't change the essence of the GDR and many people in the East, and I'll say that too, in retrospect it's a pity that the GDR went down. Of course, at first people were happy about reunification and I was stupid enough at the time to be against it for the wrong reasons, namely anti-German, but when you look back 30 years later, you have to say that for the German people, from a conservative point of view, from a national point of view, it would have been better not to have reunification, because then

we would have a state in the East that is undemocratic but still German. And you can turn a dictatorship into a democracy by mobilizing the people, but a people that has been replaced, you can no longer reverse the process yes, that's why the question of the political constitution of the state, whether it is socialist, conservative Christian, monarchist, or whatever is actually secondary, because the people can always change something about it, but what we are experiencing at the moment is yes, the people are about to be replaced, will be exchanged, and that's why it's the central question across all political and ideological issues … I believe that the biological core is the essence, but it must not be made absolute. Of course, certain characteristics are inherited, not so much through genes or DNA, but above all through cultural tradition. That is important, that this core remains strong, but the core must not, of course, shut itself off from the influences of the outside world, which means that we need a certain amount of immigration … so that's why I would say that both sides in the debate on the definition of the nation are right in a certain sense, whereby the national side defines the core. This must have been handed down over the decades and centuries, but the people who are now talking about constitutional patriotism and say we're going completely away from biology, we shouldn't speak ill of it, because it also represents an important element, namely the fresh wind that is necessary. The problem with the debate at the moment is that the constitutional patriots call the others, who I would say are the traditional nationalists, Nazis. (original in German, translated by author, Grell, 2019)

In addition to setting himself in the context of biological nationalism, Elsässer also lets shine through elements of national revolutionism, which might not be a direct link to his own left-wing past (being an anti-nationalist) but nevertheless creates some form of ideological bridge despite the "stupidity" of his old positions. Claiming that the form of government, including a dictatorship, can easily be changed by the people, he effectively advertises the overthrowing of the current system, accused of "replacing the people" (a widely used extreme-right conspiracy theory that has inspired many terrorist attacks, including the March 2019 Christchurch attack in New Zealand, see Davey & Ebner, 2019). In combination with his statements on biological nationalism, Elsässer's ideology directly points to a racist dictatorship legitimized by the alleged will of the people in obvious reflection of fascist and National Socialist concepts of statehood.

The side-switching storyline presented by Jürgen Elsässer contains many familiar elements from other accounts of defectors to the far right, such as the negation of the left-right difference and using a resistance against the establishment narrative as ideological continuity. However, Elsässer is also one of the very few who at the same time clearly voice shame and regret about previous positions, calling them "stupid" and "embarrassing." This retrospective and quite unique condemnation of himself is, however, an adequate and sensible strategy, since he now holds positions diametrically opposed and in contradiction to well-documented earlier statements. In February 1990, for example, he publicly demanded the "destruction of the German nation … and its replacement with a multiethnic state, as well as the dissolution of the German people

into a multicultural society" (original in German, translated by author, as cited in Störungsmelder, 2017). Especially keeping in mind the far-right conspiracy theorists, who now belong to Elsässer's most important clientele and form large parts of his in-group, a rhetorical self-flagellation might be the only option to retain any form of credibility. Even though his positions are clearly extreme right wing, he refuses to fully embrace the term and still talks about his concept of a joint front from left and right. In reality, and this is even acknowledged by Elsässer, this front contains only the far right. His strategy for continuing to uphold his supra-ideological narrative is to simply assign left-wing labels to right-wing extremists (such as Höcke) and court the electoral masses using the concept of the superior will and power of the people (in a biological and cultural sense).

B1.7 Conclusion

The intellectual renegades from the far left who joined the extreme right presented here share many features in their storylines with those side-switchers in the rest of this book. Although Mohler, Maschke, Matussek, Rabehl, Elsässer, and Oberlercher rarely got involved in actual extremist crimes or politics, they nevertheless combatted the liberal democratic system, and partially formulated theoretical legitimizations for racism, anti-Semitism, violent acts, nationalist revolutions, and the establishment of dictatorships. Their personal experiences in the far left provided them with knowledge and skills that they used to organize movements, establish publishing outlets, provoke outrage, or for deliberate polarization and incitement in order to advance their own goals.

Many of the intellectual renegades presented their side-switching as a form of rational maturation process, in which they advanced beyond the "emotional" left-wing activism of their youth to a "grown-up" far-right worldview. All of them also maintain a sense of ideological continuity and claim that while the world around them changed, they have stayed loyal to their anti-establishment rebellious nature. In the sample discussed here, only Elsässer actually uses some form of regret and guilt in his language, calling his past views "stupid" and "embarrassing." The others go to significant lengths to prove intellectual veracity in their narratives, usually by pointing out some form of hardly gained insights from studying in depth Hegel, Marx, or other writers. Nevertheless, all of them also experienced quite significant personal career failures and severe conflicts with their far-left in-group; there were other sources of disillusionment with their first ideological commitment as well. Despite the fact that they turned the disillusionment with the far left into extreme-right commitment, they very rarely resorted to violence themselves. This should not distract from the nature of their intellectual positions and

statements, which have very often openly called for violence in the most extreme form.

Hence, this chapter provides some additional empirical evidence for the necessary differentiation between extremist attitudes and (violent) extremist behavior. I very much consider all of the intellectual defectors of this chapter to be active extremists, as expressed in their relentless writings, speeches, and efforts to establish theoretical foundations for an actual violent takeover. In terms of violence, however, they have not decided to join terrorist groups (which they could have) or engage in other forms of organized extremism other than (mostly) writing and giving speeches. Reinhold Oberlercher's involvement in the extreme-right NPD party remains an isolated and rather unusual form of activism for those intellectual extremists. For the most part, they despised the democratic party system so much that they usually only found words of disgust for any organization still trying to change the system through parliamentary elections.

The question of why they never truly embraced violence on a behavioral level must remain unanswered here, as this was not the key focus of the analysis. By working through these fascinating biographies, however, I think it is likely that the individuals derive significant social status from being "intellectuals." Many liken themselves to revolutionary thinkers, such as Hegel and Marx, or even to popular heros like William Tell or Robin Hood. They strive for intellectual recognition and seek out the spotlight to address audiences in what they believe are brilliant and mind-blowing lectures. Reinhold Oberlecher claimed to have done nothing less than theoretically complete Marx's work and Marxism as a whole. It is obvious, that these renegades consider themselves to be the avant-garde of the far right, delivering much more important contributions to the milieu than sheer muscle and brutality, namely the theoretical foundations and reasoning behind the strategies and tactics used to bring down the democratic system and eventually get rid of the ideological and biological enemies they have identified.

B2 Historical Side-Switchers

B2.1 Benito Mussolini

Arguably, one of the most significant cases of extremist side-switching is that of Italian fascist dictator Benito Amilcare Andrea Mussolini (nicknamed "Il Duce" – the leader), who made the transition from being the leader of the Italian Socialist Party (Partito Socialista Italiano, or PSI) as a militant and outspoken socialist revolutionary to founding the fascist movement and bringing it to power. Granted, Mussolini is also somewhat of a special example of defection, since he did not switch to a fully developed opposing side but rather created his own movement.

Nevertheless, discussing extremist side-switching without looking at Benito Mussolini would be most incomplete, be it only for the overarching significance of his biography for many of the cases discussed in this book. Mussolini and his fascist movement would inspire other extreme right-wing leaders and milieus worldwide, such as Adolf Hitler and the German Nazis. Until this very day, the term anti-fascism, with its fundamental, identity-creating meaning for left-wing politics, social movements, and individual activism around the globe, shows the historical importance of this one case of successful defection alone. Naturally, libraries could be filled with studies exploring every conceivable aspect of Mussolini's biography, for example, his childhood, ideological and philosophical development, or his time as "supreme leader" of Italy. The abundance of available literature on Mussolini has been made possible in part by the fact that the Duce himself was a prolific writer and thought of himself as a gifted intellectual. His collected works total over 35 volumes (di Scala, 2016b, p. 19), providing a rich source of information on the development of his thoughts.

During his pre-fascism life, which is of key importance here, Mussolini worked as a teacher and journalist for various socialist newspapers and made it to the position of lead editor of the central outlet of the PSI, *Avanti!*, which resulted in numerous articles and editorials penned by him and commentary on various political and ideological questions. Not surprisingly, a defection of such a magnitude has caused many scholars to explore the process and motives behind his ideological transformation. In addition, many fascist and anti-fascist writers have attempted to spin the explanation for Mussolini's change of heart into one or the other direction, picturing him either as opportunistic traitor or as champion of socialism, developing it into fascism. Even though the basic facts of his life are well known, and archives are filled with primary and secondary material about him, many aspects of his ideological change are still contested and to a certain degree also a matter of perspective and interpretation. Hence, it would go far beyond the scope of one book to even attempt an exhaustive discussion of Mussolini's side-switching. But to integrate Mussolini's case into the row of side-switching storylines presented here, I will use his own narrative on the matter and particularly enlightening comments by expert scholars who have delved deeply into this particular phase of his life.

One of the sources next to various newspaper articles and speeches is his 1928 autobiography, which Mussolini dictated to his brother Arnaldo. American journalist and diplomat Richard Washburn Child, together with Italian journalist Luigi Barzini, Jr., served as the book's ghostwriters. The book itself was a clear and obvious work of propaganda aimed mainly at a US audience and remained unpublished in Italy until 1971 (Diggins, 2015). I am fully aware of the massive propagandistic distortions of Mussolini's actual childhood and ideological transmission, as is the case with many of the

accounts I discuss in this book. Still, it is key that we understand how he himself framed this transition to an international audience. I will also concentrate on the details of his life until the point at which Mussolini became the leader of the Fascist movement.

Benito Mussolini was born on July 29, 1883. He constitutionally ruled Italy as the prime minister from 1922 until 1925, after which he established a full dictatorship. His father, Alessandro Mussolini, was a blacksmith and a well-established socialist, while his mother Rosa was a devout Catholic schoolteacher. Alessandro got into conflict with the authorities due to his outspoken revolutionary opinions as early as 1878 and authored at least 20 articles in local newspapers, which can be regarded as extraordinary given his limited education. However, it appears Mussolini's father moderated his revolutionary stance somewhat until the end of the 1890s (Bosworth, 2010, p. 37). In his later life, Alessandro even turned into a small businessman and property owner, developing an understanding for the identity of a different socioeconomic class than the one he grew up with (Bosworth, 2010, p. 38).

Benito was the eldest of his parents' three children. It is clear that the intense political convictions of his father made a strong impression on young Mussolini (Cannistraro, 2016), as did the overall social and political environment in the Emilia Romagna region of Italy (which was dominated by socialist currents of various sorts and working-class inhabitants), where he grew up (Bosworth, 2010, p. 45). In his autobiography, he wrote with some admiration about his father: "heart and mind were always filled and pulsing with socialistic theories. His intense sympathies mingled with doctrines and causes" (Mussolini, 1928, p. 3). As a teenager, he would listen to political debates between his father and neighbors, which confronted him with political and social questions he found "unfathomable" and a "stupid world of words" (Mussolini, 1928, p. 9) at first. Nevertheless, Mussolini did credit his father for his own desire to find answers to those questions and never denied his paternal socialist roots. It is known and confirmed by Mussolini himself that he was oftentimes violent and aggressive as a child, causing a lot of trouble in the family: "Out of those distant memories I receive no assurance that I had the characteristics which are supposed traditionally to make parents overjoyed at the perfection of their offspring. I was not a good boy, nor did I stir the family pride or the dislike of my own young associates in school by standing at the head of my class" (Mussolini, 1928, p. 4).

In one well-documented incident, 10-year-old Mussolini got into a fight with another boy at school and stabbed him through the hand with a knife in June 1894 (Bosworth, 2010, p. 46). After changing schools, however, he turned out to be a model student. At all times during his childhood, he was an admirer of socialist thinkers, for example, carrying with him a medallion with the image of Karl Marx as a talisman (Bosworth, 2010, p. 47). After

having finished his schooling, "Benito Mussolini was young, bright, angry, ambitious, at times violent (as was society around him), disadvantaged in quite a lot of ways, but determined and fortunate to live at a time when his particular talents were beginning to matter" (Bosworth, 2010, p. 48).

In 1902, Mussolini emigrated to Switzerland, partly to avoid mandatory military service. There, he became active in the Italian socialist movement and started working with socialist newspapers. He organized meetings and gave speeches as well. In 1903, he was arrested by the Bernese police because of his support for a violent general strike and spent two weeks in jail. After his deportation to Italy, he returned to Switzerland. In 1904, having been arrested again, Mussolini returned to Lausanne, where he attended the University of Lausanne's Department of Social Science. There he sat in lectures on sociologist, economist, and philosopher Vilfredo Pareto (1848–1923), whose teachings had a profound impact on him. Pareto's philosophy circling around the glorification of elites, that is, men destined to rule by their strong will, was seen by many as antecedent of Fascist ideology in the mind of young Mussolini (Bosworth, 2010, p. 53).

Even though it is debated how much contact he actually had with Pareto and whether he really attended any lectures led by the famous academic personally, Mussolini nevertheless claims influence in his personal narrative: "Pareto was giving a course of lectures in Lausanne on political economy. I looked forward to every one. The mental exercise was a change from manual labor. My mind leaped toward this change and I found pleasure in learning. For here was a teacher who was outlining the fundamental economic philosophy of the future" (Mussolini, 1928, p. 14). In Switzerland, Mussolini was also directly confronted with issues of nationality (due to the various different backgrounds of the many emigrants in the socialist groups) on the one hand, and with intense conflicts among socialist currents over fundamental directions for the ideology on the other. The two main schools of thought fighting for domination of socialism were the reformists, arguing for a peaceful and parliamentary way to a socialist transformation of society, and the revolutionists, seeing the only path toward the socialist utopia through violence.

During his entire political life, Mussolini was a fervent revolutionist and fierce critic of the reformists. For him, violence had a fundamental and purifying quality: "I understood now that the Gordian knot of Italian political life could only be undone by an act of violence. Therefore, I became the public crier of this basic, partisan, warlike conception. The time had come to shake the souls of men and fire their minds to thinking and acting" (Mussolini, 1928, p. 18). In ideological terms, Mussolini had a "maximalist" approach to solving social problems. In Switzerland, he also added republicanism, anti-clericalism, and the first shreds of nationalism to his ideological portfolio (Bosworth, 2010, pp. 54–55). Even more importantly, he also got into contact with revolutionary

syndicalist thinkers and their ideology, developing more anti-reformist positions (Visconti, 2016).

This specific variant of socialism was growing rapidly in the decade before the First World War and promoted direct as well as radical action to transform societies through local worker-based organizations and strikes. Thereby it set itself apart from reformist schools of Marxist thought (Van der Linden, 1998). Mussolini took a special interest in the writings of the leading French syndicalist Georges Sorel (1847–1922), who argued that the masses could be easily brought to violent action by the strategic use of speech and myths, or in other words: propaganda. Sorel also emphasized the need for overthrowing liberal democracy and capitalism with the use of violence and neo-Machiavellian approaches toward emotions (Bosworth, 2010, p. 57; Tucker, 1996). Even though he later distanced himself from Sorel and syndicalism, some scholars argued that his ideological turn was the direct result of that philosophy and that he actually remained a syndicalist even as a Fascist (e.g., Roberts, 1979). It is clear, however, that many of Mussolini's ideas derived from Sorel and syndicalism (Gervasoni, 2016, p. 133).

In December 1904, Mussolini returned to Italy, which was made possible by an amnesty for military deserters, since he had been convicted in absence. However, the condition for the pardon was to serve in the army, which is why Benito Mussolini joined the armed forces on December 30, 1904, serving for two years. In February 1909, Mussolini again left Italy for the Italian-speaking city of Trento, which at the time was part of Austria-Hungary. There he also worked in the office of the local Socialist Party and edited its newspaper. In Trento, Mussolini declared himself not to be a syndicalist but nevertheless acknowledged the revolutionary value of Sorel's teachings. In an almost religious worshipping of Marxism, he wrote in an editorial: "Socialism means the elevation and purification of the individual conscience, and its achievement will be the result of a long series of efforts. Everyone, indeed, from the professional man to the worker, can bring a stone to the edifice, doing a socialist deed every day, and so prepare for the overthrow of existing society" (as cited in Bosworth, 2010, p. 61).

During his time in this city, which was filled with heated debates circling around nationalism, ethnicity, and race, Mussolini also started reading Charles Darwin (1809–1882) and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), slowly integrating a more cultural-nationalist and anti-egalitarian language in his publications (Bosworth, 2010, pp. 62–63). Through the suffering of Italian expatriates under Austria-Hungarian rule, Mussolini developed a strong and open sense of patriotism, which would later become the backbone of his nationalism (Biguzzi, 2016, pp. 118–119). After his expulsion back to Italy in 1909, he continued his work as newspaper editor with another socialist weekly in his hometown. By that time, Mussolini had become one of Italy's most prominent

socialists. Among his political positions was a fierce opposition to war and in September 1911, Mussolini participated in a riot against the Italian military intervention in Libya, which he saw as imperialist in nature, earning him a five-month prison sentence.

Around this time in his life, he also intensified his revolutionary rhetoric and campaigned not just against the reformists but also syndicalists and clericals (Bosworth, 2010, p. 69). In essence, Mussolini had found his working recipe for gaining constant attention and fame: escalating his extreme positions. Upon his release from prison, with greatly increased status, he was given the editorship of the socialist party's flagship newspaper *Avanti!* in December 1912. Even though he rapidly approached the most prominent and powerful positions within the Italian Socialist Party, Mussolini was also not fully confident about his own ideological standpoints and found himself still in the search of answers: "I am a primitive. Also in my socialism. I walk up and down in the present market society like an exile" (as cited in Bosworth, 2010, p. 76). Nevertheless, by March 1913 he had eliminated all rivals to his power in the *Avanti!* editorship, gaining even more influence. For this short period of time between 1912 and 1914, the revolutionary wing gained the upper hand within Italian socialism and Benito Mussolini with it. However, many signs also pointed to a strengthening of the moderate reformist wing (Bosworth, 2010, pp. 83–84). The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand on June 28, 1914, which would spiral Europe and the rest of the globe into the First World War, would change everything for Mussolini and his delicate act of balancing revolutionaries vs. reformists in the socialist party.

The question of whether to support Italian intervention in the war became the most fundamental center of ideological conflict in the PSI and the essential stumbling block for Mussolini. Until September 1914, he continued to support the official party line of neutrality, following his earlier pacifist positions. Then, however, Mussolini gradually started to argue in favor of Italian intervention in the war on the side of the Triple Entente of France, Russia, and the United Kingdom against Germany and Austria-Hungary. This change of position is attributed to his likely realization that wartime could be an opportunity for fundamental political change. Mussolini began to claim that the war could unite Italians in Austria-Hungary with Italy (a clear nationalist argument) and that the peasantry could be truly elevated and become members of a joint Italian effort. On October 18, 1914, Mussolini published his famous article "From an Absolute Neutrality to an Active and Working Neutrality," causing an outright shock and sensation within Italian socialism (Bosworth, 2010, p. 88). In this piece, he argued that it would be absurd for Italy and socialism to stay out of the war and that it was necessary to overthrow the imperialist Hohenzollern and Habsburg monarchies in Germany and Austria-Hungary.

Mussolini was by no means the only influential socialist in Italy or Europe to plead this case. The war had caused a strong wave of nationalism among most European socialist movements, for example, in Germany and Italy. Holding on to pacifist positions at a time of such existential conflict quickly became the route to political suicide. However, the open split from official party line and Marxist orthodoxy by the leading PSI figure Mussolini, without the backing of the organization, had crossed the line and became his moment of ideological palingenesis. Immediately, it was clear that Mussolini had gambled too high and lost the position of power acquired during more than a decade of socialist activism. Benito Mussolini resigned from the editor position of *Avanti!* to avoid a disgraceful ousting. A month later, in November 1914, he was officially expelled from the Socialist Party, which found him guilty of "political and moral unworthiness" (Gentile, 2016). In his defense argument delivered at the party congress leading to his expulsion, Mussolini tried to picture himself as the true socialist: "You hate me today because you love me still . . . Whatever happens, you won't lose me. Twelve years of my life in the party are ought to be sufficient guarantee of my socialist faith. Socialism is in my very blood . . . You will again see me at your side" (as cited in Bosworth, 2010, p. 89). This was the "traumatic, decisive and irrevocable turning point in his political life" (Gentile, 2016, p. 288). In his later autobiography, Mussolini would choose the lack of socialist support for intervention in the war as the main battleground against his former ideological milieu and the moment of his ultimate transformation in his storyline:

> But our nation was turning toward war. I was helping. The Socialist party, which at that time had a certain weight in Italian life, due more to weakness of other political parties than to its own strength, was uncertain what attitude to take. There it wabbled. The majority in that party stood for an absolute neutrality—a neutrality without limit of time, pledge or dignity. In that party there were many who stood openly in sympathy with Germany. I did not. A handful of intelligent and strong-willed men began to ask themselves if it was really right for Italians to lend themselves to the political aims of the King of Prussia, and if that was good for the future of Italy and of the world. I, myself, asked that question in the newspaper *Avanti*. For obvious reasons it was read avidly by every class of citizens. The putting of that question was my most distinguished effort at journalism. It was sufficient to cause a part of public opinion to turn toward the possibility of our standing side by side with France and England in the war . . . I saw that internationalism was crumbling. The unit of loyalty was too large. I wrote an editorial in which I said also how utterly foolish was the idea that even if a socialist state were created, the old barriers of race and historical contentions would not go on causing wars . . . Facing this new situation, every political man, including myself, began to examine his conscience. The mere mention of this problem was sufficient to make clear and evident the hidden travail of national consciousness. I was transformed in my thought . . . I began to drag with me a fraction of the Socialists in favor of war. I had with me rebels of many schools, who through the dregs of their struggles would in the end now stand once more upon the indestructible vitality of our race. The Socialist

> Senedrium, seeing where I was going, took the Avanti out of my control. I could no longer preach, by that means, intervention of Italy in the war. I faced the Socialists in our conventions. I was expelled. I held public gatherings. I created the Fasciti—a group of daring youths who believed that intervention could be forced. Do not doubt that their actions shook deeply our political framework, existing from the time of the independence of Italy up till 1914. I was their leader . . . The World War began on July 28, 1914. Within sixty days I severed my official connection with the Socialist party. I had already ceased to be editor of the *Avanti*. I felt lighter, fresher. I was free! I was better prepared to fight my battles than when I was bound by the dogmas of any political organization. (Mussolini, 1928, pp. 35–38)

Right after his break from the PSI, Mussolini started to engage in personal polemics and attacks on his former party, which retaliated in kind. In October 1914, he founded his new newspaper *Il Popolo d'Italia*, causing accusations that he had stolen funds from the *Avanti!* for his new project (di Scala, 2016a, p. 183). However, due to his pro-intervention position, Mussolini was quickly able to gain financial support from armaments corporations and other companies profiting from war, as well as from interventionist socialists, for example, in France. Naturally, this intensified socialist outrage over his military-industrial sellout. As early as December 1914, he had already started to advocate for the establishment of so-called Fasci d'azione rivoluzionara (revolutionary groups), which would evolve into the Fascist movement. The "Fasci," Mussolini claimed initially, would unite Italian workers with France, the motherland of social revolution (Bosworth, 2010, p. 93). He also publicly announced a break from the ideology of class struggle in favor of nationalism in a speech on December 5, 1914:

> The nation has not disappeared. We used to believe that the concept was totally without substance. Instead we see the nation arise as a palpitating reality before us! . . . Class cannot destroy the nation. Class reveals itself as a collection of interests—but the nation is a history of sentiments, traditions, language, culture, and race. Class can become an integral part of the nation, but the one cannot eclipse the other . . . The class struggle is a vain formula, without effect and consequence wherever one finds a people that has not integrated itself into its proper linguistic and racial confines—where the national problem has not been definitely resolved. In such circumstances the class movement finds itself impaired by an inauspicious historic climate. (as cited in Gregor, 1979, pp. 191–192)

Mussolini served in the military during the war, reaching the rank of colonel. As Italy emerged from the conflict on the victorious side, the country experienced a strong nationalization process in contrast to those who had lost and were now torn apart by internal political turmoil and revolutions (e.g., Germany). In the weeks before his departure to the frontlines, Mussolini aggressively attacked socialists such as Marx and Engels through his new interventionist outlet, further increasing the distance to his former political life.

The transformation to anti-egalitarian nationalism was also facilitated by the events in Russia, deeply shocking Mussolini. The Bolshevist Revolution led by Lenin in October 1917 had caused a civil war and chaos, eventually resulting in the Russian military's collapse. In the following peace treaty of Brest-Litovsk from March 3, 1918, the Germans dictated a painful price for stopping its forces from further advancement into the heart of now Soviet Russia, which had to cede significant territory and power.

For Mussolini, this situation was simply appalling and a dangerous forecast of what might happen in Italy should socialism take power. It also destroyed the myth of the revolutionary quality of war, which had been a cornerstone of his political agenda (Alcalde, 2017, p. 29). Shortly before the end of the war, in 1917, he had added a new component to his ever increasing nationalist ideology published as an article: the so-called trincerocrazia – the rule of those who experienced the trenches. With that concept, Mussolini added a veteran-based militaristic cast-philosophy to his political portfolio. Those who had fought in the trenches for the nation would be, according to him, more qualified and worthy of determining Italy's future, conveniently including Mussolini as well. This strategic move also aimed to prevent a defection of the troops to socialist movements, thereby causing the disintegration of nationalism: "in a sense, the nascent fascist ideology was a strategy to ensure that war veterans, in contrast to what happened in Russia, would remain loyal to the nationalist struggle to the very end" (Alcalde, 2017, p. 29).

At this point I want to leave Benito Mussolini's continuing pathway that would take him to become dictator of Fascist Italy, leading his country into the Second World War at the side of Nazi Germany, and then to the loss of his nation to the Germans as de facto occupying power and subsequently his life, to an execution squad of communist partisans on April 28, 1945. Mussolini's side-switching storyline centered on the question of intervention in the First World War, even though he had many ideological battlegrounds within the socialist movement, for example, nationalism vs. internationalism or revolution vs. reform. To be clear, even though extreme in his positions, he did locate himself in existing currents within socialist thought and in the Italian Socialist Party. Mussolini escalated the radicality of his positions as part of an internal power struggle in the socialist movement between those different currents, which turned out to be a winning strategy for him. However, he lost the ultimate power gamble with his public support for interventionism, again a position he could rightly claim was the overwhelming direction European socialism was moving into and that the PSI was out of touch with. Defending this position clearly was not a betrayal of socialism as such (di Scala, 2016b, p. 15). Nevertheless, it was the way this conflict played out that would spiral Mussolini out of his elevated leadership role into bitter and personal confrontations with his former party, including severe violent clashes:

therefore, one can say that Mussolini decided to support the war not because of his "syndicalism" . . . but because he believed himself a Socialist, because all the other leaders of European socialism, from Guesde to Vandervelde and Kautsky, had done likewise. When Italy entered the war and the PSI, including its reformist wing, opposed [to] the decision, Mussolini realized that he had lost his final definitive battle with his former party. From that moment onwards, the Socialists became his main enemies. (Gervasoni, 2016, p. 150)

His own strategy to turn this seemingly devastating and disgraceful failure around was to build a narrative of being the misunderstood genius. Mussolini fully owned his socialist past and even boasted about his rise to power. In his storyline, a failure of the socialist movement to accept his vision for ideological transformation automatically led to his defection. Applying Social Identity Theory (SIT), Mussolini felt that his own in-group, the socialist movement and party, increasingly lost status by not following the interventionist zeitgeist. As the leader of Italian socialism, this clearly weighed heavily on his social identity status, as he might have feared being seen as a backward loser by those European giants of socialism he so admired. As a consequence, his storyline makes a point of having tried to improve or salvage the movement from its alleged doom: a classic example of the social change strategy in SIT. After this was not successful, he publicly denounced the socialist ideology as a hopeless failure (Gregor, 1979, p. 193) and having succumbed to the decadence of the reformists (Gentile, 2016, p. 261). In his own words, this break was the consequence of his own conviction and strength of willpower:

I have not forgotten those who in other days were my companions in the socialistic struggle. Their friendship remains, provided they on their part acknowledge the need to make amends for many errors, and provided they have been able to understand that my political evolution has been the product of a constant expansion, of a flow from springs always nearer to the realities of living life and always further away from the rigid structures of sociological theorists. (Mussolini, 1928, p. 24)

B2.2 Richard Scheringer

The first well-documented storyline of extremist side-switching from the far right to the far left I want to discuss here is the narrative of the German officer Richard Scheringer. His extraordinary account of becoming active as a militant National Socialist and defection to communism while serving a prison sentence (before the Nazis had seized the government) is detailed in his autobiography, originally published in 1979 (Scheringer, 1988). Born on September 13, 1904 in Aachen, Germany, Scheringer was the son of a Prussian officer and was therefore raised with a focus on military values, such as discipline and patriotism.

The death of his father who was killed in action in the First World War, had a profound impact on his later development. At the time of his childhood, young Richard Scheringer was exposed to directly contradicting political opinions regarding the war, nationalism, and solutions to the increasing calamities afflicting the German population. While one of his uncles exposed him to nationalist ideas, a teacher he much respected held socialist and anti-militarist opinions (Scheringer, 1988, p. 50). Nevertheless, 12-year-old Scheringer adapted his political viewpoints to those of his nationalist uncle, as "it corresponded with what we believed father died for" (original in German, translated by author, Scheringer, 1988, p. 48).

In the final phase of the First World War, Germany experienced widespread internal political turmoil, escalating in the October/November 1918 revolution, abolishment of monarchy, and establishment of the Weimar Republic. All over Germany, various political factions started to struggle for power. Most importantly, communist and socialist groups attempted to erect local Soviet-style counsel republics on the one hand, while veterans returning from the front formed so-called Freikorps (free corps, i.e., paramilitary associations), as the German army was forced to downsize rapidly, which produced countless unemployed former soldiers. Those "Freikorps" typically (though not all of them) had ultra-nationalist, militarist, and anti-socialist/anti-communist ideologies, which not surprisingly led to a swift alignment with the upcoming Nazi movement. Paramilitary formations such as the "Stahlhelm" (steel helmet) or the "Schwarze Reichswehr" (black Reichswehr) originally served the purpose of circumventing the demilitarization requirements of the Treaty of Versailles and provided some form of social support for veterans (Sauer, 2004).

Young Scheringer experienced the collapse of German monarchist patriotism in the immediate aftermath of the First World War, even though he remembers that a "hint of that destructive romance remained" (original in German, translated by author, Scheringer, 1988, p. 57), especially regarding the conspirational explanation for the German army's defeat: the so-called stab-in-the-back legend (Dolchstoßlegende) (Vascik & Sadler, 2016). Teenage Richard Scheringer experienced the various events defining this time period, such as the occupation of Berlin by the extreme right-wing militia "Brigade Ehrhardt" in March 1920 (Stern, 1963) and the Rhineland by the Allied Forces (McDougall, 2015), as well as the assassination of leading politicians by right-wing terrorists.

Scheringer and his family lived in a part of the Rhineland that had been occupied by Allied Forces (first with American and later French troops) since March 1921. Scheringer attributes the hate and rage against the occupation forces to the development of his nationalist-revolutionary desires, which he developed during a two-month prison sentence for a minor confrontation.

This initial radicalization was facilitated by the prison warden, who held militant nationalist views himself and made sure that a "new won nationalist left the prison" (original in German, translated by author, Scheringer, 1988, p. 83). Shortly after his release, Scheringer got involved in militant cells plotting and perpetrating attacks against infrastructure (e.g., railroads) or printing houses advocating for the secession of the Rhineland to France or for the area's independence. To avoid arrest and another prison sentence, he fled to Berlin in 1923, where he became active in the Black Reichswehr and personally met members of the Organisation Consul, a right-wing terrorist group.

For the first time he heard of a person who could be "a second Mussolini" (original in German, translated by author, Scheringer, 1988, pp. 98–99) named Adolf Hitler, who was rallying the people around him. The clandestine paramilitary formation Scheringer was active in had the main purpose of fighting socialist and communist uprisings, which also meant that the overall collective identity in the group was based on militant anti-communism. At this point, however, Scheringer had little interest in Hitler and the Nazi movement yet, which he deemed to be insignificant (Scheringer, 1988, pp. 108–109). However, after his militia was disbanded as the consequence of a botched coup d'état, many members left for Munich in order to join Hitler, shortly before his own attempted violent government takeover had failed miserably on November 9, 1923. This incident proved to Scheringer that a nationalist revolution could not be done against the loyalist Germany army, the Reichswehr. So he and some of his friends decided to join the military and become officers with the single purpose of staging a nationalist uprising from within it (Scheringer, 1988, pp. 118–119). He entered military service on April 1, 1924 and was promoted to lieutenant in February 1928.

After his basic military and officer training, Scheringer and his newfound like-minded comrades started to look for the most promising political movement to connect with. His close friend Hanns Ludin (who would later become a leading Nazi storm trooper and be executed for war crimes in 1947) brought a leaflet from the NSDAP to the officers' barracks, which spoke of a social liberation and breaking the yoke of economic interest. The importance of this early propaganda contact for Scheringer, who deemed the NSDAP to be a worker's party, was clear: "everything started from there on, even though we were not really impressed by Hitler, whom we had heard speak once a while ago" (original in German, translated by author, Scheringer, 1988, p. 156).

Scheringer and his friends started to attend Nazi rallies and connect with leading storm troopers to exchange ideas and find ways to support them from inside the military. At that point, the goal for him and his fellow soldiers was clearly to establish a cell of dedicated officers within the army to eventually stage a violent uprising against the democratic Weimar Republic. It did not

take long for the authorities to learn about his rather unsophisticated attempts, as he openly discussed an outright violent takeover with other high-ranking officers. Scheringer, together with Hanns Ludin and another officer, was charged with high treason, found guilty, and sentenced to one year and six months in prison in October 1930.

During his trial, Adolf Hitler and other leading Nazis were heard as witnesses, who under oath swore to uphold only legal and nonviolent means of taking over the government. After the failed coup d'état in November 1923, Hitler had spent nine months in prison (April 1, 1924 to December 20, 1924) and his NSDAP party was prohibited between November 1923 and February 1925. Hence, the Nazi movement changed course and strategically distanced itself from any violence and illegal means in public. The trial against Scheringer and his codefendants provided Hitler with a unique opportunity to advertise his new strategy of legally acquiring power, as national and international public interest in the proceedings were high. At Scheringer's trial Hitler was able to repair a large portion of his public standing and dramatically increased his political credibility among the conservative elites he desperately needed to secure electoral successes (Brown, 2005, p. 324).

For Scheringer and the other defendants, this position was a major disappointment since they were fully committed to a violent revolution. During the pretrial incarceration and in the prison Scheringer was held in, conflicts between imprisoned Nazis and communists were normal. However, Scheringer's storyline now highlights a growing intellectual interest in Marxist literature, which he started reading at that time: "I begin to suspect that we confused the term 'socialism' with social reforms, with some kind of 'social justice . . . Revolution? Aren't we in favor for that? Really?" (original in German, translated by author, Scheringer, 1988, p. 174). While the Nazis appeared to focus on the symptoms, Marxism looked at the roots of the problems, in Scheringer's perspective. Rationally, however, he would not yet be able to bridge the ideological gaps between the two worldviews: "We want the national revolution. You cannot fight for the liberation of your own nation together with proletariats from all other countries? The thing with Marxism therefore must have a catch, there has to be a confutation . . . But I move these thoughts aside, because I cannot find a bridge between internationalism and national liberation" (original in German, translated by author, Scheringer, 1988, p. 176). The verdict was delivered on October 7, 1930, concluding the famous "Reichswehr trial of Ulm" (Bucher, 1967).

For the rest of his prison sentence, Scheringer was moved to a different prison, dominated by incarcerated communists. Fears of violent attacks against him were so strong that the warden placed Scheringer in a vacated prison wing during his initial days (Scheringer, 1988, p. 184). Surprisingly, relations between Scheringer, a convicted militant Nazi, and the communist inmates

were mostly amicable. During his first encounter with fellow inmates, Scheringer describes how a "truce" was agreed upon and any conflicts that happened afterward were mostly verbal. The communists would mock Scheringer for the "sworn legality" of his leader Hitler, which indeed he found to be a particularly hurtful scorn. The key in Scheringer's side-switching storyline, however, is comprised of personal interactions, ideological debates to be more specific, with members of the opposing milieu:

> The commonalities between us and the "commune" was highlighted. They were equally radical opponents of the existing order like us, even if they came from a totally different side. Therefore, the discussions always started with the premise of looking for the safest and best way to overcome the ruling system and liberation. Sparked by our enemies' arguments, we passionately defended the point that National Socialism was indeed a revolutionary movement, even if Hitler had sworn the opposite in Leipzig. We were bitterly serious about the party's socialism. When the official party theories weren't enough to prove that we weren't fascists, we used the arguments of Otto Strasser, even as he was no longer with the NSDAP. (original in German, translated by author, Scheringer, 1988, p. 185)

It might be surprising at first, that Scheringer argued against being a fascist in the debates with the communist inmates. At the time of his initial radicalization and activism for the NSDAP, the party and its social movement had a strong left-wing ideological component with activists such as the brothers Gregor and Otto Strasser. These two attempted to include social-revolutionary and anti-capitalist elements into the party's program (Beck, 2016; Stachura, 2014a, 2014b). Gregor Strasser, at the time of Scheringer's involvement in the Nazi movement, filled the position akin to general secretary and was second in line to Hitler. He was an extremely popular political figure within the Nazi milieu. In 1932 the looming power struggle within the NSDAP between Strasser's and Hitler's factions escalated, ending with Strasser's assassination in the so-called Röhm Purge in 1934 and the almost complete elimination of the leftist-oriented wing in the party, mainly the majority of the SA leadership.

The specific version of National Socialist ideology that was dominant in the pre-purge storm trooper movement was heavily influenced by socialist rhetoric and elements of social-revolutionism (C. Fischer, 2014; Grant, 2004). In fact, the SA recruited from proletarian working-class environments much like the Communist Party, leading to regular defections between both sides and a partially indistinguishable ideological outfit of their followers (Timothy Scott Brown, 2009; Fischer, 1982). The cold-blooded murder of leading SA members had the goal of finally deciding internal power struggles and the ideological question of whether to cooperate with the German army (Campbell, 1993; Jablonsky, 1988). In 1931, the time of Scheringer's incarceration and the beginning of his engagement with communism, it must have

become increasingly clear to initial Nazis like him that the original social-revolutionary promises were not going to be kept, as for example, Otto Strasser had already left the NSDAP in July 1930. During the ongoing conversations with the ideological enemy, Scheringer's storyline now begins to include human values beyond purely theoretical matters:

> In one point we disagreed again and again: here nationalism – there internationalism. It appeared that there is no bridge. Personally, we got close to the communists. Packages and tobacco were shared fairly during all the little acts of rebellion directed against the prison directorate, and during sport or leisure time, we were comrades. Of course, there were frictions but being so far from our old world we always found [our way] back together. It was a new world appearing to us among those communist workers; a world of unconditional dedication to a cause without the individual making a big fuss about it; a world with a lot of humor and self-criticism; a world of learning and studying, where everything was done radically and thoroughly; a world enlightened by the shine of revolution. Something like that we had rarely experienced. And even though some members [of the communist group] were obviously doctrinaire and schoolmasterly, the communists here seemed to go radically all in. (original in German, translated by author, Scheringer, 1988, p. 186)

Scheringer remembers individual communist inmates in his storyline in very friendly and personal terms. All of them were highly committed to proving to the Nazis their ideological fallacy: "at that time they competed in the attempt to convince us of the correctness of their ideas and of the crooked, antihuman aims of the Nazis" (original in German, translated by author, Scheringer, 1988, p. 187). Richard Scheringer was not only exposed to intense ideological debates with the opposing political spectrum, but also experienced internal struggles within the Nazi movement. Otto Strasser and other leading SA members, for example, visited him in prison and called Hitler a traitor (Scheringer, 1988, p. 188).

Scheringer's ideological convictions began to crumble. He and his fellow Nazi inmates started to see increasing contradictions between the Nazi party program and the actions of the Nazi movement, especially the violence and terror directed at the working class (i.e., the socialist and communist movements): "Whole days we spent looking at the various national socialist writings. But to find clarity, we continue to find new contradictions" (original in German, translated by author, Scheringer, 1988, p. 191). Finally, the ideological uncertainties and questions became too much and it was decided that Scheringer would use a rare prison vacation to meet up with leading Nazis in Berlin and Munich to discuss their answers to those key issues the group around Scheringer had identified. His meetings with Joseph Goebbels (1897–1945, minister of propaganda in the Third Reich), Rudolf Hess (1894–1987, Hitler's deputy party chairman from 1933 to 1941), and Adolf

Hitler (1889–1945), among others, became a devastating disappointment. None of them were able to give coherent and credible answers, especially regarding the question of breaking the economic burden through interest (a matter of great ideological importance for Scheringer). Hitler completely failed to convince him: "While listening I got the clear impression that this man actually believes what he says, even if his rants are so simple. He floats in his thoughts three meters high above the ground. He doesn't talk, he preaches ... He is completely incapable of any clear political analysis, no matter how powerful his agitational talent might be" (original in German, translated by author, Scheringer, 1988, pp. 199–200).

Scheringer returned to prison and shared his impressions from the meetings. Even though the group discussed different ways to proceed, Scheringer himself already knew that for him leaving National Socialism was the only option. However, he did not take this decision lightly: "Then I realize how hard it will be to throw everything behind me and to disappoint all the people who will never understand it. During the return trip this pressure weighs heavy on me. But one has to do it, because of the workers, because of the farmers and because of the soldiers. Because of the nation" (original in German, translated by author, Scheringer, 1988, p. 201). All the other available groups, including the one recently founded by Otto Strasser, did not provide credible answers regarding Germany's social problems in Scheringer's opinion: "At the end of this early spring days of internal reflection and serious tests, if one can actually speak of internal reflection during our 'storm and stress' phase, I decide to make a public avowal for the front of the revolutionary proletariat. The communist inmates welcome this decision with jubilance, but they don't sense what consequences this will have and neither do I" (original in German, translated by author, Scheringer, 1988, p. 203).

He continued to establish contact with Communist Member of Parliament Hans Kippenberger to discuss the next steps. It is noteworthy, that Kippenberger did not, in Scheringer's storyline, make any promises regarding positions in the party or other rewards for his defection. On the contrary: "We do not make any promises. We do not have any posts to give. Everything you will find with us puts your life in danger. You have to fight with us like everyone else" to which Scheringer responds: "It does not depend on posts but on the struggle as such and to warn the people of Hitler" (original in German, translated by author, Scheringer, 1988, p. 203). With that, the deal was sealed and Kippinger read out the following declaration during a session of parliament on March 19, 1931:

> The combat goal of the revolutionary German youth is the liberation of the German people. Liberation means removal of the capitalist system and tearing apart the peace dictates of the Versailles treaty till [the] Young [plan]! Having recognized, that these

goals can only be attained on a violent path, I became a soldier . . . As a consequence, since we officers from Ulm attempted to spread the idea of national and social liberation with all means possible within the army, an arrest warrant was written based on denunciation. After seven months [in] investigative custody we were sentenced in Leipzig to one and a half years of prison by the court. As the officer witnesses and we defendants declared ourselves in favor of the national and social liberation, the trial became a wonderful propaganda [tool] for the National Socialist German Workers Party. We – and with us the broad mass of the people – believed that our ideas were embodied in the NSDAP. Whoever compares the practical politics of the national socialist leaders with their radical phrases today, will see, that their deeds pose the sharpest contrast to what they say and write and what we expected from them . . . The party leadership has proven their reactionary character through these actions; treason is obvious . . . There is no doubt anymore that liberty stands alone with revolutionary workers, farmers and soldiers. This is the place of all honest warriors and not with the guards of the reaction. I declare myself definitely dissociated from Hitler and Fascism and I queue myself into the front of the militant proletariat as a soldier. Lieutenant Richard Scheringer. (original in German, translated by author, Reichstag, 1931, pp. 1739–1740)

Scheringer listed nine specific points he interpreted as acts of betrayal to the original ideals and promises made by Nazi leaders. Among these are, the departure from socialism; the siding with capitalists against the working class; and the acceptance of Germany's financial debt with international banks. Consequently, his main critique against the NSDAP was focused on its alliance with capitalism and the abandonment of socialist ideals.

Scheringer's public defection and declaration was a significant publicity stunt for the Communists and shocked political observers (Brown, 2005, p. 320). Bags of letters were delivered to him in prison, either celebrating or attacking the defector and now political pop-star. Scheringer immediately became active in the Communist Party by writing articles and leaflets using his conversion as a propaganda tool against the Nazis. In particular, he authored counter-propaganda material directed at the SA in an attempt to convince its members to switch sides like he did. This in turn resulted in additional criminal charges for high treason and he was sentenced to prison a second time (for two and a half years). His two best friends from the original Nazi cell in the German army and codefendants in the Ulm trial went different ways. While Hanns Ludin continued his path with the SA and wrote letters to Scheringer deeply regretting his defection and praising Adolf Hitler, the third friend followed Strasser's new organization.

The friendship with Ludin remained intact even after Scheringer's defection. Ludin, instead of abandoning Scheringer, stepped up his attempts to win him back and offered him high-ranking posts in the SA, for example. Other leading Nazis tried to convince him to declare his defection null and void as well by

suggesting psychological distress due to incarceration as a potential explanation. Ludin even arranged an offer of amnesty, which was advanced so far that it only required an official letter from Scheringer requesting a pardon. He declined for several reasons, including fear of being assassinated by Nazis outside of prison. The offer of amnesty had been made seven days before Hitler took over complete control of the government using a state of emergency declared after the arson attack on the Germany Reichstag during the night between February 27 and 28, 1933: "If adrenalized Nazis would have met me somewhere – especially during the time of the Reichstag arson trial – they would have made short work of a renegade like me. So I stayed in the custody of the government and under the care of a judicial system that was a long way from consolidated" (original in German, translated by author, Scheringer, 1988, p. 229). Despite his refusal to accept the various offers from the Nazis and his former friends, Richard Scheringer was still released early from prison due to continued lobbying on his behalf by Hanns Ludin. Both Scheringer and Ludin kept their active and at times heated ideological debates ongoing throughout the war. It is astonishing that Ludin, a high-ranking Nazi storm trooper, remained in touch and even supported the well-known defector Scheringer, thereby risking his own career and his life. In fact, Ludin was one of the few SA leaders who survived the Röhm purge and given the paranoid hatred of the Nazi regime against Communists and anyone helping its ideological enemies, both Scheringer and Ludin's survival of the war is quite extraordinary. Richard Scheringer again entered military service and fought in the Second World War as an officer in France and on the Eastern front until he ended up in American and French war captivity. Especially at the beginning of the war in 1939, which included the Hitler–Stalin pact from August that year (Roberts, 1989), Scheringer reflected on his ideological position again and even caused some doubt about the anti-socialist nature of the Nazis:

> They first started the war against Poland and the capitalist powers in the West. I misjudged this war at that time. Was this not the liberation fight against the dictate of Versailles? Was this not the reality of the big picture I had seen in my inner eye in my prison cell in Moabit: an alliance between nationalism and communism against capitalism and national suppression? Could everything change still? (original in German, translated by author, Scheringer, 1988, p. 312)

Back in the military, he met his old friend Ludin again since both served in the same unit. Political discussions continued in the military and Scheringer remembers quite a lot anti-Hitler and anti-Nazi soldiers, reminding him of the fascist nature of the government, to which he responded: "The fascist character can be removed most effectively during the war. If it doesn't stop, we will create a coup d'état from within the army. In this bunch we have something at

hand, namely weapons, and won't have to depend on others when the time comes" (original in German, translated by author, Scheringer, 1988, p. 316). With the invasion of the Soviet Union by the German Wehrmacht on June 22, 1941, Scheringer could no longer uphold his somewhat naive self-persuasion that the Nazis and Soviets would fight alongside against capitalism. Defecting from the army, however, was not an option for him: "Apart from the fact that I still felt very much bound to my heritage coming from an officer family and that I was far still from being a true communist – in addition to the schizophrenic situation of a front soldier – the concept of comradeship meant to me: battle is battle; one must hold the position and, if the situation demands it, go down with your comrades" (original in German, translated by author, Scheringer, 1988, p. 335). Patriotism and a sense of duty are the factors in Scheringer's storyline that explain his involvement in the war as an officer for the Wehrmacht. After the war, in 1945, he became a member of the newfound "Communist Party of Germany" (Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands, or KPD) in which he remained active even after its ban in 1956. Scheringer's continued commitment to Communism led to more criminal convictions as he had called for the abolition of the German postwar government under Adenauer. He did not change his ideological positions again until his death on May 9, 1986.

Summing up Richard Scheringer's extraordinary defection narrative and biography, two main factors stand out: first, positive impressions through personal relationships with members of the opposing side on a fundamental level focusing on character and moral values; and second, negative impressions of his own in-group leadership through direct interactions, which significantly disappointed and shattered his commitment to the Nazi movement. Those personal exchanges furthermore convinced Scheringer of the lack of ideologically based answers to his questions in his own Nazi milieu at the time. Essentially, the Nazi leaders miserably failed to respond in any meaningful way to his ideological concerns.

Second, it was the unconditional and absolute commitment of the communist inmates to their cause that had a deep impact on Scheringer. They never wavered in their open strife for a complete revolution and overthrow of the existing order, even when facing torture and death. The Nazis in turn used a legalist strategy on the outside, even though the violence perpetrated by their members spoke for itself. For Scheringer, this was pure cowardice and he was disgusted by it. Nevertheless, Scheringer's storyline also transcends the ideological spectrum of intergroup relations within violent extremism, as his friendship with at least one high-ranking Nazi (Hanns Ludin) continued well beyond his defection. For some reason, the Nazi leadership also attempted repeatedly to win Scheringer back to their cause. At first, this was driven by his

personal advocate Ludin, but later on included other high-ranking Nazis. Stunningly, while many of those communist inmates who converted Scheringer through their dedication were killed in the concentration camps, he who publicly declared his defection to the communist side was never touched by the Nazis.

B3 Additional Court Cases

B3.1 Joseph Jeffrey Brice

On May 9, 2011, Joseph Jeffrey Brice (born 1990) was arrested by federal agents and suspected of creating a jihadist website where bomb-making tips and videos could be posted. Brice pleaded guilty in September 2012 to manufacturing an unregistered firearm and attempting to provide material support for a terrorist organization. Following his sentencing hearing on June 11, 2013, he received a prison term of 12 years and 6 months, as well as lifelong court supervision after release from federal prison. Brice's Islamic extremist activities mainly involved posting explosive-related and jihadist martyr videos on a YouTube channel that he registered under the name "StrenghofAllah." He also sought contact with foreign-based jihadist terrorists on other websites, where he likewise immersed himself and gave chemical advice about manufacturing improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

In May 2011, Brice was contacted by an undercover agent as part of a sting operation, asking for his help regarding a problem another jihadist was allegedly having with a bomb for an attack in retaliation for the killing of Osama bin Laden. He agreed and provided the contact with a correct chemical formula to (FBI, 2013). Joseph Brice appears to have undergone a "rapid radicalization" (Sentencing Memorandum: United States of America vs. Joseph Jeffery Brice, 2013, p. 10) into Islamic extremism after a near-death experience in April 2010, when a self-manufactured IED detonated and severely injured him. As with the other cases presented in this section, it is difficult to fully trace Brice's radicalization process and conversion. However, the court documents and publicly available statements from observers in the press do contain some information about what seems to be a mixture of far-right and jihadist worldviews.

Joseph Brice was an admirer of the anti-government and white supremacist–leaning Oklahoma bomber Timothy McVeigh. According to the FBI, he used numerous pseudonyms to discuss and defend McVeigh, and to post videos dedicated to McVeigh in January and December 2010. In one online comment noted by the authorities, Brice stated: "Tim's characteristics are nearly the same as myself, physically/politically" (FBI, 2013). It appears, he wanted to

fully emulate McVeigh down to the very detail of using the exact same type of explosive and even operate under the alias name "Timothy McVeigh" (Sentencing Memorandum: United States of America vs. Joseph Jeffery Brice, 2013, p. 29). His contacts with jihadist-oriented extremists intensified between December 2010 and May 2011, in the lead up to his arrest. For him, the single most important constant was the continuous fascination with explosives, terrorist personalities, and organizations in general. There is little indication in the available information that he developed a deeper understanding or even conviction with a specific ideology, even though it is reported that at the time of the accident in April 2010, he identified himself as a "self-declared, conservative, right-wing Christian" (Beckett & Burke, 2017). Nevertheless, he engaged in far-right and Islamic extremist milieus by offering his explosives-related knowledge and skills, and assisting in plotting terror attacks.

The plea agreement and other court documents provide some insights into his activities and mindset. The starting point of the process that would eventually make him the suspect in an FBI investigation is the explosive accident from April 2010. Brice was heard saying "what have I done to myself" (Plea Agreement: United States vs. Joseph Jeffery Brice, 2012, p. 5) by paramedics, and the injuries included severe burns to his legs, broken bones, loss of consciousness for approximately 12 days, and damage to his vocal chords. At the time, law enforcement officers who investigated the case saw no further need to follow up, since they believed Brice had "learned his lesson the hard way" (Sentencing Memorandum: United States of America vs. Joseph Jeffery Brice, 2013, p. 10). It became known later, that Brice was plotting to use a nonfunctional bomb placed on a playground to create a diversion for a bank robbery originally set for April 39, 2010 (Sentencing Memorandum: United States of America vs. Joseph Jeffery Brice, 2013, p. 14). There is no clear information as to whether that plot was politically motivated or not.

By early January 2011, the FBI noted Brice's new terrorist interest in five videos he posted on YouTube starting in December 2010. The videos were centered on the explosives theme and started with a logo of the group Al-Tawhid Wal Jihad (a Palestinian Salafist group inspired by al-Qaeda). According to the plea agreement, Brice does not seem to have been particular about the jihadist context he aimed to address in his videos. In two videos titled "shaheedan" and "zmuzh ghanian" posted in December 2010, for example, he opened up with a logo comprised of a map of Afghanistan with two swords and an image of the Koran, as well as one depicting still images of mujahedeen and martyrs (Plea Agreement: United States vs. Joseph Jeffery Brice, 2012, p. 7). Some of the video content that showed the use of explosives was taken from the April 2010 accident, which indicates that Brice might have intended to repurpose his previous activities with a far-right context for his new milieu.

By using another alias account named "Yusuf90," Joseph Brice posted a short reply to a clearly terrorist-oriented thread in a jihadist online forum in December 2010, which appears to contain some echoes of his admiration for Timothy McVeigh:

> Strike fear into the hearts of the Kuffar namely the United States and it's [sic] allies. But I call not for the lives of the innocent citizens of the United States but mainly it's [sic] government systems which are the real criminals. There are so many Ignorant Americans it's unbelievable. They don't even know their own holy book, we know theirs [sic] better than they do. Allah grants blessings to those who fight against tyranny and prey on the weak. (Plea Agreement: United States vs. Joseph Jeffery Brice, 2012, p. 8, spelling as in original)

In the following personal chat conversations with an undercover agent, Brice went into significant detail regarding the chemical composition of certain explosives and the procedures necessary to manufacture them. He also uploaded at least two issues of the al-Qaeda magazine *Inspire* on another website dedicated to extreme pornographic and violent content. This is noteworthy, since the decision to post the jihadist content there instead of on any clearly milieu-specific website might indicate that his interest in violent and shocking content at least partially superseded any ideologically jihadist motivation. The fact that Brice was a "super moderator" (Sentencing Memorandum: United States of America vs. Joseph Jeffery Brice, 2013, p. 13) on this non-jihadist website supports this hypothesis, although it is of course theoretically possible that Brice aimed to convert and radicalize others to the jihadist cause.

However, additional details mentioned in the court documents seem to contradict that opinion, since Brice was very secretive about his interest in Islam and attempted to hide this fact from his wider social environment. In addition, his own written communication, according to psychiatric evaluation and expert witness testimony, "revealed him to be sympathetic to disparate ideologies with one overriding commonality: the use of violence" (Sentencing Memorandum: United States of America vs. Joseph Jeffery Brice, 2013, p. 19). Based on the court records, it also appears that Brice was part of a social environment that encouraged or at least positively tolerated his interest in explosives and violence. It is reported that his girlfriend accompanied him to watch some of the explosions and that his father stated he would have come to observe it too, if he had known (Sentencing Memorandum: United States of America vs. Joseph Jeffery Brice, 2013, pp. 26–28).

After his arrest, Brice did confirm his membership in a jihadist forum but not that he actually held any jihadist beliefs. He claimed to have been investigating the jihadist milieu on his own and shared the bomb making information in order to gain their trust, learn about their plans, and report them to the authorities in the future (Plea Agreement: United States vs. Joseph Jeffery

Brice, 2012, p. 13). This explanation is at least doubtful since he provided detailed and fully correct guidelines for manufacturing explosives to the chat partner whom he believed was a jihadist terrorist. It is notable that Brice's behavior in presentencing custody supports the impression that he was not switching sides to Jihadism on an ideological level, but rather based on his interest in violence and explosives.

About nine months before Brice, longtime white supremacist Wayde Lynn Kurt was arrested in August 2010 for his involvement in a neo-Nazi plot to assassinate President Obama. The 54-year-old Kurt was associated with extreme-right skinhead gangs and had become a high priest in the Odinist Asatru religion (Morlin, 2012). The Asatru belief system has spread among US right-wing extremists since the late 1990s, pushed by the proselytizing efforts of far-right terrorist David Lane (Gardell, 2003; SPLC, 1998). Once in presentencing custody, Brice began socializing, bonding, and extensively exchanging letters with Wayde Kurt, which prompted a cell search of both prisoners by the authorities due to concerns about the two terrorists linking up. Indeed, secured letters between Kurt and Brice provided evidence that the latter was seeking advice on survival in prison (a matter on which Kurt had gathered extensive knowledge throughout his more than 20 years in federal prisons) and eventually engaged in plotting future criminal acts with the neo-Nazi. It is also reported that Kurt had begun schooling Brice in the Asatru religion, likely in an attempt to convert him to this belief system (Sentencing Memorandum: United States of America vs. Joseph Jeffery Brice, 2013, pp. 16-18).

Summarizing the case of Joseph Brice, it is fair to speculate that he was driven toward the jihadist milieu by his long-standing fascination with explosives and violence. The jihadist online sphere provided him with the opportunity to apply his extensive knowledge and skills in manufacturing bombs. In terms of ideological convictions, court documents provide indications that even though Brice used much of the jihadist language, he actually remained more interested in anti-governmentalism in the form expressed by his idol Timothy McVeigh. The fact that he went right back to cooperating and socializing with other white supremacists in prison and to receiving information on the pagan Odinist Asatru belief system, casts doubt on the possibility of a deeper conversion to Islam. With the limited insights provided in court records, Joseph Brice can be seen as an example of a side-switcher (as he did take over a jihadist persona and used the milieu-specific language and reference system instead of seeking cooperation with Islamic extremists while remaining a far-right activist) who is driven to the other side not by internal conflicts in the original milieu or a change of heart and mind, but rather by a widening of the ideological "playing field," where one could live out the same core desires that facilitated entry in the first environment. In this way, there was no visible break or critical reflection on the original milieu

for Brice, which made it possible to retain fully intact residuals or even complete identities. It would be more accurate to speak of Brice as an extremist living in both worlds instead of switching from one to another. Brice might eventually have integrated more extensively into the jihadist milieu, as his interest in the religion appears to have been initially driven somewhat by his near-death experience.

B3.2 Nicholas Young

As a former Washington Metro Transit Police officer Nicholas Young (born 1979) became the first law enforcement officer to be found guilty of providing material support for the terrorist organization ISIS. According to court records and evidence presented during trial, Young attempted to send gift card codes valued close to $250 to ISIS in July 2016, as he believed this would allow jihadist fighters of the organization to securely communicate with potential recruits. He was also charged with obstruction and impediment of official proceedings by deceiving investigators in November 2014 and December 2015 about a personal contact he thought was an ISIS fighter (but who was an FBI informant in reality). For these actions, a grand jury found him guilty and convicted Young in December 2017 (DOJ, 2017). About three months later, he was sentenced to 15 years in prison (DOJ, 2018). An attempt by Young to achieve a lighter sentence through an appeal motion was unsuccessful and resulted in perpetuation of the original prison term in June 2019 (Weiner, 2019). Court records appear to show that Nicholas Young was trying to blend extreme right-wing and jihadist ideologies with a general fascination with violence and extremism. He also seems not to have broken with his neo-Nazi views or sympathy for this particular milieu but rather he complemented them with jihadist elements.

Prior to his indictment and subsequence conviction, the FBI conducted a search of Young's home in August 2016 and found approximately 19 firearms; 10,000 rounds of ammunition; 70 pieces of body armor; and 60 knives, daggers, and swords (Affidavit in Support of Application for a Search Warrant, 2017). As part of the affidavit and report of the search, investigators described Young, who had been a police officer since 2003, as having been in close contact with jihadists since September 2010 at least. Back then, he associated with other jihadists, such as Zachary Adam Chesser, an American convicted in 2010 for aiding al-Qaeda and later an ISIS-affiliated al-Shabaab terror organization in East Africa. When interviewed in September 2010 by the FBI about his connection to Chesser, Young vehemently denied knowing anything about the case (Affidavit in Support of Application for a Search Warrant, 2017, p. 3). His involvement in the jihadist milieu intensified,

however. In 2010, he traveled at least twice to Libya to fight with the jihadist militia Abu Salim Martyrs Brigade, which reportedly had ties to al-Qaeda at the time (Affidavit in Support of Application for a Search Warrant, 2017, pp. 28–33; Weiner, 2019).

In 2014, Young also raised concerns among his peers by dressing up as the infamous ISIS executioner dubbed "Jihadi John" (British Arab Mohammed Emwazi) for Halloween. Young himself reportedly dismissed shock about the costume by stating that he enjoyed provocative Halloween dress and that he previously had created a Nazi SS officer persona named "Klaus Düsselkamp" for such events. Prosecutors interestingly pointed out that Young used his Nazi online persona to post pro-jihadist comments and repeatedly fantasized about a "Worldwide Association of Islamists and Nazis" (Hussain, 2017). The latter was expressed on a poster found in his home during the search and Young's idea of such an alliance can be dated back to at least 2001, when he attended a white supremacist gathering and cautioned a witness who accompanied him not to discount the possibility of such a collaboration between the two milieus (Position of the United States with Respect to Sentencing Factors, 2018, p. 5). Young is also known to have uploaded pictures of himself wearing Nazi uniforms until at least July 2010 (Affidavit in Support of Application for a Search Warrant, 2017, p. 6).

It is difficult to trace the evolution of his ideological expansion into Islamic extremism. Investigators are cited in press reports that he, for example, took a series of photos in Nazi uniform and "Muslim garb" (Hussain, 2017) in 2006, just a couple of days apart from each other. Of course, this does not automatically mean that he already had a strong interest in jihadist interpretations of Islam, and in court Young's lawyer attempted to challenge the FBI's risk assessment of his client based on the long-term development of violent extremist views in the far-right milieu. The FBI argued that this extremist career led him to become a more dangerous follower of ISIS and jihadist groups. However, even Young's own lawyer indicated that the adherence to extreme right-wing ideology was dominant before 2010 (Reply in Support of Defendant Nicholas Young's Omnibus Motion in Limine, 2017, p. 19). Regarding Young's interest in ISIS, the government argued that this started and intensified between 2014 and 2016 (Position of the United States with Respect to Sentencing Factors, 2018, p. 2).

Originally intended as a motion to debunk the prosecution's arguments, a motion letter filed by Young's attorney provides numerous important additional insights into his side-switching. In this letter to the court, the attorney argued that large portions (half or more of the government's exhibits) of the prosecution's evidence should be dismissed, because they were comprised of neo-Nazi material and statements collected during the previously mentioned

house search (Reply in Support of Defendant Nicholas Young's Omnibus Motion In Limine, 2017). The fact that the authorities were able to collect extensive extreme-right material, such as literature, Nazi memorabilia, pictures, or uniform items, as late as August 2016, strongly indicates that Young, too, had not broken with his neo-Nazi milieu or views.

Several pictures of Mohammed Amin al-Husseini (1897–1974, the Mufti of Jerusalem between 1921 and 1948), who is infamous for his collaboration with Nazi Germany and anti-Semitism (for example, meeting with Adolf Hitler and helping the Nazis recruit Bosnian Muslims into the SS), lend further support to the notion that Young envisioned himself as some form of ideological bridge between the two milieus (Reply in Support of Defendant Nicholas Young's Omnibus Motion in Limine, 2017, p. 16). In another link to the previous case study, Nicholas Young was found to have taken an interest in the story of Emerson Begolly (Reply in Support of Defendant Nicholas Young's Omnibus Motion in Limine, 2017, p. 17). Additional evidence presented by the prosecution and criticized in the motion letter includes the fact that Young continued to use Hitler's birthday as a password and idolize former SS officer Otto Skorzeny (1908–1957), who became famous during'the Second World War for his participation in the commando raid to free Italian Fascist dictator Benito Mussolini from Gran Sasso. After the war, Skorzeny became active in Egypt and helped Gamal Abdel Nasser with building the Egyptian army and intelligence services (Campbell, 2012).

Finally, a position paper regarding the sentencing factors for Nicholas Young by the prosecution found his virulent anti-Semitism to be the main explanation for the parallel fascination with neo-Nazism and Islamic extremism:

> Young's motivation to support both Nazis and the Islamic State simultaneously was the virulent hatred of Jews that he shared with both . . . Khalil testified that Young regularly talked about his hatred of Jews. Young used an Israeli flag as a doormat . . . That his use of such a flag as a doormat was motivated by hatred of Jews – rather than by disagreement with Israeli government policies – was established by the graphic from Young's computer, depicting "Jewish Swine" . . . Even in August 2016, Young maintained a graphic on his cell phone that depicted chimneys belching smoke, and the words "Together we can finish what Hitler started" (Position of the United States with Respect to Sentencing Factors, 2018, p. 6)

Nicholas Young clearly is an extraordinary case in many regards. As the first American law enforcement officer to be convicted of material support for a jihadist terror group and by being of comparatively advanced age when the offences happened, it is clear that both the neo-Nazi and jihadist milieus were in no way insignificant or unimportant for him. He continued to show his admiration for Nazi Germany and its military, for example, by wearing a

German eagle and SS bolts as tattoos (Affidavit in Support of Application for a Search Warrant, 2017, p. 34; Position of the United States with Respect to Sentencing Factors, 2018, p. 5). Traveling to fight with the "best of brothers" (Position of the United States with Respect to Sentencing Factors, 2018, p. 5) in Libya at least twice is also significant proof of commitment at a time when Western foreign terrorist fighters joining jihadist groups increasingly raised concerns among intelligence and law enforcement agencies. Given his law enforcement background, to participate in combat with a jihadist group abroad just to return and repeat this endeavour, cannot be discounted as a simple thirst for action and adventure. Speculating about what his potential side-switching narrative could have looked like if he had provided one, it is not too far-fetched to imagine him claiming a role similar to Otto Skorzeny's before him, fighting side-by-side with his Muslim brothers against an alleged global Jewish conspiracy without giving up his white supremacist core.

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