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Colloque

« Regards croisés sur l'extrémisme politique de droite en Europe aujourd'hui »

**THROUGH THE MAGNIFYING GLASS : THE WORLD OF RIGHTWING
EXTREMISM
(BELGIUM, FRANCE, GERMANY, ITALY, THE NETHERLANDS)**

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Since the eighties, one of the main political changes in Western Europe has been the electoral take off of right-wing parties perceived as “extremist” or “radical” such as the French FN, the Flemish Vlaams Blok, the Austrian FPÖ, or the Italian Alleanza nazionale. While the electoral support for these movements has been studied extensively, their membership, with a few exceptions such as Ivaldi (1994), Orfali (1990) or Bizeul (2003) in France; van Donselaar (1991) in Holland, Maraffi in Italy (2001) has been ignored, although their capacity to attract and keep members appears as one of the key condition for their future development. There is today no available comparative study of “extreme right wing activists” in Europe. Who are they? Why do they join, why do they stay? How similar, how different are they from one country to another? These are the questions our study attempts to answer. Bringing together social psychologists and political scientists from the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Italy and Germany, it’s a large scale cross national survey based on some 150 life history interviews, completed when possible by projective tests, observation of their homes and watch of their militancy in the party, conducted between 1995 and 1999 with “extreme right activists” from each country. They were interviewed at length, they talked quite freely. Thanks to their cooperation, we know a little more about the world of RW extremists and the specificity of their political activism¹.

By “*activists*”, we refer to individuals who are not only members but active participants in a movement, with an enduring commitment to their cause. By “*extreme right*” we refer to organizations that are perceived and located by public opinion on the far right in their own country, mainly the Republikaner in Germany, the Front national in France, the Alleanza nazionale in Italy, the Vlaams Blok in Flanders, and the Centrumdemocraten in the Netherlands. The bulk of the interviews were conducted with members of these five parties and their connected networks. For comparison, we also did some with members of smaller or more radical organizations such as CP86, VNN, NVU, Nederland’s Blok and Voor Post in the Netherlands, Voorpost and NSV in Flanders, MS-Fiamma Tricolore and Fascismo e Libertà

¹ “The “Right-wing extremists” project was initiated by Bert Klandermans in 1994 and funded by the department of psychology of Free University Amsterdam and the NWO (Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research, Project. The members of the project are: Bert Klandermans and Annette Linden in the Netherlands, Nonna Mayer and Valérie Lafont in France, Bernd Simon and Ludger Klein in Germany, Hans De Witte and Kaat Bilsen in Belgium, Patricia Catellani, Patricia Milesi, Antonio Chirumbolo and Alberto Crescentini in Italy. There was initially a Spanish team, Fernando Reinares and Rosario Jabardo (Faculta de Ciencias politics y sociologia, Dipartimento de Sociologia, Madrid), who finally withdrew from the project. The first results will be published next spring, Bert Klandermans and Nonna Mayer (eds.), *Extreme right activists in Europe*, Routledge

in Italy, Junge Freiheit in Germany, Action française in France. But we were mostly interested in members of ERW organised parties, that have made the choice of taking part in the electoral competition and abiding the rules of representative democracy. In our five countries though, the type and structure of RWE organizations and the political and social context provide different opportunities to RWE activism, some environments facilitate participation more than others.

Our study departs from traditional approaches of right wing extremism in five ways.

-It adopts *a social movement perspective*. Although most of the movements studied here are political parties, they are in the wake of a larger mobilization which goes beyond the process of ordinary politics and takes the form of a social movement in the classical sense: “collective challenges by people with common purposes and solidarity in sustained interaction with elites, opponents and authorities” (Tarrow, 1994, 3). Unlike early studies which insist on the irrational dimension of extremism, the personality and relative deprivation factors, we view participation in ERW movements, as in any other movement, as rational. Taking into consideration the purposive, collective, and dynamic aspects of this activism has several consequences, mainly that we look at ERW organizations as movements organizations and at right wing extremists as movement activists. In particular, we assume that our interviewees display the same basic social psychological mechanism than other activists. They joined a ERW movement, at a moment or another of their life, because they were discontented with the way things were and believed in the possibility to change them. Militancy offered them the possibility to do so, collectively. And if it had its costs, it also had benefits. They stayed because activism provided them with relations, other people with whom they could exchange and who understood them. Joining gave them a sense of belonging, an identity. While intellectually, the movement gave a meaning to their life, a frame to interpret the world they lived in, a key to understand it.

-We also view ERW mobilizations of today as a cycle in a longer trajectory, at the level of the individuals as well as the organisations. Making use of Verta Taylor’s notion of ‘*abeyance structures*’ (1989) developed in her study of feminist movements, we attempt an exploration of the *actual connections existing between pre war and post war RWE movements*. Some authors take this continuity for granted (Scheepers et al. 1993), others state the absolute

(forthcoming).

novelty of RWE parties (Betz 1994, Ignazi 1997, Kitschelt 1995). But one lacks systematic research showing if the organizations that are involved in the supply of extreme right ideas and values are structurally linked to those which were propagating these ideas in the past, and how. And more generally, knowing how RWE came in contact with RWE ideas and movements. At the level of the individuals we tried to reconstruct political trajectories since childhood, with their part of contingency, focusing on family socialization, the role played by school years, teachers and friends, and the socializing action of RWE movements and networks.

- Contrary to many approaches of the extreme right, our research is *truly comparative*. and not just a collection of national monographs. The theoretical and methodological frame, the interview guide, the coding scheme were elaborated collectively after extensive discussions at more than a dozen meetings over a period of seven years. Summaries of the interviews were circulated, data analysis problems were debated in common, articles and papers written together. And the very choice of our five countries, in which the type and structure of the far right and its political and social environment provide very contrasted opportunities to RWE, allowed us to test systematically the impact of contextual and cultural factors on ERW activism. Besides the country chapters, thematic cross national chapters outline what extreme right activists share in common and what makes them different, from one context to another. It offers an integrated *interdisciplinary* approach. The project associates social psychologists and political scientists. Working together obliged us to confront and blend our methods and theories, and to understand involvement in ERW movements at the individual level, at the societal level and at the political level as well.

Last, the choice of a *qualitative approach*, combining semi directive life history interviews, projective tests and participant observation, provides an unique data base which, after publication of the study and guaranteeing the interviewees anonymity, will be made available to the academic community and allow for cumulative research.

We shall try here, building on our case studies, to outline the main features and paradoxes specific to contemporary RWE in Europe, and underline a central factor which makes them different from other activists: stigmatisation.

NOT SO EXTREME

The first impression one gets is quite at odds with the picture of marginality, pathology and violence given by earlier studies by Adorno (1954) and his colleagues on “authoritarians” or Billig (1979) on “fascists”. If our interviewees appear as quite a diverse lot, from different backgrounds, age and education, on the whole they appear as ‘normal’ people, socially integrated, connected in one way or another to mainstream groups and ideas. With one or two exceptions, they are not admirers of Hitler, or nostalgic of the Third Reich. If quite a lot in Italy define themselves as heirs of “fascism”, and proud to be, they claim its intrinsic difference with nazism, its lack of anti-Semitism; and minimize the violence committed in its name. If almost all our interviewees take open and clear anti foreigners and anti immigrant stands most of them avoid blatant racist or anti-Semitic formulations, or anything like “hate speeches”. Moreover the majority of them do not consider themselves as “extreme right” at all. Right wing most admit to be, at least in opposition to “left wing” activists. But extreme, practically never, massively rejecting the stigmatising label which they keep for more radical movements. Even on the classical left right scale, which is a spatial indicator, where the word “extreme” is not mentioned, they generally have difficulties in choosing a position, resisting to what they see as a too "simple" way to define themselves. Some refuse to answer, or put themselves off scale, others say they are “neither left nor right”, elsewhere. Sometimes they tick two different points on the scale. Many prefer to give an ideological self definition: “nationalist”, ”ethnic nationalist”, “right-wing national“ “left-wing nationalist“, “national anarchist”; one of the Italians even defines himself as “fascist” . And if most (16 out of 24 interviewees in Northern Italy, 22 out of 25 in Germany, 16 out of 36 in France) locate, one way or another, on the right hand side of the scale, very few chose the furthest position,

number 7 of the scale. So one of the main feature of ERW activists is that they do not consider themselves as such, and that they look at politics with different glasses than the mass public. Actually one finds the same phenomenon on the extreme left of the political scale. Trotskyite activists of the French LCR (Communist revolutionary league), asked to place themselves on the left right scale, symmetrically place themselves elsewhere, off scale, or define themselves as simply left wing, the “real left”, or revolutionary (Johsua 2003). This just goes to show the relativity and the complexity of political perceptions and frames of interpretation.

NOT SO NEW

There is a on going debate about the novelty or archaism of the movements we studied, which are not, by choice, the most radical. Are they heirs of the fascist and nazi organisations of the 30's? Or are they New Radical Rights (Kitschelt and Mc Gann 1995), “post industrial rights (Ignazi 1992), starting afresh, freed from the past? Both theories actually hold some part of truth. Social movements never come out from nothing. They are a combination of old and new elements. It is a cumulative process. Verta Taylor (1989) developed her concept of ‘abeyance’ from the study of feminism in America, showing how the present movements built up on previous waves; experiences, know-hows, frames. And how niches, secretive meeting places, invisible networks, allowed the movement to survive in spite of its hard times. It’s the same with RWE. In a country like France, these movements have developed and piled up in successive waves since two centuries. At the level of their members, what strikes us first when we reconstruct our interviewees’ political trajectories, the path that led them to their present activism, is indeed the continuity with early RWE, one way or another.

There are “conversion” cases of course, owing to contingencies, unexpected events and circumstances, which will bring to RWE people who had absolutely no previous leaning or

contact with it. There are often cases of what we call joining by “compliance”. They did not choose to join, they are there because a spouse or a member of the family pulled them into activism. This dependent attitude is mostly found with women in our sample, as it was in Birgitta’s Orfali study of the French FN (Orfali)². But in all five countries, these cases are a minority. Most of our interviewees were preconditioned, exposed to certain values since their childhood.

Family is the most important socialization agency for our activists. They actually belonged to the ERW scene long before they actually joined a movement, even if some belonged to traditional right movements or, more rarely, to the left. For some it was direct transmission of the creed, with the same commitment running through three or four generations. We found in our sample, especially in the Italian fascists, French traditionalist of Action française and Flemish nationalists. One finds RWE families passing on the torch from parents to children over almost a century, sometimes in the same organizations. For others it goes back to more recent events, such as the aftermath of the decolonisation wars in Indochina and Algeria. In France the most important part of the FN’s activists interviewed come from families who did not accept the independence of its former colonies and fought sometimes violently in terrorist networks (OAS, Secret Army organization), for a “French Algeria”. But in most cases it was indirect socialization, the transmission of traditional, nationalist, authoritarian values, with a sense of hierarchies, conditioning them to be inclined more towards the far right than to the far left, to be at odds with the evolution of modern society towards permissivity, multiculturalism, mixity, opening of borders. In that sense, the analysis of Piero Ignazi, explaining the appeal of new extreme rights as a reaction to post materialist values, as a “silent counter revolution”, fits well (Ignazi 1992). Most of our interviewees, even the younger, look towards an idealized glorious past. They resent the present state of things. They

² For a different finding see Kathleen Blee’s study of women in a quite different small “hate group”, the Ku Klux Klan, where they appear to have joined on their own free will (Blee 2002).

are “revolutionary” in the actual meaning of the term, they want to roll back the wheel of history, they are ‘anti conformist’ and proud to be so.

Afterwards there were networks, fraternities, youth movements, more rarely the encounter with a teacher or a person/hero to identify, which consolidated the first socialization.

NATION FIRST

RWE parties developing today in Europe are often presented as “anti immigrant or “xenophobic” parties. What mainly attracts their voters, what makes them different from others is basically, except perhaps for the AN ones, rejection of all “others”, immigrants, foreigners, refugees (Ivaldi 2001). Yet if one was to find a common ideological core among our interviewees, it would be less xenophobia than the other side of it, national preference, the positive side of the “ethnocentric” attitude: valorisation of one’s in-group. And the first, most important in-group of all in their eyes would be the nation. Whether the country as a whole, as among the members of the French FN, the German REP, the Dutch CD, the Italian AN or MS-FT, or a region they would like to see independent, as for the VB in Flanders fighting for a grand Flemish nation. A sometimes almost biological image of the nation as a natural almost consanguine community, with its territory, its language, its culture, that surpasses all others-family, work, religious ties- runs through the interviews, similar to what the French ERW ideologue Charles Maurras’ theorised as “integral nationalism”. Rejection of the ‘enemies of the nation’ stems from this nationalism, but there is more to it than just being against immigrants and foreigners.

In that sense, it is very clear that ERW activists do not think like ERW voters. It is particularly striking in Flanders and in Italy. Some of our Vlaams Blok militants defend a kind of ethnic nationalism, promoting the independence of Flanders, the secession from Belgium, the abolition of monarchy and even the creation of a Great Netherlands including

French Flanders and the Netherlands in a pan-Dutch nationalism, ideas which are not at all shared by the great mass of their voters (de Witte 1996). While in Italy, although Gianfranco Fini has succeeded in changing the image of his party since its *aggornamento* in the Congress of Fiuggi, and attracting more and more centre right voters (see Ivaldi 2001), it is obvious that many AN party members, at the local level, are still completely impregnated by the fascist tradition. And if they stay in the party it is because they have found a niche in some of its parallel networks, youth movement or friendly circle, which function like an internal abeyance structure, where they can go on as before and cultivate a “sub-party identity”.

MANAGING THE STIGMA

The other common link between our interviewees, and perhaps the most important, is the deep discredit they suffer from, as “extreme right” activists, even though most of them strongly reject such a label. It associates them with nazism, the Holocaust, the very essence of evil.. It is their specific stigma in the sense of “an attribute that is deeply discrediting (Goffman 1963). In the past, communists, on the extreme left, suffered from a symmetric stigma. But the Wall has fallen and communism doesn’t frighten anymore. RWE movements are still provoking rejection and ”cordon sanitaire” strategies. If it prevents many from joining, once people have joined, maybe it’s the cement that holds them together, because of the feeling of injustice it generates. In none of the countries where we conducted our study did rightwing extremism provoke stigmatisation to the extent it did in the Netherlands. ER-activists are portrayed in the Dutch media as pathologic quarrellers, troublemakers, opportunists, fanatics, racists, Nazis, and fascists and ER-parties are associated with racism, nazism, fascism and anti-Semitism. Therefore, we will use the Dutch case to elaborate on the perception, and management of stigmatisation.

The experience of stigmatisation

All our interviewees explain how they have experienced stigmatisation be it in the form of repression, attacks from the countermovement or exclusion from their social environment. Organizations and individuals were repeatedly brought to court because of the leaflets or statements they issued. If not prohibited by authorities, events and meetings were interrupted by anti-fascist organizations or demonstrations. In the political arena proper representatives of the Extreme Right were neglected or boycotted. In their personal life interviewees and their families were blackmailed and threatened, they lost their job or business, or experienced problems with their employer or colleagues. Many interviewees lost friends and were excluded from organizations or groups they were a member of.

As far as repression is concerned, the authorities for a long time banned any demonstration by the ER and tended to prohibit meetings. Furthermore, leaflets and other written material were scrutinized and individuals or organizations were prosecuted if unlawful passages were found. One of the parties (CP'86) was prosecuted and eventually sentenced for being a criminal organization, which in fact meant the end of the organization. Steemers remembers how he and the other members of CP'86 in his hometown were rounded up by the police because he stood for election for CP'86:

Six o'clock in the morning the police stood at the door. [at your door?] Yeah, wanting me at my door. I had to come with them, suspected of membership of a criminal organization. Yeah, they can take everybody into custody for that in principle thus that, ehm...[everybody can be arrested?] Yeah

apparently, yeah, that is no problem. Thus I had to come with them, and ehm...(..) In principle there is little they can do, but they acted as if they were allowed quite a bit. They began immediately to check my bookshelves. I said you even don't have a search warrant. You can try what you want, but I won't let it happen. Yeah only a quick look at your books. There's nothing strange there, thus, ehm...Yeah, they could see that themselves as well. The one wanted to put handcuffs on, but the other said I don't believe you have the intention to run away. No, think of it, running away that's totally useless. So, I just went with them. (..) I was kept until 4 o'clock, only than they began with their interrogation, and that interrogation lasted until 9 o'clock at night I believe. [Ed, 34, Voorpost].

In terms of attacks by the countermovement, Cor remembers his installation as a member of the city council

Ehm..the whole event, the whole, ehm, ehm..the whole ceremony heh, that was ehm, you see that the whole hall is completely jammed with, ehm..punkers and squatters heh, that are just your arch-enemies and then it takes an hour and a half for the police to bully everybody out that is just a great, great, great pity. My parents where there for the event (..) they had taken all the trouble to get there, after all they weren't that young anymore and there they stood in the entrance of the city hall next to each other like two pitiful little birds very, very meek while really the squatters and the police everybody passed there by, bleeding or not bleeding, by my parents, well they found it horrendous, for them it was ehm.. really, ehm really such a big scandal, they have never forgotten. [Cor, 47, NB]

The archetypical attack by the countermovement every interviewee referred to is the hotel-fire of Kedichem in 1986. The anti-fascist organizations in the country used to besiege meetings of the extreme right if they became aware of it, which often resulted in violent confrontations. As a consequence, most owners of meeting spaces tended to refuse to rent space to extreme right-wing organizations. On their turn, these organizations reacted to the situation by attempts to rent meeting space secretly under disguise (as organization and as individual), or to go to places individually and set up a meeting on the spot rather than rent space collectively. Kedichem was one of those meetings set up in the late 80s between representatives of the CD and CP'86 to discuss a possible merger. The anti-fascist movement

got the information about the meeting and turned the place into a battlefield. Be it deliberately or by accident, the hotel was put on fire and several attendees of the meetings were seriously wounded, inter alia Cor, one of our interviewees. The event led to a re-definition of strategies at both sides of the divide. Louise (67, CD) describes the event.

They began to throw bombs ... stones to break the windows and after that they threw smoke bombs that were actually fire bombs. So they threw fire bombs inside. At first that went well because we could beat the bombs out with tablecloths that laid on the tables. But yeah then a curtain took fire that we could not reach and that was the beginning of the end. I went to the balcony at the back waited for a while and simply jumped of the balcony. But [the others] all went to the side of the hotel... wandering around because the whole of the hotel was completely white of the smoke...had to find their way by touch...some through the cellars...others jumped out of the windows. Well, that was quite a fall. That was at least three to four meter before they hit the ground. That's why it turned so badly for Wil Schuurman [one of the members of the CD] because they had scattered the windows she cut her leg with the glass. That was sad, very sad. Perhaps it could have ended well had there immediately been an ambulance but the ambulance couldn't get there because the whole dike-road was blocked by fire brigades...therefore they had to leave her there for half an hour and that was why they had to amputate her leg.....Janmaat [the political leader of the CD] did file a complaint and eventually there has been a court case [against the troublemakers] but what happened? They were acquitted of the charges because it was a political act. That's why it was allowed and they just let them go. It was...well that made me furious...if we were to do something similar we all would have been in prison. But they can get away with it. [Louise, 67, CD].

Many feel that the countermovement is officially supported or at least tolerated by the authorities and are outraged about it. This was reflected in Louise's angry reaction to the follow up of the Kedichem. It is also clear in Maarten's furious commentary on what he sees as the official policy of the city administration.

...the anti-fascist movement got 20.000 guilders just to fight us. I mean, what has come over the municipality to fight a democratic party with public funds, after all we are registered by the electoral council, our statutes are in good standing, that means everything is in good standing. That I find

unreal. I can imagine that people disagree with us but I don't find that the municipality... the municipality is everybody's institution, people are elected into it and they tell their stories, but I don't think that it is the municipality's job to... imagine that you live a Christian fundamentalist town and for example a liberal women's party would run for the elections. The whole of the Netherlands would be up in arms if the municipality would set 30.000 guilders aside to fight that party... I find that the national government and the local government alike go way beyond their bounds if indeed they use public funds to fight parties that are accepted in the democratic order, otherwise they must ban them. Indeed, as a right-wing extremist or a nationalist, no matter how you name it, I pay for my own suppression... I have experienced that so often. [Maarten, 28, CP'86].

In general, in the political arena proper the representatives of the extreme right are neglected and excluded by their colleagues. Paula describes how representatives of other parties refuse to work with her or even talk to her. All this comes to a climax with the death of her son Bart.

Bart then passed away. I received a card from only two council members, I mean, that's not normal! I really think so... I find that really... [..] Of course, they could have read it in the newspaper. They knew it all too well, because I sent a card to the mayor, to the aldermen who sent a letter of condolence, to be sure, but not a single personal gesture because you must not think that Opstelten [the then mayor BK&AL] will shake hands with me, so sorry for the wife of [Vreeswijk], forget it [..] [What did you feel?] anger, terrible anger. And then they dare to say that I am a-social, in the sense that I am a fascist in their eyes. Yeah, how are they like that? How are they themselves? [Paula, 45, NB]

Making someone's affiliation to the extreme right public is common strategy of the countermovement. First of all, every person who is known to be a member of an extreme right organization is listed at several websites of the countermovement including the personal information about that person the countermovement can get hold of. Secondly, several of our interviewees found themselves confronted with items in the news meant to publicize their involvement in the extreme right. Willem is one of them. One day an anti-fascist magazine had an article titled '*The Nationalist Shopkeeper.*'

The article with the name of the shop and the street has the title 'The Nationalist Shopkeeper' with statements by van Donselaar [an expert of Right-wing extremism like 'the odd man, a wolf in sheep's clothing, the smartest and an erudite man.' Well, that was flattering, of course, as such it made me smile. Thus far, my activism had not provoked any reaction. It was in that paper on Thursday. I scared stiff, I had my heart in my throat. The day after I met some colleagues who pounded me on my shoulder saying don't let them put you down. [Willem, 34, Voorpost].

Eventually, Willem had to give up his business, however. Fred (25, Voorpost) was portrayed in the local newspaper of his hometown.

On the front page of the same newspaper[that announced his election] there was an article that you are... to say so, if I may use the phrase...a horrible creature, like a monster and that you should not be allowed to act. [...]So, on the front page and to make it worse it has the information where I am working and what I am doing and that is, that was for many people reason also people who had nothing to do with the music school but who then phoned the director of the music school Do you know who you are employing? That kind of questions. A downpour of phone calls [...] the moment I heard about it I first felt...oh boy that's going wrong completely and yeah the moment you're really..on the front page of the newspaper and eh you see it, well you're really scared...You think that your whole future collapses, that is your first reaction and also, of course, the fear that people will recognize you in the street and how your colleagues, the people at your work, your family, your friends will react...Yeah it is a psychological pressure that you experience at that moment..that is difficult to describe. And that is also really a matter of not being able to sleep[...] fortunately, it wasn't all that bad in the end but at the very moment your world really collapses. [Fred, 25,Voorpost].

Almost every interviewee reports stories of exclusion. Be it friends or members of their family who don't want to meet them anymore, a job they lost or couldn't get, a business that was troubled.

Like everyone Paula lost most of her friends, but what really did upset her was that her child was pestered at school:

'Your parents discriminate' did one recently scold at Max. I told the mentor 'I hope Max can take it.' Because Max already is worrying about the death of his younger brother and now this. It is a mentally handicapped child....well, that is so awful, I find that criminal, that parents set their handicapped child

up. That has happened before, yeah, and Max is a child that finds it difficult to defend himself [...] He is not even able to read the materials we are busy with, he has no clue. There's no need for that either in my view, a child must be kept out of this, it is a different world. But yet he is pestered with it. [Paula, 45, NB]

Mark lost contact with the members of his family, and with friends and colleagues.

Over time one gets used to the estrangement from family members. In the beginning it really hurts but right now I say they are grown-ups. It's the way it is. But my brother and two sisters have made that choice I don't see them anymore. [and] An Indonesian guy who is born and grown up here with whom I have been on vacation several times felt that he couldn't be friends any more. I had quite a few friends from the business club businessmen who because of their business couldn't talk to me anymore. In private in a bar or a restaurant yes, but not in public. [Mark, 49, CP'86].

Johan had planned to finish his study before he ran for the municipal elections, but then a car accident fouled up his plans

I was still busy with my thesis when I was already running for the elections. When my supervisor got to know that, he withdraw. He didn't want to supervise my thesis anymore, because yeah initially he was very enthusiastic, because yeah it would be publishable, and yeah we could turn it into a book, because nobody had ever written about it. Thus he was very enthusiastic about it, because he thought, of course, that could be nice for him too, than his name would be on it as well, but yeah then he discovered who I was and then he didn't find it so nice anymore that his name would be on it. [Johan, 33, CP'86].

He could not find somebody else who was willing to supervise him, and in fact never finished his study.

Edwin lost his job after his boss saw him on television taking part in a demonstration of the ER in Zwolle. It was the first time that a mayor allowed a demonstration by the extreme right in his community. The first Monday after the weekend when Edwin goes to work his boss says

I saw you on television. What were you doing there? I don't want you here anymore. Your future here is forlorn. [...] and of course, quite a few members of my family did not know. Must be scaring all those bold heads and then they think are you part of this? I have always seen you as a nice guy. Their whole ideal fell apart so to say. [Edwin, 29, Voorpost]

Rinus, finally, lost customers:

For example with the purchaser of one department [of the city of Amsterdam] I had a very good relationship and then at a given moment he said to me because he knew about it, he knew that I was a member of that party, look I don't talk politics with my customers also not if I were a member of a different party. But then he said, what about that party? I said, do you know about it? Well, he said, the newspapers are full of it. He said, I live in Flevoland [the province where Rinus is elected], ehm..you know it doesn't bother me but other employees came to me and they didn't want you anymore (..) And I have had other clients who literally told me now you are a member of that political party you're no longer welcome. Well you can take it or leave it, well I took it. [Rinus, 66, NNP].

Several years after we conducted our interviews we went back to our interviewees and asked them whether they were still actively involved in the ER. In the meantime the ER was wiped out in the elections, while extreme right organizations fell apart or had difficult times. Ten of our interviewees said they were no longer active in the ER. Ten others left their organizations but continued to be active in the ER in a different organization. Interestingly, it is the daily quarrels in the party, the conflicts, the hatred and malice rather than the stigmatisation that made people quit or change membership. Apparently, stigmatisation was all in the game. Participants were prepared to take it, but they weren't prepared to cope with the hassles inside the organization. Michael, for example, one of the key-figures of the ER responds to the questions whether he is still actively involved

No, not at the moment, no. I watch it on nicely for the time being and that suits me very well. I can come to myself again and I have more time to read books. Time to rest, because yeah I must say that the last time if you look back, I had to deal with quite a number of idiots. Look, eh...all those fights, and so on. I think that in a way it is just as well if they stay small, because, yeah, my impression is that there are just more and more crooks in the extreme right. [Michael, 34, CP'86].

Ronald, representative in a city council between 1994-1998 quit because of increasing discontent with the internal organization

Reasons to leave? Ha, it's an accumulation of dissatisfactions. The organization was led very badly, mister Janmaat was chairman of the party and his wife was the treasurer, that's very strange, eh?He occupied a seat in parliament, as did his wife, I think that is way out of line! It was like a family business.... No, to be honest little by little I experienced this growing feeling of discontent . Finally, that was what made me decide to quit! [Ronald, 72, CD].

For others the internal troubles were a reason to shift to another organization, for example, Ed, VNN-activist, vice-chairman between 1997 and 1998;

I was elected the vice-chairman of the new party VNN. But very soon trouble came our way, because two activists, Hoogstra and De Boer, wanted to overpower us..... They were annoying me so much that after six months I decided to leave that party. It was a shame, because before that time all of us had the same goal in mind, but in the new party, people were trying to get into power.....I then decided to become active in Voorpost , where I am active as a member of the daily board.... for me it's a way to express my ideas and suggestions, Yeah and we come together on a regular basis, we discuss things and there is a good atmosphere . [Ed, 34, Voorpost].

Facing stigmatisation

The impact of stigmatisation appears to depend on the pathway taken to activism. For some becoming an activists is a matter of continuity, for others of conversion, and for again others a matter of compliance. *Continuity* refers to life histories wherein movement membership and participation are a natural consequence of the preceding political socialization (Roth 2003). Continuity situates social movement participation centrally in the life course of the activist (Andrews 1991; Teske 1995). *Conversion*, on the other hand, relates to those trajectories where movement membership and participation imply a break with the past. Often critical events play a crucial role in these life histories. Blee (2002), for instance, observed that the women she interviewed about their participation in the Ku Klux Klan remarkably often referred to a dramatic personal experience (a car accident or being raped) that triggered the

decision to engage in radical politics. In addition to continuity and conversion as trajectories to become extreme right activist the interviews revealed a third pattern that we labelled *compliance*. It refers to the situation that people entered activism more or less in spite of themselves. Rather than their own desire that pushed these people towards becoming activist, it were circumstances they did not even always command that pulled them into activism.

Continuity, conversion and compliance are three possible lines our interviewees can take when they tell their stories. Whether the stories they tell us, reflect the truth, is not the point. What they do reflect, however, is important in itself: the past as constructed by our interviewees. Nineteen of the Dutch interviewees told us a story of continuity, eight told stories of conversion, and nine stories of compliance. The stories of continuity were either testimonies of lifetimes of commitment to extreme right politics, or of lifelong journeys by political wanderers who went from the one political shelter to the other. Nine of our interviewees belonged to the first category, which we labelled 'revolutionaries' and ten to the second, which we labelled 'wanderers.' The eight activists who told us conversion stories all recalled events that changed their lives or worldviews and made them susceptible to the appeals of the extreme right. Compliance stories usually tell about friends or family members who persuaded someone who did not feel particularly attracted to politics to become actively involved in the extreme right.

All Dutch interviewees, as we saw, had to face the stigmatisation associated with being an ER-activist.. How did they cope with such a markedly negative public opinion and media coverage? Was it a matter of concern when they were considering joining or did it simply not occur to them?

For the 'revolutionaries' the stigma was not at all a problem. On the contrary, they took pride in being the outcast. They were also the only ones who did not have difficulties to affirm that their ideological roots were in racism and nazism. Hans, for example, referring to possible sacrifices, says

It is an obligation I have, an obligation to the people, to my people. To other people who have a big mouth but never act themselves I can always say: "Don't blame me if something fails, I worked hard for it, you could have done the same." I really see it as an obligation to my people

and when asked about the ER's racism

I feel that people who have worked here, the guestworkers, that naturally they must be paid...but they must leave the country...let that be clear...I am in favour of a white Europe...let that be clear...I won't keep that secret...I am against mixture of races...I am dead against it. . [Hans, 35, CP'86/Voorpost].

Hans' confrere Cor is even more explicit

I am not a racist. I am a national socialist. Hitler had divisions of Georgians, Azerbeidjans, muslims. If you read Mein Kampf he writes about Über- and Untermenschen as he phrases it but I don't agree with those terms. I simply say they are all the same, but they must scam from here. And Jews are the worst of all. [...] Patriotic, yeah, I find that a disgusting phrase. The worst characters in this country are those who [worship] our flag, our leaders, that is such a cliché. My line is the swastika and my leader is Adolf Hitler. [Cor, 30, CP'86].

The political wanderers and those who told stories of conversion or compliance denied any links with racism and nazism or distanced themselves in advance. In the words of Jeanne:

That extreme is a label given by the press. You are left or right but extremism makes that you are compared to the CP'86 and that is all Hitler adoration. I find that horrifying, I really can't stand that. And that we are lumped together that I find difficult because it is difficult to get rid of because you don't get the opportunity to explain what you are and what you are doing. I abhor Hitler and the prosecution of the Jews, really that kind of things make me shiver. [Jeanne, 56, CD]

Or Harry

There is a huge difference between CP'86 and the CD, of course. And what I absolutely won't tolerate and what I have never caught someone doing, is those ideas from the Second World War. That I find absolutely unacceptable. If in a meeting next to me someone would raise his hand [Hitler salute] I would knock him of his stool right away, because I find it awful that such things happen. [Harry, 45, CD].

Yet, they did join a movement that was seen very negatively. The 'compliers' tended to neglect the stigmatisation or tried to not think of it. Paula, for example, who became active after her husband had been actively involved in the extreme right for already sometimes, reasoned:

I was already isolated, for me the step was not so difficult, of course. Because of my husband's position I was already isolated. For some time already I didn't have many acquaintances and friends. Much people beyond fellow party members and friend you have, I hadn't anyway. The people who got to know me, learn who I am and then don't want me anymore. Well, I have experienced that for so many years already, it hurts, but I don't bother any more. [Paula, 45, NB].

When Maarten became aware of the political sympathies of his party friends, he was somewhat shocked because he had learned at home and in school that these were dangerous people, but

You must take into account that I only was with them because we went out together. [...] I wasn't with them because of politics, but because we went out together. Every now and then we had discussions, but they never mind discussing. [Maarten, 28, CP' 86].

Jeanne didn't expect it and therefore the stigmatisation hit her hard. It meant an enormous change in her life. Her friends reacted extremely negatively, including her best friend:

that has been a great shock to me. I know her since I was five years old. We were friends in everything, in joy and sorrow. She was like a sister to me. And then her husband called that they had taken our address out of their address book and that they did not want to have anything to do with me anymore. It hit me right in the face. I couldn't believe it. What was happening to me? Those are your best friends, you know. If they are your best friends they should talk with you, meet with you, ask you I don't understand you, can you explain to me, or, I try to understand you but I disagree with you. Yes, it has hurt me very much. [Jeanne, 56, CD].

The most concerned were perhaps the ‘wanderers’ and the ‘converts.’ For them it was a real transition, which none of them took lightly. Pieter, for example, spent two years awaiting, looking around, talking to people at meetings and only after he figured that many members of the CD are ordinary people like himself he took the step to become a member. Mark decides to write a letter to his relatives and to withdraw from all his social responsibilities. Mattijs who became a member of the CD in 1989 consulted his children

I had thought a long time already. From the very beginning that the CD existed, I wanted to call to become a member. But I thought, why should I do it and for the children of course. I have a son who has a job in a security business, I have a son who has a hotel in this town, thus you must consult with your children [...] they must agree with it. [...] Once they had a meeting here, and then they have pushed Janmaat's car into the water, that was in Hotel Zeezicht. Well, a month later the parents of my daughter in law have still been threatened. Hence, I had asked the children, well, they said, that you must know yourself. Also when I put my name on that list, they said, dad if you feel like doing it and want to stand on the list, that's your own business. [Mattijs, 59, CD].

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Stigmatisation manifests itself in the form of repression by authorities, attacks by counter movements, and exclusion by the social environment. Although some of our interviewees were taken by surprise, most activists seemed to have known that they were up to hardship. Obviously, that did not make them refrain from entering the movement, though in hindsight a few interviewees may have wished that they had chosen otherwise at the time. The activists did cope with stigmatisation in a different manner depending on their entrance trajectory. Those who felt attracted to the ER early on—the revolutionaries—took pride in their stigma. Those who were reluctantly pulled into activism—the compliants—had the most difficulties coping with it, if only because they were the least prepared. The ‘wanderers’ and the ‘converts’ were much better prepared, not the least because they were the most concerned

upon entering the movement. None of them took the transition to extreme right activism lightly. Yet, stigmatisation was not the main reason for activists to quit. The problems inside the movement, the conflicts, the incompetence of the leadership made many activists choose to leave one organization for another. This was, of course, spurred by the electoral failure of the extreme right in the Netherlands (1998), but one should remember that despite that failure close to three quarters of our interviewees stayed involved in the extreme right family, be it sometimes in a different organization than the one they were part of at the time of the interview.

The Dutch context is like a magnifying glass of the persistent ostracism that plagues extreme right parties and activists. Reprobation reaches its climax in the Netherlands and in Germany. There being an extreme right activist not only isolates from the mainstream society but can jeopardize one's job, career, and sometimes life. It's at its lowest level in Italy where a party like AN has become part of the political establishment. This hierarchy is mirrored by the expert's judgment collected by Wouter van der Brug and Joost van Spanje in their study of 'cordon sanitaire' policies against 'anti-immigrant parties' in Europe. Of the 11 countries they studied, on a ten point scale, the highest score for the strictness of the 'cordon sanitaire' goes to the German Republikaner, the Dutch Centrumdemocraten and the Belgian Front national (9,4 ex aequo),. Three parties which never managed their electoral take off, never developed stable and viable party structures. Then one finds the Flemish Vlaams Blok (8,6) and the French FN (7,5), two movements which, on the contrary, have succeeded on the partisan and electoral level, but are kept out of office by the strategy of the other parties (van der Brug and van Spanje 2004). At the other end one finds the movements that have not only attracted voters and militants but gained access to power, the Austrian FPÖ (4,3), the Italian Lega Nord (2,3) and at the very bottom Finis's party, AN (1,9). The hierarchy of ostracism reflects

precisely the political achievement of these movements. The more stigmatised they are, the more costly it is to join them, the more difficult is their electoral and partisan development. Yet stigmatisation is at the same time a resource for the movement., helping it to hold together. Some years ago, the French journalist and extreme left activist Anne Tristan joined a local section of the National Front, in the underprivileged Northern housing projects of Marseille. She lived their life for two months. She concludes the book she made out of her experience by quoting Albert Cohen's comment about his experience of anti-Semitism in Marseille : they are "decent people who love each other from hating together".(Tristan 1987: 257). For our activists, as diverse as they may be, one could well turn round the sentence. It's being hated together, that makes them love each other all the more.

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