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Anders Behring Breivik, master of life and death: Psychodynamics and political ideology in an act of terrorism

SIRI ERIKA GULLESTAD

Abstract

According to Anders Behring Breivik himself, his massacre of 77 innocent people on July 22, 2011 in Norway was motivated by *ideology*: Breivik sees himself as being morally justified to save Europe from multiculturalism and feminism. What makes a person join such an ideology? This paper argues that the demonization of Muslims and Eurabia fits into a psychologically threatened universe and a murderous lust for revenge. Against the background of different sources (the ideological “manifesto,” forensic reports, psychiatric assessment of the mother–son relationship in Breivik’s childhood, and interview material), the mass-murderer’s attitudes are understood as expressing inner dynamic forces. Hypotheses about Breivik’s personality and unconscious motivation are discussed using the concepts of *splitting* and *personal myth* and *Oedipal catastrophe*. The paper argues that the relationship between unconscious motives and ideology must be regarded as dialectical: the terrorist’s actions are founded in a subjective war scenario, expressing personally motivated hatred and vindictiveness, being displaced and projected, and justified with reference to a war “out there.” Thus, the terrorist seeks an ideology that fits unconscious intentions. The ideology, however, is indispensable to legitimate actions.

Key words: *Anders Breivik, lone terrorist, ideology, applied psychoanalysis, personal myth, splitting, false self.*

On July 22, 2011, Anders Behring Breivik, a 32-year-old white Norwegian man from one of Oslo’s well-to-do neighbourhoods, set off a bomb at the Norwegian government headquarters in the centre of Oslo, killing eight people and crippling many more. Dressed as a policeman, he then drove to Utøya, a small island about 40 kilometres from Oslo, to the summer camp of 600 young people from the Social Democratic Party. Over one hour he killed – in cold blood – 69 youths and children, one by one, shot in the chest and in the head, through hands helplessly trying to protect their faces. Pretending to be a policeman who was there to protect them, Breivik induced them to leave their hiding places. Groups of children hiding under rocks or behind their leaders were massacred. Breivik’s original plan was to execute Gro Harlem Brundtland, former prime minister of Norway and a symbol of the victories of modern feminism;¹ she had given a political speech at Utøya earlier that day. The decapitation of Brundtland was to be videotaped and put on the Internet,

modeling al Qaeda operations. The plan had to be changed, however, because Breivik was delayed.

The shock in Norway was total. How was this possible? How can we understand these acts of evil? In his own view, Breivik was motivated by extremist right-wing ideology. The bomb and the massacre were intended to be a wake-up call: Breivik wanted to save Norway. Just before the massacre, he sent out a manifesto of 1500 pages to more than a thousand recipients, the key message of which was that a revolution was necessary to save Norway from Eurabia – a Europe dominated by Muslims. The manifesto speaks about the Nordic race and Grand National values, and is full of contempt for multiculturalism, feminism, and the dissolution of authority in our modern society. All through the 10-week trial, Breivik – immovable – maintained that he realized that what he did was “horrible.” It was, however, “necessary.” The destructiveness was, according to Breivik’s understanding, ideologically motivated.

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¹Gro Harlem Brundtland was Norway’s first female prime minister (for three periods: 1981, 1986–1989, and 1990–1996), and also the youngest person ever appointed to the role. She was then Director-General of the World Health Organization (1998–2003). “Gro” (Norwegians called her by her first name) was experienced as a kind of “mother” of the nation (also considered a “mother of sustainability”). Her government was responsible for legislation assuring women’s rights and progressive family policies. Her cabinet of eight women and nine men represented the highest level of gender equality ever seen.

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Experts on terror also regard ideology as the explanatory factor.² The question is, however, what makes a person join an ideology that justifies the sacrifice of innocent people by reference to a superior aim? Is it possible that the demonization of Muslims and Eurabia “fits” into a psychologically threatened universe and a murderous lust for revenge? This paper argues that Breivik’s ideological attitudes may be understood as expressing inner, dynamic forces. However, to explain the passage from psychological motives to action in the case of Breivik, we need to understand the role of ideology.

The present paper is a follow-up of a previous article aimed at highlighting the dialectics between personality and ideology (Gullestad, 2013). In the present paper, I will focus more closely on the inner dynamics leading to the omnipotent conviction of being master of life and death.

Breivik’s ideological universe

An astounding aspect of Breivik’s manifesto is the strong defense of a traditional form of society, resting on patriarchal values. This seems to be the deepest root of his attack on multiculturalism and fear of Eurabia. He is intensely concerned about the demography of modern Western societies, with declining birth rates of “valuable,” white, Christian people. He vehemently rages against feminism and cultural Marxism: “I feel shame on behalf of my city, my country and my civilization. I despise the post war cultural conservatives that did not manage to stop the Marxist Cultural Revolution manifested by the 68-generation” (Breivik, 2011). Indeed, the “feminization” of the whole society, and also of himself, is something specifically loathed by Breivik. In the school he was attending as a child, he was, he says, “forced to learn to knit and sew.” Breivik’s hatred is also directed against the dissolution of sexual morality: “An alarming number of young girls in Oslo, Norway, start giving oral sex at the age of 11 and 12.” It comes as a paradox that, during his teens, he was attracted to masculine boys from minority cultures, like the Muslim culture of Pakistani people, characterized by codes of honor. These boys were not “feminized.” Indeed, when I read Breivik’s manifesto, I was struck by the affective intensity in describing the threat of feminism. In the manifesto text, this threat comes forward as deeper than the threat posed by Muslims.

To restore order, the father must be reinstated as an authority figure and head of family, and the nuclear family must be strengthened. This will,

according to Breivik, result in a decline of the divorce rate by approximately 50%. Furthermore, the father can, without fear of being punished by the law, reassert an authority role in the family. Physical disciplinary methods will once again be a factor in the upbringing of children (Breivik, 2011). In this wished-for society, women’s choice will be reduced to “essentially three options – be a nun, be a prostitute, or marry a man and bear children.” In conclusion, Breivik forcefully states that, under the new laws, “fathers should be favored and have prerogative rights when child custody cases are decided in courts” (Breivik, 2011). As he stated repeatedly in court, “Who governs the crib, governs society.” Paradoxically, Breivik’s contempt of women’s liberation parallels that of the Muslims he hates.

Psychiatric illness?

How did Anders Behring Breivik come to feel this way? And what is the relationship between his way of thinking and his actions, that is, between his ideology and the massacre? Immediately after Breivik was imprisoned, it was decided that he should be subjected to forensic psychiatric observation, to determine whether he was mentally ill, that is, psychotic, in which case he could not, according to Norwegian law, be held accountable for his deeds.

The first forensic report (Husby & Sørheim, 2011) concluded that Breivik suffered from paranoid schizophrenia and that he was not accountable. In this report, Breivik’s ideological ideas are regarded as delusions resulting from psychosis – indeed, the two experts decided to totally disregard the manifesto, as irrelevant for understanding the case. The report considers Breivik’s use of terms like “suicidal Marxist”/“suicidal humanist” as neologisms indicating “bizarre delusions” (Husby & Sørheim, 2011, p. 225). Neglecting Breivik’s ideological universe means that there is no *motive* in the psychological sense of the term, the deeds are caused by illness, and there is in fact nothing to *understand*.

Professionals within the psychiatric field heavily criticized this first report. The victims and survivors from Utøya, who had experienced the mass-murderer as rational, cold, and manipulating, and not at all as “mad,” also met it with disbelief. On the other hand, many people felt that the atrocity of his acts *must* mean that Breivik was “ill” (contrary to evidence that mental illness is usually *not* the explanation of terrorist acts; Bhui, James, & Wessely, 2016). An intense public debate followed. Consequently, and

²Just after 22 July, Hagtvet, in presenting his new book on ideology and terror (Hagtvet, Sørensen, & Steine, 2011) on Norwegian radio, pointed out how Breivik “thinks in terms of centuries, stigmatizes his enemies and sees himself as morally justified to save Europe”.

contrary to Norwegian tradition, the court decided to demand a second forensic assessment.

This second evaluation concluded with the diagnosis of narcissistic personality disorder, with no sign of psychosis. Assessments by medical doctors, psychologists, and psychiatrists treating Breivik in prison supported this second report. After a 10-week trial, the court concluded that Breivik was not psychotic and that he was to be held accountable for his actions. Consequently, the verdict was prison and not treatment in a psychiatric institution. The judge, a woman, went against the pleading of the prosecution, and came forward as an autonomous and independent voice. Norway was relieved!

Mother and son

How can we understand Breivik's personality in a dynamic perspective? Two sets of data are of particular interest here (Borchgrevink, 2012; Seierstad, 2013). First, interviews with Anders' friends and with people that knew the Breivik family during Anders' childhood, and second, information conveyed by the case records from the psychiatric institution that had observed and evaluated the family when Anders was four years old.

Anders was born into an extremely conflict-ridden relationship between his mother, a nursing assistant, and his father, who had a master's degree in business administration and worked as a diplomat. Both parents had children from previous marriage. After a short, turbulent marriage, living in London due to his father's job, his parents got divorced. Anders was then 18 months old. After the divorce, Anders continued to live with his mother and half-sister in Norway, seeing his father only seldom. According to family friends, his mother perceived her ex-husband as a "monster," whereas he saw her as "mad" and "impossible to talk to."

When Anders was two years old, his mother sought official help, asking for a weekend home for Anders because she was worn out both physically and psychologically, and because Anders was a demanding child. Close acquaintances of the family witnessed a mother-son relationship full of violent conflicts followed by emotional reconciliations. Anders's mother was extremely unstable in her attitude toward the little boy, furious at one moment, treating him as if he were an extension of the hated father, and then showering him with caresses.

Anders mother sought help once more when he was four, and this time was referred to a well-known child psychiatric unit, where the small family was admitted for observation for about three weeks. A team of eight persons, including a psychologist and a chief psychiatrist, observed the family,

providing assessments of both Anders and his mother, and of the interaction between the two. According to the case record, his mother had wished for an abortion when pregnant with Anders, but had been indecisive. Already during the pregnancy, she had experienced her baby as difficult – from the moment she felt him kicking, she knew her baby boy was "evil." Anders was "aggressive, clinging and extremely demanding."

The clinic's observational team describes a mother alternately drawing her little son tightly toward herself, "symbiotically," and then pushing him aggressively away – to the psychologist, she said that she wanted to "peel him off" herself. According to the clinic, the interaction pattern was characterized by "double communication." The mother's relationship to her son was described as "sexualizing" and as "projecting primitive aggressive and sexual fantasies, everything that she feels as dangerous and aggressive in men" (case record, cited from Borchgrevink, 2012, p. 341).

After the divorce, Anders slept in his mother's bed at night. His mother had made some half-hearted efforts to break this habit, but the unclear boundaries between mother and son remained. According to the police interrogations, Breivik – "for a joke" – gave his mother a vibrator when her relationship with a boyfriend ended in 2004, a fact that, indeed, cries out for an explanation. As for the psychiatric evaluation, Anders's mother was regarded as having weak mentalizing ability – everything was the fault of other people. The mother was diagnosed as functioning on a borderline level.

The psychologist assessing Anders at the age of four, partly through the method of play therapy, reported, "Anders has become a somewhat anxious, passive child warding off contact, however with a manic defense with restless activity and a put on, averting smile" (case record, cited from Borchgrevink, 2012, p. 42). Anders was unable to play and was characterized as "pedantic" and "extremely orderly. In spite of language proficiency, he lacked ability for "expressing himself emotionally." There was a "complete lack of spontaneity and appearance of joy and pleasure."

The report of the psychiatric clinic concluded that Anders ought to be placed in a foster home. After reading the report, Anders' father claimed custody over the boy. When his mother refused, the case was brought to the court, which decided in favor of the mother. After this verdict, Anders only occasionally visited his father and his new wife, then living in France. From when Anders was 15 years old, there was no more contact between father and son. When Anders was 12, his mother got a new partner, who became a kind of stepfather to Anders, although they did not live together on a regular basis.

Growing up: Oslo West in the 1980s

Anders Behring Breivik grew up in a time of great social and cultural changes – Oslo West was at this moment confronted with multiculturalism for the first time. During the 1980s, the subway between Oslo West and Oslo East first opened, allowing for easy transportation between different regions of the city. This was a time of child robberies, that is, gangs of immigrants coming from the east to rob “naive” children living in white neighborhoods, taking their money, expensive jackets, etc. At this time, I had children attending the same school as Breivik – my own son was robbed, as was the son of my best friends. This was the context of Breivik’s adolescence.

At the age of 13, Anders began identifying himself with the hip-hop milieu of Oslo East, talking their specific slang, and also becoming friends with an immigrant Pakistani boy belonging to one of the “cool” gangs, who in a way served as Anders’s “protector.” At the same time, Anders started tagging, soon trying to become the toughest, most fearless member of the gang. His signature was “Morg,” a name taken from a cartoon character known as the executioner with a double-headed axe used for executing his own people. Morg was the first of Anders’s “doubles” – later he created different fictitious characters while playing Internet games, among them Justiciary Knight Andrew Berwick, the avatar that would eventually carry out the Utøya massacre.

When reading interviews with Anders’s schoolmates (Borchgrevink, 2012; Seierstad, 2013), one is struck by the fact that Anders never became fully integrated into any group. Although apparently a member of a gang, sooner or later he was somehow left behind. Indeed, it is heartbreaking to realize what intense efforts he made to become member of the hip-hop gang, of the tagging milieu (wanting to be “king” but remaining a “toy”), and later of the right wing Progress Party – and how he always remained – somehow – an outsider, experienced by many as somewhat strange.

His romantic relationships also failed. For a short period, he dated a mail-order bride from Belarus. His mother was delighted that at last her son had found a girlfriend. But it came to nothing. Some of Anders’ friends were convinced that he was secretly gay. His appearance was somewhat feminine, he liked to dress elegantly and wear make-up, and also he had been observed visiting gay bars. However, he angrily denied being gay – he would rather boast that he was quite a brothel man.

A psychoanalytic perspective

First a caveat: what I say about possible dynamics in the mother–father–son relationship has the status of

hypotheses. I can have my thoughts about unconscious patterns, but I cannot know. In psychoanalysis, the validity of an interpretation lies in the *dialogue* with the patient – and here there is no such dialogue. Indeed, there is a need for humility.

The relationship between Anders and his mother has previously been described in terms of disturbances in attachment (Borchgrevink, 2012). In my view, “attachment” is a too general concept here. What particularly needs to be emphasized, as I see it, is the symbiotic quality of a strikingly ambivalent mother–son relationship. Certainly, the expression of wanting to “peel him off” testifies to the mother’s experience of boundlessness in relationship to her son – as do her difficulties in denying him access to her bed at night. As described in the case record, the mother drew Anders close to her, then violently rejecting and discarding him. This pattern seems to be repeated by Anders – as an adult he would continue to suddenly “throw” himself into his mother’s lap and embrace her, only to withdraw and ignore her completely. The most striking example of an atypical relationship between mother and son, however, is the vibrator that Anders gave his mother as a gift in 2004 when the relationship with her boyfriend had ended. Undoubtedly, this is a gift that testifies to the lack of normal boundaries between mother and son.

On a conscious level, Anders Behring Breivik experienced his mother as a nuisance. Interestingly, he did not want her to be present in court or wish to see her during the trial, stating that she was his “Achilles’ heel” and the only person that could make him “emotionally unstable.” It seems warranted to speculate that, on an unconscious level, the mother might have been experienced as symbiotically engulfing – a powerful figure endangering the core of his masculine identity. Might she have represented a threat of emasculation and castration? Could it be that the mass-murderer’s rage and contempt towards a feminized society conceals a deep fear of the feminine mode – and conceivably of female sexuality? Is it possible that those unclear boundaries may result in a need to protect oneself against inner chaos and confusion? In this context, the loss of the father – a potentially protecting figure, able to assist a son caught in a symbiotic relationship – is certainly most significant.

Self-identity

Two psychoanalytic concepts appear valuable in a discussion of the mass-murderer’s self-identity, namely *splitting* and *personal myth* (Gullestad, 2013). Lack of emotional feedback that affirms the child’s feeling of being a separate self in his own right and

the resulting fear of boundlessness will inevitably affect the formation of a coherent self (Kohut, 1971). In the case of Breivik, it seems fruitful to think in terms of a *splitting* of self-representation. Typically, this implies that self-images will be organized in an either-or-manner: the person feels either invincible or like “nothing,” the self-state oscillating between extremes (Gullestad & Killingmo, 2013). Splitting may result in formation of a “false self” (Winnicott, 1965), built to comply with the demands of other people, implying loss of contact with authentic affects. Certainly, the concept of a false self seems apt to characterize the bearing of Anders Behring Breivik, as described by the psychologist at the age of four. Indeed, when reading the case record, what makes the strongest impression is exactly the following observation of the psychologist: a four-year-old boy lacking the ability for “expressing himself emotionally,” unable to play, with a complete lack of spontaneity – a boy who puts on an averting smile. One might think that the self that Breivik presented to peers as an adolescent lacked authenticity to a degree that made normal friendships difficult.

Splitting may also result in the formation of *personal myths* (Green, 1991; Gullestad, 1995; Kris, 1956).³ A personal myth refers to an autobiography that has a defensive function and at the same time represents something cherished. In line with Freud (1932), myths, like dreams and symptoms, are pictured as compromise formations, expressing at the same time a wish and the defense against this wish. In a disguised manner, the myth expresses screen memories and central unconscious fantasies. It implies mythification and heroization of the self, thus protecting against underlying feelings of weakness and worthlessness: personal myths have a wish-fulfilling function. Breivik’s picture of himself as a “savior of Europe” may be regarded as a personal myth of this kind. In this perspective, the double Justiciary Knight Andrew Berwick represents a blown-up self-image shielding against the experience of being a loser, shoring up a failing sense of self and thus protecting against a potential fragmentation (Kohut, 1971). A main function of a personal myth is to help overcome anonymity and to become *special* (Gullestad, 1995).

From the clinical context, we know that a response to an engulfing mother may be intense aggression: what is at stake for the child is the protection of his very self. Certainly, the formation of a personal myth may have a function in this context, in that a

deep function of the myth is liberation from a mother figure experienced as seductive and destructive (Green, 1991; Gullestad, 1995). Through heroization of the self, the original dependency on the mother is denied. The individual liberates himself both from the mother wishing to keep him in a dependent position and from a part within himself wishing to stay in this position. The heroic fantasy of being Justiciary Knight Andrew Berwick also may serve to deny the feminine, weak (gay?) side of him. We may hypothesize that a dynamic of this kind may have been operating in Breivik’s inner world.

Surely, it seems warranted to think that aggression, representing an enormous driving force in the case of this mass-murderer, is primarily directed against females and the feminine element. After all, Breivik’s main plan for July 22 was to execute Gro Harlem Brundtland by decapitation. Gro – Norwegian people call her by her first name – symbolizes what Breivik hates more than anything, namely the liberation of women and the creation of a society with equal rights for men and women. Although we cannot know what kind of archaic fantasy is contained in the idea of decapitation, the image of guillotining certainly seems to represent the ultimate revenge.

Oedipal catastrophe

Against the background of what we know about the sexualizing relationship Anders’ mother drew her son into, it seems warranted to speculate that the son somehow – at an unconscious level – may have replaced his father in the position as mother’s partner. Such boundary transgression entails breaking the incest taboo, with unconscious fulfillment of wishes that in their very nature are outlawed. Gaining access to a privileged position that should have been reserved for an adult, male partner would seem to stimulate an omnipotent state of mind. Indeed an Oedipal triumph!

However, the triumph is not a real one. In reality, a son is bound to fail in his wish to replace the father. The negative side of omnipotence is the experience of failure – of being too little, too weak. As stated before, Anders Behring Breivik never succeeded in competition with other men, whether it be in adolescence groups (hip-hop and tagging) or, later, in business or politics. In an interview on Norwegian television, his stepfather spoke of him as an apprehensive, fearful boy – for example, he was most uneasy when supposed to learn how to drive a car. In

³In a broader context, myths have metaphysical, cosmological, sociological, and psychological functions (Campbell, 1970), supplying answers to certain irreducible psychological problems inherent in the biology of our species. The myths of a society contain images and models that the individual can strive toward, serving as collective identity solutions, representing “instruments of socialization” (Arlow, 1961, p. 379; Bruner, 1960).

Breivik's case, the fantasized omnipotence would seem to represent a compensation for an underlying feeling of failed masculinity.

Against this background, the vibrator gift comes forward as multidetermined, condensing different motives. For one, it may suggest an almighty position – the giver is the one able to provide satisfaction. In my view, however, the gift first and foremost conveys contempt: the receiver of the present – the mother – is reduced to a sexually unsatisfied woman probably comprising the image of a whore. Most likely, she is a representative of the dissolution of sexual morality that Breivik so intensely despises.

A deviant Oedipal situation will, of course, impact on later development. We may surmise that the absence of the father through most of Anders' childhood may have prevented identification with a masculine authority figure, representing the origin of the ego-ideal (Freud, 1923). The demolition of the Oedipus complex implies that the boy's object-cathexis of his mother is given up, its place normally being filled with an intensification of his identification with the father. Thus, the masculinity in a boy's character is consolidated. However, the Oedipal situation is usually more complex than this: a boy has not merely an ambivalent attitude towards his father and an affectionate object-choice towards his mother, but at the same time also displays an affectionate feminine attitude towards his father. Of course, I am not in a position to give an accurate account of complex Oedipal dynamics in the case of Breivik. However, one is certainly struck by his repeated attempts to be "one of the gang" and gain recognition from male comrades, probably bearing witness to an intense longing for affirmation by a father figure.

Master of life and death

In the case of Anders Behring Breivik, we witness not only a lack of consolidation of masculinity, but also – most importantly – a deficiency in the formation of superego. The superego comprises the double dictum of the precept "*ought to be*" and the prohibition "*may not be*" (Freud, 1923, p. 34). In the case of Breivik, no prohibitions seem to have been internalized. On the contrary, he seems to have identified with an imagined almighty paternal authority, expressed in his pretending to be a policeman during the massacre. He comes forward as invincible – he has the right to act as a judge and to decide over life and death, with a license to kill. Breivik is all-powerful, also as concerns moral judgment. Justice is done, thanks to him.

Interestingly, the question of being the supreme judge – of having the right to decide over life and

death – became a central point during the trial, as Breivik repeatedly claimed that what he did was "necessary" to save Europe. The prosecution maintained that this idea of having the "right to kill" was evidence of a psychotic state, because no human being has such a right. The judge, however, argued that such claims of "having the right to" characterize many liberation movements, rising against unjustified political oppression. Anyway, the self-appointed position of being the "savior of Europe" clearly testifies to the almighty, godlike mindset of the mass-murderer. Indeed, breaking the incest taboo means placing oneself above the laws that constitute human society – one cannot be held to account, thus entering the realm of the inhuman. Although the price of exclusion from the life of ordinary mortals is deep loneliness, the outlaw position would seem beyond guilt – maybe providing a right to realize the forbidden. Against this background, the concept of *omnipotence* comes forward as condensing several aspects of Breivik's inner world. His relationship to his mother – condensed in the vibrator gift – as well as his moral stance, is characterized by an all-powerful, condescending attitude. In this sense, Anders Behring Breivik is *not* "one of us" (Seierstad, 2013).

Sadism at Utøya

When following the trial and the documentation of the autopsies, I was struck – and shocked – by the manner in which the killings were carried through: an extraordinary number of shots to the head against the wounded and the youths pretending to be dead – "I gave him [her] a head-shot," Breivik repeated through the trial. It is the systematic headshots that accounts for the fact that the ratio between the killed and the wounded was 2 to 1, which is an unusually high proportion of deaths in a massacre (Borchgrevink, 2012). And Breivik was surprised that the sound of the headshots was different from what he knew from TV games, he told the psychiatrists.

One of the most conspicuous features of the killings was how machinelike Breivik appeared, like a robot. According to survivors, he was utterly calm and composed. The expert psychiatrists (Husby & Sørheim, 2011) commented on Breivik's special, introverted, and frozen smile when he talked about details linked to the massacre – a smile we also repeatedly witnessed in court. His smile conveyed the distanced attitude of an outside observer, not affectively present in what he talked about.

Whereas many murderous acts are the result of an affective breakthrough – of "warm" aggression – the massacre of July 22 was the outcome of Breivik's

thorough planning over several years and instrumental preparation for the moment of killing. Through the use of drugs and of meditationlike techniques, Breivik “de-emotionalized” (his own expression) himself – a rare discipline and self-control. Breivik described that after having crossed “a border” through the first murder, he experienced the rest of the massacre like a video game. The killing was in cold blood. It would seem the *quality* of the aggression unfolding at Utøya can be understood as a result of a splitting mechanism: the killings were, so to speak, committed by an alien, split-off self. As Breivik’s manner of being was usually pleasing and “up to” other people, it would seem that the split-off, grandiose self could express feelings of rage and aggression that normally were warded off and dissociated.

Listening to the accounts of the survivors, I was also struck by the icy cruelty of Breivik faced with the helplessness of his victims: he shot them in the face at short range, when they lay in the position of a fetus, praying for their lives. Indeed, helplessness did not trigger the usual human response of empathy – on the contrary it seemed to trigger spitefulness. Although stating that it was “a hell” and that he himself found the killings “horrible” and “traumatizing,” Breivik’s emotional response was inadequate – as we were all able to notice when seeing him in court.

There is more to the aggression than cold distance, however. Breivik went about killing with an exhilarating grin. Survivors of Utøya also tell about excited shouting – “You will all die today, Marxists!” This kind of excitement would seem to be a sign of *pleasure* in murdering, thus indicating a *sadistic* component. The way the mass-murderer seduced the children to emerge from their hiding place (maybe unconsciously repeating his experience with a seductive mother who alternately embraced and rejected him) also bears the mark of sadism. The sadistic elements in Breivik’s action are inspired by studies of al Qaeda’s way of executing their victims, decapitating them while alive. As mentioned earlier, this practice served as a model for Breivik, describing “feast-lynching” in his manifesto.

From a psychoanalytic point of view, sadism is an act of inflicting pain or humiliation that provides instinctual satisfaction (Freud, 1905), although the term is also used as a synonym for maltreatment of the object (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1967). Thus, sadism is not synonymous with aggression; rather, it is aggression and lust combined. Psychoanalysis is probably the only theory accounting for the pleasure experienced through sadistic actions, thereby highlighting the most provocative human actions. Examples are children slowly and meticulously

tormenting an animal, or the systematic and impious torture committed in a place like the Abu Ghraib prison. From reports of the Breivik family’s neighbors, Anders had as a boy been known to harass and torture cats in the neighborhood.

Ideology and personality

Psychodynamic hypotheses of failure in self-development and the creation of personal myths cannot in themselves explain actions like those we witnessed on July 22. Self-disturbance may be a *necessary* but is certainly not a *sufficient* condition in explaining the massacre. The main problem in explicating July 22 is the passage from thought to action. After all, many right-wing extremists *think* like Breivik without endorsing his action.

Psychology, in my view, provides no definite answer to this question. At the same time, however, psychological knowledge may shed some light on the topic. As is well known from social psychological studies (Zimbardo, 2007), belonging to a group represents a mighty driving force for evil deeds. Executioners and torturers do not act as individuals, but rather as members of a collective identity. The killings of Utøya, however, apparently are the work of a loner. Yet is there a group involved in this case as well? Here, we need to consider the role of ideology.

In his twenties, Anders gradually became more and more politically engaged. It should be emphasized that the formation of a personal identity takes place not only through relations with significant family members and caregivers in childhood – often emphasized by psychoanalytic theory – but also through interaction with peers and the social world. Ideological worldviews are often endorsed precisely in young adulthood, at a point in time when it is expected that the individual will separate from his parents and establish an independent social identity through occupation and choice of a partner. As we have seen, Anders Behring Breivik failed in these life tasks.

He became increasingly radical in his concern about Muslim immigration, and protection of Grand National values. Maybe identification with the nation and a “pure” people represents a “solution” when the individual identity project appears too complicated. The question of “Who am I?” is then replaced by “Where do I belong?” (Bohleber, 2010), and the young adult is spared the challenge of forming a separate, individual identity – in a world of rivalry, competition, and plurality. The same search for identity seems to apply to Muslim radicalization. Recent studies underline that we need to grasp how the young adult’s feeling of misplacement and frustration, as well as his or her dreams and longings of a better society, may be at the

basis of radicalization (Leuzinger-Bohleber, 2016; Seierstad, 2016; Vestel, 2016).

Generally, it should be emphasized that an ideology like Breivik's, worshipping one's own nation and people and banishing "the other"/"the stranger," often comes as a response to real social and political frustration and experience of loss of job or status as a man. As stated by a member of the radical right-wing English Defence League about Muslims in England, "They arrive here – and take our jobs and our women." This statement indicates that loss of traditional privileges in relation to women, family, and society, experienced by many white, Western men, may be a stronger motive than we would like to think. That right-wing young adults project their dreams and longings into a uniform, homogenous, and pure Europe bears witness to how difficult it is to "find oneself" in a multicultural society.

Interestingly, recent psychoanalytic studies seek to identify deep structures that are *common* to authoritarian ideologies, whether right wing or Islamic fundamentalism (Bohleber, 2010).⁴ In both cases, an essence seems to be fantasies of *unity*⁵ and *purity*, that is, difference and otherness is experienced as impure.⁶ This way of functioning implies that the mechanism of splitting also colors perception and thinking: the world appears black and white – no shades of grey, no golden mean.

In my view, the threat that, for example, many young, white men feel from immigration has not been taken as seriously as it ought to be by politicians in Scandinavian countries eager to be politically "correct." In the wake of July 22, Norwegian newspapers published several chronicles by young white intellectuals of Breivik's age who grew up in the same social milieu as he did, describing that they could identify with Breivik's frustration about social-democratic "correctness."

Certainly, the wish to belong to a pure unity (nation or caliphate) is relevant to grasping why people are attracted to fundamentalism. Nevertheless, a limitation of theories focusing on common unconscious fantasy structures is that they are quite *general* in their proposal. Fantasies of "being one" with something bigger is a universal human longing – many people harbor such fantasies without being attracted to authoritarian ideas. From a psychological perspective, the question is not whether one has such

fantasies, but rather how they are organized within the personality as a whole. The question is one of both necessary and sufficient conditions. To comprehend July 22, a more specific understanding of Breivik's internal world is needed.

In 2006, five years prior to the massacre, Breivik moved back to his mother's flat to live in his childhood room. For the next few years, he would spend most of his time playing Internet games.⁷ Within this fictional world, grandiose self-images and myths are acted out. Games such as *World of Warcraft* and *Call of Duty* replace real trials of strength – and Breivik became a master in this illusory world. His first question to his defense counsel the day after the massacre was, "How many did I kill?" The answer to the question probably provided the basis for imaginary heroic deeds.

This pretense world also makes possible the making of a group needed for feeling connected, not through the encounter with a real "you," but through mirroring from anonymous fellow partisans, in an echo room. In this room, ideology is created, which in turn inflames actions. While being founded in personally motivated hatred and vindictiveness, the subjective war scenario is projected and justified with reference to a war "out there." In this perspective, the individual generates the ideology that in the next round makes action "necessary." The relationship between psychological motives and ideology becomes dialectical: one seeks an ideology that "fits" partly unconscious intentions; the ideology, however, is indispensable to legitimate actions. The ideology cannot only be reduced to underlying causes; it must also be analyzed on its own premises.

Given this background, we need to underline the connections between psychological dynamics on the one hand and the ideological world of the terrorist on the other. The feeling of being threatened by invasion as well as hatred toward an annihilating object – these seem to be themes on the psychological as well as on the ideological level: on the psychological level, being threatened by an engulfing mother; on the ideological level, being threatened by Muslims coming here and "taking our women and our jobs," as expressed by Breivik's right-wing ideology.

This line of understanding is in sharp contrast to the first forensic report. Through psychiatric "glasses" focusing on illness, there is no link

⁴Psychoanalysts since the 1930s have tried to analyze the authoritarian, destructive ideologies that came to the fore in the twentieth century – Nazism and fascism (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Lewinsohn, & Sanford, 1950; Fromm, 1941; Fromm, Horkheimer, Mayer, & Marcuse, 1936; Reich, 1933).

⁵Nazism contained ideas about the nation and the Aryan "*Volk*" (people); fundamentalist Islam has the conception of *ummah*; radical right-wing ideologies have the idea of a homogeneous Europe restraining Eurabia.

⁶Within Nazi ideology, Jews became "parasites" and scroungers attaching themselves as leeches to the "ethnic body" (*Volkskörper*). Within radical right-wing ideologies of today, Muslims are the carrier of impurity.

⁷For an analysis of the "arousal addiction" of Internet games (and pornography), see Zimbardo & Coulombe (2011).

between the diagnosis and Breivik's manifesto – the ideological ideas are seen as delusions resulting from psychosis. In contrast, a psychoanalytic perspective opens up the chance of comprehending *why* the mass-murderer felt threatened and called on for defense and revenge. In this view, there are links between psychological explanations on the one hand, and Breivik's self-understanding and values on the other. At the same time, connections to the cultural, social, and political Norway that has also formed Breivik's personality are established. In this analysis, ideologies are interpreted in a dialectical movement, both through what the French philosopher Paul Ricouer (1965) calls a "hermeneutics of suspicion," with a view to grasping psychological causes, and in a "teleological" frame, with a view to the values and intentions that the individual identifies with.

Concluding remarks

Psychoanalysis, with its potential for highlighting unconscious dynamics, certainly is a powerful theory. In the clinical situation, the hypotheses that the analyst has about patients' inner motivations are validated in the dialogue with that patient. Thus, the patient is the final "judge" on the validity of interpretations. To analyze a person that we do *not* have a dialogue with is quite another matter. Indeed, it should be emphasized that our thoughts here have the status of being hypothetical. Should we for that reason abstain from thinking psychoanalytically about cases like July 22? To my mind, the horrendous nature of a massacre of this kind calls for all attempts at understanding. We need multifactorial explanations – sociological, political, cultural, ideological – and psychological. The psychoanalytic contribution in this multifactorial field is to highlight possible unconscious dynamics.

In the eyes of Breivik, the terrorism perpetrated against the government building and the Utøya massacre carried a message: the violence should introduce a manifesto and an ideology, conveying the message of a threatened Europe and the mass-murderer as a savior. The killer wants us to look at him, and it is as a rescuer that he wants us to see him. However, the director does not control the stage. In an imaginary reality he might, within a relational scenario without a real "you," without friction, but not so in the real world. Here we do not control the eye of the other. One of Sartre's (1947) fictional figures says, "Hell that is the others" – a hell because we do not control how other people see us. The terrorist wants us to perceive his actions as he himself does.

For those of us trying to understand his actions, however, the explanation of the ill deeds is not to be found in his self-understanding and his ideology, which cannot be taken at face value. Philosophers have criticized psychoanalysis for its "disclosing" attitude, which does not take the person at his word but sees through the reasons given by the person himself. Confronted with unspeakably extreme actions like Breivik's, a "disclosing" look is not only advisable, but also difficult to avoid. The mass-murderer has staged a scene, with uniforms, medals, and specific bodily postures. As I have argued earlier (Gullestad, 2013), he wants us to look at him in a specific way, but what we see is someone who wants to be looked at in this specific way. Anders Behring Breivik does not have it his own way! What the world notices, confronted with his ill deeds, is not what he wants us to see. What we see is unfathomable evil.

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