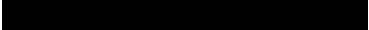


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# **2011 Norway Attacks: Immediate Reactions and Prevalence of Stereotypes**

Name: Catharina Drott



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## **1. Introduction**

On July 22<sup>nd</sup> 2011, twin attacks hit Norway's capital Oslo and claimed 77 dead and 96 injured victims. The attacks were carried out by Anders Behring Breivik and are regarded terrorist attacks.

This paper is primarily concerned with the immediate reactions after the attacks, which were false trails. People believed an Islamist organisation to be behind the attacks and drew rapid conclusions. Furthermore, I will attempt to answer the question why the false accusations were made in the first place. In order to understand the subject better, I will briefly outline Norway's immigration policy, which gave cause to the attacks, and look at different definitions of terrorism to justify that the attacks are in fact terrorist acts. When people eventually learned the truth about the perpetrator, they were shocked and surprised. The unexpectedness of the attacks will also be discussed in the paper.

My observations of the immediate reactions after the attacks are based on articles in selected newspapers, such as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Atlantic* or *The Guardian*.

## **2. Norway's immigration policy**

With favourable terms like income per head, education level and high life expectancy, Norway is not only the frontrunner in the UN's human development reports, but also an attractive and promising country for immigrants (cf. Human Development Index 2010). Since 1970, the number of immigrants has increased tenfold, which make 11% of Norway's population in 2010 immigrants. Among the immigrants are an unusually high number of refugees: At the beginning of the year 2010, 3, 1% of Norway's population had a refugee background (cf. Beckmann-Dierkes, Fuhrmann 2011: 40).

In 2009, the Progress Party (FrP) demanded the limitation of immigration and the deportation of criminal immigrants (2011: 47). These demands were met with approval of the Norwegian people, and the party was elected second most powerful faction in the 2009 elections. Another survey has shown that 70% of the Norwegians argue in support of stricter and more controlled immigration or restricted immigration laws. The FrP even

warned against an “islamisation” of Norway, although in reality, only every third immigrant comes from a Muslim country (2011:50). Under the cabinet of Jens Stoltenberg, the Labour Party has passed an Immigration Act in 2010, which restricts immigration and includes the deportation of illegal immigrants and immigrants without residence permit (2011: 48). Nevertheless, Norway continues to be a favoured and attractive country for immigrants and refugees.

The high percentage of immigrants in Norway’s population is reason for the emergence of stereotyped thinking and rapid finger-pointing. Admittedly, the crime rate in Norway has risen due to its immigration policy. 2010, for example, was the fifth year in a row, where 100% of all reported violent rapes in Oslo were committed by immigrants (cf. Rohde). Those kinds of figures, all available to the public, can attribute to the formation of enemy images concomitant with stereotypes in the minds of people. This, namely the Norwegian immigration policy as well as typical associations with terrorism led to a number of false assumptions immediately after the terrorist attacks in Oslo.

### **3. Why Can the Attacks be Called “Terrorist Attacks”?**

Breivik can be called a terrorist, who carried out twin terrorist attacks. The simplest prevailing definition of terrorism is the notion of terrorism as the use of violence to achieve political ends by targeting civilians (cited in Nivedita 2009: 13). Breivik’s aim was the achievement of restrictions in Norway’s immigration policy and the demonstration of his protest against the immigration laws and the consequential high number of “foreigners” in Norway. To achieve his aim, he violently killed innocent civilians.

Terrorism, additionally to the definition above and according to the United States Code (18 U.S.C. § 2331(1)(a-c), 2000), are activities that

involve violent acts [...] to intimidate or coerce a civilian population, [are intended] to influence the policy of a government [and] affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction [or] assassination [...] (Cited in Moser 2009: 1-2).

To Breivik, all of these aspects can be applied. His attacks were violent to the utmost and resulted in the intimidation of people. The motive behind the attacks was the attempt to influence Norway’s policy and thereby the Norwegian government with the means of mass assassinations. The effects of the attacks in the long run are yet unclear, although

the attacks already gave rise to discussions about Norway's immigration policy and the conduct of the government. Moreover, the attacks might "destabilize[e] [...]the fundamental political structures of"(Article 1 in the EU's *Framework Decision on Combating Terrorism*, cited in Moser 2009: 2) Norway or even Europe, since they may give rise to a Right-Wing sentiment. According to the New York Times,

the attacks in Oslo [...] have riveted new attention on right-wing extremists not just in Norway but across Europe, where opposition to Muslim immigrants, globalization, the power of the European Union and the drive toward multiculturalism has proven a potent political force and, in a few cases, a spur to violence (Kulish)

Breivik cannot be called a person who ran amok, because in the original meaning, amok includes a sudden, arbitrary violent attack of a person *non compos mentis*, that means a person who is insane and not aware of his actions (cf. Helmchen 2000: 127). Breivik is neither *non compos mentis*, nor did he kill arbitrary people. His attacks were planned in minute detail while he pursued a goal he had clearly in mind.

#### **4. Immediate Reactions: Prevalence of Stereotypes**

Terrorism entails many consequences, of which a major one is threat. Terrorism shatters the sense of security for many people and consequently results in an ever-present feeling of threat. An American study of November 2001, for example, has shown that 35% of Americans are worried that they or a close relative will become a victim of a terrorist attack (cf. Huddy 2002a et al.). Threat, in turn, also entails consequences, which Huddy et al. list as intolerance, ethnocentrism, xenophobia, closed-mindedness and a reliance on stereotypes and enemy images (cf. Huddy 2002b et al.: 486). Those consequences are directed against foreigners and aliens, namely those who do not belong to the ethnic group of a country. Thus, immigrants and refugees are viewed as potential terror threats and received with suspicion (cf. Tumlin 2004: 1128 et seq.). In the United States, the admittance of immigrants was even stopped after the attacks of 9/11, which resulted in the lowest refugee admittance level since 1970 (2004: 1129.). It seems absurd that the enemy image per se is a male black-bearded figure with a turban. Yet this image is what automatically comes into most people's minds when thinking about terrorists. Thus, the notion that immigrants are potential terrorists is astonishingly

prevalent. This phenomenon can quite clearly be observed when looking at the immediate reactions after the attacks in Oslo.

The immediate reactions after the bombs exploded in Oslo's government district, were speculations about the perpetrators' origin. At this stage, it seemed clear that only an organisation could be behind the bombings and not an individual attacker. Out of reflex, terror experts and news agencies immediately suspected an Islamist terror organisation behind the incidents. Some, for example *News Weekly* or the *Washington Post*, even specified their theories and claimed, a "jihadist hydra" (Joscelyn) or "a specific jihadist connection" (Rubin) were behind the attacks. The local newspaper *Fuldaer Zeitung* even went so far as to say: „Diesem feigen Terrorpack mit Großzügigkeit zu begegnen, hieße, ein Feuer mit Benzin löschen zu wollen“<sup>1</sup> (Borchert 3). Without hesitation or any evidence, this article declares Islamists guilty of the attacks. These immediate and apparently self-evident accusations were not only made by the press, media or terror experts. Also, civilians instantly made the connections between the bombings and Al-Qaeda. A reporter, for example, who was present when the bombs exploded, used the word "bomb" even before she had any evidence that it actually was a bomb and drew the conclusion of an Islamist terror attack (cf. Siddique and Godfrey). Posts in social networks and forums also immediately spoke of an Islamist terrorist attack or believed Al-Qaeda behind the attacks. But why were the first reactions reflex-like accusations? On the one hand, there were in fact several reasons for Islamists to attack Norway. On the other hand, terrorism in combination with Islamism has spread fear and terror among the people and thereby has influenced their conception of terrorism.

In the article "Why Does Al-Qaeda have a problem with Norway?" Hegghammer and Tierney propose three different reasons for a possible attack against Norway. Firstly, Norway has been a part of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan, with Norwegian soldiers stationed there. It is therefore involved in the "war against Muslims" (cf. Hegghammer and Tierney) and poses a threat against them. However, the number of soldiers is relatively small and furthermore, they are stationed in a fairly quiet part of Afghanistan. Secondly, Norway has been involved in the "cartoon crisis" of 2006

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<sup>1</sup> Freely translated: Approaching this gutless bunch of terrorists with such liberality is the same as extinguishing a hot fire with petrol.

and reprinted Danish Muslim cartoons in a Norwegian newspaper. This led to attacks of the Norwegian embassy in Syria and of a Norwegian company in Pakistan. Thirdly, the treatment of Islamist Mulla Krekar led to protests by Islamist groups, when Krekar was declared a threat to national security and deported back to Iraq. Islamists regarded Krekar's treatment as "Norway's subservience to the cruel whims of the United States". There might be some truth behind those arguments, yet were they too weak to justify the fast accusations after the Oslo bombings. What may have accelerated the spread of speculations could have been the fact that terror experts felt put under immense pressure to deliver a quick statement. Hegghammer's and Tierney's article from one year before therefore was enough to at least provide some evidence for, what later proved to be false, accusations. Also, Hegghammer's and Tierney's article was basis for other articles in *The Guardian* and *The Atlantic*, in which it also served as evidence for blaming an Islamist organisation for the attacks.

Another reason for the emergence of false theories is a result of the representation of terrorism in the media. The media coverage of 9/11 left an Islamist imprint on terrorism as such, which influenced and captured reasoning. Since then, the mental images of terrorism and Islamism have been closely linked in the minds of people. This is accompanied by the cartoon-like image of a terrorist as a bearded Taliban. Gridlocked thinking of this type leads, as Kazim puts it, to quick explanations that lack a basis (cf. Kazim). People are in need of clarification and explanations to straighten out stereotyped thinking and to adapt it to reality. Especially the media, which often only fuel stereotypical thinking, have the power to work against this phenomenon. This can be done, for example, by including important facts and figures in their reports, for example the *EU Terrorism and Trend Report*. According to the report, the EU had to record 249 terrorist attacks in 2010, of which only three were carried out by Islamists (cf. *EU Terrorism and Trend Report 2011: 17 et seq.*). At the same time, 189 people with Islamist background were arrested for the planning of terrorist attacks. Those numbers show the success of terrorism combat and could therefore heighten the public sense of security.

The first statement of Norway's Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg after the bombings was: "We do not know who attacked us" (cited in Kazim). This statement did not give in to quick accusations or jump to false conclusions, but only stated the truth. The

neutrality of Stoltenberg's statement sets a good example of how to deal with similar situations in the future. Instead of adding fuel to the fire and thereby intensifying stereotypical thinking, the mere stating of known facts is a better solution.

Many newspapers took these immediate reactions as cause to warn against a rise of "Islamophobia" (Reeves), the Europe-wide fear of Muslims and the belief that Muslims are the primary security threat in Europe. Reeve even calls Muslims "the new Jews of Europe" and the New York Times also warns against an "'us vs. them' mentality in European societies" (Cesari). Therefore, Reeves suggest the deepening, broadening and strengthening of the bridges between Muslims and non-Muslims, especially among the younger generations. The danger of "Islamophobia", however, was underestimated. Of course, there are different degrees of "Islamophobia" but an extreme form eventually led to the killings in Oslo.

## **5. The Unexpectedness of the Attacks: A Reverse Scenario**

As soon as news trickled through that an ethnic Norwegian was behind the attacks, people were shocked. Not only those who made false accusations or were fast to blame Al Qaeda had to learn that the attacks were in fact a reverse scenario. When people heard about the shootings on the island of Utøya, they realised that this pattern did not match the usual "procedures" of Al-Qaeda or other Islamist organisations. It turned out that the bombing and the shootings were not carried out by Islamists but instead were directed against this and other ethnic minorities. This fact came like a blow to Norway and all other countries. What happened is incomprehensible and beyond everything that is human. Yet, Anders Behring Breivik committed this crime, because, if he believed Frantz Fanon's remark, "at the level of individuals, violence is a cleansing force" (Frantz 1966: 64). This statement is problematic, yet Breivik could try to justify his actions by referring to it. He is an individual with his own ideals and moral concepts; for him, Norway needs to be "cleansed" of immigrants in order to remain a "pure" country. The high degree of violence he used served as a cleansing force for him, because by means of the attacks he attempted to stir up the country in favour of his radical ideology. Breivik's



extremist ideology is an example of probably the highest degree of “Islamophobia”. He wanted to fight against a

conspiracy of ‘cultural Marxists,’ [who] concocted ‘political correctness’ as a way to impose ‘multiculturalism’ on White Christian societies, thus flooding them with Muslim immigrants who intend to destroy Western Christian civilization (Berlet).

Breivik, who has been called an extremist right-winger in many newspapers, is not the only one with such an extremist ideology. But although Islamophobic right-wingers might share his view, they would not share his radical methods.

Breivik targeted not those he wanted to get rid of, but the children of those who worked on Norway’s immigration policy. He apparently felt compelled to act because the politicians of Norway’s Labour Party failed to “stem the Islamist tide” (Erlanger). His attack therefore can be regarded as a reverse scenario, because it was not carried out by “dreaded” Islamists, but directed against them. It was never feared nor even considered that a terrorist resided among ethnic Norwegians, which is why the attacks were unexpected. What is also unexpected and unusual is the fact that Breivik is not a member of a terrorist organisation, but an individual terrorist, who planned and worked out the attacks alone.

## 6. Personal Experience and Conclusion

When I heard about the attacks in Norway, I was on vacation with my boyfriend. We watched a special broadcast about the attacks on BBC, only a few hours after it had happened. After I heard about it, I found it hard to be blithe or casual and felt very sad for the rest of the day. I continued to follow the media for new information about the attacks, which is how I became aware of the false accusations and the immediate reactions to the attacks. This reminded me of various discussions we had in our seminar about prevailing stereotypes in people's minds. Reading about the attacks, I was able to directly observe this phenomenon, and this made me think. Especially when I read the radical newspaper article in the *Fuldaer Zeitung* at my parents' house in Fulda, I decided to work more on the subject. The attacks and also the victims were in my thoughts a lot, also because two friends of a friend of mine were shot on the island. The cruelty of the attacks is of such an intensity that many people, including myself, felt a lack of words to talk about it. Particularly Breivik's disguising himself as police officer on the island and literally executing innocent teenagers is beyond anything I can think of.

The subject of stereotypes, enemy images and Islamophobia is something that has become rampant in Europe and the United States and which has to be worked against. It may even place obstacles in the way of preventing non-Islamist terror attacks. Maybe the attacks in Oslo will make people aware of the danger of stereotypical thinking and may give them reason to found of organisations that will fight against this type of thinking.

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