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# Social Failure and Rage: The Downward Social Mobility and Unsettled Life Course of a Norwegian Terrorist

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**Abstract:** This essay sketches out an analysis of some of the key aspects of the life course of Anders Behring Breivik, the Norwegian mass murderer and terrorist, as well as his typical delusional and paranoid traits. His acts of terror should be understood against the backdrop of a historical conjuncture, one that took place during the shift from class politics to identity politics and the “cultural struggle” on the one hand, and the emergence of precarious life courses within what I have dubbed the “education society” in Norway. Individuals who have experienced downward social mobility seem particularly predisposed to transforming ideological fantasies and delusions into rage, aggression, and violence. The essay takes an interdisciplinary approach. It is based on systematic reinterpretations of some empirical sources from journalism, extracts from the terrorist’s Manifesto and public records. On 22 July 2011, Behring Breivik detonated a home-made bomb outside a government building, killing eight people. Later that afternoon, he systematically and cold-bloodedly executed 69 young people who were isolated and gathered on an island, Utøya, for the annual summer camp of the Workers’ Youth Wing of the Norwegian Labour Party. These events continue to be a source of reflection in Norway today, 10 years after the terrorist attack.

**Keywords:** Terrorism, Social Mobility, Life Course

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## 1. Introduction

In the summer 2011 the Norwegian society and political institutions, the Labour movement, and the very young members of the youth movement of the Norwegian Labour Party, AUF, were hit by a terrorist attack from a right-wing ideologist who proclaimed to defend the Norwegian society and the western civilisation against Islam [23]. Following 22. July 2011 there have also been several right-wing terrorist assaults, which have all drawn inspiration from the heinous deeds of the Norwegian mass-murderer, and his paranoid ideology and his writings, published in a Manifest. The most violent of these was the attack against two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, where 50 were killed and 50 were seriously injured, in which the terrorist video streamed his acts of murder and mutilation. In Norway there was lately-10. August 2020- a terror assault against the Al-Noor Mosque executed by Philip Manshaus, a self-proclaimed neo- Nazi. But his assault was halted by a very determined action of an elderly member of the religious congregation. Nonetheless, right before, Manshaus slaughtered his own sister because

she was adopted from China.

In the aftermath of 22. July, there have been published two books that have seen the terror events from the point of view of the Labour movement. The historian Henry Notaker has documented in detail what really happened throughout the process from the terror acts till the following commemoration and the treatment in court and the political system [22]. It is pivotal to have a historical work to describe what happened in this case, because it is a great danger that it will emerge conspiracy theories of the event, and a denial of that the fact that the terrorist slaughtered 77 persons, and most of them defenceless teenagers. AUF, the youth organization, has recently published a book, «Aldri tie, aldri glemme» (Never be silent, never forget (2021), in which the main point is that the political parties and the public sphere, never have confronted the radical right circles head on, after all Behring Breivik did take part in certain circles of radical right - wing propaganda, and his ideology was inspired of a typical far right rhetoric.

In this article, I will attempt to show that the life course of the Norwegian terrorist and mass murderer, Anders Behring Breivik, and his evil and insane mass murder of 77 innocent

victims at Utøya and Oslo 22. July 2011 must be seen on the background of a unique historical conjuncture of a new geopolitical situation, the emergence of a post-industrial society, and a paranoid- narcissistic personality disorder. This means that one must understand and analyse the interplay between these sociocultural and individual characteristics to describe how it was possible to produce such evil and utterly Phanatic deeds [7]: Firstly, one must describe a new geopolitical context - with a shift from class politics to identity politics and the ideological "cultural struggle". Secondly, it is also important to analyse the rise of a new social trajectory, with the emergence of the new post-industrial precariat and with the importance of educational credentials, and the corresponding threat of downward social mobility. The third element in this historical conjuncture is that the terrorist had a mental susceptibility to paranoid delusions and grandiose fantasies, which may be particularly likely to result in terror and violence in people who lack participation in communities of shared meaning and who experience loss of meaning, and who have also experienced downward social mobility, or who perceive this as a threat.

C. Wright Mills [19] believed that we could use the sociological imagination to explore the way in which individual, biographical life courses can be understood against the background of a historically shaped social structure. How have the social structure and institutional patterns been shaped by a historical development and how do these social structures affect different life courses and different types of people? Is it the case that these historical and social facts also determine the successes and failures of men and women alike? Based on an ambitious sociological imagination, I will attempt to grasp some essential aspects of Behring Breivik's life course - not least his acts of mass murder on 22 July 2011 - within a social and historical context [6, 18].

Nonetheless, this man was "a child of his time", and the experiences and challenges he faced during his life course were similar to those of many other young men from the capital, Oslo, who grew up in a "postmodern" society of culture, media, and education. His mass killings and unbounded evil were the expression of *one* man's vices - although many others live out similar vague and precarious life courses, have similar ideological delusions and similar fantasies and obsessions, only the few - or in this case, the one - carry out such acts of terror [36].

## 2. Geopolitical Context, Ideology, and the Emergence of 'Cultural Struggles'

What was the geopolitical and cultural context of, or the most usual background for, young people's life courses in Europe and Norway between 1980 and 2011? Michel Wieviorka [34, 35] believes that we should always understand societal violence and aggression within a historical context, while understanding violence as the *opposite* of conflict and the founding of new social movements. If interests, needs, feelings, opinions, and

meanings cannot unfold within social movements and conflicting relations, social energy can soon precipitate into aggressive acts of terror and mass murder.

Up until the 1970s, Western societies were largely shaped by the class conflict: class opponents encountered one another within confrontational structures as adversaries, but seldom as violent enemies. There were strong class communities, trade unions, a political system with inbuilt standards for negotiation between labour and capital, bad-tempered political and intellectual debates and clear work and career choices for many young people. This institutionalization of the class conflict mostly hindered outbreaks of direct violence, although there could be tough strikes and open confrontations.

The contemporary situation in many Western countries was at the time of the terror deeds radically different; this had especially affected many young people occupying more precarious social positions and had also seemingly opened for new forms of violence. The decline in industrial jobs had often led to unemployment, an increase in unstable terms of employment and social exclusion, especially in urban centres and cities in Europe and America. Many marginalized and socially excluded youngsters felt "useless" or "cast aside", and social failure was often experienced as caused by personal shortcomings. This can also be portrayed as the growth of a post-industrial precariat [27, 30], created by deindustrialisation and downward social mobility. For such young people there are no institutions capable of tackling the demands of outcasts faced with uncertain prospects, and there are few available means to establish social movements that can actively confront dominance and exclusion. Social reactions were thus typically expressed as spontaneous outbreaks of violence by desperate, disenfranchised youngsters, deprived of the opportunities for negotiation which were usual within the limits of the structural class conflict. A much wider space had arisen for violence and "meaningless" acts of rebellion, and there was a much narrower space for the formation of social movements and for negotiations between parties in a conflict where they are opponents, but not enemies [34, 35].

This portrayal of social exclusion was not as apt in describing Norway since approx. 1980 up until today - there has been low unemployment throughout, the welfare state has remained intact, there have been opportunities for participation in voluntary organizations and there is a long tradition for negotiations and institutionalized conflicts. Most young people have had the opportunity, if they so wished, to get involved in social movements and participate in social institutions; nonetheless, it may be claimed that for a marginalized group of youngsters, this path to allow their interests, points of view, feelings and frustrations flow into social movements has been closed, with frustration sometimes leading to violence.

A few years after the decline in organized class conflict, a new period arose, after the dissolution of the Bloc system. The bipolar international position at the time had its own violent profile in the form of the Cold War and several actual acts of war, but only ever in the "Third World". New phenomena of violence emerged. First, the ethnic wars in Yugoslavia and a wholly new political differentiation in terms of religion and

ethnic belonging, which was less likely under the Bloc system. New forms of transnational violence also arose, with links to organized crime, transnational terrorism, and the “privatization” of war, where “lone-wolf terrorists” made themselves manifest as new social figures. The dissolution of the Blocs also led to a glut of weapons and increase in the arms trade, and ethnic warriors, terrorists and criminals could easily get their hands on weapons, preferably a Russian Kalashnikov.

Within this new geopolitical situation, seen in tandem with the decline in the organized working class, new cultural ideas developed, as well as new ideological contradictions and new political conflicts. In academic circles, it was often written that class conflicts and the clash between East and West were merely superficial, usurped in the 1990s by more deep-seated clashes between civilizations [12]. Adherents of the “war on terror” and supporters of transnational terrorism and far-right extremism (including the idea of Eurabia) promoted their points of view and acts against the cultural background that there were irresolvable cultural and civilizational conflicts, necessarily resulting in open violence. Just as the ethnic wars in Yugoslavia were less likely under the Soviet regime, and transnational terrorism was less likely under the Bloc system, Behring Breivik’s private warmongering and violence would probably not have occurred during the Cold War in a society largely structured by the class struggle. Such far-right terror can only occur because the class conflict has been replaced by the “cultural struggle”, as Islamic civilization has replaced the Soviets as the great scourge for Western civilization.

In the case of Behring Breivik, this “cultural struggle” is closely linked to an apocalyptic view of the world, often touted within far-right ideology, claiming that we are experiencing an extended battle between the forces of good and evil. The Muslims represent the forces of evil, whereas Christendom and the white man are the force for good, but there is also a conspiracy of external and internal enemies represented by cultural Marxism, multi-culturalism, Islam, and feminism. But above all the main internal enemy is the Norwegian Labour Party that has stabbed the nation in the back (the myth of the “stab in the back” or *Dolchstoßlegende* in German), allowing for the Islamification of society [16]. Such paranoid, apocalyptic notions were also linked to the presumption of the conspiracy that historical development was governed by a secret plot, or a strong historical will shaping all realities. There were also certain “chosen ones” who had the charisma, or the *imaginatio*, to see through these secret plots. This can also lead to personal myths, such as being a hero acting to save Christian Europe from Islam [10]. Behring Breivik as the hero of history could fend off this immense historical plot through two steps. First, by killing representatives of the backstabbers, i.e., members of the Workers’ Youth League, the youth wing of the Norwegian Labour Party, in a spectacular act of terror. Behring Breivik could then proceed to his second step, distributing his *Manifesto* so that his magic words could draw out the good, nationalistic, and revolutionary forces of cultural conservatism and the will of the good, ultimately to save the Christian nation and civilization. Or as Toril Moi wrote: “The *Manifesto* demonstrates an almost incredible belief in the

power of the word” [20].

Behring Breivik’s ideological world was influenced by tales of an irreconcilable “battle of civilizations” and the growth of “Eurabia”, and these “fantasies” seamlessly blended with the constitution of the mass murderer’s character [1, 31].<sup>1</sup> It seems reasonable to assume that his paranoid character drew on a philosophy influenced by the radical gulf between the Christians as wholly good and the Muslims as evil, threatening our lives and identity. The aggressor also presents himself as a victim, and the victims who perished were described as the true aggressors and enemies of European culture [29]. Many social scientists have claimed that classic neuroses, often springing from sexual frustration, have been replaced by narcissistic personality disorders, which pertain to a Self which is immature, still attached to infantile fantasies which are transferred to and replayed in all relations later in life [15]. This results in relatively superficial phenomena such as being vain, an obsession with youth and beauty and the fear of infection, illness, and aging. One’s inner life is thinly populated, and neither the praise nor care of parents is present; there is, therefore, only a grandiose inner figure accompanied by the shadows of rejection and denial. This leads to a powerful urge for admiration and praise, and such praise must be constant to maintain the immature Self. One’s inner experience of time is also poorly developed, and one’s personal memories are quite unrealistic, involving swift alternation between heroes and “bad guys”. On a more profound level this personality disorder was recognizable by a lack of emotional insight into the needs and feelings of others, and an undeveloped ability to see oneself through the eyes of others. But above all this narcissistic personality disorder signalizes that a loving figure of authority is absent, releasing infantile fantasies filled with sadistic rage. It is this “baby” that screams furiously until its mother holds it in her arms and removes the source of discomfort, and which erupts in the immature adult’s violent, sadistic attacks on fellow humans [13, 15].

### 3. The Paranoid - Narcissistic Personality Disorder

The key traits of Behring Breivik’s life course were that, as a child, he probably experienced mental insecurity, a lack of recognition and a lack of “basic trust” [10], [2]. His parents divorced when he was about 18 months old and he then lived with his mother, his sole carer. After the divorce, Anders never had a stable relationship with his father, a diplomat in the Foreign Service. We should always be cautious about making superficial diagnoses, but here I will mention just a few well-known yet striking observations about Behring Breivik. First, in the initial years of his life there was a destructive ambivalence in his maternal relations; his mother could switch suddenly from smothering love to harsh rejection [31]. When he was four years old, he was observed by psychologists from the now defunct State Centre for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (*Statens senter for barne - og ungdomspsykiatri*). They concluded that he was the victim of neglect. He was portrayed as a boy with a disarming smile,

incapable of playing with other children; when he was encouraged to play with toys in an observation room he just stood there, almost helpless, and he showed signs of compulsive and rigid forms of behaviour. He was regarded as intelligent but very immature emotionally [2].

He was a relatively good student at school, but never finished upper-secondary school, thus facing uncertain career prospects and he was forced to explore vague positions, such as being a “gamer”, an “entrepreneur” and an “intellectual”. He never gained permanent employment but endeavoured (with varying degrees of success) to be a self-employed businessman in a grey area between lawful enterprise and outright fraud. He experimented to some degree with multicultural identities; for example, he had a close Pakistani friend who later came to personify the “Islamic threat”. As an adult, he never managed to establish a “normal” family life and he was never romantically involved with a woman. But there was a way out, or a refuge in his childhood bedroom at his mother’s house, where he could join cyber-gaming communities and “archaic” communities of shared meaning on social media. It was here he could give vent to his violent, omnipotent fantasies, founding his imaginary organization, the Knights Templar, which he marshalled as lord, judge, and executioner.

Two books by journalists about Behring Breivik and the events of 22 July, which were written in the aftermath of his acts of terror, posited the idea that he was both extreme *and* average. The first of these books was Aage Storm Borchgrevink’s *A Norwegian Tragedy: Anders Behring Breivik and the Massacre on Utøya* (2013). A year later, Åsne Seierstad published *One of Us: The Story of a Massacre in Norway - and Its Aftermath* (2013). Both authors believed that Breivik’s extreme acts must be understood within a Norwegian context. He was “one of us” and he played a role in what was “a Norwegian tragedy”. We can interpret relatively well-known information about his life within a life-course perspective, which means that Behring Breivik life course arguably constituting “a special case” compared to more typical ones also characterized by social failure and downward mobility. Accordingly, this man may appear to be a typical social figure who, through his metapolitical myths and unworldly ideology, transformed himself into “a man of terror”. Instead of resigning himself to a vague lack of prospects, he became an active agent of devastation and death.

#### 4. Downward Social Mobility

Behring Breivik’s life course must also be understood within a “post-industrial”, non-standardized life course, partly characterized by an increased emphasis on education and prolonged transitional phases between youth and adult life, less obvious career options, temporary contracts, and the constant risk of downward mobility [18]. Against this background it is telling that Behring Breivik belonged to the cohort of young men who were granted “the right” by the government to upper-secondary education by the legislation known as “Reform 94”. The main remit of this legislation was to make upper-secondary education a universal

entitlement. This led to more young people completing upper-secondary education, but also to the greater expectation that *everyone* would finish upper-secondary school, producing much public interest in problematizing those who did not complete this stage of education.

One may also understand this growth in upper-secondary education within the context of the incomplete formation of an urban, post-industrial *precariat* in the early 2000s [27, 33]. In analytical terms, I would suggest dividing the formation of this post-industrial precariat, or “service proletariat”, into two relatively independent processes, one from the point of view of the working class, and the other from the perspective of the educated middle class, or two different trajectories into the new proletarian service class. The first such process leads to the formation of a “service proletariat” in the wake of the decline of industrial production, leading to fewer working-class males in numerical terms, meaning that young men from the “working class” have experienced a structural tension between the social decline of the “service proletariat” and the (non-) attainment of a specialized vocational education at upper-secondary school [32]. The second process leads to the formation of a “service proletariat” due to the downward social mobility of young middle-class men, which is linked to the expansion in the number of people taking upper-secondary school and the growth in the number of students taking higher education. In the period in question, there was strong growth in the number of young people taking higher education: in 1980, just 10% of 19-24 years old took higher education, whereas approx. 25% were in higher education by 2000. This has led to a shift from elite universities to mass universities, with a greater proportion of poorly qualified students and problems with flow and dropping out [17].

Behring Breivik faced this threat of educational failure and downward social mobility because he did not complete upper-secondary education and never took higher education. Although he was from the wealthy West End of Oslo and his father was a prominent civil servant in the foreign service, his chances of reaching an equally dignified position within the professional middle classes were slim, and he was thus “forced” to experiment with various projects and ambitions relatively weakly linked to his realistic opportunities.

It has been usual to focus on upward social mobility, both as far as the opportunities of working-class children are concerned to take education and enter middle-class professions, and the inherent tendency of the middle class to reproduce itself, particularly strong within the liberal professions, such as doctors and lawyers. Generally, the strategy prioritized has been to avoid downward mobility, with upward mobility a secondary strategy [11]. Nonetheless, there has been less interest in studying downward mobility, and the loss of honour, the feelings of inferiority and the social exclusion this implies [11].

I think this offers crucial insight into grasping why “social decline” and the experience of living “with no future” led to such rage and such unsettled, fantastical ideas in Behring Breivik. Bourdieu [3] uses the term people with “no future”

in depicting the shifting, unrealistic traits which arise in the “sub-proletariat”, because they do not take part in a social universe, such as work, which could lead to the creation of more solid, realistic expectations adapted to objective opportunities. There thus often arises an alternation between dreams and millennialist fantasies on the one hand, and total resignation to hopeless conditions on the other:

The often disorganized and even incoherent behaviours, constantly contradicted by their own discourse, of these people without a future, living at the mercy of what each day brings, and condemned to oscillate between fantasy and surrender, between flight into the imaginary, and fatalistic surrender to the verdicts of the given, are evidence that, below a certain threshold of objective chances, the strategic disposition itself, which presupposes practical reference to a forth-coming, sometimes a very remote one, as in the case of family planning, cannot be constituted [3].

Based on Bourdieu's insight, I believe we may understand Behring Breivik as a typical representative of a young man who experienced “downward social mobility”, also seemingly appearing to be a typical example of a young, middle-class man “with no future”. In addition to the fanciful ambitions which can easily arise in people with no future, it seems reasonable to believe that downward social mobility creates more rage, envy, and aggression in the middle class than in the underclass, as the latter has incorporated the ignominy of exclusion in its mental categories. A person who lives through downward social mobility experiences a lack of prospects and exclusion from life's opportunities through experiential categories which are incorporated under privileged social conditions, and rage is triggered by the huge gap between these contrasting experiences.

In this context, I would claim that the positions in which Behring Breivik placed himself, such as “the gamer”, “the entrepreneur”, “the intellectual activist” and finally “the militant terrorist” and “the actor” in court were “rational” responses to the vague prospects of a post-industrial education society, where the existential threat of downward social mobility prevails.

## 5. An Unsettled Life Course - Gamer, Intellectual, Entrepreneur, Terrorist

Thus far I have attempted to depict the most general geopolitical and cultural context and have shown the internal relationship between far-right ideology and a paranoid and narcissistic personality. The next analytical step is to sketch out the more specific historical context – is it possible to pinpoint any typical cultural experiences and life courses of young men in Oslo from the mid-90s up until the act of terror on 22 July?<sup>2</sup> It is important to emphasise that such socio-cultural changes particularly affected young people's life courses during their most formative phase, from the ages of approx. 15 to 25 [6]. This youth cohort lived through a period of swift cultural changes, and they were also the first to have wide-ranging experiences of immigration and a pluralistic culture,

experimenting with new youth cultures, and sometimes they had the troubling experiences of divorced parents, new forms of family life and a new equality in gender roles.

There was also swift growth in online social media, cyber-gaming, and interactive media. The pervasiveness of social media led to a mushrooming in sectarian, quasi-public discussion forums online, including numerous far-right websites. This allowed for intense involvement from a socially isolated position, offering objective opportunities for asocial, paranoid, and narcissistic individuals. Within such online communities, extreme opinions can be tested out, while avoiding the critique and counterarguments common in daily life and in the more transparent, critical public sphere. Behring Breivik eagerly took part in a relatively secret anti-Islamic online community, where the blogger known as Fjordman was one of his great heroes. Breivik's membership of these sectarian online communities was decisive in his development of extreme opinions [24].

Most striking about Behring Breivik's journey towards infamy was the way in which he shut himself away in the bedroom of his boyhood, strictly isolating himself from communities of shared meaning. While fleeing from the real world, he systematically built up a psychical imaginary world peppered with ingredients from violent online games and far-right ideological texts accessed online, which he patched together to form his *Manifesto*. It was here he was the “gamer” who controlled the whole world, winning and losing without bodily pain, playing out his inner fantasies and projecting them onto the real world. Between 2006 and 2011 he stayed friendless at home, ensconced in his room, and between 2006-2007 he was constantly logged in on *World of Warcraft* [2]. This flight from daily realities allowed for a “de-emotionalization” and the reshaping of real people into soulless figures so he could execute en masse. In this room at home, he developed into an unworldly “intellectual”, keenly discussing issues on various far-right websites, allowing him to transfer his fantasies into an enormous cut-and-paste work, or collage, doubtless demonstrating some intellectual capacity [21]. Behring Breivik's extreme opinions are a particular example of a general “postmodern” phenomenon, based on creating a glut of extreme and peculiar opinions within virtual and “archaic tribal networks” using blogs, social media and sectarian websites [28].

Before his complete withdrawal to a world strongly influenced by inner fantasies, Behring Breivik had endeavoured to win the recognition of various communities, though without much success. He sought acclaim and admiration as a tagger and emotional attachment and identification with a hip-hop gangster environment populated mostly with immigrant lads. But he never became part of the “posse” and this career ended in his being ridiculed and ejected from the gang. Later he inscribed these deeply emotional experiences with immigrant youths in a jihad narrative [2] and this reinterpretation led to an inversion of the identification – from a positive one with the tough immigrant lads (for a while Behring Breivik talked what is pejoratively known as “kebab Norwegian”) to a negative one,

where the immigrant boys represented a violent, dangerous threat to the Norwegian nation.

Later, though still in his younger days, he set his hand at carving out a place for himself within the youth wing of the “libertarian” Progress Party, but he was not taken seriously and gave up mainstream politics. He endeavoured to link up with the *English Defence League* but even the representatives of this extreme, anti-immigrant grouping did not want anything to do with him, regarding him as too extreme. Investigations following his crime revealed most of his contact with far-right groups took place online, though he did have a meeting with two or three others in London [37]. He also tried to persuade Hans Rustad of *Document.no* (a far-right, web-based community, which has intellectual pretensions and styles itself as a think tank) to support an ambitious plan to set up a new culture conservative newspaper, but here too he was rejected. He was also given the cold shoulder when he tried to strike up contact with Fjordman (Fjordman’s political essays were a major source of reference throughout his *Manifesto*), one of his great role models and Ego ideal.<sup>3</sup> This led to political resignation and so gradually he developed a wide-ranging, militant project designed to bend the historical development to his own, omnipotent will, realized in the mass killings.

Behring Breivik also had another great project – involving another unsettled social position – to become an entrepreneur and succeed as a self-employed businessman, but apart from one lucrative share deal, and a certain degree of success selling fake certificates, his business ventures were full of big plans and many failures. Part of the reason he had to switch to a career in business was because he never finished upper-secondary school and later he combined two individual life projects, both vague and unsettled and only weakly based on objective opportunities. One was to strike it rich and become an “entrepreneur”, and the second, which gradually came to predominate, was to become a prominent intellectual and ideological leader of the far right. He falsified an impressive CV laying out his unique intellectual feats, with one master’s degree and two BAs [37]. And when he was sitting in court to be held to account for his crimes, he insisted he was a writer by trade, yet another vague, unsettled identity, possibly to shun his role as a mass murderer on trial. If we add to this his inability to form relations with women, he may seem like some kind of “loser from the West End of Oslo” [14], because his objective prospects were out of kilter with his subjective life projects, oozing ambition yet wholly vague.

On his path to his self-produced, cloistered isolation, assiduous cyber-gaming and the writing of his *Manifesto*, he also visited the Freemason’s lodge in Oslo on a couple of occasions in 2007. This served as a bridge for him, or as an intermediate stage between his attempt to carve out a role for himself within an actual community and his creation of the Knights Templar, a purely imaginary product [26]. For a while, the lodge constituted a “transitional object”, in the terminology of the psychoanalyst Donald W. Winnicott, because on the one hand it served as an actual ritualistic community, and on the other its rituals hinted at historical

myths and fantasies, lies and bejewelled uniforms, inspiring Behring Breivik’s creation of his fictitious organization, the “Knights Templar”.

Within this fictitious organization, a purely imaginary product of fantasy, Behring Breivik was the astute leader and judge, or “justitarius” as he dubbed it, enjoying the right to determine that certain enemies had to die. He attempted to project these fantasies onto reality, describing several meetings with others, though subsequent investigations seem to reveal that they never took place, the crux of the prosecution’s strategy to have Behring Breivik declared insane. He himself may have been rather unsure as to whether it existed:

Q: Why haven’t we heard anything about PCCTS, Knights Templar before, considering the fact that the organization was formed in 2002? A: That’s a good question. I am surprised why EU countries haven’t labeled our organization yet. Perhaps it is politically motivated psychological warfare, who knows? First of all, I only met 4 out of the 9 original founding members due to security precautions and I only know the identity of 5 of them (4 of them know my identity). There might be tens, even hundreds of Justiciar Knights now spread all across Western Europe as far as I know (*Manifesto* p. 1362, see also pp. 1378-79).

Much indicates that this fictitious organization was created by an inner drama, or a “reaction formation” in the Freudian sense [4, 8] so that Breivik could enjoy the praise and admiration of fictitious figures, located deep within his emotional landscape, a type of admiration he may never have felt before within real communities. Behring Breivik played out his brutal, merciless acts of violence under the guise of his role as the “commander” of this fictitious organisation, claiming on his “surrender” to the police that he was “commander” of the “Knights Templar”. Behring Breivik’s life course largely tells the tale of someone who was never accepted by real communities and, when he interviewed himself, he admitted he was not that good at the “social game” (*Manifesto*: p. 1401). None of his creative projects in a normal life course succeeded, and reactively he fled to his own imaginary world, where he could make his mark through his desire to wreak destruction and murder. He could make his mark only through “creative” destruction because many of the opportunities of a normal life course were closed off to him, living under the constant threat of the ignominy of downward social mobility.

## 6. Conclusion

Likely, there was a fatal conjunction of a personality disorder; the ‘cultural struggle’ and far-right ideologies, an unsettled, vague life course and downward social mobility that helped transform Behring Breivik into a mass murderer. According to the public version of his biography, he experienced a life course that was unsettled and precarious, involving social withdrawal and rejection by various communities, and probably a loss of meaning. Finely-tuned interaction with other people creates mutual recognition and mature, morally responsible people. It was this form of

primary communication that Breivik lacked, leaving him empty, lonely and without any real sense of self-respect, turning other people into mere soulless figures in his inner world. Behring Breivik's extreme responses to relatively common challenges during his life course have allowed Arne Johan Vetlesen to conclude that he was evil, sane, *and* mad all at the same time, because his madness and evil were self-produced and necessary consequences of his withdrawal from real communities of shared meaning. His extreme withdrawal led to his "rogue" subjectivity, unreceptive to other people's views and formative experiences, and he could thus murder without feeling empathy or regret because other people had become mere lifeless figures [30, 31].

His attempts to participate in mainstream politics failed, and he transformed his political interest into political myths and the orchestration of violent projects. He made numerous attempts to make a name for himself, and he desperately wanted to be respected for his ventures, but his more "normal" attempts to do so failed (though his *Manifesto* can be said to constitute at least some kind of "intellectual" venture). He thus sought a means of escape by creating a "hypersubjectivity", and his desperate quest to find meaning led him to excessive and "metapolitical" far-right extremism, providing an ideological basis for his acts of mass murder. When extreme meaning is produced without being reality-oriented, myths may arise, such as being a martyr who kills others while losing one's own life [34, 36].<sup>4</sup> From more or less the same point of view, the French philosopher Dufour [5] believes that such "postmodern subjects" emerge when experiences with other people are absent, and such subjects can then fill this symbolic vacuum with various forms of fanaticism, megalomania and extreme violence, while determining whether others should live or die [5].

Behring Breivik probably suffered a desperate lack of experiences with other people, and he experienced a symbolic vacuum, filling it with imaginary communities and his exaggerated right to determine the fate of others. He was a true fanatic who also practised various forms of systematic, extreme self-control, following a monkish, pedantic routine while ensconced in the room of his childhood, and he followed a strict exercise regime to gain ascetic control over his own body. He was also vain, had plastic surgery (a nose job) and dressed metrosexually, and determined to always look his best. At times, he was terrified of infection and even wore a face mask at home [2].

In court, he cried out: "I have never been lonely...I have never been rejected by anybody in my whole life" [25]. It may seem apt to view such emotional outbursts in the Freudian sense of *Verneinung* [9]. Often when we "deny" something intensely and emotionally, we can sometimes see our hidden fantasies, gazing deeply into our grief, glimpsing our ungovernable wishes and desires. Behring Breivik probably encountered difficulties in turning himself into a "subject" through creative interaction with other people, and he did not form realistic experiences of society within conflicting social institutions, which may have alleviated his rage and led it towards constructive forms of negotiation. Instead, he drew

emotional strength from an infantile form of rage, while lacking the ability or will to become reality-oriented, with no interest in compromise or conflict-resolution.

Many of us have striven for some time to understand his crimes, while sympathizing for the victims, both those who perished and those still living with the pain. This man may elicit our revulsion, even though, at the same time, he represents our own inner abyss.<sup>5</sup> But when we read of his obsession with looking at his best, we may also glimpse a fellow human who has known suffering and hopelessness. He complained several times to prison officials that it was freezing in his cell, requesting that one of his warmest jumpers be brought to him. But time after time only his stylish Lacoste jumpers were given to him, which he wanted to keep for best, away from the wear and tear of daily use [25]. He wanted to save these jumpers for a later occasion - sometime in the future when he would emerge from prison and ask for admiring gazes. Behring Breivik can thus be said to be a typical representative of the pathological aspects of a "postmodern subject": fanatical, infantile, narcissistic, and paranoid, violent, vain and ascetic, following an extreme regime to control his own body.

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1 This portrayal of Breivik’s pathological character traits is on a general level, not about whether he was “sane” in the legal sense. There were two public reports. Both expert reports said, however, that the terrorist demonstrated paranoid, narcissistic traits. In the first report, Synne Sørheim and Torgeir Husby concluded that he was paranoid-schizophrenic, a psychotic condition relieving him of criminal responsibility for his deeds. This diagnosis also scuppered the potential power of his political ideology, reducing it to mere psychotic delusions. The second report, written by Terje Tørrissen and Agnar Aspaas, concluded that the defendant had an antisocial personality disorder with narcissistic traits, but that he was sane and thus accountable for his actions.

2 Elder 2003: 12, “The principle of Time and Space. The life course of individuals is embedded and shaped by the historical times and places they experience over their lifetime”.

3 Like with his business ventures, it seems that Breivik had trouble realizing his ambitions on islamophobic social media channels. He exchanged views with like-minded people online, but it seems he failed to carve out a position for himself. He repeatedly tried to promote his ideas to the editorial of Document.no but without success, and during the autumn of 2010 he gradually stopped taking part in discussions on Document.no (NOU 2012: 356).

4 “A myth is the fusion of a historical fact with fantasy that ‘sounds true’ to humans within a certain area or at a certain time” (Erikson 1963 [1950]: 288).

5 Based on this view, Breivik is no monster, that belongs in a different category than we other, average, usual, “normal people”. He is a grotesque version of the culture we ourselves must be responsible for. He is our selves at our very worst moments (Moi 2012: 24).