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Who or What to Blame
Competing Interpretations of the Norwegian
Terrorist Attack

Abstract

The terrorist attack in Norway on 22 July 2011, carried out by a right-wing extremist, was a shocking event, leaving 77 dead and dozens seriously wounded. It soon gave rise to a range of interpretations and explanations as to the causes and implications of the attack. Engaging with classical anthropological and more recent sociological literature on trust and blame, the article shows that there was no hegemonic narrative or explanation of the attack, and similarly no broad agreement over the steps to be taken in order to reduce the chances of future attacks. Six different attempts to account for the terrorist attack are described, but only two correctly identify demographic change, migration and the rise of xenophobic politics as the underlying causes of the terrorist attack. This suggests that the high level of trust characteristic of Norwegian society is likely to be reduced as a result of accelerating change and accompanying social fragmentation.

Keywords: Trust; Blame; Social change; Cohesion; Terrorism.

THE SEARCH FOR EXPLANATIONS when unexpected and unpleasant things happen has been a topic for anthropological research since Evans-Pritchard's (1937) study of Azande witchcraft, since such accounts reveal the fundamental values people live by and the world-structures within which they live. In the contemporary world, where fast and often poorly understood changes are widespread and often triggered by large-scale, transnational processes, questions pertaining to trust, blame and redressive action are urgent. At a juncture in world history where there no longer is a strong, compelling narrative about the present and the future, there is—accordingly—no broad agreement, in typical situations of accelerated change, concerning what or whom to blame, what or whom to trust, and what are the appropriate reactions to perceived vulnerability. Comparative research on blame, trust and

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redressive action can therefore shed light on fundamental aspects of societies affected by accelerated change in one or several domains, bringing out the ambiguities and ambivalences, contestations and diversities, uncertainties and certainties surrounding a historical moment which is difficult to translate into a grand narrative, for social scientists as well as for everybody else. Sometimes, blame is shifted towards a lightning conductor or a scapegoat, so that society can avoid confronting a complicated and potentially divisive underlying problem; or else competing attributions of blame may place society in a state of suspension where competing structures of blame correspond to different understandings of the past, present and future. In such a situation, it is by no means certain whom or what to trust, and different persons or groups living in the same society will have different, and sometimes strongly opposing, views.

This was exactly the situation that arose following the terrorist attack in Norway on 22 July 2011. No hegemonic understanding of the causes and appropriate redressive measures emerged, and the diversity of modes of blaming reveals a lack of a shared understanding of the nature of contemporary Norwegian society. It even seems that the very existence of a “higher common principle” justifying a political order and making disagreements meaningful and potentially constructive (Boltanski and Thévenot 1991) was in doubt.¹

On 22 July 2011, normally peaceful Norway was plunged into a state of shock and confusion when a right-wing terrorist single-handedly killed 77 persons, most of them adolescent members of the AUF (Young Labour). In the weeks, months and now years since the attack, there has been a continuous debate in Norwegian society about the causes of and ultimate responsibility for the terrorist attack, and no dominant account has emerged. This article outlines and critically discusses the structures of blaming emerging in Norwegian society in the aftermath of the terrorist attack, distinguishing mainly between six accounts. First, those focused on the terrorist Anders Breivik himself and his individual characteristics. Second, those blaming the institutions of Norwegian society, notably the police, for not having been able to prevent the attack and protect its citizens. Third, those blaming poor political leadership, targeting in particular the Prime Minister. Fourth, those connecting the attack to violent online games of which

¹ Boltanski and Thévenot (1991) include, in their list of axioms for a higher common principle, “common humanity and common dignity”. An ideological position which that

regards Muslim citizens of Norway as undesirable or second-class citizens clearly does not fulfill the requirements for a “higher common principle”.

the terrorist was an adept. A fifth account argued that the rise of cultural diversity, notably Muslim immigration, was indirectly to blame for the terrorist attack, which was de facto motivated by a wish to cleanse Norwegian society of unwanted foreign influences. The sixth and final account argued that the rise of Islamophobia, and its accompanying hatred of Muslims, was ultimately to blame for the attack, feeding on an ethnonationalist dimension in Norwegian nationalism (as discussed, inter alia, in Gullestad 2006) as well as broader European tendencies. Although four of the six structures of blaming identify causes beyond individuals, only the two final ones attribute the terrorist attack to structural conflicts in society.

The divergence between these interpretations of the arguably most dramatic single event in recent Norwegian history, indicates that there is no shared “Norwegian” outlook or understanding of contemporary society, and also suggests that trust in common institutions is unevenly distributed. This question, which is especially interesting in so far as Norway ranks very high on international surveys of trust, will eventually be explored. The objective of this article is, in other words, not to explain the terrorist attack, but to investigate the structures of trust and blame in a rapidly changing society.

Structures of blaming

Trust is often analysed in relation to risk (e.g. Luhmann 1979, Douglas 1992, Misztal 1996); its intrinsic relationship to blame is no less obvious, but understudied. You blame that of which you are aware, but do not trust. As pointed out by Luhmann (1988: 96), whereas *confidence* presupposes danger, *trust* presupposes risk. Confidence comes without saying, while trust is the result of a decision, although it requires a “leap of faith” (Möllering 2001) beyond the mere calculation of costs and benefits.

Although the topic was already introduced in sociology by Simmel in his *Philosophy of Money* (Simmel 1990 [1900]), social science literature on trust remains patchy and sprawling. In recent years, the topic nevertheless seems to have gained popularity, arguably because of rapid societal changes that have led many, inside and outside the social sciences, to question the enduring stability and legitimacy of structures and kinds of social relationships that were capable of producing trust in the past. The standard modernist narrative about “the growing circle”

and the shift from interpersonal trust to trust in institutions (Gellner 1988, Fukuyama 1995, Ridley 1996) or “disembedded”, abstract phenomena (Giddens 1990) remains influential, but it has been questioned by empirical research which looks specifically at variations in levels of trust within contemporary complex societies, revealing that people in one and the same society may differ radically as to what or who they trust and distrust. Trust is far from evenly distributed in any population. Therefore, it is not adequate to state without qualification that, for example, Norwegians are trusting of each other and of institutions.

As shown by Rothstein (2000), generalised trust in fellow citizens is, in a society such as Sweden, correlated with belief in the fairness of the legal system; in other words, trusting persons and trusting institutions may be two sides of the same coin. However, as Uslaner (2004, see also Rothstein and Uslaner 2005) argues, trust and corruption are not, contrary to common assumptions, polar opposites.² Trust in persons may be positively linked to corruption, while trust in institutions is not. Uslaner’s distinction between particularised and generalised trust is central here: in the former case, only a few, specific people (who are like yourself) can be trusted; in the latter case, impartial and anonymous institutions are to be trusted. Norway always ranks at or near the top of international surveys, such as the World Values Survey (www.worldvaluessurvey.org) that measures levels of trust among citizens, and this holds true both for interpersonal trust and trust in institutions. There have nevertheless been concerns, especially in the media and among politicians, that the level of trust may be declining due to an increase in the levels of diversity, individualism and social fragmentation. On the other hand, recent research suggests that levels of trust remain very high (Skirbekk and Grimen 2012), and that the modest degree of inequality in the country (Moene 2013), along with short social distances and dense networks (Eriksen in press) go a long way towards explaining this. Marek Kohn (2008), writing from a UK vantage-point, sums up much of this research by stating that highly trusting countries “are ethnically homogeneous, are well governed, have Protestant religious traditions, and enjoy wealth that is evenly distributed. In other words, they are the Scandinavian countries” (Kohn 2008: 125).

Yet there are indications that trust is unevenly distributed in Norway and that generalised trust has been weakened in segments

² Corruption, in this context, is defined as the active use of a public position to increase personal gain, in other words the activation of a particularistic morality in a setting presupposing a universalistic morality.

of the population. It is somewhat more unequal and much less ethnically homogeneous than it was only a decade or two ago (the immigrant population grew from about 200,000 to more than 700,000 between 1990 and 2014). Weakened trust can especially be observed among those who feel excluded or marginalised. Although severe poverty is unknown in Norway and unemployment figures are officially low, a very high number of Norwegians (700,000 out of a total population of 5 million) depend on social welfare benefits and hence do not participate in the labour market. Although it has time and again been demonstrated that ethnic discrimination contributes to excluding minorities from certain arenas, notably the labour market, the most visible and vocal expressions of distrust in “the system” come from people opposed to immigration, who support the view that the state and government institutions do not function in a fair and equitable manner, since they are assumed to be dominated by middle-class cosmopolitans favourable to immigration and indifferent to the plight of the domestic working class (Strømme 2011, Skirbekk and Grimen 2012). The question, which must be raised with a new and heightened urgency after the 22 July terrorist attack, concerns to what extent these views, expressed regularly on dedicated anti-immigrant websites and elsewhere online, indicate the existence of a deeper gulf in society and, accordingly, a weakening of the institutional, social and cultural coherence that has underpinned the welfare state.³ The question is, in other words, to what extent the “leap of faith” in the fairness and transparency of the social democratic state has been weakened.

In the context of migration and diversity, David Goodhart (2004), the founding editor of *Prospect*, set off a rather heated debate in the UK when he asked whether middle-class Britons were likely to continue to accept high taxation levels if the money was increasingly spent on people (immigrants) with whom they felt that they had little in common. In Norway, the rise of the right-wing populist Progress Party (currently in government with the Conservatives), a party founded on opposition to high taxes and the “nanny state”, but since the 1980s increasingly marketing itself mainly as an anti-immigration and anti-green party, is suggestive of a shift in the dominant structures of trust. The lack of a single, dominant narrative about blame and trust in the aftermath of the 22 July attack, to which we shall turn shortly, indicates that there is no entity that can be called “the Norwegian people” which shares basic views about who or what to trust and blame.

³ See Bangstad 2014 for anti-immigrant minority online debates following the online debates, and Andersson 2012 for terrorist attack.

Blaming presupposes a sociology, however rudimentary, or a cosmology, that is an underlying order, founded in trust, against which aberrations and deviations can be understood. Finding out where to place the blame is necessary in order to decide what to do to reinstate a stable state and to punish the culpable. Who or what is blamed when something goes wrong, moreover, determines which kind of reaction is deemed appropriate. In an important essay on risk and blame, Mary Douglas (1992) distinguishes between three different forms of blaming when, for example, a woman dies in the kind of African village society with which she was familiar, accompanied, accordingly, by distinctive reactions from society.

First, the woman might have been to blame herself: she could have offended the ancestors or broken a taboo. In this case, the redressive act from the community would be one of purification and expiation, meant to ensure the future obedience of rules and norms. Secondly, the blame could be attributed to an individual adversary or a competitor within the community, in which case the reaction might be that of compensation according to a tit-for-tat logic of justice. Finally, the cause of the woman's death might be located outside the community, from someone who did not respect local norms and who could represent a subversive, disruptive force. It would usually, but not necessarily, be an outsider, but it could also be a traitor. Douglas mentions communal punishment and demands for compensation as typical reactions, but she might have added war or cessation of relations, depending on the perceived gravity of the death inflicted.

It is perfectly possible, and could be instructive, to identify similar modes of blaming in contemporary societies: when something is perceived to do wrong, it could ultimately be the victim's own fault, it could be the result of conflict, contradiction or competition within society, or it could be the work of insidious outside forces. Douglas may have underestimated the degree of disagreement and conflicting perspectives present in the traditional societies she wrote about here; be this as it may, it is beyond doubt that in the complex societies of the early 21st century, several modes of blaming are at work simultaneously, and indeed much of the competition for scarce resources as well as the most significant ideological conflicts can be understood against these differences in modes of blaming. Surely, they often appear in ambiguous and confusing ways in contemporary societies, characterised as they are by proliferating risks—environmental, economic, social, cultural—and widespread insecurity about the future. The belief in progress, crucial to theories of social evolution and an

ideological lynchpin of capitalism, has been weakened perceptibly almost everywhere in recent decades, largely as a result of the continuous onset of unpredictable crises which seem to have been produced, in the final instance, by the system itself, but which nevertheless inspire a whole range of different modes of blaming. Douglas states: “There are communities, barely earning the name, which are *not organized at all*: here blame goes in all directions, unpredictably” (Douglas 1992: 6, my italics). The situation in contemporary, complex societies may perhaps be described as intermediate between this, arguably a borderline case, and that of the cohesive moral community where there is agreement about whom to blame and what to do.

To what extent can Douglas’ three ideal-typical modes of blaming be seen as relevant in the context of contemporary societal anxieties and perceived vulnerabilities? Who is to blame for mass unemployment and the encroaching informalisation of labour? In some of the smaller banana-growing islands in the Caribbean, there has been a tendency by certain politicians to attribute the recent weak performance of the industry on the laziness of the banana farmers. The latter may blame neoliberalism, as the European Union quotas and guaranteed minimum prices for bananas from the Eastern Caribbean have successively been abandoned since the 1990s. This has had dismal consequences for small producers, whose competitive disadvantage vis-à-vis the large-scale banana plantations in countries like Costa Rica already constitutes a serious handicap (Aamnes 2014). The two modes of blaming reveal two opposing social ontologies, one which blames the victim and individualises social processes, and one which points to underlying systemic factors which are harder to identify. They correspond with two of Douglas’ modes of blaming, the missing one being that which attributes blame to an internal competitor or adversary. It is not unthinkable, however, that the relative failure of the banana exports could also be attributed to a lack of priorities among politicians, who may have favoured other economic activities and failed to support the banana industry sufficiently for it to remain competitive.

The economic crisis affecting many European countries, which now face large-scale unemployment and uncertain prospects, has also been explained in a number of ways. Seen from the position of the new precariat (Standing 2011)—the informalised labour force, which lives in a state of perennial insecurity—three typical explanations are invoked. First, the fact that a person does not have permanent employment could be said to be his own fault. He may have inadequate qualifications, he may have made professional mistakes in earlier jobs, or he may

have failed to market his skills in a sufficiently confident and convincing way. Second, the situation may be blamed on unwanted competition from within, for example foreign workers who are prepared to work under less advantageous conditions. Blame can thereby be seen as an implication of a zero-sum game rather than an intentional act. Thirdly, the deterioration in working conditions may be attributed to systemic failure, such as deregulation and a generalised neoliberalism which successfully evades social responsibilities, or general incompetence and dishonesty in the political classes.

So far, Douglas' simple typology of modes of blaming appears to work well in a complex society, just as it does in a simpler one, although in our kind of society, all forms of blaming are present simultaneously. We nevertheless need to add an important dimension, which is not included in Douglas' model: standard accounts of modernity emphasise a movement from the tangible to the abstract as a constitutive element of the transition from a traditional to a modern society. Trust, notably, is expected to be invested in abstract entities such as laws and state institutions, disembodied science and context-independent knowledge. Morality, similarly, is expected to be based on universal principles, not social relations. The critiques of this kind of dichotomous thinking are familiar and relevant, and the point is not that trust and blame in modern societies are *de facto* associated with abstract, person-independent forces and structures, but that there is a widespread cultural assumption that it should be so.

Does this hold for modes of blaming as well? Is there, in general, a stronger tendency to blame abstract entities in contemporary state societies than in traditional non-state societies? It would scarcely be well-advised to try to answer this question unequivocally: societies where the structures of trust are based chiefly on face-to-face contact, kinship and personal familiarity exist, but religion often enters into the mode of trust—and therefore also that of blame—in decisive ways. Likewise, in societies where the inhabitants learn to trust institutions and principles rather than individuals, people remain socially embedded in interpersonal relationships, and individuals are frequently blamed for what could equally well be seen as structural failure. In an important sense, however, it may arguably be said that institutions take the place of religion in many modern contexts.

Following the catastrophic earthquake in Lisbon in 1755, at the height of the French Enlightenment, reactions ranged from the religious to the sociological (Shrady 2009). The Jesuit priest Gabriel Malagrida published a book in the year after the earthquake where he argued

that it was God's punishment for the many sins committed by Lisbon's inhabitants. Voltaire wrote a poem about the earthquake where the inherent argument was that this kind of meaningless disaster reveals the cruelty and amorality of nature, reminding humanity that we are on our own and cannot trust or blame God when things go wrong. He would later elaborate this perspective in his famous philosophical novella *Candide*. Rousseau, in a long letter to Voltaire, disagreed. He pointed out that although the earthquake was not humanly induced as such, precautionary measures might have mitigated its disastrous effects—a third of Lisbon's population perished. For example, Rousseau suggested, a more scattered form of settlement as well as a kind of early warning system might have helped save many lives. These three attributions of blame correspond to a great extent with Douglas' types: Malagrida blamed the people themselves and their sinful behaviour; Voltaire blamed an external foe, that is the mindless and amoral forces of nature; while Rousseau suggested that internal arrangements in society itself could at least partly be blamed for the consequences of the disaster. Given the scale of the disaster, it stands to reason that nobody seemed to blame individuals. The diversity of the responses to the earthquake, and the different accounts of its consequences, bear testimony to a plurality of competing world-views, and bear some resemblance to the reactions in Western Europe to the South-East Asian tsunami of 2004.

The current economic crisis in Europe is similarly accounted for by competing and sometimes contradictory world-views. Blame is attributed to certain persons within the crisis-ridden societies, who are depicted as enemies of the people—Greek civil servants, Spanish investment bankers etc., or outside the societies in question: consider the widespread demonization of German Chancellor Angela Merkel, especially in Greece. There have been situations where people even blame themselves when the system they have trusted fails. In the early 1990s, Sweden went through a severe economic crisis which led to the devaluation of the Swedish krona, substantial unemployment and a de facto decline in wages. At the time, few blamed their own political and economic elites, foreign capitalists or immigrants offering cheap labour. Instead, the general identification with the system was so strong that many Swedes felt that they themselves had failed, since no clear boundary was drawn between state and society, people and elites.

Modes of blaming relating to climate change reveal a similar pattern which again corresponds roughly to Mary Douglas' tripartite division. Many members of the Western middle classes tend to place the blame on themselves, or their neighbours, for their unsustainable lifestyles.

Others blame their own elites for not acting upon extant scientific knowledge. Yet others blame external forces—technology, neoliberal ideology, world capitalism—which come across as nihilistic as Voltaire’s godless nature, but which are nevertheless unintended aggregate consequences of human agency for which we are, collectively, ultimately, responsible. Again others deny the reality of climate change, and blame powerful international organisations, governments and scientists for keeping the truth from the public eye.

In general, the more abstract and more distant the instance responsible for misfortune becomes, the more difficult it is to act upon one’s assumptions about who or what to blame. Therefore, it can often be socially and psychologically necessary to personalise blame, to reduce the scope and/or complexity of a phenomenon in order to make it manageable—finding someone to blame, someone to punish and a relevant course of action in the midst of a situation which is de facto too complex to deal with properly. As is well known from the classic anthropological functionalist accounts of witchcraft (Evans-Pritchard 1937, Nadel 1952), siphoning blame off to a weak or vulnerable agent can efficiently deflect attention from underlying social conflicts.

The Norwegian terrorist attack

Blaming can be directed towards the victim, a view that can, but need not, be shared by the victim him- or herself; it can be directed towards an internal adversary, a competitor or enemy within society; or it can be directed towards some external force. Moreover, blame can be attributed to tangible persons or abstract entities such as institutions, ideologies or gods.

I shall now consider the modes of blaming that were mobilised in the aftermath of the terrorist attack in Norway on 22 July 2011. The underlying question, here as elsewhere when we speak about blame, is what blaming says about the society in which it develops.

It was at the height of the holiday season in Norway when news was broadcast about a large explosion in the city centre. The immediate reports indicated that it was caused by a bomb, although one commentator in the panel hastily assembled in the TV studio at NRK (the state channel), namely a liberal political philosopher and frequent commentator on Islam and human rights, Lars Gule, suggested that it could have been an explosion in a gas pipe, as there were currently

roadworks in the area. Suspicion was immediately directed at Muslim groups. Libya was mentioned, as was—naturally—the almost mythical al-Qaeda network of Islamic terrorists. The leader of the right-wing populist Progress Party, Siv Jensen, simply said that “this is an attack on Norway”, loyal to the logic of the “war on terror” introduced by President Bush after the 9/11 attack in the US. (When it was later disclosed that the terrorist was a former member of her own party, she did not repeat that particular sentence.) During the afternoon, reports came about ordinary Muslims being harassed across the country and blamed for the explosion in central Oslo. Sharing a religion with the suspected terrorists was, as is often the case with Muslims in Europe, considered to be sufficient for attributing guilt by association. However, by nightfall, news reports about the massacre of Young Labour delegates at Utøya, a proverbially idyllic and somewhat dull island on a lake less than an hour’s drive from the city, suggested that militant Islamism might have little to do with this assault on Norwegian society. The perpetrator of both acts of terrorism, which left 77 dead and dozens wounded, turned out to be a right-wing extremist convinced that multiculturalism in general and Muslims in particular were inimical to Norwegian nationhood and destructive of the fabric of Norwegian society.

When the facts of the terrorist attack had been established, a vivid and prolonged discussion began in the media and its cyberspace extensions concerning the future of trust and the question of blame. No single hegemonic blaming discourse could be discerned. The terrorist Breivik was an anomaly in a society where dramatic events were rare, and there existed no established narrative about this kind of attack which could have been drawn upon. The Norwegian public sphere has at its disposal a range of standard narratives blaming foreigners for the ills suffered by the country, with those of the German Nazis and of Islamic terrorists at the forefront (although no Muslim terrorist act has to date been committed on Norwegian soil). There was no readily available narrative about a homegrown anti-Jihadist turned violent; indeed, the police admitted that they had not kept right-wing groups under surveillance at all, concentrating their efforts on Islamists.

One blaming narrative that emerged very shortly after the attack individualised the event and pathologised the terrorist. His ideological affiliations were played down, and many considered him primarily a psychiatric case (Borchgrevink 2012 is an acclaimed, book-length exploration of this view). In fact, the first forensic psychiatrists to examine Breivik concluded along these lines. This structure of blaming

avoids a critical interrogation of aspects of Norwegian society through its incessant focus on the terrorist's mental state. It also implies that similar attacks could in principle happen again, and that they could take place anywhere, like natural disasters. It implies no specific course of action.

Another narrative, which surfaced in the summer of 2013 as part of the Conservative Party's election campaign, targeted the erstwhile Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg. The Prime Minister was not blamed directly for the attack, but supporters of the Conservative candidate for the premiership, Erna Solberg (Prime Minister since September 2013), claimed that the tragedy might have been avoided with a stronger political leadership (Aftenposten 2013).

What these two accounts have in common is the way in which they deflect attention from any societal or cultural causes of the terrorist attack, the first explicitly by locating the cause of the attack to Breivik's childhood, the second by shifting the floodlights to the person of Jens Stoltenberg. Both share the properties of the lightning conductor in deflecting the potential overheating produced by lightning to a destination where it would rapidly cool down.

A third blaming narrative focused on the inadequacies of the police. They should have been able to identify Breivik as a security risk before it was too late, some said, while others added that the police were far too slow and inefficient in reacting when they learned about the shootings at Utøya. The government-appointed 22 July Commission, which submitted its report in August 2012, confirmed this view in criticising the efficiency and coordination of the police (NOU 2012). According to this narrative, technical solutions—an improvement of the organisational infrastructure of the state—could make a decisive difference in the future. Within this structure of blaming, the concept of trust was essential: trust in the protective capacities of the police, the critics said, must be reestablished. The lack of a political or ideological dimension is equally pronounced in this narrative: terrorism is made to appear like the Lisbon earthquake or the Asian tsunami; it may emerge suddenly and out of nowhere, and it can therefore best be prevented through a technical solution, similar to keeping Mexicans out of the US, or Palestinians out of Israel, by building a wall along the border.

A fourth blaming structure places the blame mainly on violent online computer games. It was often pointed out in the weeks and months after the terrorist attack that Breivik had in fact spent a year doing little else than playing *World of Warcraft*, and that his behaviour while shooting teenagers at Utøya—wearing a home-made uniform

with insignia purchased on eBay—resembled that of an avatar in a computer game. Like the previous blaming structure considered, the solution here seems to be largely technical, namely banning certain violent computer games.

We now have four competing modes of blaming: one which individualised the attack, one which used the prime minister and his style of leadership as a lightning conductor, one which saw the cause in a general feature of contemporary mass culture and, finally, one that blamed the success of the attack on shortcomings and weaknesses in the police force. The fact that Breivik was motivated by hatred of Muslims and multiculturalists, and that his targeting of the future leaders of the social democratic movement in Norway was not coincidental, was not made relevant for any of these stories of blame, which predominated in the press, and also in the government commissioned 22 July Report, led by legal scholar Alexandra Bech Gjørsv. The report, submitted on 13 August 2012 (NOU 2012), focused mainly on the technical and operational responses to the event, and its recommendations concerned security, surveillance and the efficiency of the police. In summer 2014, Raymond Johansen, the party secretary of the Labour Party, publicly criticised the 22 July Commission, also commenting on the general debate, for not dealing with what he saw as the main issue, namely the rise of Islamophobia and racism, talking about the “depoliticisation of the Fascist Breivik” (Strand 2014).

However, a structural understanding of the terrorist attack, emphasising not merely the “proximate” causes but also “ultimate” causes (to use the terms favoured by evolutionary psychologists), was also discernable in the public sphere. The two remaining modes of blaming both attributed the terrorist attack to political causes, but were based on opposing world views and, accordingly, contrasting analyses. On anti-immigrant and counterjihadist websites, a common view was that multiculturalism and the Labour Party were indirectly to blame themselves (Eide, Kjølstad and Naper 2013). Had the political elite of the country not opened the doors to mass immigration from Muslim countries, they argued, this would never have happened. Some—mostly anonymous bloggers—expressed agreement with Breivik’s analysis, but not with his methods (Hervik and Meret 2013). According to this view, the government and the victims of the shootings, as young members of the ruling party, were ultimately to blame, along with the Muslims, whose very presence in the country is an unbearable provocation to any right-thinking patriot (Bangstad 2011, 2014). In a certain sense, this is tantamount to saying that the precariat are themselves responsible for

their precarious situation, or in Douglas' terminology: the victim has sinned, offended the gods and the ancestors, and is therefore responsible for his or her own downfall. According to this narrative, the social democrats were appropriate targets, even if the attack itself was almost universally disapproved of, since the steep growth in Norway's minority population has occurred during a period when Labour has been in government most of the time. It is fair to add, however, that Labour's policy on immigration and integration has not been especially radical, neither in a European context nor by comparison to other political parties in Norway, with the exception of the anti-immigration Progress Party.

The sixth and final mode of blaming identified anti-jihadism and a purity-seeking ethnic nationalism as the underlying causes of the terrorist attack. It was well documented that Breivik had voraciously perused blogs and websites devoted to the demonisation of Islam and Muslims (Tittley 2013), some of them squarely within the "Eurabia" framework, according to which Western governments have made secret agreements with Muslim states to allow the virtual occupation of their countries by Muslims in exchange for oil (Ye'or 2006). The subtext of this world-view, which exists in both weak and strong versions, is that politicians are deliberately hiding the truth about immigration, Islam and multiculturalism from voters. These views, which have many thousands of adherents in Norway, are regularly propagated through oft-visited interactive websites, on Facebook and through the occasional book or op-ed article in a national or regional newspaper (Eriksen 2011, Bangstad 2014). The flourishing of this world-view, seen as conspiratorial and paranoid by its detractors, was thus seen as a decisive factor. Breivik found his historical mission in the narratives of the vehement anti-jihadists, which defended the view that Muslims and Europeans could never share the same territory peacefully. One of their websites is called, tellingly, "Gates of Vienna", referring to the decisive battle outside Vienna in 1683 when Ottoman expansion into Europe was halted.⁴

Although all the modes of blaming mentioned except the first two emphasise societal causes, only the last two focus on contradictions or conflicts within Norwegian society as underlying causes of the terrorist attack. While the anti-multiculturalist perspective sees the openness of

⁴ Breivik's much publicised manifesto is entitled *2083: A European Declaration of Independence*, referring to the fourth centennial of this event and envisioning a Muslim-free Europe in that year.

Norway to immigration as the cause of violence, the anti-anti-jihadist perspective sees the unwillingness to accept immigrants as equals as being the main problem. The former sees a possible solution in the installation of a “truly national government”, while the latter appears to see no other alternative than meeting hatred with knowledge, good intentions and more efficient methods for combating racism and exclusionist identity politics. What these modes of blaming have in common, however, is the conviction that the terrorist attack was ultimately caused by a simmering conflict in society between a cosmopolitan or multiculturalist elite and the patriotic or nationalistic masses—or between a majority committed to decency and human rights, and an angry and potentially dangerous minority which refuses to respect the principles and practices of democracy.

The election results in 2011 (local elections) and 2013 (general elections) suggest that Breivik’s world-view has limited support in the Norwegian population. The party of which he had been a member for many years, the populist Progress Party (Fremskrittspartiet), saw a reduction in their support at both occasions, but was still capable of forming a coalition government with the Conservatives (Høyre) in 2013, despite receiving only 16.4% of votes (compared to 22.9% in 2009). In other words, the vast majority of Norwegians voted for parties which did not blame societal problems chiefly on immigration. At the same time, an opinion poll from autumn 2011, moreover, suggested that a quarter of the Norwegian population saw Islam as a threat to Norwegian culture, and felt that there were too many Muslims in the country (Norstat 2011). Moreover, another survey, from 2012, indicates that 40% were negative to the building of mosques in the country, and roughly the same percentage was negative to persons with Muslim beliefs (IMDI 2012). It is, thus, possible to conclude that a substantial minority of the Norwegian population is dissatisfied with Norwegian policy on immigration and integration. The terrorist attack did, in other words, highlight—in a grotesque way—a real ideological division in Norwegian society, which only the final two structures of blame correctly identify.

Conclusion: Social ontologies and conditions for trust

The ideological divide in Norwegian society, evident in the difference between these structures of blaming, raises questions not

only about blame, but also about its dialectical opposite, trust. In the weeks immediately following the terrorist attack, the international press strongly emphasised the informality and openness of Norwegian society, where trust in both people and institutions had been very high for generations. They, and many locals, now asked whether Norwegians would become less trusting of both each other and of abstract institutions, in the awareness that they had encountered evil, that it was homegrown, and that something similar might happen again unless steps were taken to prevent it. The only problem was that although the domestic concern about the loss of trust was—and is—widespread in the aftermath of the attack, there is no general agreement regarding its causes, effects and possible remedies. For who, or what, should be blamed for the loss of trust? Was it the inefficiency of the police, the unchecked rise of right-wing xenophobic movements, the gullibility of multiculturalist politicians or even the prevalence of online computer games? Accordingly, there has been no general agreement concerning the appropriate course of action necessary to reestablish the kind of generalised trust for which Scandinavian societies are famous.

Some call for more openness and inclusion, while others call for more closure and exclusion—and both sides are convinced that their analyses of the deeper causes of the terrorist attack, and their recipes for reinstating a cohesive society based on generalised trust, is superior. It deserves emphasising that, unlike the attempts to divert attention to the inefficiency of the police, the allegedly poor leadership of the government and the unhappy childhood of the terrorist, these perspectives, opposing as they are, concur in assigning blame to structural properties of Norwegian society and are, accordingly, commensurable.

Referring to Douglas' typology, both perspectives combine the second and third type of blaming, which makes sense in a society where the boundary between the inside and the outside is blurred. This opposition between conflicting attributions of blame, moreover, shows that the ideological divide in Norway shares important features with similar divisions in other European countries. Some blame social ills—including the assumed loss of trust—on irresponsible immigration policies and gullible multiculturalism, if not on the immigrants themselves; while others argue that the terrorist attack and the motivation behind it demonstrate, in a grotesque way, that the dream of ethnic and cultural purity is not only futile and unrealistic,

but extremely dangerous at a historical juncture when “we are all on the move” (Bauman 1999: 77).

The contrasting social ontologies on which these positions are based emphasise, respectively, closure and openness as prerequisites for trust and security. On the one hand, there is a positive evaluation of values such as security and tradition, the historically rooted group as the main basis of social solidarity, boundedness and continuity as guarantors for autonomy and trust. On the other hand, values such as freedom and innovation are valued, just as the future-oriented individual or project-based social movement, are seen as the stuff of social life, openness to change as a necessity and a virtue, mixing and diversity as enriching, not as fragmenting.

These social ontologies⁵ function as templates of interpretation in a wide range of situations across the world where societal vulnerability becomes apparent through some crisis, and there is disagreement as to who or what to blame. I have argued that this kind of contradiction chiefly emerges in situations of accelerated change where there is no established pre-existing narrative into which a particular event can be integrated. This is one way in which the Norwegian experience of the 2011 terrorist attack can fruitfully be generalised to shed light on more widespread structures of trust and blame in today’s world: since this event was unprecedented and unexpected, in addition to being tragic, shocking and collectively traumatising, it brought out, in an unfiltered and often unreflexive way, some very basic modes of blaming and trusting. The nationalistic “traitor discourse” alleges that the Norwegian elite are in cahoots with the enemy, notably Muslims, both inside and outside of the country. The elite, accordingly, must be attacked and the Muslims assimilated, deported or exterminated. The cosmopolitan discourse which blames paranoid Islamophobia and ethnic nationalism, on the other hand, sees cultural narrow-mindedness and resistance to change as a main source of conflict.

What these modes of blaming share is the recognition that underlying societal conflicts are the cause of crises, rather than evil or incompetent individuals, technically inefficient institutions or cultural surface phenomena such as computer games. When faced with a crisis, people will typically ask who is to blame and what they can do. In the

⁵ This difference resonates with the debate in social philosophy between communitarians and liberals (MacIntyre 1981, Dworkin 2000, Kymlicka 1988). My usage

of the term “social ontology” refers to fundamental assumptions about the nature of society and the social; it is not related to the so-called ontological turn in anthropology.

case of the 22 July attack in Norway, the underlying cause is a mounting tension between openness and closure, mixing and purity, diversity and homogeneity. By individualising the attack or calling for technical solutions as preventive measures, attention is deflected from structural issues that need to be addressed critically. No course of action results which would deal with this conflict in society. Similarly to situations where blame is placed on the victim, such as when Caribbean politicians blame the effects of neoliberal trade policies on the alleged laziness of local farmers, or European leaders blame the precariat for its chronic vulnerability, the mainstream public debates after the Norwegian terrorist attack have dodged a very substantial elephant in the room. They have failed to ask whether there is a connection between Breivik's Islamophobic ethnonationalism and the roots of Norwegian nationalism in 19th century romanticism, or—more generally—discussing the terrorist attack as an act of political violence rather than that of a demented individual. Avoiding this question and failing to see underlying causes behind the symptoms is not merely bad sociology. It may also turn out to be detrimental to the proverbially high levels of trust in Norwegian society.

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Résumé

L'attentat terroriste réalisé en Norvège le 22 juillet 2011 par un partisan de l'extrême droite a constitué un événement particulièrement choquant. De nombreuses interprétations et explications ont cherché à rendre compte des causes et implications d'une attaque à l'origine de 77 morts et de dizaines de blessés sérieux. A partir d'un dialogue avec l'anthropologie classique mais également des travaux sociologiques plus récents consacrés à la confiance et à la culpabilité, cet article montre qu'il n'y pas eu un récit ou une explication majoritairement accepté de l'attaque, tout comme il n'y a pas eu d'accord général sur les mesures à prendre afin de limiter les risques de futures attaques. Sur les six tentatives d'explications recensées, seules deux identifient correctement le changement démographique, les mouvements migratoires et l'émergence des politiques xenophobes comme des causes sous-jacentes de l'attaque terroriste. Ceci suggère que l'augmentation du changement sociale comme de la fragmentation sociale qui l'accompagne contribue à réduire le niveau jusqu'alors élevé de confiance caractéristique de la société norvégienne.

Mots-clés: Confiance ; Culpabilité ; Changement social ; Cohésion ; Terrorisme.

Zusammenfassung

Der Terroranschlag, der am 22. Juli 2011 in Norwegen von einem Mitläufer rechtsextremer Gruppen verübt wurde, war ein schockierendes Ereignis, das sehr rasch zu einer steigenden Anzahl von Interpretationen und Erklärungen der Gründe und Konsequenzen führte und mehrere Dutzend Verletzte forderte, sowie 77 Personen das Leben kostete. Aufbauend auf klassischer anthropologischer und neuerer soziologischer Literatur zum Thema Vertrauen und Schuld, verdeutlicht der Beitrag, dass es weder zu einer allgemein anerkannten Darstellung oder Erklärung des Anschlags noch zu einer Übereinkunft bezüglich der zu ergreifenden Maßnahmen gekommen ist, um das Risiko neuer Anschläge zu verhindern. Sechs verschiedene Interpretationsansätze werden beschrieben, wobei nur zwei den demographischen Wandel, die Migration und die Entstehung xenophober Politiken eindeutig als Ursache für die Anschläge identifizieren. Dies deutet daraufhin, dass der hohe Grad an Vertrauen, charakteristisch für die norwegische Gesellschaft, wahrscheinlich aufgrund der zunehmenden sozialen Veränderungen und Fragmentierungen abnimmt.

Schlüsselwörter: Vertrauen; Schuld; Sozialer Wandel; Kohäsion; Terrorismus.