



## CHAPTER 8

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# Responses to Radical(ising) Messages and Their Messengers by Young Marksmen and Their Clubs *From Rejection to Normalisation*

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## Introduction

This chapter explores how young marksmen and markswomen<sup>1</sup> engage with, and respond to, radical(ising) messages and their messengers in concrete, everyday situations and interactions. It draws on situational descriptions and narratives of encounters with radical(ising) messages and those who convey them from interviews with young people from a German marksmen's club milieu, together with observations from the field, to illustrate the spectrum of responses. These range from their outright rejection, suggesting 'resilience' to radicalisation or 'non-radicalisation', to their normalisation, indicating the potential for radicalisation. Alongside the analysis of individual responses, the chapter considers the responses encountered within the milieu of the marksmen's clubs to which interviewees belong and from the clubs themselves. While, today, marksmen's clubs (*Schützenvereine*) may be considered part of the political mainstream or the social centre of society (*Mitte der Gesellschaft*), the milieu has attracted right-wing or extreme-right actors who have sought to influence and appropriate certain aspects of it. In this contribution, responses at both individual and milieu levels are analysed to explore the interactive, contextual and situational dimensions of radicalisation and non-radicalisation, on the one hand, and factors of resilience to radicalisation, on the other. This dual-

analysis approach also allows insight into how resilience of the marksmen's club milieu might impact on the resilience and non-radicalisation of individual milieu actors.

### ***Non-Radicalisation as Process and the Concept of Resilience***

While there may remain 'no agreed definition' (Neumann 2013: 874) of radicalisation, it has become widely understood as a process (ibid.; Khalil, Horgan and Zeuthen 2019: 2–3) in which 'people become increasingly motivated to use violent means against members of an out-group or symbolic targets to achieve behavioural change and political goals' (Doosje et al. 2016: 79). However, in some formulations a distinction between 'attitudinal' or 'cognitive' and 'behavioural radicalisation' is drawn (McCauley and Moskalenko 2017; Gøtzsche-Astrup 2018), which recognises that 'radicalisation of opinion' may take place without 'radicalisation of action' (McCauley and Moskalenko 2017). This may explain why only a small proportion of those who have radical or extreme ideas engage in political violence and not all of those who engage in violence have radical or extreme ideas (ibid.: 211; Moghaddam 2009: 280; Horgan 2012; Neumann 2013: 879–80). In terms of the endpoint of the radicalisation process, it suggests a person might be considered radicalised if they support political violence in their attitudes and/or in their actions.

Together, these understandings of radicalisation offer a means to shift the perspective away from the violent individual at the 'sharp end of radicalization' (Schuurman 2020: 16) and towards an understanding of radicalisation as a process of 'becoming more radical' (Malthaner 2017: 371). The latter is indicated by a transformation of aims, attitudes and perceptions and/or changed forms of activism and actions (ibid.: 372) on a spectrum between non-radicalisation and radicalisation. Moreover, if radicalisation is a process, then non-radicalisation is also; this offers the possibility of exploring the process not only of becoming more radical, but also of partial, stalled or partially reversed radicalisation (see Introduction, this volume) or remaining non-radical. It is with this process of remaining non-radicalised that this contribution to the volume is primarily concerned. It understands this as an interactive, contextual and situational process in which individuals, or communities and organisations – specifically marksmen's clubs – engage with radical(ising) messages and their messengers but reject the support for attitudinal or behavioural violence. This is largely in line with Cragin's (2014: 342) concept of 'non-radicalization', understood as the 'rejection of violence' by individuals exposed to radical ideologies or violence, envisaged as

involving a process evolving in a 'series of stages with multiple choices along the way' (Cragin et al. 2015: 11).

In contrast to Cragin's studies, however, this chapter draws explicitly on the concept of *resilience* to, at least partially, explain the rejection of radical(ising) messages and their messengers at the level of both individual respondents and the marksmen's clubs or communities to which they belong. The concept of resilience, with disciplinary genealogies and applications in physics, material science, ecology, psychology and political science, has become a key concept in Counter Terrorism (CT) and Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) research, discourses and policy. Reviewing its use in CT and P/CVE, Grossman (2021: 295) notes how resilience refers to *prevention of violent extremism and resistance to violent extremism* (akin to Cragin's use of non-radicalisation) but also to *adaptation or recovery* (ibid.: 297). In this sense, resilience in CT and P/CVE draws on social-ecological resilience models (ibid.: 298), which broadly understand resilience as '...processes of recovery, adaptation, or systemwide transformation before, during, and after exposure to adversity' (Ungar 2021: 6). Thus resilience, like violent extremism, terrorism and radicalisation or non-radicalisation, can be understood as a multi-systemic and interactive process that takes place within and between several nested or co-occurring interdependent systems (e.g. an individual child and their family), their parts and across different scales (e.g. spatial scales, time scales, organisational scales) and various systemic contexts and situations (Ungar 2018, 2021; Bouhana 2019; Grossman 2021). Drawing on these conceptualisations, in this chapter, resilience is used to understand a process manifest primarily as resistance – to encounters with radical(ising) messages and their messengers – in situations of the exposure (of individual marksmen, marksmen's clubs and their umbrella organisations) to adversity. In some situations, however, it will be shown also how such resilience leads to the adjustment of behaviour or learning (adaptation) or even more comprehensive and radical change of the system exposed to adversity (transformation) (Ungar 2018: 7–9; 2021: 20).

Existing studies of non-radicalisation are set in the context of civil or military conflict (e.g. Cragin 2014; Cragin et al. 2015) or concerned with the non-practice of political or terrorist violence (Schuurman 2020) or the more general differentiation between violent and non-violent extremism (Holt et al. 2018; Becker 2021; Pritchett and Moeller 2021). In contrast, this contribution focuses on the everyday engagement with radical(ising) messages, and those who convey them, of individuals who are non-radicalised or weakly radicalised. Specifically, it considers how such messages and messengers are either rejected or normalised by individuals and in the context of the marksmen's club milieu.

## German Marksmanship and German Marksmen's Clubs

The history of German marksmanship is centuries old (see Leineweber et al. 2020: 19–51),<sup>2</sup> dating back to the Middle Ages, when marksmen's clubs first appeared in the form of marksmen's guilds and brotherhoods and provided security, protection and order within medieval towns. Today it is recognised as an 'intangible cultural heritage'; according to the German UNESCO Commission, 'in many regions, marksmanship is an important and vibrant part of the regional or local identity. It incorporates many customs and traditions, which manifest themselves in different ways' (Deutsche UNESCO-Kommission n.d.). The marksmen's club milieu, with its over one million marksmen throughout Germany, is characterised by a strong sense of community and a Christian and middle-class or civic self-understanding. In the public perception, marksmen's clubs are considered to be rather conservative (Burger 2014). This is reflected in the importance placed by many clubs on values, history, customs and traditions,<sup>3</sup> and their often hierarchical or military organisational structure. While some clubs focus on so-called 'cultivation of tradition and customs' (*Traditions und Brauchtumspflege*), celebrated in particular at annual marksmen's festivals,<sup>4</sup> others emphasise shooting sports;<sup>5</sup> this split began in the Weimar Republic when the number of club memberships and newly founded clubs increased sharply (Leineweber et al. 2020: 30).

Regarding their political positioning, marksmen's clubs in general can be understood as a milieu of the political mainstream or the social centre of society (*Mitte der Gesellschaft*), which is also reflected in the milieu's self-understanding. Thus, in selecting the marksmen's milieu for research, it is not suggested that the wider milieu, or individual clubs, are either radical or extreme right-wing in a classically defined sense. Rather, it recognises that the milieu exhibits various characteristics attractive to right-wing and extreme right-wing agents, which makes it a target for such actors, who may seek to influence or appropriate elements of it. These characteristics include its membership profile (being predominantly white, male and Christian) as well as the traditionalist orientation of many marksmen's clubs and strong attachment to 'home' (*Heimat*) (so-called '*Heimatverbundenheit*'). The marksmen's club milieu is also known for its structures and rituals borrowed from the military, training in the use of firearms and the practising of shooting sports. Indeed, one of the few means to legally acquire and possess small firearms and ammunition in Germany is through engagement in shooting sports, through the issuing of a 'gun ownership card' (*Waffenbesitzkarte*). A number of racist and right-wing terrorist attacks and killings have been perpetrated by

members of marksmen's clubs. These include the murder (in 2019) of the district president of Kassel, Walter Lübcke, and the racist attack in Hanau (in 2020), in which the perpetrator killed nine people of immigrant background as well as his own mother (Lohr, Meyer and Thiele 2019; Weber 2020). Field research in a number of marksmen's clubs for this study has suggested, moreover, that the marksmen's club milieu is a site of encounter with radical(ising) messages and those who promote them. In selecting the marksmen's milieu, however, it was also envisaged that some characteristics of this milieu – including (Christian) values, a strong sense of community and a set of democratic and participatory structures – might work to prevent young people from becoming radicalised, at least to the point of violent political extremism. Thus, the milieu appeared a promising site to explore not only radicalisation but also trajectories and pathways of non-radicalisation (Kerst 2021a, 2021b).

## Empirical Approach and Dataset

This chapter draws on empirical data collected during field research conducted between December 2018 and August 2019 as part of the Dialogue about Radicalisation and Equality (DARE) project. Of these data, twenty-three semi-structured interviews (audio recorded, transcribed and analysed) with young members of German marksmen's clubs have been used for this chapter alongside data from ethnographic observation in the milieu. The interviews were conducted with informed consent and were carried out either in the author's office or at a location chosen by the respondents, such as local pubs or clubhouses. All respondents gave informed written consent prior to the interview in line with the ethical guidelines of the project.

The marksmen's clubs to which the respondents belong are located in urban areas, in medium-sized and large cities, or particular districts of these cities, in a western German region where marksmanship is relatively strong. Most respondents live in the cities or districts of the city where their clubs are located. In total, respondents from five clubs were interviewed; thirteen respondents came from a single club, six from a second club and the remaining four respondents were drawn from three other clubs. The respondents were on average 23.5 years old, and the median age was twenty-five. At the time of the interviews, the youngest respondent was sixteen years old, and the oldest respondent was thirty-two. Twelve respondents were male, and eleven respondents were female. It is worth noting that the gender and age profiles of research participants do not reflect the average gender and age profile of membership

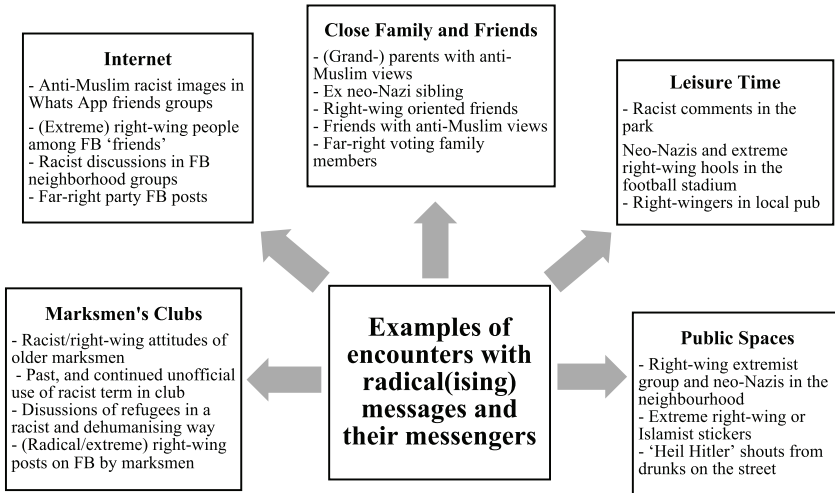
of the marksmen's clubs, which have a high proportion of male<sup>6</sup> and older members (Deutscher Schützenbund 2019; Leineweber et al. 2020: 58–59). The age profile of the study was dictated by the overall DARE project, which focused on young people (between twelve and thirty years old). The project also encouraged including women's views and experiences in the milieus even where they were a minority. The study's sample does closely correspond with wider marksmen's club membership distribution in relation to religious affiliation and ethnic background. Twenty respondents were of German origin, and twenty-three respondents were Christian (although not all of them were practising) and white. This corresponds to a study by the Federal Institute for Sports Science, which showed that in 2009, only 5% of members of marksmen's clubs had an immigration background (Breuer and Wicker 2011: 151 ff.), but also to the accounts of respondents and field observations.

Ethnographic field data were collected through participation in numerous events in the marksmen's milieu, especially marksmen's festivals and other events such as summer parties or shooting competitions. The clubs I researched, or key marksmen in these clubs, were informed about my research from the outset. I carried out my research as a 'participant observer' but also as an 'observing participant', that is, through involvement in the activities and practices engaged in by others, including my respondents, at these events (Hitzler and Gothe 2015: 10–12). I recorded my observations and experiences in the field in over a hundred pages of field diary.

In the following empirical sections, respondents' situational descriptions and narratives of their encounters with radical(ising) messages and their messengers, field observations and documentary research material are drawn on to illustrate respondents' trajectories as well as the strategies of engagement and response to radical(ising) messages and their messengers by individuals, the marksmen's clubs to which they belong and one of their umbrella organisations.

### **Encounters with Radical(ising) Messages and Their Messengers**

The term 'radical(ising) messages' is used to refer to messages whose radical content can give rise to attitudes, feelings or actions that constitute or facilitate attitudinal/cognitive and behavioural radicalisation processes. Such content might be of a racist, anti-human, anti-democratic or neo-Nazi nature and, whatever its specific content, is more radical than the attitudes currently held by those exposed to it. It is delivered



**Figure 8.1.** Examples of encounters with radical(ising) messages and their messengers. Created by Benjamin Kerst.

in 'messages' that may take a wide range of forms including statements, utterances, slogans, arguments, appeals, jokes, flyers, posters or social media posts. Certain ways of dressing, adorning the body or acting may also be said to constitute a form of radical(ising) message.

Those who convey these messages do not necessarily have to be radical or extreme to trigger or fuel radicalisation processes through the messages they disseminate, or through other interactions, and, in this way, become agents of radicalisation. Radical(ising) messages and messengers can manifest in different systemic contexts, such as the immediate social environment (family or circle of friends), within different milieus (such as the marksmen's club milieu), in public spaces or on the internet. The dataset revealed more than forty encounters with radical(ising) messages and their messengers among respondent narratives, mostly in the systemic context of their family, friends and acquaintances, at school, at work, or in the marksmen's clubs as well as in their neighbourhoods, local pub, city districts, public spaces, football stadiums or online environments. Respondents encountered such messages in situations such as discussions with friends, during everyday activities in the neighbourhood or at the marksmen's festival. Some respondents reported only occasional encounters while, for others, these situations were more frequent; regular encounters were experienced, for example, by respondents who had right-wing friends and acquaintances and by members of one particular

club, who regularly came across 'racist' or 'right-wing' jokes and remarks (see Figure 8.1).

## Situations and Factors of Resilience: The Individual Level

At the individual level, rejection of radical(ising) messages and/or their messengers was evident in a range of situations narrated by respondents while their reflections on these responses suggest a number of important factors that build resilience to radicalisation.

### *Rejecting Radical Messages and/or Their Messengers*

At the individual level, the research data reveal a variety of degrees, and ways, of rejecting radical(ising) messages. This illustrates the interactive, contextual and situational character of resilience towards radical(ising) messages and their messengers and of pathways of non-radicalisation.

The complete rejection of such messages and those who convey them is illustrated in the case of Anne, who rejects what she considers unacceptable right-wing content shared online by deleting the responsible person from her Facebook (FB) 'friends' list. She explains her decision thus:

I kicked him off, because, at some point, his political opinion became too extreme for me. He regularly stirred up hatred . . . And he also shared many articles from the AfD [Alternative für Deutschland] party and so on. So, I thought to myself, 'No. I don't want to have that kind of thing in my list' . . . Maybe that's also intolerant of me, undoubtedly – because actually I should accept his political opinion – but I don't want to be confronted with it every day. (Anne)

Anne's response not only displays resilience as resistance but enacts a form of adaptation; by removing this individual, she has changed her online environment in such a way that the likelihood of future encounters with radical(ising) messages and their messengers is reduced.

Jana is more inclined to engage in 'heated debates' with 'right-wing oriented' friends but also seeks to stop the flow of those political views she does not agree with when they become too much. At a certain point, she tells these 'right-wing' friends, 'I like being friends with you, but I don't want to talk about politics with you in that case' (Jana). In this sense, like Anne, Jana's strategy is to try to change her social environment, in this case her friends' behaviour, so that she is less confronted with radical(ising) messages. Unlike Anne, however, she only rejects the



messages and not the messengers. She continues to engage in argument and dialogue with her friends, partly with the aim of changing their views; she sometimes succeeds.

Vanessa also struggled with some of her friends' views on immigration and immigrants, expressed in comments such as 'bloody foreigners' and 'they have no business here' or blanket generalisations like 'Muslim equals terrorist'. Her response was to challenge such statements, arguing that 'you can't lump them all together' and pointing out that, following such logic, another friend in their group, who had an immigration background from a Muslim majority country, would be made to leave the country. Like Jana, Vanessa thinks that she has dissuaded friends from their views as a result of such discussions. Jana's and Vanessa's encounters and responses to radical(ising) messages and those who convey them within their circle of friends appears to involve an interactive process of non-radicalisation, in which both show an adaptive form of resilience to these messages by challenging (as well as suppressing) these views and entering into dialogue with those who promote them. Given that this strategy, at least sometimes, leads to a shift in views among their friends, Jana and Vanessa's disputative and dialogical interactions might also be interpreted as contributing to the development of a certain resilience among their friends in that they prevent their progression to more radical views or attitudinal or behavioural support for violent extremism. Data from this study cannot demonstrate whether this is likely to result in any long-term or comprehensive change in the political views within these circles of friends. However, it suggests that milieu actors are engaging in what might be called a kind of informal radicalisation prevention or non-radicalisation practice (for further discussion, see Kerst 2021b).

Not all respondents are so decisive in their rejection of radical(ising) messages and may find their resilience weakened by messages they encounter through their immediate social environment or on social media. Camilla considered herself politically neutral or leaning towards the 'left-wing'; she had never voted 'right-wing' and could not imagine ever doing so. She thinks it is 'dangerous' that many people vote for far-right parties and says some of those close to her had done so and have critical or negative attitudes towards refugees, immigrants and immigration policy. However, discussions with these friends and family, as well as AfD and other right-wing content on social media, had made Camilla doubt her decision not to vote for the AfD and influenced her political views:

... I have discussed this with my colleagues at work, I have discussed it with my friends and family. There are many people who say that we

should vote for the AfD party or The Right [a small German, neo-Nazi, extreme right-wing party], because then you are more likely to be heard and some change in politics would be more likely to happen. And at one point, I started to hesitate and think, 'yes, hmm, hmm, they are not wrong'. And, after the elections, there was really a moment, very briefly, where I thought, 'wow, did you vote correctly or should you have also. . .'. (Camilla)

Camilla's narrative provides insight into the interactions, contexts (family, romantic relationship, work, social media) and situations (discussions, reading social media content) in which her political views shifted towards a more radical position. However, her reflections also indicate how this relative radicalisation, itself as much an emotional as an ideological process, is interrupted by moments of resilience:

Well, I do read some [online] articles [referring to online content from right-wing parties] and catch myself thinking: 'Wow. Are you really clicking on that now? If anyone saw you looking at this.' Then, I am really thinking: 'What would others think. . .?' But you read it anyway and you always think: 'Wow, they are actually right. . . . We let everybody in and why didn't we register [those entering the country] somehow differently? But then . . . I catch myself feeling ashamed of the fact that I sometimes think like that. Because I don't think all people are the same. . . . Even if my boyfriend or my work colleague [do think like that] . . . Lots of people [have negative attitudes towards refugees and immigrants] . . . Like being quick to say, 'wow, them [refugees or immigrants] again' or 'they are getting something again'. That often happens when you are overwhelmed by emotions. And then, when you think about it again, I think, 'wow, what did I just say?' Or, 'was that so right?' And, 'if you were in that situation, you wouldn't want to be treated like that either'. That's the point [of reflection] when I just don't get it. Not at all. Because, at that moment, it seems that it's just not human. (Camilla)

At these moments, feelings of shame, empathy and the reflection they invoke furnish Camilla with a resilience to radical(ising) messages, and those who convey them (even when they are very close to her), and stall potential radicalisation.

### ***Individual Factors of Resilience***

Alongside insight into the processual, interactive, contextual and situational character of non-radicalisation and resilience that can be gleaned from how individuals respond to encounters with radical(ising) messages and their messengers, the data also allow the identification of a number

of factors of resilience to these messages. These may be individual factors, such as experiences, desires or views, which participants 'charged up with emotions and consciousness' (Collins 2004: 3) bring into the interaction, but can also be properties of higher-level systems such as groups and communities. In both cases, these 'background conditions' (Collins 2008: 21–22) shape and are shaped by the interaction.

In Camilla's case (see above), while negative sentiments towards refugees and immigrants<sup>7</sup> appeared to make her susceptible to radical(ising) messages, a sense of shame about those feelings also worked as a factor of resilience to, or protection from, such messages (Kerst 2021b). Camilla also feels a certain, at least residual, trust in established parties and politics, stating, 'It is still the case that I think there is definitely a solution and that politics is there for that'. This is reflected also in her belief that it is important to vote in order to 'express your opinion'. The belief that it is possible to change something by democratic means is also shared by other respondents and potentially confirms that 'democratic citizenship' may work as an individual factor of resilience against violent extremism (Sieckelinck and Gielen 2017; Council of Europe 2018: 114). Camilla's engagement also demonstrates her ability to empathise, a capacity that has been identified by P/CVE researchers as an individual factor in resilience to extremism (Feddes, Mann and Doosje 2015; Lösel et al. 2018; Grossman 2021: 298) and which explains respondents' rejections of radical(ising) messages and their messengers. Camilla's reflection that not all people are the same, mirrored by other respondents' statements that it is wrong to generalise when considering issues of immigration and multicultural coexistence, also indicates adherence to a fundamental idea of humanity. This is found also among respondents who base their understanding of equality on the fact that 'human is human' and 'it doesn't matter how someone looks or whatever. . .' (Vanessa). These principles all reflect Schwartz's (1992) basic value of 'universalism', which also includes understanding, appreciation and tolerance (see also Schwartz and Boehnke 2004: 239).

Camilla's response to the adversity of radical(ising) messages and their messengers demonstrates a wider ability to reflect, differentiate, question her own views and tolerate ambiguity. Together, these suggest a certain open-mindedness, including the willingness to engage in dialogue (see also Pilkington 2020: 49–51; 2022; Kerst 2021b: 114–15). Such open-mindedness is also identified as a possible factor of resilience in the context of preventing violent extremism (BOUNCE n.d.; Sieckelinck and Gielen 2017; Council of Europe 2018; Stephens and Sieckelinck 2021: 4). Moreover, this open-mindedness is contrasted by Camilla, and other respondents, to the closed-mindedness that they associate with those who

convey radical(ising) messages, who are described as right-wing individuals who 'do not think outside the box. They only look inside themselves instead of looking out to the world' (Julian). As discussed extensively in the literature, such closed-mindedness is characterised by a 'need for closure' (Kruglanski 2004), the need for clear-cut knowledge, the avoidance of uncertainty, and intolerance of ambiguity and challenges to one's worldview and considered a key cognitive disposition associated with extremism, especially right-wing extremism (Kruglanski 2004; Kruglanski and Orehek 2012; Schmid 2013; for a critique of this association, see Pilkington 2022).

As is evident from respondents' differentiation of themselves from closed-minded, right-wing individuals, many viewed negatively what they perceived as right-wing, and especially as radical or extreme right-wing. Most respondents associated the terms 'radical' or 'extreme' with the 'right-wing camp', far-right parties, like the AfD, 'aggressive neo-Nazis' or actions and attitudes such as right-wing violence, 'racial hostility' and 'xenophobia'.<sup>8</sup> Anton used 'incomprehension', 'grief' and 'suffering' when describing what the terms 'radicalism' and 'extremism' meant to him, while Alexander associated them with 'fear' and said that he tried to avoid and (mentally) distance himself from anything radical or extreme. Ronja explained that she had not voted for the far-right AfD party, even though she agrees with the party's assertion that too many refugees have been received, 'because they are presented as right-wing'. Many other respondents rejected the AfD at least partially because they viewed it as a right-wing or right-wing radical/extremist party, while Frederik, who considers himself 'somewhat right-wing', rejected the party because it was 'more right-wing than me'. As demonstrated by Camilla (see above), the high level of stigma attached to right-wing radicalism or extremism in Germany means that many respondents feel, or would feel, ashamed of having thoughts that might be considered right-wing (Kerst 2021b). This might be considered another possible factor in the resilience of respondents to radical(ising) messages and their messengers and, thus, also as part of the explanation for their non-radicalisation.

The highly negative association with extremism, especially right-wing extremism, is evident among the broader German population.<sup>9</sup> It is a stigma rooted in German history as refracted through the highly critical approach to the German National Socialist past and current phenomena of right-wing extremism conveyed through civic or political education. Such education may be understood as another dimension to the 'democratic citizenship' noted above that acts to promote resilience to (violent) radicalism/extremism. This is reflected in Peter's rejection of violence as a means to reach political goals: '. . . whenever I have an opportunity to

vote, to participate, to change something, I think it's unrealistic [to use violence]. I do not need violence in Germany' (Peter). Such a rejection of (political) violence was found among the majority of the respondents, while two-thirds of the respondents connected terms like (right-wing) 'radical', 'extreme' or related phenomena to physical (political) violence (and sometimes also to verbal violence and closed-mindedness). Thus, the data suggest that respondents evaluate (right-wing) radical/extreme phenomena as negative, in addition to rejecting phenomena across the right-wing political spectrum, because they evaluate (verbal/political) violence associated with these phenomena as negative.

When considering individual factors of resilience to radical messages and their messengers, therefore, in addition to personal capacities for open-mindedness, empathy, shame, trust in democratic institutions and adherence to universal principles of humanity, negative associations with (violent) right-wing radicalism or extremism can be considered an important factor also.

### **Situations and Factors of Resilience: The Milieu Level**

The rejection of radical(ising) messages and/or their messengers was identified in this study not only at the individual level but also at the level of the milieu (in individual marksmen's clubs as well as marksmen's clubs' umbrella organisations). Such rejections are facilitated by a number of milieu-specific factors of resilience that became evident during field research. Exploring rejections of radical(ising) messages and resilience factors at this level reveals how resilience can develop in extra-individual systems such as organisations and communities (Grossman 2021: 299–300). It also allows insight into how resilience at the milieu level impacts on the resilience and non-radicalisation of individual milieu actors and vice versa.

#### ***Rejections of Radical(ising) Messages and/or Their Messengers in the Marksmen's Club Milieu***

One of the most striking examples of the rejection of radical(ising) messages and their messengers encountered during fieldwork were the declarations made by the Catholic 'Historic German Marksmen's Brotherhood'<sup>10</sup> (Bund der Historischen Deutschen Schützenbruderschaften, BHDS) umbrella organisation and its youth organisation 'Federation of the St. Sebastianus Marksmen's Youth' (Bund der St. Sebastianus Schützenjugend, BdSJ). These declarations stated the incompatibility

of membership of the AfD party with membership of the BHDS/BdSJ (Staudenmaier 2020; Kirche und Leben 2021) and were issued following attempts by the AfD to influence and appropriate Catholic marksmen's clubs, for example by distributing flyers to the BHDS, and their clubs, which sought to appeal to the reservations of sports shooters and hunters about a tightening of gun control laws (Staudenmaier 2020). In an interview on this issue, the first president of the BHDS responded to the overtures made by the AfD by stating, 'For us, home is not only the place where I was born and grew up. Home is not defined by origin, nationality, skin colour or religion. For us, home is the place where I feel at home and secure. Our Christian view of humanity is clearly different from the ideas and statements of the AfD'<sup>11</sup> (Zerback 2020). This case might be understood as an illustration of the resilience of systems such as organisations and communities consisting in a multi-systemic interactive process that takes place between different systems and subsystems (BHDS, BdSJ, member clubs of the umbrella organisation, political organisations like the AfD party, the press, individuals such as the first president of the BHDS etc.) and at different scales (e.g., following a change of rules, declarations of incompatibility with the AfD party are now allowed by clubs). In this way, the resilience of the BHDS and the BdSJ can be understood not only as resilience in the sense of a process of resistance, but also as a process of adaptation and transformation as these organisations implement far-reaching changes in the wake of the AfD's attempts at influence and appropriation.

At the level of individual marksmen's clubs, the field research also revealed processes of resilience that we might consider as episodes of resistance of these clubs to radical(ising) messages and their messengers. For example, in two cases where individual marksmen made statements or comments reflecting xenophobic or extreme right-wing sympathies, the club's management responded by speaking to those concerned. Even if it is not clear whether these conversations led to a real shift in attitudes, the conversations stopped these behaviours. Another example is the case of two marksmen who posted right-wing content on Facebook, as a result of which they were excluded from their clubs. Anton, from whose club a marksman was expelled, alongside those fellow marksmen who defended him, supports such strict measures:

Because it's just not tolerable. I think the marksmen's club is very clear on that point. I think it is right and symbolic to say. Because we can't claim that, 'Everyone is welcome here, no matter what skin colour, no matter what cultural background' while, on the other hand, tolerating that. Or to say, 'Hey, you – don't do that again'. It's not appropriate. (Anton)

### *Factors of Resilience in the Marksmen's Club Milieu*

As at the individual level, such examples of responses to radical(ising) messages and their messengers can be used to identify possible background conditions that work as factors of resilience in the milieu or individual clubs within it. These examples suggest that certain values associated with the club milieu are evoked in rejecting radical(ising) messages.

In the example of the statement of incompatibility of the BHDS umbrella organisation with the AfD party above, the first president of the organisation directly referenced the importance of Christian values in taking this stand. The prevalence of these Christian values in his marksmen's club was also cited by Peter when explaining how he had become conflicted about the 'extremist ideas' within a neo-Nazi group of which he had been a member at that time. In his marksmen's club, he said, he learned also to help and stand up for other people, challenge bullying and voice his views in a democratic way. This suggests that Christian values, as well as democratic structures and a strong sense of community in the marksmen's clubs (Kerst 2021b), can also contribute to the individual resilience of marksmen in resisting radical(ising) messages and their messengers and ensure pathways of relative non-radicalisation, or, as in the case of Peter, deradicalisation.

The field research also revealed a certain culture of openness in some marksmen's clubs – as indicated by Anton's reflections above. This was reflected also in the positions stated by members of marksmen's clubs' management boards, when speaking for example at marksmen's festivals. In addition to openly speaking out against racism, right-wing populism and right-wing extremism, they also emphasised cosmopolitan values, open-mindedness, diversity, tolerance and multicultural coexistence. This culture of openness corresponds to the open-mindedness of respondents noted above and, as such, shapes, or at least reinforces, such a disposition among individual club members. That this culture of openness is a factor that protects young people in her club from radicalisation is articulated directly by Lara:

Because the club already conveys such an open image. We accept everyone and if then maybe people from other cultures come to the club and you live near each other and then you get to know something about their culture, but you can also show them the marksmen's club and your own culture, this helps. . . . So, it was not explicitly said that it was open to everybody. That was just somehow clear, because nobody was ever looked at in a strange way or . . . it was always out of the question that people from other cultures or nationalities couldn't come into the club. That was somehow irrelevant. It was other things

that mattered – whether people were nice or so on, not their origin or accent or anything. (Lara)

In this way, a culture of openness appears to constitute a factor of resilience towards radical(ising) messages and their messengers at the club level and act as an effective non-radicalising force.

### **Normalisations of Radical(ising) Messages and Their Messengers**

Alongside the widespread rejection of radical(ising) messages and their messengers discussed above, this study also revealed examples of where such messages were received uncritically or were played down, tolerated, accepted, perceived as normal, or evaluated as benevolent and positive; to a degree at least, they became normalised. Such normalisation was found both inside and outside the marksmen's club context and is explored below drawing on two particular examples and focusing on the interactive, contextual and situational dimensions of the normalisation of such messages and its implications for radicalisation.

The first example concerns the attitude among some respondents towards a violent right-wing extremist group active in the district of one of the researched marksmen's clubs. These respondents appeared forgiving or accepting of this group, members of whom were also visibly present at their club's marksmen's festival. Not only did their presence go unchallenged but I observed interactions, such as greetings and conversations, between some marksmen and members of the group. One respondent with whom I spoke even felt that the presence of this group helped maintain safety at the festival:

Researcher: And what do you know about them [the right-wing extremist group]?

Steven: [breathing noticeably and pausing a few seconds before answering] They are also ordinary people [tinged with laughter] like you and me. Right? Well, really calm, they don't come here [to the festival] and play up or whatever. I have never seen that. They don't want that either. They really do keep law and order here [at the festival] because their presence is a bit of a deterrent, I think.

Other respondents told me that, when walking past them or chatting to them, members of the group had not acted in a hostile way to them or others; their members were 'nice' or 'harmless'. Although considering the group to be 'far-right', Anne believed that they would not act violently: 'They might say, when a person [with foreign appearance] had gone, they



might get upset about the person or say, "shame on Germany" or whatever. But I don't think they're really that extreme. Or even radical enough to attack someone who walks past them. I don't believe that' (Anne). The group may have been accepted at the festival because respondents, and other marksmen, were, to various degrees, acquainted with the group.<sup>12</sup> Of course, the respondents in this study also encountered the group primarily in everyday situations in which they did not behave violently and this might also explain why the group was not considered radical.

The second example concerns a number of young male members of another marksmen's club, who are 'right-wing' and frequently make racist and right-wing jokes and statements within the club milieu itself. Mona, another member of this club, explained that she responded to such jokes and statements with a gently disapproving 'come on, boys'. She accepts their behaviour as 'all right', explaining that, '. . . they only talk among themselves. They don't have a go at anyone or anything. . . . But uhm, as long as they just talk, I don't care'. She would only intervene, she said, 'if they were really yelling at someone and attacking someone or whatever'. When I asked Mona, like other respondents, if she thought that her marksmen's club could do anything to counter radicalisation, she felt that, on a small scale, they could talk critically, for example, to AfD voters. However, she does not believe that anything could be done to stop radicalisation in the group of young marksmen she mentioned:

Because we are also among ourselves, because we are also predominantly German. If someone has something against something or somebody, then he says, 'yes, for this and that reason'. And uhm then you talk more about it and then it is often the case that you say, 'oh yes, that's right and so on'. And then you just have this one-track thinking again. . . . Well, there are also discussions, but that is a bit difficult and it is quite rare to be divided, for example, when it comes to foreigners. (Mona)

Mona's descriptions of the contexts in which the normalisation of radical(ising) messages and their messengers manifests indicates the processuality, interactivity, contextuality and situativity of such normalisations. These situations are ones in which club members feel 'among ourselves', in which, due to the relative ethnic homogeneity of the group, she thinks, others, such as 'foreigners', are spoken about and discussed in a uniform manner, leading to individuals confirming, rather than challenging, each other's opinions. In addition, as in the case of the acceptance of the right-wing extremist group, racist and right-wing jokes and statements of fellow marksmen are perceived as relatively unproblematic because they did not involve acts of physical violence. This view was encoun-

tered among other respondents with right-wing persons in their close social environment, who, like Mona, would only find that a real problem if they were (verbally) violent towards others or openly right-wing extremist. Thus, Maria, another member of this club, considered the jokes and statements of her fellow marksmen as 'a bit radical' but not extreme; they would become the latter only if they started 'to distribute flyers or conduct propaganda in the right-wing direction. . . . Or if they were beating up people, which fortunately they don't'. 'As long as it stays with some drunken jokes', she continues, 'I think you can still tell them to take a break'. Thus, within the respondent set, radical(ising) messages and their messengers were rejected, among other things, when they were perceived as right-wing and especially as radical/extreme right-wing or as radical/extreme in general or accompanied by (political) violence. If this was not the case, and radical(ising) messages and their messengers did not cross the line into the attitudinal or behavioural support for political violence and/or were not associated with organised (violent) radical/extremist right-wing behaviour, like neo-Nazism, they were, in contrast, normalised by some respondents.

The implications of the normalisation of radical(ising) messages and their messengers are two-fold. First, such normalisation facilitates the expression of hostile attitudes towards certain groups, expressed as anti-Muslim racism or right-wing extremist attitudes. This is a cause for concern since such attitudes correlate significantly with the acceptance of, and willingness to use, violence (against immigrants and other groups) (Zick, Küpper and Hövermann 2011: 118–21; Küpper, Berghan and Rees 2019: 194; Zick et al. 2019: 99–102) or with the intention to vote for anti-immigrant parties or to discriminate against immigrants (Zick, Küpper and Hövermann 2011: 115–18, 121). Second, this normalisation can provide an entry point and fertile soil for extreme right-wing closed-mindedness or trigger entry into corresponding milieus across the right-wing political spectrum. Thus, such attitudes can be elements of, or facilitate, attitudinal/cognitive and behavioural radicalisation processes. When radical(ising) messages and their messengers are normalised, they can also lead to a social climate in which, as was visible in the case of the right-wing extremist group at the marksmen's festival and in Mona's situational descriptions, no need for interventions, counteractions or distancing seems necessary and in which critical opinions are not challenged or are even confirmed. This increases the risk of non-radicalised individuals being radicalised or radical and extreme individuals having their views and behaviours confirmed, as, it might be assumed, was the case in the marksmen's club in which the murderer of Walter Lübcke was a member. In a television interview about this case, the chairman of the marksmen's

club in which the perpetrator and his alleged accomplice (who has since been acquitted of this charge) were members reportedly claimed that neither of these individuals had been noticed as a 'right-wing extremist'. He is also quoted as saying that 'politics, however, had been discussed . . . After all, many people did not like the immigration policy'<sup>13</sup> (Feldmann and Seidel 2021). This does not mean that disagreement with immigration policy is always radical or extreme, but in this case, it is possible that the individuals mentioned felt confirmed or at least not contradicted in their radical or extreme views.

Arguably, the tendency towards the normalisation of negative and prejudicial attitudes towards (minority) groups and radical or extreme right-wing views, or at least the tendency to see them as problematic only when they are linked with far-right parties or right-wing extremist organisations or when they cross the line into political violence, is evident in German society more widely. Such attitudes are not only found on the radical/extreme and violent fringes of society but exist in what has been called 'extremism of the centre' (Decker, Kiess and Brähler 2016), in the political mainstream, or in the social centre of society (*Mitte der Gesellschaft*) (Schröter 2019b; Zick, Küpper and Berghan 2019; Zick, Küpper and Schröter 2021). Over recent years, this normalisation of radical(ising) messages and their messengers across the right-wing of the political spectrum has become more permanent or even increased in the social centre due to the mainstreaming of the extreme and a corresponding shift to the right (Brähler et al. 2016; Melzer 2016; Decker and Brähler 2018; Schröter 2019a; Kerst 2021a; Zick, Küpper and Schröter 2021). Ultimately, such normalisation of radical(ising) messages and their messengers can weaken and erode possible resources to prevent and counter radicalisation in the marksmen's club milieu and society as a whole.

## Conclusion

This chapter has explored how young members of selected marksmen's clubs in Germany, as well as the clubs themselves and their umbrella organisations, engage with, and respond to, radical(ising) messages and their messengers in concrete, everyday situations. It identified the existence of a spectrum of responses from outright rejection to the normalisation of such messages and those who convey them. Drawing on the latest developments in the theorisation of resilience to radicalisation, it has been suggested that these findings support a multi-systemic, processual and interactional understanding of resilience and non-radicalisation. This is reflected in the concrete processes identified of *resistance* to rad-

ical(ising) messages and their messengers but also *adaptation* to such messages and messengers in individuals' immediate social circle. The empirical research also identified processes by which radical messages were halted (by suppressing political discussion in friendship circles or removing those conveying them from one's communicative circle) or disputed, through dialogical engagement. In this way, individuals in these milieus either remained non-radicalised, or showed partial radicalisation, often interrupted by episodes of resilience (for example expressed in feelings of shame or reflection), or even engaged in informal radicalisation prevention by challenging the views of those conveying radical(ising) messages.

Alongside the importance of the situational dimensions of the encounter with radical(ising) messages, the study allowed the identification of a number of factors of resilience to radicalisation. At the individual level, these included personal capacities for reflection, open-mindedness, empathy and the experience of emotions such as shame as well as the presence of certain values such as humanism and the negative evaluation of (right-wing) radicalism/extremism and (political) violence. At the level of the marksmen's club milieu, Christian values, democratic structures, a strong sense of community as well as a culture of openness were identified as factors that can also increase the resilience of individual marksmen towards the adversity of radical(ising) messages and their messengers. While these factors demonstrate resilience as *resistance*, the study also identified resilience as a process of *adaptation* and *transformation* in the example of the multiscale interaction of a marksmen's umbrella organisation with the far-right AfD party, following the latter's attempts to influence and appropriate parts of the milieu. Through this dual-level (individual and milieu) approach, the empirical data drawn on in this chapter not only demonstrate the interactive and processual nature of resilience, and its non-radicalising effects at intra- and extra-individual levels, but also provide insight into how extra-individual resilience processes at the marksmen's club milieu level can impact individual processes of resilience and non-radicalisation.

At the other end of the response spectrum, the interactive dynamics of the normalisation of radical(ising) messages and their messengers were explored. This discussion drew on empirical examples of encounters in the neighbourhood, or at marksmen's festivals, with right-wing extremists and of responses to racist and right-wing statements and jokes within a marksmen's youth group. Such normalisations appeared to take place first and foremost where the messages, and messengers, encountered were perceived as not supporting political violence (attitudinally or behaviourally), or as not associated with organised (violent) right-wing rad-

ical/extremist behaviour, such as neo-Nazism. Such normalisation, it was suggested, could counteract factors that prevent radicalisation and fuel radicalisation processes also on a societal level.

This study of young marksmen and markswomen, their clubs, and the broader marksmen's club milieu has identified factors that contribute to explaining resilience to radical(ising) messages (and thus to non-radicalisation and the prevention of radicalisation) but also to the normalisation of such messages and their messengers, that can undermine these factors. Encounters with radical(ising) messages and their messengers take place in everyday life and everyday situations where, in the course of interactions that take place there, such factors of resilience may develop or become activated or strengthened. As a consequence, individuals, and milieus, may reflect and adjust what they consider legitimate and what is too radical, what should be criticised and what should not, but are able to resist attitudinal or behavioural support for political violence and remain relatively non-radicalised. However, the encounter of radical(ising) messages and agents in such everyday situations may also lead to their underestimation, toleration, acceptance, perception as normal or evaluation as benevolent and positive; they become, in some sense, normalised. Thus, the study of such everyday situations, with their specific interactions and dynamics, is critical for understanding radicalisation, non-radicalisation and the prevention of radicalisation.

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## NOTES

1. In the marksmen's club milieu, the terms 'marksman' (*Schütze*) or 'marksmen' (*Schützen*) are the terms generally used to refer to members even by female club members, i.e. markswomen (*Schützinnen*). Thus, unless referring explicitly to markswomen, this chapter will use these terms whilst recognising that they refer to people of two or more genders.
2. For a more detailed history of (German) marksmanship and its various stages of development, see: Reintges 1963; Sauer mann 1983; Stambolis 1999; Crombie 2016; and Kreyenschulte 2017. On the interesting and complex history of German marksmanship during National Socialism, see Borggräfe 2010.
3. The high value attached to tradition is evident in one of the few empirical studies on marksmanship, which found that 69% of the surveyed marksmen (n=3,871) thought the term 'tradition' 'strongly' applies to marksmen's clubs, and 28% responded that it 'applies' (Leineweber et al. 2020: 60, 70).
4. Marksmen's festivals (*Schützenfeste*) are probably the most famous of the marksmen's customs. They are annual events organised by every marksmen's club. In many cases, marksmen's festivals are not merely club events but function as whole village, town or city fêtes or folk festivals.
5. The clubs I researched can be categorised more as clubs that focus on traditions, customs and sociability, although they also engage (to various degrees of professionalism) in shooting sports.
6. Traditionally, marksmen's clubs were largely men-only clubs, and although this has gradually changed, some marksmen's clubs still do not allow women as active members. This was the case in one of the clubs I researched.
7. Camilla reported a sense of injustice – articulated by other respondents also – about the perceived favouring of refugees and immigrants over herself or the German population, for example in terms of state support (Kerst 2021a: 38–44).
8. Some respondents did also mention 'left-wing extremists' and, less frequently, 'Muslims', 'Islamist terrorists' and the 'Islamic State' in connection with these terms.
9. Representative German long-term studies on right-wing extremist attitudes in Germany show that only a very small proportion of the German population has a 'closed right-wing extremist worldview' (1.7% in the most recent of these studies) and that there is a broad rejection of extreme right-wing ideological content in the German population (Küpper, Zick and Rump 2021: 84–91).
10. The BHDS was founded in 1928 and is the largest umbrella organisation for its so-called 'marksmen's brotherhoods' (*Schützenbruderschaften*). It claims to have 400,000 members distributed across almost 1,300 clubs (European Community of Historic Guilds n.d.).
11. Translated by the author.

12. However, no respondent was a member of this group and as far as I know neither were any marksmen of this club.
13. Translated by the author.

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