

Ideological Incorrectness beyond ‘Political Religion’

Discourse on Nazi Ideology among Scandinavian National Socialist Intellectuals
1933-1945

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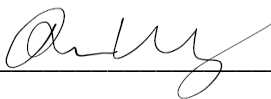
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Declaration of Authorship

I, Rebecca Wennberg, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

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Abstract

The concept 'political religion' has become the epitome of the 'ideological turn' in Holocaust research: the idea of the Nazi regime's aim to replace Christianity and let its ideology function as a 'political religion'. But the heretical nature of National Socialism that has increasingly found its way into contemporary research remains untheorised in this context. This study seeks to address this gap by introducing the concept of 'ideological incorrectness' – a first step towards a re-theorisation of 'political religion' that acknowledges the ideological divergence and the transgressive mindset so characteristic of the Nazis.

With ideological divergence in mind, this thesis approaches Nazi ideology not from its 'generic' centre in Nazi Germany, but from its political peripheries. Combining analyses from archival material with text based research it examines a selected group of Danish and Norwegian National Socialists who went from being leaders of small, sectarian and pan-Germanic movements in their respective home countries throughout the 1930s, to becoming high-ranked SS men following the Nazi occupation of Denmark and Norway on 9 April 1940. The study reveals that contrary to the notion that National Socialism functioned as a substitute religion for Christianity, their hostility towards Christian confessionalism made them reject the idea of a 'political religion'. The study further demonstrates how these individuals even used this religious critique in attacks against aspects of the Nazi regime that they deemed dogmatic.

The contributions of this study revolve around conceptualising an alternative angle to 'political religion' that assumes that contrary to 'correctness', individuals were often incorrect towards official ideological doctrines. This incorrectness, in turn, does not equate with a lack of Nazi conviction. Far from it, the Scandinavian Nazis in this study regarded their 'ideological incorrectness' as a core value of National Socialism. The study thus contributes to the understanding of National Socialism in Scandinavia 1933-1945, while at the same time suggesting broader patterns that will advance research on National Socialism more generally.

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Introduction

There is no doubt about the interpretative importance of racial ideology to understanding the Third Reich. But this view has now turned into a catechism, depreciated by surplus use and acquiring a metaphysical explanatory status.¹
Alon Confino

Ironically, the force of Nazi racial propaganda seems to have directed not only the Third Reich but also the academic practice of those who study the regime. Alon Confino's analogy between the scholarly hype around the ideology concept and a religious catechism is not only a very compelling one, but it is also an implicit critique of the concept that has become the epitome of this 'ideological turn' in Holocaust research: the idea of the Nazi regime's aim to replace Christianity and let its ideology function as a 'political religion'. Like Confino's point, the present study finds that the concept of 'political religion' has turned into a religion of its own, driven by a rigid notion of Nazi ideology based on a set of racist doctrines. The heretical nature of National Socialism that has increasingly found its way into contemporary research remains untheorised in this context. This study introduces the concept of 'ideological incorrectness' to explain that if National Socialism was ever to apply as a 'religion', it would require analytical room for ideological divergence and the transgressive mindset so characteristic of the Nazis' 'uncompromising generation'.²

With ideological divergence in mind, this thesis approaches Nazi ideology not from its 'generic' centre in Nazi Germany, but from its political peripheries. At the same time, its peripheral position is a debatable label as Nazi propaganda regarded Scandinavia as the epicentre of Aryan supremacy. Precisely the Scandinavian ideological proximity to National Socialism combined with its geopolitical distance creates an ideal setting for discussing both the limitations and potential of 'political religion'. In other words, how did the peripheral yet in Nazi rhetoric 'pure-blooded Aryans' relate to the Nazi 'political religion'? This thesis explores the way a selected group of Scandinavian National Socialists envisioned the relationship between Christianity and National Socialism, and between their nation-specific National Socialism and the Third Reich. They believed in an

¹ Alon Confino 'Why did the Nazis Burn the Hebrew Bible? Nazi Germany, Representations of the Past, and the Holocaust', *The Journal of Modern History*, 84 (2012), p. 372.

² Michael Wildt's notion of how the Nazi leadership was comprised of an 'uncompromising generation' will be discussed extensively throughout this thesis.

undogmatic, heretic National Socialism to the extent that they rejected dichotomies between ideology and religion in the first place.

Within the timeframe of 1930 to 1945, I examine the intellectual life of a few Danish and Norwegian National Socialists who went from being leaders of small, sectarian and pan-Germanic movements in their respective home countries throughout the 1930s, to becoming high-ranked SS men and Waffen-SS soldiers following the Nazi occupation of Denmark and Norway on 9 April 1940. Beyond stereotypes of ‘Aryan warriors’, these individuals rejected the catechism of a particularly *German* racial ideology. They were *incorrect* with respect to the idea central to the theory of ‘political religion’: they objected to the assumption that Christianity and National Socialism were ideologically incompatible. Contrary to the notion that National Socialism functioned as a substitute religion for Christianity, the histories of the individuals presented in my study reveal how their hostility towards Christian confessionalism made them reject the idea of a ‘political religion’. The thesis goes on to describe how these individuals even used this religious critique in attacks against aspects of the Nazi regime that they deemed dogmatic. In other words, these Scandinavian Nazis ascribed features of ‘political religion’ theory to Nazi Germany, but they did so in order to separate true National Socialism from the ‘political religion’ of a totalitarian regime.

With the Scandinavian histories in mind, I offer an alternative angle to ‘political religion’ that assumes that contrary to ‘correctness’, individuals were often *incorrect* towards official ideological doctrines. The thesis introduces the concept of ‘ideological incorrectness’ to illustrate that the incorrectness does not equate with a lack of Nazi conviction. Far from it, the Nazis in this study regarded their ‘ideological incorrectness’ as a core value of National Socialism.

I

Scandinavian Heretics

When the notion of ‘incorrectness’ plays such a major role in a thesis devoted to the study of what it is that defines Nazi ideology, one needs to address the question of relativism. When does a history of Nazi pluralism turn into a practice of historiographical relativism? Indeed, the thoughts on National Socialism among this group of Scandinavian intellectuals as they are presented in this thesis will

come across as wishful thinking, naivety and perhaps even extraordinary sophistry, considering our knowledge today about the Nazi crimes and its violent ideology. So naïve that one could raise the question of whether these intellectuals count as ‘real Nazis’ or just delusional political idealists.

In philosophical terms, intellectuals like Martin Heidegger would embrace the idea of relativism against dogmatic absolutism: ‘Philosophy is the opposite to all comfort and assurance. It is turbulence, the turbulence into which a man is spun’.³ These are words not dissimilar to how historian Peter Fritzsche described the Nazi modernist revolt against the morals and principles of truth of the ‘old world’: ‘With every step, the political adventurer as much as the modernist poet or painter revealed ground that was tremulous, breaking apart, unclear. Liberal certainties that proposed to reveal the coherence of the world appeared completely inadequate.’⁴ The Scandinavian National Socialists analysed in the present study found in National Socialism a world-view that corresponded to this revolt against dogmas and the simultaneous acceptance of uncertainty. The line between a fanatical and perhaps just a naïve dream of *Volksgemeinschaft* and the active participation in genocide is as blurry for historians today as it was for many contemporary National Socialists. Julian Young raises this issue in his work on Heidegger’s presumed sympathy with Nazism. As a first step, just as Young sought to ‘establish what National Socialism really meant to Heidegger’⁵, the present thesis focuses primarily on the same point. For the individuals in this study, their National Socialist ideas, albeit both historically and theoretically flawed, nevertheless worked to define National Socialism for them. What Heidegger identified as the ‘inner truth’ of Nazism (thoughts that his defender Hannah Arendt wrote off as nothing but naïvety) – how Nazism challenged dogmas and encouraged genuine thinking – is a thought the reader of the thesis will recognise in statements made by the Scandinavian intellectuals chosen for this study. Young’s question of whether Heidegger’s ‘private National Socialism’ makes Heidegger count as a Nazi, equally applies to the Scandinavians:

Did Heidegger, in 1933, embrace this century’s paradigm of evil? Did he [...] subscribe to views on race [as] the logical outcome of which was the Holocaust? Or did he, on the other hand, subscribe to a ‘private National Socialism’ so private as to be something which, when properly understood, no right-thinking person would wish to take exception to? If the latter is the case, then the worst Heidegger can be convicted of is the political naivety

³ Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude* [1929-30] (trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 19.

⁴ Peter Fritzsche, ‘Nazi Modern’ *Modernism/Modernity*, 3:1 (1996), p 12.

⁵ Julian Young, *Heidegger, philosophy, Nazism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 6.

of supposing that the Nazi movement could even become the embodiment of his conception of its 'inner truth and greatness.'⁶

Heidegger's 'private National Socialism' indicates a Nazi world-view with roots much broader and deeper than what any 'political religion' could achieve in terms of indoctrination. In Michael Wildt's view, the Nazis were part of a much broader 'uncompromising generation' to which we can trace a part of the explanation behind the Holocaust. But it also tells us about the expressions of this transgressive mentality beyond the symbolic killing fields, gas chambers and Nuremberg parades that works to create distance between "us" and "them". Fritzsche acknowledges this elusive task of finding Nazism behind its 'end-result' – the Holocaust – to see the more 'humane' aspects of Nazism that attracted individuals to the ideology in the first place:

It requires that we focus less on unintended consequences, more on underemphasized premises, and that we view National Socialism as a distinctive, horrifying, but nonetheless plausible version of social renovation. That is not easy, for it makes the Nazis much more familiar, much more like us; it undermines cherished notions of how different "they" are from "us" or "we" are from "them."⁷

The Scandinavians in this study raised sharp critique of the regime. A critique that could compete with the most perceptive commentaries from contemporary Nazi opponents. Yet, they ascribed humanism and social responsibility to the 'true' core of National Socialism. Many readers of the intellectual outputs of the Scandinavians might be struck by the absurdity of this combination. One might also come to raise the question of 'how much of a Nazi' these individuals really were as they frequently relativized Nazi ideology to fit their needs. The answer this thesis seeks to give is that the development in research on Nazi ideology, driven by the works of Fritzsche and Wildt, has come to a point where we can situate this absurdness into an analytical framework. 'Ideological incorrectness' is this thesis' way to address the plurality of Nazi identities and conflicting views. Heidegger's 'private' Nazism did not make him less of a National Socialist. Indeed, compared to Heidegger, the Scandinavians in this study satisfy more of the standard criteria; they were SS-men and their political activism in National Socialist circles was high. Despite how different their ideas on the meaning of Nazism might appear to the images of the Nazi totalitarian dogmas and the Holocaust, these ideas nevertheless document the nature of National Socialism in Scandinavia. By drawing links between

⁶ Ibid, p. 11.

⁷ Fritzsche, 'Nazi modern', pp. 3-4.

these ideas and the new historiographical research on Nazism in Europe, moreover, the thesis points to areas in international historiography where the fear of the Nazis being more like ‘us’ than ‘them’ persists to demonise the image of the ‘real Nazi’.

Beyond the fruitfulness of comparison per se, these case studies thus complement each other and provide an argument that reaches beyond Scandinavia and towards the wider historiography of Nazi ideology. The thesis follows a relatively small group of individuals and their subsequent entries in SS-led organisations during Nazi occupation. The Norwegian *Ragnarok* movement has a central role, but only 10 out of its approximately 100 members feature in this study. The same goes for the Danish case study, where the focus on the milieu around the intellectual Ejnar Vaaben includes fewer than 10 close individual studies. Despite its narrow focus, the individuals and movements figuring in this thesis will throw light on historiographical issues relevant for contemporary historical research on both Scandinavia and other areas that once were parts of Nazi-occupied Europe. Through their radical outlooks, their contacts with the DNSAP leadership in Nazi Germany and their wealth of intellectual output between 1930 and 1945, these empirical case studies confirm and validate the analytical and less geographically-defined arguments that are made in chapters 1 and 2 of the thesis regarding the development of ‘political religion’-theory. Effectively, the thesis does not offer an extensive account of the political development of Nazi splinter parties in Scandinavia, as one might assume the standard geo-political comparative framework to be. Instead, its focus lies in analysing the National Socialist discourse among Nazi intellectuals in Scandinavia – both nationally and from a transnational perspective, to make a wider point about how we can understand National Socialism in Nazi Germany and the rest of Europe in the years 1930-1945. From that point of view, the selected case studies respond not only to the lack of Scandinavian studies in this particular field, but to a much wider gap in research dealing with the history of Nazi occupation and the intellectual discourses on National Socialism that arise from this political situation. In that sense, this intellectual discourse did not develop in a vacuum isolated from the political reality. Thus it is also important to stress that while this thesis is not operating within perpetrator studies in a strict way (i.e. this thesis does not seek to document the direct involvement of these Scandinavians in mass shootings or deportations) there are of course grey areas as most individuals in this study were active collaborators through SS involvement. Certainly, historical records do prove that the *Ragnarok* member Per Imerslund served in Division Wiking during a time when the division was involved in active participation in the Holocaust. In the timeframe of Imerslund’s voluntary service from July to October 1941, Wiking

passed through areas that were marked by the systematic slaughter of Jewish civilians.⁸ That being said, this is not a study about perpetrators' motivations, but the research into perpetrator motivations and its linkage to the wider field of studies on Nazi ideology makes it a relevant area for the present study.

This thesis is not the first to group these individuals together in an overall analysis. In fact, in the early 1930s the NSDAP found the National Socialist profiles of these individuals to be of particular interest to the Aryan visions of Nazi Germany. To the Nazi regime, the small Danish circle of individuals including Ejnar Vaaben and Wilfred Petersen and the group of Norwegians who were later to form the *Ragnarok* movement represented particularly promising National Socialist forces in Scandinavia. They were promising to the Nazi regime because they were, according to historians Terje Emberland and Matthew Kott, heretics.⁹ Himmler had a particular focus on those Scandinavian activists who stood in opposition to the major indigenous Nazi parties in Denmark and Norway, namely Frits Clausen's *Danmarks Nationalsocialistiske Arbejderparti* (DNSAP) and Vidkun Quisling's *Nasjonal Samling* (NS).¹⁰ The image of Clausen's DNSAP and Quisling's NS that appears in this thesis reflects the image provided by its opponents. *Ragnarok* and men like Vaaben often exaggerated the ideological gap between the pan-Germanic splinter movements on the one hand and DNSAP and NS on the other. This gap was used as a rhetorical device in proclaiming ideological originality at the time.¹¹

Therefore, by virtue of their radicalism, this group of individuals were on several occasions during the 1930s invited to Germany by the German Nazi party to attend ceremonies and receive ideological

⁸ Ibid., p.371. Emberland and Røghvedt refer to F.H. Hinsley, *British Intelligence in the Second World War*, vol. 2 (London: HMSO, 1981): 'Radiotelegraphic messages, sent from Einsatzgruppen to Berlin were caught by British Intelligence and reported that "Norwegian battalions" participated in the final solution, in Galicia, early July 1941. At the time, the only Norwegians in south Russia belonged to Division Wiking.' Emberland and Røghvedt, *Det Ariske Idol*, p. 319.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 81–83.

¹⁰ Øystein Sørensen, *Hitler eller Quisling: Ideologiske Brytninger i Nasjonal Samling 1940–45* (Oslo: J.W. Cappelens Forlag, 1989), p. 71.

¹¹ Indeed, the image of DNSAP as simply the German NSDAP's 'puppet party' is questionable, considering DNSAP's various attempts to distance itself from the German Nazi party, for example by propagating the relationship between National Socialism and the Nordic heritage and thus implying the necessity to consider the race principle from a Danish perspective too. Frits Clausen's article from April 1933 was re-published in 1942 where Clausen continuously emphasise the racial bond between the Danes and the Germans; see Clausen, 'Forholdet Dansk-Tysk', *Dansk Udsyn*, 2:2 (1942), pp. 72–73. For more insight on Quisling's ideological profile and its divergences from Nazi Germany, see Hans Olaf Brevig and Ivo Figueiredo, *Den norske fascismen. Nasjonal Samling 1933–1940* (Oslo: Pax, 2002).

education.¹² Emberland describes the ‘heretical’ *Ragnarok* as the true representative of Nazism in Norway in its ongoing attempts to convince Quisling’s NS of its racially ideological philosophy.¹³ The risk of viewing *Ragnarok* as a pure political pro-Nazi organ obscures the fact that the gods *Ragnarok* were to conquer were as much metaphysical as political.¹⁴ In a similar manner, and in the limited research on the subject, Danish historians describe Vaaben as a significant Danish Nazi in terms of his intellectual position, but less so in terms of political influence.¹⁵

As we shall see in this thesis, shared experiences also shaped the internal relations between the Norwegian and Danish individuals. It is not surprising to note that their identities and future relations with Nazi Germany gradually became hard to separate from each other, and the thesis thus speaks of an emerging shared identity of ‘ideological incorrectness’ among these Scandinavians. If we assume, as Confino argues that contemporary research often tends to do, that National Socialist ideology emerged from the doctrines from a political centre, then the individuals of the present study were indeed ‘ideologically incorrect’. Their ‘ideological incorrectness’ and thus their strength to resist the doctrines of any establishment was in their view a demonstration of their true National Socialist identities. This particular point is discussed throughout the thesis, but from different angles: The first two analytical chapters describe how scholarship both today and through the works of Hannah Arendt and Eric Voegelin, stresses the Nazi revolt against dogmatism and conventional political ideologies. The empirical chapters then work to illustrate this point historically through the Scandinavian case study. Considering that the Nazi regime early on praised their heretical nature, the thesis discusses the potential for viewing ‘ideological incorrectness’ as a central feature of National Socialist ideology more generally. Emberland concluded by observing a paradox in how the *Ragnarok* editor and leader Hans S. Jacobsen ‘could adhere to a totalitarian ideology, but yet be emotionally against dictatorships and totalitarian tendencies’.¹⁶ It is, however, only a paradox when assuming a doctrinal rigidity in National Socialist ideology. The notion of ‘ideological incorrectness’ will be used throughout this thesis as a tool to demystify precisely these kinds of ‘paradoxes’.

¹² Emberland and Kott, *Himmlers Norge*, pp. 81–83.

¹³ Terje Emberland, *Religion og Rase: Nyhedenskap og Nazisme i Norge 1933–45* (Oslo: Humanist Forlag, 2003), pp. 15–16.

¹⁴ Emberland, *Rase*, p. 263.

¹⁵ Andreas Monrad Pedersen, “‘Den nordiske tanke’ – bidrag til en politisk biografi af Ejnar Vaaben’ in *Fra Mellemkrigstid til Efterkrigstid*, Henrik Dethlefsen and Henrik Lundbak (eds.) (Copenhagen: Københavns Universitet, 1998), pp. 117–134; John T. Lauridsen “‘Den første graensereder’ – Ejnar Vaaben og den berlinske linie’, *Fund og Forsking*, 50 (2011), pp. 411–419. See more on this historiographical discussion in chapter 3.

¹⁶ Emberland, *Rase*, p. 294.

II

Sources

The point this thesis seeks to make about ‘ideological incorrectness’ is not made with the aim of separating these organisations and individuals from the wider Nazi milieu in Scandinavia and Germany. In contrast, the thesis deliberately draws from external sources outside the isolated case studies to prove broader ideological patterns. Therefore, the thesis refers to various contributors in the *Ragnarok* pamphlet, the cooperation between *Ragnarok* and Eugen Nielsen’s *Fronten*, as well as the activities of men like Wilfred Petersen, Carl Frants Popp-Madsen and Jørgen Skeby, all of whom featured in the circles close to Vaaben and Andersen.

Scandinavian historiography has compiled a wealth of historical studies on the political development of indigenous Nazism before and during the Nazi occupation. The present comparative study has thus taken a different direction in focusing firstly on the ideological exchange between Norwegian and Danish splinter parties, and secondly on the way a shared experience in facing the ‘official’ ideology of Nazi Germany informed this exchange. The approach therefore requires a broader base of sources than, for example, the archival material from Danish state institutions before, during and after the war, and German wartime records. The thesis combines these sources with the wealth of information left behind by those organisations and individuals examined. Findings from post-war trial records as well as the documented correspondence between the German occupation offices in Denmark and Norway and Berlin proved critical in framing the political context in which these actors found themselves. But these frameworks are not novel, and the thesis does not seek originality in its account of the political and organisational context.

It is in the less explored personal archives of Ejnar Vaaben and Anders Malling where this thesis has departed and found a way to connect the intellectual works of these individuals to the intellectual outputs of their Norwegian and Danish colleagues. In combination with an extensive reading of individual contributions to papers and pamphlets, the works of Vaaben and Malling have thrown new light on the material produced by both *Ragnarok* and Aage H. Andersen’s *Dansk Antijødisk Liga*. While studies on the two already exist, the thesis offers an original comparative approach to their ideological profiles as well as illuminating unexplored areas of their works.

III

Willing Scandinavians as Ordinary Europeans

Confino's notion of 'the metaphysical explanatory status' of ideology is not confined to studies on Nazi Germany. The ideological warrior, with his sadism, brutality and willingness, has become a dominating feature in representations of those Europeans who collaborated with Nazi Germany. Scandinavia, the Germanic 'highlands' in Nazi rhetoric, is a case study that more effectively than many others puts the finger on the issues at stake in the 'ideological turn'. A division between Nazi policymakers and 'ordinary men' marked post-war historiography on perpetrators and it manifested in debates between the interpretive schools of intentionalism and functionalism. On the level of individual perpetrators, Dirk Moses has clarified the debate as one between structuralist explanations – such as contextual constraints of the inherent modernity of Nazi bureaucracy, and socio-psychological theories on obedience¹⁷ – and emphasis on the role of Nazi ideology as its own logic to radicalisation.¹⁸ In general terms, as the so-called 'new perpetrator research' emerged in the 1990s, the functionalist–intentionalist debate increasingly lost its analytical value.¹⁹ The notion of 'ideology' as a driving force to the Holocaust was transferred from being a factor confined to the Nazi leadership to include the agency of the masses as studies on Holocaust collaboration increased.

The dimension of collaboration also put the image of the ideologically 'willing' perpetrator into a wider geographical perspective. Parallel to the ideological turn was a tendency towards Europeanising the Holocaust perpetrator, and thus creating a framework that positioned the explanatory terms 'ideology' and 'context' in opposition to each other. This framework grew from Daniel Goldhagen's and Christopher Browning's divergent interpretations of the Nazi Police Battalion 101, stationed in Lublin, Poland from the summer of 1942. The battalion is described by Goldhagen and Browning as being comprised of either 'ordinary Germans' or 'ordinary men'. This labelling of either 'men' or

¹⁷ The social psychologist Stanley Milgram developed an experiment to investigate the human instinct of obedience towards authorities in his aim to explain Nazi killing, *Obedience to Authority* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1974). Milgram's framework was adopted to account for anonymous bureaucratic processes in Zygmunt Bauman's later critique of Western modernity and rationalisation; see *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989).

¹⁸ A. Dirk Moses, 'Structure and Agency in the Holocaust: Daniel J. Goldhagen and His Critics', *History and Theory*, 37:2 (1998), p. 199.

¹⁹ The term 'New Perpetrator Research' encompasses research since the 1990s, and the term figures in Gerhard Paul's survey of perpetrator historiography in 'Von Psychopaten, Technokraten des Terrors und "ganz gewöhnlichen" Deutschen: Die Täter der Shoah im Spiegel der Forschung' in *Die Täter der Shoah: Fanatische Nationalsozialisten oder ganz normale Deutsche?*, ed. Paul (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2002), pp. 13–90.

‘Germans’ forwarded two rigid perpetrator types: Goldhagen presented ‘ordinary Germans’ from a ‘cognitive-anthropological model’ who acted on behalf of nation-specific German culture ‘pregnant with murder’.²⁰ Browning, in turn, followed socio-psychological lines of argument in his statement that these ‘ordinary men’ demonstrated the universal human disposition to evil that ultimately rendered cultural and ideological factors of secondary importance.²¹

On the face of it then, the two ‘turns’ appear oxymoronic and the scope of research in the last two decades has surely shown that no primacy can be given to either the pan-European ‘context’ or the Nazi ‘ideology’ when discussing the mechanisms behind the Holocaust. In considering that these two terms of ‘context’ and ‘ideology’ effectively counted as two isolated explanatory concepts in post-war historiography between 1960 and 1990, contemporary research is said to have moved beyond this dichotomy, a move manifested in attempts to capture the *dynamic* between the two terms, rather than mapping their positions in an explanatory hierarchy.

The Scandinavian ‘context’ was indeed highly ‘ideological’. The occupation of Denmark and Norway in April 1940 also created the possibility of recruitment of ‘Aryan fighters’ in a transnational racial struggle. Seen from the Scandinavian perspective, the fact that Nazi race theory positioned Norwegians and Danes at the top of the racial hierarchy adds to the number of reasons why scholars increasingly investigate Scandinavian collaboration as a mirror of Nazi faith. Although Danish research put weight on the country’s own development of race hygiene as part of a broader international community, and thus not Nazi-specific,²² the Norwegian case has most persistently focused on the way race theory drove Scandinavian collaboration. Apart from giving evidence for how the Nazis and particularly Himmler’s SS fundamentally perceived Norway through the lens of racist ideology,²³ there is also a growing emphasis on the direct connections between Nazi policy in the East and the Norwegian occupation. The latter’s police system, according to Matthew Kott and Bernt Roughtvedt, went through an ‘education for genocide’ which could be directly put into practice

²⁰ Daniel J. Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997).

²¹ Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1993).

²² Lene Koch, *Racehygiejne i Danmark 1920–56* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1996).

²³ Terje Emberland, ‘Å Stjele Godt Bondeblod: Heinrich Himmler, Walther Darré, SS og den Norske Bonde’, *Fortid*, 2 (2009), pp. 19–34 and Emberland and Jorunn Sem Fure (eds.), *Jakten på Germania: Fra Nordensvermeri til SS-Arkeologi* (Oslo: Humanist Forlag, 2009).

in Eastern Europe, and thus the thesis' conclusion moves beyond the case of Norway in order to demonstrate the deep ideological core of Nazi occupational policies from east to west.²⁴

Yet, scholars increasingly point to how the 'ideological turn' has tended to consolidate the notion of 'ideological collaboration' as a one-dimensional reflection of a Nazi policy. By example, Antero Holmila's research on the Nazi occupation of Finland identifies a retreat to a rigid intentionalist–functionalist dichotomy. According to Holmila, these binary structures fail to encompass more complicated aspects such as the fact that the seemingly 'intentionalist' unfolding of Finnish collaboration nevertheless revealed an absence of overwhelmingly pro-Nazi convictions, such as widespread anti-Semitism.²⁵ Holmila thus detects a wider phenomenon where Western peripheral events were increasingly integrated within the framework of the Nazis' master plans for racially reorganising Europe.

Similarly, Anton Weiss-Wendt's study on Estonian collaboration, which according to Nazi sources revealed one of the higher levels of collaboration and lower degrees of resistance,²⁶ also questions a literal reading of Nazi aims when approaching collaboration. Weiss-Wendt illustrates the complexity behind the concept of 'ideological collaboration' by giving evidence for how Estonian nationalism rather than fierce anti-Semitism drove the Estonian persecution of the Jews.²⁷ Ultimately, what could appear as an ideological blueprint was in fact a collaboration built around Estonian nationalist sentiments which did not necessarily contradict elements in Nazi ideology, but neither were they a mere replication. Confino's notion of the 'catechism of ideology' is replicated in several scholarly observations of how approaches to National Socialism seem to lack analytical flexibility in the light of studies on collaboration.

There is indeed little doubt about the level of brutality that informed genocidal actions among not only Germans but also among Europeans more generally. But arguably, this focus on a 'European

²⁴ Matthew Kott and Bernt Roughtvedt, 'Kongsvinger: Politiutdannelse eller Opplæring i Folkemord?', *Fortid*, 2 (2009), pp. 6–14. See also Dirk A. Riedel, 'Die SS-Inspektion z.b. Vin Norwegen. Nationalsozialistische Täter in den Gefangenen-lagern für jugoslawische Partisanen', in Timm C. Richter (ed.) *Krieg und Verbrechen. Situation und Intention: Fallbeispiele* (Munich: Martin Meidenbauer, 2006), pp. 119–122.

²⁵ Antero Holmila, 'Finland and the Holocaust: A Reassessment', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 23:3 (2009), pp. 414–416.

²⁶ Anton Weiss-Wendt, *Murder without Hatred: Estonians and the Holocaust* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2009), p. 336.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 333, See also Weiss-Wendt's concluding discussion on pp. 344–45.

willingness' to collaborate with Nazi Germany also comes with a political agenda. It is fair to say that the scholarly development also responds to present demands on confessional contributions to the construction of a 'humanitarian Europe' – founded upon the dark memory of the Holocaust. When the left-liberal intellectual Jürgen Habermas traced the relevance of Goldhagen's work, it was to be found 'in the connection between political self-understanding and historical awareness' when facing continuous crimes against humanity.²⁸ Other scholars add that 'countries can no longer simply declare themselves neutral or claim that they were enemies of Nazism; now everyone is guilty'.²⁹ Alternatively, in Tony Judt's compelling formulation: 'Holocaust recognition is our contemporary European entry ticket.'³⁰

The representation of the Holocaust in European identity politics is an expression of Jeffrey Alexander's notion of the 'widening of the circle of perpetrators'.³¹ The Holocaust perpetrator was 'reconstructed' through a process of 'simultaneous historical detachment and deepening emotional identification'. This personification of the universal perpetrator figure made the Holocaust into a 'symbolic extension' of defining inhumanity while serving as the antithesis of Human Rights-projects in the new Europe.³² Consequently, with a paradoxical universalisation of the image of a particular sadistic perpetrator, the ordinary perpetrator was attributed personal motivation and willingness. What Geoff Eley called the 'Goldhagen effect'³³ is arguably an expression of how the historiographical 'ideological turn' extended to the political realm, and brought with it its reductionist tendencies.

A closer look at Norwegian and Danish publications on Scandinavian Nazi collaboration clearly shows the analytical influence of Goldhagen's work – and the tendency of public media to enhance its sensationalism. Furthermore, Goldhagen's main argument that evidence of the perpetrators' sadism was a confirmation of ideological conviction is also absorbed in this context. Between 2012 and 2014, the Norwegian journalist Eirik Veum published a trilogy on Norwegian wartime Nazi

²⁸ Jürgen Habermas, 'Goldhagen and the Public Use of History: Why a Democracy Prize for Daniel Goldhagen?', in Shandley (ed.), *Unwilling*, p. 265.

²⁹ Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), p. 202.

³⁰ Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), p. 803.

³¹ Jeffrey Alexander, 'On the Social Construction of Moral Universals: The Holocaust from War Crime to Trauma Drama', *European Journal of Social Theory*, 5:1 (2002), pp. 37–38.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 43–44.

³³ Geoff Eley, ed., *The 'Goldhagen Effect': History, Memory, Nazism—Facing the German Past* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000).

activities with the collective title: ‘The Ruthless Norwegians’. Followed by a massive debate, Veum revealed the names of those Norwegian citizens who served the agenda of Nazi occupation, including members of Quisling’s paramilitary force *Hirden*, the state police and the Gestapo.³⁴ A review of the books in the tabloid newspaper *Verdens Gang* described Veum’s work as ‘a catalogue of horror’. This register of Norwegian citizens furthermore clarifies a horror ‘made in Norway’ and not a product of the traditionally demonised German Nazism. The reviewer thus stresses that ‘the willing Norwegian helpers enabled the German occupational machinery to assert domination to the extent that the German presence would not have lasted without it’.³⁵ In Denmark, Dennis Larsen’s book *Suppressed Gruesomeness* tells a similar story: a review of the book in the leading Danish newspaper *Berlingske Tidene* was headed ‘Danish Gruesomeness’.³⁶ Similar to *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*, Larsen’s work attracted attention for its extensive usage of horrific witness accounts of the bestial violence and murder perpetrated by the SS guards. However, the detailed presentation of this ‘Danish sadism’, the review argued, was entirely necessary in order to bring Denmark into the reality of the Holocaust. That is, through the insight of how the Danes ‘went just as far as the Nazis in their extreme acts of violence’.³⁷

The works of Veum and Larsen show willingness and sadism on behalf of the Scandinavian Nazi collaborators. The irony of this quest for Scandinavian particularism is that it reveals its debt to Goldhagen’s highly problematic linkage between ideological motivation and genocidal actions. While the scholarly practice of demonisation seemed confined to the early post-war years, it resurfaced in a different shape through the ‘Goldhagen effect’: Browning’s ordinary men with profane motives stood in analytical opposition to Goldhagen’s methodologically problematic yet to many scholars appealing thesis on the ideological sacralisation of genocidal violence.

³⁴ Eirik Veum, *Nådeløse nordmenn: Statspolitiet 1941–1945* (Oslo: Kagge Forlag, 2012); *Nådeløse nordmenn: Hirden 1933–1945* (Oslo: Kagge Forlag, 2013); *Nådeløse nordmenn: Gestapo 1940–1945* (Oslo: Kagge Forlag, 2014).

³⁵ See review in *Verdens Gang*, 13 November 2014: <http://www.vg.no/rampelys/bok/bokanmeldelser/bokanmeldelse-eirik-veum-naadeloese-nordmenn-gestapo/a/23334774/> [accessed 15 May 2015].

³⁶ Dennis Larsen, *Fortrængt grusomhed – danske SS-vagter 1941–45* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2010). For the review, see Bent Blüdnikow, ‘Dansk Grusomhed’, *Berlingske Tidene*, November 17, 2010: <http://www.b.dk/boeger/dansk-grusomhed> [accessed 18 May 2011] (my emphasis).

³⁷ Blüdnikow, ‘Dansk Grusomhed’.

IV

Between Sacred and the Profane

The division of the ‘sacred vs profane’ will be discussed from diverse angles in the two analytical chapters. The thesis argues that the ‘sacred’ and ‘profane’ schools continue to structure approaches to ideology in general and theories on ‘political religion’ in particular. The focus of this thesis is primarily on the ‘sacred’ approaches, which in scholarly terminology refers to the phenomenologist school of ‘political religion’ theory. Indeed, my empirical research does not concern a regime with an aim to construct a ‘political religion’ with the force of state machinery. Those types of questions are traditionally confined to functionalist approaches, while the phenomenologist school focuses on the individual experience of a religious belief. In other words, the phenomenologist school promises a breadth that makes it applicable to research on National Socialist conviction beyond state propaganda and coercion. On the face of it then, this is the approach to ‘political religion’-theory most relevant to examining this concept in the context of Nazi-occupied areas where there was no experience of state-initiated rituals, ceremonies and propaganda like those played out in Nazi Germany during the 1930s and 1940s.

The complexity of examining the Nazi ‘political religion’ outside of Nazi Germany increases when considering the interpretive dichotomies that mark the contemporary use of the concept. The thesis finds that the use of ‘political religion’ and its analytical limitations has its roots in the scholarly polarisation of the works of Hannah Arendt and Eric Voegelin. They have polarised as representatives of ‘profane’ and ‘sacred’ approaches to Nazism and its explanatory role in the Holocaust. Voegelin’s phenomenological theory on ‘political religion’ is described as a turning point – towards a greater focus on ideological motivation, and *away* from Arendt’s alleged focus on the banal and profane factors behind the Holocaust. The two analytical chapters depart from this putative polarisation and offer two ways of looking at how the phenomenological approach as an analytical tool has continued to demonise Holocaust perpetrators. Both chapters conclude that the concept of ‘ideological incorrectness’ is a move beyond this false dichotomy of the ‘sacred’ and the ‘banal’. The concept of ‘ideological incorrectness’ is reflected in the works of Voegelin and Arendt where their emphasis on the transgressive dimension of Nazi ideology has tended to be ignored and shows that works of Arendt and Voegelin were pioneering in ascribing ‘ideological incorrectness’ to Nazism. Their binary position in academia is a historiographical construct that contributes to Confino’s notion

of ‘the catchiness of racial ideology’ rather than an adequate description of Arendt’s and Voegelin’s approaches to National Socialism.

Chapter 1 examines the use of ‘political religion’ among scholars today. The chapter focuses primarily on the issues with the ‘sacred’ phenomenologist understanding of ‘political religion’ where it firstly explains a divide between two schools of ‘political religion’ theory. This divide has worked to create a gulf between studies on Nazism, where the ‘political religion’ has taken a ‘sacred’ phenomenological dimension, and studies on fascism where ‘political religion’ reads as more of a ‘profane’ and historically measurable tool in comparing totalitarian regimes. Considering the peripheral focus on the empirical case study, a section on transnational studies on Nazism further clarifies why this fusion would benefit contemporary research, stressing that this field of study lacks a flexible framework for studying National Socialist expressions across Europe. The boom in research on Holocaust collaboration has worked to bridge the gap between ‘sacred’ and ‘profane’ approaches, but a re-theorisation of ‘political religion’ beyond these stereotypes remains necessary. The chapter concludes that the phenomenological school with its emphasis on a sacralisation of violence and ideological passion struggles, despite its promises, with its tendencies to demonise National Socialism.

Considering the analytical weakness of the phenomenologist school, **chapter 2** examines the roots to this approach to ‘political religion’. It is a deeper examination of the discussion on how ‘political religion’ connotes dogma and indoctrination. The chapter reveals that, ironically, this type of criticism of the phenomenologist school was present already in the works of Hannah Arendt and Eric Voegelin – two of the most influential intellectuals in the historiography of Nazism. Contemporary research points to Voegelin as the ‘founding father’ of the phenomenologist school. What is less known, however, is his rejection of ‘political religion’ following several decades of critique of structuralist Holocaust historiography. Ironically, Voegelin’s rejection of his own concept was motivated not only by a revolt against the homogenising impulse of Nazi ideology, but also by his observation that contemporary scholarly interpretations of Nazism echoed the ideological rationale of a quest for singularity. In this vein, the chapter argues that the tendency to consolidate both Arendt and Voegelin in their oppositional historiographical positions is ironically a reminder of the quest for singularity, which these two intellectuals sought to overcome. Ironically, as we shall see in the following empirical chapters, Voegelin described the totalitarian Nazi state in terms not dissimilar to the

Scandinavians' attitudes to the Nazi authorities following the occupation. What is more, Voegelin and Arendt found the most forceful (or in their view, most lethal) aspect of National Socialism to be its transgressive nature – the same transgressive nature as the 'ideological incorrectness' that the Scandinavians emphasised as the true core of their belief. The breadth of National Socialism beyond totalitarian dogmas and quests for singularity and towards its capacity to encapsulate diverse political movements and attitudes across Europe, was Nazism's dangerous novelty. This 'ideological incorrectness' was Voegelin's biggest reason to reject his own concept 'political religion' as too narrow in analyses of Nazism. The same 'ideological incorrectness' encouraged the Scandinavian intellectuals to reject the dogmas of the Nazi regime while maintaining a firm belief in 'true' National Socialism beyond coercive singularisation.

There are also striking parallels between Voegelin's rejection of 'political religion' as an analytical concept and those made by scholars today. He shared with Hannah Arendt the understanding of National Socialist ideology as being conceptually transgressive. They agreed that no conventional concepts of 'ideology' could encompass National Socialism and its crimes. This way of thinking about Nazism has been overshadowed by simplistic and structuralist adaptations of Arendt's banality thesis. The thesis traces a continuous tendency of demonisation in the scholarly applications of Voegelin's phenomenological understanding of 'political religion'. His concept emphasised the sacred dimension of National Socialism, an emphasis on the primacy of ideology that by the 1990s had fully replaced Hannah Arendt's much-debated notion of the banality of the Nazi Adolf Eichmann in particular, and the implementation of the Holocaust in general.

V

Scandinavian research

There is an already established consensus that this type of 'ideological incorrectness' makes sense in a German context. The aim of this thesis is to bring 'ideological incorrectness' into the framework of Nazi collaboration in Europe. Politically, this is a straightforward argument: there was naturally an aspect of incorrectness in the landscape of different nation states and Nazi groups heading for a continent-wide war. The empirical research is thus less devoted to analyses of the 'religious' dimensions of the state propaganda in the Third Reich. Rather, it focuses on Scandinavian

intellectuals who indeed proclaimed a radical National Socialist identity but did so within national contexts – Norwegian and Danish – that separated them from the German Nazis. The doctrine of ‘Aryan supremacy’ became less rigid and entailed multiple meanings among the Scandinavians as they faced German occupation of their home countries. The Nazi ‘political religion’ appeared rather different from the viewpoint of those National Socialists, radical in their convictions but politically tied, who faced Nazi Germany from the ‘outside’. The Scandinavian study clarifies Nazi plurality in the clearest sense: the conflictual relationship between peripheral Nazi organisations and the National Socialist mothership, Nazi Germany.

Choosing this particular non-German case study throws light on what the analytical chapter identifies as one of the key issues with ‘political religion’: the concept lacks broadness, and rather than being able to address the heterogeneity of Nazism, ‘political religion’ appears as dogmatic in its application as the ideology it is supposed to illustrate. In an increasingly ‘Europeanised’ historiography on Nazism and the Holocaust, any framework for studying ideological collaboration ought to work with a concept of ‘ideology’ as such that accommodates divergent National Socialist practices and policies. The individuals of this study attached an undogmatic and essentially heterogenic meaning to National Socialism that moreover separated it from confessional Christianity and even Italian fascism. This identification of Nazism as unorthodox and undogmatic compared to the beliefs of ‘the old world’ is not confined to the Scandinavian context, but works to confirm this aspect of National Socialism as something shared among Nazis across national borders.

Social-psychological accounts of both Norwegian and Danish volunteers did take place in the 1950s; they demonstrated that these men were far more civilised than any ordinary criminal was.³⁸ But as the rather one-dimensional post-war narrative of heroic resistance flourished in Scandinavia, the ‘traitors’ were presented as alcoholics, opportunists and even victims of weak character – but rarely as thinking individuals.³⁹ It is clear that the aim of challenging post-war demonisation is central in

³⁸ On Norwegian volunteers, see Ørnulv Ødegård, ‘The Incidence of Mental Disorder among the Norwegian Quislings’, *Acta Psychiatrica Neurologica* (1947), pp. 568–73 and later Harald Frøshaug, ‘A Social-Psychiatric Examination of Young Front-combatants’, *Acta Psychiatrica Neurologica*, 30 (1955), pp. 443–465. On Denmark, Thomas Sigsgaard, *Psykologisk Undersøkelse av Mandlige Landssvigere under Besættelsen* (Copenhagen: Direktoratet for Fængselvæsenet, 1954).

³⁹ This is especially evident in the first historical representation of the war years in Denmark, edited by the former resistance member, Wilhelm LaCour, in the three-volume, *Danmark Under Besættelsen, 1945–47* (Copenhagen, Westermann, 1945–47). See also the essays in Arnd Bauerkämper, Odd-Bjørn Fure, Øystein Hetland and Robert Zimmermann (eds.), *From Patriotic Memory to a Universalistic Narrative? Shifts in Norwegian Memory Culture after 1945 in Comparative Perspective* (Essen: Klartext, 2014).

the current state of research. Henrik Lundtofte's research on Danes in the Gestapo during the occupation is an example of the move away from demonisation, as Lundtofte stresses that 'you were not a Gestapo man – that was something one became'.⁴⁰

Post-war demonisation aside, we have already established that there is evidence of a later and much more complex tendency of demonising the Nazis in the rhetoric of Goldhagen's 'willing warrior' that now has a transnational European charge. The appeals of Nazi racial ideology are, however, integral to any analysis of Scandinavian collaboration. Contemporary research thus increasingly focuses on the particular Scandinavian perceptions and expectations of this 'ideological occupation'. For example, a growing number of Norwegian historians argue that the ideological collaboration with Nazi Germany stemmed from a particular Norwegian ideological strand of 'Aryan supremacy'.⁴¹ Other historians have approached the race question in a manner that downplays its relevance among those Scandinavians who called themselves National Socialists. Danish historian Steffen Werther presents a dilemma among Danish National Socialists of choosing between 'race' and 'people' – a dilemma conceptually translated as a conflict between supranational, pan-Germanic visions on the one hand and nationalist sentiments on the other.⁴² Werther thus depicts an essential conflict between the race idea and national implementation of National Socialism. That being said, the emphasis on Scandinavian particularity and ideological independence from Nazi Germany is as present in Werther's work as it is among those scholars arguing for a particular Scandinavian race idea. Terje Emberland's study of *Ragnarok* illustrates this consensus among scholars to emphasise an indigenous drive behind the Nazi landscape in Scandinavia. Emberland balances the evidence for *Ragnarok*'s German sources of inspiration with an emphasis on an idiosyncratic mix of pagan religion, Nazi race thinking and Norwegian nationalism.⁴³

⁴⁰ Henrik Lundtofte, *Gestapo! Tysk Politi og Terror i Danmark 1940–45* (Copenhagen: Gads Forlag, 2003), p. 102, and Dennis Larsen, *Fotrængt Grusomhed: Danske SS-vagter 1941–45* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2010).

⁴¹ Jon Røyne Kyllingstad, *Kortskaller og langskaller. Fysisk antropologi i Norge og striden om det nordiske herremennesket* (Oslo: Scandinavian Academic Press/Spartacus, 2004).

⁴² Steffen Werther, 'SS-Vision und Grenzland-Realität. Vom Umgang dänischer und "volksdeutscher" Nationalsozialisten in Sønderjylland mit der "großgermanischen" Ideologie der SS', Ph.D. Thesis, Stockholm Studies in History 95 (Stockholm University 2012), p. 329. Accessed online <http://su.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:475516/FULLTEXT01.pdf> [accessed 20 February 2014].

⁴³ Emberland, *Religion og Rase*. On the particular establishment of *Nordischer Ring* and the idealisation of 'The Nordic Race', see Nicola Karcher, 'Den Nordiske Bevegelses "Generalstab": *Nordischer Ring* og Samarbeidet med Norske Raseforskere', *Fortid*, 2 (2009), pp. 43–52.

Emberland's study of *Ragnarok* effectively nuanced Øystein Sørensen's classic divide between nationalism and racism that traditionally marked Norwegian historiography. Sørensen described Quisling's *Nasjonal Samling* (NS) as divided between Norwegian nationalists and followers of a racist pan-Germanism.⁴⁴ Apart from Emberland's study, Ivo de Figueiredo's and Hans Olaf Brevig's publication on Norwegian fascism remains one of the few comprehensive studies in the last decades on the content of Nazi belief in Norway. Another example of how Scandinavian emphases on particularity have related to the 'German factor' in historiography is the attempt to adapt analytical concepts used on German National Socialism to fit the Scandinavian context. Stein Ugelvik Larsen applied his concept of 'charisma from below' to Quisling's leadership. This is a notion with reference to Max Weber's term 'charismatic leadership' that often function as a sub-category in discussion on the Nazi construction of a 'political religion'. Ugelvik argued that Quisling's leadership, albeit different from Hitler's type of charisma, generated its own form of loyalty. The point is that Quisling was far from a political opportunist, but instead a reflection of his movement, in which 'many people wanted the same things that Quisling did'.⁴⁵ In other words, there is clear evidence of how scholars have transnational ambitions with analytical concepts such as 'political religion'.⁴⁶

The grass-roots perspective on Scandinavian fascism aside, the pattern of studying 'ideological collaboration' from the perspective of its relative failure has dominated Norwegian and Danish post-war historiography. The last decade of Danish research, however, indicates a development beyond theories on 'why not', and towards the question of 'why did the Danish Nazis have followers at all?'⁴⁷ John Lauridsen describes this academic tendency as a way to show the limitations of generic theory in research on comparative fascism. While acknowledging the importance of the comparative perspective, Lauridsen advocates analytical frameworks that enhance individual, national cases and their divergences from 'high theory'.⁴⁸ He presents Frits Clausen's DNSAP as a political sect and revolutionary party that borrowed influence from Germany but gradually gained a specific Danish character.⁴⁹ A part of the explanation behind Lauridsen's call for a more complex analytical framework stems from the incorporation of the individual stories of Danish Waffen-SS volunteers in

⁴⁴ Øystein Sørensen, *Hitler eller Quisling: Ideologiske Brytninger i Nasjonal Samling 1940–45* (Oslo: J.W. Cappelens Forlag, 1989), p. 27. On Emberland's comments, see *Religion og Rase*, p. 17.

⁴⁵ Stein Ugelvik Larsen, 'Charisma from below? The Quisling Case in Norway', *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 7:2 (2006), pp. 243–244.

⁴⁶ See also Terje Emberland's analysis of *Ragnarok*'s 'political religion' in Chapter 4.

⁴⁷ John T Lauridsen, *Dansk Nazisme: 1030–45 – og derefter* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2002), pp. 50–51.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 45–47.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 60–61.

his argument. As Lauridsen continues, the significance of these volunteers for historical research is not the fact that 75% of them were members of the DNSAP, but that 25% were not. Yet, his interest does not lie within the defined category of the 25%; instead, Lauridsen argues that measurements of Nazism according to political membership have become far too simplistic. This categorisation further ignores a historical-sociological dimension of ‘political conviction’.⁵⁰ For Lauridsen, the individual cases of the volunteering soldiers are symbols of the agency behind political membership records, and beyond demonisation stemming from Nazi ideal-types.⁵¹

Despite Lauridsen’s criticism of the categorical juxtaposition of the ‘political’ with the ‘ideological’, he is dependent on the pioneering research on Danish Waffen-SS volunteers conducted by three historians representing the young generation of Danish scholars. In their study published in 1998, Peter S. Smith, Niels B. Poulsen and Claus B. Christensen were motivated by the aim of moving beyond the stereotyping and demonisation of the Waffen-SS men that had traditionally characterised previous literature.⁵² The Norwegian post-1990s scholarship on Waffen-SS volunteers was more of a slow starter. Earlier post-war studies from Ole Andreas Dahl and Svein Blindheim on the Norwegian Legion are conventional military-political approaches from the 1970s and thus outdated in terms of both documentary evidence and analytical precision.⁵³ The past eight years, however, have witnessed a boom in research on Norwegian volunteers in the Waffen-SS. In the Danish case, an emphasis on both national and individual particularities implies a move beyond Hans Werner Neulen’s argument that the Waffen-SS represented a *Eurofaschismus* quite distinct from Nazism.⁵⁴ It also departs from the more conventional line introduced by George Stein and later modified by Bernd Wegner of viewing the organisation as the vital core of the SS’ and Himmler’s ideological intentions.⁵⁵ Both interpretations suggest not an ordinary soldier, but a political and ideological warrior. In contrast, the study by Christensen et al represents the current Scandinavian historiography as they conclude that ‘the service of the Danish volunteers is thus the story of Nazi ideology

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 27.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 112.

⁵² Claus Bundgård Christensen, Niels Bo Poulsen and Peter Scharff Smith, *Under Hagekors og Dannebrog: Danskene i Waffen SS 1940–45* (Emkjær: Aschehoug Viborg, 1998), p. 15.

⁵³ Ole Andreas Dahl, *Frontkjemperbevegelsen i Norge*, Unpublished Master Thesis (Universitetet i Oslo, 1972) and Svein Blindheim, *Nordmenn under Hitlers Fane: Dei Norske Frontkjemparane* (Oslo: Noregs Boklag, 1977).

⁵⁴ Hans Werner Neulen, *An deutscher Seite. Internationale Freiwilligen von Wehrmacht und Waffen-SS* (Munich: Universitas, 1985).

⁵⁵ George H. Stein, *The Waffen-SS: Hitler’s Elite Guard at War 1939–1945* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1966), p. 122 and Bernd Wegner (Trans. Ronald Webster), *The Waffen-SS: Organization, Ideology and Function* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p. 22.

implemented in real life'.⁵⁶ For the purpose of this thesis, 'ideological incorrectness' is thus not a dividing line between what ideology is and what it is not; rather, it describes National Socialism as a borderland where the cerebral term 'ideology' meets reality – not for the sake of reducing the explanatory power of ideology, but to rethink the assumed 'correctness' of the term.

VI

The Empirical Case Study

The first chapter of the empirical case study is **chapter 3** in the thesis. It begins with the simple question of why there were several Nazi groups in Denmark, as well as in Norway, during the 1930s. It is an introduction to those individuals and organisations present throughout the thesis, and therefore it takes the shape of a prosopography, a collection of brief biographies. The focus throughout the chapter is the relationship between Nazi radicalism and political structures, which becomes so obvious in studying expressions of Nazism outside Nazi Germany. Chapter 3 uses the example of Otto Ohlendorf, a man who in many ways stands as an archetypical Nazi through his fusion of intellect and radicalism. I compare his profile to that of the Scandinavian intellectuals present in this study. What they lacked in terms of political significance they gained in their radical profiles, where the meaning they ascribed to National Socialism resonates clearly with the ideological outlooks of 'generic' Nazis like Ohlendorf. By the end of the chapter, I discuss the limits and benefits of using Michael Wildt's notion of the 'unbound generation' on those men who called themselves real National Socialists – in Scandinavia.

Chapter 4 examines the connection between Nazi groups and theological circles in Scandinavia on the relationship between National Socialism and the term 'political religion'. It compares Voegelin's 'phenomenological' school with the thoughts on religion present in this theological milieu. The chapter departs from Klaus Vondung's distinction between the mysticism associated with a 'volkish religion' contrary to a 'political religion' understood as Hitler's socially dominant (*sozialdominante*) religion in the Third Reich. The critique of Christianity among National Socialists such as Anders Malling, Jørgen Skeby and members of *Ragnarok* often resembled the criticism of the politics of Nazi Germany – at the same time as they praised the 'religious qualities' of National Socialism. It became

⁵⁶ Christensen et al., *Under Hagekors*, p. 96.

a matter of distinguishing between a functionalist and constructed religion on the one hand, and an organic, phenomenological understanding of religiosity on the other. Neither of them saw National Socialism as a ‘political religion’ – a substitute for Christianity – but as a worldview that encompassed conceptual contradictions such as those between ‘religion’ and ‘politics’ and ‘Christianity’ and ‘National Socialism’. In that sense, these movements were ‘theologically incorrect’. First, they were consciously incorrect towards a rigid Christian evangelicalism, as they proposed the Christian interaction with National Socialism, thus the Christian interaction with worldly matters, as the source for Christian liberalist reform. Second, from an ideological angle, it is very interesting to note that the discourse on religion and politics underlined the sources of conflict between these movements and the power politics of the Nazi regime. This chapter thus indicates the first step of ‘theological incorrectness’ in the movement’s discourse on religion, while the next chapter discusses more directly their ‘*ideological* incorrectness’ as a natural consequence of the first. As will be discussed extensively in both chapters, the opposition to the dogmatic structures of the Nazi doctrine of the superiority of racial laws did not merely have a structural resemblance to the critique of Christian dogmatism, but it was also a comparison made explicit by several members of these Danish and Norwegian movements. For them, the future of Christianity as well as National Socialism lay in the incorrectness towards their respective dogmas, because only in that way was a true interaction between these two worldviews possible.

Chapter 5 moves beyond the isolated study on ‘political religion’ and towards Nazi ‘pluralism’ more generally. It moves from the point on ‘theological incorrectness’ and shows how the historical context drove this idea towards a manifestation of ‘ideological incorrectness’ as the Scandinavians faced the dilemma of competing Nazi visions. It focuses on this power-political imbalance between the Scandinavian individuals and Nazi Germany and examines how this imbalance shaped the discourse on transnational Nazism among *Ragnarok* members and Ejnar Vaaben’s circles. While ‘transnationalism’ was not part of their explicit vocabulary, these individuals theorised National Socialism as a fundamentally transnational ideology *because* of this imbalance. In mapping out this complex relationship between national particularity and the transnational framework, these Scandinavians acted ‘ideologically incorrectly’ in the sense that their National Socialist perceptions deviated from the officially sanctioned ‘doctrines’ from Berlin. They also embraced ideological incorrectness as a symbol of deviation from the constraints of a Nazi ‘political religion’, and as the only true principle to follow in order to fruitfully implement National Socialism on Scandinavian soil.

In this sense, ‘ideological incorrectness’ is a conceptual illustration of the attempt these Scandinavians made to merge theory with practice in order to explore the boundaries of transnational Nazism. As this introductory chapter shows, ‘ideological incorrectness’ is not only useful in exploring the historical events in which Nazi pluralism expressed itself through transnational Nazi collaboration, but it is equally important in order to understand how these movements made sense of this collaboration in the first place.

While the previous chapter focuses on the ideological dilemmas that awaited these Scandinavian intellectuals as Nazi Germany occupied their home countries, **chapter 6** gives a more detailed account of the organisational and political mechanisms that underpinned these dilemmas. The majority of individuals examined in the thesis entered the SS-led organisations *Schalburgkorpset* and *Germanske SS Norge*, where they took leading positions within the areas of propaganda and ideological education within the organisations. Previous chapters stress the emphasis that Vaaben and *Ragnarok* members put on the pivotal position of pluralism in National Socialist ideology. This final chapter explains how this embrace of pluralism became for them a political necessity. It returns to the comparison between the Scandinavians and Ohlendorf. While all of them praised the violence of the National Socialist ‘fighting worldview’ (*kämpferische Weltanschauung*), geopolitical borders and institutional boundaries lent the Scandinavians’ understanding of it a different meaning from the Germans’. Their version of the Nazi ‘fighting worldview’ not only engaged in idealist battles against liberalism, the confessional church and fascism, but also against precisely the imperialism and ‘fanaticism’ of the Third Reich as it occupied Denmark and Norway on 9 April 1940. This final chapter thus focuses on the situations following the German occupations where ‘ideological incorrectness’ took its most political and tangible form.

The stories in the four empirical chapters disrupt the homogeneous narrative of the archetypal SS man who succumbs to the rites and dogmas of the SS ‘political religion’. These movements and individuals operated in the grey zone between being de facto collaborators and being the strong voices of Nazi critique in their respective countries. Consequently, far from providing coherence, the histories of the ordinary Scandinavian men who described themselves in far from ordinary terms, as ‘ideological prophets’, ‘action idealists’ or simply ‘the true believers of National Socialism’, fused the ‘sacred’ and the ‘profane’ up to a point where they can no longer be viewed separately

Chapter 1: Between the Sacred and the Profane:

'Political Religion' and Nazi Collaboration in Europe

Introduction

In a lecture on the potentials and limitations of the concept of *Volksgemeinschaft* (People's Community) in Nazi historiography, Ian Kershaw raised one particular concern: 'How do you turn a propaganda slogan into a tool for analytical explanation?'¹ For Kershaw, the concept represented a striving for explanatory coherence. The obsession with the 'Nazi Success Story' bordered on reductionism, which in turn was an awkward fit within an academic paradigm driven by the imperative of challenging the 'orthodoxy' of structuralism.

Kershaw's question illuminates a historiographical phenomenon not confined to debates on the *Volksgemeinschaft*. The passage could also have been an excellent introduction to the notion that National Socialism was a 'political religion'. The Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft* and 'political religion' are products of a much broader academic phenomenon that increasingly stresses the explanatory strength of 'ideology' in Holocaust research. This chapter examines how the theory on 'political religion' has sought to redefine National Socialist 'ideology', and finds that despite its culturally inclusive label, 'political religion' has a consensual emphasis that leaves little room for theorising the heterogenic nature of National Socialist ideology. The growing evidence of the transgressive nature of the Nazi genocide also transgresses the boundaries of 'political religion's' previous distinctions. Ultimately, 'political religion' assumes a far too correct reading of ideological dogmas when instead the room for 'ideological incorrectness' was the true factor that can explain the extent of National Socialist collaboration in Europe.

¹ Ian Kershaw, *Volksgemeinschaft: Potential and Limitations of the Concept*. Keynote Lecture at the international conference 'German Society in the Nazi Era. "Volksgemeinschaft" between Ideological Projection and Social Practice', co-organised by the German Historical Institute London and the Institut für Zeitgeschichte München-Berlin, 25 to 27 March, 2010: <http://www.ghil.ac.uk/podcast.html> [accessed 26 August 2014].

The chapter begins by mapping out the deeper structures of ‘political religion’, illustrating how for a long time ‘sacred’ and ‘profane’ approaches marked a divide in historiography. This divide has become increasingly more difficult to separate in light of recent research into fascist Holocaust collaboration. That breadth of violence that integrated fascist and National Socialist agencies across Europe is one further argument for the need to rethink the way ‘political religion’ is theorised. A section on transnational studies on Nazism and European fascism further clarifies why a fusion of ‘sacred’ and ‘profane’ approaches to ‘political religion’ benefits contemporary research, stressing that a flexible framework for studying National Socialist expressions across Europe is needed. The Scandinavian case illustrates the limitations with ‘political religion’ as it situates the concept within a transnational context with its heterogenic Nazi expressions. When Holocaust research points to the gospel of transgression rather than blind confession, an ‘integrated’ theory of ‘political religion’ is missing.

That said, an integrated theory of ‘political religion’ requires a closer look at the current assumptions surrounding the concept today. The second part of this chapter tackles the two classic schools of ‘political religion’: the phenomenologist and the functionalist. The divide between the phenomenologist and the functionalist school addresses in more historiographical terms the divide between sacred and profane approaches to ‘political religion’. Since this present thesis is a study devoted to National Socialist organisations, the chapter focuses primarily on the issues with the ‘sacred’ phenomenologist understanding of ‘political religion’. Ironically, the anti-structuralist turn in historiography has safeguarded the phenomenologist’s sacred approach to ‘political religion’ from methodological scrutiny to a much higher degree than analyses of the functionalist school. Despite its culturally inclusive label, ‘political religion’ persists in connoting dogma and indoctrination. Drawing from current research that identifies a transgressive principle at the heart of National Socialism, the chapter finally introduces the term ‘ideological incorrectness’ as a response to this issue.

I

Holocaust between Apocalypse and Normality

‘The total dissonance between the apocalypse that was and the normality that is makes adequate representation elusive, because the human imagination stumbles when faced with the fundamental contradiction of apocalypse within normality.’² Holocaust historian Saul Friedländer’s words describe the Holocaust and the uniqueness of the scope of violence that for Friedländer was not only unprecedented in history, but posed a unique problem to the writing and representation of history. In this vein, Friedländer illustrated what he saw as the impossibility of historicising the Holocaust: the impossibility of integrating the event within the conventional framework of modern European history. This historicisation as such was, according to Friedländer, stumbling upon the clash between apocalypse and normality; between, on the one hand, the unique and ‘sacred’ that was National Socialism and its crimes, and the uncanny normality and profaneness of traditional history writing on the other. The Nazis, in Friedländer’s view, crossed a ‘theoretical outer limit’ that unhinged their crimes from the ‘normality’ of conventional historical methodology.³ The question of whether National Socialism should be seen as an integral part of a ‘normal’ European historical framework or separated from it due to its uniqueness formed the core to the German *Historikerstreit* in 1986, in which Friedländer participated as a spokesperson for the uniqueness argument.⁴ This divide, not freed from political considerations regarding Germany’s future in a united Europe, had carved the contours for differentiating the ‘sacred’ National Socialism from the ‘profane’ European fascism.

To tackle this pattern of dichotomies in Holocaust studies, Friedländer embarked upon the project of writing an ‘integrated history of the Holocaust’. In *Years of Extermination*, he presented a different account of the event, and the perpetrators.⁵ It followed the methodological imperative of ‘not eliminating or domesticating that initial sense of disbelief’.⁶ Friedländer unconventionally gave the centre stage to the victims’ experiences found in diaries from the Holocaust period rather than

² Saul Friedländer, ‘The Shoah in Present Historical Consciousness’, in *Memory, History and the Extermination of the Jews in Europe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 51.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 82–83.

⁴ Dirk Moses, *German Intellectuals and the Nazi Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 219–229.

⁵ Saul Friedländer, *Years of Extermination: Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1939–1945* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007).

⁶ Wulf Kansteiner, ‘Success, Truth and Modernism in Holocaust Historiography: Reading Saul Friedländer Thirty-Five Years After the Publication of *Metahistory*’. *History and Theory*, 48:2 (2009), p. 48. Friedländer in Stone, ed., *The Holocaust and Historical Methodology*.

documents from the perpetrators' archives in order to illustrate precisely that 'human imagination' which stumbled against the apocalyptic drive of the perpetrators. *Years of Extermination* marked a historiographical paradigm in this sense, but scholars raised concerns: What about the perpetrators? Was there a clash of 'human imagination' and apocalypse in the worlds of the perpetrators?⁷ Friedländer was certainly aware of the risk of simultaneously demonising the perpetrators in the process of humanising the victims. He thus sought to maintain a sense of disbelief by describing a clash between a 'redemptive anti-Semitism' – a peculiarly German, and sacred, drive of the Nazi leadership – and the complicity of Western European societies that formed a web of collaboration across the continent.⁸ While Nazi policies were defined as a fusion of mystical racism and a 'decidedly religious vision' of Aryan Christianity that shaped this German redemptive anti-Semitism, Friedländer devotes less space to the rationale behind European collaboration. Rather, he presents European collaboration soberly as an empirically measurable entity freed from metaphysical motivational forces. This divide implicitly underscores Friedländer's argument that National Socialism transgressed the conventional and comparative framework of European history. Its compelling methodological novelty aside, the dichotomy created between National Socialism and its fascist collaborative agents persisted.

Friedländer's portrayal of the Nazi 'political religion' broadened the spectre of Holocaust perpetrators in the way it fused the worlds of the profane collaborators with sacred fantasies of a Nazi apocalyptic mission. But it did not tackle the issue of demonisation: to avoid presenting the Nazi perpetrators as supernatural zealots, a theorisation of the human and profane mechanisms behind the project of collaboration only becomes fruitful in the light of a closer look at what exactly it was that made up the sacred 'political religion' of the Nazi project itself. Considering that the concept of 'political religion' has been used in analyses of *both* fascist movements and National Socialism, the divide in 'profane' and 'sacred' understandings of the concept has worked to consolidate them as two opposing camps in the understanding of not only religion but, as it turns out, also the nature of Nazi ideology. 'Political religion' has tended to be drawn either towards the mystification that comes with the sacred and incomprehensible labels, or the simplification of the concept when used as a comparative, profane

⁷ Alon Confino, 'Narrative Form and Historical Sensation: on Saul Friedländer's *The Years of Extermination*', *History and Theory*, 48:3 (2009), p. 203 and Doris L Bergen. 'No End in Sight? The Ongoing Challenge of Producing an Integrated History of the Holocaust', in Christian Wiese and Paul Betts (eds.), *Years of Persecution, Years of Extermination: Saul Friedländer and the Future of Holocaust Studies* (London: Continuum, 2010), p. 297.

⁸ Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews: The Years of Persecution, 1933–1939* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), pp. 73–11.

tool in describing the external similarities between traditional religion and ‘political religion’. In this sense ‘political religion’, to use Friedländer’s terminology, inhabits both ‘apocalypse’ and ‘normality’ and the concept thus stands at a theoretical crossroads between the sacred National Socialism and the profane phenomenon of fascist collaboration. Translated into the field of Holocaust studies, this chapter argues that we are speaking of a concept that on the one hand aims deep into the minds of single individual perpetrators and their sacred fantasies, which are impossible to represent historically. On the other hand, to follow a more ‘profane’ path, ‘political religion’ through its increased application in fascist movements also represents a scientific, comparative scholarly tradition with a sense of normality that is bound to clash with the sacred dimensions often attributed to the Holocaust.

II

The Europeanisation of the Holocaust Perpetrator

The deep division between ‘profane’ and ‘sacred’ representations of the Holocaust was consolidated with the *Historikerstreit* in the mid-1980s, but crumbled in the face of a series of events in the 1990s. Beyond the killing fields in the ‘Wild East’, the opening of former Soviet archives revealed a continent-wide scale of Holocaust collaboration, reaching from Oslo in the west to Kiev in the east. The evidence of continent-wide collaboration prompted the ‘reworking of the past’ also within Western European nation states.⁹ This historiographical development of ‘Europeanising’ the Holocaust perpetrator is reflected in the contrasts between two works on Holocaust perpetrators published between 1996 and 2011. The latter is Christopher Hale’s *Hitler’s Willing Foreign Executioners: Europe’s Dirty Secret* with a title that explicitly worked to challenge the main argument in the former, Goldhagen’s debated publication from 1996 on the willing *German* executioners.¹⁰ Goldhagen’s history of the ‘ordinary Germans’ implied a sacred dimension to German National Socialism where ordinary Germans were infected by a uniquely German brand of ‘eliminationist antisemitism’ that nurtured a particularly barbaric and *German* Holocaust perpetrator.¹¹ In contrast,

⁹ Roni Stauber (ed.), *Collaboration with the Nazis: Public Discourse after the Holocaust* (London: Routledge, 2011).

¹⁰ Christopher Hale, *Hitler’s Foreign Executioners: Europe’s Dirty Secret* (Stroud: The History Press, 2011).

¹¹ Daniel J. Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Knopf, 1996); A. Dirk Moses ‘Structure and Agency in the Holocaust: Daniel J. Goldhagen and His Critics’, *History and Theory*, 37:2 (1998), pp. 194–219.

Hale's emphasis on 'willing' collaborators revealed a barbarism and fanaticism that crossed cultural and geopolitical borders beyond Nazi state power – but *within* Europe. The collaborators were indeed Hitler's helpers, but their help was not the result of blind bureaucratic practice or totalitarian coercion, but of their own beliefs. The zealous Nazi perpetrator had company in the no less willing or convinced European collaborator.

The binary positions between the European collaborator and the Nazi perpetrator follow the same dichotomous logic as that of the traditional divide between European fascism and German National Socialism. In an integrationist spirit similar to that of Friedländer, Aristotle Kallis' work on fascist collaboration in the Holocaust is a European story of the 'eliminationist mindset' behind the murder of the European Jews that united the fascists and National Socialists. In his notion of a 'fascist agency', Kallis aims to illustrate 'an emerging sense of an international fascist loyalty centred on the idea of a NS-led crusade for the regeneration of Europe'.¹² Moreover, he describes an 'almost metaphysical allegiance' that 'integrated a plethora of parallel eliminationist agencies and projects from across the continent into a single history-making crusade of pan-European regeneration.'¹³ Described as an almost sacred and supernatural fusion of National Socialist and fascist agency, Kallis' work moves a step closer towards the integration of the sacred and the profane approaches to the perpetrators' motivations. With words like 'allegiance', 'integration' and 'fusion', Kallis' argument represents a growing focus on the transnational dimensions of fascist and National Socialist ideology.

III

Holocaust and Transnational Studies

The transnational turn in wider European historiography finds its expression in the scholarly directions of *histoire croisée*, entangled histories, and the concept of 'transfer' history (*Transfergeschichte*), all of which are approaches that in Hartmut Kaelble's words have become

¹² Aristotle Kallis, *Genocide and Fascism: The Eliminationist Drive in Fascist Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 209.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

‘comprehensible’ through the very experience of transnational wars.¹⁴ The transnational dimension of the field has past and present roots when considering both the implementation of the genocide in the midst of a transnational war and the central positioning of the Holocaust in European history writing of the past two decades. The transnational character shows in how scholarly trends have been quickly absorbed from other fields such as social and cultural history.¹⁵ Indeed, the history of the event itself has proven such an interpretative challenge to the conventional scholarly framework that the analytical tools developed for these contexts have transferred to areas related, but not confined, to the Holocaust.

The transfer that stands out in this latter case is the one between Holocaust research and the field of fascist studies. Naturally, considering the geographical, temporal and thematic proximity, this scholarly exchange has indeed been a constant in post-war historiography. The link between fascism and the Holocaust was pioneered – albeit not explicitly – by Hannah Arendt’s thesis on totalitarianism from the 1950s. Her aim to develop a concept for comparative studies on the extreme politics of interwar Europe was in turn adopted – and modified extensively – by scholars of fascism in the 1990s through the concept of ‘political religion’.¹⁶ Adding to this, however, the transnational turn held a pan-European dimension, a result of European integration since the 1990s and the vast influx of empirical documentation on Nazi collaboration, which further highlighted the intersections of the two fields. Dan Stone clarifies this triangular relationship between fascism, the Holocaust and the European continent with precisely the term ‘transnational’:

¹⁴ Hartmut Kaelble, ‘Between Comparison and Transfers – and What Now?: A French-German Debate’ in *Comparative and Transnational History: Central European Approaches and New Perspectives*, eds. Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Jürgen Kocka (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), p. 36.

¹⁵ The most recent example is arguments for the use of cultural history as methodology only on ‘softer’ stories of the victims of the Holocaust, but also as an anthropological approach to the motivations and mindsets of the Nazi perpetrators. See Alon Confino’s contributions: ‘Fantasies about the Jews: Cultural Reflections on the Holocaust’, *History and Memory*, 17: 1–2 (2005); ‘A World Without Jews: Interpreting the Holocaust’, *German History*, 27:4 (2009); ‘Why did the Nazis Burn the Hebrew Bible? Nazi Germany, Representations of the Past, and the Holocaust’, *The Journal of Modern History*, 84:2 (2012), pp. 369–400; and Dan Stone, ‘Holocaust Historiography and Cultural History’, *Dapim: Studies on the Shoah*, 23 (2009), pp. 52–68.

¹⁶ The relationship between fascism and totalitarianism under the umbrella term ‘political religion’ was pioneered by Emilio Gentile in ‘Fascism, Totalitarianism and Political Religion’, *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 5:3 (2004), pp. 326–375, especially pp. 337–346. See also the works of the fascist studies scholar Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: A Sense of Belonging under Mussolini and Hitler* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). The totalitarianism thesis dates back to Hannah Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1952), produced the same decade as she interestingly enough criticised the ‘political religion’ concept, a term that appeared among contemporary intellectuals in the interwar period. See Arendt, ‘[The Origins of Totalitarianism]: A Reply’, *The Review of Politics*, 15:1 (1953), pp. 76–84.

The Holocaust was thus a transnational phenomenon, not because Jews lived everywhere in Europe but because the issue of collaboration had their roots in national cultures as well as the imposing transnationalism in the racial ideology of Nazism – in order to solve the Jewish Question.¹⁷ [...] The events we call the Holocaust represent a totality defined by this very convergence of distinct elements.¹⁸

Against the backdrop of this transnational lens through which we view the Holocaust, fascist studies faced a scholarly turn that significantly challenged previous traditions within their own narrow field. This challenge is illustrated well in what Federico Finchelstein describes as an interpretative divide on the meaning of fascism: while the field of Holocaust studies on the one hand generally has an experiential emphasis in its approach to fascism, the field of fascist studies on the other hand tends to lean towards an intellectualist framework. Intellectualist in the sense that the search for a generic or an ‘ideal type’ of fascism that naturally draws from ideological reading guides the scholarly work, rather than an emphasis on the more mundane and violent expressions of fascism in historical reality.¹⁹ Also Kallis finds this methodological and interpretative divide to be a distorting dichotomy in contemporary fascist studies, and similarly to Finchelstein, he identifies the dichotomy as one between intellectual, ideological approaches and those approaches that are experiential.²⁰ For transnational studies, ‘the ideological “minima” offers only limited insight into the various country-specific permutations of fascism’.²¹

That said, in order to capture the pan-European dimension and a sense of entanglement between the various instances of fascist violence across the continent, both Finchelstein and Kallis use the term ‘transnationalism’ to maintain a sense of coherence within the mosaic of fascist stories they present. Yet, the step from transnational fascism understood as a set of entangled but diverse and country-specific histories of fascism, and an underlying quest for an ‘ideological minima’ is small. The question is of course to what extent ‘transnational’ fascism does what it promises, if it *does* serve as an analytical bulwark against simplistic and totalising pan-European concepts, which overlook the

¹⁷ Dan Stone, *Histories of the Holocaust* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 18.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁹ Federico Finchelstein, ‘Fascism and the Holocaust’, in Dan Stone (ed.), *The Holocaust and Historical Methodology* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2012), pp. 256–58. The ‘generic school’ of fascist studies is most commonly associated with Roger Griffin’s claim in 2002 that a consensus had been reached among fascist scholars on the main factors constituting generic fascism; see Griffin, ‘The Primacy of Culture: The Current Growth (Or Manufacture) of Consensus within Fascist Studies’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 37:1 (2002), pp. 21–43.

²⁰ Aristotle Kallis, ‘Studying Inter-war Fascism in Epochal and Diachronic Terms: Ideological Production, Political Experience and the Quest for “Consensus”’, *European History Quarterly*, 34:1 (2004), p. 11.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

important mechanisms of competing fascist intentions. Alternatively, is ‘transnationalism’ just another vogueish expression of the historians’ quest for consensus *among themselves* – a consensus which, ironically, might not be mirrored in the actual histories of the fascist movements?

Indeed, those scholars focusing on only one specific geographical area or movement within Europe during the time of Nazi occupation and the Holocaust would agree with Kallis’ argument on the fascists’ sense of a shared identity across national borders. Nevertheless, regional scholars downplay the international dimension in favour of an emphasis on conflict and nation-specific divergences from this ‘NS-led crusade’. Regardless of whether we turn east or west, Holocaust historians with a specific emphasis on fascism and Holocaust collaboration thus distinguish themselves from fascist studies scholars working on the same theme. By downplaying a transnational fascist loyalty and instead focusing on national borders as symbolic disruptions of the scholarly – or the generic historians’ – approaches to an international fascist coherence, Holocaust studies have had a significant effect on contemporary fascist scholarship.²² While the divide between scholars of fascism and the Holocaust in dealing with fascism on a transnational basis is smaller today, the difference between regional and generic approaches indicates that the divide persists.

By way of synthesis, recent years have witnessed how scholars from fascist studies increasingly employ the term ‘transnational fascism’ as a symbol of challenge, rather than a breeding ground for the making of an international fascist loyalty. In Arnd Bauerkämper’s words, ‘fascist cooperation was continuously hampered by mutual antagonism’.²³ Samuel H. Goodfellow, in his study of the diverse nature of interwar fascist expressions in the Alsace region, goes so far in his emphasis on the role of conflict to argue that the idea of a cooperative fascist international is the very oxymoron of fascist transnationalism. Moreover, the crux of the concept’s oppositional relationship lies in the way we approach the ‘ideological minima’. As transnationalism in his view assumes less coherence and rather emphasises ‘cumulative processes over time’, Goodfellow argues that the actual failure among various groups across Europe to create a consensual ideological framework for fascism ‘also points

²² Recent regional approaches that emphasise the idiosyncratic nature of regional fascism vis-à-vis the Nazi occupational project range from Eastern peripheries to Western Europe. For example, on Croatia, see Alexander Korb, *Im Schatten des Weltkriegs: Massengewalt der Ustasa gegen Serben, Juden und Roma in Kroatien 1941–1945* (Hamburger Edition HIS, 2013). In Western Europe and the SS occupation visions for Norway and the Nordic countries, see Terje Emberland and Matthew Kott, *Himmlers Norge*.

²³ Arnd Bauerkämper, ‘Transnational Fascism: Cross-Border Relations between Regimes and Movements in Europe, 1922–1939’, *East Central Europe*, 37: 2–3 (2010), p. 214.

to the central features of transnational fascism'.²⁴ Contrary to the quest for definitional consensus and ideological minima then, to understand fascism from a transnational point of view ultimately 'means embracing a degree of definitional fluidity'.²⁵

That is not to say that a quest for a universal fascism, effectively transnational in its nation-transgressing sense, did not exist among these various movements at the time. Goodfellow stresses that the fascists created and re-created an essentially *different* type of universality. He comments on the way research has presented 'universal fascism' as an ideology that mysteriously was already 'there' when the fascists themselves embarked upon their political projects towards reductionist scholarly practice. Goodfellow's point is that fascist movements across Europe appropriated 'universal' doctrines selectively to match their idiosyncratic agendas, which in turn depended upon regional and socio-economic contexts. Goodfellow illustrates this relationship between transnational and universal fascism compellingly as he writes that 'in the focuses of affirming universality, fascists created differences'.²⁶ Transnational fascism thus demands definitional fluidity not because it adheres to the ideals of our contemporary scholarly practice, but because this fluidity was a historical reality.

It is against this backdrop of the 'transnational' turn in studies on National Socialism that we must situate the theoretical crux of 'political religion'. The double application of 'political religion' to both fascist and Nazi agencies does indicate a possible way of integrating the Holocaust into the framework of European political violence. The breadth inherent in the term's connotations of a religious belief system corresponds to the loose framework required when examining the phenomenon of a European-wide collaboration. However, it would also mean incorporating a mundane and comparative approach to the relationship between Nazi and collaborationist agencies. In other words, precisely the approach that Friedländer objected to in his striving to maintain the sense of uniqueness in which National Socialism transcends the realm of 'normal' history. In the following section, however, a closer look at the 'sacred' application of 'political religion' also reveals a rigid structuralist tendency that would benefit from a more historicised application that comes with the use of the term in fascist studies.

²⁴ Samuel H. Goodfellow, 'Fascism as a Transnational Movement: The Case of Interwar Alsace', *Contemporary European History*, 22:1(2013), pp. 88–89.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

IV

‘Political Religion’

‘Political religion’ is a concept that heavily depends on the user’s particular understanding of religion as such. In 1917, the theologian and historian Rudolf Otto published *Das Heilige* (The Sacred) which sought to illustrate the varieties of religious experience in the realm of the irrational. Otto meant that for the believer, God ‘was not an idea, an abstract notion, a mere moral allegory. It was a terrible *power* manifested in the divine wrath [...] It is like nothing human or cosmic.’²⁷ One finds this description of Otto’s piece in Mircea Eliade’s *The Sacred and the Profane*, written 40 years later. Eliade’s work departed from Otto’s point on how traditional religions comprise, and were thus the result of, the beliefs that arose from individual experiences. Otto’s claim that these religious individual experiences were fundamentally different from the ‘natural realities’ and beyond human comprehensiveness was central yet modified in Eliade’s subsequent argument; for Eliade, this distinction had quasi-universality, and thus he came to signify the proper rationalisation of the divide between the sacred and the profane.

With this traditional distinction of religious theory in mind, we can begin to see how it shaped the concept of ‘political religion’. Originally, it developed as an intellectual response to the rise of fanatic mass politics across the political spectrum in interwar Europe including fascism, National Socialism and communism.²⁸ In 1952, Waldemar Gurian reflected upon three decades of unprecedented political violence arguing that ‘we observe today an astonishing spectacle [...] the totalitarian movements which have arisen since World War I are fundamentally religious movements’.²⁹ Because of the broad platform for comparison that ‘political religion’ assumed, the individual approaches among contemporary intellectuals varied widely. Some resisted the rise of National Socialism on more conventional ‘political’ grounds, such as the theories on totalitarianism put forward by Frederick Voigt, Franz Borkeu and Sigmund Neumann,³⁰ while others argued from the point of ‘religion’, such as Gurian and Adolf Keller who more explicitly pointed to the movements as secular,

²⁷ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1959), pp. 9–10.

²⁸ Dan Stone, *Responses to Nazism in Britain, 1933–1939: Before War and Holocaust* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

²⁹ Waldemar Gurian, ‘Totalitarian Religions’, *Review of Politics*, 14:1 (1952), p. 3.

³⁰ Frederick Voigt, *Unto Caesar* (London: Constable & Co, 1938); Franz Borkeu, *The Totalitarian Enemy* (London: Faber and Faber, 1940); Sigmund Neumann, *Permanent Revolution: The Total State in a World at War* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1942).

non-Christian by-products of modernity.³¹ Their approaches nevertheless merged in a shared emphasis on the relationship between uncompromising state power and the rise of pseudo-religious belief systems in an era of mass politics.

Common for these elaborations on ‘political religion’ were also the intellectual references to Emile Durkheim’s understanding of religion. For the sociologist Durkheim, religion was a social phenomenon, ‘a set of shared beliefs’, and in that sense different from Otto’s individual and existential approach. Because Durkheim understood religion as a product of society, it was not sacred or supernaturally inspired. Instead, its mundane character allowed for the study of religion to be comparative.³² From this Durkheimian perspective, concepts of ‘sacred religion’, ‘civil religion’ and ‘political religion’ flourished in interwar Europe, because when one interprets religion as a social phenomenon, this view on religion signals a phenomenon that also transgresses outside its divine realm. For observers, the messianic leadership of the new political movements, their apocalyptic rhetoric and the fanatical crowds surrounding them became sources of comparison under the symbolically accessible umbrella term ‘political religion’.

The Durkheimian analysis of religion laid the theoretical foundations for the functionalist school within political religion theory. It is most prominently associated with the French sociologist and philosopher Raymond Aron who based his notion of a ‘secular religion’ on his wider analysis of the reasons behind the success of totalitarian regimes.³³ Similar to the contemporary intellectuals listed above, Aron primarily approached the sacred aura of Nazism from the angle of its *function* for the regime and thus took a bird’s-eye view of the mechanisms behind the leaders and their followers in totalitarian regimes. Hence, Aron saw ‘political religion’ in a functionalist sense: it was a political construction and a direct imitation of Christianity for purposes of domination.

The collective emphasis at the core of the functionalist understandings of ‘political religion’ gives it a ‘profane’ character when compared to the second strand of thinkers on ‘political religion’ – the phenomenologist school. Emerging from the German-born political theorist Eric Voegelin’s work on ‘political religion’ in the late 1930s, phenomenological approaches to ‘political religion’ are different

³¹ Waldemar Gurian, ‘Totalitarian Religions’, *Review of Politics*, 14:1 (1952), pp. 3–14; Adolf Keller, *Religion and Revolution: Problems of Contemporary Christianity on the European Scene* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1934).

³² Emile Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* [1912] (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1965).

³³ Raymond Aron, *L’Opium des intellectuels* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1955).

from the functionalist in the sense that their underlying philosophy is the absolute opposite to Durkheim's religious philosophy.³⁴ Voegelin's work adopted a theory on religion similar to Otto, and he regarded William James as his main intellectual inspiration.³⁵ James' psychological approach to religion distinguished radically between the individual 'religious experience' and 'external' religion, and was in this sense radically different from the 'profane' and external focus of the functionalist school. Moreover, James was – as we shall see later in the case study in this thesis – a great influence on the interwar liberal theological milieu that had a profound impact on the Scandinavian National Socialists' approaches to religion. Voegelin's distinctively phenomenologist take on 'political religion' thus stemmed from his focus on the individual experience of Nazi extremism:

The state of the deed is not the victory, but the deed itself; the pain inflicted upon the enemy is to be resumed to the soul of the perpetrator [...] The inner experience of being an active element in breaking down resistance [...] of mythical self-dissolution and communion with the world up to the point of relaxation in bloodlust.³⁶

Voegelin's approach is similar to Friedländer's aim of maintaining a sense of disbelief, as he described a National Socialist 'political religion' that eluded definition. His understanding of religion prompted a definition of 'political religion' as a sacred, individual and thus intrinsically unique religious experience of National Socialism in each perpetrator.

V

The 'Phenomenologist' School

The ideological turn in perpetrator research in the 1990s was, if understood through the isolated micro-history of 'political religion' theory, also a phenomenological turn. The subsequent demise of structuralist theory manifests through the rise of a new explanatory paradigm that challenged Hannah

³⁴ Eric Voegelin, 'The Political Religions' [1939], in Manfred Henningsen (ed.), *Modernity without Restraint: The Political Religion, the New Science of Politics and Science, Politics, and Gnosticism, The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, Volume 5* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), pp. 19–73.

³⁵ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*; Being the Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion Delivered at Edinburgh in 1901–1902 (New York: Modern Library, 1902); Ellis Sandoz, *The Voegelinian Revolution: A Biographical Introduction*, 2nd edn (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2000).

³⁶ Voegelin, 'The Political Religions', p. 69.

Arendt's 'banality' figure of Adolf Eichmann being stuck in the totalitarian machinery.³⁷ The ideological turn presented an image of the new Holocaust perpetrator that was closer to Goldhagen's willing warrior, a unique individual with agency and belief. In this vein, 'political religion' came to symbolise the agency of the masses – a grass-roots perspective and a 'humanised' alternative to Cold War theories on totalitarianism.³⁸ The focus on the identity of the perpetrators also revealed the complexity at a new level. In Neil Gregor's words, the turn to micro-history also meant that these small stories were to challenge the hegemony of historical metanarratives. With the assumption that 'it was all much more complicated than that',³⁹ the field of new perpetrator studies is situated in the intersection of the 'big history' of the Holocaust with its well-documented chronology, the deportations, the racial laws, the propaganda and the epistemological abyss of tracing individual motivation.

The phenomenological approach to 'political religion' fits very well in the academic imperative. Complex and elusive to grasp, scholars like Michael Burleigh who applied 'political religion' directly to the question of perpetrators' motivations emphasise the 'the deeper metaphysical context which shaped these appalling actions at the highest level'.⁴⁰ Michael Ley furthermore describes the Nazi project of extermination as a manifestation of homogeneous acts of killing where Nazism understood as a political religion portrays the Holocaust not as an event of 'social, economic or mass psychological nature, but one with a religious theoretical background'.⁴¹ To stress that hundreds of thousands of individuals actively implemented the Holocaust and that their actions entailed a plethora of factors that transgress an abstract notion of a 'political religion', Ley focused on the perpetrators' motivations. With reference to Voegelin's phenomenology, he argued that Hitler's supporters saw annihilation and the fantasy of destruction as the road to redemption; the murder of the Jews was a 'holy deed'.⁴²

³⁷ Hannah Arendt, *Report on the Banality of Evil* [1962] (New York: Penguin, 1992); Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1989).

³⁸ Tom Lawson, *Debates on the Holocaust* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), pp. 154–192.

³⁹ Neil Gregor, 'Nazism – A Political Religion? Rethinking the Voluntarist Turn', in Neil Gregor (ed.), *Nazism, War and Genocide: Essays in Honour of Jeremy Noakes* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2005), p. 2.

⁴⁰ Michael Burleigh, 'National Socialism as a Political Religion', *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 1:2 (2000), p. 14.

⁴¹ Michael Ley, *Holocaust als Menschenopfer. Von Christentum zur politischen Religion des Nationalsozialismus* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2002), p. 166.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp.167–169.

Indeed, the debate around ‘political religion’ in Holocaust studies has been one of the most extensive in the last decade of research on Nazi perpetrators, all related to the methodological issue of maintaining the disbelief that surrounds the Holocaust and avoiding a simplification of the enquiry into the motivations of the perpetrators. On the one hand, Burleigh stressed the way ‘political religion’ stood in stark contrast to old images of the perpetrator as ‘less than fully human [...] degraded into instruments of ideology and radically divorced from the plenitude of human spiritual destiny’.⁴³ On the other hand, Gregor argues that the concept ‘shoehorns into a crude single mould a social, political and ideological movement whose essential characteristic was in its incredible heterogeneity’.⁴⁴ Similarly, Holocaust historian Hans Mommsen objects to the theory since it ‘attributes an ideological stringency and coherence to it [National Socialism] that it – a merely simulative movement in every way – did not possess’.⁴⁵

The arguments for and against ‘political religion’ are thus all linked to a scholarly resistance to explanatory coherence. Those who use ‘political religion’ with respect to the Holocaust find the phenomenological approach to be less rigid and less prone to explanatory reductionism when compared to the functionalist school. In this vein, the phenomenologist direction was an *improvement* on structuralist ‘political religion’ theories that in a Durkheimian spirit engaged in more immanent and profane types of external comparisons. By way of contrast, Voegelin’s phenomenological legacy is clear as Klaus Vondung – a former student of Voegelin – acknowledged the risk of making causal simplifications by providing ‘a linkage between Hitler’s apocalyptic worldview and the beliefs of Eichmann and other organizers of the Holocaust down to the perpetrators in the concentration camps’.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, Vondung maintained that it was to a ‘high degree plausible’ that Hitler’s ‘article of faith’ motivated the perpetrators and further claimed the National Socialist political religion to be ‘the only plausible explanation of the Holocaust’.⁴⁷ He attempted, however, to nuance the rather rigid explanatory link he had made between ‘Hitler’s article of faith’ and the execution of the Holocaust. A latter piece by Vondung reveals a less rigid approach to political religion where Vondung argues that the establishment of a ‘political religion’ was indeed a matter of contention within the Nazi party

⁴³ Burleigh, ‘National Socialism as a Political Religion’, p. 21.

⁴⁴ Gregor, ‘Nazism – a Political Religion?’, p.13.

⁴⁵ Hans Mommsen, ‘National Socialism as a Political Religion’ in Hans Maier and Michael Schäfer (eds.), *Totalitarianism and Political Religions, Volume II: Concepts for the Comparison of Dictatorships* (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 161.

⁴⁶ Klaus Vondung, ‘National Socialism as a Political Religion: Potentials and Limits of a Concept’, *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 6:1 (2005), p. 93.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

itself. He draws a useful distinction between the mysticism associated with a ‘volkish religion’ contrary to a ‘political religion’ understood as Hitler’s socially dominant (*sozialdominante*) religion in the Third Reich.⁴⁸ This distinction is a reflection of the one between the ‘sacred’ phenomenologist religion and the ‘profane’ functionalist theory. In the latter case, National Socialism reads as a ‘political religion’ for its instrumentalist and coercive character in being primarily a belief system constructed to consolidate the power of a totalitarian regime. As we shall see in chapter 4, the attitudes to traditional religion among the Scandinavian Nazis of this present study would clearly fall under the second, ‘volkish’ category. Moreover, it will clarify how Vondung’s ‘volkish’ category of ‘political religion’ clearly corresponds to the characteristics of the ‘phenomenological’ school.

The attractiveness of the phenomenologist school is visible also in studies that are more empirical. Michael Wildt’s research on the leading members of the RSHA (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*) – described as the ‘genocidal core’ of the Nazi regime – also incorporates Voegelin’s ‘political religion’ into the analysis of the perpetrators’ motivations as he finds ‘political religion’ to be heuristically fruitful in order to approach Nazi belief. This approach, however, depends on acknowledging the aspect of belief, rather than focusing on religious exteriors, such as rituals and symbols.⁴⁹ What Wildt and more theoretically Vondung and Ley arrive at is an argument that the phenomenological dimension of ‘political religion’ alone is necessary when applied to Nazi perpetrators. Vondung’s argument that ‘behind the form there was faith’ further illuminates the wider trend in which it is the ‘sacred’ core rather than the ‘profane’ exteriors of the Nazi ‘political religion’ that attracted Holocaust scholars to ‘political religion’.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Vondung, ‘Von der völkischen Religiosität zur politischen Religion’ in Uwe Puschner and Clemens Vollnhals (eds.), *Die völkisch-religiöse Bewegung im Nationalsozialismus. Eine Beziehungs- und Konfliktgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), p. 33.

⁴⁹ Michael Wildt, ‘The Spirit of the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA)’, *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 6:3 (2005), p. 334.

⁵⁰ Vondung, ‘National Socialism as a Political Religion’, p. 89.

VI

Fascism and 'Political Religion'

Since the 1990s, the use of 'political religion' in theories on fascism has moved from dominating functionalist approaches to arriving close to Holocaust historians' phenomenologist view of 'political religion'. The work of the pioneering scholar on fascism and 'political religion' Emilio Gentile is an example of how the fascist-Nazi dichotomy dissolves through the very concept of 'political religion'. Originally, Gentile took a rather functionalist stand in 1990 as he described how 'fascist religion placed itself alongside traditional religion, and tried to syncretize it within its own sphere of values as an ally in the subjection of the masses to the state'.⁵¹ His words display, on the one hand, a focus on the external, 'profane' characteristics of 'political religion'. On the other hand, and in more phenomenological terms, Gentile maintains that 'what unified fascists was not a doctrine but an attitude, an *experience of faith*'.⁵² Gentile later modified his functionalist approach by further emphasising the linkage between 'political religion' and 'fascist culture' to be 'not at all metaphoric [...] political religion is certainly an ideology, but, we could say, an ideology with an extra ingredient, which makes it qualitatively different from other political ideologies'.⁵³ Gentile's two takes on 'political religion' thus illustrate a wider historiographical development from 1990 to the 21st century where the phenomenologist 'political religion' also made inroads into research on fascism.

Gentile's own clarification of his concept of 'political religion' corresponds to Roger Griffin's definition of the religious dimensions of fascism. In promoting a distinctively phenomenologist understanding of 'political religion', Griffin's emphasis on the 'experience of faith' takes a central position as Griffin relates the concept to his wider call for a more 'humanized' field of fascist studies.⁵⁴ By introducing the term 'palingenetic ultranationalism', Griffin finds the value of 'political religion' in its capacity to stand as a conceptual expression of the existential myth of national re-birth that drove the fascist regimes. In that sense, 'political religion' is not a metaphor, nor is it an ideal-typical abstraction, but an umbrella term for the heterogeneity of expressions that encompass a

⁵¹ Emilio Gentile, 'Fascism as Political Religion', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 25:2/3 (1990), p. 230.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 234 (my emphasis).

⁵³ Emilio Gentile, 'Fascism, Totalitarianism and Political Religion: Definitions and Critical Reflections on Criticism of an Interpretation', *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 5:3 (2004), p. 36.

⁵⁴ Griffin, 'The Primacy of Culture', p. 39.

primordial human need for a sense of belonging.⁵⁵ For Griffin, his concept was a heuristic device that illuminated the

dynamics of collective belief systems, new religions and the psychology of crowds under modern social conditions. [Therefore] ‘political religion’ is a concept that symbolizes the kind of academic openness which is necessary as one approaches the worldview of an individual movement or even a single fascist activist.⁵⁶

Beyond the hegemony of structuralist theory, the emphasis on voluntarism and personal motivation has thus brought forward ‘political religion’ as an illustration of the increasing overlap between fascism and National Socialism in the historiography. This overlap stemmed from precisely those academic paradigms that arose in the wake of new perpetrator research in the 1990s: the focus on agency, micro-histories and above all the abundance of empirical evidence that portrayed the ‘ideal-type’ Holocaust perpetrator with a heterogeneous and essentially unorthodox ideological checklist.

VII

Nazism as Transgression

Recent research increasingly portrays the Holocaust with a transgressive dimension that stems from a new understanding of Nazi ideology. Beyond sacred and profane, Eric Kurlander stresses in his work on Nazi relations with Wilhelmine occultism that Nazi ideology ‘incorporated an eclectic array of popular mythologies and contradictory attitudes’ and thus avoided the constraints of occult sectarian doctrines. In this vein, National Socialism was successfully justified within the broader social sphere precisely because of ‘this fungibility, this lack of a clear “political religion”’.⁵⁷ Kurlander thus objects to the use of ‘political religion’ for its failure to acknowledge the ideological inconsistency in National Socialist ideology. The ‘sacred’ aura of its worldview was thus enforced and sustained through intrinsically populist and profane symbols. Therefore, as Kurlander stresses the need to rethink the coherence conventionally assumed in the term ‘sacred’, his argument further

⁵⁵ Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: A Sense of Belonging under Mussolini and Hitler* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 271–275.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁵⁷ Eric Kurlander, ‘Hitler’s Monsters: The Occult Roots of Nazism and the Emergence of the Nazi “Supernatural Imaginary”’, *German History*, 30:4 (2012), p. 531.

illustrates that perhaps also the ‘sacred’ understandings of National Socialism must be questioned for its structuralist dimension.

In a similar manner, Finchelstein argues that by virtue of its heterogenic character, it is precisely the broadening of Holocaust research and the ‘Europeanisation’ of the perpetrator that has forced traditional understandings of Nazism to question the coherence assumed in the term ‘ideology’. Moreover, Finchelstein explicitly links these cerebral readings of ideology to the conventional use of ‘political religion’. In pointing to a gap between ‘high theory’ and the historical realities, in accordance with contemporary research on Nazi ideology, he stresses that Nazism shared with fascism an experiential ideology, where no doctrines or dogmas but pure ‘violence became the ultimate form of theory’.⁵⁸ Different from the traditional divide between ‘sacred’ and ‘profane’, Finchelstein further invokes the work of Dominick LaCapra whose arguments on the sacred nature of Nazism incorporate Finchelstein’s emphasis on pure violence beyond high theory and sacred preaching. In LaCapra’s words: ‘to the extent fascism and especially Nazism arguably have a significant relation to the religious and the sacred, it is, I think, more to a specific form of the immanent sacred’.⁵⁹ For LaCapra, the way one can speak of sacred transcendence from a Nazi point of view is the perpetrators’ move beyond normative limits. Only in this form of earthly, experiential transcendence can one apply the notion of a Nazi ‘sacred’.

LaCapra’s take on ‘political religion’ is in fact not very different from one of the more perceptive contemporary criticisms of ‘political religion’. David D. Roberts argues similarly to LaCapra that it is time to ‘historicize’ ‘political religion’ as the conception we currently have of ‘religion’ is one of idealism; believing we know so well what religion is (either ‘sacred’ or ‘profane’), ‘political religion’ is the ideal-typical construction that saves us from digging deeper into the real nature of these movements. As Roberts clarifies, ‘because it seems credible, “political religion” truncates the inquiry into the content of belief’⁶⁰ and to historicise it would mean to bring ‘political religion’ down to the dirty, much less romantic and more ‘profane’ factors that counterbalance the sacred image of a

⁵⁸ Finchelstein, ‘Fascism and the Holocaust’, pp. 424–425; Alon Confino ‘Fantasies about the Jews: Cultural Reflections on the Holocaust’, *History and Memory*, 17: 1–2 (2005); Boaz Neumann, *Nazi Weltanschauung – Space, Body, Language* (Tel-Aviv: Haifa University Publishing House and Sifriat Ma’ariv, 2002).

⁵⁹ Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (London: John Hopkins University Press, 2001), pp. 135–136.

⁶⁰ David D. Roberts, ‘Political Religion and the Totalitarian Departures of Inter-War Europe: On the Uses and Disadvantages of an Analytical Concept’, *Contemporary European History*, 18:4 (2009), p. 397.

National Socialist ‘political religion’.⁶¹ The need to historicise ‘political religion’ away from religious blueprints of ‘holy worships’ and quick-fix images of Hitler’s messianic leadership as a mere replacement of Christian structures is an argument that also comes through in the work of the theorist of religion Stanley Stowers. Just as there are idealist conceptions of theological doctrines, Stowers points out an under-theorised factor in the context of ‘political religion’ theory as he argues that the ‘sacred’ phenomenologist school tends to carry a pre-fixed and essentially romantic understanding of religion:

The concept of political religion trades on expressive-symbolist theory with its romantic roots [...] the content of religion is said to be an ineffable experience or an incomprehensible pre-rational something or social structure that is then expressed in a uniquely self-referential symbolic form. The result is pure meaning that scholars and specialists are able to detect beneath the external form of language and symbol.⁶²

A rethinking of the sacred label on ‘political religion’ would effectively mean to theorise ‘political religion’ according to National Socialism’s transgressive dimension. This re-theorisation thus challenges the notion of a belief system’s ‘pure meaning’ by pointing to the iconoclastic violence of the ideology as such. It further allows for the historical diversity that avoids demonising the perpetrators with a sacred blueprint. Stowers identifies this phenomenologist idea that individual religious belief inhibits a ‘pure meaning’ – in Burleigh’s words ‘existential core’, or for Griffin a ‘palingenetic myth’ – as a scholarly practice of maintaining hard boundaries which ultimately enable and preserve both mystifications and simplifications. In order to move away from the romanticism that Roberts and Stowers identified in the use of ‘political religion’, both suggest comparative and profane interpretations to supply the glorification of the phenomenologist ‘existential core’. As Stowers points out, historians and ‘writers do not seem to realize that theories of religion based on the idea of [...] phenomenology and on religious experience are almost always religious theories rather than theories of religion’.⁶³ Therefore, the phenomenologist school of ‘political religion’ runs the risk of mystifying the concept into a semi-religious vision in its own right.

Kallis, Finchelstein and more theoretically LaCapra, Roberts and Stowers have thus shown in consideration of the growing field of research into fascist collaboration that the religious dimension

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 405.

⁶² Stanley Stowers, ‘The Concepts of “Religion”, “Political Religion” and the Study of Nazism’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 42:1 (2007), p. 12.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 20.

did not lie in the functionalist exteriors of ‘political religion’, where functionalist exteriors are, for example, mass parades and ideological indoctrination. It was neither ‘sacred’ in terms of Ley’s grandiose claim that ‘Auschwitz was National Socialism’s holy worship’ as a symbol of a set of shared religious fantasies, or, in Goldhagen’s view, that a Nazi gospel of ‘eliminationist’ anti-Semitism moved the perpetrators unanimously.⁶⁴ The sacralisation of pure violence that preceded the Holocaust apocalypse appears strikingly profane and thus the sacred and the phenomenological ‘political religion’ seems to regain strength only by referring to its conceptual sibling: its banal and profane antithesis. Indeed, as Friedländer argued, Nazism crosses the outer limit of conventional historical methodology, and the argument put forward here is that it is precisely for this reason that the Nazi sacred cannot be contained within a traditional understanding of supernatural religious theory. In consideration of the growing research on the spirit of transgression in Nazi ideology, Friedländer’s call for maintaining disbelief needs to finally uncover the unorthodoxy and thus the profane ‘paganism’ of the Nazi ‘sacred’.

VIII

Ideology and Culture

This second section proposes a new understanding of ‘political religion’ that turns away from previous emphases on repression or confession. ‘Nazi belief’ is here examined with an emphasis on individual expressions of ‘ideological borderlands’ vis-à-vis the high theory of official doctrines. These ideological borderlands at a grass-roots level are later described as an illustration of the ‘ideological incorrectness’ in National Socialism. Considering the broad scope of the ‘political religion’ concept, its potential to cover analytically both the policies of the Nazi state and sentiments of the German people, ‘political religion’ positions closer to conceptions of ‘culture’ rather than ‘ideology’. Despite the fact that the aim of the ‘political religion’ theory is to challenge static ideology concepts, it nevertheless comes with an inherent structuralism. As we have seen, recent research gives evidence of an intrinsically unorthodox Nazi ideology. This heterodoxy, moreover, challenges the validity and explanatory coherence of traditional approaches to ‘political religion’.⁶⁵ This

⁶⁴ Ley, *Holocaust als Menschenopfer*, p. 166.

⁶⁵ Richard Steigmann-Gall, *The Holy Reich. Nazi Conceptions of Christianity 1919–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Susannah Heschel, *Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008); Derek Hastings, *Catholicism and the Roots of Nazism: Religious Identity*

documented deviation of theological doctrines which ultimately enabled co-mingling Christian and Nazi identities signals a need to abandon the ‘confessional’ turn of the ‘political religion’ paradigm.

Ironically, ‘political religion’ gained popularity at a time when research on Nazism was moving away from the ‘primacy of ideology’ consensus, as the 1990s witnessed a boom in micro-historical studies which emphasised heterogeneity and diversity. Yet, it nevertheless brought a subsequent strengthening of the argument that Nazi ideology stretched beyond state propaganda, into the hearts and the minds of the German people. How could one otherwise explain the uncanny insight that this vast number of heterogenic stories amounted to something as terrifyingly coherent as the Nazi project of genocide? In the geopolitical context of the early 1990s, racist stereotypes and myths of national rejuvenation legitimised ethnic wars in Rwanda and Yugoslavia. These political events worked to translate the Foucauldian ‘cultural turn’ into the ‘racial/ideological turn’ in Holocaust Studies.⁶⁶ But more than 20 years later, scholars today argue that perhaps the pendulum has swung too far, and that it is necessary to move beyond the paradigm of the ‘racial state’ in order to avoid new metanarratives.⁶⁷ For instance, Alon Confino concludes that the concept of ideology borders on essentialism and simply does not add up, since ‘people’s tendency to think outside, against, underneath and above it is left historically unrecorded [...] In short, ideology is part of culture, not culture itself; it is too cerebral to embrace culture.’⁶⁸ The problem, in other words, was not that one overestimated the explanatory strength of ideological components such as anti-Semitism and racism, but that the ‘ideology’ concept was too narrow to encompass these often conflicting and at times idiosyncratic mentalities, even among Nazi decision-makers. ‘Ideology’ demanded reconfiguration – where the answer has often been to invoke the term ‘culture’.⁶⁹

In order to separate ‘Nazi culture’ from its structuralist forerunner, ‘ideology’, one must clarify their actual differences. For the anthropologist Sherry Ortner, a study of culture is ultimately ‘a story of struggle and change’.⁷⁰ With a focus on ‘the clash of meanings in borderlands’, Ortner interprets

and National Socialism (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Christopher J. Probst. *Demonizing the Jews: Luther and the Protestant Church in Nazi Germany* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012).

⁶⁶ Stone, *Histories of the Holocaust*; Eric Kurlander, ‘Violence, Volksgemeinschaft and Empire’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 46:2 (2011), pp. 920–934.

⁶⁷ Mark Roseman et al. (eds.) *Beyond the Racial State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming 2016).

⁶⁸ Confino, ‘Fantasies about the Jews’, p. 303.

⁶⁹ Stone, ‘Holocaust Historiography and Cultural History’, p. 60.

⁷⁰ Sherry B. Ortner, ‘Introduction’ in Ortner (ed.), *The Fate of Culture: Geertz and Beyond* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 10.

culture as an area of study that might not generate its most penetrating insights through the search for a central core, but indeed from the conflicting areas of its borderlands. This is an approach to ‘culture’ similar to Confino’s point that our understanding of National Socialism must be broad enough to include ideological divergences – ‘people’s tendency to think outside, against, underneath and above’ – as integral parts of our perception of Nazism as such. Although the cultural turn became the ‘ideological turn’ in Holocaust research, historiography persists in regarding culture and ideology as two conflicting terminologies.

This tendency is visible in the intellectual history of anti-Semitism, which has gradually turned ‘cultural’ with the simultaneous definition of being ‘non-ideological’. For instance, Shulamit Volkov’s notion of anti-Semitism as a ‘cultural code’ during the Wilhelmine period is an explicit rejection of anti-Semitism understood as a consensual ‘ideology’. Rejecting cultural cohesion, Volkov’s study incorporates conflicting sub-cultures to explain that if one speaks of anti-Semitism as the cultural framework from which the German Nazi party, the *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (NSDAP), later drew its popular support, then one ‘can properly define this phenomenon [anti-Semitism] only when it is understood in the broadest possible sense’.⁷¹ By virtue of their lack of coherence, the anti-Semitic symbols functioned as a cultural ‘glue’ in the German society that united traditionally divergent ideologies of the new and old Right, where anti-Semitism was thus given cognitive meaning by individuals in widely different settings and experiences:

It was clearly operating, in society as well as in individuals, both on the intellectual-rational level and on that of implicit values, norms, lifestyle and thought, common ambitions and emotions. The cluster of ideas, sentiments and public behaviour patterns that characterize this syndrome cannot be subsumed under the title ‘ideology’ as this term is commonly understood.⁷²

This perceived gap between ‘ideology’ and ‘culture’ has introduced a third component to account for a broader understanding of the Nazi *Weltanschauung* – the notion of faith. Thomas Rohkrämer’s study of the German Right portrays a journey from conservatism to Nazism. In this piece, Rohkrämer advances the idea that striving for a ‘single communal faith’ – a ‘sacred homeland’ –functioned as precisely a ‘cultural code’ that glued together the agendas of the new and old German Right. Despite

⁷¹ Shulamit Volkov, *Germans, Jews and Antisemites: Trials in Emancipation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 110.

⁷² Ibid.

previous ideological barriers and despite the traditional tension between religious and worldly authorities, Rohkrämer argues that the striving for a single communal faith tolerated a ‘variety of personal convictions [...] in a single communal political mission or a civic religion’.⁷³ In a similar way, the social historian Claudia Koonz (to whom Rohkrämer frequently refers) explicitly employs the term ‘Nazi culture’ in arguing that this culture offered a ‘secular faith’. Based on an ‘ethnic fundamentalism’, this faith was equipped with new conceptions of life and morality that were fundamentally different from those traditionally assigned to religion. For Koonz, the ‘Nazi conscience’ was not simply an ideology, because ‘what outsiders saw as ideology, the Nazis experienced as truth’.⁷⁴

Previous studies have either discussed the genealogy of ‘political religion’ in historiography⁷⁵ or they have more generally debated empirically whether National Socialism was in fact a ‘political religion’.⁷⁶ These studies pay less attention to the interpretative position of ‘political religion’ between ‘ideology’ or ‘culture’. In fact, one has to look to the use of ‘political religion’ in fascist theory studies where ‘political religion’ has undergone a more thorough theorisation and thus systematic comparison to the term ‘ideology’.

Emilio Gentile’s work towards developing a generic understanding of the concept and its integration in fascist studies argued that ‘political religion is certainly an ideology, but, we could say, an ideology with an extra ingredient’.⁷⁷ Roger Griffin seconded this approach by ‘clustering’ the concepts of ‘totalitarianism’, ‘fascism’ and ‘political religion’, claiming that this methodological move would contribute to developing a concept of an attempted fascist ‘cultural revolution’.⁷⁸ Griffin’s earlier contribution was to introduce the term ‘palingenetic ultranationalism’, where ‘political religion’ increasingly contributed as the conceptual expression of an existential myth of national re-birth which drove the fascist regimes towards the ‘cultural revolution’.⁷⁹ The palingenetic myth itself drew

⁷³ Thomas Rohkrämer, *A Single Communal Faith: The German Right from Conservatism to National Socialism* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), pp. 13–15.

⁷⁴ Claudia Koonz, *The Nazi Conscience* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 2–3.

⁷⁵ Richard Shorten, ‘The Status of Ideology in the Return of Political Religion Theory’, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 12:2 (2007), pp. 163–187.

⁷⁶ Angela Kurtz, ‘God, not Caesar: Revisiting National Socialism as “Political Religion”’, *History of European Ideas*, 35 (2009), pp. 236–252.

⁷⁷ Emilio Gentile, ‘Fascism, Totalitarianism and Political Religion: Definitions and Critical Reflections on Criticism of an Interpretation’ *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 5:3 (2004), p. 363.

⁷⁸ Roger Griffin, ‘Cloister or Cluster? The Implications of Emilio Gentile’s Ecumenical Theory of Political Religion for the Study of Extremism’, *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 6:1,(2005), pp. 33-52.

⁷⁹ Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism*.

together aspects of Christian millennialism, charismatic politics and, most importantly, the perspective of a national ‘revitalisation moment’. Methodologically, Griffin has described this theoretical development as parts of the scholarly aim to maintain ‘the primacy of culture’, whereby ‘theories on generic fascism can retain a healthy empirical sense of the extraordinary heterogeneity of the genus, while empirical studies of it can be informed by a sophisticated concept of cultural revolution’.⁸⁰ This ‘primacy of culture’ school of fascist studies thus framed ‘political religion’ as a methodological advance beyond the utopian quest for definitive explanations and total understandings.

IX

Defining Religion

By virtue of its explanatory heterogeneity, the advocates of a cultural-historical approach to fascist and Holocaust studies have therefore found in ‘political religion’ a useful supplement to ‘ideology’. Scholars approaching National Socialism from the field of religious studies, however, have raised concerns: the assumed difference between ‘political religion’ and ‘ideology’ was one thing, but it was another thing to address the relationship between ‘political religion’ and Christianity.⁸¹ Richard Steigmann-Gall therefore argued that the main problem with ‘political religion’ is that it ‘presumes a static “zero sum” model of identity formation’. This is because the concept reads as a supplement – an ‘*ersatz*-religion’ – to that of traditional religions.⁸² With such a substitution comes the presumption that totalitarian politics in an era of secularisation and through the persecution of alternative belief systems (i.e. the Churches) was essentially anti-religious. This interpretative divide has led to a perceived incompatibility between traditional views of the Christian religion and the Nazi ‘political religion’ that Steigmann-Gall finds so problematic:

⁸⁰ Roger Griffin, ‘The Primacy of Culture: The Current Growth (Or Manufacture) of Consensus within Fascist Studies’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 37:1 (2002), p. 39.

⁸¹ Milan Babík, ‘Nazism as Secular Religion’, *History and Theory*, 45 (2006), pp. 375–396.

⁸² Richard Steigmann-Gall, ‘Nazism and the Revival of Political Religion Theory’, *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 5:3 (2004), p. 382.

What exactly constitutes ‘religion’ such that both Christianity and Nazism can be considered two equally valid examples of it? By what means can we demonstrate that one form of identity – being nationalistic – must necessarily impinge upon and usurp another form of identity – being Christian?⁸³

Steigmann-Gall’s research on the theme describes how Christian structures underpinned the Nazi conceptions of *Volksgemeinschaft* and argues that Christianity thus co-mingled with race-biological terminologies and militant ethno-nationalism.⁸⁴ In other words, ‘Christianity did not constitute a barrier to Nazism. The battles waged against Germany’s enemies constituted a war in the name of Christianity.’⁸⁵ To follow this argument, the use of ‘political religion’ has encouraged an essentialisation of both Christianity and Nazi ‘ideology’ that ultimately has served to create a false dichotomy between these two belief systems. Overlaps could and indeed did coexist for Nazi ‘believers’. To this end, Rohkrämer also expressed ambivalence about the concept, claiming on the one hand that ‘political religion’ in no way carried theoretical assumptions that would challenge his own argument, and on the other, considering the Nazi ideological heterogeneity, admitting that the concept ‘seems to imply too much of a terminological heterogeneity for it to be methodologically useful’.⁸⁶

Now, the argument that Christian belief and Nazi convictions were mutually exclusive remains widely accepted among researchers in the field. Moreover, as scholars diverge in their perceptions about precisely which aspects of Christian religion actually influenced Nazism, their treatment of the relationship between ‘a traditional religion’ and a ‘political religion’ has also questioned the coherence of Christianity. In examining the Catholic roots of Nazism in Munich in the 1920s, Derek Hastings has recently stressed that there were indeed possibilities of religious identities not being exactly what we expect from them. He argues that viewing Nazism through its self-representation revealed its ideology to be ‘intricately intertwined with Catholic identity’.⁸⁷ Susannah Heschel compellingly re-formulates this argument from the angle of Protestant theology; she finds that a mutual interdependence developed between the ‘German Christian Movement’ (*Glaubensbewegung Deutsche Christen*) – a pro-Nazi faction within the German Protestant Church – and the Nazi leadership. When the Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Church

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Steigmann-Gall, *The Holy Reich*.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 261.

⁸⁶ Rohkrämer, *A Single Community of Faith*, p. 2.

⁸⁷ Hastings, *Catholicism and the Roots of Nazism*, pp. 5–6.

Life (*Institut zur Erforschung und Beiseitigung des jüdischen Einflusses auf das deutsche kirchliche Leben*) was established in May 1939, it adopted a racist rhetoric to bolster and redefine its take on the Christian message. With respect to Nazism, its

relationship to Christianity was not one of rejection, nor was it an effort to displace Christianity and become a form of ‘political religion’ [...] Nazism was a form of supersessionism, as usurpation and colonization of Christian theology, especially antisemitism for its own purposes.⁸⁸

This tendency to use the argument that Nazism was *not* a ‘political religion’ in order to strengthen the main point that it was compatible with Christianity is a common phenomenon when scholars present their research as an explicit challenge to the idea that the NSDAP was ‘anti-religious’. For instance, Steigmann-Gall finds that, since Christianity infused the Nazi worldview, it is therefore ‘clear that, by their own account, most Nazis did not believe their movement was a political religion’.⁸⁹ For Hastings, the ‘reconfiguration’ of Nazism from its Catholic roots did promise a Nazi ‘political religion’ *as soon as* the Christian influences had been outsourced: after its re-founding in the early 1920s, it ‘embarked on a vastly different trajectory that ultimately culminated in the highly stylized form of political religion’.⁹⁰ Steigmann-Gall formulates his initial question of whether the concept of ‘religion’ allows for the coexistence of competing identities because most scholars consensually perceived ‘political religion’ as a conceptual rejection of such coexistence. A triangular relationship of three isolated entities – religion, ‘political religion’ and Nazism – thus emerges. The either/or rationale of the relationship works to re-enforce this structure of coherence.

X

Theological Incorrectness

‘Political religion’ has proved to be of limited use when accounting for the Christian influences upon Nazism. The problem, however, is that the same homogeneity ascribed to ‘political religion’ is automatically transferred to the idea of religion. This either/or rationale thus forces a choice between

⁸⁸ Heschel, *Aryan Jesus*, p. 8.

⁸⁹ Richard Steigmann-Gall, ‘Nazism and the Revival of Political Religion Theory’, *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 5:3 (2004), p. 393.

⁹⁰ Hastings, *Catholicism and the Roots of Nazism*, p. 4.

whether Nazism was the product of ‘pure’ Christianity, or an ersatz (in)version of it. For instance, Steigmann-Gall stresses that ‘Nazism cannot represent but a “destructive mimesis of Christianity” and simultaneously derive its ideology from Christian convictions [...] which was it?’⁹¹ That Nazism could simultaneously contain both ‘true’ Christian and anti-religious elements means that they are both possibilities that become automatically rejected in perceptions of what ‘political religion’ is able to encompass. This is not to argue that scholars themselves question the fact that both religious and anti-religious sentiments existed among the top Nazi leadership. The point is rather that ‘political religion’ has traditionally functioned as the conceptual weapon for those preferring to emphasise the anti-religious character of the regime, such as Wolfgang Dierker’s extensive research on the anti-religious policies of the German Security Police (*Sicherheitsdienst* – SD).⁹²

Connections between ‘political religion’ and ‘anti-religion’ have worked to further establish an interpretative distance between ‘political religion’ understood as ‘pseudo-religion’ on the one hand, and ‘real’, i.e. traditional religion, on the other. Claus-Ekkehard Bärsch, who argues that one cannot draw a straight line between the Nazi leadership’s rejections of Judeo-Christian monotheism and then simply label them as pagans, further elaborates on this point.⁹³ Bärsch’s conclusion that ‘political religion’ must be studied in a way that makes room for Christian and anti-Christian sentiments to mingle indicates that it is perhaps not ‘political religion’ as such that constitutes the greatest obstacle to studying ideological pluralities within Nazism. Instead, it might be in the way the concept is used and in which analytical frameworks it is placed. Ultimately, if ‘political religion’, by virtue of having the broader, more ‘cultural’ connotations that come with the term ‘religion’, nevertheless assumes an overly narrow and coherent definition of both ‘religion’ and Nazism, then its separation from early discussions of ideology is rendered superfluous.

Doris Bergen’s study on the German Christian Movement breaks with this consensual image of religion while it simultaneously engages with the ‘political religion’ debate.⁹⁴ Bergen brings the question of belief down to the level of individual actors analytically and empirically as she argues

⁹¹ Steigmann-Gall, ‘Nazism and the Revival of Political Religion Theory’, p. 385.

⁹² Wolfgang Dierker, *Himmlers Glaubenskrieger: Der Sicherheitsdienst der SS und seine Religionspolitik, 1933–1941* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2003), pp. 548–49.

⁹³ Claus-Ekkehard Bärsch, ‘Der Topos der Politischen Religion aus der Perspektive der Religionspolitologie’, in Michael Ley, Heinrich Neisser and Gilbert Weiss, eds., *Politische Religion? Politik, Religion und Anthropologie im Werk von Eric Voegelin* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2003), pp. 176–198.

⁹⁴ Doris Bergen, *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

that ‘the German Christians did not fit most standard theological criteria for Christians [...] nevertheless, they remained consciously Christian’.⁹⁵ Despite acknowledging the importance of Steigmann-Gall’s ambition to illuminate the Christian presence in the Nazi movement, Bergen criticises his view that Christians who engaged in Nazi – that is, ‘un-Christian’ – activities, such as genocide and murder, were led by a ‘false consciousness’. Although it is clear that individuals acted incorrectly from a theological point of view, the question is whether an enquiry into religious conviction should necessarily end there. Bergen stresses, for example, that there is a crucial difference between what she labels as ‘ideal/theological definitions’ and ‘historical/institutional categories’. It is the interaction, rather than their differences, that best reveals the relationship between Nazism and Christianity, let alone the nature of ideological and religious conviction:

the ironic and often violent contradictions between ideals (love of neighbour; liberty, equality and fraternity; from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs) and realities (slavery, racism, terror, ethnocide) is the everyday stuff of human history.⁹⁶

The claim is that because of idealist conceptions of Christianity, its sometimes brutal past is overshadowed. The conceptual understanding of Christianity thus undermines a proper enquiry into the ways Christianity informed individuals’ actions and motivations. Instead, focus lies on the conceptual conflict between ‘Christianity’ and ‘Nazi political religion’ – a distinctively cerebral scholarly enterprise, one far from the culturalist methodology advocated by, for example, Confino. David D. Roberts has further depicted a number of shortcomings with the concept, pointing to the ‘familiarity’ factor as the main issue: Roberts’ notion of ‘familiarity’ resembles Bergen’s point on ‘idealist’ approaches to Christianity. Roberts’ main issue with ‘familiarity’, then, is that the idealist assumption about the nature of belief systems fundamentally excludes the factor of human agency. In believing we are so sure of what religion is, ‘political religion’ becomes an ideal-typical construction when the familiarity we know in the term ‘religion’ juxtaposes with the unknown ‘as if the agents, thanks to a religious blueprint actually knew what they were doing’.⁹⁷ This ‘religious blueprint’ is thus a composition of doctrines that shape the idealist conceptions of religion that Bergen and Roberts depict in ‘political religion’ theory. When ‘political religion’ derives its theoretical foundations from this dogmatic understanding of ‘religion’, the concept is bound to transfer the same

⁹⁵ Doris Bergen, ‘Nazism and Christianity: Partners and Rivals? A Response to Richard Steigmann-Gall, *The Holy Reich. Nazi Conceptions of Christianity 1919–1945*’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 42:1 (2007), p. 28.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁹⁷ Roberts, ‘Political Religion and the Totalitarian Departures of Interwar Europe’, p. 405.

essentialism to its analyses of Nazism. If conviction equates to confession, there are aspects of a belief system that arguably remain untouched. Furthermore, from a theoretical perspective, those ‘forgotten’ aspects are those of conflict and divergence from theological teachings that should be emphasised, not ignored.

XI

Cognitive Studies on Religion

Philosopher of religion Sami Pihlström has helpfully analysed the ‘elusive boundary’ between religion and so-called ‘pseudo-religion’. To illuminate this, Pihlström turned traditional assumptions of religious purity on its head by asking whether a belief that heavily relies upon a theological system is ultimately only an indication of ‘a non-religious life’.⁹⁸ Essential to this reasoning is the argument that anyone solely dependent upon an officially sanctioned system of thought suggests a lack of personal attachment to this belief in the first place. The debate on ‘political religion’ faces its strongest challenge in the similar argument that if individuals believed they were Christians but functioned in their daily lives as dedicated Nazis, is that theological deviation, or false consciousness, enough to write them off as Nazis who could not possibly be Christians? Bergen argued that this was not the case; these individuals were indeed ‘theologically incorrect’, but at the same time they *believed* they were acting wholeheartedly in the name of their faith. In a similar vein, Stanley Stowers has also criticised the use of ‘political religion’ through his claim that a ‘rational-cognitive’ category of religious belief had to be introduced right next to the ‘romantic’ and idealist view of ‘religion’. Contrary to an idealist tendency to assume theological coherence, this theory ‘agrees with what most people who practice religion think that their religion is about’.⁹⁹ Often overshadowed by scholarly disagreements over whether National Socialism was Christian or anti-Christian, Bergen and Stowers usefully emphasise confessional ‘incorrectness’ as counterweights to the hegemony of the idealist/theological category.

⁹⁸ Sami Pihlström, ‘Religion and Pseudo-Religion: An Elusive Boundary’, *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 62:1 (2007), p. 10.

⁹⁹ Stowers, ‘The Concepts of Religion’, p. 12.

The separation of ‘people’s conceptions of religion’ on the one hand, and the official dogmas of a religion on the other has dominated cognitive studies of religion since the 1990s.¹⁰⁰ Although Stowers does not refer to it explicitly when proposing the ‘rational-cognitive’ theory, the actual concept of ‘theological incorrectness’ was coined in 2004 as ‘the idea that what one learns in one’s given culture, such as theological ideas, plays only a partial role in what people actually think and do’.¹⁰¹ While acknowledging the overlapping nature of religion, the proponents of cognitive studies above all argue that doctrinal modes of religiosity are insufficient when viewed in isolation from people’s conceptions and daily lives. In fact, ‘theologically incorrect’ versions among ordinary people often override theological doctrines.¹⁰² It is therefore highly relevant to note that cognitive theory captures a dimension of religion that goes beyond ideal-typical understandings of religious concepts, since ‘people’s actual practices and concepts generally deviate from officially sanctioned ones’.¹⁰³ For this reason, the cognitivist interpretation provides two insights that are surely fruitful in studies on National Socialism. Firstly, from a naturalist approach, religion and ideology are conceptually inseparable. Secondly, even more significantly, religion and ideology can be similarly ‘deconstructed’ in order to detect individual agency in the praxis of a belief system. This deconstruction, in turn, requires an emphasis on deviation and even conflict between individual belief and doctrinal teachings. The conflict is the premise underpinning ‘theological incorrectness’. Ultimately, such a concept of ‘theological incorrectness’ thus indicates the possibility of developing a similar conceptual notion of ‘ideological incorrectness’ when applied in this interdisciplinary way.

Historiography on Nazism has not explicitly dealt with the scholarly potential of ‘theological incorrectness’. All the same, the transgressive nature of National Socialist ideology is increasingly emphasised vis-à-vis both traditional conceptions of political ideologies and institutional Christianity. Indeed, scholars often portray National Socialism as transgressive in the sense that its worldview rested upon principles of violence and action that naturally challenged the idea of dogmatic constraints. In other words, increasingly central to studies of Nazism is a still loosely defined principle

¹⁰⁰ Todd Tremlin, ‘Divergent Religion: A Dual Process Model of Religious Thought, Behavior and Morphology’, in Whitehouse, H. & McCauley, R. (eds.) *Mind and Religion: Psychological and Cognitive Foundations for Religiosity* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2005), pp. 69–84; Pascal Boyer, *Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

¹⁰¹ Jason Slone, *Theological Incorrectness. Why Religious People Believe What They Shouldn’t* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p.4.

¹⁰² Harvey Whitehouse, ‘Towards an Integration of Ethnography, History and the Cognitive Science of Religion’, in Whitehouse, H. & Laidlaw, J. (eds.) *Religion, Anthropology and Cognitive Science* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2007), pp. 247–280.

¹⁰³ Boyer, *Religion Explained*, p. 6.

of transgression, or a worldview that, according to Michael Wildt, rested upon the principle of the ‘unbound’ (*Unbedingten*).¹⁰⁴ Recent work by Boaz Neumann emphasises how the Nazis differentiated between the terms ‘ideology’ and ‘worldview’ as part of an all-encompassing Nazi battle with materialistic liberalism associated with the term ‘ideology’. Neumann further describes an iconoclastic construction of a Nazi worldview that ‘was conceived as articulated through the intellectual faculty and associated with ideas concerning life. *Weltanschauung* was coupled with life experience and the senses [...] The “idea” of ideology based on reason was identified with the detested liberal tradition.’¹⁰⁵ The distance between ‘theological incorrectness’ and ‘ideological incorrectness’ is further minimised when Kurlander explains the absence of a ‘political religion’ in National Socialist ideology. He points not merely to the overlaps of theological and Nazi doctrines as such, but frames their interaction as a deliberate Nazi revolt against both ideological and theological consistency:

The haphazard introduction of numerous pagan and National Socialist holidays indicates less the desire to create a political religion or ‘sacralization of politics’ and more a pragmatic attempt to exploit existing supernatural tropes without worrying about the internal theological consistency of the proceedings.¹⁰⁶

The transgressive principle has thus begun to make its way into the analytical frameworks of today’s research. Scholars increasingly position ‘political religion’ within the framework of transgression rather than confession. One example is LaCapra’s alternative understanding of ‘political religion’: if there ever *was* a sacred aura to National Socialism, it should not be sought in a comparison with Christian theology, but in the ‘real’ limit-shattering experience of murder. Stemming from the urge to break out from theoretical and moral limits, Nazi violence thus became a sacralised act of transcendence – one that to them was worthy of glorification.¹⁰⁷ LaCapra’s ‘activist’ approach to Nazi sacralisation resonates with his earlier writings on ideology and culture, which called for ‘a concept of ideology that is not simply conflated with a homogenised idea of a cultural system’.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, his divergent image of the Nazi as sacred presents the concept of ‘political religion’ as precisely the kind of theological construct so commonly transgressed by the Nazis. This culturalist emphasis on conflict

¹⁰⁴ Michael Wildt, *Generation des Unbedingten. Das Führungskorps des Reichssicherheitshauptamtes* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2002).

¹⁰⁵ Boaz Neumann, ‘The National Socialist Politics of Life’, *New German Critique*, 85 (2002), p. 109.

¹⁰⁶ Kurlander, ‘Hitler’s Monsters’, p. 543.

¹⁰⁷ LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, p. 138.

¹⁰⁸ Dominick LaCapra, ‘Culture and Ideology: From Geertz to Marx’, *Poetics Today*, 9 (1988), p. 388.

is thus not only informed by broader methodological developments in the field of cultural studies, but also empirically and theoretically supported by contemporary research on Nazism. It is thus increasingly clear that 'political religion', as it reads today, fails its original purpose of conceptualising a heterogenic approach to Nazism.

The second point separates this thesis from previous critical examinations of the concept. The aim of this literature survey, then, has been to use the genealogy of 'political religion' in order to trace what really has been missing in today's research: a positive link between the 'incorrectness' often found in individual conceptions of their belief vis-à-vis official doctrines, and ex post facto theories on Nazi ideology. Indeed, this chapter began with an analytical separation between the more inclusive 'culture' and 'religion' on the one hand, and the more narrow 'ideology' on the other. Yet, this discussion has shown that the difference in the historiographical use of these concepts is not that significant after all. Regardless of whether we use the term 'religion' or 'ideology' in approaches to Nazism, what remains absent is the inclusion of 'incorrectness'. This emphasis on the importance of illustrating the dynamic between the official nature of Nazi propaganda and its ideological aims, and its actual adaption in the daily lives of the NSDAP's 'ordinary men' is indeed already integral to contemporary scholarship. Just because definitions of Nazism have new conceptual exteriors, such as religion in place of ideology, there is little room for heuristic headway unless it challenges the assumed coherence of Nazism in the first place. What the 'political religion' debate has offered contemporary research are insights that, ironically, derived from its shortcomings. As a response to the failures of the concept, scholars have since proposed a more thorough systematisation of intermingling convictions. Importantly, these are propositions necessitated by a turning away from the categories of doctrine and confession, where 'ideological incorrectness' must be viewed as both a principle and an agent in the making of a transnational 'Nazi culture'.

Chapter 2: Beyond the Banality of ‘Political Religion’

‘Ideological Incorrectness’ in the Works of Hannah Arendt and Eric Voegelin

Introduction

In 1973, Eric Voegelin argued that his own conception of National Socialism as a ‘political religion’ was ‘too vague and already deforms the real problem of experiences by mixing them with the further problem of dogma or doctrine’.¹ While Voegelin never fully engaged in discussions with postmodern thinkers, his words echo their argument on the affinitive relationship between philosophical essentialism and the totalitarian ideologies of homogenisation.² With the Holocaust in hindsight, Voegelin saw a ‘spiritual disease’ right at the core of the Western intellectual tradition; the dominance (*Herrschaft*) of so-called objective science had degraded historiography into historicism, and the subjective individual was transformed into an ‘illiterate *idiote*’ – a mere puppet of public life and ‘essentialist truths’.³ But for Voegelin, the *idiote* was still a politically willing person, and not merely driven by a metaphysical force such as a ‘political religion’. The Nazi crimes committed in acts of both compliance and direct persecutions were, in Voegelin’s view, beyond the reach of collectivist classifications. Scholars tended to ascribe a banality to the actions of the Nazi *idiote* in post-war historiography, and this became a trigger towards the formation of Voegelin’s theory of consciousness – and his ultimate rejection of ‘political religion’.

¹ Eric Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, Ellis Sandoz ed. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), p. 50.

² See Peter A. Petrakis and Cecil L. Eubanks (eds.), *Eric Voegelin’s Dialogue with the Postmoderns: Searching for Foundations* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004). The similarities between Voegelin and Emmanuel Levinas have been particularly highlighted in their respective works on ethics and transcendence: Levinas’s phenomenology of the ‘Other’ and Voegelin’s appropriation of Plato’s *Metaxy*. The latter will be discussed further in this text. For further reading on the parallels between Voegelin and Levinas, see William Paul Simmons, ‘Voegelin and Levinas on the “Foundations” of Ethics and Politics’, Petrakis and Eubanks (eds.), *Eric Voegelin’s Dialogue*, pp. 121–144., and Marie L. Baird, ‘Eric Voegelin’s Vision of Personalism and Emmanuel Levinas’s Ethics of Responsibility: Toward a Post-Holocaust Spiritual Theology?’, *Journal of Religion*, 79:2 (1999), pp. 385–403.

³ Voegelin, ‘The German University and the Order of German Society: A Reconsideration of the Nazi Era’ [1966] in *Published Essays 1966–1985. The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin Volume 12*, Ellis Sandoz (ed.) (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), p. 25.

While the previous chapter described the contemporary use, potentials and limitations of ‘political religion’ today, this chapter describes the historiographical development of the concept from the interwar years until today. It is the argument of the chapter that the concept’s trajectory is marked by essentialisation and, ironically, a dogmatic approach both to the meaning of the term ‘religion’ and to National Socialism. Today’s use of the concept is marked by binary structures – the sacred and the profane; the phenomenologist and the functionalist; the National Socialist and the fascist – and with this observation comes the subsequent scholarly critique of the concept’s reductionist tendencies. Chapter 1 thus argued that the use of ‘political religion’ needs to move away from its either/or assumptions and rather focus on how heterogeneity and pluralism infused National Socialist ideology. There is certainly no novelty in this type of conclusion. Indeed, it has become standard historiographical practice to point to the fact that since the 1990s, scholars have increasingly called for explanatory heterogeneity in studies on Nazism and the Holocaust.

What is less explored, however, is the role of theories on Nazi pluralism before the 1990s – a historiographical period so often written off as dominated by rigid structuralism in the way Nazism was interpreted. The present chapter transgresses the commonly used periodisation by arguing that the notion of National Socialist ideological pluralism, in this thesis ‘ideological incorrectness’, formed the core of the ideas of two of the most influential intellectuals on Nazism since the late 1930s: Eric Voegelin and Hannah Arendt. Similar to Arendt’s firm positioning within Holocaust historiography in the early post-war years, Voegelin’s concept of ‘political religion’ (1938) has reached canonical status since the 1990s. ‘Political religion’ is thus largely applied by scholars who emphasise explicitly that contrary to Arendt’s banality thesis, the force of ‘ideology’ took such dimensions during the Holocaust that one should speak, as Voegelin did, of a Nazi religion. This yet another form of historiographical dichotomy has created a distorting image of the works of both Arendt and Voegelin. This chapter describes how historiography not only before but also *after* the ideological turn in the 1990s has failed to acknowledge two uniting aspects in the works of Arendt and Voegelin: firstly, their rejection of the explanatory hegemony of concepts, and secondly, their subsequently shared argument that National Socialism displayed an ‘ideological incorrectness’. This form of ‘incorrectness’ that Arendt and Voegelin depicted at the heart of National Socialism transgressed not only conventional approaches to ‘ideology’, but eventually, in Voegelin’s own view, it transgressed also the dogmas assumed in ‘political religion’.

‘Ideological incorrectness’ not only describes Nazi pluralism, but it is an anti-concept that seeks to highlight the almost dogmatic striving for ‘correctness’ in research on National Socialist ideology. Contrary to the bipolar historiographical positions of Arendt’s banality thesis vis-à-vis Voegelin’s image of the Nazi religion, both scholars rejected the term ‘ideology’ in explanations of perpetrators’ motivations. In 1953, Hannah Arendt wrote to Voegelin: ‘I hate ideologies as much as you do.’⁴ Voegelin’s later rejection of ‘political religion’ has been largely overlooked by contemporary users of the concept. Moreover, his post-Holocaust theory of consciousness, published in parts from 1966 up to his death in 1985 – and which Voegelin later stated to be the core to all his work⁵ – was intimately related to the events of the Holocaust and its aftermath. These dates significantly parallel the post-war hegemony of structuralist interpretations in perpetrator historiography. There is thus a need to examine more closely whether Voegelin’s post-structuralist rejection of ‘political religion’ was in fact a philosophical response to this particular historiographical development that still seems to have taken a hold on the way the concept is used today. This type of examination seeks to draw a link between Voegelin’s and Arendt’s critique of the historiographical development, and the theorisation of a less dogmatic way of understanding ‘political religion’. The link is the ‘ideological incorrectness’ that both Arendt and Voegelin depicted in National Socialism and which later made Voegelin rethink his own concept. This ideological incorrectness was a clear ideal also among the Scandinavian National Socialists present in this study, and with this broadness in mind, ‘ideological incorrectness’ is not necessarily a negation of ‘political religion’ theory but an adaption of the concept to a more complex historical scenery. In that sense, one can understand Voegelin’s rejection of his own concept as a sign that he should not be regarded as the founding father of ‘political religion’, but rather more pioneering in the way he depicted its dogmatic assumptions.

⁴ Cited in Peter Baehr, ‘Debating Totalitarianism: An Exchange of Letters between Eric Voegelin and Hannah Arendt’ (with Gordon C. Wells), *History and Theory*, 51: 3 (2012), pp. 364–380
http://peterbaehr.99scholars.net/uploads/9/0/5/3/9053324/peter_baehr_-_debating_totalitarianism_an_exchange_of_letters_between_eric_voegelin_and_hannaharendt.pdf, p. 5.

⁵ See Ellis Sandoz, *The Voegelinian Revolution: A Biographical Introduction*, 2nd edn (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2000), p. 22, and Lissy Voegelin ‘Foreword’ in Eric Voegelin, *Order and History Volume V: In Search of Order* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987).

I

Hannah Arendt

‘He was not stupid. It was sheer thoughtlessness – something by no means identical with stupidity – that predisposed him to become one of the greatest criminals of that period.’⁶ Just as the totalitarian system rendered humans superfluous, Hannah Arendt saw in Eichmann a high-ranking Nazi with an inability to *think* outside the singularity of the Nazi worldview.⁷ Yet, in her later publication *The Life of the Mind*, she also added that ‘there were no signs in him [Eichmann] of firm ideological conviction or of specific evil motives’.⁸ According to Michael Mack, this passage, seemingly confined to Eichmann’s own thoughtlessness, does in fact highlight the difficulty of separating the account of Eichmann’s personal features from Arendt’s description of the wider nature of Nazi ideology. First, Eichmann was a true Nazi because he fully absorbed the ‘absoluteness’ of the Nazis’ take on a ‘reversed’ Kantian morality in ‘thou shalt kill’.⁹ Second, Arendt’s portrayal of Nazism as the antithesis of human plurality was nurtured by Eichmann through his own thoughtlessness. Eichmann was an incarnation of Nazi ideology since his profile fully corresponded to the violent logic of non-thinking that was ‘completely removed from the inconsistency and plurality that characterizes humanity’.¹⁰ Following on from that, Mack further agrees with Richard J. Bernstein that Arendt’s banality thesis rested upon her use of Eichmann’s case to illustrate how the Nazi system *and* ideology challenged moral and philosophical ideas by refusing to reject moral thought and logics, but nevertheless was founded upon an ethic of mass murder.¹¹ Because on the one hand, Arendt saw the banality of evil as

⁶ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem – A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin, 1992 [1963]), pp. 287–288.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁸ Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Mary McCarthy ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981 [1978]), p. 3.

⁹ Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, p. 150.

¹⁰ Michael Mack, ‘The Holocaust and Hannah Arendt’s Philosophical Critique of Philosophy: Eichmann in Jerusalem’, *New German Critique*, 36:1 (2009), p. 60.

¹¹ Although important for a comprehensive analysis of Arendt’s thesis, I will not engage in the discussion of whether Eichmann’s moral was in fact a reversal of Kantian laws, or whether it represented its extreme version. For a more recent overview with an emphasis on the former, see Carsten Bagge Laustsen and Rasmus Ugilt, ‘Eichmann’s Kant’, *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 21:3 (2007), pp. 166–180.

no theory or doctrine but something quite factual, the phenomenon of evil deeds, committed on a gigantic scale, which could not be traced to any particularity of wickedness, pathology, or ideological conviction in the doer, whose only personal distinction was a perhaps extraordinary shallowness.¹²

On the other hand, if one accepts the argument that Eichmann encompassed the nature of Nazism as Arendt described, as much as Nazism encompassed the figure of Eichmann, one can turn the question of superfluosity on its head; by emphasising the uncanniness in his banality, the agency is enhanced rather than trivialised. It brings us to the relationship between Arendt's terminology of radical and banal evil. In contrast to viewing Arendt's 'two evils' in conceptual opposition, Mack and Bernstein both argue that in the light of Arendt's earlier work on *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 'the concept of the banality of evil is compatible with her earlier thoughts about radical evil'.¹³ For Bernstein, the conception of banal evil depends on the understanding of an existing radical evil,¹⁴ a contention followed by Mack when he interprets Arendt's message to suggest that the 'greatest evil is not radical, it has no roots, and because it has no roots, it has no limitations'.¹⁵

As Arendt realised the boundless nature of the Nazi crimes, she also faced the insufficiencies with her own use of the term 'radical'. As Bernstein clarifies in his interpretation of Arendt, 'the so-called Nazi crimes and radical evil breaks the boundaries of our traditional concepts or standards' where the human-made conception of something 'radical' is a term rendered banal in the face of the unprecedented nature of the Nazi crime.¹⁶ In that sense, the conception of 'radical' evil was on the one hand indicating a banality since it was unable to encompass Nazism as such, but on the other hand, it also meant that the 'banal' Nazi evil was a kind of 'banality' that radically altered any previously held conceptions of its meaning.

So, what does the equivalence between radical and banal evil imply for the interpretation of Eichmann? Ultimately, it becomes a question of how to interpret Arendt's already mentioned notion of the 'factual extraordinary shallowness of Eichmann'. I follow Mack's analysis of Arendt's liturgical strategy in the report on Eichmann to argue that there are two ways to approach this equivalence. First, her text could simply be understood literally: that Eichmann's banal and obedient

¹² Hannah Arendt, 'Thinking and Moral Consideration', *Social Research*, 38:3 (1971), p. 417.

¹³ Richard J. Bernstein, *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), p. 184.

¹⁴ Bernstein, *Radical Evil: A Philosophical Interrogation* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), p. 218.

¹⁵ Mack, 'Philosophical Critique', p. 45.

¹⁶ Bernstein, *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question*, p. 150.

figure was a cog in a radical machine where the equivalence of evils was shown in the totality of genocide; in Mark Roseman's description of this interpretation, he was 'a modern man in his vulnerability to totalitarianism'.¹⁷ Holocaust historiography until the 1990s gives evidence for the attractiveness of this reading of Arendt: as the post-war debate between intentionalists and functionalists from the 1960s to the end of the Cold War was based on two divergent holistic frameworks to account for the Holocaust, 'the banality of evil' was absorbed in this dichotomy. In contrast to the early historiographical demonisations of Hitler and 'hardcore-Nazis' in the 1950s, Stanley Milgram's social-psychological experiments followed in the wake of Arendt's thesis and underlined the ordinariness of obedient men like Eichmann.¹⁸ In other words, as the focus among Holocaust historians lay primarily on the macro-structures of decision-making processes and Nazi policy, 'the banality of evil' could confirm the intentionalists' focus on Hitler's grand project as well as the functionalists' emphasis on a 'cumulative radicalisation' beyond the reach of individual agencies.¹⁹ When Roseman states that 'it is striking how slow post-war historians have been to see its perpetrators as motivated by ideas or convictions', he also comments on the period in which Eichmann in his thoughtlessness became the archetypal Holocaust perpetrator.²⁰ Because according to this image, thoughtlessness was not reflected upon as a fundamental part of National Socialism, and therefore Eichmann's 'inability to think' implied his detachment from ideological conviction.

There is also a second possibility emphasised by Mack that Arendt, by juxtaposing the particularity in the individual figure of Eichmann with the metaphysical terms of 'banality' and 'evil', already in her title aimed to challenge her interpreters with inconsistency – an inconsistency that she was later criticised for.²¹ Therefore, scholars have engaged in the seemingly elusive task of differentiating the 'radical' from the 'banal' – based on the fundamental premise that the two are contradictory and that the latter excludes ideology. But, in fact, it was the realisation of how the radical and the banal conflated in Nazi ideology that prompted Arendt's reconsideration of using the term 'radical'. She wrote to Karl Jaspers in 1946: 'the way I've expressed this [‘what the Nazis did’] up to now I come

¹⁷ Mark Roseman, 'Beyond Conviction? Perpetrators, Ideas and Action in the Holocaust in Historiographical Perspective', Roseman, Frank Biess and Hanna Schissler (eds.), *Essays on Modern German History: Conflict, Catastrophe and Continuity* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), p. 86.

¹⁸ Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1974).

¹⁹ There are numerous analyses available on the impact of the banality thesis on perpetrator research; for a concise overview of its position in perpetrator historiography, see Roseman, 'Beyond Conviction', pp. 83–90.

²⁰ Roseman, 'Beyond Conviction', p. 83.

²¹ Mack, 'Philosophical Critique', p. 46.

dangerously close to that “satanic greatness” that I, like you, totally reject’.²² With a deliberate linguistic instability, Arendt thus critiques logic as part of both philosophy and ideology when she attempts to ‘develop a political philosophy in response to the Nazi genocide while undermining “philosophy” as a discipline hostile toward diversity and the plural realm of politics’.²³ Because, just as Arendt expressed in her 1953 essay ‘Terror and Mankind’, ‘all our political concepts and definitions [...] seem to explode in our hands the instant we try to apply them’.²⁴ In other words, the way that Arendt’s critique of scientific reason and Nazi totalitarian dogmas had also posed penetrating questions for her own intellectualist practice comes through as she describes her use of the term ‘the banality of evil’ in *The Life of the Mind*: ‘Behind the phrase, I held not thesis or doctrine. I was dimly aware of the fact that it went against our tradition of thought.’²⁵ The dogmatic lenses derived, in Arendt’s view, from conventional perceptions of what a political ideology looked like. Arendt’s observation not only attacked the dogmatism of Western scholarly tradition, but it was also a comment on its failure to grasp the ‘ideological incorrectness’ of Nazism.

Arendt seems to imply that Eichmann lived out Nazism beyond historiographical conceptions of ‘conviction’, to the extent that it was the interpretative term ‘ideological’ that was rendered superfluous by the Nazi crimes, rather than the individual conviction as such. As Peter Baehr’s study on Arendt emphasises, although she became increasingly more occupied with the term ‘ideology’ over the years, Arendt’s works from the 1950s also show evidence for an early link between Arendt’s principle of plurality and her academic style of inconsistency and irony. In 1951, in a first draft of a letter to Voegelin, Arendt defined totalitarian ‘ideology’ through her characteristic juxtaposition of two seemingly contradictory concepts. Just as Eichmann came to represent the blurred distinction between the ‘radical’ and the ‘banal’, Arendt’s notion of ‘ideology’ left her with nothing but the observation of a conceptual inconsistency, that ‘there is something truly crazy about this logicity’.²⁶

²² Hannah Arendt and Karl Jaspers, *Correspondence, 1926–1969*, Lotte Kohler and Hans Saner (eds.) (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1992), p. 69.

²³ Mack, ‘Philosophical Critique’, p. 36. For an alternative view, Dan Diner has departed from an acknowledgment of Arendt’s inconsistency, but argues contrary to Mack that Arendt’s liturgical inconsistency was caused not by a deliberate philosophical critique but by Arendt’s personal ambivalence in her own Jewish self-conception, being torn between extreme universalism (the emphasis on the banality of the perpetrators) and radical nationalism (the emphasis on the monstrous Nazi barbarity and the Jewish suffering); see Dan Diner, ‘Hannah Arendt Reconsidered: On the Banal and the Evil in her Holocaust Narrative’, *New German Critique*, 71 (1997), pp. 177–190. This approach to Arendt, and its impact on perpetrator research, is further discussed by Richard Wolin, ‘The Ambivalences of German-Jewish Identity: Hannah Arendt in Jerusalem’, *History and Memory*, 8:2 (1996), pp. 9–34.

²⁴ Arendt, ‘Mankind and Terror’, in Jerome Kohn, ed., *Essays In Understanding, 1930–1954: Formation, Exile and Totalitarianism* [1953] (New York: Schocken Books, 1994), p. 302.

²⁵ Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, p. 3.

²⁶ Cited in Baehr, ‘Debating Totalitarianism’, p. 5.

Arendt therefore did not reject Nazi ideology as a motivating factor for Eichmann, but she did reject its assumed consistency.

As much as the post-war structuralist interpretation of Arendt turned her banality thesis into a slogan for the secondary importance of ideological conviction, her name also takes a centre position in a more recent paradigmatic debate in Holocaust discourse. By virtue of its very existence, the growing field of genocide studies is often interpreted as a logical refutation of the uniqueness claim to the Holocaust. Arendt's 'boomerang thesis', a thesis in which Arendt draws continuities of exclusionary ideas and politics between colonialism and the drive of National Socialism (i.e. genocide), has, as Dan Stone observes, become an intellectual justification the continuity thesis. It has further consolidated a polarised scholarly climate of pros and cons for Arendt's thought – and therefore for genocide studies as such.²⁷ In giving evidence for Arendt's simultaneous emphasis on continuities as well as radical breaks between the Holocaust and colonial atrocities, Stone argues similarly to Mack that Arendt's 'causal pluralism goes hand in hand with her defense of human plurality'.²⁸ When not interpreted in accordance with her principle of pluralism, her analytical inconsistency leads to the scenario where 'somewhat ironically, those who argue against this suggestion [the 'boomerang' thesis] might be closer to Arendt's thinking than they suppose'.²⁹ To recall Arendt's critique of the logics in philosophy then, she would have opposed the label of being a 'prophet' of the 'boomerang' thesis, not because she might have had second thoughts about her argument but primarily because that would have been a *thoughtless* position to be in – and a rejection of the historical complexity that plurality brings.

II

Voegelin's 'Political Religion'

It was against this essentialism that Arendt based her critique of Voegelin's analysis of Nazism as a 'political religion'. In a response to his critical review of *Origins of Totalitarianism* in 1953,³⁰ Arendt detected 'semi-teleological' features in Voegelin's concept that seemed to homogenise the plurality

²⁷ Dan Stone, 'Defending the Plural: Hannah Arendt and Genocide Studies', *New Formations*, 71 (2011), p. 54.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

³⁰ Eric Voegelin, 'The Origins of Totalitarianism', *The Review of Politics*, 15:1 (1953), pp. 68–86.

of historical elements that could explain the emergence of totalitarianism. In Voegelin's own words, as he recalled the main points of her criticism, the problem lay in the fact that according to Arendt, he had given Nazism the status of a 'Weltanschauung-movement without any particular historical factors'.³¹ Interestingly throughout the post-war years, Voegelin's comments on Nazism were increasingly moving towards Arendt's argument that 'political religion' indeed implied a 'functionalisation' of religion.³²

As Voegelin began to formulate his critique of 'political religion', scholars were busy praising its analytical potential. While the critique of Arendt's banality thesis gained momentum in the 1990s, this decade also marked the point of departure for the resurgence of 'political religion' in research on Nazi perpetrators. A few factors contributing to this academic development must be highlighted. First, the scholarly turn to cultural history furthered a preoccupation with the 'small histories' of individual actors and their beliefs and agency so that portrayals of Eichmann gradually took the shape of a dynamic ideologue. Second, in the post-Cold War context of a growing focus on religious fundamentalism, theories on totalitarian movements experienced a renaissance with a specific focus on the phenomenon of mass participation in political extremism.³³ These factors taken together meant that 'political religion' came to symbolise the agency of the masses – a grass-roots perspective in contrast to structuralist Cold War theories of totalitarianism – and its application to Nazism led to the concept's inevitable connection with Holocaust perpetrators.³⁴

Voegelin was certainly not the only theorist of Nazism as a 'political religion'. In the 1930s, one did not have to be a political scientist to observe a National Socialist politics that seemed out of this world. Victor Klemperer's essay 'I Believe in Him' described a 'Hitler religion' where political support across the conventional boundaries of class, gender and religious confessions had entered

³¹ Voegelin, 'Autobiographical Statement at the Age of Eighty-Two', Ed Lawrence ed., *The Beginning and The Beyond: Papers from the Gadamer and Voegelin Conference* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984), p. 122.

³² Hannah Arendt, '[The Origins of Totalitarianism]: A Reply', *The Review of Politics*, 15:1 (1953), pp. 81–82. Arendt's most elaborative critique of the application of the term 'religion' in Nazism is, however, found in her article 'Religion and Politics', published in *Confluence* (1954), also available in Jerome Kohn ed., *Essays in Understanding 1930–1954: Formation Exile and Totalitarianism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1994), pp. 368–390.

³³ The link between Voegelin's analytical perspective and the study of terrorism is explicitly drawn by Barry Cooper in his study on 'the spiritual disorder' (Voegelin's term applied) of modern terrorism, in *New Political Religions, or An Analysis of Modern Terrorism* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004).

³⁴ Neil Gregor offers a comprehensive contextualisation of the resurgence of the 'political religion' concept in the light of the voluntarist turn in the wider social sciences and humanities; see Gregor, 'Nazism – A Political Religion? Rethinking the Voluntarist Turn', in Neil Gregor ed., *Nazism, War and Genocide: Essays in Honour of Jeremy Noakes* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2005).

into the realm of a collective religious faith: ‘Thus I have heard this profession of faith in Hitler from two different social strata [...] and I unfortunately never had any reason to doubt that as well as coming from the lips, it also came from the heart.’³⁵ Klemperer’s words could have been mistaken for being Voegelin’s because it was the roots to the formation of National Socialism as sacred collective that both sought to unmask. At the centre of Voegelin’s attention stood the individual’s experience of the religious:

Wherever a reality discloses itself in the religious experience as sacred, it becomes the most real, a realissimum. The basic transformation from the natural to the divine results in a sacral and value-oriented recrystallization of reality around that aspect that has been recognized as being divine.³⁶

Voegelin’s *Die politischen Religionen* was the culmination of a decade’s elaboration on the nature of totalitarian ideologies and politics. Living in Austria at the time, the German-born Voegelin predicted early the unbound reach of the Nazis’ false claim to science. On racism, *Rasse und Staat* (1933) and *Die Rassenidee in der Geistesgeschichte* (1933) were published at the time of the Nazi seizure of power in Germany. The striving to penetrate the core of exclusionary ideologies had early on given Voegelin the insight that the line between a religious experience and the exclusionary quest for scientific certainty easily overlapped. Later in his life, he explained how

this reality of murdering through inspired idiocy [...] is not simply an academic problem, or a problem in the history of opinion and so on that evokes my interest in this or that issue in the theory of consciousness, but the very practical problem of mass murder which is manifest in the twentieth century.³⁷

Ernst Nolte’s idea of meta-political fascism sees the fascist experience as non-transcendent beyond the individual experience³⁸ and similarly did Voegelin’s ‘phenomenological’ approach to a National Socialist ‘political religion’ emphasise the inner experience of Nazism within political structures. The argument that the religious aura of National Socialism was itself an uncanny explanation of the violent nature of the regime is evident as Voegelin describes the formation of ‘inner-worldly religions’

³⁵ Victor Klemperer, *The Language of the Third Reich: LTI: Lingua Tertii Imperii: A Philologist’s Notebook* [1947], Martin Brady tr. (London: Athlone Press, 2000), p. 109.

³⁶ Voegelin, ‘The Political Religions’ [1939], Manfred Henningsen ed., *Modernity Without Restraint: The Political Religion, the New Science of Politics and Science, Politics, and Gnosticism. The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, Volume 5* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), p. 32.

³⁷ Voegelin, ‘Autobiographical Statement at the Age of Eighty-Two’, pp. 116–117.

³⁸ Ernst Nolte, *Three Faces of Fascism: Action Française, Italian Fascism, National Socialism* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966).

(*innerweltliche Religionen*); as opposed to ‘trans-worldly religions’ (*überweltliche Religionen*), the ‘inner-worldly’ religious movements found the real and divine (*realissimum*) in earthly phenomenon. In this vein, Voegelin presented National Socialism as such an ‘inner-worldly’ religion where its *realissimum* was built around the racist idea of an Aryan community, or *Volk*. A belonging to the Nazi community meant that each individual was being in a state of action. As a result, Voegelin sought to balance the individual and the supra-individual dimensions of ‘political religion’ by emphasising that the religious experience of a racial community itself became a suprahuman reality.³⁹ To explain the willingness of the individual to gain such an experience while simultaneously letting himself sink ‘down into the impersonal nothingness of instrumentality’, Voegelin saw how ‘individuals experience themselves as actors in the course of world history’.⁴⁰ In short, the banality in the individual’s active aim to master his worldly existence was for Voegelin the very essence that formed the pillars of the Nazi ideology of racial exclusion and its manifestation in violence.

III

Arendt, Voegelin and Historiography

There is, however, an irony in how the growing focus on the Nazi *Weltanschauung* marked the end of the polarising power of the use of Arendt’s banality thesis, only to be replaced by the image of Eric Voegelin as the founding father of ‘political religion’.⁴¹ In fact, both Voegelin and Arendt hold a canonical place in perpetrator historiography and represent important milestones in its development. As scholars have described an ‘ideological turn’ in perpetrator research since the 1990s, this ‘ideological turn’ coincided with what one could see as the turn away from Arendt’s Eichmann to Voegelin’s ‘ideological believer’ in the representation of the archetypal Holocaust perpetrator. In the context of Arendt, Dana Villa perceptively identifies the irony which motivated Goldhagen’s

³⁹ Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, p. 30.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ The analogy between Arendt’s and Voegelin’s positions in Holocaust historiography is discussed most recently by Tom Lawson. Lawson argues that the works of both scholars have been absorbed and circumscribed to answer for interpretative meta-structures in the wider field of research and surrounding political contexts. See Lawson, *Debates on the Holocaust*, esp. pp. 217–227.

reductionist thesis on German ideological ‘executioners’, namely by proclaiming it as a response to one-dimensional Eichmann figures – where the one to blame was ‘of course, Hannah Arendt’.⁴²

Similarly, Gilbert Weiss has remarked that Voegelin’s sudden popularity says more about the limited interpretative ability among contemporary scholars than the actual content of Voegelin’s work. What these comments on Arendt and Voegelin indicate is an appropriation of their work into the perpetrator historiography, driven largely by historiographical meta-structures, such as post-war structuralism as well as the ‘ideological turn’. In this vein, Villa concludes that when scholars have strived to detect the ‘representative perpetrator’ in Arendt’s writing, they have paradoxically ‘diminished the plurality’ that signified not only Arendt’s intellectual works but also her very principle of thinking.⁴³ Just as Dan Diner has described how in the academic disciplines and beyond, the ‘banality of evil’ now constitutes a career in itself, Weiss notes that besides the ‘inadequate and unoriginal’ use of Voegelin’s concept as applied to National Socialism, ‘political religion’ seems to have taken on ‘a life of its own’.⁴⁴ In this context, Jürgen Gebhardt has further observed that Voegelin rather paradoxically tends to be read as a prophet, offering ‘a vision of the true order’, which is a historiographical position scarcely different from the mentioned place of Arendt in genocide research.⁴⁵ As I move on to discuss ‘political religion’ in current perpetrator research against Voegelin’s theory of consciousness, it will become clearer how these two parts of his philosophy came to clash through the very notion of logical ‘ideal-types’. I will begin with an overview of the use of ‘political religion’.

Remembering how Vondung and Ley both stressed the explanatory power of political religion, the ambition to crack the code and solve the mystery of Nazism paradoxically transforms the obscurity of ‘political religion’ into a tool in the quest for certainty. Precisely because it appears as the closest possible articulation, ‘political religion’ is thus used in order to overcome the mystery rather than to ‘live with’ the uncertainty it entails. Besides the analytical shortcomings of the concept, the ethical dimension in Roberts’s critique mirrors Friedländer’s aim to maintain a disbelief, for the

⁴² Cited in Dana Villa, *Politics, Philosophy, Terror: Essays on the Thought of Hannah Arendt* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 40.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 58–59.

⁴⁴ Gilbert Weiss, ‘Between Gnosis and Anamnesis: European Perspectives on Eric Voegelin’, *The Review of Politics*, 62:4 (2000), pp. 761–762 and Dan Diner, ‘Hannah Arendt Reconsidered’, p. 177.

⁴⁵ Jürgen Gebhardt, ‘The Vocation of the Scholar’, in Stephen A. McKnight and Geoffrey L. Price (eds.), *International and Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Eric Voegelin* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997), p. 11.

representation of the Holocaust not to ‘be assimilated by the known’ and not to ‘be transformed into new understanding; the imaginative leap has only partly succeeded; the mind is not at rest’.⁴⁶

What Roberts describes is thus the banality of interpretation, or in Arendt’s terms, thoughtlessness, when the familiarity we know in the term ‘religion’ is juxtaposed with the unknown, ‘as if the agents, thanks to a religious blueprint actually knew what they were doing’.⁴⁷ Hence, apart from the fact that the study of perpetrators’ motivations – not to mention the content of their ideological beliefs – in its own right leads into an epistemological abyss, the closure to causal particularity that the concept brings simultaneously symbolises a functionalist mode of thinking about the perpetrators. In a letter to the Austrian philosopher Alfred Schütz in September 1943 – in the midst of the Nazi project that involved bureaucrats and intellectuals indistinguishable from the barbarity of their tasks – Voegelin elaborated with sarcasm on the elusive nature of the functionary:

I do not distinguish sufficiently between functionaries of the National Socialist party and functionaries of mankind; or that the functionaries of the party slaughter mankind, while the functionaries of mankind do not see deep enough into the nature of evil, to see at least one of its roots in the nature of the functionary.⁴⁸

Certainly, the aim here is not to imply that either Roberts or Voegelin attribute totalitarian aspirations to scholars of ‘political religion’. Rather, the above lines serve to illuminate the way Voegelin’s commentary on scholarly functionalism mirrors the functionalism of his concept and its applications, which both Arendt and Roberts detected, albeit in their separate ways. In his discussion, Roberts significantly included Voegelin’s own hesitant remarks on ‘political religion’. Consequently, it indicates that what Weiss saw as Voegelin’s concept ‘living its own life’ is a part of Roberts’s fundamental critique of the contemporary usage of political religion.⁴⁹ In other words, the process of the concept’s canonisation involves a non-critical dimension. The clash between the familiarity of the concept and the inconsistency of historical realities is also a reflection of historians’ non-familiarity with Voegelin. As we shall see, Voegelin’s post-Holocaust discussion of symbolism elaborates

⁴⁶ Saul Friedländer, ‘The Shoah in Present Historical Consciousness’, in *Memory, History and the Extermination of the Jews in Europe*, p. 48.

⁴⁷ Roberts, ‘Political Religion’, p. 405.

⁴⁸ Cited in David J. Levy, ‘Europe, Truth and History: Husserl and Voegelin on Philosophy and the Identity of Europe’, Stephen A. McKnight and Geoffrey L. Price (eds.), *International and Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Eric Voegelin* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997), pp. 76–77.

⁴⁹ Roberts, ‘Political Religion’, p. 393.

precisely on Roberts' concern with the problem of 'familiarity' in 'political religion' as an analytical concept.

IV

Voegelin's Critique of Postwar Historiography

In Munich in 1964, Voegelin's lectures on 'Hitler and the Germans' roughly coincided with Arendt's commentary on Eichmann in 1963. By then, Arendt had already discussed her early interpretations of the trial in one of Voegelin's graduate seminars in 1961. As a student at that time, Manfred Henningsen underlines the similarities in Voegelin's and Arendt's approaches by stating that Voegelin's lectures could have been 'subtitled reflections on the evil banality of the Third Reich'.⁵⁰ On the individual level, Arendt had previously argued that Eichmann 'was incapable of uttering a single sentence that was not a cliché'.⁵¹ In a similar vein, rather than engaging his students in theories on Nazism, Voegelin encouraged a revolt against scholarly functionalism as he stated that 'nothing can be explained by the cliché of National Socialism'.⁵² Hence, the study of the Nazi phenomena would mean an exercise in its own form of doctrinalisation if it followed a literal reading of its ideological clichés.

In a response to the wider phenomenon of demonisation of the perpetrators in the context of the Federal Republic's slogan of 'mastering the past' (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*), Voegelin explicitly criticised Percy Ernst Schramm's *Hitler's Table Talk*, where Schramm gives Hitler demonic features. Instead, Henningsen describes how Voegelin portrayed Hitler as a man where the only depth could be found in his ignorance.⁵³ The links between Arendt's thoughtless Eichmann and Voegelin's image of Hitler thus clearly reveal the banality Voegelin ascribed to the leading figure of Nazism, and

⁵⁰ Manfred Henningsen, 'The Arendt-Voegelin Controversy on Totalitarianism', in Wolfgang Leidhold, ed., *Politik und Politeia. Formen und Probleme politischer Ordnung, Festgabe für Jürgen Gebhardt* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann: 2000), p.190.

⁵¹ Cited in Zoe Waxman, 'Thinking Against Evil? Hannah Arendt, Zygmunt Bauman, and the Writing of the Holocaust', *History of European Ideas*, 35:1 (2009), p. 94.

⁵² Voegelin, 'Hitler and the Germans' [1964], in Detlev Clemens and Brendan Purcell (eds.), *Hitler and the Germans. The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, Volume 31* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999), p. 155.

⁵³ Henningsen, 'The Origins of Evil and the Banality of its Perpetrators: Some Thoughts on Reflections by Kant, Schelling, Arendt, Voegelin and Others', Paper presented at the Eric Voegelin Society Annual Meeting, The American Political Science Association (Seattle, 1 September 2011).

possibly Nazism as such. As Henningsen further clarifies, it was a departure from ‘the “satanic” seducers Voegelin tried to understand in 1938’ and by 1964, ‘the “satanic” aspect of the Nazis had obviously changed’.⁵⁴

Although Voegelin never revised his pre-Holocaust writings on Nazism, ‘political religion’ as a concept reflected the methodological challenges in studying totalitarian phenomena. The attribution of the symbol of ‘religion’ to account for Nazism revealed homogenising impulses and crude simplifications which for Voegelin could not be completely detached from the single-mindedness of totalitarian ideologies. This linkage is particularly clear in an essay from 1967 where he argues that the upheaval in the use of symbols such as ‘religion’ turned into a ‘doctrinal deformation’ similar to a ‘too doctrinal reading of the [National Socialist] ideology’.⁵⁵ Instead, Voegelin concluded his letter to Schütz in 1943 with the message that the study of totalitarian regimes had to be centred on a theory of individual consciousness.⁵⁶

Voegelin tried to come to terms with the phenomenon of the ‘inspired idiot’.⁵⁷ Ultimately, his message was that in the nature of all kinds of functionaries was an inability to live with the inconsistency and the complexity of existence, manifested in their readiness to uncritically receive given symbols. Whether concerned with movements or individual experiences, Voegelin’s approach to symbols, such as ‘religion’ and ‘ideology’, was formed around the idea that symbols arise from the forces of imagination and language in ‘man’s experiential response to the reality of which he is a part’.⁵⁸ In this experience, symbols are created to express this reality, but since man participates in a world of constant change beyond his own intentionality, ‘the concrete situation in which man has to find the images and symbols of his existential order change with the course of history’.⁵⁹ Yet, for the ‘inspired idiot’, symbols replace the existential quest for reality, a process of symbolisation described by Voegelin as a process of deformation.

⁵⁴ Henningsen, ‘Introduction’, Henningsen ed., *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, Volume 5*, p. 6.

⁵⁵ Voegelin, ‘Immortality: Experience and Symbol’ [1967], Sandoz ed., *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, Volume 12*, p. 85.

⁵⁶ Voegelin, ‘Remembrance of Things Past’, Gerhart Niemeyer ed. and tr., *Anamnesis: On the Theory of History and Politics* [1966] (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978), p. 3.

⁵⁷ Voegelin, ‘Autobiographical Statement at the Age of Eighty-Two’, p. 116.

⁵⁸ Voegelin, ‘Wisdom and the Magic of the Extreme: A Mediation’ [1981], in Ellis Sandoz ed., *Published Essays 1966–1985, the Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, Volume 12*, p. 372.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

In the event in which symbols or images are taken as ultimate expressions of reality and truth, the ‘imaginative response can issue onto the untruth of a Second Reality’.⁶⁰ Voegelin refers to Heimito von Doderer’s novel *Daemonen* (1956), where the term ‘Second Reality’ was introduced. The inspiration drawn from his theory is clear as Voegelin commented that Doderer’s ‘analysis of National Socialism in the post-war novels is extremely acute, and results in the conception of second realities which replaced the first realities’.⁶¹ The ‘Second Reality’ is interpreted as ‘a realm of spiritlike nonspirit [...] which finds its representation of the plane of politics in the ideological mass movements’.⁶² With an aim to ‘eclipse the reality of existential consciousness’,⁶³ these movements constructed an image of reality through a process of ‘doctrinalization and literalization’⁶⁴ of symbols. This construction of reality represented ‘a deliberate act of imaginative oblivion’.⁶⁵ What Voegelin described as a form of ‘selective conscience’ in the emergence of collective ideologies also applied to his interpretation of the microcosm of individual Nazi followers; by accepting a static symbol of reality, for example the doctrine of the race idea, the ‘inspired idiot’ actively refused to perceive the complexity and contradictions in their own surroundings.⁶⁶ Voegelin describes the ‘inspired idiot’ as one who ‘gets an inspiration that one is on the just side, one feels no concern about consequences of nonsensical, even murderous actions: it is as if one no longer really effects the murders one will be committing’.⁶⁷

In this vein, Roberts’s ‘familiarity’ thesis as a critique of ‘political religion’ reflects Voegelin’s objection to the uncritical acceptance of literal symbols. For Voegelin, the need to refuse symbols as equivalences of reality went beyond the ethical dimension of countering totalitarian non-thinking. Evident from his lectures in Munich was also a message directed to the academic field on the need to move beyond concepts and classifications and towards a study of differences in historical realities. As Voegelin argued, ‘the aim is to gain a genuine understanding of the truth of the language symbols in their historical variants – not brought under the heading of “history of ideas” or “comparative religion”’.⁶⁸ Instead, one should approach ‘the “ideas” as objects of a history and to establish the

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Voegelin, ‘Autobiographical Statement at the Age of Eighty-Two’, p. 113.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Voegelin, *Order and History – In Search of Order* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), p. 47.

⁶⁴ Voegelin, ‘Wisdom and the Magic of the Extreme’, p. 372.

⁶⁵ Voegelin, *In Search of Order*, p. 47.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Cited in Gebhardt, ‘Vocation’, p. 32.

experience of reality [...] as the reality to be explored historically'.⁶⁹ For Roberts, the familiarity with 'political religion' obscures the fact that our reading of 'the historical specificity is not rich or deep enough'.⁷⁰ Moreover, similar to Voegelin, on the static nature of conceptual symbolism, Roberts argues that

The point is not so much to play down the elements featured by proponents of 'political religion' but to find a more convincing way of accounting for them and the roles they played, in interface with others. At the same time, we must recognize, as proponents of 'political religion' tend not to, that roles, proportions, and relationships change as practice proceeded.⁷¹

What Voegelin saw as a problem of 'high theory' vis-à-vis the reality of historical experience thus remains a methodological puzzle in Holocaust research.

V

Eichmann: Thinking and Consciousness

So far I have attempted to establish that Voegelin rejected the concept of 'political religion' based on similar criteria to those that characterise contemporary objections to the concept. This leads to the question of whether Voegelin's post-Holocaust analysis of National Socialism provides the complexity sought, both by Voegelin himself as well as the contemporary field of perpetrator research in their consensual rejection of the notion of an 'ideal-type' Nazi.⁷²

Since Arendt's and Voegelin's works have been presented here from the angle of the 'thoughtlessness' and 'stupidity' they ascribed to the perpetrators, Zoë Waxman's following critique of Arendt's banality thesis will take this discussion a step further in that respect. Waxman identifies

⁶⁹ Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, p. 80.

⁷⁰ Roberts, 'Political Religion', p. 397.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 409.

⁷² For a historiographical overview and an explicit discussion on typologies in perpetrator research, see Gerhard Paul and Michael Mallmann, 'Sozialisation, Milieu und Gewalt. Fortschritte und Probleme der neueren Täterforschung', in Paul and Mallmann (eds.), *Karrieren der Gewalt. Nationalsozialistische Täterbiographien* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2004), pp. 17–18.

a paradox in that Arendt's image of the thoughtless perpetrator Eichmann functions as the antithesis to Arendt's call for individual critical thinking. By constructing a bipolar relationship between the notion of the perpetrator and that of critical thinking, described by Waxman as an 'inviolable, immediate morality', she argues that Arendt is in fact formulating her own take on 'pure ethics' *against* her principle of plurality.⁷³ In failing to fully emphasise the meditative act between thinking and doing which Eichmann displays, for example, in Arendt's own description of him as an 'idealist' obeying orders,⁷⁴ Waxman concludes that Arendt ultimately fails to

forward a mediated account which avoids the categories of simple opposition: rationality/irrationality; legality/morality; human/divine; innocence/guilt. The failure to acknowledge the inter-dependence of these categories influences the way that the events of the Holocaust are represented: aesthetically, philosophically and verbally, and subsequently means that a fuller understanding of modern existence continues to elude modes of representation.⁷⁵

Thus, Waxman seems to imply that if Eichmann indeed was thinking (something Arendt might necessarily not have objected to, as Waxman also notes),⁷⁶ there is yet to be established an account of Nazi perpetrators which acknowledges the tension between them as thinking individuals and their relationship to a Nazi doctrine of 'non-thinking'. Reading from this argument, Eichmann's thinking did not necessarily contradict his Nazi worldview, but it most definitely contradicted the Nazi project of establishing singularity. Eichmann thus gained control over the Nazi totalitarian ideology through his own thinking. Therefore, he not only represented Nazism – just as the banal represented the radical in Arendt's terms – instead his actions imply that the National Socialist ideology surely proclaimed a doctrine of non-thinking, but nevertheless functioned upon a plurality of thinking individuals. In other words, to reconcile Eichmann's thinking with that of his exemplary career within the Nazi regime forces us not only to re-visit Eichmann as an individual as so many scholars already have done. Assuming that the Nazis indeed were 'thinking', it also highlights the relationship between the individual 'ideological incorrectness' and the 'correctness' of the Nazi doctrine as two integral parts of National Socialism.

⁷³ Waxman, 'Thinking Against Evil?', p. 95.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 103. Dana Villa offers a similar argument on the paradox of how Arendt's anti-Hegelianism is contradicted by Arendt's own narrative structures in her elaborations on 'totalitarianism'; Villa, 'Genealogies of Total Domination: Arendt, Adorno, and Auschwitz', *New German Critique*, 34 (2007), pp. 1–45.

⁷⁶ Waxman, 'Thinking Against Evil?', p. 100.

The theoretical possibility to address Nazism beyond stupidity and towards individual thinking is a crucial aspect that is implicit in Voegelin's theory of consciousness. Voegelin argued that individuals resisting truth share the same grounds of consciousness as those resisting untruth.⁷⁷ You could be a Nazi or you could be a humanitarian peacekeeper, but your levels of consciousness were measured the same way. They were measured through your ability to form your own perception of reality and thus resist a blind acceptance of the ideas provided to you, regardless of whether they came from totalitarian propaganda or more 'truthful' sources. This idea of consciousness is significant to note in relation to Voegelin's commentary on Holocaust historiography regarding Eichmann. The relativisation he makes between 'truth' and 'untruth' should be seen as an attempt to move beyond the demonisation of the Nazis: Voegelin effectively 'humanised' the Nazis by arguing that there was room for consciousness even within the most inhumane contexts. In that sense, Voegelin's notion of consciousness plays on the relationship between the incorrectness of the individual vis-à-vis the information and ideas projected onto him from the outside world.

What measured the individual's consciousness was his ability to resist this type of inspiration from the outside. The 'inspiration', in Voegelin's words, was thus the ideas that the individual faced from its surrounding world. Voegelin therefore stressed that these ideas were regarded as inspiration regardless of their nature, i.e. they could be both humanitarian and totalitarian inspirations. In fact, the nature of the messages mattered less than the individual attitude to them. By resisting given symbols and messages of reality, a conscious individual was defined by the resistance to inspiration from this received symbolism. The uncritical acceptance of images (or propaganda) as such signalled a lack of consciousness. In Arendt's words, the state of being 'unthinking' defined the lack of consciousness more than the nature of the images as such. Voegelin clarified this point as he stated that 'nor should there be forgotten the contemporary enmity between certain representatives of "positivism" and ideological activists'.⁷⁸ Like Arendt, Voegelin drew parallels between the homogenising tendency present in Western scholarly tradition and those totalitarian ideologies subject to this scholarly scrutiny.

⁷⁷ Voegelin, *In Search of Order*, p. 35.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

Particularly important for this thesis is Voegelin's argument that a man who succumbed to the deformed 'truth' was thus a man who 'can well be conscious of his deformation'.⁷⁹ Here, in the last stage of his career, Voegelin seems to argue that ideological conviction was an individual choice and that there was room for consciousness as the individual dedicated his actions to a collective idea. This is a significant nuance of Voegelin's approach to National Socialism, because it implicitly reveals that Voegelin saw no clear contradictions between human consciousness and ideological conviction. Instead, the process of being conscious of one's own deformation of reality – i.e. the acceptance of the Nazi *Weltanschauung* – is in Voegelin's theory of consciousness also marked by an emphasis on individual agency. In other words, since Voegelin draws similarities between 'truth' and 'untruth', he also offers an interpretation of Nazis with conscience, which contradicts a perception of Nazis as a collective group of 'inspired idiots'. This interpretation is given further evidence in one of Voegelin's late writings: 'he [man] is not afflicted with blindness for the open cosmos, but deforms its reality while being conscious of deforming it'.⁸⁰ Voegelin thus acknowledges the possibility that a believer in 'non-truth' (i.e. Nazism) might not necessarily have a blind trust in ideological symbols but that 'non-truth' also meant the conscious individual reformation of these symbols.

VI

Agency

This depicted emphasis on agency in *thinking* connects with Voegelin's emphasis on agency in *doing*, which is clearly essential in the study of perpetrators. In fact, his theory of consciousness is also relevant to the contemporary critique of the assumed 'divine transcendence' in 'political religion' theory. In Voegelin's view, mundane factors were always present in divine transcendence, i.e. he rejected the idea that the perpetrator would act in the name of a 'political religion' entirely detached from mundane reality. This conflation of the sacred and the profane is, as we have seen, frequently called for among scholars today. In this vein, and against doctrinal or 'fanatical certainty', Roberts' second objection to 'political religion' points to a feeling of fragility so present among men in times

⁷⁹ Voegelin, 'The Eclipse of Reality', Thomas A. Hollweck and Paul Caringella (eds.), *What is History and Other Late Unpublished Writings. The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), p. 114.

⁸⁰ Voegelin, 'On Henry James's Turn of the Screw', in Ellis Sandoz ed., *Published Essays 1966–1985. The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, Volume 12*, p. 163.

of upheaval and destruction, but is given no space in ‘political religion’ theory. This feeling, Roberts argues, accompanied the sense of historical openness and space for action among the totalitarian movements, where a ‘fanatical certainty’ also came with uncertainty:

It entailed among other things, a sense of the need to improvise – but also a sense of the human capacity to do so. Still, the uncertainty inevitably shadowed the confidence. So mixed characteristically with hubris in all three cases was a certain shrillness, reflecting the *lack* of any suprahistorical assurance, the feeling that it was all up to them, acting within an unforeseeable history.⁸¹

Ultimately, Roberts questions the notion of a ‘divine transcendence’ for its reductionist tendency to ignore the historical realities of interwar Europe. As we have seen in chapter 1, this emphasis on ‘historical realities’ is a critique of the sacralisation of National Socialism implied in ‘political religion’ theory, and one which Roberts shares with many other scholars today. He compellingly argues that ‘the fragility at issue could have been experienced only when even the possibility of religious assurance had been left behind’.⁸² A similar hesitation towards the notion of ‘divine transcendence’ can be found in Dominick LaCapra’s arguments on the sacred nature of Nazism, which is rather different from most scholars on ‘political religion’. For LaCapra, the way one can speak of transcendence from a Nazi point of view was in the exaltation and willingness of the perpetrators, which became dependent on the aspect of victimisation. LaCapra puts forward a view of Nazism deriving from his focus on the perpetrators’ move beyond normative limits. Only in this form of earthly, *experiential*, transcendence beyond norms can one invoke the notion of a Nazi ‘sacred’.⁸³

In essence, LaCapra demonstrates an ideology that becomes on the one hand dependent on transcendental acts in their ritualistic forms, but that on the other hand remains centred on the non-transcendental; the ritual of violence itself depends on an acknowledgement of boundaries in order to maintain the possibility of exceeding them. To clarify, since the sacred is found ‘beyond good and evil’ and is in constant need of repeated acts of transgression, it remains in the uncertain, rather than certain, position of being in-between.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Roberts, ‘Political Religion’, p. 401.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 405.

⁸³ Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (London: John Hopkins University Press, 2001), pp. 135–136.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 135. LaCapra further elaborates on ‘transgression’ in *History and its Limits: Human, Animal, Violence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), p. 71.

At the centre of the perpetrators' ideological motivation, LaCapra argues that there is a need to emphasise more clearly the plausible awareness that the perpetrators had over their own violation of moral norms. Berel Lang has further clarified the implication of this kind of moral knowledge for the discussion on thinking. Lang argues that from the process of dehumanisation follows the assumption that the perpetrators actually knew of their immorality, since the act of dehumanisation 'required a conscious affirmation of the wrong involved in it'.⁸⁵ Consequently, while Roberts and LaCapra describe the nature of Nazism on different levels, they both base their opposition to 'political religion' on the connection to the conventional symbolism of 'religion' as linked with 'divine transcendence'. Both also emphasise the notion of a 'worldly transcendence', where the assurance that comes from divinisation was replaced by a form of transcendence that sacralised the traumatic and the mundane. This transcendence comprises both a feeling of uncertainty at the root of the Nazi world order as well as a seemingly conscious maintenance of this instability through the repeated acts of breaking moral norms.

Voegelin's understanding of transcendence is intimately connected with his discussions of symbolism and of consciousness. First, the relationship between Voegelin's theory of consciousness and transcendence can be summed up as follows. In Heideggerian terms, Voegelin's notions of 'authenticity' and 'being' in the world were not separated, and 'consciousness is an experience of participation in the ground of being'.⁸⁶ The experience of participation could either be deformed by the individual through the act of a refusal to apperceive the complexities of reality, or it could be reflected upon through an awareness of what Voegelin simply calls 'the complexity'. To account for this complexity, Voegelin borrowed the term *Metaxy* from Plato to illuminate the human existence in tension, the status of being 'in-between'. Visually, Voegelin's 'complexity' represents the idea that human reality is comprised of poles in tension between the questing human and the 'divine reality' which moved the individual.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Cited in Dan Stone, 'Genocide as Transgression', *European Journal of Social Theory*, 7:1 (2004), p. 51.

⁸⁶ Voegelin, 'Consciousness and Order: Foreword to *Anamnesis* (1966)', in Ed Lawrence ed., *The Beginning and the Beyond: Papers from the Gadamer and Voegelin Conference*, p. 35.

⁸⁷ Voegelin, 'The Meditative Origin of the Philosophical Knowledge of Order', in Ed Lawrence ed., *The Beginning and the Beyond: Papers from the Gadamer and Voegelin Conference*, p. 47.

Voegelin rejected the notion of the 'divine' to fully encompass an act of transcendence; instead, he emphasised the actual position of 'in-between'.⁸⁸ Against Hegelian dialectics, Voegelin saw the tension of the poles in relation to the so-called 'thing-reality' which in the individual consciousness is perceived to exist outside the 'self', but according to Voegelin nevertheless lies within consciousness.⁸⁹ The thing-reality can in simple terms be described as the world we live in and the external objects to which we refer. With an insight that a 'subject-reality' (i.e. the tension between the 'divine' and the inner quest of the individual) and a 'thing-reality' (i.e. the external world) exist, Voegelin draws from Nietzsche to argue that the coexistence of these realities make up the 'it-reality'. This reality is beyond pure subjective intentionality since it is bound to an awareness of the human existence in tension. Ultimately, the knowledge of this 'in-between' status of the human in relation to the beyond and unknown, as well as to the 'thing-reality', is for Voegelin the structure of consciousness.⁹⁰

Parallels can be drawn from the Voegelinian theory of transcendence to LaCapra's and Roberts' linkage between uncertainty and conscience within Nazism, and how it was expressed among its individual followers. Voegelin refers to the platonic usage of transcendence as 'meditative', opposed to conventional usage, which is stated to go beyond the worldly reality of the 'de-divinized' world.⁹¹ For Voegelin, an act of transcendence and the move 'beyond' tends to be objectified and read doctrinally to indicate a divine 'destination' of transcendence. Similar to the way LaCapra puts emphasis on the perpetrators' experiential transcendence, Voegelin calls the experience of transcendence a 'cognitive event'.⁹² He further argues that one cannot separate the act of transcendence, which he calls 'the rise', from an understanding of the collective consequences of this transcendence as such: 'there is not a "transcendent reality" other than the Beyond experience in the "rise". If it is torn out of the experiential context, it suffers the intentionalist reduction to an object.'⁹³

⁸⁸ Michael P. Morrissey discusses in detail Voegelin's conception of 'transcendence' and its challenge to Christian theology, as well as Western philosophy. By so doing, Morrissey rejects the commonly held assumption that Voegelin's 'political religion' by necessity represents a traditional theological response to the phenomenon of Nazi ideology, but that it rather should be seen as a move beyond the false dichotomy of philosophy and theology. See Morrissey, *Consciousness and Transcendence: The Theology of Eric Voegelin* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994).

⁸⁹ Voegelin, 'The Meditative Origin', p. 49.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 49–50.

⁹¹ Voegelin, 'The Beginning and the Beyond', in Thomas A. Hollweck and Paul Caringella (eds.), *What is History? and Other Late Unpublished Writings, The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, Volume 28*, p. 218.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 219.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 218.

Voegelin's linkage between the experiential 'rise' and notions of sacred transcendence in the context of the perpetrator is in line with LaCapra's alternative understanding of 'political religion'. It is seen not as a static conception of a doctrine of divinity where individuals across time and space acted unanimously as believing puppets, but where the experience of individually divergent acts themselves amounted to the sacralisation of Nazi violence. Voegelin further explains the relationship between the mundane, historical acts and the transcendence as an intrinsically 'sacred' phenomenon where one must not separate the

participle *transcendent* from the act of transcendence and transform it into a fideistic attribute of the reality that becomes visible in the act [...] it furthermore obscures the historical process in which the modes of the 'rise' change.⁹⁴

The 'ideological incorrectness' in individual actions thus amounted to the homogenising 'correctness' that scholars have ascribed to National Socialism and its genocidal project.

VII

Perpetrator Motivations

Claus-Ekkehard Bärsch has invoked Voegelin's rejection of divine transcendence in his critique of current theorisations of 'political religion'. To an extent, his argument follows Voegelin's theory of consciousness as well as the early thesis on 'political religion' in that the divinisation took 'inner-worldly' expressions in the sacralisation of ideological symbols such as Hitler's leadership and the Aryan *Volksgemeinschaft*. Nevertheless, Bärsch's analysis stops short of providing significant insight as to how this 'inner-worldly' notion of 'political religion' is analytically useful in the particular study of 'ordinary perpetrators' and their relationship to Nazism.⁹⁵ In line with scholars such as Boaz Neumann, I would argue that it is in fact the move away from a programmatic reading of ideological

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Claus-Ekkehard Bärsch, 'Der Topos der Politischen Religion aus der Perspektive der Religionspolitologie' in *Politische Religion? Politik, Religion und Anthropologie im Werk von Eric Voegelin* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2003), p. 195. For a comprehensive account of Bärsch's approach to the concept, see Bärsch, *Die politische Religion des Nationalsozialismus: Die religiöse Dimension der NS-Ideologie in den Schriften von Dietrich Eckart, Joseph Goebbels, Alfred Rosenberg und Adolf Hitler* (Munich: Fink Verlag, 1998).

doctrines that somewhat ironically might direct us towards the ‘existential’, yet perhaps also banal, core of the National Socialist ideology,⁹⁶ a ‘core’ indicated by LaCapra to encompass the ‘secularization of the sacred, and of the desire for radical transcendence of ordinary conditions and banality, including ordinary moral limits’.⁹⁷

In fact, when faced with instances of individual excessive violence proclaimed to be motivated by metaphysical political ideologies, even the most eager defenders of ‘political religion’ have displayed hesitations towards its analytical value. Michael Franz has depicted an interesting development of Michael Burleigh’s scholarship on the motivations of perpetrators, ranging from National Socialist to 21st-century terrorists. Franz directs attention to the fact that Burleigh’s previously mentioned preference for ‘political religion’ as applied to Nazi perpetrators was abandoned completely in his later work *Blood and Rage* – focusing on the agency of individual terrorists. Within the latter work, Franz finds it striking how often Burleigh

finds merely mundane personal motivations underlying terrorist violence [...] Burleigh’s book seems to suggest that many, many more terrorists acted as they did – and became who they were – not because of spiritual agitation or any sort of ‘second reality’ apocalypticism, but rather because of ‘first reality’ processes involving motivations and attractions that were thoroughly prosaic.⁹⁸

Although I concur with Franz’s general warrant that a too one-sided emphasis on mundane motivational factors might distort us from the wider ideological patterns and cultural contexts in which these individuals acted, I choose to disagree with Franz as he further makes a rather rigid separation between intrinsically personal motivations and ideological consciousness. Yet again, ‘political religion’ is placed in opposition to personal motivation, as Franz concludes in a questionable manner that it is in the absence of the concept that Burleigh fails to account for ideological conviction.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ See Boaz Neumann, ‘The National Socialist Politics of Life’, *New German Critique*, 85 (2007), p. 109. In a later article, Neumann further emphasises that Nazism was about experience rather than ideas, since ‘ideology’ as such was an integral part of the liberal tradition that Nazism aimed to break out of; ‘in the case of Nazism, there was no gap between the idea/ideology and practice’. See Neumann, ‘The Phenomenology of the German People’s Body (Volkskörper) and the Extermination of the Jewish Body’, *New German Critique*, 36 (2009), p. 152.

⁹⁷ LaCapra, *Writing History – Writing Trauma*, p. 136.

⁹⁸ Michael Franz, ‘Moral Insanity and Spiritual Disorder: Conceptualizing the Terrorist Mind’, Paper presented at the Eric Voegelin Society Annual International Meeting 2010, American Political Science Association (Washington D.C., 2–5 September, 2010).

⁹⁹ Ibid.

When Dirk Moses critiques the ‘quick-fix’ scholarly concepts of racial hatred, ‘eliminationist’ ideologies and ‘political religion’ in studies of contemporary mass violence, the crux he identifies is the absence of approaches that actually consider the study of ‘ideology’ to contain ‘an analysis of how and why these eliminationist ideologies develop at all’.¹⁰⁰ In other words, the absence of ‘mundane’ aspects of ideology, such as broader geopolitical contexts as well as more narrow and immediate personal dispositions, renders concepts such as ‘political religion’ de facto detached from the actual historical events under study. This detachment is an ironic contradiction to what proponents of ‘political religion’ aimed for, namely to capture the ‘existential’ individual experience in a supra-individual political project which had taken a metaphysical meaning – hence, to study individuals’ realities as they appeared on the ground rather than from a concept moving across time and space. Instead, there is room to argue that precisely by highlighting Burleigh’s avoidance of applying ‘political religion’ to terrorist activities – thus acts of violence fundamentally connected with agency and personal transgression – we can also trace the limits of the concept as applied to Nazi perpetrators. In this context, the theoretical works of both Voegelin and LaCapra share the contention that there should be no analytical separation between the act of transcendence and the fact that it was accompanied by its often mundane reasons.

VIII

Chapter Conclusion

The chapter began by arguing that despite their intellectual quarrels, Eric Voegelin and Hannah Arendt formed their respective philosophies around a battle against the term ‘ideology’ and the correctness assumed with the term. The chapter has clarified how and why it was that ‘ideology’ formed the core of both Arendt’s and Voegelin’s work. In different ways, Arendt and Voegelin fought the violent logic they detected not only in totalitarian ideologies, but also in the interpretative responses to it. Arendt’s and Voegelin’s approaches to the Nazi perpetrators were fundamentally connected to their apprehension of the conceptually unbound structure of National Socialism as such. This transgressive nature of National Socialism also worked to contextualise Voegelin’s theory of consciousness in the wake of Arendt’s portrayal of Eichmann and the subsequent emergence of perpetrator research in the mid-1960s. Voegelin thus developed his post-Holocaust philosophy from a growing awareness of the intellectual homogenisation that resulted in the construction of ideal-type

¹⁰⁰ A. Dirk Moses, ‘Paranoia and Partisanship: Genocide Studies, Holocaust Historiography, and the Apocalyptic Conjunction’, *The Historical Journal*, 54:2 (2011), p. 582.

Nazi perpetrators. In that sense, the bipolar position of Arendt's and Voegelin's concepts in perpetrator research is an ironic reflection of the homogenising impulses they themselves sought to transgress by intellectual means. In the face of the historical plurality of chaos, conflict and divergences that the Nazis created, Voegelin's critique of 'political religion' was a historically informed revolt against a broader development in Holocaust historiography of imposing metanarratives on the actions and motivations of Nazi perpetrators.

Voegelin's post-Holocaust works thus reveal greater similarities to contemporary critiques of 'political religion' than they do to its defenders. Contrary to the contention of many of Arendt's and Voegelin's interpreters, the underlying principle in their work was not to define Nazi ideology, but to unmask it. As Voegelin and Arendt both expressed clearly, the only way to do so was to approach Nazism with the kind of plurality that the totalitarian ideologies ultimately had sought to destroy and this involved a rejection of rigid collective classifications. In that sense, the little attention paid by scholars to the ways in which Arendt's and Voegelin's trajectories in historiography bear striking similarities is itself an uncanny reminder of the homogenising impulse that lies in the very notion of 'ideology' as such, or in Confino's words, the 'catechism of ideology'. It is clear that Arendt and Voegelin disagreed on several aspects of the nature of Nazi totalitarianism, but the underlying structures they both sought to use to overcome the impulse of demonisation in the face of Nazism are clear. As I have attempted to show, just as Voegelin came to acknowledge how an act of sacralisation could emerge from something intrinsically banal and mundane, so too does Arendt's Eichmann represent a banality that *radically* challenges our conception of 'banal' as such. Voegelin and Arendt strived for inconsistency, not only in the structures of their own philosophy, but also in order to grasp the inconsistency in which Nazism transgressed its own conceptual limits for what constitutes an 'ideology'. This linkage between plurality and inconsistency was ultimately Voegelin's and Arendt's intellectual common ground where they both responded to Nazism by refusing to let their own work provide conceptual closure to the study of Nazism.

Ultimately, Arendt and Voegelin were pioneering not so much regarding Nazism's banality or its 'political religion', but in the way these two intellectuals pointed to the 'ideological incorrectness' in National Socialism. It was incorrectness in the sense of being an ideology fundamentally detached from the assumptions of a conventional political ideology. But that is not to say that the ideology was out of this world, or a divine 'political religion'; Voegelin's theory of consciousness pointed to

another form of ‘ideological incorrectness’: thinking about Nazis as conscious individuals meant accepting the space for incorrectness vis-à-vis the Nazi dogmas. It did not render National Socialism less lethal, but rather enabled its adaptability in highly diverse contexts across the European continent, such as Scandinavia.

Chapter 3: ‘Why Are There Several “Nazi” Groups?’

A Biographical Introduction to the Nazi Sub-Cultures in Norway and Denmark

Introduction

‘Why are there several “Nazi” groups?’¹ The situation in the 1930s when Danish politics faced a growing anti-parliamentary wave prompted this rather simple question. The article was published in the pamphlet *Stormen*, edited by ‘one of Danish National Socialism’s most dynamic and controversial personalities’ as one historian describes Wilfred Petersen.² The pamphlet itself was banned by the Danish justice ministry, with its final publication on 10 October 1940.³ Several Danish “Nazi” splinter-parties deliberately work to destroy the true National Socialist idea’, read the verdict from the article. It continued to describe party leaders who despite their self-acclaimed identity as *fuehrers* were nothing but ‘false prophets’, in the author’s words.⁴ While the *Stormen* article seemed to attack this situation in which splinter parties competed with one another, the commentary was published in autumn 1940 when nearly a decade of rivalry had entered a new phase; now, ‘true’ National Socialism had to be debated among not only various Danish movements but also an occupation regime. The timing of this call for Danish unity, in a pamphlet edited by probably the most notorious rebel in the history of Danish National Socialism, thus goes some way to explain what otherwise appears a paradox: throughout the 1930s, Petersen had contributed to the creation of several Nazi groups rather than working for unity. But now, the criticised ‘false prophets’ were no longer just Danish National Socialist ‘wannabes’; they also included actors within the Nazi occupation regime who, in the eyes of these splinter parties, perpetuated a false National Socialism.

Danish unity aside, paradoxes did surround Wilfred Petersen’s name throughout his political career. With anti-Semitic actions, political sabotage through break-ins and blackmailing and, later, bomb attacks among his repertoire, the verdict from Dr August Wimmer regarding Petersen’s mental health

¹ ‘Why are there several “Nazi” groups?’ Journal article located in Rigsarkivet, nr. 10192, box 47. ‘1932-1944: Diverse Avisudklip’.

² Ole Ravn, *Dansk Nationalsocialitisk Litteratur 1930–1945* (Copenhagen: Berlingske Forlag, 1979), p. 131.

³ ‘DNSAP, visse politiske smaapartier og lignende’, dated 10 June 1945, Rigsarkivet, P-Journalsager nr. 24.

⁴ ‘Why are there several “Nazi” groups?’ Rigsarkivet nr. 10192, box 47.

on 25 August 1934 probably surprised many. Wimmer described a man with ‘sound ethical values’ who gives a ‘cultivated impression, intrinsically idealist’ and without a doubt ‘a well-oriented human being’.⁵ Petersen’s notorious quest to challenge the established political parliamentary system and the established norms and customs surrounding it does not provide him with a revolutionary profile in the historiography of Danish National Socialism. In fact, he appears rather mainstream when placed in a comparative framework. Petersen’s figure illustrated the political pattern so characteristic of the milieu of Danish and Norwegian Nazis in the 1930s; they all represent the splinter groups outside of Vidkun Quisling’s NS and Frits Clausen’s DNSAP, a peripheral position for these splinter groups that implicitly debated the nature of their radicalism through swiftly changing alliances. The exclamation mark on ‘Nazi’ in the *Stormen* article gives us a clue to understand the rivalry and the very coexistence of multiple Nazi groups. The conflict with the major Nazi parties in their respective home countries profiled these intellectuals as proponents of the more radical SS vision – in their own view, also a more pure vision – of an Aryan pan-Germanic community. Their pan-Germanic propaganda was noticed and encouraged by the German NSDAP leadership early on, most prominently by Himmler.⁶ These pan-Germanic groups in Scandinavia were often guided primarily by their self-perception as radical outcasts – an outcast identity which simultaneously confirmed their own imagery of what it meant to be a *real* National Socialist. This chapter starts with the same question of why there were several Nazi groups in Denmark, as well as in Norway, during the 1930s. It introduces those individuals and organisations discussed throughout the thesis and therefore takes the shape of a prosopography, a collection of brief biographies. At the end of the chapter, I discuss the limits and benefits of using Michael Wildt’s notion of the ‘unbound generation’ in understanding those men who called themselves *real* National Socialists – in Scandinavia.

This chapter focuses on those individuals who stayed close to Petersen at the radical end of the Scandinavian National Socialist spectrum. The focus on Petersen provides a form of introduction to the overlaps and ideological commonalities between a number of Danish and Norwegian National Socialist intellectuals; like Petersen, they all claimed originality, but in a comparative framework they appear rather more ordinary. The Danes Ejnar Vaaben and Aage H. Andersen collaborated frequently and at times closely with Petersen in conspiracies against not only the political establishment but also

⁵ Wilfred Petersen, *Maal og Midler* (Copenhagen: Dansk Socialistisk Forlag, 1940), unpaginated. This psychological analysis was published in the leading Danish newspaper *Berlingske Tidene*, 11 January 1935.

⁶ The Norwegian *Ragnarok* member Adolf Egeberg Jr. and Vaaben’s personal acquaintance Poul Sommer were invited to Germany to attend an SS school in National Socialist education. Straffeakt, nr 20, Rigsarkivet Copenhagen.

Clausen's DNSAP. Similarly, one of the major characteristics of the Norwegian splinter group *Ragnarok* was its anti-Quisling rhetoric, and another was its significant connections with influential individuals in Nazi Germany. A third was the significant attention given to debating religion through *Ragnarok*'s links to Eugen Nielsen who in turn was deeply influenced by Eric Ludendorff. This type of attack on religious dogmas also prompted Andersen's and Vaaben's connections with priest Anders Malling. What they lacked in terms of political significance they gained in their intellectual profile, where they – again somewhat paradoxically – propagated anti-intellectualism in the name of the Nazi glorification of action. Furthermore, their outcast positions in their national contexts proved attractive for the Nazi regime as it sought mediating links in Scandinavia as a means of controlling the development of indigenous National Socialism. Entering the 1940s, Andersen and Vaaben led the ideological realm of the SS project *Schalburgkorpset*. *Ragnarok* members Ola Furuseth and Hans S. Jacobsen held equally significant roles and were responsible for the ideological indoctrination of aspiring members of the Norwegian *Germaniske SS* and in Jacobsen's case, being the editor of its propaganda organ *Germaneren*. The perceived closeness to Nazi Germany was a feeling shared by Jacobsen and Vaaben who published their independent works with almost identical German titles: Jacobsen's *Ein Norweger Spricht* and Vaaben's *Ein Däne spricht zu Deutschland*.⁷ These two pieces show two Scandinavians who in 1930 believed they had an important voice within Nazi Germany.

I

Ejnar Vaaben

There are several factors that give substance to Ejnar Vaaben's label as 'Denmark's first National Socialist'.⁸ His contact with leading individuals in Nazi Germany combined with his pioneering role on the Danish National Socialist scene prompted a question that many Danish Nazis would later ask themselves: 'how could a young man from Southern Denmark ever be such a thing as German-

⁷ Hans S. Jacobsen, *Ein Norweger Spricht. Die deutsch-tschechische Frage* (Berlin: Widukind Verlag, 1938) and Ejnar Vaaben, *Ein Däne spricht zu Deutschland. Deutschlands Kampf – eine europäische Angelegenheit* (Leipzig: Hesse & Becker, 1940). Note also the echo of *Mein Kampf* in Vaaben's title.

⁸ Andreas Monrad Pedersen, "'Den nordiske tanke' – bidrag til en politisk biografi af Ejnar Vaaben", in *Fra Mellemkrigstid til Efterkrigstid* (eds.) Henrik Dethlefsen and Henrik Lundbak (Copenhagen: Københavns Universitet, 1998), pp. 117–134. John T. Lauridsen aims to nuance this image; see John T. Lauridsen, "'Den første graenserredder' – Ejnar Vaaben og den berlinske linie", *Fund og Forsking*, 50 (2011), pp. 411–419.

friendly?’⁹ Vaaben, born in 1902 and with a university degree in History and German, displayed pan-Germanic ideas as early as the late 1920s. According to his own statement in police records, he regarded himself as a National Socialist in 1924 and his political activities throughout the 1930s were commonly considered ‘German-friendly’. His awareness of the importance, and indeed difficulty, of balancing Danish national interests with the pan-Germanic idea was formulated very early in Vaaben’s career, and became a signature feature of his intellectual works on National Socialism throughout his career. Vaaben’s memoirs describe a meeting in October 1930 where he interviewed Hitler for the Danish newspaper *Venstrepressen* and where Hitler had claimed that Danes must realise that National Socialism was not a product for exportation. In response, Vaaben answered that ‘National Socialism comes from within every healthy nation and by knowing that, the question of importation becomes irrelevant.’¹⁰ In 1928, so before the time of the interview, Vaaben had already established Denmark’s first National Socialist party, or rather a small intellectual circle. Four years later, Frits Clausen’s predecessor Cay Lembcke founded Denmark’s largest National Socialist party, *Dansk Nationalsocialistisk Arbejderparti* (DNSAP). In this context, Vaaben’s movement, which on 9 November 1930 had taken the name *Dansk Nationalsocialistisk Parti* (DNP), was incorporated into the new organisation, where Vaaben functioned as the leader of the county Fyn, while Clausen held the same position regarding DNSAP’s reach in Southern Jutland bordering with Germany. Vaaben left DNSAP 1934 as a result of growing tensions between him and Clausen.

A more detailed account of the ideological underpinnings of Vaaben’s split with the DNSAP will be provided in chapters 4 and 5. On the most fundamental level, however, it suffices to refer to Vaaben’s own words in his memoirs which state that ‘up until the 1930s it was not so much the worldly-political matter, but the world-view, the “Voelkisch” moment in the National Socialist freedom-movement, its “Grundtvigianism”’ that attracted him.¹¹ Vaaben’s DNP cooperated with several National Socialist splinter groups without gaining any significant political influence. Meanwhile, he profiled himself as the leading Danish pan-German expert through several individual publications and contributions to the Danish National Socialist milieu. His main publication was *Hagekorset over Danmark* (‘The Swastika over Denmark’) from 1939. It followed from his piece *Hagekorset over Tyskland* (‘The Swastika over Germany’), published in 1931, which stands as one of the earliest Danish introductions

⁹ Vaaben, ‘Det var det hele værdt’, p.10. Rigsarkivet, nr. 06540, box 4.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 17.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 12. Grundtvigianism was a religious movement based on the Lutheran religious philosophy of Nikolaj Grundtvig who sought greater religious freedom for both laity and clergy and propagated the authority of the living Christ over formal religious doctrines. Grundtvigianism will be further discussed in chapter 5.

to German National Socialism.¹² The 1939 publication indicates how the split from the DNSAP was one factor that clearly nurtured Vaaben's position on the extreme wing of Danish National Socialist groups, particularly his radical racist outlook. The book further displays continuities with Vaaben's article in *Dansk Udsyn* that dealt with the notion of 'Nordic thought' which ultimately called for a united Scandinavian movement along the lines of the race idea.¹³ His emphasis on race science deepened and had its pre-war culmination in *Hagekorset over Danmark* – one year preceding the German invasion. Although more concrete geopolitical factors were added to this 'völkisch' foundation of Vaaben's attraction to National Socialism, he maintained his profile as a National Socialist *intellectual*, in opposition to more conventionally political Nazi supporters in Denmark, throughout the 1930s.

These sentiments can partly be explained by his hostility and distance to rival National Socialist parties on the Danish scene. Despite brief cooperation with other Nazi groups, DNP remained independent until 1939 when it was incorporated into Wilfred Petersen's *Dansk Socialistisk Parti* (DSP). Besides a shared emphasis on the centrality of the race principle in National Socialist politics, Vaaben and Petersen agreed on one thing in particular: the limitations of Frits Clausen's ideological insights and thus his unsuitability as a leader of the DNSAP. Following a couple of years in Munich in the early 1930s, where he not only familiarised himself with German academia but also with the top leadership of the German NSDAP at the time, Vaaben returned to Denmark and joined a brief alliance with Clausen and the DNSAP from late 1932. He recalled his subsequent exit in 1934 as the result of two factors: 'the absence of a Danish line and the rejection of my demands for morally qualified individuals within the higher ranks of the party'.¹⁴ One additional reason, according to Vaaben, was the fact that 'Frits Clausen's circle did not approve of my [Vaaben's] significant German network'.¹⁵ And while the DNP continued its activities independently after 1934–35, economic hardship and political isolation marked the 1930s. These experiences made Vaaben recall the period as 'a political interregnum'.¹⁶ Despite his impressive Nazi connections then, Vaaben spent the years from 1935 to 1939 in a political vacuum, where, instead of fighting in political constellations or 'sectarian movements', as he called them, he consolidated his image as first and foremost a National

¹² Vaaben, *Hagekorset over Tyskland* (Copenhagen: Reitzel, 1931).

¹³ Vaaben, 'Den Nordiske Bevægelse', *Dansk Udsyn* (December, 1935).

¹⁴ Vaaben, 'Ejnar Vaaben om den Danske Folkerejsning', *Dannebrog*, nr. 5 (February 1941), p. 5.

¹⁵ Vaaben, 'Det var det hele vaerdt', p. 35. Rigsarkivet, nr. 06540, box 4.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

Socialist intellectual.¹⁷ The distinctively academic approach to National Socialism taken by Vaaben in the early 1930s is described in an article on him located in his personal archive. It claims that:

Had it not been for his lofty intellectualism [...] his position as Danish *fuehrer* would have been uncontested [...] had he cooperated wholeheartedly with Clausen, Danish National Socialism would have been considerably more dangerous.¹⁸

These early National Socialist initiatives peaked in Vaaben's correspondence and subsequent cooperation with the University of Jena's race biologist Hans F.K. Günther and the organisation *Nordischer Ring* (Nordic Ring) throughout the 1930s.¹⁹ Vaaben's unpublished memoir from 1978 emphasise on his connections to Günther. Describing his political life in the early 1930s, Vaaben further highlighted his personal connections with Himmler's and Rosenberg's admiration for 'anything Nordic' – two central NSDAP proponents of this kind of pan-Nordic ideological cooperation.²⁰ *Nordischer Ring* was founded in 1926 with the aim to unite all Nordic groups in a movement guided by the principles of Nordic thought as set out by Günther. These principles of 'Nordic thought' will be discussed in detail later on. Vaaben's intellectual exchange with Günther, beginning in 1928 and lasting until Günther's death in 1968, portrays the early years of his National Socialist career as ones where Vaaben not only aimed to cross Nordic borders through Günther's pan-Nordic organisation, but also Vaaben's ambitions of making a name for himself within the NSDAP leadership in Nazi Germany. Indeed, the entire practice of *Nordische Ring* was built upon this task of merging intellectual *völkisch* circles with the political leadership of the DNSAP.²¹

Of course, these two hallmarks, the Nordic idea and the National Socialist idea, overlapped on a practical as well as ideological level through Vaaben's activities; Vaaben's connections with Günther introduced him to the close circle of Nordic pan-Germanic experts around Alfred Rosenberg. Rosenberg's interest in Nordic race science, in turn, provided a direct link between the Nazi regime and pan-Germanic groups in Norway and Denmark such as Vaaben's in the early 1930s. In 1932, Rosenberg participated at a lecture given by Günther in Jena attended by Danish and Norwegian

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Unknown author and publication located in Vaaben's private archive, Rigsarkivet nr. 06540, box 1.

¹⁹ Correspondence with Hans F. Günther. Rigsarkivet nr. 06540, box 3.

²⁰ Vaaben 'Det var det hele værdt', p. 17. Rigsarkivet nr. 06540, box 4.

²¹ For more information on the Scandinavian focus of *Nordische Ring*, see Nicola Karcher, 'Schirmorganisation der Nordischen Bewegung: Der Nordische Ring und seine Repräsentanten in Norwegen', *NORDEUROPAforum*, 19:1 (2009), pp. 7–35.

National Socialists.²² One indication of Vaaben's prominent position in this context is his appointment together with the leading Norwegian race scientist Jon Alfred Mjøen to lead seminars specifically on the topic of Nordic race science. These seminars were arranged on Günther's initiative between 1931 and 1933.²³

Vaaben's political activities in the 1930s were thus both diffuse and to some extent politically insignificant – after all, he was not even the leader of the largest Nazi party in Denmark, the DNSAP, which nevertheless proved an electoral failure. In light of the larger 'failure' of Danish National Socialism,²⁴ historians continue to debate the role of Ejnar Vaaben in this historiography. Departing from an analysis of his pan-Germanic visions, some scholars insist on Vaaben's role as a significant intellectual in legitimising pan-Germanic voices in Denmark, while some denounce these visions as signs of an 'insignificant political fanatic'.²⁵ Indeed, despite early encouragement from the top leadership in Nazi Germany including Himmler and Göring, Vaaben's hopes for a place in a future National Socialist government were crushed after two personal meetings with Himmler in May and August 1940 following German occupation where Himmler firmly declared the NSDAP's faith in the cooperation policy of the Danish government.²⁶ Yet, high-profile voices within the Nazi milieu in Denmark such as the writer and Nazi sympathiser Knud Nordentoft did to some extent confirm the image Vaaben himself liked to proclaim of a man who reached beyond the unsophisticated and relatively insignificant political scene of Danish National Socialism. Nordentoft noted in his journal on 18 September 1943 that Vaaben was the only 'brave man left' and after all 'the only Dane who knows Himmler, Rosenberg, and Hitler in person'.²⁷

This reputation of Vaaben's high Nazi connections, albeit exaggerated, cannot be interpreted as either an indication of a significant political position in Denmark or of Vaaben necessarily being a successful mediator of Danish interests in Germany. It can, however, give us an idea of Vaaben's

²² Letter from Günther to Vaaben, dated March 1932, Rigsarkivet nr. 06540, box 3.

²³ Vaaben's correspondence with Hans F. Günther 1931–1933, Rigsarkivet nr. 06540, box 3.

²⁴ For the Danish historiographical debate on the 'failure' of Nazism in Denmark, see the thesis introduction.

²⁵ John T. Lauridsen, 'Den første graenseredder'. Lauridsen maintains that from a political perspective, the central position of Vaaben in historiography is uncalled for and to an extent even ahistorical. Lauridsen positions his argument against Anders M. Pedersen's, whose image of Vaaben is as a pioneering National Socialist and an 'ideological original'; see Pedersen, "'Den nordiske tanke" – bidrag til en politisk biografi af Ejnar Vaaben', in Henrik Dethlefsen and Henrik Lundbak (eds.), *Fra Mellemløstid til Efterkrigstid* (Copenhagen: Københavns Universitet, 1998), pp. 117–134.

²⁶ Poul C. Rasmussen's witness testimony, Rigsarkivet, Straffeakt, nr. 8624.

²⁷ Two entries in Knud Nordentoft's journal, dated 8 October and 18 September 1943. Rigsarkivet, Straffeakt, nr. 313.

uncontested image within Nazi circles as an intellectually pioneering National Socialist, perhaps by virtue of his political failure. Vaaben's post-war trial records for instance end with the judicial statement that 'Vaaben's activities were predominantly on "a spiritual level" which is beyond the reach of criminal law'.²⁸ Since the post-war years, however, one of the main breakthroughs in contemporary historiography of Nazism is indeed the notion that activities on a 'spiritual level' cannot be detached completely from the scene of 'political' life, which in the Danish case from 1940 was increasingly dictated by an ideologically infused project of Nazi imperialism.²⁹ Vaaben travelled twice to Germany immediately following the Nazi takeover of Denmark in 1940. During two visits in June and August that year, Vaaben functioned as spokesperson for the small movement *Danmarkskredsen*. The ambition was to secure cooperation between *Danmarkskredsen*³⁰ and the German government regarding future occupation plans in Denmark. During his first trip, Vaaben allegedly had a promising meeting with Rudolf Hess, but Vaaben's later meeting with Himmler proved a disappointment. Himmler made it brutally clear that Nazi Germany, following the declaration of the Danish government in the summer of 1940, would remain loyal to the promise of cooperation with the existing government. Vaaben returned to Denmark disillusioned with the Nazi regime and Himmler in particular, who effectively advised him to leave his ideological fantasies aside for the meantime.³¹ Yet, it was precisely Vaaben's peripheral position in Danish National Socialist politics that would provide him with an entry ticket to Himmler's pan-Germanic plans for Denmark as the Nazi regime had begun to discuss the limited potential of Clausen's DNSAP.

²⁸ Court statement, 16 January 1946, Rigsarkivet, P-journal, nr. 9509.

²⁹ The fusion of intellectual ideological concepts and *realpolitik* in Nazi occupational practice is an approach to the Holocaust which in recent years has turned into a scholarly paradigm. See for example Peter Longerich's notion of *Judenpolitik* to illustrate the driving force of anti-Semitism as both policy and politics in Longerich, *Holocaust* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 4–7 and Isabel Heinemann's emphasis on the fusion of science and mysticism among the Third Reich's 'race-experts' in occupied Eastern Europe, Heinemann, *'Rasse, Siedlung, deutsches Blut': Das Rasse- & Siedlungshauptamt der SS und die rassenpolitische Neuordnung Europas* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2003).

³⁰ *Danmarkskredsen* comprised former core members of Anders Malling's *Dansk Folkefællesskab* who in 1940 sought to establish an alternative government outside of the established political parties. Being part of a wider anti-parliamentary wave in 1940, the organisation was soon dissolved and the membership was divided between either seeking new forms of alliances with a goal similar to that of *Danmarkskredsen* or aligning with right-wing parties. *Danmarkskredsen* formally ceased to exist on 15 October 1940. See especially Henning Tjørnehøj, *Rigets bedste Mænd. Da det store erhvervsliv ville tage magten i 1940. Om Højgaardkredsen og Haustrupkredsen* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1990).

³¹ Rigsarkivet, P-journal nr. 1851.

II

Aage H. Andersen

Few other Danish National Socialists were able to challenge Vaaben on the position as leading Danish Nazi intellectual, but the one man closest to achieving that was arguably Andersen and his circle around the pamphlet *Kamptegnet*. As we shall see in chapter 4, Andersen was an initiator of incompatible, and even paradoxical, interactions; deeply Christian and anti-Semitic, he spent the second half of the 1930s juggling Christian messages with the advocacy of race science across the Danish National Socialist spectrum. If Malling's anti-Semitism had been elusive and contradictory throughout his time in the DNSAP in 1935, Andersen's anti-Semitic attitudes were so fierce it forced his exit from Clausen's party. His radicalism regarding anti-Semitic propaganda would form a pattern in his political career until the end of the war.

Andersen's active involvement with National Socialism started a couple of years later than Vaaben. In 1933, at the age of 41 and thus considerably older than Vaaben, Andersen embarked on political cooperation with the young and radical National Socialist, Wilfred Petersen. The cooperation involved Andersen's entry into Petersen's political party *National Socialistisk Parti* (NSP), which was one year later renamed the *Dansk Socialistisk Parti* (DSP). The nature of Petersen's 16-point party programme from 1933 early on established the centrality of the race idea *alongside* the aim of dissolving the state church as two principles that dominated the ideological rationale in the politics of both Vaaben and Andersen.³² The initial connections between Andersen and Petersen are among the early indicators of the radicalism that marked Andersen's entire National Socialist career. It would not be an exaggeration to describe Wilfred Petersen, born in 1905, as the partisan among the Danish Nazis before and during the occupation. He was one of the early DNSAP members to leave the party and thus initiated the trend that both Vaaben and Andersen were to follow through their own exits and subsequent creations of more extreme National Socialist groups.

³² The party programme of NSP, 'Dansk National-Socialistisk Parti', dated 9 November 1933, pp. 1–12. in Rigsarkivet, nr. 10192, box 49. '1932-1944: Diverse Materiale'.

Petersen did not leave Clausen's DNSAP alone but was accompanied by a circle of loyal men that came to constitute his own SA group.³³ Petersen's initiation of a Danish equivalent of the National Socialist SA and SS milieu also provides some insight into why Andersen continued to label Petersen as a comrade in their united struggle against the corrupt Danish parliamentary system, as late as 1939.³⁴ When Andersen abandoned formal political cooperation with Petersen in late October 1935 and, following the brief encounter with the DNSAP, he finally established his own independent party, *National Socialistisk Parti* (NSAP), Petersen's influence was clear throughout the NSP's organisational design. From 1936, the major organisational task for Andersen's NSAP was the creation of a similar SA division within the party, where the notion of 'SA' reflected the idea of the concentration of 'particularly active' (*særligt active*) party members into an elite formation.³⁵ In fact, the plans for a particular SS organisation in 1937 indicate even more strongly the far-reaching plans of Andersen's political project. In practical terms, the establishment of an SS organisation was accompanied by the establishment of party political schools (*Førerskole*) which under the strongest disciplinary rules would stand at Andersen's disposal and function as his personal military unit.³⁶ The programmes for these schools indicate the primacy of an ideological homogenisation *within* the movement, where lectures on the theme of 'ideological education' were designed to function as the introductory and foundational component of each meeting within Andersen's SS formation.³⁷

Despite the grand designs, however, the history of the NSAP was one of financial struggle. The sectarian outlook that emerged from the strict adherence to the race principle effectively narrowed the circle of potential members. While actual membership records are lacking, the post-war trial records back up later scholarly estimates that Andersen's movement never reached beyond 1,000

³³ For a brief but comprehensive overview of Petersen's activities from 1930 to 1945, see Lauridsen, *Dansk Nazisme*, p. 531. For the SA groups, see Rigsarkivet, nr. 10192, 'Organisationsplan og Vedtægter for Danmark's National Socialistiske Parti' dated 9 November 1933, Rigsarkivet, nr. 10192, box 49. '1932-1944: Diverse Materiale'. The archive of NSP (re-named Dansk anti Jødisk Liga in 1941) hosts a large number of Danish newspaper articles covering the life and crimes of Wilfred Petersen as Petersen's loyal circle embarked on a number of attacks on the Danish Social Democratic party throughout the 1930s. The attention given to Petersen's activities demonstrates the central role that Andersen gave to Petersen in his mapping of the National Socialist milieu in Denmark at the time. See Rigsarkivet, nr. 10192, box 42-49. '1932-1944: Diverse Avisudklip'.

³⁴ Unknown author, 'Det 20. Aarhundredes Kættere', *Kamptegnet* in Rigsarkivet, nr. 10192, box 45. '1932-1944 Diverse Avidudklip'.

³⁵ A document listing the current SA members in November 1936 shows how the SA project was an early priority and identity marker for the NSAP as it was already running in the second year of the party's history, see 'Til Medlemmar af den særligt active arbejdende Gruppe (S.A.)', dated November 1936, Rigsarkivet, nr. 10192., box 1. '1934-1937: Vedtægter og Organisationsplaner'.

³⁶ 'Forslag til Dannelse af S.S.', Rigsarkivet, nr. 10192, Ibid box 1.

³⁷ 'Forslag til Oprettelse af de Partipolitiske skoler', Rigsarkivet, nr. 10192, Ibid box 1.

members.³⁸ These estimates also include the years after the German occupation, when it is likely that the membership numbers increased. It is therefore safe to conclude that the NSAP remained a marginal political party throughout the 1930s. But the notion of ‘marginal’ is of course measured in comparative terms. There are several factors indicating that Andersen as much as Petersen revolted against the idea of conventional politics to the degree that they found nothing less than a revolutionary greatness in the marginal and sectarian. Estimates by two leading newspapers at the time certainly add to this sectarian image, finding that the core membership of the NSAP originally comprised up to 100 excluded members of the DNSAP.³⁹ But the main example of how elite aspirations were not only reflected in the NSAP’s plans for an SS division but more concretely in what should be viewed as Andersen’s trademark in this decade can be seen in the party organ *Kamptegnet*. While Sofie Lene Bak’s pioneering study on Danish anti-Semitism presents a comprehensive overview of the nature of this particular pamphlet and its far-reaching ambitions, the present study is less concerned with its rabid anti-Semitic outlook and vulgar anti-Semitic language in which *Kamptegnet* took the role of a Danish version of Julius Streicher’s *Der Stürmer*.⁴⁰ Beyond anti-Semitic caricatures, chapter 2 focuses on Andersen’s vision of a revolutionary interaction between the two pillars of his own National Socialism: Christianity and the race principle. The envisioned interaction of Christianity and National Socialism is an indicator of how Andersen’s political outlook challenged the very concept of ‘politics’ as such. In that sense, the non-political identity that is usually ascribed to both Andersen and Vaaben is indeed valid, but it was infused with a fierce political critique.

In the Norwegian National Socialist milieu during the 1930s, the opposition to the political establishment was more outspokenly antagonistic. The National Socialist attack on the political establishment in Norway was concentrated less around a few individuals leading separate political circles, as in Denmark, and more as a collective effort centred on a few organisations. What really sharpened the rhetoric, both in Norway and Denmark, was the growing *internal* antagonism that developed between Quisling’s NS and Frits Clausen’s DNSAP on the one hand, and the remaining National Socialist splinter parties on the other. This divide is clearly illustrated by the cooperation

³⁸ Sofie Lene Bak, *Dansk Antisemitisme 1930–1945* (Copenhagen: Aschehoug, 2004), pp. 59–60.

³⁹ Estimations from *Dagens Nyheder* (13 November 1935) and *Arbejderbladet* (11 June 1937), see Bak, *Dansk Antisemitisme 1930–1945*, p. 52.

⁴⁰ Before the launch of *Kamptegnet*, an article in the Danish newspaper *Arbejderbladet* from 1937 describes these links between Andersen and Streicher as an already established truth: ‘Andersen is thus well known as the Danish Streicher’, Rigsarkivet, nr. 10192. Box 43. ‘1932-1944 Diverse Avisudklip’.

between the editorial staff of the two pamphlets *Ragnarok* and *Fronten*, and their subsequent opposition to Quisling.

III

The Ragnarok Circle

Ragnarok's establishment in 1935 was a consequence of the development of a radical National Socialist sub-culture in opposition to Vidkun Quisling's political party *Nasjonal Samling* (NS). In this environment, Terje Emberland identifies the *Fronten* editor Eugen Nielsen, an architect, publicist and pioneering National Socialist, as a leading figure among reactionary National Socialist activists in Norway during the 1930s.⁴¹ The interaction between *Ragnarok* and *Fronten* was most clearly evident in the political trajectories of a few individuals who were actively engaged in activities for both pamphlets. *Fronten*'s official declaration from 1938 states the purpose of the pamphlet:

Fronten is a pamphlet that propagates a holistic view on life, where the spiritual, biological, material and political areas are being compensated accordingly for the lack of attention they are given in the conventional press. *We guard those areas that others neglect.*⁴²

The official declaration to 'guard those that others neglect' eventually became visible in Nielsen's later determination to go against Hitler's power politics in order to support the *völkisch* ideas that had become increasingly distanced from Hitler's *realpolitik*. This attitude, that Petersen's psychiatrist had called 'an altruistic approach to the small people in society', resonated particularly well with a movement such as *Ragnarok*. Whether it considered small people, or small and isolated ideas in society, *Ragnarok* editor Hans S. Jacobsen would in a similar manner highlight *Ragnarok*'s independent outlook: 'It has always been independent of others and never received financial backing [...] the fact that it was generally German friendly did not however keep it from criticising German violations.'⁴³

⁴¹ Emberland, *Religion og Rase*, pp. 114–115.

⁴² 'Frontens Program', *Fronten*, 15 February 1938 (original emphasis), p. 1.

⁴³ Riksarkivet Oslo, L-sak Moss politikammer nr. 488.

Taking into account the fact that *Ragnarok* figured in grey zones both politically and intellectually, it should not come as a surprise that its approach to religion was unorthodox – although others might have preferred to use the word ambivalent. It may be questioned to what extent *Ragnarok*'s editor Hans S. Jacobsen and its leading members deliberately crafted this unorthodox profile as a principle in its own right, or whether the mix of religious attitudes that we find in its publications was a result of a more conflicted position caused by a chaotic political climate. This thesis will emphasise the former assumption and illustrate how *Ragnarok*'s connections with the liberal theologian Kristian Schjelderup and *Fronten* were marked by the aim of actively striving for the kind of heterogeneity visible in the *Ragnarok* pamphlet. Indeed, Jacobsen's outlook reflected a more general pattern of his personal aversion towards dogmatism. This 'dogmatism' appeared in several guises, reflecting Jacobsen's experience of different contexts throughout the 1920s. Raised in a conventional Christian home, early on Jacobsen retreated from the state church, but it was his time in North America in the 1920s that more fundamentally shaped the political beliefs that came out of his early preoccupation with Christian dogmatism. Emberland argues that the combined experience of religious fundamentalism in the Midwest and Jacobsen's critique of American liberal society was crucial; Jacobsen meant that the detachment of the individual from the collective actually undermined rather than encouraged true individual freedom and it fostered a political standpoint against dogmatism rather than a critique of religiosity.⁴⁴

Beyond the ideological similarities of the two men's general outlook, several other leading contributors to *Ragnarok* and *Fronten* met within the same political organisation; the radical political party *Norges Nasjonal-Socialistiske Arbeiderparti* (NNSAP) that was established by Nielsen in 1932 had *Fronten* as its propaganda organ. The NNSAP was a political formation with a young profile, where for example *Ragnarok*'s future member Stein Barth-Heyerdahl started his National Socialist career. Among the leadership of both *Fronten* and the NNSAP was Adolf Egeberg Jr. who together with Ejnar Vaaben's brother-in-law Poul Sommer had been invited in 1932 by the NSDAP to take part in SS educational activities in Munich.⁴⁵ Egeberg Jr. would also briefly operate as the editor of *Ragnarok* in 1940.⁴⁶ By 1934, it was precisely this group of young Norwegians with experience of SA activism in Germany who pushed Nielsen out of the NNSAP due to divergent ideas of the kind

⁴⁴ Emberland, *Religion og Rase*, pp. 232–233.

⁴⁵ Witness testimony Knud Nordentoft in Rigsarkivet Straffeakt, nr. 20. Sommer's work on Christianity and National Socialism, *Under Hagekorset* (Danmarks National-Socialistiske Arbejder Parti, 1932) was advertised in *Fronten*, 2:2, (February 1933), p. 3.

⁴⁶ Editorial note, *Ragnarok*, 7:1, (May 1941), p. 43.

of ideological profile *Fronten* represented. While Nielsen remained preoccupied with *völkisch* ideas, the younger members led by the future *Ragnarok* ideologues, Barth-Heyerdahl and Per Imerslund, sought to direct the party away from Nielsen's fierce anti-Semitism and towards a more explicit struggle against Bolshevism.⁴⁷

Nielsen's ideological trajectory throughout the 1930s was a reflection of his aim 'to guard those who others neglect' as he came to support views that were gradually being isolated in Nazi Germany. Besides his early fascist activities in Norway dating back to the 1920s through the party *Den Nasjonale Legion*, Nielsen had personal connections to Eric Ludendorff who greatly influenced Nielsen's attitudes to the relationship between Christianity and National Socialism. After serving in the First World War, Ludendorff had become an active spokesperson for the *völkisch* movement in the Weimar Republic, and rather than seeking to 'germanise' Christianity, Ludendorff propagated an anti-religious and essentially pagan profile for the NSDAP. This profile eventually led to a conflict with Hitler, which would result in Ludendorff being expelled from the party in 1927.⁴⁸ As a reflection of this development, the following years witnessed *Fronten*'s increased anti-religious attitude. For instance, one article from 1938 stated in Nietzschean terms that 'Christianity is nothing but a Jewishness in disguise'.⁴⁹ Nielsen's pamphlet had existed for less than one year in 1933 when the swastika was removed from the front page in response to Hitler's takeover and as a mark of Nielsen's sympathy with Ludendorff.⁵⁰

This emphasis on having the courage to confront the establishment was central to the contributors to both pamphlets. In 1939, *Fronten* clearly indicated its intention to side with *Ragnarok* when it published a list of Norwegian Nazi or Nazi-sympathising pamphlets with accompanying comments from the *Fronten* editors. In the article, Quisling's NS organ *Fritt Folk* was described as anti-Marxist, anti-Jewish, pro-Norwegian and pro-Nordic but a pamphlet which nevertheless does 'not dare to attack freemasonry in Norway and the Jewish Christianity'.⁵¹ The NS pamphlet was thus criticised

⁴⁷ The anti-Bolshevism of these early activists had momentum in 1936 when Per Imerslund and Ola Furuseth were part of the group of young radicals that broke into Leo Trotsky's home in exile in Norway to seek evidence for Trotsky's revolutionary activities in Norway. The action was hardly successful but led eventually to Trotsky's expulsion to Mexico.

⁴⁸ For more on Ludendorff and the wider discourse on religion within the NSDAP, see Richard Steigmann-Gall, *The Holy Reich: Nazi Conceptions of Christianity, 1919–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁴⁹ 'Frontens Program', *Fronten* (February 1938), p. 1.

⁵⁰ Emberland, *Religion og Rase*, p. 116.

⁵¹ 'Nasjonale aviser i Norge', *Fronten* (June 1939), p.3.

for its hypocrisy in only fighting the Nazi doctrines (i.e. in this case, the battle against Jewishness) when it suited them, and avoiding a confrontation with those areas that more subtly expressed its Jewishness. Contrary to this accusation of hypocrisy, *Ragnarok* was described as ‘the largest national pamphlet in the Nordic countries and most importantly a pamphlet that struggles for Norwegianness in spirit and action and attacks all forms of Jewishness present in the Nordic countries’.⁵²

A prominent *Ragnarok* activist with a similar aim in his editorial role was Ola Furuseth who edited the pamphlet *Baunevakt* before taking the position as ideological leader of *Germanske SS Norge*. Furuseth’s aim in *Baunevakt* was to reveal cases ‘that never have been published in other newspapers, everything that the newspapers are banned from publishing’.⁵³ The men behind *Baunevakt* as well as *Fronten* and *Ragnarok* thus sought to give the Norwegian people another perspective, to move beyond conventional truths and customs, whether with respect to politics or religion. In Furuseth’s words, true faith ‘needs no dogmas, no thick books’.⁵⁴ Stein Barth-Heyerdahl summed up this goal in a letter to Hans Jacobsen in 1942 in which he had urged the *Ragnarok* editor to continue his important mission:

As long as it [*Ragnarok*] is published to the same standard as before, so that it touches the spirit of our times and remains brave, everything is alright. If it is difficult to find interesting things to write about back home, look out and write about foreign lands, preferably in a utopian manner and about ideal conditions in Illyria or Utopia. Write theoretically about human values and dignity. Be confusing, urge the people to once more ponder over these idealist thoughts.⁵⁵

This statement by Barth-Heyerdahl is indicative of his general perception of the *Ragnarok* mission on the Norwegian intellectual and political scene which was, similarly to *Fronten*, marked by the striving to illustrate contradictions in its many forms. Indeed, *Ragnarok*’s idealist position often resulted in precisely stressing the contradiction between political practice and the original ideas that underpinned them. As we shall see later in this thesis, the criticism directed against those ‘great men’, such as Hitler and Quisling, who claimed to represent these authentic ideas, were thus often fierce and involved accusations that these leading politicians had corrupted the entire National Socialist ideology for imperialist reasons.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ ‘Baunevakt’, *Baunevakt* (February 1940), p. 1.

⁵⁴ Ola Furuseth, ‘Troens makt’, *Østlendingen* (22 May 1943), p. 2.

⁵⁵ Stein Barth-Heyerdahl to Hans S. Jacobsen, 22 June 1942. Riksarkivet L-sak Oslo politikammer nr. 6331.

IV

Anders Malling

The priest and previous DNSAP member Anders Malling spent the latter half of the 1930s eagerly trying to convince Vaaben to enter *Dansk Folkefællesskab*. Like Vaaben, Malling found it difficult to accommodate his personal views on National Socialism within the DNSAP framework. Historian Martin Schwarz Lausten writes about Malling's past and subsequent exit from the DNSAP as a result of his 'attitudes to Christianity, Nazism and the Jews [that] were often elusive and contradictory'.⁵⁶ A letter from party comrade Johannes Sørensen dated as late as October 1939 reveals that it was their Grundtvigian colleague Ejerslev who functioned as the link to Vaaben. Sørensen concludes that 'He [Vaaben] might be persuaded to join us as long as we take one step at a time.'⁵⁷ Vaaben, however, remained sceptical about Malling's radicalism, and regarded *Dansk Folkefællesskab* as too moderate. Despite their shared Grundtvigian intellectual heritage, an issue that will be discussed further below, Vaaben was more radical in his nationalist approach and was also more attracted to the idea of political cooperation with Nazi Germany than the conservative Malling. Their different levels of political radicalism aside, what they had in common was the conviction that no one could claim ownership of National Socialism.

Similarly to Vaaben, Malling's political profile in the late 1930s was characterised by his gradual distancing from the idea that National Socialism could be translated into political imperialism. The fact that the letter to Sørensen was written in 1939 is interesting when taking into account that Malling left the Danish political scene less than a year later. Following the German occupation of Denmark in April 1940, Malling explained his disillusionment with what National Socialism had effectively become. He reveals that the affinitive relationship between National Socialism and a Grundtvigian philosophy appeared clearer than ever following the invasion; it was the *resistance* to Nazi Germany's imperialistic politics that had brought the spiritual revival sought for among dedicated National Socialists.⁵⁸ What Malling describes is less an exit from National Socialism than a break of political connections with Nazi Germany. In this context, it is fruitful to compare Malling's break with Clausen

⁵⁶ Martin Schwarz Lausten, *Jødesympati og jødehad i Folkekirken* (Copenhagen: Forlaget Ania, 2007) p. 182.

⁵⁷ Johannes Sørensen to Anders Malling, Dated 10 October 1939, Rigsarkivet nr. 07187, box 14 '1936-1949: Breve Politisk liv'.

⁵⁸ Malling, 'Den Danske rejsning etter Brandes', p. 12., Rigsarkivet nr. 07187, box 40 '1916-1976: Foredrag, Møder og Taler'.

and the DNSAP in 1936 to his exit from politics following the occupation. The break in 1936 was followed by an article in his newly established party *Dansk Folkefællesskab* stating that

We have struggled for the implementation of the *Fuehrer*-principle, but never for the kind of conditional despotism that DNSAP represents today [...] but although we see it as necessary to break with our old party, we are still deeply bound to the National Socialist idea and will not stop fighting for it in the future.⁵⁹

The ‘two exits’, Malling’s separation from Clausen in 1936 and from Nazi Germany in 1940, converge in the face of Malling’s preoccupation with safeguarding the Danish southern border. In fact, similarly to Vaaben’s early focus on these issues, Malling’s entry into the DNSAP in the first place was related to Clausen’s promises of active engagement in the border question.⁶⁰ Just as Malling saw Clausen’s leadership as an outright abuse of the *Fuehrer*-principle, his article from February 1940 discusses the German quest for *Lebensraum* as a political slogan that in no way met the promises of National Socialism, but rather resembled an ‘ideology’ no different from the old imperialism.⁶¹ In a letter from 1937, Malling’s breaks with Clausen’s DNSAP and with Nazi Germany appear even more ideologically close as he describes the exit from the DNSAP as one where ‘we broke with the principle that we always had to look south and try to translate all Hitler’s good ideas. We saw that this kind of strategy would ultimately result in something foreign to the spirit of our Danish people.’⁶²

Malling’s writings thus reveal the same pattern that is visible in Vaaben’s separation between ‘Nazism’ and ‘National Socialism’, that is, the divide between an imperialist and constrained ‘German’ or ‘Danish’ ideology and that of a holistic National Socialist worldview. This separation is one way to approach the difficulties that Malling’s party colleagues had when defining the ‘level’ of his National Socialist dedication. In the correspondence between the party member Arne Sørensen and Malling during the years 1937 and 1938, Sørensen accused Malling of representing such a rabid anti-Semitism that labelling him a ‘Nazi’ was well deserved.⁶³ These accusations, in turn, prompted

⁵⁹ Untitled article in *Dansk Folkefællesskab*, 1:1 (27 May 1936), unpaginated in Rigsarkivet, nr. 10192, box 43. ‘1932-1944: Diverse Avisudklip’.

⁶⁰ Correspondence Malling and DNSAP, May-June 1933, Rigsarkivet nr. 07187, box 4 ‘1931-1935: Breve i alm.’.

⁶¹ Malling, ‘Geopolitik. En ny ideologisk maske. Skal de nationale stater opslukes av imperialistiske “livsrum”?’ *Dansk Folkefællesskab*, 5:5 (February 1940), pp. 4–5.

⁶² Letter from Malling to Axel Clausen, dated 15 December 1937, Rigsarkivet nr. 07187, box 13 ‘1936-37: Breve Politisk liv’.

⁶³ Correspondence Arne Sørensen to Anders Malling, 1937–38, Rigsarkivet nr. 07187, box 13 ‘1936-37: Breve Politisk liv’.

an improvised meeting where Malling, on behalf of *Dansk Folkefællesskab*, declared that ‘we refrain from all German forms, symbols and methods. There is thus no reason to speak of any “Nazism”.’⁶⁴

That Malling, despite his official rejection of ‘Nazism’, continued to search for cooperation with a political figure such as Vaaben, whose pan-Germanic profile positioned him closer to the image of the ‘hard-core’ Nazi, is not necessarily a contradiction. For both Malling and Vaaben, ‘Nazism’ was not the same as ‘National Socialism’, and the difference often took the form of a comparison between a ‘German’ approach and a true ‘Danish’ belief. One article by Ernst Christensen, the editor of Southern Jutland paper *Flensborg Avis* and Vaaben’s ally in questions regarding the German–Danish border in Southern Jutland, stressed this distinction: ‘the real truth about Ejnar Vaaben is however – whether he agrees or not – quite simply that, despite all his race science and race theories, he will never qualify as a National Socialist in the German sense of the word’.⁶⁵ Vaaben formulated this criticism within the argument that Clausen – with his party political and thus inherently parliamentary mindset – had failed to see the essential values of National Socialism. It was one thing to maintain friendly relations with Germany in order to safeguard Danish national interests in Southern Jutland but quite another to import German National Socialist propaganda. In Vaaben’s view, Clausen had

viewed my [Vaaben’s] and the DNP’s hard work of creating a dialogue with the new leaders of Germany as ‘competition’ [...] and our friendly relations with Germany have been overturned by Clausen through his abandonment of the border question and his ‘Danish–German’-*Volksgemeinschaft* humbug.⁶⁶

Wilfred Petersen, who worked closely with Vaaben outside the DNSAP and also contributed articles to *Ragnarok*,⁶⁷ reflected on the crisis within the DNSAP in the 1930s:

The movement [DNSAP] was soon divided where the majority sought to adopt National Socialism in its German form without considering our specific national conditions and Danish mentality, and others who showed a true understanding of National Socialism [...] in striving to create a politics that reflected our cultural heritage and spiritual life.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ ‘Inbydelse til Samling. Aabent Brev til Generaldirektør Pürschel and Arne Sørensen’, *Dansk Folkefællesskab*, 19:4, (11 May 1939), p. 1.

⁶⁵ Article in *Flensborg Avis*, 10 August (1939) located in Rigsarkivet nr. 10192, box 43. ‘1932-1944: Diverse Avisudklip’.

⁶⁶ Vaaben in correspondence with Christensen, p. 3, Rigsarkivet nr. 06540, box 3.

⁶⁷ Wilfred Petersen, ‘Nordisk Politik’, *Ragnarok*, 2–3 (1943), p. 99.

⁶⁸ Wilfred Petersen, *Rene Folk med Rene Haender: Blade af Frits Clausens Blå Bog* (Copenhagen: Dansk Socialistisk Forlag, 1941), p. 3.

This idea also comes through in Vaaben's letter of defence which was read in court in 1939. Vaaben had received access to top-secret documents regarding the German Social Democratic Party that had been sent in strict confidence to the Danish Social Democrats, documents which Vaaben had made public. His defence, unsurprisingly in the judicial context, contained some criticism expressed towards the Nazi regime; yet it maintained that

I [Vaaben] openly admit that I sympathise with the New German National Socialist movement, but *I am not a National Socialist in the sense it is understood in this country*. I do not praise foreign political systems or support foreign power politics at the expense of Danish interests and Danish dignity. True to this conviction, I have tried my best to teach my fellow Danes the values that lie in the idea of the nation, but these ideas and comparisons are indeed taken from Germany.⁶⁹

V

'Anarchy-Nazis'

Their outcast positions as opponents to these two dominant Nazi formations alone justify studying the positions of *Ragnarok*, Andersen's NSAP and Vaaben's DNP in a comparative framework. But it is even more interesting to note that their respective breaks with NS and the DNSAP both occurred between 1935–37 as a result of a divide between moderate and more 'reactionary' forces. This break is described by *Ragnarok* as the exit of the 'best men of the movement and the most convinced idealists'.⁷⁰ As we have seen in Denmark, the split with Clausen's DNSAP in the mid-1930s also centred upon a conflict understood by the splinter movements. It was a conflict between the idealism of creating a specifically Danish and thus organic form of National Socialism, rather than a materialistic copy of the German version.

Most members of *Ragnarok* had begun their National Socialist careers in NS. Their personal trajectories in the Norwegian Nazi milieu were, however, more shaped by their exit from rather than their time in NS. Several *Ragnarok* activists played important roles in the crisis in 1936–37, which marked the end of their careers in NS and the beginning of what one Norwegian author claims was

⁶⁹ Vaaben, 'Forsvar' dated September 1939, p. 1 (my emphasis), Rigsarkivet nr. 06540, box 2.

⁷⁰ Hans S. Jacobsen, 'Vidkun Quisling og NS', *Ragnarok*, 3:3 (1937), pp. 62.

NS's journey from 'mass party to a revolutionary group waiting for a moment to strike'.⁷¹ This break and simultaneous reconfiguration of the NS outlook is examined in various Norwegian scholarly works, and there is a clear consensus that both NS and its opponents (including *Ragnarok*) came out of the conflict with a sharpened ideological rhetoric.⁷² The image of NS that was propagated among Quisling's opponents was that of an NS party torn between 'the national and social forces', the freemason circle and one which – once again – likened Quisling's leadership to an absolute monarchy:

Vidkun Quisling is an immovable absolute dictator [...] In a fighting idealist movement, the pure leadership must prevail encouraging the best men to become fuehrers after proving their qualities. If this organic principle had been established within NS, things would have looked much different today.⁷³

The conflict within NS had its roots in the events of 1933–34 that involved the Ragnarok activists Barth-Heyerdahl and Walter Fürst. They had drafted a law to establish a board of leading NS members close to Quisling in order to avoid an absolutist Führer-cult. While Quisling took part in meetings regarding these plans for reorganisation, the end result was disappointing. Quisling chose to appoint the regional leaders (*fylkesførere*), whose positions he had the sole authority to remove. This action effectively rendered the draft insignificant and resulted in Quisling's dictatorial position being further consolidated.⁷⁴ The reaction in *Fronten* and *Ragnarok* was clear: Fürst described the events as an indication of an NS dictatorship that ruled the Norwegian National Socialist members by 'oriental' strategies that characterised a dictatorship.⁷⁵

The accounts of this event were used in *Ragnarok* as somewhat of a founding myth and the rhetoric is also present in the movement's later years where Jacobsen for example re-cites Quisling's words from *Fritt Folk* stating that they, the SS, do not need the radical kind of Nazism that is propagated by the splinter movements like *Ragnarok*.⁷⁶ Indeed, Quisling's label of *Ragnarok* as a radical movement was welcomed and defined their revolutionary ambition. At the same time, the relations with NS were complex and became even more so after the occupation, where strategic concerns grew among

⁷¹ Hans Fredrik Dahl, *Vidkun Quisling. En fører blir til* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1991), p. 431.

⁷² See for example Ivo de Figueiredo's claim that NS's ideological orientation was much stronger after 1937, in De Figueiredo, 'Ideologiens Primat: Nasjonal Samling 1937–40', *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 74:3 (1995), pp. 370–390.

⁷³ 'Nasjonal Samlings skjebne', *Fronten*, 6:2 (15 February 1937), p. 1.

⁷⁴ Jacobsen, 'Vidkun Quisling og NS', p. 63.

⁷⁵ Walter Fürst, 'Årsakene til og følgene av N.S.' sammenbrudd', *Ragnarok*, 3:3 (1937), pp. 66–70. Walter Fürst was more personally involved in these events than other *Ragnarok* contributors, considering that he as chief of propaganda in NS was accused of being the cause of the NS's financial problems. See 'Kringsjø', *Ragnarok*, 3:4 (1937), pp. 84–85.

⁷⁶ Cited by Jacobsen in 'Vidkun Quisling og NS', p. 64.

Ragnarok relating to whether a re-entrance into the NS was necessary in order to realise their National Socialist political aspirations. *Ragnarok* members attacked Quisling's supposedly dictatorial politics while simultaneously consolidating their heretical identity. Stein Barth-Heyerdahl opposed Hitler's and Quisling's politics and presented himself as an 'anarchy-Nazi'. The anarchist label referred to Barth-Heyerdahl's critique of the leadership behaviour of both NS and the German NSDAP. This critique prompted his anarchist call for a revolt against the 'false' prophets of National Socialism.⁷⁷

Barth-Heyerdahl had been an eager member of NS in its founding years. In a letter dated 30 June 1933, Barth-Heyerdahl wrote to the NS propaganda office and offered his assistance as a spokesperson for the party in the summer months preceding the election campaign in autumn the same year.⁷⁸ He quickly became an important individual within the party. When NS announced its party programme between 30 May and 2 June 1933, Barth-Heyerdahl held one of three lectures. His topic of race and spiritual revival was followed by Quisling's lecture on the 'revival of politics'.⁷⁹ In this party programme as well as following proclamations made by Quisling, the different emphasis placed by Quisling and Barth-Heyerdahl on the NS's aims become clear. With no mention of spiritual revival, Quisling's pragmatic tone comes through in a clarifying declaration in the following days after the lectures, on 5 June 1933: 'To avoid any misunderstandings: NS builds upon the Führer principle.'⁸⁰ Just like the article in Wilfred Petersen's *Stormen*, Barth-Heyerdahl hinted at the emerging sense of corruption among all those 'false National Socialist prophets'. What is more, Barth-Heyerdahl hinted at the fact that these false prophets were not to be found among the 'small people' of the splinter groups, but among those, like Quisling and Clausen, who dared to claim ownership over an essentially unbound ideology; being an 'anarchy-Nazi' was for Barth-Heyerdahl equivalent to being a real Nazi.

⁷⁷ Emberland, *Rase*, p. 193.

⁷⁸ Stein Barth-Heyerdahl, 'Forslag: Om organisasjon og propaganda i Helgeland', dated 30 June, 1933, Riksarkivet NS Hovedkontor 1933, Oppfordring til Nasjonal Samling 0758/F/Fh/Box 0002.

⁷⁹ Preparations for Barth-Heyerdahl's lecture on 'Rase', Dated 1 June 1933, Riksarkivet, RA/PA-0758/F/Fh/Box 0002.

⁸⁰ Vidkun Quisling, 'Organisasjon og Disiplin', dated 5 July 1933, Riksarkivet, 0758/F/Fh/Box 0002.

VI

Chapter Conclusion

The present chapter has illuminated the ways in which the question of what defined a real National Socialist occupied the contemporary discourses as much as it dominates current historiography today. Michael Wildt's research on the generational cohort of men born between 1900 and 1910 – men who were spared the first-hand experience of the First World War and who came to lead the genocidal machinery of the SS main office (RSHA) – has provided, in scholarly circles, a widely accepted profile of the archetypal Nazi. In Wildt's words, these individuals shared 'a concept of a new world, which based both its appeal and its absoluteness on the collapse of the old world'.⁸¹ They were completely uncompromising in their attitudes and breaking the old world's rules became their motto.

Wildt sees this ideal type personified in Otto Ohlendorf, born in 1907. The post-war trial records of Ohlendorf's case echoes the psychologist's confusion about Wilfred Petersen's cultivated personality and his completely outrageous actions. It is, to an extent, indeed possible to draw parallels between Ohlendorf and these Scandinavian intellectuals. That is, if one follows the framework of Wildt's 'uncompromising' mentality as key to tracing the 'real' National Socialist, more so than focusing on the murderous consequences of this mentality. Compared to Wildt's stencil of the uncompromising National Socialist, Petersen and his colleagues were hardly as revolutionary in their ideologies as they might have thought. Demographically speaking, Petersen was born in 1905 and Ejnar Vaaben a couple of years earlier, in 1902. Aage H. Andersen, however, was considerably older. Born in 1892, he entered *Schalburgkorpset* in 1944 when he was over 50 years of age. Like Petersen and Vaaben, and unlike Andersen and his colleague Arendt Lemwigh-Müller born in 1899, the individuals covered in this study were all born within the years 1900–1910 or later:⁸² the *Kamptegnet* contributor Jørgen Skeby in 1905, the *Fronten* editor Adolf Egeberg Jr. in 1909 and *Ragnarok* editor Hans S. Jacobsen in 1901. The *Ragnarok* ideologues Per Imerslund (1912), Ola Furuseth (1908), Tor Strand (1912) and Stein Barth-Heyerdahl (1909) are no exceptions. Even when we look beyond the immediate circles around *Ragnarok*, *Kamptegnet* and Vaaben's closest allies, among noteworthy members of

⁸¹ Michael Wildt, 'Generational Experience and Genocide: A Biographical Approach to Nazi Perpetrators' in Volker Rolf and Simone Lässig (eds.), *Biography Between Structure and Agency: Central European Lives in International Historiography* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008) p. 149.

⁸² Anders Malling was born in 1896 and *Fronten*'s Eugen Nielsen in 1884. Their exclusion from this argument about the parallels between Wildt's generational focus and the Scandinavian profiles is based upon the fact that these two individuals, different from the others, were peripheral figures following the German occupation.

Schalburgkorpset and *Germaniske SS Norge*, which will be discussed later in this thesis, we find the *Germaneren* editor Egil Holst Thorkildsen (1916), the GSSN staff-chief Leif Schjøren (1906) and leader of *Schalburgkorpset* Carl Popp-Madsen (1900) all within this age group.

However, only limited conclusions can be reached based on these generational factors alone. Apart from considering the obvious particularity of the German *Kriegsjugend* in contrast with the Scandinavian context, it is enough to take a look at the time of death of these individuals. Ohlendorf was executed by hanging on 7 June 1951 following the Einsatzgruppen trial. Ejnar Vaaben, by contrast, lived a peaceful post-war life until his death in 1997. The same can be said about Hans S. Jacobsen who lived until 1980 and Aage H. Andersen who died at the age of 76, in 1968. Indeed, neither Furuseth and Barth-Heyerdahl nor Imerslund and Skeby met Ohlendorf's fate. Furuseth died in 1983 and Barth-Heyerdahl in 1972. Imerslund and Skeby, however, did not live to see the post-war period: Imerslund died accidentally in the midst of his plan to assassinate Quisling in late 1943, and Skeby committed suicide on 10 April 1940, the day after the German occupation of Denmark. Considering that the judicial punishment for these Scandinavians was rather mild even within their national contexts,⁸³ if men like Vaaben and Jacobsen are ever to be regarded as uncompromising National Socialists, one needs to look beyond gas chambers, Einsatzgruppen and the murderous ambitions of the SD.

Dr August Wimmer describes Petersen's ideological convictions as 'controlled yet deeply passionate', a description very much in line with post-war psychiatrists' impressions of Ohlendorf. As we shall see later in this thesis, the paradoxically dogmatic quest for breaking the hegemony of the confessional church, liberalism and all forms of intellectualism stemming from 'the old world' was as widespread among fascists and National Socialists in Scandinavia as it was in Germany. Compared to Quisling and Clausen and their respective parties, it was however expressed in its most radical Scandinavian form by the individuals examined in this thesis. Needless to say, these aspects are all different forms of expressing one particular ideal and, moreover, a very central ideal to the ideology of the German SS: the glorification of agency – in particular, the glorification of violence. The question of why violence ceased to become an aspect associated with these Scandinavian men leads us to Wildt's own argument about the explanatory limitations of a biographical approach with

⁸³ Vidkun Quisling, Frits Clausen and *Schalburgkorpset* leader K.B. Martinsen were among those 91 (46 in Denmark and 45 in Norway) individuals sentenced to death in post-war trials.

its generational emphasis. The transformation from a radical National Socialist to an actual perpetrator must ‘also take into consideration an analysis of the society, the structure of the power apparatus, in particular the new specifically National Socialist institutions’,⁸⁴ and these were all aspects of radicalisation where Petersen’s and Ohlendorf’s trajectories diverge from one another. In what follows, a number of Scandinavian National Socialist intellectuals will be presented, being singled out for this thesis because of their connections with Nazi Germany and their self-acclaimed radicalism. They do not constitute ideal-types of the Nazi perpetrator, but in their own context and the subsequent *absence* of a National Socialist institutional framework, they never ceased to call themselves ‘true National Socialists’.

⁸⁴ Wildt, ‘Generational Experience’, p. 159.

Chapter 4: ‘There are a Number of Gods to be Crushed’

Nazi Germany as a Political Religion

Introduction

In 1933, the Danish theologian Halfdan Høgsgbro described National Socialism as ‘undoubtedly highly religious’, but yet a movement ‘of falsification which meets the Church with a kiss’.¹ National Socialism was thus a sophisticated imitation of a religious system, where the act of falsifying traditional religion had fostered a new kind of faith. In Norway, Kristian Schjelderup admitted in a lecture on the ‘conflict in German religious life and our contemporary religious crisis’ from 1935 that ‘many of the founding principles of modern liberal theology experienced a religious revival when it became separated from Christianity and instead linked to “Blut und Boden [Blood and Soil]”’.² Schjelderup was, however, not hesitant in raising criticism, stating that the faith in a sacred Germany had ‘religious clothing but with an inner core indicating nothing but a nationalist movement striving for power’.³ These Danish and Norwegian voices expressed a dilemma they shared not only with other liberal theologians but also with radical Nazi individuals in their respective countries, vis-à-vis the religious politics of Nazi Germany: if National Socialism indeed was a form of religiosity, what safeguarded it from meeting the same fate as the (in their view) corrupt and degraded confessional Christianity? The first edition of the Norwegian *Ragnarok* pamphlet from 1935 stated that ‘there are a number of Gods to be crushed and it demands a struggle’.⁴ Indeed, their critique of Christianity eventually was bound to clash with aspects of the Nazi regime.

This chapter examines the conjunction between Nazi groups and theological circles in Scandinavia regarding the relationship between National Socialism and the term ‘political religion’. Just like many other Christian writers across Europe in the 1930s, Schjelderup and Høgsgbro formulated their early

¹ Halfdan Høgsgbro, *De Nye Religioner: Kommunisme, Nationalsocialisme som Livsanskuelse* (Århus: De Unges Forlag, 1933), pp. 44–46.

² Kristian Schjelderup, *Den tyske religionskamp og nutidens religiøse krise, Foredrag holdt den 14. Mars 1935, Chr. Michelsens Institut for Videnskap og Åndsfrihet* (Bergen: John Griegs Boktrykkeri, 1935), p. 14.

³ Schjelderup, ‘Krisen i det tyske hedenskap’, *Fronten*, (May 1936), p. 1.

⁴ Hans Jacobsen, *Ragnarok*, 1:1 (March 1935), p. 1.

theories of Nazism as an inner-worldly ‘political religion’ – a secular alternative to Christian religion. Another Danish theologian, Eduard Geismar, clarified that this Nazi ‘political religion’ symbolised the resolution of Christian polemics: as blood and race formed the pillars of a new worldview, the tension between the divine and the worldly had been reduced and conquered by man.⁵ This is a clarification no different from Eric Voegelin – the founding father of political religion theory – and his definition of the phenomenological approach to inner-worldly religiosity.⁶ At the same time, these Christian intellectuals were nonetheless also inspired by the functionalist approach to ‘political religion’ that – less from an individual and more from a Durkheimian socio-political angle – saw the Nazi religion as a power-political construction with the aim of seducing its population into obedience. It is the contention of this chapter that the tension between a functionalist and phenomenologist understanding of ‘political religion’ that figures in today’s historiography was therefore also present in the Nazi writings in Scandinavia at the time.

The establishment of a ‘political religion’ was certainly a matter of contention within the Nazi party itself. As discussed in the historiographical chapter, Klaus Vondung distinguishes fruitfully between the mysticism associated with a ‘volkish religion’ contrary to a ‘political religion’ understood as ‘Hitler’s socially dominant (*sozialdominante*) religion in the Third Reich’.⁷ The *sozialdominante* approach assumes that National Socialism is understood as a ‘political religion’ in a functionalist sense. That means, National Socialism was defined a religion based on its instrumentalist and coercive character, being primarily a belief system constructed to consolidate the power of a totalitarian regime. To follow Vondung’s distinction in this Scandinavian context, the attitudes to traditional religion among the *Ragnarok* members and most of their Danish colleagues would clearly fall under the other, ‘volkish’ category. This observation is significant because it will be able to tell us more about how and why the critique of Christianity among National Socialists such as Anders Malling, Jørgen Skeby and members of *Ragnarok* often resembled the criticism of the politics of Nazi Germany – while they at the same time praised the ‘religious qualities’ of National Socialism. It became a matter of distinguishing between a functionalist and constructed religion on the one hand, and an organic, phenomenologist understanding of religiosity on the other. The chapter further argues that the Nazis determined this distinction by stressing the importance of the principle of ‘theological

⁵ Eduard Geismar, *Religiøse Brydninger i det Nuværende Tyskland* (Copenhagen: G.E.C. Forlag, 1934), pp. 87–110.

⁶ See chapter 1 in this thesis.

⁷ Klaus Vondung, ‘Von der völkischen Religiosität zur politischen Religion’ in Uwe Puschner and Clemens Vollnhals (eds.) *Die völkisch-religiöse Bewegung im Nationalsozialismus. Eine Beziehungs- und Konfliktgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), p. 33.

incorrectness' and thereby favouring what we now call the phenomenologist school of 'political religion' theory.

'Theological incorrectness' is thus introduced in the particular context of Nazi theory as a clarifying tool when mapping the divide between functionalist and phenomenologist understanding of the term 'political religion'. The term works to clarify why many Nazis combined an outspoken aversion to the term 'religion' while at the same time calling for a religious move beyond Christianity. Without exaggerating the proximity of liberal theology and National Socialism, the chapter does assume significant ideological overlaps between liberal theologians and the Scandinavian Nazis of this study.⁸ These overlaps are structured into three main themes.

First, the chapter describes how the emerging field on the psychology of religion informed contemporary liberal theologians. Through the calls for a more loosely defined understanding of religiosity that came with a phenomenological – and essentially individual – emphasis on religiosity, this opposition to concretisation also made way for ambivalent attitudes among liberal theologians vis-à-vis pagan movements. The broad approach to divergent forms of religiosity, in turn, prompted the question of whether it was possible to be 'theologically incorrect' and nevertheless claim a religious identity. Scholars have, as we have seen in recent research on the Nazi *Kirchenkampf*, stressed that Nazi historiography should incorporate a greater openness to a less dogmatic understanding of religiosity.⁹ This chapter not only argues for the use of 'theological incorrectness' from an analytical/historiographical point of view, but it also stresses that it was a principle the Nazis themselves used to measure the quality of emerging religious systems.

Second, because of the basic opposition to 'religious mediators' like priests, dogmas and institutions, Scandinavian theologians and National Socialists alike shared an aversion to any notions of constructed, man-made and thus rigidly defined religions. From a theological point of view, this opposition fostered an ambivalent attitude towards National Socialism. The ambivalence was shown in how theologians on the one hand saw National Socialism as a spiritual movement and to an extent sympathised with some of its aspects. On the other hand, theologians still objected to the way the once pure Nazi ideals were consolidated and constrained within a power-seeking political regime led

⁸ For a fairly recent commentary, see Arne Rasmusson, 'Historiography and Theology: Theology in the Weimar Republic and the Beginning of the Third Reich', *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte*, 20:1 (2007), pp. 155–180.

⁹ See my discussion of Doris Bergen's argument with regards to *Deutsche Christen* in chapter 1.

by Hitler. Thus, their critique of the ‘Nazi religion’ was structurally similar to their revolt against the constraints of orthodox Christianity. This ambivalence in attitudes to National Socialism was also present in the writings of Anders Malling, *Ragnarok* members and individuals and movements close to these circles.

Finally, however, the principle of ‘theological incorrectness’ that had paved the way for the acknowledgement of National Socialism as a religious movement also informed the critique of Nazi politics that was raised from both theological and Nazi circles in Scandinavia. Central to this critique were those voices who objected to the so-called religious chauvinism that they identified in Nazi calls for an ethnicised religion, or more particularly a ‘Germanised Christianity’. The chapter gives examples of the works of individual contributions in *Fronten* and *Ragnarok* pamphlets as well as prominent Nazi intellectuals on religious matters where they stress the inauthentic and even dogmatic dimensions of National Socialist principles. The pamphlet contributors objected to an overtly rigid subordination to the race principle’s supremacy, i.e. the dogmatisation of race. Ultimately, it was an objection, which again indicates how a pre-conceived framework of the ideal religious system that stemmed from their critique of Christianity guided their judgement of the Nazi worldview.

I

Wilhelm Hauer and Deutsche Glaubensbewegung

Although this chapter focuses on the religious attitudes of relatively small and distinctively radical Nazi circles in the region, this has to be set within a much broader spectrum of opinions on Christian religion in Norway and Denmark at the time. Chapter 3 of this thesis has established *Ragnarok*’s relations to *Fronten* more thoroughly, where the latter pamphlet included contributions of several profiled *Ragnarok* members including Ola Furuseth and Barth-Heyerdahl. Editor Eugen Nielsen described the young Barth-Heyerdahl as a ‘true National Socialist’ and ‘probably the only one that can provide the Norwegians with honest and authentic reports [on National Socialism]’ in his position as lecturer at the University of Greifswald in 1933.¹⁰ There were indeed overlaps in terms of

¹⁰ Eugen Nielsen, *Fronten*, 2:16 (November 1933), p.1.

individual contributors and shared opinions between *Ragnarok* and *Fronten*. These conjunctures serve to provide a broader framework of the attitudes to religion that shaped both pamphlets.

Moreover, these discourses did not take place in isolation from religious or political developments in Nazi Germany, where a *Kirchenkampf* played out between the mainstream evangelical Christian church and its NSDAP-supporting wing, the *Deutsche Christen* (DC) from 1933 to 1939. DC, with its racially infused rhetoric of an Aryan Christianity, sought to reform the Christian Church in the direction of Nazi dominance.¹¹ Of the German movements, however, it was Jacob W. Hauer's *Deutsche Glaubensbewegung* (DGB) rather than DC that attracted most attention from Scandinavian Nazi groups. The private correspondence and friendship that Hauer had with both Vaaben and Jacobsen from the late 1920s until the after the war is just one example of the interest DGB received in Scandinavia.¹² Another is Jacobsen's claim that he, following Hauer's exit from the DGB and the movement's marginalisation in 1936, proved his loyalty to Hauer in a meeting with the NSDAP leadership the following year:

I have personally explained to Alfred Rosenberg [...] (and in oral conversation also to Himmler) [that we] have the greatest respect for Wilhelm Hauer and that we regard them [DGB] as one of the leading, or rather *the* leading, spirit in the revival of the Third and Nordic Reich.¹³

The emphasis on the Nordic and in turn the link between the Nordic idea and the race principle was fundamental to Jacobsen's and Vaaben's admiration for Hauer. Indeed, Terje Emberland points to the great influences that Hauer had on *Ragnarok*'s outlook by identifying a shared goal in the creation of a 'reality religion'.¹⁴ Ivar Aker's article in the pamphlet from 1943 advocated a 'real-religion' by citing Henrik Ibsen that 'there will come a time when art, religion and science synthesise in a higher unity'.¹⁵ Aker described 'Nordicness' (*Nordendom*) as 'a real-religious race-politics or a race-political real-religion but both versions derive from the same principle: to manage without the rule of

¹¹ On the *Deutsche Christen*, see Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Christopher J. Probst, *Demonizing the Jews: Luther and the Protestant Church in Nazi Germany* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012).

¹² Correspondence Vaaben and Hauer, Rigsarkivet nr. 06540, box 3. Hauer further mentions his contact with Jacobsen in correspondence with Vaaben.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 283.

¹⁴ Emberland, *Religion og Rase*, p. 56.

¹⁵ Ivar Aker, 'Nordendom og Austendom', *Ragnarok*, 9:1 (March 1943), p. 19.

foreign systems'.¹⁶ This understanding of a religious and scientific synthesis emphasised the primary position of race theory in shaping a new Nordic faith.

The frames for Aker's article and the premise of this 'reality-religion' derived from the volkish fusion with occultism. The fusion, termed Ariosophy, had gained momentum in early 20th-century Europe.¹⁷ The opposition to scientific rationalism had thus found its spiritual, yet 'scientific', substitute in the culturally specific Aryan race. In pessimism, one of Hauer's main sources of inspiration, Walter de Lapouge had stressed that the only way to move beyond old Christian promises was to relate to human existence in terms of fostering biological continuity and the struggle of the Aryan 'master race'.¹⁸ Lapouge thus offered a 'respectable racial science' where spirit and morale were the results of a given racial heritage, which easily merged with volkish spiritualism. *Ragnarok's* Lapougian heritage comes through in their common opposition to the dogmas of both science and religion, and it was an opposition shared with Hauer. Historian Jennifer Michael Hecht stresses the striking 'religiosity of his anti-religion' when referring to Lapouge's critique of both liberal politics and Christianity.¹⁹ Just like chapter 3 of this thesis has sketched an image of the Danish and Norwegian Nazi sub-milieus as deliberately heterogenic and unorthodox, the scholars Karla Poewe and Irving Hexham apply the same characteristics to Hauer. They maintain that Hauer sought to establish a 'new religion', but they also stress that the DGB's pagan label was not written in stone, referring to Hauer's statement in 1936 that he had forbidden 'anyone [to] say that National Socialism and Christianity are irreconcilable'.²⁰

True to its volkish Lapougian heritage, the leading figures of the Norwegian *Ragnarok* movement shared with Hauer a curious attitude to religion where their at times fierce anti-religious rhetoric took on religious dimensions, while simultaneous calls for the creation of a 'new' religion were toned down since it implied an unsought association with traditional religious systems. As Tor Strand put it in an edition of *Ragnarok*, 'we should not think that we have now created a new religion' since that would only lead to 'national conflicts and misunderstandings'.²¹ Strand saw a danger in the process

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 20.

¹⁷ Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism: The Ariosophists of Austria and Germany, 1890–1935* (Wellingborough: The Aquarian Press, 1985), p. 33.

¹⁸ Jennifer Michael Hecht, 'Vacher de Lapouge and the Rise of Nazi Science', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 61:2 (2000), p. 290.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 289.

²⁰ Re-cited from Karla Poewe and Irving Hexham, 'Jakob Wilhelm Hauer's New Religion and National Socialism', *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 20:2 (2005), p. 201.

²¹ Tor Strand, 'Flere momenter i det nasjonale ordskifte', *Ragnarok*, 4:1 (February 1938), pp. 42–43.

of dogmatising the new faith, and Emberland thus draws a link between *Ragnarok* here represented by Strand's ideas and other liberal theological voices in Norway. Poewe and Hexham similarly explain Hauer's objection to a clear-cut paganist outlook by emphasising Hauer's intellectual debt to liberal theology.²² The triangular relationship between liberal theology, Hauer and *Ragnarok* is most visible in their shared preoccupation with the individual experience of religiosity which they saw as a determining factor for future religious studies. For example, Hauer's article in *Ragnarok* from June 1935 criticised conventional theology for 'humanising the divine and enclosing God as the symbol of eternal being [...] trying to win over the outer reality which we cannot grasp with abstract phrases [...] the divine is the inner soul of the person'.²³ While he stressed the connection between religious faith and the collective ideal of the Aryan race, the philosophical foundation for DGB was the phenomenologist emphasis on divergent modes of religiosity. Theoretically speaking, the primacy they assigned to individual religiosity naturally prompted Hauer's DGB and *Ragnarok*'s (as well as liberal theologians') hostile attitudes to the thought of subordinating individual religiosity to religious dogmas.

Heterogeneity was more than an abstract ideological principle in the Danish Nazi discourse on religion. More so than in the Norwegian context, heterogeneity defined the entire landscape of opinions and the relations between the various Nazi intellectuals. There was no equivalent movement to *Ragnarok* in Denmark in the sense of one specific organisational platform for radical discourse on National Socialism and 'political religions'. Rather, these discussions spread across various party political forums and they were discussions primarily shaped by the personal attitudes held by the party leaders. While a worldly consolidation of divine teachings was seen by many Danish theologians – like Høgsbro and Geismar – as a deadly threat to the Christian Church, for others it symbolised the birth of Christianity as such. Different from Hauer's DGB and *Ragnarok*, the religious discourse among Danish Nazis outside of Clausen's DNSAP had a greater emphasis on a particular fusion of Christianity and National Socialism. According to several leading Danish National Socialists in the 1930s, the Nazi sacralisation of politics went hand in hand with a Christian religious revival in Denmark. Moreover, these individuals argued that the intertwined relationship between Christianity and National Socialism had its intellectual heritage in the religious philosophy of Denmark's founding father of liberal theology, Nikolaj Grundtvig.

²² Poewe and Hexham, 'Jakob Wilhelm Hauer's New Religion', pp. 204–205.

²³ Wilhelm Hauer, 'Det Tyske Trosbevægelses tilblivelse, vesen og mål', *Ragnarok*, 1:5 (1935), p. 113.

The main spokesperson for this kind of fusion was Malling, who expressed this vision most explicitly in his own work from 1935, 'The Swastika paves the way for the Christian Cross'.²⁴ In fact, Malling's religious outlook was to some extent reflected in his preoccupation with religious fusions more generally. Historians have positioned Malling in the intersections of the two dominating religious forces of 19th-century Denmark: the biblical fundamentalist line of the Lutheran-evangelical *Indre Mission* into which he was born, and the Grundtvigianist liberal theology that infused Malling's writings in the 1930s.²⁵ Although this positioning would indicate a less radical and more traditional Christian approach than, for example, his National Socialist colleagues in *Ragnarok*, a look at Malling's allies on the Danish Nazi scene tells a different story.

Kamptegnet's Aage H. Andersen declared his intellectual debt to Malling on religious matters when he initiated an anti-Semitic study circle motivated by the fact that 'only in this way can one grasp the deepest meaning of the words by the Danish National Socialist priest; the swastika paves the way for the Christian Cross'.²⁶ Other noteworthy contributors to *Kamptegnet* on religious matters were Sofus Nervil and the future chief of propaganda in *Schalburgkorpset*, Arent Lemwigh-Müller. Overall, the chapter covers two circles in each country: *Fronten* and *Ragnarok* in Norway; and Malling's interactions, both historically and ideologically, with Andersen's *Kamptegnet* in Denmark.

The relationship between Andersen and Malling had taken new light following Malling's exit from the DNSAP in 1936. In a letter from that year, Andersen acknowledged that despite their differences, their Christian faith was their true source of agreement. Indeed, Malling was concerned about Andersen's rabid anti-Semitism, an anti-Semitism that often bordered on a rejection of biblical Christianity. Malling's distinctively evangelical approach comes through in his book from 1935 and he moreover expressed hesitation regarding Andersen's fanaticism in his public rejection of Andersen's piece 'The Christian Church in Nordic Light' (*Kristen Kirke I Nordisk Belysning*).

²⁴ Anders Malling, *Hagekorset baner Vej for Kristi Kors* (Copenhagen: Landsoldaten, 1935). The title became a slogan for Malling's religious profile and had been used by him even before his publication; see Malling 'Den danske Nationalsocialisme og Kirken', *Kirkeligt Centrum*, 12:10 (1934), pp. 138–139.

²⁵ *Indre Mission* as such was not freed from ambivalence regarding modern liberal theology, where regional strands of the organisation leaned towards Grundtvigianism, the area of Copenhagen included. Sofie Lene Bak's study on anti-Semitism demonstrates how the organisation conditionally accepted the race principle in the ideas of a moral degeneration of the 'white race', but rejected the idea of race hierarchies on the basis of references to Christian principles of equality. One other factor contributing to the fact that *Indre Mission* took an official stance against the politics of the NSDAP relatively late (1937) is its early fascination with the leader principle in the representations of both Hitler and Mussolini. See Bak, *Dansk Antisemitisme*, pp. 121–166.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

Andersen published the book in 1935 and distributed it to 141 leading Danish intellectuals, the majority being theologians.²⁷ Andersen in turn justified his radicalism by reassuring Malling in the same letter from 1936 that his own ‘uncompromising anti-Semitism’ was the necessary precondition for the preservation of his Christian faith.²⁸ Despite these hesitations, the main indicator of Malling’s significance in the religious discourse among Danish Nazi circles is found in his ‘Guiding principles of NSAP’s propaganda’ from as late as January 1938. It revealed that Andersen had plans to recruit Malling together with NSAP’s Jørgen Skeby as co-editors of the section of ‘religion’ in the future party organ.²⁹

Against the backdrop of this brief introduction of the Nazi milieus under study in this chapter, it is clear that heterogeneity not only describes the two national discourses, but it also marks the entire nature of this comparative chapter. Considering that Malling formally ended his activities in *Dansk Folkefællesskab* by the time of German occupation, one could indeed question the purpose of comparing the religious outlook of Malling and the *Ragnarok* circle in the context of National Socialist political religion theory. If these individuals first of all diverged on the most fundamental level regarding their religious outlooks, and second of all, must be regarded as Scandinavian National Socialists with radically different political trajectories, then what is the point of comparison? On the face of it, Anders Malling’s supposed lack of radicalism (in contrast to *Ragnarok*’s distinctly radical profile) is the main issue. Yet, in addition to the authority that Andersen gave Malling in religious issues by envisioning him as co-editor, Malling’s central profile in these radical circles outside Frits Clausen’s DNSAP does indeed modify the conservative image of his outlook. When Andersen received a personal invitation to the NSDAP’s Nuremberg rally in September 1937, it was not only the archetypical rebel Wilfred Petersen who accompanied him as representatives of Danish National Socialism, but also Malling.³⁰

²⁷ Aage H. Andersen, *Kristen Kirke i Nordisk Belysning* (Copenhagen: NSAP, 1935). On the distribution, see ‘NSAP Forlaget’, dated 20 November 1935 in Rigsarkivet, nr. 10192., box 7. ‘Manuskripter til artikler, taler m.m.’ Malling’s public denouncement of the piece involved his signature on the list of formal complaints about the content of Andersen’s writings. Moreover, this initiative was issued by the DNSAP where Malling had a central role at the time. See Bak, *Dansk Antisemitisme*, p. 174.

²⁸ Letter from Andersen to Malling, 24 December 1936, Rigsarkivet nr. 07187, box 13 ‘Breve Politisk liv’.

²⁹ ‘Grundlinjer for NSAP’s Propaganda 1 Januar 1938’, Rigsarkivet nr. 10192, box 49. ‘1932-1044: Diverse Materiale’.

³⁰ ‘Danske Nazister til Nüremberg’, *Arbejderbladet*, 7 September 1937, Rigsarkivet nr. 10192, box 47. ‘1932-1944. Diverse Avisdudklip’.

While we can establish Malling's position in this milieu and thus to an extent confirm his radicalism, it is however not the radicalism as such that makes a comparison between *Ragnarok* and Malling particularly fruitful with regards to Nazi attitudes to political religion theory. Instead, although commonalities should be stressed, the divergences between the two are equally as important since 'theological incorrectness' after all is a concept that assumes interactions between 'incompatibles': between theology – albeit in its liberal form – and Nazi 'pagan movements'; between dogmas and individual religiosity; and, of course, between the two distinct worldviews of Christianity and National Socialism. In that sense, the chapter actually benefits from working with such a broad spectrum of identities and incompatibilities in order to show more strongly how the principle of 'theological incorrectness' cut across these divergences. By doing so, it works to illustrate that the debate between proponents of a functionalist 'political religion' and volkish understandings of religiosity was as much a historical conflict as it is a historiographical one.

III

Liberal Theology and the Psychology of Religion

The theological influences on the discourses on religion within Malling's and *Ragnarok*'s circles were naturally separated according to the national context and cultural heritage. This following part of the chapter therefore divides into two main sections: the influence that Schjelderup's theological ideas had on *Ragnarok*'s attitudes to Christianity and religion, and similarly in Denmark, how Danish National Socialists borrowed from the religious philosophy of Nikolaj Grundtvig in their anti-Christian attitudes. While the works of Schjelderup heavily influenced the Norwegian context and even Danes like Aage Andersen followed his work closely,³¹ it was not a contemporary figure but instead the 19th-century theological writings by Nikolaj Grundtvig that influenced the Danish scene. As we shall see, and despite the fact that their writings originated in profoundly different periods, Schjelderup and Grundtvig were incorporated in the Nazi discourse in a very similar manner by virtue of their roles as national representatives of liberal theological ideas. More particularly, they propagated a distinctive *phenomenologist* understanding of religion that scholars like Vondung have attached to volkish approaches to religious systems. The obvious connection to the later volkish

³¹ A review of Schjelderup's 'På vei mot hedenskapet' in the Danish newspaper *Politikken*, dated 17 January 1936 is located in Aage Andersen's political archive, Rigsarkivet, nr. 10192, box 45. '1932-1944: Diverse Avisudklip'.

ideology, and its central position in the propaganda of the main NSDAP ideologue Alfred Rosenberg, was noted among Nazis, just as it was among their evangelical Christian opponents. A contributor in the Danish pamphlet *Gads Magasin* – a leading forum on cultural matters at the time – put forward in November 1934 a very clear comparison between liberal theology and Rosenberg:

Rosenberg is, regardless of his extremist standpoints, an echo of the period that he so outspokenly despises; the liberal age; yes, in fact he appears as its disciple. The weapons that Rosenberg uses against true Christianity are weapons he has gathered from the otherwise so despised liberals. The anxiety over dogmas (although he indeed is creating a new one: the racial soul, the dogma of the blood), the attempt to construct a Christianity free from dogmas [...] There are thus a number of factors pointing to a clear connection between a Nazi-infused religiosity and liberal outsourcing of Christianity.³²

The author Paul Holt was particularly wary of how Danish liberal theology had undermined so-called ‘true Christianity’, and concluded that what ‘the protection against this Nazi falsification of Christianity needs is a dogmatic “old-fashioned” gospel about Jesus as our saviour’.³³ The interesting aspect of statements like this is that it adds to the wide spectrum of voices on the relationship between Christianity and National Socialism that although they came from various political and spiritual camps, all raised the same point: the essential conflict was the conflict on the position of dogmas in a religious system. This part of the chapter will strengthen the point that one could be an evangelical Christian, a liberal theologian or a National Socialist but still agree that liberal theology had inspired Nazism to adopt the principle of ‘theological incorrectness’ in its critique of Christianity.

The phenomenologist school

The overlaps between the phenomenological school of ‘political religion’ theory and the notion of ‘theological incorrectness’ has its starting point around the birth of psychological approaches to religion. When Eric Voegelin formulated his concept of ‘political religion’ in 1938, he particularly mentioned one source of inspiration in William James’s *The Varieties of Religious Experience* from 1902. Voegelin described the piece as ‘a treasure trove for examples of the new mass religiosity’.³⁴ In that sense, Voegelin acknowledged that the psychology of religion was a driving force behind the birth of the kind of phenomenologist approaches to religion that he, in turn, saw as foundational for

³² Paul Holt, ‘Alfred Rosenberg og den tyske religion’, *Gads Danske Magasin* (1934), p. 588.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 590.

³⁴ Eric Voegelin, ‘The Political Religions’, p. 75. See also William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*.

the Nazi ‘political religion’. A background as a professor in psychology had informed James’s approach to religion, and his notion of ‘religious experience’ stands as the pioneering initiative to merge psychology with religious studies that informed liberal theologians at the time. From what we have learned about the trajectory of ‘political religion’ theory considering the way the experiential dimension (the focus on the individual experience of religiosity) informed the phenomenological school, the link between Voegelin and James is also an indication of the link between Voegelin’s concept of ‘political religion’ and liberal theology.³⁵ Between 1902, when James published his piece, and Voegelin’s ‘political religion’ concept from 1938, however, liberal theologians in interwar Europe had already begun working towards a rationalisation of religion: of how to understand the various expressions of belief systems that extended beyond the realm of traditional religion. In the light of the emergence of ethno-nationalist and race-scientific propaganda in contemporary politics, the tensions between what was commonly perceived as confessional ‘faith’ and the logic of science seemed greater than ever before.

‘Religion and Religions’: Kristian Schjelderup on the purity of inner religiosity

The relationship between the terms ‘reality’ and ‘religion’ was not, however, a discussion limited to the contradictory principles of biological race science and Christian theology. The greatest challenge to confessional Christianity came from the entire spectrum of contemporary cultural relativist ideas, not confined to race-biology. As a move away from the ‘correctness’ of the theological systems that for modern theologians seemed outdated and anachronistic, the Norwegian Kristian Schjelderup made his point clear: ‘we have had enough of the kind of religion that seeks uniformity; that ranks theological adaption higher than personal religiosity’.³⁶

Schjelderup’s time at the University of Marburg in the autumn of 1920 shaped his theological profile, since it was in Marburg that he met Otto for the first time. In the decade that followed, Schjelderup’s work was characterised by its increased emphasis on the need to modernise Christianity so that it

³⁵ Although one must not assume that Voegelin’s private religious preferences were a direct reflection of the ‘political religions’ he studied, scholars have consequently pointed to the tendency in Voegelin’s work to incorporate his own Christian critique of the outdated theology in his commentary on the nature of newly religious movements such as National Socialism. See for example Jardine Murray, ‘Eric Voegelin’s Interpretation(s) of Modernity: A Reconsideration of the Spiritual and Political Implications of Voegelin’s Therapeutic Analysis’, *The Review of Politics*, 57:4 (1995), pp. 581–605.

³⁶ Schjelderup, *Religion og religioner* (Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 1926), p. 6.

could meet the demands of contemporary society.³⁷ One article in *Fritt Ord* – the liberal theological pamphlet edited by Schjelderup – summed up the driving force of liberal theology. It was the unbearable tension between Christianity and culture’ that called for future action: ‘It [liberal theology] is the first approach to the problem of shaping the form of religion that is adaptable to the specific chapter in history that we call modern times.’³⁸ Although the failure of Christianity often was discussed as a social problem (i.e. as a problem relating to an entire culture, rather than solely on an individual level), the message was the same. The irrational element in religion that was influenced by psychology, and detected in individual religiosity, was symptomatic of the relationship between national cultures and religious systems. All people’s communities (or, in the Nazi racist configuration of the idea: the *Volksgemeinschaft*) had particularities that deserved to be highlighted, rather than flattened out, as had been the case during the reign of Christian confessionalism. There was thus a sense of disjunction between the Christian doctrines and the idiosyncratic development of religiosity both individually *and* communally.

With the idea that the true nature of religion was preconditioned by a wider or smaller gap between theological doctrines and its believers, the ideas of liberal theologians bear structural resemblance to the premises of ‘theological incorrectness’ in today’s cognitive studies on religion. One example of this link is Schjelderup’s piece ‘Religion and Religions’ from 1926 which differentiated between the inner religiosity and its external forms. The book advocated a more systematic approach to comparative religious studies, and Schjelderup clearly drew on Otto’s work as he sought the sacred core that was common to all religious systems. He further argued that since ‘form is in fact secondary’,³⁹ one could fail to notice the fact that different forms (i.e. different exteriors of religious systems) actually could express the same thing. ‘Everything that people see as religion: dogmas, transmissions, moral preaches, ceremonies, the Church and the sacraments – it is nothing but the slag released when the fire starts to burn.’⁴⁰

Schjelderup would later on in the mid-1930s sketch a relationship of conflict between the authentic and primitive religion (*Urreligion*) and the *forms* of religion. The primitive religion understood in

³⁷ Hans S. Jacobsen, ‘Bokkronikk: Kristian Schjelderup og hedendommen’, *Ragnarok*, 1:8 (October 1935), p. 238. On Schjelderup’s theological development in the 1920s, see Pål Repstad, *Mannen som ville åpne kirken: Kristian Schjelderups Liv* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget Oslo, 1989), p. 243.

³⁸ C.J. Bleeker, ‘Nogen av de frie teologis grunnprinsipper’, *Fritt Ord* (1932), p. 218.

³⁹ Schjelderup, *Religion og religioner*, p. 15.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

singular form was the core of all religious systems, while the *forms* of religion referred to plural form as the cultivation of the religious core – a core that looked different across all religions.⁴¹ This image of conflict was a development of the original distinction between *religion* and *religions* that he had drawn in 1926. Moreover, Schjelderup's distinction made it clear that different from individual religiosity, theological doctrines were parts of the external forms of religion that varied across religions and were not components of a sacred inner religiosity.

IV

Grundtvig's Living Religiosity

The Dane Nikolaj Grundtvig stated in a poem from 1837 that one was 'first human, then Christian'. Although at that point there was no field of 'psychology of religion', Grundtvig's emphasis on inner religiosity was, like Schjelderup's approach, a way to distinguish this form of experiential religiosity from external synthetic forms. But this distinction was made partly with the intention of illustrating the actual interaction between these two forms of religious life. The Danish theologian Hans R. Iversen has described Grundtvig's collected work as 'a life-long battle of separating and uniting' without ever letting the factors act independently of the other.⁴² Grundtvig was in that sense a witness and a commentator of the eventful 19th century. Similar to Eliade's later divide between the sacred and the profane, Grundtvig's theological writings focused on the tension between the sacred individual religiosity and aspects of mundane reality – like the dogmas of religious systems. In one of Grundtvig's early writings from 1810, this tension had already begun to dominate his religious philosophy:

We sense a duality inside of us, something that drives us towards the visible and something that pulls us away from it, but to where we do not know – to declare what we call the invisible in us as the highest and let it conquer our drive towards the visible, is only possible if we are fully aware of our connection to that invisible.⁴³

⁴¹ Kristian Schjelderup, *På vei mot hedenskapet* (Oslo: Aschehoug & co, 1935), p. 100.

⁴² Hans Raun Iversen, *Grundtvig, Folkekirke og Mission: Praktisk Teologiske Vekselvirkninger* (Copenhagen: Forlaget Anis, 2008), p. 11.

⁴³ Cited in *ibid.*, p. 23.

The battle and the simultaneous embrace of the duality identified in the earthly and the divine that Grundtvig expressed was a reflection of his own historicity; his religious philosophy and theological reflections took place in a century divided by the forces of rationalism and romanticism. Grundtvig personally experienced this divide as a theologian pursuing his career while surrounded by the rationalism of the Copenhagen bourgeois elite. In response to the rationalists, Grundtvig made clear that fundamental to it all was God's creation of man, a truth that transgressed the boundaries of reason. At the same time, as Grundtvig stressed Christianity's historicity, he also challenged the romanticists in their separation of body and spirit. Grundtvig described this balance by stating that 'as much as we cannot grasp God's interference in this world and in man's place in history, it is simultaneously clearly present and visible for us'.⁴⁴ Grundtvig's specific thoughts on God's incarnation can explain why the sentence is more than merely paradoxical: God created man and left man to act and *believe* the presence of God in this world, by becoming God's physical expressions on earth.⁴⁵ This idea of God's incarnation in man also relates to Grundtvig's view on contemporary Christian practices. Iversen's study compellingly describes this relationship in that the foundational structure behind Grundtvig's notion of 'human first, then Christian' is the idea that the capacity to believe, the *action* of believing, is a human capacity that constitutes Christianity as much as the Christian content or its doctrines.⁴⁶ In the Danish context of the 1930s, these lines represented one of the pioneering reflections between the earthly and divine powers that both Andersen and Malling later took up in their defence of National Socialism. Grundtvig himself described the human impact on the unfolding of Christianity in the following way:

For Christianity to be a living religion, its teachings have to be reflected in real life, in the people and their specific historical development. This mirroring relationship between Christianity and life is the only way to fully *understand* Christianity [...] the Christian message stands and falls with us, and we can *understand* the message only out of something that is familiar to us, where Christianity can be reflected in the same way as God since the creation has mirrored himself in the human that is created in his image.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 20.

⁴⁵ Iversen's argument is a response to Kaj Thanning's unpublished thesis *Mennesket først. Grundtvig's Opgør med sig selv* ('The human first. Grundtvig's self-reflections') from 1963. Thanning sees this interaction as an expression of Grundtvig's 'confusion'. Iversen thus situates the 'confusion' as such as the guiding principle for Grundtvig's entire Christian philosophy. In Iversen, *Grundtvig*, p. 32. Thanning's later publication had the title changed to *For menneskelivets skyld: Grundtvigs opgør med sig selv* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1971).

⁴⁶ Iversen., *Grundtvig*, p. 39.

⁴⁷ Cited in *ibid.*, p. 21, (original emphasis).

Grundtvig formulated a close relationship between the birth of true ‘Danishness’ and the growth of Christian belief.⁴⁸ The quest for a ‘national consciousness’ on Christian grounds was brought to the fore in the midst of the political upheaval of 1848–49. Grundtvig responded to these events by stating that a detachment from the Christian horizon would undermine any sense of a united people, or to use his term, *Folkelighed*. In the 1930s, the Grundtvigian movement struggled to distance itself from the Nazi regime, since *Folkelighed* is linguistically difficult to separate from the German word *Völkisch*, and its connotations in the Nazi era.⁴⁹ Grundtvig himself discussed the term *Folkelighed* in 1838 as both a purely Danish phenomenon but that equally applied to other countries in their specific contexts of defining their true national characteristics. Ultimately, *Folkelighed* meant ‘in line with the people’, as Grundtvig formulated the term from two parts: first, *Folk*, meaning the people, or the *Volk*, and second, the Danish word *lighed*, which translates into the English ‘equality’.⁵⁰ Paul Holt has further identified the Nazi connotations in Grundtvig’s concept of *Folkelighed* and its emphasis on the Nordic spirit, sarcastically stating that ‘if Alfred Rosenberg had known Danish, he would probably have made space for these [Grundtvigian] quotations in his *Mythus des XX Jahrhunderts*’.⁵¹

By the 1930s, liberal theologians like Schjelderup thus saw potential in National Socialism to break this unholy pact between the correctness towards fabricated dogmas and Christian universalism that Grundtvig had previously identified. Just like the premises of Grundtvig’s *Folkelighed* concept, Schjelderup called for a new type of faith, one anchored within the people, grown from their heritage and soil. The remaining parts of this chapter will compare these theological arguments to Nazi writings from the same period. It will discuss a number of conjunctions between the writings of liberal theologians and those of the Nazi intellectuals chosen for this study. Firstly, we have seen so far that the liberal theological emphasis on the personal experience of religiosity implicitly gave way for a more inclusive attitude to what it was that counted as a religion. This widened horizon for how to view religion ultimately led to a rejection of constraining dogmas and attempts to concretise religion. Schjelderup did not consider the wider process of secularisation in Western Europe as well as the

⁴⁸ On the political dimensions of Grundtvig’s writings, see especially Ove Korsgaard, *N.F.S. – as a Political Thinker* (Copenhagen: DJØF Publishing, 2014).

⁴⁹ Henrik S. Nissen, ‘Folkelighed og Frihed 1933: Grundtvigianernes reaktion på modernisering, krise og nazisme’, in *Dansk Identitetshistorie Vol. 3* (Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzels Forlag, 1992), pp. 588–89. For example, the Grundtvigianist M.P. Ejerslev stated somewhat ambivalently that ‘Grundtvig’s *Folkelighed* cannot be sidelined with Alfred Rosenberg’s *Mythus* although one cannot deny their intellectual overlaps.’ In *Dansk Folkefællesskab* (11 April 1940), p. 2.

⁵⁰ Flemming Lundgreen-Nielsen, ‘Grundtvig og danskhed’, in Ole Feldbæk (ed.), *Dansk identitetshistorie, bind 3, Folkets Danmark 1848–1940* (Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzels Forlag, 1992), p. 56.

⁵¹ Holt, ‘Alfred Rosenberg og den tyske religion’, p. 589.

particular crisis of the Christian institutions within Nazi Germany as church-political crises. Instead, he preferred to see the relations between National Socialism and Christianity from a more ideological viewpoint as ‘a struggle between two incompatible spiritual movements’.⁵² Secondly, and echoing the propaganda of so-called pagan movements like Hauer’s DGB, Schjelderup argued that ‘Christianity is a form of religion that is foreign to our character as a people’.⁵³ Statements like that expressed National Socialist calls for an ethnicisation of religion, an adaption of religiosity to the particular national context. Echoing Grundtvig’s synthesis of the people’s community and a Christian revival, Schjelderup wrote in a 1936 edition of *Fronten* that:

when it is argued that National Socialism rejects the Christian worldview and that the religion is squeezed into the principles of National Socialism one must disagree – it is precisely a sign of intolerance to argue that the teachings of Christianity only resonate with one’s own perception of Christianity and its humanitarian ideals. [...] Nothing can resonate better with the ethical demands of Christ than the people’s community.⁵⁴

The struggle to narrow the distance that had grown between Christian theology and ordinary people was a factor that – albeit for a brief period – perhaps more clearly than any other united liberal theologians and Nazi intellectuals. Although these opinions stemmed from critical theological approaches to biblical anachronism, the space for racist interpretations of this critique of Christianity was wide. Despite the standard theological standpoint that Christianity and National Socialism were indeed two opposing worldviews, Schjelderup nevertheless viewed this supposed incompatibility with less rigidity than one might have expected. National Socialism, in his view, was not a cheap copy of Christian religion but appeared as an alternative worldview that indeed offered a broader view of religiosity. That said, the effort to avoid a concretisation of religion and the striving for an ethnicisation of religion were primarily visions of a new religion that depended on these Nazis’ attitudes to the notion of dogmas. These attitudes, in turn, stemmed from more in-depth analyses of the relationship between individual belief and official doctrines.

⁵² Schjelderup, *På vei mot hedenskapet*, p. 14.

⁵³ Schjelderup, ‘Den tyske religionskamp’, p. 15.

⁵⁴ Schjelderup, ‘Krisen i det tyske hedenskap’, p. 3.

V

The Nazi 'Theological Incorrectness'

The Nazis' designation of liberal theology as 'theologically incorrect' explains the ambivalence that many contemporary (liberal) theologians felt towards National Socialist politics in Germany. *Ragnarok's* and their Danish colleagues' shared opposition to Christian orthodoxy stood at the crossroads between liberal theology and the Nazi attack on Christianity. Independent of whether we examine liberal theologians in Nazi Germany or in the Scandinavian countries at the time, they all emphasised the need to move away from the assumed correctness vis-à-vis theological dogmas.

The personal trajectory of the German theologian Herbert Grabert illustrates these links. The republication of Grabert's articles in *Ragnarok* as well as Schjelderup's *Fritt Ord* further indicates the internal Norwegian connections between liberal theology and National Socialist thoughts on religion. Most importantly, however, Grabert was a theologian *and* a National Socialist who explicitly stressed the importance of transgressing the correctness of confessionality. Grabert edited the liberal theological pamphlet *Die christliche Welt* between 1928 and 1933, but increasingly turned towards the Nazi regime as in January 1934 he became the editor of the paganist monthly *Deutsche Glaube* ('German Faith'). He had already written in *Fritt Ord* in 1931 that the religious revival of German youth 'had something *protestant* about itself. Not something confessional, but a firm spiritual direction that is over-confessional.'⁵⁵ As might be expected, the radical development of his National Socialist career influenced his thoughts on the future of religion. By using the term 'over-confessionalism', Grabert had pointed to how the German youth through their anti-confessionality actually transgressed into the realm of a deeper and more authentic religious life. In that sense, the terms 'over' and 'anti' came to mean the same thing as Grabert made his point on the dogmatic constraints that confessional Christianity had put on the idea of religiosity: 'The church has gone so far that it rejects the authentic and strong religious life as heresy. What is missing is the acknowledgement of the holy spirit beyond the borders of the church.'⁵⁶ With the term 'over-

⁵⁵ Herbert Grabert, 'Viljen til religiøs fornyelse hos Tysklands ungdom', *Fritt Ord* (1931), p. 266. Grabert also had articles published in *Ragnarok*; see Grabert, 'Germansk-tysk verdenanskuelse i kamp', *Ragnarok*, 1:6–7 (September 1935), pp. 146–148. A decade later, membership of the NSDAP and a position at Alfred Rosenberg's Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories from 1941 added to Grabert's professional trajectory.

⁵⁶ Grabert, 'Viljen til religiøs fornyelse', p. 267.

confessionalism', Grabert thus identified 'incorrectness' towards theological dogmas as an essential aspect of National Socialist ideology.

Habitual Christianity: Scandinavian writings on 'theological incorrectness'

Grabert's term 'over-confessionalism' had in these Scandinavian Nazi circles its antidote in the term 'habitual Christianity'. It implicitly referred to the inability to learn from the developments of the psychology of religion; firstly, that inner religiosity was entirely different from theological dogmas, and secondly, that the tension between the two meant a tension between the cultural heritage of a particular people and an externally imposed religious system, like Christianity.

That said, it is important to stress once more that the term 'habitual Christianity' was not hostile to Christianity per se, but more so towards its dogmatic development. In fact, by using the exact term 'habitual Christianity' (*Vanekristendom*), Anders Malling searched for a belief beyond both the Bible and the race idea, a belief which left the incompatibility between Christianity and National Socialism as nothing more than a dogmatic construct. The notion of 'habitual Christianity' is the aspect of Malling's religiosity that bears most resemblance to the religious philosophy of his National Socialist contemporaries. It also challenged Malling's own evangelical position as such, and thus contributed to the kind of ambivalence that we find in his collected work of the 1930s. Not very different from Grabert's praise of the German youth's 'anti-confessionalism', Malling's unpublished piece 'The Hardships of Believing' (*Trosvanskeligheder*) insisted that religious belief could – and perhaps *should* – be drawn from other sources than Christian dogmas in order to break out of 'habitual Christianity'.⁵⁷ In some of his writings, the notion of 'habitual Christianity' goes under the second name 'the religious mask' where Christian people under the 'mask' are said to insist that 'I feel no hardships in believing, I do not doubt any of the dogmas. I believe in everything'. For Malling, this lack of questioning was the greatest threat to 'true' Christianity.⁵⁸ His article 'Are we Christian? [Er vi kristne?]' also touches on the argument that what constitutes Christianity is indefinable, describing how

a man once expressed that National Socialism is an un-Christian movement [...] but can these people separate what is Christian from what is not? [...] So what is Christianity, and what does it mean to be Christian? [...] You

⁵⁷ Malling, *Trosvanskeligheder*, pp. 3-4, Rigsarkivet, nr. 07187, box 40 '1916-1976: Foredrag, Møder og Taler'.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

would want to participate in the struggle for the freedom of you and your people with your entire heart. This is Christianity, but it is also National Socialism.⁵⁹

In a similar manner, Ejnar Vaaben put a strong emphasis on what he called ‘the farmers’ habitual Christianity which in reality is pagan in its origin and entire spiritual structure’.⁶⁰ Vaaben’s Grundtvigian references are largely confined to his writings on the geopolitical relationship between Germany and Denmark. In fact, his writings on religion more generally were also limited, and this thesis primarily deals with Vaaben as an early theorist on Nazi transnational relations in chapter 5. That being said, Vaaben maintained that his National Socialist conviction was born from its ‘volkish moment’, which for him also meant ‘its Grundtvigianism’.⁶¹ This inspirational source can partly be explained by his admiration for Hans F.K. Günther and the ideas of a Nordic spirit, but in his writings about Günther we can also trace Vaaben’s personal attitudes to the religious issues that were so frequently debated in his circles. Vaaben praised Günther for his religious philosophy, stating in a review article about Günther’s ‘sociological and biological study’ of the German farmer that the chapters on religion were particularly exceptional.⁶² In his review of Günther’s piece, Vaaben made his point clear that common people found it difficult to understand that although the farmer indeed believed in God, he was not necessarily a Christian. Vaaben explained this difficulty by stressing that:

They [the common people] are incapable of differentiating between God and Christ, faith and Christianity. It is also unknown to most people that religion and faith can be two very different things. Faith comes from within and has its roots in the holy mystery of the blood, while religion means the doctrines or dogmas that are brought to people from outside themselves and often contradict the values and character of their heritage.⁶³

This statement shares Doris Bergen’s argument that ‘theological incorrectness’ was an integral part of many individuals’ Christian identity; whether they were called ‘pagans’, ‘National Socialists’ or ‘Christians’ was irrelevant. What mattered was that beyond these artificial categorisations, human religiosity primarily comprised contradictions and incorrectness. One article in the Norwegian *Fronten* from 1937 stated in a similar manner that

⁵⁹ Malling, ‘Er Vi Kristne?’, *Dansk Folkefællesskab*, 1:1 (1936), pp. 3–4.

⁶⁰ Vaaben, ‘Bondens tro’, *På Godt Dansk – Månedssblad for nordisk kultur*, October 1943, pp. 11–14.

⁶¹ Vaaben, ‘Det er det hele verdt’, p. 12. Rigsarkivet nr. 06540, box 1.

⁶² Vaaben, ‘Et storværk om den tyske bondestands sociologi og biologi’, *På Godt Dansk – Månedssblad for nordisk kultur*, December 1944, pp. 18–19. See Hans F.K. Günther, *Bauernglaube: Zeugnisse über Glauben und Frömmigkeit der deutschen Bauern* (Berlin: B.G. Teubner, 1942).

⁶³ Vaaben, ‘Et storværk om den tyske bondestands sociologi og biologi’, pp. 18–19.

when one speaks of the Christian image of God one must remember that there are few ‘Christians’ who know it. When the Christianity bound with dogmas is presented to those who believe they are Christian, they see it as blasphemy. That is after all good news. It shows that most Christians have created their own image of God that often bears little resonance with the Christian image [...] they call themselves Christians because they have yet to engage with its theology and from there realise that they are in fact ‘pagans’.⁶⁴

More so than the correctness of dogmas, these writings show that ‘theological incorrectness’ was regarded as an integral part of a religious system since it grew from the idiosyncratic experiences of everyday life. The everyday life, in turn, was a matter of cultural differences, subjugated for ages to the dogmas of Christian universalism. In other words, leaving ‘habitual Christianity’ behind meant, for these Nazi intellectuals, rejecting Christian universalism by embracing mainly the idea that religiosity was not equal with theological *correctness*.

The Norwegian priest Einar Edwin put forward the perception that orthodox confessionality implied an uncritical and essentially unthinking form of religiosity. He introduced the term ‘hangover-orthodoxy’ in *Fritt Ord*, based on an argument similar to what had fostered the notion of ‘habitual Christianity’. Edwin explained ‘hangover-orthodoxy’ as something he had ‘picked up in art circles’ and that was ‘of course highly unscientific’, but still he found that the term resonated well with the wider spiritual crisis of Christianity. Edwin argued that weak individuals in the time of crisis turned to the toxic conformity: just like the day after ‘when the radicalism of the alcohol is lost [...] we are facing what psychologists call *the regression*’.⁶⁵ This psychological state was one of apathy and signalled a form of habitual Christianity that Edwin found to be ‘the cheapest form of religion. And it is just as inauthentic as it is cheap.’⁶⁶

VI

The Discourse on ‘Paganism’

Whether to call it ‘habitual Christianity’ or ‘hangover-orthodoxy’, the point for these theological and Nazi writers alike was that since Christian orthodoxy was a detested term, it also implied a challenge

⁶⁴ Unknown author, ‘Den Nordiske Gudserkjennelse’, *Fronten*, 4:9 (November 1935), p. 3.

⁶⁵ Einar Edwin, ‘Bakrusortodoksi’, *Fritt Ord* (1932), p. 214.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

to its antithesis, paganism. More precisely, if it indeed was categorisation, dogmas and confinements that characterised Christian orthodoxy, was paganism really to be understood as simply atheism? Or was that conception merely a construct of Christian dominance? An article in *Fronten* confirmed the difficulty of defining the term paganism, and even more so of defining its relationship to religiosity:

We pagans are not atheists [...] our image of God is only dependent on our own spiritual development; therefore we are not putting any constraint on our own development. We are thus not attaching dogmas to the image of God we have reached so far. We continue searching. The search itself is the praise to God.⁶⁷

Although it remained frequently used, the question was whether the notion of paganism assumed a sense of dogmatism in its own right. Schjelderup paid close attention to the ‘pagan’ movements within Nazi Germany, which at the time meant Hauer’s DGB: ‘The question is whether instead of calling it a pagan movement we should rather speak of a “newly religious” one, of individuals searching for a type of religious feeling that Christianity was unable to provide them.’⁶⁸ Hauer’s movement, as Schjelderup continued, had a particular resemblance to liberal theology which

after all is an attempt to create harmony between religion and contemporary cultural life – only with the difference that the arguments that have been used by liberal theology in its conflict with the orthodox wing of Christianity are now used by the pagan movement in their struggle against Christianity as such.⁶⁹

This argument resembled that of the Danish theologian Johs Bech, whose articles and other activities on the intellectual scene were followed closely by Andersen’s NSAP. An interview located in Andersen’s organisational archive concerns Bech’s conversation with Rosenberg and DC in Germany 1935. Bech concluded that ‘the new paganism is a distorting concept’ as he described that Rosenberg’s worldview conformed neither to Hauer’s ‘pagan’ *Deutsche Glaubensbewegung* nor to the ideas propagated by the *Deutsche Christen*.⁷⁰ Bech’s relatively early treatment of this phenomenon is found in the piece ‘Cross and Hammer’ (*Kors og Hammer*) from 1921. In this publication, he argued that the volkish spirit was situated in an in-between position, which ultimately rejected conventional religious divides.⁷¹ The title’s connotations of Nordic mythology, with the

⁶⁷ Unknown author, ‘Den nordiske Gudserkjennelse’, p. 3.

⁶⁸ Schjelderup, ‘Den tyske religionskamp’, p. 9.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 14.

⁷⁰ Interview with Johs Bech, ‘Skaber den Kristne ærlighedslære et usunt føleri?’, 11 June 1935, Rigsarkivet nr. 10192, box 45. ‘1932-1944: Diverse Avisudklip’.

⁷¹ Johs Bech, *Kors og Hammer* (Copenhagen: Stein Hasselbachs Forlag, 1921).

hammer belonging to the warrior god Odin, reveals Bech's embrace of the Grundtvigian tradition. He further defined this tradition as believing in God *instead* of the Christian dogmas.⁷² The aim was not to break with Christianity, but to *break out* of Christianity, 'to help the Christians go beyond Christianity [...] beyond Christianity we have transgressed the realm of bound religions'.⁷³ On the day when reconciliation takes place between Odin's hammer and the Christian Cross, 'only then has a new day dawned over the Nordic countries'.⁷⁴ The Grundtvigian connotations continue, as Bech's following passage vividly illustrates the ongoing process of interaction between the Christian teachings and the historicity of this world:

All its dogmas are in their own right contradicting our time [...] it [Christianity] has become nothing more than a hard shell that has to be broken in order to bear fruit. A new tree is then born, that gives more fruit, whose shells again have to be crushed in order for its core to survive. The struggle is eternal and the orthodox idea of completion and eternal perfection with its accompanying salience is not only unthinkable, but also unworthy of the human spirit [...] It was not until the day I realised that I was a seeking human being, that I finally broke with the traditions of dogmatic belief and the Church as such.⁷⁵

Indeed, this analysis of Christianity and its relationship with Nazi volkish ideology was not confined to theologians but formed an integral part of Nazi propaganda. Arent Lemwigh-Müller, a co-editor of Andersen's *Kamptegnet* and, as mentioned before, the future propaganda leader of *Schalburgkorpset*, was a frequent contributor of opinions on issues regarding Christianity and religion. The point was, according to Lemwigh-Müller, that people simply did not understand that 'Rosenberg does not only reject the Christian dogmas, but all dogmas. He is not seeking new dogmas, or a new institution.'⁷⁶ Lemwigh-Müller saw this inability to understand Rosenberg's undogmatic position as a symptom of the many centuries of Christian theological rule, where 'the abstract notion of God' had suppressed the 'living religiosity' of pagan faith.⁷⁷ Considering the writings of Schjelderup and Bech, Lemwigh-Müller might indeed have underestimated the liberal theologians' abilities to move beyond the orthodox mindset when he argued that people

⁷² Ibid., p. 11.

⁷³ Ibid., pp. 125–127.

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 134–135. Grundtvig's ideas were themselves not free from the rhetoric of the Nordic spirit. In fact, Lundgreen-Nielsen states that it is through Grundtvig's piece 'The Nordic Mythology' (*Nordens Mytologi*) from 1832 that Grundtvig developed the term. See Lundgreen-Nielsen, 'Grundtvig og danskhed', p. 26. In this piece, 'Danishness' encompassed Grundtvig's call for a new Danish 'living, *Folkelig* and all-encompassing spiritual culture and science'.

⁷⁵ Bech, *Kors og Hammer*, p. 46.

⁷⁶ Arent Lemwigh-Müller, 'Alfred Rosenberg og Kristendommen', *På Godt Dansk – Månedsblad for nordisk kultur* (July 1943), p. 2.

⁷⁷ Arent Lemwigh-Müller, *Vort Folk for Korset* (Copenhagen: Universitetsbiblioteket/Eget Forlag, 1940), p. 79.

did not see his [Alfred Rosenberg's] words as expressions of a faith, but as already made formulas, and instead of interpreting them as suggestions, they saw his words as dogmatic preaches. But when one, as indeed is the case among theologians, has got used to speaking dogmatically about religious matters, it is certainly difficult to recognise true faith when you see it.⁷⁸

This statement presents the dogmas as weapons of a process where Christianity *and* National Socialism were falsified in their characterisation as incompatible. Efforts of defining and closing the boundaries of each of the two worldviews ultimately led to a false perception of what constituted true National Socialism and equally Christianity. In the manuscripts in the NSAP's archive, the piece 'The Christian and the Others' (*De kristne og de andre*) is particularly interesting in relation to these discussions on authentic belief. The text begins with the observation that National Socialists are not Christian and goes on to question if National Socialism is in fact un-Christian. The verdict is 'yes!' where Jewish-Christian intellectualism would indeed reject the notion of National Socialism as Christian. But this rejection was, for its authors, nothing more than a sign that Christianity itself has degraded into academic phrases and stiff doctrines. Instead, as the text concludes, and contrasting the preachers of a Jewish 'fake Christianity', the 'real' Christian is National Socialist partly by virtue of its label as 'un-Christian'.⁷⁹ True to the principles of individual religiosity, it was an argument about how the identity of being an incorrect Christian was in some cases the clearest sign of an authentic Christian belief.

Lemwigh-Müller did not see Rosenberg's National Socialist worldview as one where 'the purpose was to replace one ideology with another', but instead to find the way back to what he called 'the living middle ground [...] a middle ground which ultimately defines the term "world-view"'.⁸⁰ Lemwigh-Müller thus implied that being preoccupied with whether the National Socialist ideology was Christian or not was to miss the point. That way of thinking was nothing but a mimesis of the old world where dogmatism had ruled. National Socialism had transgressed these old categorisations was not measurable according to levels of correctness. The only way to grasp National Socialism was to acknowledge its consistent incorrectness towards these dogmatic categorisations. According to that reasoning, being 'theologically incorrect' actually meant having a sense of religious authenticity. The

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Unknown author, 'De Kristne og de Andre', pp. 1–2, Rigsarkivet nr. 10192, box 5. '1935-1944: Manuskripter til artikler, taler m.m.'

⁸⁰ Lemwigh-Müller, 'Alfred Rosenberg og Kristendommen', p. 2.

efforts of defining and closing the boundaries of each of these worldviews had ultimately led to a false perception of what constituted true National Socialism and equally Christianity. In a similar manner, the speech from Malling's political party *Dansk Folkefællesskab*'s meeting in July 1936 had clarified the meaning of the term *Folkefællesskab*. It further confirmed Malling's inspiration from Grundtvig: 'The ideas of the *Folkefællesskab* shall embrace our people [...] so that our fellow Danes understand that we provide the message of truth; that National Socialism is in fact the practice of Christianity.'⁸¹ Another example of this emphasis on a fusion of worldviews is located among the manuscripts in Andersen's NSAP's archive.

We have seen so far that Nazi sympathisers employed the terms 'habitual Christianity' and 'hangover-orthodoxy' to illustrate what they saw as an alarming conformity among practitioners of traditional religion. This conformity, in turn, had given much more than any other factor to the Christian demonisation of the term 'paganism'. One author in *Fronten* provocatively raised the question: 'When you Christians formed a mass movement, the glory was transformed into shame' [...] 'are you [Christians] afraid of being called "outcasts"? Are you afraid of being called "pagans"?'⁸² Being an 'outcast' or being 'theologically incorrect' had, through Christian hegemony, turned into a curse. A Danish review of Schjelderup's work on German paganism, found in Andersen's organisational archive, further concluded that the result of the dogmatic Christian theology was 'that the distance between Jesus and German Paganism is less than the distance between Jesus and church theology.'⁸³ True to Otto and other liberal theologians who stressed the primacy of the individual religious experience, this form of authentic religiosity thus transgressed the hegemony of universalism.

VII

Ethnicisation of Religion

With the opposition to Christian universalism and its dogmas came the search for a type of religious system that encouraged rather than extinguished the particularities of the people and their cultural

⁸¹ Manuscript to speech at party meeting, July 1936, Rigsarkivet nr. 07187, box 28 '1917-1971: Manuskripter og Udkast'.

⁸² Unknown author, 'Paganism', *Fronten*, 4:8 (October 1935), p. 3

⁸³ Review from the Danish newspaper *Berlingske Aftenavis* (18 December, 1935) located in Andersen's political archive, Rigsarkivet, nr. 10192, box 23. '1932-1944: Diverse Avisudklip'.

heritage. The question of nationalism, however, would make matters more complicated, as it is positioned somewhat in-between individual religiosity and Christian universalism. As we shall see later in the thesis, the question of to what extent nationalism itself had become a new dogma became the crux for these Nazi intellectuals as they realised that, ironically, their original criticism of Christianity became the stencil for their growing opposition to the imperial politics of Nazi Germany. At this point, it is important first to stress that with the emphasis on race came also statements on the foreignness of Christianity in the Nordic context, and how Christian ‘orientalism’ and internationalism went hand in hand. In clarifying this ‘orientalism’, Sandborg’s article in *Ragnarok* from 1943 pointed to what he identified as Christianity’s oriental features, such as the practice of dictatorship.⁸⁴ Sandborg further depicted a fundamental opposition between the flattening ‘internationalisation’ of the Christian religion and the embrace of natural particularities within the race idea.⁸⁵

What mattered was that beyond these artificial categorisations, human religiosity was primarily comprised of contradictions and incorrectness. More so than the correctness of dogmas, ‘theological incorrectness’ was important to note as an integral part of a religious system since it grew from the idiosyncratic experiences of everyday life. An article in *Fronten* stated that ‘the goal of Christianity, through various confessional systems, is to gather people from all nationalities to unite in an international mission’.⁸⁶ What National Socialism and the Germans had done was to challenge this foreign and imposed universalism by finding

a new faith which allows them to be true to the best parts of themselves. [...] The new movement of faith is not searching for outer-worldly religious guarantees as heaven, hell and salvation, it has not the old superstition and the hypocrisy associated with habitual Christianity. It is safely resting in itself because it knows that is where the religious source is located.⁸⁷

The present chapter uses the term ‘ethnification’ of religion to describe the process whereby the liberal theological rhetoric on the failure of Christianity was attached to the race idea and ultimately served to legitimise attempts by National Socialist proponents to ‘Germanise Christianity’. Although inspiration from DC and Hauer’s DGB should not be underestimated, Nazi interpretations of

⁸⁴ P. Th. Sandborg, ‘En nordisk kirke’, *Ragnarok*, 9:2 (May 1943), pp. 74–77.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

⁸⁶ Unknown author, ‘Hvad kommer etter kristendommen’, *Fronten*, 6:2 (February 1937), p. 3.

⁸⁷ Unknown author, ‘Nordisk tro’, *Fronten*, 4:6 (June 1935), p. 3.

Scandinavian liberal theologians like Grundtvig and Schjelderup underpinned their calls for a ‘Germanised Christianity’ among the individuals of this study. Movements like *Ragnarok* and their colleagues in *Fronten* expressed these notions in terms of a ‘reality religion’ or ‘race-religion’. In the case of Andersen’s *Kamptegnet*, the fierce racial propaganda was no less visible. Indeed, Anders Malling’s writings were more ambivalent regarding the primacy of the race principle over traditional Christian dogmas. Despite its variations, however, the entire spectrum of calls for an ethnicisation of religion among Nazi intellectuals and liberal theologians alike brings us closer to an understanding of how exactly they envisioned the relationship between National Socialism and Christianity. On a deeper level, however, this relationship not only assumed an abstract reconciliation between two worldviews, but what it all came down to, more precisely, was the question of how to approach the new dogma of National Socialist race propaganda.

***Ragnarok*, Schjelderup and the ‘reality religion’**

The historian Terje Emberland has situated *Ragnarok* in the ‘political religion’ debate by arguing that more than merely political, *Ragnarok* sought the establishment of a ‘reality religion’ (*Wirklichkeitsreligion*).⁸⁸ The movement added ‘reality and authenticity’ to what *Ragnarok* perceived as old materialistic structures of traditional religion by seeking a synthesis between racial science and *völkisch* religion.⁸⁹ Emberland’s concept is drawn from the terms explicitly used in *Ragnarok* publications in the 1940s, where the ideas of a ‘real-political race-religion’ or ‘real-religious race-politics’ were used to explain ‘Nordic thought as a new religion’.⁹⁰ In fact, the concept ‘reality religion’ had already been introduced by Schjelderup in a lecture in 1935. At that point, he employed the term ‘reality religion’ as the type of religiosity of movements such as the DGB. Just as Schjelderup had admitted, this ethnicisation of religion was the kind of reasoning that welcomed the Nazi racist rhetoric of ‘Blut und Boden’. Schjelderup published an article by Wilhelm Hauer in *Fritt Ord* in 1935, where Hauer described the main principles of the Germanic religion that was propagated by the DGB: ‘The 19th century liberal theology is first and foremost nothing but an attempt to Germanise Christianity.’⁹¹ One could no longer rely on old theology but needed to find new platforms

⁸⁸ Terje Emberland, ‘Im Zeichen der Hagal-Rune. “Arteigene” Religion und nationalsozialistischer Aktivismus in Norwegen’, in Puschner (eds.), *Die völkisch-religiöse Bewegung im Nationalsozialismus. Eine Beziehungs- und Konfliktgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), p. 524.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 510.

⁹⁰ Ivar Aker, ‘Nordendom og austendom’, *Ragnarok*, 8:1 (1943), p.19. and Gustav M. Jacobsen ‘Nordens religion’, *Ragnarok*, 9:2 (March 1944), p. 44.

⁹¹ Wilhelm Hauer, ‘Den tyske hedenskaps forutsetninger’, *Fritt Ord* (1935), p. 82.

that were more suitable to the Germanic people. By describing Christianity as the ‘foreign guest’ that had given way to a millennial religious conflict in the pre-Asian Semitic and indo-German worlds, Hauer wrote that ‘the Nordic world has been rediscovered’ as precisely an inner-worldly and more authentic faith.⁹² In an article in *Ragnarok* the same year 1935, Hauer clarified that the label ‘German’ in the DGB must not be taken literally as a rejection of indo-Germanic people outside of the German national borders, but should be seen as a ‘Nordic Germanic’ movement.⁹³ Schjelderup defined the reality religion as different from Christianity’s focus on the transcendent. But it was entirely in line with Voegelin’s definition of ‘political religion’ as a practice of inner-worldly religiosity that sought to narrow the gap between peoples’ cultural realities and their religious belonging. Schjelderup further mentioned the term ‘reality religion’ in his piece ‘Towards Paganism’ (*På vei mot hedenskapet*) written in the same year, where he argued that ‘religion must not function as an escape from reality – neither theoretically nor practically. We need a reality religion, a religion that empirically resonates with our entire human self.’⁹⁴ Unlike the Christian religion that in Schjelderup’s view ‘never managed to capture the German people’, the Germanisation of the religious life of the people ‘did not need to conflict with inner religiosity’.⁹⁵

Most writings on the topic of religion in *Ragnarok* in the pre-war years shared the argument that National Socialism represented a reformation of Christianity, which spoke to the authentic Norwegian heritage. Otto Sverdrup Engelschiøn, who was for a short while in 1940 the main editor of *Ragnarok*,⁹⁶ stated in 1938 that ‘all national and social people-movements are contrary to Christianity’.⁹⁷ One article in *Ny Dag* edited by Ola Furuseth would state that ‘for us, it seems that Hitler is fulfilling and continuing the major work that was initiated by the “farmerfuehrer” Münzer and the reformer Luther, 400 years ago. It is the completion of the struggle against the Catholic-Jewish burden.’⁹⁸ This ‘burden’ referred to the Christian dominance that for centuries had buried Nordic faith under its hegemonic rule. But as Stein Barth-Heyerdahl stressed, ‘even in the darkest

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Hauer, ‘Den tyske trosbevægelses tilblivelse og mål’, p. 109.

⁹⁴ Schjelderup, *På vei mot hedenskapet*, p. 93.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 102.

⁹⁶ Shortly after Engelschiøn took over the editorial position in 1940, Hans S. Jacobsen announced in the same year that Engelschiøn had decided to leave the pamphlet and its political activities. See the editorial note, *Ragnarok*, 7:1 (May 1941), p. 43.

⁹⁷ Otto Sverdrup Engelschiøn, ‘Kristendom og Nordisk livssyn’, *Ragnarok*, 4:3 (April 1938), pp. 57–63, cited on p. 61.

⁹⁸ Ola Furuseth’s article ‘Religion’ that was published in *Ny Dag*, 9 September 1937. The article is located in Riksarkivet, L-sak Østerdal politikammer, nr. 651.

hours of Christianity, the flame of the Nordic spirit was still burning'.⁹⁹ Like several other contributors to *Ragnarok*, Barth-Heierdahl thus argued that despite the Christian universalist attempts to eradicate the old Nordic religion and impose its foreign system on the Nordic people, the Nordic faith had never ceased to exist. These arguments on the Nordic heritage, in turn, were often justified by references to the primacy of race drawn from race science. This statement, for example, was published in 1940:

The concept of God is a product of volkish or racial fantasies, and this goes for all religions. The laws of the religious movements are shaped by the mentality of race. It is rare to hear about a Volk that replaced their old religion with a new one without there being obvious external reasons for it. More common, however, and especially during religious wars and wars of conquest, was that a people was forcibly subordinated to a foreign religion.¹⁰⁰

In a later article in *Ragnarok* from 1943, Tor Strand, who wrote frequently on these issues, would describe this relationship as 'the clash between Norwegian religion and Christianity',¹⁰¹ where Christianity nevertheless managed to take a specifically Nordic form and deviate from its pure programme in order to resonate with the Nordic people. In 1932, *Fronten* had already published an article that sought to make a distinct separation between the Nordic thought and confessional religious systems like Christianity: 'against the pan-European inauthentic collectivism the Nordic people shall raise their banner of freedom and individualism'.¹⁰² That sensitivity towards Nordic particularities was thus the starting point for what Strand called the making of 'Christianity in its Germanised form'.¹⁰³

Interactions: From Grundtvig's 'Folkelighed' to the Nazi Volksgemeinschaft

This interaction between the human inner religiosity and the divine beyond the single individual that Schjelderup had called for dominated Danish Nazi intellectuals' writings on religion. Among Danish National Socialist voices, however, the interactive point held a more literal meaning than in the case of *Ragnarok*. There was indeed a shared emphasis across the Danish and Norwegian organisations

⁹⁹ Stein Barth-Heierdahl, 'Norsk ånd under kristendommen', *Ragnarok*, 2:7–8 (1936), pp. 171–175, cited on p. 175.

¹⁰⁰ Lars Hansen, 'Religion, tro og sannhet', *Ragnarok*, 6:1 (January 1940), p. 81.

¹⁰¹ Tor Strand, 'Da Noreg ble kristnet', *Ragnarok*, 9:1 (March 1943), pp. 27–29. The title of Strand's piece refers to the work by the intellectual profile and Norwegian professor in religious history at the University of Oslo Georg Sverdrup who one year earlier had published a study he himself had described as a 'religious-sociological' examination of the time when 'Norway was Christianised'; see Sverdrup, *Da Norge ble kristnet: en religionssosiologisk studie* (Oslo: Norli, 1942).

¹⁰² 'Den nordiske tanke', *Fronten*, 1:2 (June 1932), p. 1.

¹⁰³ Strand, 'Da Noreg ble kristnet', p. 29.

on the need to synthesise Christianity and National Socialism, but where *Ragnarok* proposed a ‘Germanisation’, individuals like Malling, Andersen and Skeby stressed a more direct cooperation between the existing forms of Christianity and National Socialist politics. Andersen’s NSAP election speech from 1935 not only touched upon the divine and inner-worldly interaction, but it also illustrated the adoption of Grundtvig’s *Folkelighed* into racist National Socialist rhetoric:

If one would summarise the question [‘What is National Socialism?’] in as few words as possible, the answer would be that National Socialism is the spirit of national unity in love for the people and its land [...] the National Socialist world-view is also founded upon the principle of race, in our case the Nordic blood [...] is the heritage that conditions not only our bodies but also our souls.¹⁰⁴

The interaction appears even more violently in Andersen’s anti-Semitic text ‘The Jewish Question’. The term ‘Nordic-Aryan Christianity’ was presented in opposition to Jewish religion, and with a clear millennial message:

It is not only through National Socialism that antisemitism rose as a true source of power, as an idea – an idealistic and determined striving for the preservation of the race, a positive factor in the eternal struggle between light and darkness, between good and evil [...] the struggle between idealism and materialism [...] Christ will appear as the God of the struggle. Our God who separates the evil from the good and who uncompromisingly sides with the good.¹⁰⁵

The struggle between light and darkness that so often figured in race propaganda suggested that the Christian religion had spread darkness over the Nordic landscape for centuries, as the light of the old Nordic religion had faded. A lecture from May 1938 by Sofus Nervil, a frequent contributor to NSAP propaganda, was titled ‘Naivety and Race’ (*Naiviteten og Race*). Nervil defined ‘naivety’ through its relation to ‘purity’ and more specifically *racial* purity. Like Schjelderup’s point on the primitive *Urreligion*, Nervil stressed that the intimate relationship between purity and authenticity was determined by the race principle. In this reasoning, naivety and purity not only characterised the ‘Nordic’, but it also represented the depth and truth ‘which separated Christianity from Jewishness, Jesus from Jehovah, darkness from light’.¹⁰⁶ The interaction between National Socialism and

¹⁰⁴ ‘Hvad er Nationalsocialisme?’, unknown author, dated 1935, Rigsarkivet nr. 10192, box 23. ‘1932-1944: Diverse Avisudklip’.

¹⁰⁵ Andersen, ‘The Jewish Question’, undated manuscript, Rigsarkivet nr. 10192, box 4 ‘1935-1944: Manuskriber til artikler, taler m.m.’.

¹⁰⁶ Sofus Nervil, ‘Naiviteten og Race’, Lecture 31 May 1938, p. 5. Rigsarkivet nr. 10192, box 3 ‘1935-1944: Manuskriber til artikler, taler m.m.’.

Christianity was a necessity, and Nervil praised the thoughts of Luther and Grundtvig in being the founding fathers of the kind of theology which sought a pure and naive Christianity.¹⁰⁷ In other words, the Nordic and racist rhetoric was given a label of being pure and authentic, in contrast to the flattening Christian universalism.

Just as the race principle was indeed more contested in Jørgen Skeby's and Anders Malling's works, their pieces also offered a far more complex and interesting level of discussion on these matters compared to the more stereotypical tone in Andersen's and Nervil's works, which were difficult to separate from standard Nazi propaganda material. Contrary to the critique that was raised within more conservative Christian milieus, neither Malling nor Skeby regarded National Socialism as a 'political religion' if the meaning of the term implied that it functioned as a secular substitute for traditional religion. Instead, National Socialism expressed the natural unfolding of true Christianity in its historical context. The position of race was, however, more or less explicit in these authors' works.

The combination that Andersen had envisioned with Malling and Skeby as co-editors of *Kamptegnet* was hardly an incompatible alliance. It was, however, not necessarily a conventional one considering the very different approaches taken by Malling and Skeby. Indeed, both Andersen and Malling had praised Skeby's publication from 1934, 'The Christian Cross and the Swastika' (*Kristenkors og Hagekors*). Skeby's piece was one of the more radical Danish National Socialist arguments for a holy alliance between Christianity and Nazism, especially compared to Malling's more moderate standpoint.¹⁰⁸ Skeby's writings were, in contrast to Malling's evangelicalism, infused with an aggressive liberal critique of Christian dogmatism that resonates more clearly with the kind of material we find in *Ragnarok* and *Fronten*. Belief after 1914, Skeby argued, had now moved beyond the confines of priestly preaching and academic lectures; it was born out of 'the bitter and bloody reality of life – in the unforgiving frontier of blood and steel that forced the participation of all men as the new ground laid for the unification of the people.'¹⁰⁹ While he did not use the explicit term 'reality religion', Skeby's Jüngerian references to the trench experience tell a story of a new kind of belief, rooted in reality and consolidated through the *Volksgemeinschaft*.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁰⁸ Jørgen Skeby, *Kristenkors og Hagekors* (Copenhagen: NSAP, 1934).

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 7.

Skeby objected to functionalist notions of a substitute religion in his argument that National Socialism stood not in opposition to Christianity, but at its best, as Christianity's most fruitful ally. He wrote in *Kristenkors og Hagekors* that

the idea of "Christ is our *Fuehrer*" does not imply a critique of Adolf Hitler's extraordinary achievement, but a consolidation of the idea that National Socialism is in the eyes of the Christians not a world-view but a means towards the liberation of the people through racial cleansing.¹¹⁰

In other words, National Socialism was in its ideal form an un-definable phenomenon in relation to Christianity, and thus not a worldview functionally comparable to it. It becomes clearer in the following passage: 'there is the possibility that a continuous support for the Christian faith will stand as the spiritual companion to the rise of National Socialism, and therefore the ultimate world-view of the Third Reich'.¹¹¹ The rise of National Socialism in turn depended on Christian faith. Skeby further illustrated this gradually intertwined relationship by arguing that 'only through Christian faith [...] will the evils of the materialistic age be buried'.¹¹² In this vein, Skeby refers directly to Malling as he also points to how Christianity not only paves the way for National Socialist ideals, but also how 'the swastika paves the way for the Christian Cross' in that 'behind the external struggle for national and social revival, burns the living Christian faith'.¹¹³ Contrary to the functional resemblance between Christian doctrines and race dogmas, which only points to the 'false Christianity', Skeby's description of the connection between *true* Christianity and National Socialism indicates that it took place on a more phenomenological level where dogma had lost its value as a measurement of true belief.

Skeby was not alone in rejecting neat and tidy categorisations of religiosity. Malling also emphasised that DGB confessional Christians as well as *Deutsche Christen* all reflected divergent religious directions, which nevertheless remained ultimately connected through their shared identities of being National Socialists.¹¹⁴ The interaction between National Socialism and Christianity culminated at the point where these so-called separate worldviews became indistinguishable from each other. In rejecting conventional religious boundaries, National Socialism thus nurtured an unprecedented

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 19.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 21.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 29.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Malling, *Nationalsocialismen og Kirken* (Copenhagen: Landsoldaten, 1935), p. 13.

Christian union of perceived incompatibilities. In ‘The demands of our time’, Malling continued in this vein, arguing that

National Socialism is the complete opposite of Communism, also religiously speaking. I choose to see National Socialism as more than a political party [...] they see in Christianity the best way to strengthen the morale of the people.¹¹⁵

Compared to Skeby and *Ragnarok*, Malling’s moderate image is to an extent a product of the radicalism that contemporary scholars have attributed to his Nazi contemporaries. Wilfred Petersen and Malling had come to a stalemate in the mid-1930s. Petersen had terminated any prospects of political cooperation with Malling’s party *Dansk Folkefællesskab* since Petersen saw a fundamental incompatibility between the National Socialist beliefs in race science and Malling’s Christianity. Despite Malling’s early efforts to initiate dialogue, Petersen stated in a personal letter to Malling in 1936 that he saw it necessary to distance himself from any religious and ‘anti-Nordic’ communities in order to make his anti-Semitic attack as ‘forceful as possible’.¹¹⁶ But Malling’s mobility across organisational boundaries, which his contact with Andersen clearly indicates, also blurred the dichotomy-like borders between race and religion. He certainly did maintain that dogmas should not take authority over individual belief, and the fact that the majority of the Danish population had little or no knowledge of the dogmas as such also pointed to unfamiliarity with the Christian tradition as a whole.¹¹⁷ In practice, therefore, National Socialism ‘paved the way’ for Christianity, not by counteracting the Christian teaching through race science, but by incorporating state resources in the efforts of raising the knowledge of religious dogmas to an unprecedented level.¹¹⁸

Despite the partial rejection of the race idea, however, the passage also demonstrates that it was not total. In the same publication, Malling nuanced his approach by making it clear that ‘Danish National Socialists also acknowledge the necessity of racial purity and active race hygiene [...] Race is the material foundation for the people’s spirit.’¹¹⁹ A letter from 1938 confirms Malling’s acknowledgement of the race idea, albeit on what he would have stated as purely biological grounds, stating that ‘we only seek pure race [...] the pure personality necessary to lead an entire Nordic

¹¹⁵ Malling, ‘Vor tids krav’, p. 3. Rigsarkivet nr. 07187, box 28 ’1915-1979: Manuskripter og Udkast’.

¹¹⁶ Letter from Wilfred Petersen to Anders Malling dated 23 October 1936, Rigsarkivet nr. 07187, box 13 ’1936-37: Breve Politisk liv’.

¹¹⁷ Malling, *Hagekorset baner Vej for Kristi Kors*, p. 37.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 7

National Socialism'.¹²⁰ The letter was part of a correspondence between Malling and the ad hoc organisation *Nordisk Front*, which comprised individuals within Andersen's circle in the NSAP. The elusive attitudes to the race principle had deeper roots than mere opportunistic alliance building. It comes through in a letter of more private character to the *Dansk Folkefællesskab* colleague, the Grundtvigian Mikkel Ejerslev,¹²¹ where Malling wrote that 'there is something more than just the cultural, but what? It seems to me that it is something to do with race.'¹²² In citing Grundtvig's call for the necessary reconciliation between 'high Odin and white Christ',¹²³ Malling's envisioned synthesis of Christianity and National Socialism followed the pattern of his Nazi colleagues. Despite their divergent standpoints on religious issues, radical *Ragnarok* writers as well as 'moderate' voices like Malling all incorporated Nordic racist rhetoric in their envisioned fusion of Christianity and National Socialism.

VIII

Critique of Nazi Germany

Whether one expressed the ethnicisation of religion in terms of an envisioned fusion or as a dogmatic substitution of Christian teachings with the race principle, these visions eventually had to face geopolitical realities. When the political situation in Norway and Denmark changed dramatically in April 1940, the question of national chauvinism turned its direction towards the so-called German imperialism. The Scandinavians presented in this study attacked the Nazi regime for its homogenising ambitions – just as Christian universalism had been throughout the previous decade. Like the message of 'theological incorrectness', these writers objected to the flattening impulse of the Nazi regime and the use of dogmas to mesmerise a population into obedience and uncritical thinking. Before 1940, however, these more nuanced lines of thinking regarding the paradoxes of National Socialist anti-

¹²⁰ Letter from Malling to *Nordisk Front*, dated 10 May 1938, Rigsarkivet nr. 07187, box 15 '1938-39: Breve Politisk liv'.

¹²¹ Mikkel Ejerslev, a DNSAP member and later follower to Malling's *Dansk Folkefællesskab*, held a position as a teacher in the Grundtvigian educational *Højskole* system. Due to Ejerslev's National Socialist activities, an article in the internal pamphlet *Højskolebladet* from November 1934 declared that Ejerslev had been removed from his position. See Nissen, 'Folkelighed og Frihed 1933', pp. 647 and 667.

¹²² Letter from Malling to Ejerslev, dated 3 January 1939, Rigsarkivet nr. 07187, box 15, '1938-39: Breve Politisk liv'.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

Christian rhetoric remained peripheral, and the critique of the constructing process of a worldview was mostly confined to Christianity.

It is, however, possible to trace early tendencies where the ideals of a 'theological incorrectness' that had infused writings on religion were moving towards the realm of politics and the actions of the Nazi regime. Emberland refers to George Mosse's point that Hitler's policies 'concretised and objectivized an ideology that originally had been too vague to fit a mass movement'.¹²⁴ This journey from a phenomenological enthusiasm with the promises of National Socialism to disillusionment with its functionalist system is visible when taking a closer look at the development of Schjelderup's writings on the topic. His critique of National Socialism was obviously more outspoken by 1945, and he justified his early support apologetically. He pointed to the difference between the Nazis' idealism and the consequences of the politics of the Third Reich, the death camps, the terror and the genocide.¹²⁵ Despite the fall of the Nazi regime, he stressed that National Socialism would remain a factor in contemporary society unless a revival of Christianity took place: 'if National Socialism is to be fought from within, we need a stronger faith'.¹²⁶ Schjelderup certainly did not avoid a condemnation of the Nazi crimes and the consequences of the National Socialist idealism. But those who were familiar with his earlier writings would find a striking continuity in his call for Christian reforms. For a moment, Schjelderup had thought that the 'theological incorrectness' of liberal theology had been reflected in the National Socialist faith. In 1945, it was clear for him that the Nazi faith and traditional Christianity had both failed to meet the needs of their people. Similarly to Heidegger's thoughts on how in 1945 it was clear that Nazism lacked the 'inner greatness' it had appeared to possess back in the early 1930s, Schjelderup added Nazism to his list of inauthentic religious systems.

One could certainly argue that it was easy for Schjelderup to say then. By 1945, the Nazi regime had broken down and National Socialist ideology was forever to be condemned. But Schjelderup's opinions on Nazi Germany did not take a drastic turn by the mid-1940s in parallel with the failure of the German war effort. Rather, a growing sense of disillusionment with Hauer's 'new religion' and with the entire National Socialist politics was visible in Schjelderup's writings as early as the mid-

¹²⁴ Emberland, *Religion og Rase*, p. 27.

¹²⁵ Schjelderup, *Oppgjør med nazismens ideologi: Et foredrag* (Oslo: Aschehoug & co, 1945), pp. 9–10. The publication was based on a lecture held on 16 October 1945 at an event arranged by the Norwegian Church.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

1930s. The decline of the German Christians (*Deutsche Christen*) had paved the way for Hauer's movement, but as the Nazi regime was increasingly consolidated, the lofty ideas propagated by Alfred Rosenberg of a Nordic religion had to give way to Hitler's *realpolitik*. In 1936, Hauer had resigned as leader of the DGB. By then, Schjelderup had already lost his faith in this 'religious movement, albeit religious in a primitive form', as he had earlier characterised the DGB.¹²⁷ Hauer's movement was thus no longer the kind of authentic religion for which Schjelderup once had at least partially expressed his admiration.

Between content and form: Ragnarok opposition on the concretisation of religion

With the title 'Religion and Politics', Christian Benneche's article in *Ragnarok* stressed the need to 'avoid dangerous overlaps between national and religious movements'.¹²⁸ Schjelderup was not alone in seeing the rise of National Socialism as a potential dawn of a dangerous pseudo-religiosity based on nationalist chauvinism. When Schjelderup accused Hauer of constructing a religion, what he essentially did was to criticise Hauer for giving primacy to the process of forming and externalising the religion rather than being shaped by the spontaneity of people's inner religiosity. The phenomenologist impulse was thus replaced by a calculating functionalist mind. The type of critique directed against both Christian internationalism *and* universalism turned against these National Socialist movements to make themselves question their own dogmas of ethnic exclusion and racial supremacy. Benneche's warning of the making of a Führer-cult and his critique of Nazi propaganda's indoctrinating power was an example of this ambivalence.

For the *Ragnarok* activist Tor Strand, it was precisely the kind of 'materialist direction within Nazism'¹²⁹ and its dictatorial features that movements such as *Ragnarok* fought against. This materialist direction, moreover, was not confined to a critique of Christianity, but was increasingly applied to the 'enlightened absolutism' (*aufgeklärten Absolutismus*) and the 'orthodoxy' of both Quisling's and Hitler's leadership cults.¹³⁰ But it was another Norwegian whose writings on religion came to signify the religious profile of the *Ragnarok* pamphlet. With several extensive articles published during the mid-1930s, the lawyer Albert Wiesener stressed that despite the greatness of the

¹²⁷ Schjelderup, 'Den tyske religionskamp', p. 8.

¹²⁸ Christian Benneche, 'Religion og Politikk', *Ragnarok*, 1:4 (June 1936), pp. 85–86.

¹²⁹ Riksarkivet, L-sak Gulbrandsdalen politikammer, nr. 1098.

¹³⁰ Witness testimony of Ernst Zuchner in the case against *Ragnarok* member Stein Barth-Heyerdahl, May 1945. Zuchner led the Scandinavian foreign office department of the German propaganda ministry and enjoyed friendly relations with Barth-Heyerdahl and other *Ragnarok* members. In Rigsarkivet, L-sak Oslo politikammer, nr. 6331.

Third Reich, no state could replace religion and God. Yet, the argument against a construction or concretisation of religion took a different turn from the standard theological version: for Wiesener, it was important not to concretise God, and by not doing so, he implied that it was possible to avoid defining God as such.¹³¹ He further pointed to the issue of definition as the crux of all religions, where the process of concretisation transports the religions ‘into a world of seminarism [being centred on the seminary] and propaganda’.¹³² Wiesener gave the example of Nazi Germany in his argument that the personality cult around Hitler and Quisling had constrained the movement and therefore compromised its spiritual depth: ‘that Hitler and Germany is one and the same is only propaganda and nothing else’.¹³³ At the same time, the opposition to concretisation could also be interpreted from the opposite angle, as an argument for the fact that National Socialism could count as a religion as much as any other traditional religious system. Although Wiesener had concluded with reference to Nazi propaganda and the Hitler cult mentioned above, the tone of the article also revealed an author torn between two positions. On the one hand, it reflected the idealism of the kind of ‘theological incorrectness’ that opened up an acknowledgement of the Nazi movement as a modern form of religiosity, and on the other hand, it highlighted the evidence for how the Nazi regime had corrupted the original religious sentiments that had given rise to the NSDAP movement.

The ambivalent attitudes to Christianity were in many ways reflected in the *Ragnarok* opinions of Nazi Germany. Certainly, liberal theology assumed a certain religious freedom that in principle would accommodate this new Germanic religion. Yet, Wiesener had indeed – and similarly to Schjelderup – raised a word of warning about the risk that the Nazi religion would fall into the same dogmatic trap as Christianity had done. Despite their general support for Rosenberg’s volkish line in Nazi Germany,¹³⁴ the publications in *Ragnarok* continued to express opinions that challenged the volkish hegemony. Wiesener’s piece was a response to the article by a Norwegian priest who pointed to the dangers of ‘the promises of Rosenberg’s paganism’ and who argued that that contrary to ‘Rosenberg’s seminarism’, Christianity could not be replaced with anything deeper.¹³⁵

¹³¹ Albert Wiesener, ‘Almengyldig og nasjonal religion’, *Ragnarok*, 3: 9–10 (December 1937), pp. 237–240.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 238.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ See for example Cläre Mjøen, ‘Alfred Rosenberg og den tyske kirkestrid’, *Ragnarok*, 3:6 (October 1937), pp. 160–162.

¹³⁵ Sogneprest H. Devold, ‘Det er umulig!’, *Ragnarok*, 3:8 (November–December 1937), pp. 209–211.

The work of Christian Benneche was another example of *Ragnarok* voices on religion where an implicit criticism was directed against Nazi Germany. In a text published after his early death in 1936, Benneche had made it clear that the authenticity of the Nordic idea was entirely dependent on one not defining or dogmatising it:

As soon as it [religion] becomes conscious, humans try to construct religion. Religion, however, is not human-made but grows from our heritage and develops along with society [...] Religious feelings are products of the unconscious, and the articulated religion is just a symbolism of these emotions and feelings [...] The importance of religion is not in its shaping power but how it is shaped.¹³⁶

With this statement, Benneche not only summed up the main points of Schjelderup's fascination for Nazi paganism and its resonance with liberal theology, but he also pointed to the dangers and its pitfalls. In accordance with Wiesener, Benneche emphasised the dangerous impulse for humans to construct a religion, while the truth was that, arguing in a manner clearly inspired by Otto and by extension Schjelderup, religiosity could not be concretised. *Ragnarok* had dedicated one of its publications to Benneche as a special edition in his memory. The edition included previously unpublished papers chosen personally by *Ragnarok* members. Considering that contributors like Per Imerslund and Barth-Heyerdahl, who have been labelled in current historiography as *Ragnarok*'s main ideologues with strong idealist profiles,¹³⁷ praised Benneche's work, Benneche must also be seen as representative of *Ragnarok*'s collective attitudes to religious issues. Imerslund described Benneche as 'a nationalist intellectual of the best kind',¹³⁸ where he referred to the dilemma that many *Ragnarok* members had faced as part of a National Socialist intellectual circle while at the same time basing their ideological outlook on a collective rejection of the establishment and its intellectualism. But precisely the intellectualisation and effectively the *construction* of religion was one of Benneche's main targets when it came to identifying the problems with Christianity. Having these opinions in mind, Wiesener's critique of the constructive impulses in Nazi propaganda should not be viewed in isolation from the *Ragnarok* writings on religion.

¹³⁶ Christian Benneche, 'Om religionen', *Ragnarok*, 2: 9–10 (1936), pp. 199–203.

¹³⁷ Emberland, *Religion og Rase*, p. 192.

¹³⁸ Imerslund in memorial of Benneche, in *Ragnarok*, 2: 9–10 (1936), p. 187.

Danish writers on the failure of the ‘race prophets’

The critique of a construction of religion that we find in *Ragnarok* implied an opposition to the making of dogmas. Andersen’s writings from this period touched on the argument that the dogmatisation of the race idea mirrored the critique the Nazis themselves raised against Christian evangelicalism:

National Socialism has by virtue of being a political movement stated clearly that ‘our Reich is from this world’, not in a self-righteous Judeo-Christian sense, but as a humble acknowledgement of the blasphemy it would entail if a worldly movement would attempt to conquer God’s Reich.¹³⁹

The piece ‘National Socialism and the Church’ (*Nationalsocialismen og Kirken*, 1935) defines the ‘un-Christian’ as the sacralisation of the race principle that threatened the teachings of Christianity on a *functional* level. That is, when Malling argued that the race principle is presented as ‘something mystically religious’ he also implied that the ‘un-Christian’ feature of the Nazi paganism was the functional replacement of Christian dogmas with that of race dogmas. In that sense, Malling therefore made an implicit structural comparison between the two worldviews by referring to a replacement of dogmas. A concluding passage clarifies the point that ‘we do not view the race theory religiously, but biologically. We have no mysticism in our movement, no myths, no Alfred Rosenberg, no Professor Hauer.’¹⁴⁰

Jørgen Skeby’s writings are particularly interesting in this respect as he elaborated further on the functional similarities between the racist and the Christian dogmas and the problematic phenomenon of dogmatism as such. Skeby described what he called the pagan ‘prophets of the “race-religion”’.¹⁴¹ Just like Schjelderup’s initial fascination with the authentic impulses of the National Socialist spiritual search, Skeby similarly described his disillusionment as he also realised how ‘the primitivism in National Socialism that in so many areas expressed itself through instinctive searching into the depth of the people’s spiritual sources of power, seems to [...] have failed catastrophically’.¹⁴² Skeby further defined the attempt to make the race idea the basis of the worldview that is evident ‘among certain

¹³⁹ Andersen, ‘Verdensanskuelse: Race-anti-Race’, (1934), p. 7. Rigsarkivet, nr. 10192, box 49: ‘1932-1944: Diverse Materiale’.

¹⁴⁰ Anders Malling, *Nationalsocialismen og Kirken*, pp. 7 and 14.

¹⁴¹ Skeby, *Kristenkors og Hagekors*, p.13.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 13.

German thinkers and *fuehrer* as a ‘conscious race-belief’.¹⁴³ Like the criticism of concretisation, the notion of consciousness was in this context not a compliment but a sign that the race-belief was a constructed system more than the kind of primitive instinct it was supposed to be. Skeby consequently argued that because of this construction of race-belief, the bipolar positioning of National Socialism and Christianity was ultimately the work of race-theoretical dogmatism. Significantly, he made it clear that ‘this bipolarity has no anchoring in reality, because in reality the world-views of most National Socialists are peculiar examples of a co-mingling of these two extremes, “the race-faith” and “the Christian faith”’.¹⁴⁴ Schjelderup was therefore not alone in identifying a hidden nationalist chauvinism in the new ‘reality religion’: Skeby went so far as to argue that in fact, the ‘race-belief’ had taken the shape of a new form of ‘Jewishness’. He defined the race-belief as

the belief in the chosen German people – [and] of them being greatest and strongest representatives of the Nordic master-race’s blood are statements to be found not only in the philosophies of front soldiers, but especially in the outrageous dogmas of the race-theoreticians.¹⁴⁵

IX

Chapter Conclusion

The argument that both politics and religion were terms that had taken on a new meaning and were no longer part of the ‘old world’ dominated the writings of the individuals discussed in this study. A political religion theorist today would therefore struggle to decide whether to interpret this semantic revolutionism as a defence of the term ‘political religion’ or a rejection of it. Indeed, on the one hand, the calls for synthesis seemed to imply the merging of politics [National Socialism] and religion [Christianity] into a ‘political religion’. The rejection of any attempt to construct a religion, on the other hand, also questions whether a ‘political religion’ was a welcome concept in these circles after all. As we have seen, the heavy critique of the functionalist tendencies of the Christian religious system that has been identified as a common factor in the writings of both liberal theologians and Nazi intellectuals indicates that the making of a Nazi ‘political religion’ was a process that too much resembled the evils of old Christian confessionalism. The term ‘political religion’ resonates more

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 14 (my emphasis).

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

with these individuals' writings on the ideal type of religion if the concept reads less in a functional and more in a phenomenologist sense. This chapter has drawn clear links between liberal theology, these radical Nazi circles and those attitudes to religion that informed the development of the phenomenological school of 'political religion' theory. These links have gone under the umbrella term 'theological incorrectness'. The 'theological incorrectness' present among the individuals discussed in this study points to a way ahead for a re-theorisation of the phenomenologist school to include the heterodox dimensions of Nazi ideology.

Although the works of Malling and the contributors to *Kamptegnet* and *Ragnarok* would thus frequently stress the danger of mixing religion and politics, their judgement of Christianity was infused by political commentaries; if its policies were to be translated politically, Christianity represented the intolerant dictatorship. Equally so, it worked the other way around in that *Ragnarok's* attitudes to the political systems could not entirely be understood without taking into account their thoughts on religion. This present chapter has primarily established the premises behind the idea of 'theological incorrectness' that informed these Nazi writers in their attitudes to religion. The following chapter will examine how 'theological incorrectness' was adopted in political commentaries on the geopolitical actions taken by Nazi Germany. 'Theological incorrectness' and the critique of Christianity thus informed 'ideological incorrectness' as both an ideal and political practice that developed among these Scandinavian Nazis as they faced Nazi occupation

Chapter 5: 'Both Frontier and Bridge'

Ideological Incorrectness and the Transnational Logic

Introduction

'Among those "dogmatic fanatics" I have seen a wider horizon', reads the conclusion of an article by a Norwegian National Socialist from 1943. The original Norwegian article had been re-published in the Danish Nazi pamphlet *Akademisk Aktion*. The pamphlet comprised of young and radical Danes who shared the Norwegian's support for National Socialism.¹ This rhetoric on the inclusiveness and broadness of National Socialism was, however, not the same as seeking the establishment of an international movement. The 'wide horizon', stretching from the political order of the Third Reich over the divergent national visions within the occupied Nordic countries, was indeed a political reality beyond ideological abstractions. Some even argued that National Socialism was nothing less than a 'pan-European ideology'.² But among Danish and Norwegian pan-Germanists in the 1930s, the separation of 'Danishness' or 'Norwegianness' on the one hand from 'Germanness' on the other was seen as essential to successful implementation of National Socialism on Scandinavian soil. If one were to single out one issue that encompassed the wider nature of the Scandinavian National Socialist discourse until 1945, with its diverse movements, political conflicts and ideological controversies, it would be the continuous debates regarding nation-specific 'ownership' of National Socialism.

This debate on ownership was essentially a discussion about establishing the premises for a transnational National Socialist ideology. In other words, to what extent could one speak of a generic form of National Socialism? And how did this generic form accommodate not only national divergences in terms of ideology, but also questions of national security in the midst of Nazi expansionism? These questions occupied groups and individuals who represented various and highly

¹ 'Nazismen dreper det frie menneske', signed 'A.S.B.' and originally published in *Hugin*, the propaganda organ of NSU, the youth organisation of the Norwegian National Socialist party Nasjonal Samling. The article was re-published in *Akademisk Aktion*, 7–8 (April–May 1943), p. 12.

² Carl Frants Popp-Madsen, radio speech titled 'Nationalsocialismen', published in print by *National Studenter Aktion* (1 December 1942).

diverse national and political agendas on the National Socialist *hierarchy* – where for example *Ragnarok*'s Hans Jacobsen's relative political insignificance stood in stark contrast to the aims and visions of the Nazi leadership in the Third Reich.

The present chapter focuses on this power-political imbalance and examines how it shaped the discourse on transnational Nazism among *Ragnarok* members and Ejnar Vaaben's circles. While 'transnationalism' was not part of their explicit vocabulary, these individuals theorised National Socialism as a fundamentally transnational ideology *because* of this imbalance. That is, the very existence of various nation-specific National Socialist movements and their subsequent political negotiations was seen as the foundation for a transnational dialogue. It was a dialogue, moreover, through which they came to define 'true' National Socialist practice. Indeed, this type of thinking did not emerge in isolation from global political events, but the idea that National Socialism was an ideology emerging as the *result* of this transnational pattern, rather than being its prerequisite, created a legitimate space in Nazi theory for the Scandinavian underdogs.³ These ideological negotiations, conflicts and divergences challenged the premises of generic National Socialism. When applied in theory, as we shall see in this chapter, the ideological incorrectness that characterised this reality was incorporated into the way these Scandinavian Nazi intellectuals discussed 'true National Socialism'.

I

Transnational Ideas

The concept of 'true National Socialism' leads us to the question of how notions of purity and incorrectness could be reconciled. The Norwegian article in *Akademisk Aktion* tells a story of something more than a 'wide horizon' geographically speaking. It positions the wide horizon of National Socialism as an ideological antithesis to the kind of dogmatism of which National Socialism was often, and in the view of many contemporary Nazis, wrongly accused. Transnational Nazism, i.e. a dialogue between Nazism's classic form (Nazi Germany) and its various reformulations (here, the

³ The term 'underdogs' is used in a geopolitical sense. From a racially ideological perspective, however, the Scandinavians consequently pointed to their superior position vis-à-vis the Germans. See discussion on race theory and transnationalism later in this chapter.

Scandinavian countries),⁴ thus symbolised a form of unorthodoxy. It is only more recently that historians have begun to take an interest in this type of consciousness among National Socialist groups over their idiosyncratic ideology on the one hand, and their role as parts of a wider transnational web of organisations on the other. Walther Gutmann identifies a curious fusion of nationalism and internationalism in foreign SS volunteers' ideology, including those from Sweden and Denmark. Gutmann is not attempting to illustrate their ideology as 'a clearly defined dogma',⁵ but he wants to make clear that the typical Waffen-SS volunteer had transnational visions and an intellectual awareness that stood in sharp contrast to the stereotype of the soldiers as barbaric beasts fighting for the sake of mere violence. Another example is Samuel Goodfellow's previously mentioned study of the various fascist groups in the Alsace region. Goodfellow describes the interaction between these groups as one where 'a sense of commonality and differentiation were simultaneously present. In the process of affirming universality, fascists created differences. Arguably the collapse of definitional clarity for fascism starts here.'⁶ The emphasis on divergence and ideological conflict has therefore increased the more historians have looked into the historical realities of fascism and simultaneously left behind their overly rigid preoccupations with the search for a 'generic fascism'.⁷

In the case studies of this chapter, we see more ambition among the men of Goodfellow's case studies than among *Ragnarok* members and their Danish colleague Ejnar Vaaben to strive for a universal National Socialism. Among the Scandinavians in this study, 'universalism' was rejected as a liberalist construction, and thus they actively sought differentiation rather than 'universalism'. This quest for differentiation was completely in line with the Nazi worldview. In order to illustrate the awareness among the Scandinavian National Socialists of the 'definitional *unclarity*' at the heart of their ideology, this chapter uses the term 'ideological incorrectness' to describe a process whereby – contrary to Goodfellow's observation on Alsace – the striving for differentiation was driven by an outspoken ideal of unorthodoxy. This principle of 'dogmatic incorrectness', did more than just lay the foundation of thinking about National Socialism as a transnational phenomenon. At the end of

⁴ Federico Finchelstein formulates this loose definition of 'transnational patterns' in Finchelstein, *Transatlantic Fascism: Ideology, Violence and the Sacred in Argentina and Italy, 1919–1945* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 6.

⁵ Martin Gutmann, 'Debunking the Myth of the Volunteers: Transnational Volunteering in the Nazi Waffen-SS Officer Corps during the Second World War', *Contemporary European History*, 22:4 (2013), p. 605.

⁶ Goodfellow, 'Fascism as a Transnational Movement', p. 102.

⁷ This argument is put forward by Federico Finchelstein who points to the Holocaust as a historical event that through its multitude of causes and ideological outlooks challenges the overtly intellectual outlook of fascist studies. See Finchelstein, 'Fascism and the Holocaust'.

this chapter, ‘ideological incorrectness’ is also presented as a way of thinking about National Socialism that functioned not only theoretically, but also justified individual actions. The anti-doctrine of ‘ideological incorrectness’ enabled these Scandinavian movements to embark on the simultaneous process of ambivalently supporting and actively opposing the occupational politics of Nazi Germany while firmly seeing themselves as ‘true’ National Socialists.

II

The ‘Correctness’ of Fascism

Because attacks on Nazi Germany remained subtle and were kept hidden from the official discourse in *Ragnarok* publications and its Danish equivalents, a critique of fascism was even more dominant. This critique, moreover, was part of a process of re-defining National Socialism that extended beyond the Scandinavian context. At the *SS-Junckerschule* in Bad Tölz in May 1941, the Danish SS officer Poul Ranzow Engelhardt took notes during a class on National Socialist ideology. The contents of his notebook provide a clear illustration of what it was that German Nazi officials sought to teach the aspiring Scandinavian SS men about National Socialism. Engelhardt noted that worldviews could be sorted into different types with a main distinction between the so-called ‘confessional *Weltanschauung*’ and the ‘fighting [*Kämpferische*] *Weltanschauung*’. The first ideology – the confessional – was the Catholic Church and the ‘fighting’ worldview was of course National Socialism.⁸ Liberalism was also mentioned as a form of worldview but definitely not a ‘fighting’ one!⁹

A Danish National Socialist publication further developed and presented this fighting worldview as standing in contrast to ‘all the movements of the old sort – conservatism, fascism, liberalism [that] are driven by the more or less rationalistic, but always materialistic world-view’.¹⁰ The separation between fascism and National Socialism on the basis of its fundamental ideological differences was thus shared among Danes, Norwegians and Germans alike. This bidirectional attack against doctrinal

⁸ See Michael Wildt’s argument about the bureaucracy of the RSHA being like no conventional bureaucracy, but instead a *kämpferische Verwaltung* (literally, a ‘fighting bureaucracy’). Wildt describes the ideological core of National Socialism through a similar emphasis on its ‘fighting characteristics’ in Wildt, *Generation des Unbedingten*.

⁹ Notebook, entry 18 May, 1941 in Rigsarkivet, nr. 6926, ‘Poul Ranzow Engelhardt’, box 14.

¹⁰ Wilfred Petersen, ‘Materialisme – Idealisme’, *Nordiske Stemmer*, 3 (1936), p. 6.

‘correctness’ from the angle of both politics (against fascism and liberalism) and religion (Christianity) ultimately points to the centrality of the *kämpferische Weltanschauung* in National Socialist ideology.

‘Quisling’s fascism’

With an emphasis on fighting comes a preoccupation with transgression of boundaries – and dogmas. An article in *Fronten* argued that while fascism was an ideological system, National Socialism was an organic worldview: ‘while fascism is form seeking content, National Socialism is content seeking form’.¹¹ Another piece stated that ‘the similarities between fascism and National Socialism are not greater than their respective similarities to Bolshevism’.¹² This rejection of fascism was also a message about the National Socialist embrace of national divergences and principle of incorrectness vis-à-vis generic visions like that of a fascist international. In that sense, the rejection further defined National Socialist ideas. Jacobsen explained how the fascist system symbolised ‘the eternal opposition between the Mediterranean culture’s formalism, ideas of equality and demands for universality as opposed to Nordic, Germanic strivings for independence, [and] our emphasis on human diversity’.¹³ Echoing his own critique of Christianity, the doctrines of universality and internationalism were attributes of fascism that drove the process of creating what Jacobsen called a “‘world centre” for the fascist movements in all countries’.¹⁴

Jacobsen referred to the international fascist conference in Montreaux, Switzerland on 16–17 December 1934 that had sought to gather various European fascist movements to organise a fascist international. This effort was initiated by Mussolini’s CAUR network (Action Committee for the Universality of Rome), and it further prompted Jacobsen’s comment that ‘Mussolini is not exactly trying to hide his imperialism’.¹⁵ Internationalism and imperialism were seen as intimately connected. For those *Ragnarok* voices that criticised this fascist internationalism, arrangements like the one in Montreaux were first and foremost signs of the way fascist political visions ignored the principles of national heritage, race and, ultimately, national sovereignty:

¹¹ ‘Fascismen kontra Nasjonalsocialismen’, *Fronten*, 4:9 (15 November 1935), p. 1.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Hans S. Jacobsen, ‘Nasjonalsocialisme og Fascisme’, *Ragnarok*, 1:6 (August 1935), p. 138.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

The reason I have stressed the incompatibility between National Socialism and fascism so strongly is informed by the danger that threatens us. It is the danger of not going beneath the surface of the ideas of our time that possibly contains a foreign content. This danger is present among all parties and political movements in our country.¹⁶

The actual split with Quisling in the mid-1930s was described as a fundamental conflict between National Socialism and fascism, where Quisling was associated with supporting the Montreaux arrangement. *Fronten* addressed the ‘problem and truth’ about Quisling’s leadership of NS where a number of particularly significant factors were singled out:

[...] the engagement with the Montreaux fascist international, misunderstanding of the Fuehrer-principle, free-mason alliance, a lack of psychological insight into how to utilise the strongest forces of the movement. [...] Quisling has made a choice. He has distanced himself from those he, ironically, calls ‘nazi’ (in exclamation mark) while choosing the non-nationalist line and proclaiming to be the only one with a Norwegian base. [...] We must warn all good Norwegians against Quisling.¹⁷

The statement sums up two important aspects of this National Socialist critique of fascism: first, it addressed the problem of leadership by pointing to the thin line between being a *Führer* and a dictator. Second, and as we have seen, while National Socialism was presented as pro-nationalistic, fascism was accused, like Christianity, of representing a flattening internationalist idea that undermined national particularities.

Against dictatorship

Beyond the critique of the fascist international agenda, which Jacobsen called ‘the dogma of national equality’,¹⁸ fascist domestic policies also came under attack. Jacobsen, like other *Ragnarok* contributors, spoke of Christianity’s ‘oriental features’, which was an accusation referring to the political methods of dictatorship. In several *Ragnarok* articles, these features were also presented as characteristics of southern European fascism. Unlike the ‘oriental features’ of fascism,

National Socialism is something different from the Roman Caesar cult – it is first and foremost a burning, foundational Nordic idea. It is not an oriental dictatorship, although the Fuehrer in hard times will need to lead firmly.¹⁹

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 145.

¹⁷ ‘Nasjonal Samling i oppløsning’, *Fronten*, 4:6 (15 April 1937), p. 1.

¹⁸ Hans S. Jacobsen, ‘Quisling og fascismen’, *Ragnarok*, 1:8 (October 1935), p. 195.

¹⁹ Jacobsen, ‘Nasjonalsocialisme og Fascisme’, p. 145.

The divide between the National Socialist and fascist state set out here also came to reflect the rhetoric against the *sozialdominante* version of a ‘political religion’ that was discussed in the previous chapter. Hans Jacobsen wrote in *Ragnarok* in 1935 that the fascist system, like traditional Christianity, belonged to the past, to the 19th century, while National Socialism represented a new, contemporary way of life.²⁰ Fascism was thus an expression of old perceptions of a political ideology, in the same way as Christian confessionality was an outdated model for religious belief. In opposition to Mussolini’s personality cult, the conscious construction of dogmas and other signs of religious chauvinism, Jacobsen continued his attack on fascism by claiming that

the fascist centralized state is the last chapter of absolutism, not its conqueror. This ‘god’s creation’, the total absolutist state might for a moment bring dynamism and vitality to the people [...] But it distances the people from the state. It is a foreign, southern product of the East.²¹

While disguised as ‘God’s creation’, the fascist Führer-cult was thus essentially nothing less than an absolute dictatorship. One article in *Fronten* was titled ‘Quisling’s fascist and dictatorial tendencies’ where ‘the worst thing that could happen to this country would be having Quisling as its dictator’.²² Ultimately, the calls for a ‘theological incorrectness’ that had dominated discourses on the Nazi ‘political religion’ were brought into the context of fascism as a form of ideological incorrectness. All those factors that had signified the confessional church, the dominant institutions, the absolutist leader and the indoctrinating dogmas identified more clearly how *Fronten* and *Ragnarok* described the differences not only between Quisling and themselves but more fundamentally the difference between fascism and National Socialism:

When Quisling speaks of a ‘sacred fascism’ he is obviously not grasping the nature of fascism. Something that is empty and only consists of form can never be sacred. If he continues to lead his followers in a fascist direction he will deceive his own followers who seek to establish a solid Nordic state on a biological basis. That can never be achieved through fascism. The best of his followers demand a Norwegian National Socialism. Fascism is not natural for the Norwegians in any form. It demands the pope in church, state and bureaucracy. Quisling must learn the difference between authoritative institutions and the spiritual dominance over a people’s politics.²³

²⁰ Ibid., p. 142.

²¹ Ibid., p. 145. In accordance with *Ragnarok*’s emphasis on the importance of presenting divergent opinions in current debates, the pamphlet also published a translated version of an article by the editor of the Italian fascist pamphlet *Revue Fascism*, Nino Guglielmi, ‘Rom, fascisme og imperium’, *Ragnarok*, 2:2 (April 1936), pp. 39–43.

²² ‘Nasjonal Samling i oppløsning’, p. 1.

²³ ‘Quisling’, *Fronten*, 3:6 (May 1934), p.1.

Indeed, the rhetorical incentive on the part of *Ragnarok* to claim such a division between their outlook and that of Quisling's NS is clear, but the division also continued to feature in *Ragnarok*'s theoretical writings on National Socialist ideology. The political power struggle with Quisling on the one hand and the principal objections towards international fascism in theory on the other provided an escalating framework for these intellectuals not only in their continuous critique of fascism, but most importantly in their simultaneous formulation of National Socialism's exceptionality.

In Denmark, Ejnar Vaaben's colleague in *Schalburgkorpset* Carl Popp-Madsen delivered one of the more interesting and sophisticated critiques of the fascist 'political religion' to be found among Scandinavian National Socialists. In a speech from December 1942, Popp-Madsen criticised the Enlightenment's ideal of human progress by painting a grim scenario – a scenario that resembles what contemporaries saw as the trajectory of the interwar 'political religions':

We are facing the breakthrough of individualism and the liberation of personality. [Man] is no longer the obedient son of the Church [...] but an astonishing Titan who overthrows Popes and ends up seeking the destruction of God to satisfy his urge to take the throne [...] who rejects all authority, transgresses all boundaries and in blind faith in his own strength and abilities demands individual freedom. [...] Now we have a freedom that screams rootlessness and as an irony of faith, the deepest humiliation for human kind. It is a story of the magician's disciple who thought he could master the genius unleashed.²⁴

Popp-Madsen described how the spirit of the materialist age had sown the seeds for 'political religions'. His analysis resonated clearly with Eric Voegelin's approach to 'political religion' as a way analytically to unite Italian Fascism and National Socialism. But while Popp-Madsen suggested Voegelin was right in his account of Italian fascism, National Socialism was different:

National Socialism is indeed new, but not new in the sense of an imposed otherworldly system that has fallen from the skies: [which is] suitable for angels and machines but not for real people humans made of flesh and blood.²⁵

Popp-Madsen was further convinced that the true difference was that National Socialism had been embraced by the people before it came to power, 'unlike fascism, which seemed to have reached power, aided by the king, before reaching its own people'.²⁶ The fascist 'political religion' was thus

²⁴ Popp-Madsen, 'Nationalsocialismen', p. 5.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 7.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 8.

presented as Christianity in disguise in the sense that it displayed the same characteristic features of dogmatism, foreignness and despotism.

III

Scandinavianism

The emphasis on National Socialist incorrectness vis-à-vis the outdated and non-organic systems of Christianity and fascism thus became a way to prove ideological purity. With the same key words of ‘foreignness’ and ‘dogmatism’, the Danish National Socialist milieu also extended the critique of fascism to include opposition to a political movement closer to home, drawing a line between the political federalist idea of Scandinavianism and the quest for a National Socialist pan-Germanic order. One example of this development is an article by Aage Andersen where he asked the reader to choose either ‘Scandinavianism or pan-Germanism’. Scandinavianism was described as ‘empty and transparent’ where the ‘implementation of pan-Scandinavianism assumes the abandonment of local nationality. One cannot make an omelette without breaking the eggs, and how many of us Danes are willing to break that egg that is our Danishness?’²⁷

Scandinavianism developed in the 18th century as a system of ideas related to the establishment of a concrete political union of defence between the Scandinavian countries. This idea of forming a Scandinavian military alliance had become increasingly attractive in light of the German territorial expansion in the 1860s.²⁸ The political outlook of Scandinavianism²⁹ resurfaced in national discourses following the Nazi occupation of Denmark and Norway in 1940 and was a topic that also caught the attention of the German SS authorities.³⁰ A distinction between the establishment of a Scandinavian

²⁷ ‘Storskandinavisme eller Stor-Germanisme’, *Kamptegnet*, 2:12 (15 June 1940), p. 1;4. in Rigsarkivet, Straffeakt, nr. 404 II.

²⁸ The concrete geopolitical background to Scandinavianist thought was the defence treaty signed by the Nordic countries in 1794, where its ideas reappeared during the Napoleonic wars and again re-surfaced in the 1940s due to the anxiety over German expansion and the future of Southern Jutland. Kasper Sevaj, *Dansk Nationalisme 1776–1848: Borgerkrig, Grundtvigianisme og Skandinavisme*, unpublished MA thesis (Copenhagen University, 2002).

²⁹ The emphasis on the political, or pragmatist, outlook of Scandinavianism is an exaggeration that stems from the need to distance it from Grundtvigianism, and it is important to emphasise that Scandinavianism during the 1820s to 1850s was as much centred upon cultural expressions such as Nordic literature and music as it was on foreign diplomacy. See *Ibid.*, pp. 100–104.

³⁰ A telegram from the advisor of Joachim von Ribbentorp, *Auswärtige Amt*'s Martin Luther to Werner Best, 25 January 1943 mentions the article ‘Nordic supremacy’ (*Nordens Suveränitet*). In the article, the notion of the ‘Nordic thought’

federation *or* the so-called ‘participation in the making of the [pan-Germanic] new Europe’ was made in these broader discourses over the fate of the Scandinavian countries in the war,³¹ and the distinction was often translated as a matter of ‘Scandinavianism versus pan-Germanism’.

Both Andersen and Ejnar Vaaben positioned Scandinavianism as a threat to Danish national identity and its pan-Germanic roots. The intimate relationship that Vaaben described between the Nordic race idea and the essence of Danishness positioned the race idea as a determinant factor when favouring a pan-Germanic political order over Scandinavianism. Vaaben stressed that the Nordic race idea cannot be

contained within Scandinavian borders, since precisely because of the dynamic between our local heritage and the racial Nordic world mission, it strengthens the activist demand of a kind of Nordic community that acknowledges its political obligations and acts on the historical possibilities that is revealed. [...] The Nordic myth can only be realised in conjunction with the Race idea and its leading pioneers, such as Günther [...]³²

An additional article in *Akademisk Aktion* described Scandinavianism and Nordic thought thus we ‘are not against it, but only fighting against its abuse and inauthentic expressions.’³³ It was a matter of clarifying the meaning of the term Nordic. Kurt Erik Wassman’s article from March 1941 further consolidated the role of *Akademisk Aktion* as a channel where criticism of Scandinavianism was made on the basis of a pan-Germanic thinking that implicitly questioned the black-and-white separation between Nazi and non-Nazi. Wassman described the proponents of Scandinavianism as struggling to

turn Norden into a museum for outdated political doctrines and isolate it from the new Europe [where the Scandinavianists] arrange for ‘Nordic cooperation’ but mean ‘democratic preservation’ and ‘Nordic’ meetings that are nothing more than anti-German demonstrations.³⁴

and Swedish Scandinavianism is positioned against pan-Germanism, and Luther henceforth demands information on the involvement of the SS in these matters. See John T. Lauridsen and Jakob Kyril Meile (eds.), *Werner Bests korrespondance med Auswärtiges Amt og andre tyske akter vedrørende besættelsen af Danmark 1942–1945 Bind 2* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanums Forlag, 2012), pp. 162-163.

³¹ Several articles on the topic in *Akademisk Aktion* referred to the public lecture given by professor Knud Berlin in 1943 called ‘Old and New Scandinavianism’ where Berlin made a ‘political analysis of Scandinavianism with its conditions and frameworks’ which concluded that old ‘romantic fantasies of a Nordic federal state’ could in the face of Nazi power have a devastating impact on Denmark as a nation. In Unknown author, ‘Gammel og ny Skandinavisme’, *Akademisk Aktion*. 9 (1943), pp. 3–4.

³² Ejnar Vaaben, ‘Ja eller Nej til Norden: Den Nordiske Myte’, *På Godt Dansk* (July 1943), pp. 9–13.

³³ Jorgen Wernberg, ‘Fellesnordisk antityskland eller?’, *Akademisk Aktion* (November 1941), p. 4.

³⁴ Kurt Erik Wassmann, ‘Nordisk Isolation?’, *Akademisk Aktion* (March 1941), p. 2.

These negative assessments of Christianity, fascism and also Scandinavianism served the purpose of describing what National Socialism was not. We have seen in publications, mainly from *Fronten* and *Ragnarok* but also from Vaaben's circles in Denmark, a fierce attack on these Christian/Fascist/Scandinavianist attempts to impose a 'foreign' idea or system upon the distinctive national culture and character of each Nordic country.

IV

National Particularity

Ragnarok and the circle around Ejnar Vaaben based their anti-liberal critique of Christianity, fascism and Scandinavianism alike on their rejection of 'correctness'. Whether it was religious dogmas, the fascist international's dogma of national equality or Scandinavianism's tendency to flatten the particularities of each Nordic country, in the eyes of these National Socialists, all three ideas were based on a striving for homogenisation. The 'ideological incorrectness' we find in the case of Ejnar Vaaben and *Ragnarok* defended the idea of national particularities and acknowledged the *interaction* as such between the particularities as an integral part of the holistic National Socialist worldview. This 'ideological incorrectness', i.e. the ideological practice of claiming incorrectness towards politics of homogenisation, figured in these visions as the ideal transnational relations between Nazi organisations.

'There is greatness in being small' – Nikolaj Grundtvig's influence on Vaaben

Vaaben stated in the pamphlet *Faedrelandet* in September 1944 that 'those who study the history of the Germanic people will soon realise that Denmark is the country best suited for the implementation of National Socialism considering something as central and fundamental as its intimate relation to Grundtvigianism'.³⁵ Nikolaj Grundtvig's writings on politics and religion belong to the 'second golden age' in Danish cultural production, among names such as Soren Kierkegaard and H.C. Andersen. Grundtvig's works influenced Vaaben's National Socialist identity to the extent that Vaaben in his memoirs indeed mentioned the 'grundtvigianism' of National Socialism.³⁶ These two

³⁵ Vaaben, 'Dansk National Socialisme', published in *Faedrelandet* 9 September, 1944, and located in Rigsarkivet, nr. 06540, box 1.

³⁶ Vaaben, 'Det var det hele værdt', p. 17., *ibid* box 4.

–isms were interrelated rather than separate. Vaaben maintained throughout his political career that Danish National Socialism could be neither understood nor properly implemented without reference to Grundtvig. It was particularly the term ‘Danishness’ that Vaaben found relevant and became helpful for him and his colleagues in *Schalburgkorpset* when negotiating those intellectual obstacles that awaited all Danish National Socialists after the Nazi occupation on 9 April 1940, namely the need to figure out the relationship between National Socialism and German foreign politics.

When Vaaben used the term ‘Grundtvigianism’, he referred to an intellectual Grundtvigianist movement that emerged parallel to that of Scandinavianism. An antagonistic relationship between Grundtvigians and Scandinavianists developed in the late 19th century, and Grundtvigianists tended to view Scandinavianism as an expression of the thoughts among the intellectual elite confined to the higher layers of Danish society.³⁷ The perceived distance between Grundtvigianism and Scandinavianism remained an issue among Vaaben and his contemporaries. One example is C.P.O. Christensen, who was a Grundtvigianist and a frequent contributor to the intellectual circles where both he and Vaaben operated during the 1930s and 1940s. He described Grundtvig’s organic Nordic spirit in contrast to the schematic nature of Scandinavianism:

Whilst the men propagating Scandinavianism spoke of the greater and external power that could be sought through a fellow king, army, parliament and justice [...] Grundtvig spoke of far greater inner power that is to be found only within the Nordic spirit.³⁸

Discourses on the Nordic race idea dominated and Christensen further pointed to similarities between Vaaben’s race thinking and Grundtvig’s writings on the Nordic idea. As a fusion between two approaches:

Grundtvig has two contributions to the field of Nordic thought: [first] the mythological message that builds upon the common Nordic idea and [second] the contemporary need for a spiritual revival within each population in each Nordic country – and therefore the Grundtvigian movement stands against the Scandinavianism which brought the ‘intelligentsia’ and bourgeoisie with it.³⁹

³⁷ Sevaj, *Dansk Nationalisme*, p. 97.

³⁸ C.P.O. Christensen, ‘Grundtvig, den nordiske Aand og den nordiske Sandhed af i Dag’, *Gads Magasin* (1942), p. 13.

³⁹ Christensen, ‘Grundtvig, den nordiske Aand’, p. 1. Vaaben praised Christensen for describing Scandinavianism in a ‘deep and truthful way’, but it should be mentioned that Vaaben and Christensen had their disagreements over the concrete future of the ‘Nordic’ idea although they had similar perceptions of Grundtvig’s Nordic thinking. Vaaben expressed disappointment over how Christensen found ‘the Nordic movement in Denmark to be an essentially German movement’. This German labelling was in Vaaben’s view yet another sign of the frequent misunderstandings of Nordic

This text describes a separation between the all-encompassing and mythological idea of the Nordic and the implementation and adaptations of the Nordic idea within each national context. Christensen concludes that Grundtvig managed to bring forward the important insight that ‘there existed different spirits in each Nordic population’.⁴⁰ In Vaaben’s view, these spirits belonged to the wider pan-Germanic framework, where the dream of a strong and united Nordic community would

not be realised through congresses, but strived for as a reality that reflected our heritage [...] Neither Denmark nor other Scandinavian countries will maintain their particularities and independences unless in an open-minded way a cooperation and a community of fate [*Skaebnefaellesskab*] is established strong enough for the rest of the world to acknowledge.⁴¹

Scandinavianism was thus rejected based on what in Nazi circles was perceived as liberal and materialistic systems that ruled at the expense of ‘authentic’ Nordic thought. The separation of Scandinavianism from Grundtvigianism therefore promoted a pan-Germanic system at the expense of Scandinavianist visions of a ‘closed’ federation.

Grundtvig’s ‘Danishness’ and the claims to National Socialist ownership

The closed nature of Scandinavianism stood in stark contrast to the embrace of pluralism that Vaaben found in Grundtvig’s ideas. He not only saw Grundtvig as a ‘pan-Germanic prophet’, but he also attached Grundtvigianism to his perception of National Socialism.⁴² Grundtvig had a vision for a people’s community. This vision, which he called ‘Danishness’, was a form of national consciousness that would act as a precondition for the spiritual unification of the Danish people.⁴³ One article in the pamphlet *Dannebrog* adds to this picture with the statement that ‘Dannebrog frequently cites

thought. In Vaaben, *Den Nordiske Tanke*. Vaaben further directed strong objections to Christensen’s ambivalent attitude to National Socialism in an article that highlights the revival of the German people through National Socialism, yet maintains the National Socialist ideology to be foreign to Danish mentality, in Christensen, “‘Det tredje Norden’ og ‘Det tredje Rige’: Skaebnemodsætningen mellem Tyskland og Nordens Historie’, *Gads Magasin* (1937), pp. 337–338.

⁴⁰ Christensen, ‘Grundtvig, den nordiske Aand’, p. 2.

⁴¹ Vaaben, ‘Norden’, *Vort Vaern: Dansk Tidsskrift for Folkestyre, Udenrigspolitik og Forsvar* 17–18 (1–15 September 1939), p. 389.

⁴² Vaaben, ‘Grundtvig – tyskehaderen sett med tyske øjner’, *På Godt Dansk* (August 1943), pp. 11–12 and Vaaben, ‘NFS Grundtvig, eine bedeutende Gestalt der dänischen Glaubensgeschichte’, *Rass Monatsschrift der nordischen Bewegung*, 9 (1939), pp. 89–100.

⁴³ Grundtvig’s legacy is connected to his advocacy of an egalitarian educational system, *Højskole*, which would bring about a modern enlightenment through the education of the Danish people from different socio-economic backgrounds. It formed the pillar of the Grundtvigian tradition that continued into the 20th century. In the 1930s, the Grundtvigian movement, which adhered to Grundtvig’s liberal theology, struggled to distance itself from the Nazi regime namely on the basis of the word *Folkelighed* which is linguistically difficult to separate from the German word *Völkisch*, and its connotations in the Nazi era. Henrik S. Nissen, ‘Folkelighed og Frihed 1933’. pp. 588–89.

Grundtvig [...] What Grundtvig strived for was “folkefællesskabet”.⁴⁴ When in 1943 Vaaben reflected upon his early years as a National Socialist, he remembered that ‘National Socialism from the early 1920s appeared for a young Dane as Grundtvigianism with capital letters [...] The spiritual revival of the people was as essential to the National Socialist movement as the external political struggle.’⁴⁵ In Vaaben’s words from March 1945, ‘much that once appeared elusive in Grundtvig’s philosophy is becoming clearer today, not because we have become wiser, but because world events have worked to clarify his ideas’.⁴⁶

The German factor was consistently present in Grundtvig’s thought on Danish identity, as it was for Vaaben roughly a century later. ‘There is greatness in being small’ were Grundtvig’s words in 1814 when he described an intellectually stiff German culture. The definition of ‘Danishness’ was thus effectively shaped by Grundtvig’s growing fear of imperialism, which for him came to define the ‘German’.⁴⁷ To counter the threat of ‘godless and scientific’ Prussian imperialism, Grundtvig’s notion of a ‘Nordic heroic spirit’ came into the limelight in the following decades. Ultimately, the Danish defeat in the Schleswig war in 1864 preceding German unification prompted Grundtvig’s call for the spiritual revival of the Danish people. In other words, as Grundtvig’s ‘Danishness’ emerged in the shadow of German foreign politics, the term was bound simultaneously to define the ‘German’. Yet, the phenomenon of ‘Danishness’ was not to be confined to the Danish national context; rather, Grundtvig spoke of it as holding a universal principle, where the Danish people would lead a globally historical mission of strengthening the bond between the *Folk* and their common culture, language and heritage. As he categorically rejected the term ‘nationalism’ based on his critique of materialistic intellectualism,⁴⁸ Grundtvig further stressed in a proclamation from September 1850 that he condemned the ‘Germanisation’ of the Nordic countries as much as he would condemn any Danish attempt on cultural imperialism in Germany.⁴⁹ Any claims to ‘ownership’ of this historical mission that he identified in the idea of ‘Danishness’ would thus turn into an ideological oxymoron. ‘Danishness’ in its particular context meant the safeguarding of the Danish spirit within its national borders, but in its wider context it implied the acceptance that beyond the confines of human-made borders, the universal principle of ‘Danishness’ was built upon the acknowledgement of its multitude

⁴⁴ Vaaben, ‘Ejnar Vaaben om den Danske Folkerejsning’, *Dannebrog*, 5:3 (February 1941), p. 4.

⁴⁵ Vaaben, ‘Hans F.K. Günther og den Nordiske bevægelse’, *På Godt Dansk*, (August 1943), p. 17.

⁴⁶ Vaaben, ‘Nogle ord om Grundtvig’, *Akademisk Aktion*, 5:4 (6 March 1945), p. 6.

⁴⁷ Lundgreen-Nielsen, ‘Grundtvig og Danskhed’, p. 19.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

of particularities. Consequently, it could not be confined to the notion of ‘nationalism’. In a similar manner, and a source of inspiration for Vaaben, Alfred Rosenberg in February 1939 similarly stressed in the context of National Socialism that it was ‘not a universal world-view’.⁵⁰ Instead, ‘National Socialism meant different things in different countries’⁵¹ and Rosenberg thus stressed similarly to Grundtvig’s thoughts on Danishness, that any copying of foreign symbols would distort the true force of National Socialism.

Vaaben praised how Grundtvig, in the midst of European identity wars, had formulated his notion of a particular Danish national identity *without* losing sight of the universal dimension of ‘national consciousness(es)’. It was a dynamic that Vaaben, as well as his Danish colleagues and the Norwegian *Ragnarok* members, found crucial in their understanding of pan-Germanism. The perceived ‘greatness in being small’ thus structured Vaaben’s and other Danish National Socialists’ thinking about the relationship between various national Nazi movements. Vaaben’s party colleague within *Dansk Enhedsparti*, Sven Koefoed, described how this principle of particularist–universalist interaction found resonance in the National Socialist *Weltanschauung*:

The National Socialist ideology encompasses a vast spectrum of ideas which under certain conditions can be adapted and used in other countries [...] As the name certainly indicates, National Socialism is not a product of German imperialism. It is in fact the opposite of internationalism.⁵²

This clarification is a key to understanding the way Grundtvig’s work was adopted in Danish National Socialist propaganda. Grundtvig had effectively formulated a structure of the interplay between a supranational principle and its nation-specific expressions, all confined within one distinct worldview. With this structure as a foundation for the implementation of National Socialism in Denmark, Koefoed argued for pluralism as the only way of affirming the universal principle of a pan-Germanic order in Europe. Only in this way could National Socialism, despite its German original expressions, be understood as Danish and in that sense also Grundtvigian. It places National Socialism as a phenomenon above the quests for definitional certainty and as a form of transgression beyond the confinements of national borders. One of Vaaben’s articles in *På Godt Dansk* points to

⁵⁰ An account of Rosenberg’s speech to diplomats and journalists during a visit in Copenhagen, 1939. ‘Tyskland ønsker ikke Nazisme og Hagekors brugt i Udlandet’, *Nationalsocialisten* (8 February 1939 located in Rigsarkivet, nr. 10192, box 23, ‘1932-1944: Diverse Avisudklip’.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Svend Koefoed Jensen, ‘D.N.S.A.P.’s Forhold til Dansk Mentalitet’, *Dannebrog*, 3 (12 February 1941), p. 4.

the all-encompassing universality of these claims for a National Socialist ‘Danishness’; he writes that ‘the Nordic race idea is not bound to Nordic myths and therefore it transgresses Scandinavian borders precisely because of the interaction between our particular heritage and the Nordic race principle as a world mission’.⁵³

V

‘True’ National Socialism

The idea of National Socialist pluralism and Danish independence was an idealist vision challenged ideologically and politically by German expansionism, irrespective of how much it defended the so-called pan-Germanic union in theory. From the perspective of Scandinavians like Vaaben, they were engaged in a balancing act of maintaining the acknowledgement of the Nazi leadership in Berlin while simultaneously confirming the Grundtvigian roots of the Danish version of National Socialism. The pre-war decade had been a time when Vaaben was occupied not so much by worldly political matters but was more ideologically focused on what he called the ‘volkish moment in the National Socialist freedom-movement’.⁵⁴ The ‘volkish moment’ in Vaaben’s memoirs was also described as a ‘Grundtvigianist’ understanding of national consciousness.⁵⁵ But in his post-war writings, he clarified that ‘in one aspect, I remained politically conscious [during the 1930s] and that was the question of the southern Danish borders’.⁵⁶

While Grundtvig did not hesitate to criticise German power politics (for example, he witnessed with despair the Schleswig border crumbling in the face of German expansionism), Vaaben proclaimed in 1933 what was to become his trademark in Danish National Socialist politics: the ‘Berlin Line’. As its name suggests, the ‘Berlin Line’ sought friendly political relations with Nazi headquarters in Berlin. To reconcile this political line with his Grundtvigian convictions, Vaaben repeatedly claimed the pan-Germanic assumptions in Grundtvig’s thinking by using notions such as ‘the volkish

⁵³ Vaaben, ‘Ja eller nej til Norden’, p. 9.

⁵⁴ Vaaben, ‘Det var det hele verdt’, p. 12, Rigsarkivet, nr. 06540, box 1.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

Grundtvig⁵⁷ and notoriously stressing that Danes must soon realise that ‘*the German–Danish border is both frontier and bridge*, in the long run neither party can break these connections or erase these borders’.⁵⁸

On a deeper dimension, however, the Berlin Line was a battle for national freedom. It was a line developed in order to undermine German expansion into Danish territory by embracing pan-Germanic thought as a symbol not of German National Socialism but of National Socialism meaning Danish sovereignty. In a piece from 1933, Vaaben writes that the ‘struggle for Germanisation’ had since the Great War been the ‘silent goal for those men who through the Nordic movement and National Socialism have worked hard and consistently to unite an independent Germany and an equally independent Denmark in the destined Germanic union’.⁵⁹ Vaaben then goes on to illustrate the meaning of the Berlin Line as a force transcending national borders and leading ‘the way to a lasting friendship between the Germans and the three Scandinavian Folk’.⁶⁰ That said, Vaaben’s letter to E. Christensen, the editor of southern Danish newspaper *Flensborg Avis*, makes clear that the de facto cooperation with the Nazi regime rested upon the precondition that the ‘right’ understanding of National Socialism prevailed. National Socialism was not a particularly German phenomenon but had values that would primarily safeguard Danish national interests: ‘National Socialism is, apart from being true in its own right, the only fruitful way for our nation to resist the German expansion in Southern Jutland.’⁶¹

Just as we have seen in the case of *Ragnarok*’s criticism of Quisling’s fascist and internationalist tendencies, Vaaben was not impressed with Frits Clausen’s National Socialist politics. Principally, he found that the Grundtvigianist unification of universalism and particularism was fatally overlooked by Clausen and the DSNAP, and therefore he accused Clausen of claiming ownership over National Socialism, as if its universal legacy could be reduced to either Danish or German. For Vaaben, that type of ownership thinking was essentially an exercise in ‘wrong’ apprehensions of National Socialism since ‘real’ National Socialism does not welcome ‘those people who discuss “a particularly

⁵⁷ In Vaaben, *Ein Däne spricht zu Deutschland. Deutschlands Kampf eine europäische Angelegenheit* (Leipzig: S. Hesse & Becker Verlag, 1940).

⁵⁸ My emphasis, in Vaaben, ‘Norden’, p. 507.

⁵⁹ Vaaben, *Brodersmålet* (1933), p. 1, Rigsarkivet nr. 06540, box 2.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁶¹ Vaaben to E. Christensen dated 1934, p. 2, Rigsarkivet nr. 06540, box 3.

Danish form of National Socialism””.⁶² Yet, and somewhat paradoxically, Vaaben maintained, ‘they are as far from reality (and honesty) as those who like Dr Clausen copy and in a byzantine way praise German National Socialism and all its actions’.⁶³ On the one hand then, in order to intellectually condemn a Nazi takeover of Denmark, Vaaben maintained that a nation-specific National Socialism must prevail within Danish borders, but on the other hand, his immediate geopolitical context of German border threats enhanced the necessity for him to simultaneously point to National Socialism as a transnational and thus intrinsically *cooperative* phenomenon.

Vaaben therefore saw ‘the abandonment of the border question and the “Danish–German” *Volksgemeinschaft* humbug’ as a sign of Clausen’s faulty understanding of National Socialism. Vaaben’s Grundtvigian understanding emphasised that it was the safeguarding of Danish interests rather than an uncritical cooperation with Germany that would pave the way for a true National Socialism.⁶⁴ His colleague in *Folkevaernet* in the 1940s, Wilfred Petersen, made similar points when describing the DNSAP’s failure to take a ‘German line’ in the 1930s:

The movement was soon divided where the majority sought to adopt National Socialism in its German form without considering our specific national conditions and Danish mentality, and others who showed a true understanding of National Socialism [...] in striving to create a politics that reflected our cultural heritage and spiritual life.⁶⁵

The cut-and-paste attitude that for Petersen was evident in DNSAP’s propaganda ultimately led to a falsification of the universal legacy of National Socialism that went deeper than the modern construct of geopolitical borders. In Koefoed’s view, the political failure of DNSAP was based on this lack of national particularity, that ‘the Danish National Socialism, both ideologically and politically is a true copy of the German. Not only have one taken the ideas, one has also slavishly adopted the symbol: The Swastika.’⁶⁶ In this vein, it is worth drawing structural parallels back to Grundtvig’s notion of *Folkelighed* as a phenomenon applicable to each national context, such as the fact that there existed a Danish *Folkelighed* as much as a Swedish, or even a German *Folkelighed*, but its essence was not reducible to national ownership. In 1939, Vaaben similarly pointed to the fact that because of

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 3.

⁶⁵ Wilfred Petersen, *Rene Folk med Rene Haender: Blade af Frits Clausens Blå Bog* (Copenhagen: Dansk Socialistisk Forlag, 1941), p. 3.

⁶⁶ Sven Koefoed-Jensen, ‘D.N.S.A.P’s Forhold til Dansk Mentalitet.’, p. 4.

DNSAP's 'German line', the idea of National Socialism in Denmark had been circumscribed into a 'specifically German movement which has systematically falsified the universal principles of National Socialism'.⁶⁷

Vaaben found it particularly alarming that the racial bond between the Germanic countries was often neglected in Danish popular perceptions of Nazism, where that ideology was primarily understood as an essentially German product. In 1939, he wrote that 'Danes have begun to separate "Nazis" from "non-Nazis". Anything in between is hardly respected.'⁶⁸ Two years later, in February 1941, this dichotomy was described as a result of the fact that 'the majority of the [Danish] population was more occupied with ideology than Denmark as such. Through their so-called foreign political outlook, they divide their fellow nationals into opposing camps and thus ultimately lead them farther away from what is important: Denmark.'⁶⁹ Vaaben stressed that the Nazi/non-Nazi dichotomy was a product of the old world, and that the new Europe 'could not afford thinking in terms of borders'.⁷⁰ In that sense, he also sketched the contours of his idea of National Socialist ideology as transgressive and essentially revolutionary because of its incorrectness towards old perceptions of ideological conviction. Thus, a pattern emerged where Vaaben increasingly drifted away from the unsettling political realities he faced, with the effect that he ignored *realpolitik* and built his National Socialist ideal on wishful thinking.

VI

Grundtvig and the Race Idea

Vaaben's references to the pan-Germanic and universal mission of National Socialism were ultimately arguments about what he called 'the Nordic idea'. This way of thinking, which marked Vaaben's political activities for 20 years, was indebted to the works of Hans F.K. Günther, the leader of *Nordische Ring* and a pioneering pan-Germanic thinker in both the Nordic and German race-theoretical context of the late 1920s. In the years preceding 1933, Vaaben's contact with Günther can be described as a decade-long correspondence with one underlying question that was more or less

⁶⁷ Vaaben, *Hagekorset over Danmark* (Odense: Dansk Nationalsocialistisk Parti, 1939), pp. 40–41.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁶⁹ Vaaben, 'Ejnar Vaaben om den Danske Folkerejsning', p. 4.

⁷⁰ Vaaben, 'Det var det hele verd', p. 25.

expressed in each letter: 'How did Hitler plan to solve the Danish–German question?'⁷¹ In his memoirs, Vaaben pointed to Günther's piece *Allnordische Utopie* from 1928 as a milestone in what Vaaben saw as a 'turn' in the NSDAP's Danish policy, from revisionist aims to a cooperative line in the name of a Nordic racial community.⁷² Nordic race theory thus had an essential impact on Vaaben in helping him to formulate the cooperative 'Berlin Line'.

While Günther's position within Nazi race theory should not be understated, the questions of whether or not Günther had the impact Vaaben estimated, or whether or not NSDAP's line, from their point of view, in reality was cooperative are less relevant. What is of more importance is the fact that Vaaben above all distinguished through Günther's Nordic race idea a clear divide between the idealist and political ways of thinking about pan-Germanism. For instance, Vaaben argued that the notion of the German *Herrenvolk*, or a superior people, was mocked by both Günther and another prominent race theorist within the NSDAP, Walther Darré. The propaganda of the *Herrenvolk* was as 'a form of self-contentedness that represents a static mind and thus hardly reflects the hunger and the drive of Nordic thought'.⁷³ Similar to his critique of Clausen's ownership ambitions for National Socialism, Vaaben made these references to Günther and Darré to make a similar point. The thought of the Nordic spiritual and racial community not only transcended isolated nationalist ambitions, but this transcendence was above all a sign of its unbound character and signalled a superiority to which geopolitical concerns simply had to accommodate themselves.

In never losing sight of the race principle, Vaaben envisioned a bond between the Germanic countries that was superior to both the German revisionist claims *and* some Nordic protectionist strategies to undermine these German claims, such as Scandinavianism. The race principle was thus the foundation upon which the idea of pan-Germanism as 'both frontier and bridge' was used by Vaaben to explain why pan-Germanism did not necessarily imply support for German foreign policies. But it was also used to undermine the power in those arguments made by Nazi opponents that pan-Germanism was merely an extended arm of Hitler's imperialistic fantasies. From this perspective, Vaaben and several

⁷¹ This expression is cited from Günther's response to Vaaben in a letter from 5 April 1930. A similar answer is found in an earlier letter from December 1929, and the majority of letters, sometimes as frequent as monthly, are concerned with the situation within the NSDAP and their attitudes to the Nordic (and thus Danish) question of whether the pan-Germanic thinking would be translated politically as cooperation or conflict. In Rigsarkivet nr. 06540, box 3.

⁷² Vaaben, 'Det var det hele verdt', p. 14, Rigsarkivet nr. 06540, box 1.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

Schalburg members were therefore bound to identify not only the ‘real’ meaning of National Socialism, but also, and perhaps more fundamentally, the real meaning of the ‘Nordic’.

Grundtvig’s work was free from scientific race theory and it is indeed problematic to draw parallels between the German word *Volksgemeinschaft* and Grundtvig’s notion of a ‘people’s community’. The latter translates in Danish as ‘Folkefællesskab’ and does not share the racial and biological assumptions of the Nazi term *Volksgemeinschaft*. This is obvious, considering that ‘scientific’ race theory peaked after Grundtvig’s intellectual activities in the mid-1800s. I am not even suggesting that the Danish Nazis *themselves* located the race principle in Grundtvig’s works. The reason, however, why one could compare the two terms lies within the Danish perception of the National Socialist utopia of *Volksgemeinschaft* and the meaning they themselves ascribed to it. Vaaben did not merely introduce Grundtvig’s notion of *Folkelighed* as an intellectual predecessor of the National Socialist idea; instead, he went a step further to present *Folkelighed* as the ‘ideal outcome’ of the racial purity that a Nordic movement would bring about.⁷⁴ In Vaaben’s later piece ‘The Swastika over Denmark’ from 1939, his introductory chapter on the ‘Nordic idea’ deals specifically with this connection. He argued that anyone who embraces Grundtvig’s philosophy and simultaneously rejects the race idea effectively turns ‘Grundtvig’s thoughts on tribe and heritage into empty poetry and words without meaning’.⁷⁵

In a circulated letter to members of *Den Danske Front* – one of the small movements that merged with Vaaben’s and Madsen’s organisations into *Den Nationale Aktion* and later *Dansk Folkevaern*⁷⁶ – the author makes an extensive and quite clear definition of the National Socialist *Volksgemeinschaft*. It speaks of a German ‘Folkefaellesskab’, explicitly using the Danish term. The National Socialist version was presented as a ‘new’ type of ‘Folkefaellesskab’ and the foundation for the entire National Socialist idea.⁷⁷ Its definition did not include references to race theory and described the National Socialist goal of ‘providing the people and the nation strength, to revive, to nurture and to gather all

⁷⁴ Ejnar Vaaben, ‘Den Nordiske Bevægelse’, pp. 470–473, Rigsarkivet nr. 06540, box 2. As a wider basis for the idea of ‘Danishness’, Grundtvig described the term *Folkelighed* in 1838 as an expression of the pure Danish, just as the term equally applied to other countries in their specific contexts of defining their true characteristics.

⁷⁵ Vaaben, *Hagekorset over Danmark*, p. 35, Rigsarkivet nr. 06540, box 2.

⁷⁶ *Dansk Folkevaern* was the civilian branch of *Schalburgkorpset*, open for both men and women and focused on political/ideological tasks such as propaganda. The organisation is further described in chapter 6.

⁷⁷ Gunnar Holm, ‘Danske Betragtninger over det tyske Folkefaellesskab’, Information letter, *Den Danske Front*, 30 October 1941, p. 1, Rigsarkivet nr. 10192, box 20. ‘1932-1944: Diverse Avisudklip’.

strengthening idealist powers and values that is hidden in the people'.⁷⁸ It is thus evident that the German *Volksgemeinschaft* was ascribed a depth in its meaning through the Danish translation. Moreover, it ultimately enabled an understanding of the term which was rich enough to even exclude the race principle for a moment. In Vaaben's usage, the race principle added to Grundtvig's notion of 'Danishness' and gave it a contemporary relevance that further enhanced the National Socialist claim to universality. But that is not to say that the race principle was ever ascribed to Grundtvig. Rather, it was the opposite: Grundtvig's 'Folkefaellesskabet' was another, more spiritual and thus *complementary* side of the National Socialist worldview and part of its universal dimension.

Christian Teisen was a frequent contributor to *Akademisk Aktion* and the key Danish contact for the SS in the early stages of the establishment of *Schalburgkorpset*. His pan-Germanic siding in this debate was thus undeniable. In an article titled 'Separatism or Cooperation' from 1941, he argued that 'most of those who speak of the "Nordic" imply its incompatibility with Germany', but, as Teisen continued:

We and our Nordic fellow nationals must without hesitation reach to Germany in the making of the new Europe. At the centre of the National Socialist world-view is the Nordic blood [...] We shall not confine our expansionist need to abstract Scandinavian manifestations that have had their heydays in the past century – but today lack any reasonable sense.⁷⁹

Vaaben's own definition of the Nordic idea ('Den Nordiske Tanke') is taken from the words of the Grundtvigianist and politically active Nazi sympathiser Mikkil Ejerslev, a friend of Vaaben throughout the 1930s and 1940s, who stressed that

the Nordic idea is not political ideas of the differentiation between blue- and brown-eyed individuals. It is not a 'blonde international' [...] It is central to the Nordic idea that people from this race share more than physical characteristics, that they have in common what determines their entire fate.⁸⁰

As it refutes the race principle in its strictly biological sense for the more mythical understanding of the Nordic common heritage, this description of the Nordic idea could appear ambivalent. But it does perhaps even more so tell a story of the importance Vaaben ascribed to the fusion of

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 2.

⁷⁹ Christian Teisen, 'Separatisme eller Samarbejde', *Akademisk Aktion*, 9 (1941), pp. 13–14.

⁸⁰ Cited by Vaaben, 'Den Nordiske Bevægelse', p. 468.

mysticism and science. Nordic thinking was not strictly equivalent to pseudoscientific theories on race, it also had a more spiritual dimension. Vaaben's preoccupation with race theory stemmed from what he called 'the volkish moment' in National Socialism, rather than from the Scandinavian racial and biological institutes and their theorists. In 1939, Vaaben modified DNP's party programme from 1930, where the term 'Danish' replaced 'race-scientific' as the foundation for the education of the Danish people.⁸¹ That is not to say that Vaaben did not draw parallels between these myths of a common heritage and race theory, for he did in fact praise its 'clarifying' effects on the idea of 'race'.⁸² He was, however, convinced that the biologically founded race principle ultimately depended upon a mythical core in the racial community that transcended clinical and scientific measurements. In an article from 1935, Vaaben stressed that it was Günther's pioneering work, *Rassenkunde des deutschen Volkes*, from 1922 that had finally articulated the relationship between race science and Nordic thought. However, as Vaaben clarified it, 'Nordic thought has in all ages, and among all Nordic people witnessed [Günther's] predecessors who emphasised the Nordic blood and its unbreakable bond with cultural values and characteristics.'⁸³ For Vaaben, Grundtvig was undoubtedly one of those Nordic prophets who had articulated the race principle long before it was even provided with biological or scientific terminology. In Vaaben's words, Grundtvig 'despised the failed attempts in the 1800s which sought to impose foreign systems on people in their natural environments', and Vaaben ends by claiming that 'Nordic thought is thus not an imported product [...] "Made in Germany", but an inner necessity for every healthy and strong Nordic people'.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Vaaben, *Hagekorset over Danmark*, pp. 48–49.

⁸² Vaaben explicitly mentioned the importance of the 'Racial-biological perception of history' as developed in the Scandinavian context by the Norwegian Jon Alfred Mjøen and the Swedish chief for the Racial-Biological Institute of Uppsala, Professor Lundborg. See Vaaben, 'Den racebiologiske Historieopfattelse', *Morgenbladet* (20 January 1930). As part of Hans Günther's close circle of Nordic race specialists, Vaaben indeed strongly admired more 'scientifically' profiled theorists such as the Norwegian race scientist Jon Alfred Mjøen. Vaaben and Mjøen were both appointed by Günther to lead seminars specifically on the topic of Nordic race science, at the University of Jena between 1931 and 1933. See correspondence with Hans F. Günther 1931–1933, Rigsarkivet nr. 06540, box 3.

⁸³ Vaaben, 'Den Nordiske Bevægelse', p. 468.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

VII

Divergent Visions of Pan-Germanism

The Nordic idea had to overcome certain paradoxes concerned with the ‘pro-German’ association with pan-Germanism. Just as we have seen a divide between a scientific and a mythical understanding of the Nordic idea, the historian Anders Monrad Pedersen has distinguished between two parallel understandings of German nationalism in Vaaben’s intellectual work. This, according to Pedersen, is the divide between the essentially political and ‘imperialist’ understanding and the more idealist and racially oriented view.⁸⁵ Vaaben’s position as ideological leader of the Schalburg school during the war further indicates how an analysis of his work extends beyond his personal profile and indicates the ideological outlook of many Danish National Socialists at the time. In fact, we find expressions of this divide in approaches to pan-Germanism in the statement by Schalburg member and editor of *Akademisk Aktion* Christian Teisen that there was an ‘inner tension within the occupational machinery regarding the relationship with Danish National Socialism and *Schalburgkorpset*’.⁸⁶ From the Danes’ perspective, Pedersen briefly describes – but does not sufficiently elaborate upon – what he identifies as *Schalburgkorpset*’s ‘attempts to create a Danish National Socialism’ with a foundational Grundtvigian philosophy.⁸⁷ Vaaben identified a fundamental conflict within nationalism between Aryan solidarity and imperialist domination. With two such diverse strands of German nationalism, both Vaaben and the Norwegian *Ragnarok* members operated with the perception that two equally diverse interpretations of pan-Germanic politics and ideas emerged: either a mythical, less concrete, union between the Nordic people or a political alliance that, falsely according to Vaaben, would imply recognising the German *Herrenvolk* ahead of Nordic equality.

It was in this dilemma, of claiming a pan-Germanic identity and at the same time avoiding an uncritical acceptance of German foreign policies, where Vaaben saw Grundtvig’s work as a remarkable fusion between precisely the idealist and the political. The adoption of Grundtvigianism in thinking about National Socialism as a form of transnational dialogue meant that Vaaben

⁸⁵ Andreas Monrad Pedersen, ‘Den nordiske tanke’ – Bidrag til en politisk biografi af Ejnar Vaaben’, p. 120.

⁸⁶ Christian Teisen’s witness testimony in the case against Carl Frants Popp-Madsen, Rigsarkivet, Straffeakt, nr. 313.

⁸⁷ Andreas Monrad Pedersen, *Schalburgkorpset: historien om korpset og dets medlemmer 1943–45* (Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag, 2000), pp. 88–93. Pedersen builds his argument upon references to the ideological profile of the pamphlet *På Godt Dansk – Månedssblad for Nordisk Kultur* which through a fusion of Nordic race theory and the emphasis on a commonly shared cultural heritage presented a Danish-specific understanding of the SS race doctrines.

considered the safeguarding of Danish particularity integral to a true understanding of National Socialism. This way of thinking also served to set boundaries for Nazi Germany's expansionism in the sense that the pan-Germanic order was presented in a dynamic relationship with national freedom. Another article in *På Godt Dansk* from December 1943 states that while 'the spiritual foundation for the pan-Germanic idea is encompassed by the National Socialist principle of preserving the race and the *Volk* as homogenous entities', pan-Germanism 'must not turn into a static scheme that overlooks the specific national contexts'.⁸⁸ The Grundtvigian structure thus functioned intellectually to safeguard particular Danish interests.

***Ragnarok*: 'Heretical pan-Germanists'**

This structural way of thinking, however, also prompted Vaaben and his Norwegian colleagues to take a stance against certain versions of National Socialism, at home and abroad, that they saw as contradicting its generic principles. Just like Vaaben's criticism of Clausen, the *Ragnarok* author Imerslund described in an article of 1942 how the 'traitors within our own ranks' were to be found in Quisling's movement.⁸⁹ The frequent use of terms implying a generic meaning to National Socialism, like 'true' and 'pure', among these Scandinavians did not prevent their embrace of pluralism. *Ragnarok* writings on pan-Germanism, in a similar way to their Danish counterparts, opened up the idea that pan-Germanic thinking implied a transnational dialogue in order for it to be called 'pan-Germanic' in the first place. Albert Wiesener established this point clearly in his article in *Ragnarok*, stating that 'without the acknowledgement and the respect for national particularities, an all-encompassing internationalism is impossible'.⁹⁰

The respect for national particularities also called for a degree of 'incorrectness' towards those notions of pan-Germanism where missions of an all-encompassing internationalism dominated. The historians Terje Emberland and Matthew Kott argue that from an ideological angle, 'where race theory and pan-Germanism is concerned, *Ragnarok* remained heretical'.⁹¹ Whether *Ragnarok*'s attitudes to pan-Germanic ideology should be regarded as heretical in nature or not depends on whether one approaches the issue from a historiographical or a historical viewpoint. First, the

⁸⁸ Unknown author, 'National Frihed i det Europeiske Faellesskab', *På Godt Dansk* (December 1943), p. 18.

⁸⁹ Per Imerslund, 'Sabotører i våre egne rekker', *Germaneren*, 1:2 (August 1942), p. 2.

⁹⁰ Albert Wiesener, 'Nasjonal-socialisme', *Ragnarok*, 1:5 (1935), p. 123.

⁹¹ Emberland and Kott, *Himmler's Norge*, p. 419.

heretical label is dependent on a contrasting image of something orthodox which, in a similar way to the argument of this chapter, is identified by Emberland as macro-nationalist German expansionism. In a more recent piece, however, Emberland and Kott approach the issue from the opposite angle, from the SS visions of Norway and their treatment of indigenous Nazi movements like *Ragnarok*. Historical research on SS policies shows a high degree of acceptance regarding national divergences and particularities. This tolerance, in turn, tends to be overshadowed by analytical approaches that rest on a perception of ‘the German factor’ – i.e. SS ideology – as the cohesive force in transnational studies on Nazism.⁹² Consequently, there is reason to question the ‘orthodox’ label with respect to the SS’s pan-Germanic policies as such.

That being said, it is one thing to consider historical research on SS policies but quite another to consider the perceptions held by *Ragnarok* members in a context of occupation and general disillusionment with National Socialist ideals. In the latter case, it is clear that regardless of the relatively tolerant SS policies, the *Ragnarok* movement had a *self-proclaimed* heretical identity. We see this in their embrace of ‘theological incorrectness’ in their critique of Christianity, and its continuation into the political realms of fascism and various National Socialist movements. *Ragnarok*’s heretical outlook was not isolated to their pan-Germanic ideas, neither was it confined to their religious criticism, but it was a principle of incorrectness that they expressed both theologically and ideologically. *Ragnarok*’s publication of the Nazi theologian Herbert Grabert’s definition of the ‘Germanic German worldview’ is one indication of their emphasis on the transgressive ingredient in the Nazi worldview. Grabert, who served in Alfred Rosenberg’s foreign political office for ideological information and had connections with Norwegian theologian Schjelderup mentioned in chapter 4, emphasised that:

It is an unfortunate illusion thinking that the beliefs of a young nation will have to appear proper and correct in order to face their tasks. What is required is precisely the opposite. [...] A world-view without the fighting spirit is no belief worth the effort [...] The forces of stolidity that continuously undermine the revolt of youth will demand facades and dogmas.⁹³

This text acquired a particular meaning in the Norwegian context. In a way radically different from the clear-cut elitism of the SS, the Scandinavian take on Nazi transgression was infused with an

⁹² Ibid., p. 496.

⁹³ Grabert, ‘Germansk-tysk verdensanskuelse i kamp’, p. 146.

intrinsic sense of being in an ‘underdog’ position. Four months after the occupation of Norway, *Ragnarok* published an article by the Waffen-SS soldier and Norwegian war correspondent Ulf Breien, who discussed the judicial implications of *Lebensraum*. His approach was primarily focused on the consequences for pan-Germanic, yet ‘subordinate’, states:

Who should have the authority to decide upon the position of the smaller states? Should their fate rest in the hands of the Greater Reich? The unevenness that develops naturally between states is one matter, it is quite another to deliberately construct a system of leading states [*førerstater*] and follower people [*følgefolk*] [...] The dangerous implications this will have on international law are clear.⁹⁴

Lebensraum was, according to Breien, an expression of the ‘supranational concepts that German theorists claimed resonated with the demands and universalism (pan-Europe) of the time’.⁹⁵ While it was more common among *Ragnarok* individuals to emphasise the race principle in order to compensate for their lack of national supremacy, Breien’s conclusion was heretical in another sense. In a second article from the same publication, Breien rejected the primacy of race by sidelining the importance of racial heritage for that of ‘geographical heritage’:

Scandinavia has no state which can claim the absolutist position of being the Greater Reich. This thinking must be replaced with the existence of principally equal states and their common ability to actively cooperate. The establishment of a greater region [German: *Grossraum*, Norwegian: *Storrøm*] cannot be a universal process but is dependent upon the particularities of the relevant states and its people.⁹⁶

The position of Norway between German expansionism and a pan-Germanic utopia was a dilemma shared by many National Socialists in Norway at the time, regardless of affiliations with the *Ragnarok* circle. In order to configure the expectations from their Norwegian readers with their affiliations with the SS, the editorial board of the SS-supported Norwegian pamphlet *Germaneren* frequently stressed the complexity of the pan-Germanic question. Its editor Egil Holst Thorkildsen stated in October 1942:

It is time to explain what we mean when we speak of a Germanic cooperation. Let us once and for all make it clear that this concept is among many people, not only in this country, seen as a cliché with no deeper meaning. When we speak of Germanic cooperation we are not speaking of a cooperation between a ruler and its slaves – but a

⁹⁴ Ulf Breien, ‘Livsrum-begreppet i Folkeretten’, *Ragnarok*, 6:5 (August 1940), p. 100. On Breien’s National Socialist career and war correspondence, see Björn Westlie, *Hitlers Norske Budbringere* (Oslo: Aschehoug & co, 2013).

⁹⁵ Breien, ‘Livsrum-begreppet I Folkeretten’, p. 100.

⁹⁶ Ulf Breien, ‘Norden som storrøm’, *Ragnarok*, 6:5 (August 1940), p. 127.

cooperation based on equality [...] Many intelligent individuals still believe that the pan-Germanic idea essentially undermines our own heritage and character [...] Germanske SS is in an inter-Germanic organisation. Only those Germanic people who safeguard their particularities deserve a place in the pan-Germanic community and are valid members of Germanske SS. It is a misunderstanding to believe that SS is led by a principle of homogenisation with for example the Germans as the model. It is also a misunderstanding to believe that due to its superior size, the Germans will have the leading role [...] we solely believe in quality and race.⁹⁷

There are different ways to approach this text. Certainly, coming from the propaganda organ of an SS organisation, the statement is an argument against the idea that there is a fundamental contradiction in combining support for the SS idea and striving for Norwegian independence. But beyond SS propaganda, Torkildsen's statement on the SS should also be analysed for the aggression with which he asserts Norwegian independence in relation to Nazi Germany. As much as this article was directed to those criticising the entire pan-Germanic idea, it was also a message to those Norwegian National Socialists who had begun to see how the idea was taking different forms that in turn required different political actions. Indeed, as Breien stated in *Ragnarok* in 1942, 'The pan-Germanic idea is not new to us' but, as he continued, 'today, the struggle for the pan-Germanic idea has a double meaning for us Norwegians'.⁹⁸

Germaneren's defence of the 'Norwegian' strand of pan-Germanic thinking was often based on arguments that pointed to a connection between the deepening of Norwegian identity and the process of pan-Germanic cooperation. For example, one article from 1942 argued that being a true Norwegian meant needing to 'look beyond Norway, to think and act Germanic. *That* is our best national particularity.'⁹⁹ The author continued his defence of the pan-Germanic idea by pointing to the need to transgress old conventions:

Some got lost in the foreign, some got lost in their own particularity. Perhaps it is the struggle between these oppositional forces, between those longing to break out and those holding on to the old patriotism, which on a deeper level creates the conditions for a particularly Norwegian character. It is a struggle that ultimately results in the unification of the two on a higher level. In this struggle, in this unification, and on this higher expression, is the Norwegian consciousness developed.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Egil Holst Torkildsen, 'Tanker om SS', *Germaneren*, 6:3 (October 1942), pp. 2–3.

⁹⁸ Breien, 'Kamp og Idè', *Ragnarok*, 8:10 (1942), pp. 209–210.

⁹⁹ Kaare Westbye, 'Egenart og Egenhet', *Germaneren*, 1:2 (August 1942), p. 8 (original emphasis).

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

The author first and foremost illustrates a fundamental connection between a particular form of Norwegian National Socialism and the principle of transgression. In the Norwegian context, the act of looking beyond the conventional frames, including national borders, was thus seen as essential to the National Socialist idea. A Norwegian front soldier wrote that ‘National Socialism demands a total reconfiguration. Old concepts cease to have meaning, and are thrown overboard.’¹⁰¹ It was in actual struggle, both theoretically and physically, that the true National Socialist and simultaneously Norwegian character would emerge. Rather than being perceived as incompatible, pan-Germanism and Norwegian nationalism were presented as two mutually strengthening components in the process of fostering a typically *Norwegian* National Socialism. It was a National Socialist ideology that ‘avoided confusing being Germanic with being German’.¹⁰²

VIII

Ideological Incorrectness

Whether it was Vaaben’s Grundtvigian references in his pan-Germanic thinking or whether it was the Norwegians’ discourse on the emergence of ‘Norwegianness’, the act of struggle was seen as pivotal to a true National Socialist identity. The tension between the national particularities of each National Socialist nation and imperialistic impulses to homogenise these particularities for power-political purposes was an issue of pan-Germanic thinking that these Scandinavians were not only well aware of, but also guided by in their works on National Socialist ideology. For geopolitical reasons, the emphasis on struggle took a different meaning within Scandinavian peripheral movements compared to its German centre. Indeed, ‘ideological correctness’ was a way of thinking not confined to these small movements. As several scholars today argue, it was actually central to German National Socialism both in political practice and in its idealised form. But it gained a more concrete meaning in the Scandinavian context through the discourse on pan-Germanism between political reality and idealism. So far, we have looked at ‘ideological incorrectness’ from the point of these individuals’ thinking about macro-political issues regarding the diverse National Socialist nations’ relations with

¹⁰¹ The text titled ‘Frontkjemperånden’ was originally written on 1 June 1944 by the front soldier Thomas Sandborg. After his death on the front in late September 1944, it was published as a dedication to his memory with the title ‘Et politiskt testament: av Oberstormföhrer Sandborg falt 23/9–44’ in *Germaneren*, 42:3 (21 October 1944), p. 1.

¹⁰² Ibid.

each other. Being ‘ideologically incorrect’ in this setting thus meant that the National Socialist identity of each country depended on the safeguarding of their ‘incorrectness’ vis-à-vis the political implementation of National Socialism in other countries. In the next and final section of this chapter, ‘ideological incorrectness’ will be discussed for its function on an individual level, with a primary focus on the Norwegian *Ragnarok* milieu. The oppositional position that the *Ragnarok* individuals found themselves in was a position of ‘incorrectness’ in relation to other National Socialist agents both internationally and nationally, and the argument is that the *Ragnarok* individuals themselves justified this position ideologically. On a personal level too, they saw their individual ‘ideological incorrectness’ as a manifestation of a correct National Socialist identity.

IX *‘Action Idealists’*

The Danish National Socialist writings on Scandinavianism moved beyond being merely a battle between two movements of ideas to include an image of a war between two types of personalities. Vaaben sketched an individualised ideal as he glorified ‘the warrior’ where Scandinavianism was accused of its ‘passive’ (pacifist) and ‘isolationist’ (neutral) character.¹⁰³ Christian Teisen described how these ‘Scandinavian separatists [separatist in the sense of being anti-Nazi] have a vision of the Nordic as the preservation of out-dated and static ideologies that politically avoid the uniting framework that exists under the auspices of the German Reich’.¹⁰⁴ Thus, Vaaben and Teisen described the political idealist who had to battle the passive and corrupt personality that characterised the liberal tradition. But it was not only individuals belonging to self-declared oppositional forces against National Socialism who displayed this type of passive personality. The Norwegian Egil Holst Thorkildsen made it clear that it also included those individuals who called themselves National Socialists but in fact subscribed to an incorrect concept of its meaning, for example, ‘those Germans who acted unsympathetically as compromised National Socialists’.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Vaaben refers to his own articles published in *Flensborg Avis*, July–August 1934 and ‘Den Nordiske Tanke’, *Dansk Udsyn* (December 1935).

¹⁰⁴ Teisen, ‘Separatisme eller Samarbejde’, pp. 13–14.

¹⁰⁵ Riksarkivet, L-sak Oslo politikammer, nr. 2483.

The notion of ascribing to someone a ‘wrong’ perception of National Socialism was often coupled with an accusation of a lack of idealism. In other words, being an idealist was a clear measurement of National Socialist character. The German leader of the Scandinavian office at the NSDAP’s Department of Propaganda (*Reichspropagandaministerium*), Ernst Zuchner, for example, described the entire *Ragnarok* movement as a ‘circle of young Norwegian political idealists, called *Ragnarok*, who moreover referred to themselves as National Socialists’.¹⁰⁶ For opportunistic reasons, Zuchner’s and the *Ragnarok* members’ post-war defences all underlined that there indeed existed an orthodox, totalitarian version of National Socialism that had gradually departed from the original, idealist version. Barth-Heyerdahl recalled a meeting with Zuchner immediately following 9 April 1940, where Zuchner had told him that

you Norwegians must learn to think outside the box [*um die Ecke denken*] [...] You need to be clever, to make oaths with the sole intention to break them. Use all phrases, but act entirely the opposite. It is perfectly allowed against someone like Hitler, who does the same thing.¹⁰⁷

In this NSDAP official, *Ragnarok* had a German ally who shared their opinions on the German imperialist methods. Zuchner had a word for this form of imperialism, he called it ‘Nazi orthodoxy’.¹⁰⁸ ‘They [*Ragnarok*] were full of criticism against the established political system’ and Zuchner saw it as his primary task ‘to make these young Scandinavian idealists aware of the true nature of Nazism and Hitler, his obsession with power and its violent methods – which in reality was a fundamental contradiction to their ideals’.¹⁰⁹

But despite the opportunistic tone of such post-war testimonies, the idealist and reactionary position of the majority of *Ragnarok* members throughout their National Socialist careers points to a continuity that cannot be explained by mere opportunism. Testimonies from individuals with no obvious reason to understate the *Ragnarok* members’ National Socialist convictions are consistent in their labelling of the *Ragnarok* circle as a group of National Socialist idealists. For example, Quisling’s secretary Rolf J. Fuglesang had the following impression of Hans Jacobsen:

¹⁰⁶ Ernst Zuchner testimony in Riksarkivet L-sak Oslo politikammer, nr. 6331. The *Ragnarok* circle, particularly Hans S. Jacobsen and Stein Barth-Heyerdahl, had a close relationship with Ernst Zuchner during the war.

¹⁰⁷ Barth-Heyerdahl’s testimony in *ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

He was an idealist, and not afraid to express his divergent opinions and meanings. He was also a person with an independent nature, who struggled to subordinate to an organisation, or even to the leadership of others. He did, despite his [Nazi] sympathies, take a clearly independent stance when it came to his Norwegian outlook [...] He took a clearly Norwegian stance, and distanced himself from the imperialist tendencies in for example SS policies.¹¹⁰

Jacobsen was described by Quisling's right-hand man Fuglesang as an idealist to the extent that Jacobsen did not hesitate to act incorrectly towards SS authorities. The picture of Jacobsen resonates well with the kind of line in political thinking that the *Ragnarok* member Tor Strand called a 'third way'. Strand was a former NS youth activist who, symptomatically of the *Ragnarok* movement, had left NS in 1936. Strand led the voluntary labour service organisation *Frivillig Norsk Arbeidstjeneste* (later renamed *Arbeidsdugnad*). After 9 April 1940, Strand was advised by Carl Frølich-Hansen, the chief of the labour service which had gone into the hands of NS, and renamed *Nasjonal Samlings Arbeidstjeneste* (AT), to re-enter the party. Fuglesang responded to Strand's request by stating that membership in NS required 'the unconditional recognition of Quisling'.¹¹¹ Strand never re-entered the party and his work at AT was also threatened by people from NS circles who opposed Strand's 'unpolitical attitude',¹¹² where the NS leadership had allegedly listed him as an 'unreliable element, not to be accepted as a member of the party'.¹¹³ Strand explained his unpolitical outlook as driven by the fact that since 1936, he had believed in taking 'an individualistic third position' in politics that implied a political 'modernisation of the democratic system'.¹¹⁴

Tor Strand: 'The synthesis of contradictions that creates totality'

Strand explicitly referred to the Danish political party *Dansk Samling*, which was established in 1936 by Arne Sørensen with their party pamphlet called *Det tredje Standpunkt* ('The Third Way'). *Dansk Samling* advocated a fascist-inspired synthesis of liberal and socialist politics, and this was a political outlook that very much resembled Anders Malling's *Dansk Folkefællesskab* in its critique of the DNSAP's imitation of the German NSDAP.¹¹⁵ The parallels with *Ragnarok*'s position in the Norwegian context are clear as the formation of *Dansk Samling* coincided with the establishment of

¹¹⁰ Statement by Rolf Jørgen Fuglesang, dated 2 October 1945 in *ibid.*

¹¹¹ Riksarkivet, Ls-sak Guldbrandsdalen politikammer, nr. 1098.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ Stein Barth-Heyerdaahl's witness testimony 17 January 1946, in *ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ On *Dansk Samling*, see Henrik Lundbak, *Staten stærk og folket frit: Dansk Samling mellem fascisme og modstandskamp* (Århus: Museum Tusulanums Forlag, 2001).

Ragnarok. Moreover, *Ragnarok*'s exit from NS was based on similar accusations of Quisling's inauthentic National Socialist politics as we find among the Danes in their attitudes to Clausen. It was Strand's belief in the 'third way' that had attracted him to AT in the first place, as an organisation that symbolised 'the possibility of a practice beyond dogmas and political parties'.¹¹⁶ The 'third way' was a call for a political practice based on a principle of ideological incorrectness – an incorrectness towards the kind of ideological homogeneity that undermined fruitful exchanges between the different political parties.

Strand's perception of *Ragnarok*'s role in Norwegian politics cannot be separated from his 'third way' ideology. His idealisation of the unconventional comes through in his description of the published material in *Ragnarok* as works: 'You need to read between the lines' and the entire position of *Ragnarok* as being between the polar opposites on the political spectrum: between the current weakness of the democratic system on the one hand and the Nazi dictatorial politics on the other.¹¹⁷ Strand did not regard this in-between position, however, as a safe and mediocre middle way. Far from it: an unpublished paper with the title 'Reckoning and Outlook' (*Oppgjør og Utsyn*), written after the German occupation, reflects his reactionary and dynamic understanding of the 'third way'. Strand describes a life without opposition as a life that is 'sterile, annihilating, [and] a total destruction of the freedom that lies in contradictions'.¹¹⁸ The experience of German occupation had forced Norwegians to adapt to an environment full of violence, opposition and war. In that way, Strand argued, the occupation symbolised an ideal of constantly transgressing all that is perceived as contradictions: 'The contradiction becomes the inspiring accentuation of itself and the contradiction. It reflects the versatility of life. It dictates life, renewal and the synthesis of contradictions that creates totality.'¹¹⁹ Strand embraced the fighting ingredient of conflict that had become even clearer following the Nazi occupation: 'we had to face conflict and a broadening of the horizon we had to acknowledge ourselves, and were forced to live in opposition'.¹²⁰

Strand developed an equally complex and contradictory attitude towards National Socialist ideology. On the one hand, he argued that Nazi dictatorship was the final consequence of the crisis of democracy

¹¹⁶ Riksarkivet L-sak Guldbrandsdalen politikammer, nr. 1098.

¹¹⁷ Drafts on an article with the title 'Demokratiets Krise' ('the Crisis of Democracy') from 1939 in *ibid*.

¹¹⁸ Strand, 'Oppgjør og Utsyn' in *ibid*.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*.

in Europe – Nazism was in that sense a symbol of failure rather than an authentic ideology.¹²¹ On the other hand, he clarified that it was a specific ‘materialist direction within Nazism’¹²² that had caused National Socialist ideology to be so intimately associated with dictatorship in the first place.¹²³ The latter statement seems to imply that Strand had an idea of a pure, non-corrupt side to National Socialism. His fascination with the work of Norwegian economist and intellectual Erling Winsnes potentially explains how Strand reconciled his attraction to Nazism with his aversion for actual Nazi politics. First of all, Strand was attracted by the *völkisch* ideas that tied his Norwegian nationalism to aspects of Nazi ideology: Strand described the term *Folkenorske* (‘Norwegianness’) as the nation-specific foundation on which Norwegian society must be built. He drew explicit parallels between Winsnes’s position and that of Grundtvig’s conception of ‘Danishness’ in Denmark when he presented Winsnes as the Norwegian equivalent, and an improved version, of the way Grundtvig had led his Danish people.¹²⁴ Similar to the way Vaaben understood the relationship between National Socialism and ‘Danishness’, Strand stated that ‘Nationalism is the political realisation of the *Folkenorske*’ and by that he meant that the more political ideologies, technology and religious ideas were compatible with these ‘*Folkenorske*’ foundations, the greater the likelihood that a true and authentic Norwegian nation would emerge.¹²⁵ The *völkisch* outlook can be seen as the common denominator in Strand’s nationalism and National Socialism, but it was his emphasis on Nazi pluralism that enabled Strand to hold a strong profile within a National Socialist circle such as *Ragnarok* and still condemn dictatorships. The embrace of plurality was an intellectual preoccupation for Strand and it infused all his political activities. In his own publication on Winsnes’s philosophy, Strand described Winsnes as ‘undogmatic, and free of systematic constraints’. In fact, Strand’s argument that future politics must follow a ‘third individualistic line’ seemed a replication of Winsnes’s ‘two wrong lines, and the true third’.¹²⁶ Like Ejnar Vaaben’s fascination with Grundtvigian thinking, Strand held a similar fascination with Winsnes’s contradictory and interactive thinking:

¹²¹ Strand, ‘Det tyske eliteproblem’, in *ibid.*

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ Tor Strand, *Vår vei heter Nordveien: En bok om Erling Winsnes* (Oslo: Gyldendals Forlag, 1945). p. 101. The close relationship between AT, the *Folkenorske* and Winsnes is described by Strand in the article ‘Norsk arbeidstjeneste’, *Ragnarok*, 2:1 (March 1936), p. 1.

¹²⁵ Riksarkivet, L-sak Guldbrandsdalen politikammer nr. 1098.

¹²⁶ Strand, *Vår vei heter Nordveien*.

He [Winsnes] wants to make us uneasy, to unravel and destroy the dream, all that in order to help us to break free from our familiar patterns, to force us to see things from a new angle. That is why his philosophy is free from systems, and provides only a thinly weaved web of allusions, often slippery and self-contradictory.¹²⁷

Strand described Winsnes's method of thinking as the 'contrasting effect' (*kontrastvirkingen*). Different from the materialist direction within Nazism, Strand had seen 'promising impulses from Nazi Germany' where National Socialism seemed the ideology fit to realise his dream of the *Folkenorske*.¹²⁸ For him, Nazism appeared to break with old political structures and modes of thinking, and ideally the ideology resonated with Strand's aversion to conventional politics and conventional thinking more generally. But following the occupation, Strand's activities in AT were threatened by a loss of independence because of increased German efforts at interfering. By 25 September 1940, AT had been subordinated to NS and effectively to the German administration. By then, Strand had urged *Ragnarok* colleague Barth-Heyerdahl to join his efforts in undermining the German influence on AT: 'There was a need for someone willing to disagree with the Germans in their demands and plans.'¹²⁹ It was then that Strand's National Socialist idealism faced Nazi politics for the first time and experienced its constraining effects. Walter Fürst, a colleague in both AT and *Ragnarok*, described Strand as 'a genuine idealist, entirely captured by AT, and so Norwegian in his outlook that he met opposition not only from NS, but also from the Germans'.¹³⁰ His idealism, moreover, was increasingly defined as a particular strand of National Socialism. Against the materialist elements of Nazism depicted by Strand, Thorkildsen similarly called for an idealist revolution: 'we need men, not puppets', he wrote, who do 'not talk National Socialism but act and live National Socialism'.¹³¹

To Hitler: A word of warning from a 'True National Socialist'

The *Ragnarok* member and frequent contributor to the pamphlet Ola Furuseth took Thorkildsen's connection between action and true National Socialist identity one step further. He defined himself explicitly as an 'action idealist' struggling against the corrupt elite, and he simultaneously defined the ideal he found central to National Socialism.¹³² Against the correctness that Thorkildsen despised

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 42.

¹²⁸ Strand's testimony from 20 October 1945, in Riksarkivet Gulbrandsdalen politikammer, nr. 1098.

¹²⁹ Riksarkivet L-sak Oslo politikammer, nr. 6331.

¹³⁰ Testimony from Walter Fürst dated 29 March 1946, in *ibid.*

¹³¹ Egil Holst Thorkildsen, 'De Revolusjonaere', published in *Germaneren* in Riksarkivet L-sak Oslo politikammer, nr. 2483.

¹³² The term 'action idealist' is defined by Furuseth as 'the willpower of the Nordic soul' in Riksarkivet, L-sak politikammer, nr. 651.

as a ‘puppet mentality’, Furuseth incorporated incorrectness into his definition of the real Nazi man. But the corrupt elite to which he referred was not a liberal government, a fascist movement or the Church. In fact, he was describing the SS leadership in Berlin. We shall see in the next and final chapter more precisely how the political relations between these Norwegian individuals and the SS played out. For now, it suffices to pay attention to the image of the SS that comes through in some of Furuseth’s writings, and how it contrasted with his ideal of a true National Socialist individual. It is clear that these two images developed simultaneously and fed each other. In a private letter from 1944, he described the SS head office as an endless struggle against Pharisees and bureaucrats.¹³³ He had also reflected upon Claus von Stauffenberg’s attempt to assassinate Hitler on 20 July 1944, and in a letter from August 1944, he condemned the nature of both Quisling’s and Hitler’s leadership:

Had it not been for all the mini-fuehrers who suppress the voices of the lower ranks of the party, the real idealists, the plot would not have been executed. As it is now, both Hitler and Quisling are sitting with their heads in the clouds, and a circle of opportunists surrounds them.¹³⁴

Furuseth’s experience in the SS had proved to be nothing but ‘a stiff and irresponsible bureaucracy, where no one had clearly defined responsibilities’ and where his own mission to ‘improve certain conditions for the Norwegians within the SS were diminished’.¹³⁵ He described everyday squabbles between Germans and Norwegians at the SS schools, where the ‘Germans called us [the Norwegians] opportunistic Germanics whilst we replied that the Germans were nothing but southern-European “dagos”’.¹³⁶ Furuseth expressed through several letters and other written material how the ‘Germans’ perpetuated a corrupt kind of National Socialism. Idealists were pushed aside to make way for hypocrites. The accusation of Nazi hypocrisy is clearly expressed in a letter written on 5 November 1944 titled ‘A word of warning form a Norwegian to the German people: In the eleventh hour’:

You must admit that now your friends among the world’s nations are few. You had natural allies but they are disappearing one by one. Why? [...] Have you kept your promises? Can you lead other nations and races? [...] I believe I can safely answer no to that question [...] There is nothing wrong with setting the goals high, but don’t be surprised over other nations’ impulses to defend themselves. You have learned to view other people’s land as your ‘Lebensraum’, to view other people as nothing but servants for your own cause. That is precisely how the Jews look at people as ‘Gojim’ – people of a second class and people who only live for the purpose of being used

¹³³ Private correspondence dated 5 November 1944, in *ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

[...] Many occupied areas had to have a Reichskommissar and a German mark on them in order to be seen as worthy of existing in Europe [...] Now, in the eleventh hour you must learn from history, and avoid repeating old mistakes. There is no turning back this time, no bridge leading back [...] You have a fuhrer looked up to by all conscious Germanics across the world, and we are willing to call ourselves 'national traitors' to join you in your world mission [...] One of the greatest tragedies in history will repeat itself and you will destroy the white man's world completely if this will not be your victory. If not, you will go on the path of suffering as the Jews did 2000 years ago, and history will repeat itself without exception. The exodus, the slavery, the persecutions, the hatred from others – you will be a persecuted people without a home.¹³⁷

His desperate attempts, in his own words, to warn the Nazi leadership of its dominant and homogenising politics continued until the very end of the war. Increasingly, this was a project with no clear allies. While it had begun with a criticism limited to the Reichskommissariat's policies in Norway, Furuseth's greater involvement in the SS organisation in 1943 expanded his negative views on Quisling's NS and German power politics to include the SS. This role of being in constant opposition is captured in Furuseth's trial records where Norwegian judicial authorities held the impression that

There is a constant sense of opposition in the accused's (Furuseth's) description of his activities – an opposition to anyone he encountered. The trial has illuminated his opposition to Karl Leib, the chief of the SS head office in Norway, where the conflict led to Furuseth being ordered to do front-service. He barely managed to avoid it. This oppositional relationship relates to Furuseth's claim that his education of the front-soldiers was 'Norwegian' and that this was his way to support them. It was especially the editing of the SS pamphlet which caused tensions between Furuseth and the Germans, as Furuseth tried to incorporate distinctive Norwegian material in its content.¹³⁸

Beyond the struggle against Christian universalism, the real threat to the National Socialist order came from circles that were far more difficult to detach ideologically. Similarly to how Imerslund described 'traitors in our own ranks', Vaaben claimed that 'it is not the obvious enemies that are the worst. The most dangerous are those who falsify National Socialism from within.'¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Letter written by Furuseth: 'Ett alvorsord til det tyske folk: 5 minutter for 12. Av en nordmann', dated 5 November 1944, in Riksarkivet, L-sak Østerdal politikammer nr. 651.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Vaaben, *Hagekorset over Danmark*, p. 37.

X

Chapter Conclusion

The struggle against cultural imperialism that united *Ragnarok* with Ejnar Vaaben and Aage Andersen in Denmark thus did not end with their battle against Christianity. The previous chapter on the concept of ‘political religion’ focused on how ‘theological incorrectness’ played into the relationship between the Scandinavian Nazis’ own definitions of National Socialism and their rejection of Christian religion. This chapter has shown that it was not only theological but also ‘ideological incorrectness’ that informed *Ragnarok* members and their Danish colleagues when facing what they perceived as the new dogmas of Quisling’s and Clausen’s politics and Nazi foreign policy. There were similarities between the criticism of Christianity identified as a principle of ‘theological incorrectness’ and the later critique we find among these Scandinavian intellectuals that was directed against the policies of Nazi occupation. While this opposition was formulated as a struggle between divergent notions of a *correct* National Socialism, this chapter has found that embracing the idea of ‘ideological incorrectness’ represented a claim to ideological purity in its own right.

This chapter has sought to make two interrelated points about National Socialism and ‘ideological incorrectness’: first, ‘ideological incorrectness’ identifies the logic of differentiation that Scandinavian Nazis used when setting *their own* rules for the relationship between National Socialist movements in the Nordic peripheries and the Third Reich. This logic underpins the way we can understand the transnational relations that existed between various Scandinavian National Socialist movements at the time. It also illuminates the actual discourse among these individuals about this transnational relationship. Second, that dimension of ‘incorrectness’ could only function as a guiding principle if it resonated – i.e. was justified theoretically – with a more universal perception of what National Socialist ideology entailed. ‘Ideological incorrectness’ was indeed a historical reality considering the heterogeneity among Nazi movements as well as being a reality that these movements were aware of. But above all, this ‘ideological incorrectness’ was an affirmation of the kind of uncompromising and transgressive character that scholars today describe as generic features of National Socialist ideology.

Chapter 6: ‘Fed Up with *Weltanschauung*’

Years of Radicalisation and Disillusion, 1940–1945

Introduction

The psychiatrist François Bayle’s post-war analysis of the leader of *Einsatzgruppe D*, Otto Ohlendorf, likened Robert Stevenson’s figure ‘Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde’ to Ohlendorf’s conflicted personality. Bayle described Ohlendorf as ‘brilliant, but with a limited analytical and intellectual capacity that was subordinated to a kind of idealism not freed from fanaticism’.¹ The Nazi dream of a society where the *Volksgemeinschaft* replaced ‘confession’ was, in Bayle’s analysis, a manifestation of this fanatic idealism.² A copy of Bayle’s observations is located in Copenhagen, among the psychological investigations made in the post-war trials of Danish National Socialists, and they probably functioned as guidelines for Danish investigators in the cases against their own ‘national traitors’. Fanaticism and radicalism were not absent among Danish Nazis, where Aage Andersen, for example, was described as the Danish ‘Julius Streicher’ for his rabid anti-Semitism and Ejnar Vaaben’s racially infused pan-Germanism was regarded as a trait of a ‘political fanatic’.³ But as it turned out, Andersen’s organised anti-Semitic activities were put to an end in the mid-1940s: Werner Best and the German authorities realised the complicating consequences that Andersen’s radicalism might have for the politics of occupation and German financial support was consequently withdrawn.⁴ And Ejnar Vaaben, as we shall see, ended his career as a disillusioned Nazi collaborator.

A similar fate met Andersen’s and Vaaben’s Scandinavian colleagues, and the final years of their careers will be the focus of this last chapter. While the previous chapter focused on the ideological dilemmas that awaited these Scandinavian intellectuals as Nazi Germany occupied their home

¹ Copy of François Bayle, *Psychologie et Etique du National-Socialisme*, in Rigsarkivet, nr. 1355 Justitsministeriets Psykiatriske Undersøgelseklinik, ‘1935–51 Diverse sager vedrørende Besættelsestiden’, box F14 ‘DNSAP’.

² *Ibid.*

³ On Vaaben’s image as a pioneering Nazi, see John T. Lauridsen, ‘Den Første Graenserdedder’, pp. 411–419. Andersen was described as ‘Denmark’s Julius Streicher’ in various milieus including the first Danish historical account of the time of occupation in Børge Outze, ‘Vore hjemlige nazister’, in Wilhelm LaCour (ed.), *Danmark under besættelsen vol. II* (Copenhagen: Westermann, 1946), pp. 449–478.

⁴ Werner Best to Auswärtige Amt, 15 April 1943 in Lauridsen (ed.), *Werner Best’s Korrespondance*, p. 493.

countries, this chapter will give a more detailed account of the organisational and political mechanisms that underpinned these dilemmas. Ejnar Vaaben, in *Schalburgkorpset* and the Norwegian *Ragnarok* circle, continued to have access to the inner circles of the NSDAP's decision-making regarding Denmark and Norway – only to realise their political impotence rather than importance. While Ohlendorf's National Socialist fanaticism turned him into a mass murderer on an unprecedented scale, these Scandinavian Nazi intellectuals are more difficult to position on the spectrum 'between idealist humanism and murderous fanaticism' that Bayle had identified in the Nazi worldview.⁵ There is an obvious difference between Ohlendorf and these Scandinavians, a structural difference which will also function as the framework of this chapter: while all of them praised the violence of the National Socialist *kämpferische Weltanschauung*, geopolitical borders and institutional boundaries lent the Scandinavians' understanding of it a different meaning. Their version of the Nazi 'fighting worldview' not only engaged in idealist battles against liberalism, the confessional church and fascism, but also against the imperialism and 'fanaticism' of the Third Reich as it occupied Denmark and Norway on 9 April 1940. In Vaaben's own words, the idea 'that swastika cannot stand against swastika is merely a phrase – of course it can, and it does'.⁶ The emphasis that Vaaben and his colleagues put on the pivotal position of pluralism in National Socialist ideology has been discussed above and this final chapter will explain how this embrace of pluralism became for them a political necessity.

This final chapter focuses on the situation following the German occupation where 'ideological incorrectness' took its most political and tangible form. It presents the histories of the Scandinavian SS organisations *Schalburgkorpset* and *Germanske SS Norge* as Vaaben and the profiled *Ragnarok* members figured in them during the occupation years. The chapter is structured into two main parts: firstly, the Norwegian case study of *Ragnarok's* involvement in *Germanske SS Norge* (GSSN) and secondly, the Danish *Schalburgkorpset* with Vaaben as the ideological leader of the corps' educational branch. Despite this division, both national case studies reveal striking similarities when it comes to how the 'war' unfolded between various Scandinavian and German visions of the purpose of these organisations. More extensive accounts of the mechanisms behind the establishment of GSSN are available, and research already shows how the organisation comprised divergent pan-

⁵ François Bayle, *Psychologie et Etique*, Rigsarkivet, nr 1355, box 14.

⁶ A quotation of Vaaben made by the nationalist conservative historian Wilhelm LaCour in an article published in *Graensevagten*, September 1934. In Rigsarkivet, nr. 06540, box 3.

Germanic ideologies.⁷ The power struggles that were characteristic of both organisations, however, are important to cover here in order to be clear about the kind of organisational and political contexts within which these Scandinavian intellectuals operated. With these contexts established, the particular form of transnational pan-Germanism that was discussed in chapter 3 will be further analysed as these idealist visions finally faced the possibilities of political concretisation following 9 April 1940. With these possibilities came expectations and this chapter will describe a period that the main subjects of this thesis recalled as the ‘dark years’. The geopolitical realities that had been lurking in the background in the interwar years were now all the more obvious and the rules and practices of political occupation had once and for all illuminated the paradoxes of the Nazi anti-confessionalist gospel. In response, the ‘fighting worldview’ became the ideological weapon for these Scandinavians in claiming a National Socialist identity freed from the domination of Nazi Germany and which ultimately emphasised pluralism at the centre of its ideology.

I

Norway under Occupation

‘Three wars went on in Norway during the occupation: Germans against Norwegians, Germans against Germans and Norwegians against Norwegians.’⁸ In his post-war trial, the *Ragnarok* editor Hans S. Jacobsen described the five years of the German occupation of Norway and his own role as a ‘Nazi collaborator’. There should be no doubt that emphasising grey zones and complexities within the Nazi milieu was an integral part of Jacobsen’s defence strategy. Indeed, he had obvious reasons to stress that the National Socialist milieu in Norway was more heterogeneous than one might have believed at the time. As the editor of GSSN’s propaganda organ *Germaneren* between June 1942 and January 1943, Jacobsen contributed actively to its ideological outlook in a formative period for the GSSN organisation. In fact, many of Jacobsen’s colleagues in GSSN and *Ragnarok* would similarly outline their post-war defences with the main explanation that they had entered GSSN to undermine the organisation and the entire German occupation system. At the same time, when we look into their intellectual production, their critique of Nazi policies – expressed both intellectually and politically

⁷ For more recent research, see Emberland and Kott, *Himmlers Norge* and Olav Bogen, *Fremst i fylkingen: Germanske SS Norge. Organisasjonens historie, skoleringsvirksomhet og ideologi* (Oslo: University of Oslo, 2008).

⁸ Riksarkivet, L-sak Moss politikammer nr. 488, box 3.

– were often accompanied by fierce National Socialist propaganda. Rather than being signs of declining Nazi convictions, their actions instead appear as desperate attempts to safeguard the ‘pure’ core of National Socialism from what was perceived as the corrupt and ‘false’ forces led by Quisling and Terboven.

These ‘three wars’ all have in common the fact that they fought over the ‘right’ implementation of ideology in politics. Regardless of whether we look into the Norwegian Nazis’ opposition to German ‘imperialism’, German internal conflicts between the SS policies and the German Foreign Ministry (*Auswärtiges Amt*), or *Ragnarok*’s criticism of Quisling’s *Nasjonal Samling* (NS), a self-proclaimed National Socialist identity did not necessarily contradict an opposition to aspects of Nazi policies.

Germanske SS Norge between nationalism and pan-Germanism

The proclamation of the establishment of *Germanske SS Norge* on 21 July 1942 stressed that ‘Germanske SS Norge is a National Socialist formation of soldiers with Nordic heritage who adhere to a Nordic world-view. It is an independent sub-division of NS, directly subordinated to the NS leader.’⁹ Yet, conflict within GSSN throughout its existence was caused by diverging visions of the organisation’s purpose. Some members had envisioned it as a military organisation with Waffen-SS recruitment as its main task, while others saw GSSN as primarily a cultural and ideological formation. The majority of *Ragnarok* members belonged to the latter group.¹⁰ What united these camps, however, was the common perception – which was implied in the official proclamation cited above – that GSSN represented a Norwegian, rather than German-led, elite formation of exceptional National Socialists.

Gradually a more cynical view of the organisation emerged among the Norwegians. The NS party secretary, Rolf Jørgen Fuglesang, described tensions emerging even during the establishment of *Germanske SS*, the pre-runner of *Germanske SS Norge*, and was not just evident with the later GSSN. The idea of *Germanske SS* was delivered to the NS leadership during a meeting with Himmler in the summer of 1941, where ‘the attempt seemed to have come as somewhat of a surprise for Quisling, and that he [Quisling] in reality was not that persuaded by the thought, but agreed due to strategic

⁹ ‘Partiforordning om “Germanske SS Norge”’, *Germaneren* (July 1942), p. 1.

¹⁰ Riksarkivet, L-sak Oslo politikammer, nr. 3003.

concerns'.¹¹ The later establishment of GSSN was envisioned by high-ranking NS members like Fuglesang as just another way for the Germans to gain control over the organisation. Despite promises of cooperation, GSSN was looked upon as an extended arm of the SS which, as Fuglesang expressed it, ran 'contrary to Norwegian national interests'.¹²

GSSN was marked by SS elitism and was never intended to become a mass movement; it comprised 1,200 men at the end of 1943, including 400–500 policemen and 400 front soldiers.¹³ Its propaganda organ *Germaneren* was established on 1 July 1942, with new editions published every second week until January 1943 when production became weekly. With a head office in Oslo, the organisational reach of GSSN was structured through geographical zones that followed the 15 Norwegian counties, with one leader, *Stormfører*, in each county. These leaders were generally unpaid, although there were exceptions, and the entire enterprise of GSSN was largely based on voluntary work.¹⁴ In addition to being a Norwegian male aged between 17 and 40 with a minimum height of 1.70 m., an aspiring member of GSSN would have to meet three fundamental requirements upon entering the organisation. First, one had to have held the status of aspiring member for one year. The following conditions dealt with racial matters, where the aspirant had to have genealogical documentation that confirmed his 'Nordic' heritage, as well as having his 'hereditary and racial measurements confirmed positive'.¹⁵ In terms of political affiliation, the aspiring member had to either be a member of NS *or* have served the Waffen-SS *or* *Den Norske Legion* (a sub-division of the Waffen-SS comprised only of Norwegian soldiers). If none of these criteria were met an application could only be accepted directly by the NS secretariat.

From an SS point of view, the plans to establish GSSN were a result of the growing concern within the Waffen-SS leadership regarding the ideological motivations among Norwegian front soldiers.¹⁶ In the first half of 1942, with Himmler's permission, negotiations took place between Gottlob Berger (the Waffen-SS leader), Terboven (the Reichskommissariat) and Quisling to form an *Allgemeine SS* organisation in Norway. While the NS representatives were involved in the process, the establishment

¹¹ Report from 21 January 1941 on Fuglesang's account of the establishment of *SS Norge*, in Riksarkivet, L-sak Oslo politikammer, nr. 2125.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ The numbers refer to those provided by Emberland and Kott in *Himmler's Norge*, p. 246.

¹⁴ Karl Leib witness testimony in Riksarkivet, L-sak Moss politikammer, nr. 488.

¹⁵ From the pamphlet 'Germanske SS' by Asbjørn Hansen, 1943 in Riksarkivet, L-sak Oslo politikammer, nr. 3003.

¹⁶ Emberland and Kott, *Himmler's Norge*, p. 341.

of GSSN was also a symbol of a more interventionist German line regarding the recruitment of Waffen-SS soldiers in Norway. This intervention effectively implied a compromise in Quisling's role in the recruitment process. At one of the meetings regarding the establishment of the GSSN, *Reichsjugendführer* ('Reich Youth Leader') Artur Axmann had, according to a Norwegian GSSN member, described the NS as 'useless' and ridiculed Quisling.¹⁷

GSSN received financial backing from the NSDAP in Munich from where funding was channelled through the SS office *Germanische Leitstelle* in Norway. The whole enterprise was part of a wider geopolitical experiment of establishing an inter-Germanic order in all Nazi-occupied 'Germanic' countries and simultaneously expanding the SS. Subordinated to the SS Main Office in Berlin, a *Germanische Leitstelle* was first established in each country, where *Germanische SS* (in Norway, Denmark, Belgium and the Netherlands) functioned as the first offices with non-German leaders. The leader of the *Germanische Leitstelle* in Norway from June 1942 was Karl Leib who in turn was directly subordinated to Gottlob Berger, a Waffen-SS general and chief of the SS Main Office who also happened to be Leib's father-in-law. Leib described the German purposes of GSSN as a wider and more ideologically informed aim to 'create a basis for communication between the Germanic people and the Germans, and raise understanding for the German struggle in the east'.¹⁸

Internal organisational divisions

GSSN was part of a web of military and political National Socialist organisations in Norway that had emerged by the second half of 1942. The SS stronghold in Norway had begun through organisational measures taken in 1940 with the establishment of the *Dienststelle der Höheren SS- und Polizeiführer* (HSSPF). This institution provided the SS with control over the Norwegian police, at the expense of the Reichskommissariat, and first and foremost represented a divide in the Nazi occupational policies in Norway between the SS and Terboven's Reichskommissariat.¹⁹ Although the differences between the two Nazi institutions should not be exaggerated, it set the scene for the clear and more outspoken conflict between Quisling's *Hirden* and the GSSN that developed a couple of years later. In January 1941, Jonas Lie, the Norwegian chief of police, had already established *Norges SS* (NSS) as the predecessor to GSSN. NSS was, just as its successor GSSN, entirely separate from NS's military group *Hirden* as the latter organisation was subordinated to Terboven's *Einsatzstab*. The *Einsatzstab*

¹⁷ Riksarkivet, L-sak Oslo politikammer, nr. 2125.

¹⁸ Witness testimony by Karl Leib in *ibid*.

¹⁹ Hans-Dietrich Look, *Quisling, Rosenberg og Terboven* (Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 1972), pp. 255–278.

was comprised of NSDAP members recruited by Terboven and placed as representatives of the Reichskommissariat in the various Norwegian counties. The short history of NSS reflects aspects of the later GSSN's position, as NSS was a project undermined primarily by diverging German forces and power politics. While the men within the *Einsatzstab* tried to strengthen *Hirden*, doing so effectively reduced recruitment to NSS.

As preparations for a new SS organisation took place in spring 1942, Leib was sent to Norway to undertake a thorough intervention in an already chaotic – and from the SS point of view – unsatisfactory Norwegian National Socialist milieu. At the time of the establishment of GSSN, the structures for potential conflict were thus already set. Fuglesang described a growing struggle between NS and GSSN in the years after 1942, with constant German attempts to isolate the organisation from NS influence.²⁰ As Leib initially sought to release GSSN from the control of NS in order to broaden the recruitment basis, tensions quickly emerged between Leib, as a representative of SS, and Quisling.²¹ The Norwegian Leif Schjøren, who led GSSN from April 1943 to February 1945, confirmed this situation. Schjøren stated in his post-war trial that 'according to official declarations, GSSN was intended as an independent sub-division of NS', but that, as he continued, 'GSSN was entirely independent of NS, and many of its members were not members of the NS [...]' It is safe to say that there were tensions between GSSN and NS.'²² Schjøren further claimed that Fuglesang had spoken of GSSN as 'the common ground for all NS opponents and those unwilling to subordinate to the party discipline'.²³ Fuglesang himself mentioned the conflict with Leib, where Fuglesang described GSSN as 'a German attempt to expand its military position in Norway in the event of German victory. Indeed the Germans had purely imperialist ambitions in their so-called Germanic cooperation.'²⁴ This situation, according to a former Waffen-SS soldier, was considered serious enough to prompt a German order to assassinate Fuglesang based on his opposition to GSSN.²⁵

The conflict that had originated in diverging political constellations thus soon developed into the perceptions of two equally National Socialist yet contradictory ideological camps. It was a

²⁰ Witness testimony of Rolf Jørgen Fuglesang, *ibid.*

²¹ Witness testimony of Karl Leib, *ibid.*

²² Riksarkivet, L-sak Oslo politikammer, nr. 3003.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Witness testimony of Rolf Jørgen Fuglesang, *ibid.*

²⁵ Riksarkivet, L-sak Oslo politikammer, nr. 1099, box 1.

widespread perception at the time that the NS represented a particular ‘national line’ compared to the ‘German-friendly’ GSSN. The GSSN organisation, in turn, was perceived among these ‘nationalists’ to be ‘dictated by Leib and entirely in the hands of the Germans’.²⁶ One of the clearest expressions of this Norwegian–German National Socialist divide is the conflict that developed between *Hirden* and GSSN regarding the control of Norwegian front soldiers. Joint membership of *Hirden* and GSSN was not allowed, and this led to constant struggle regarding membership numbers.²⁷ The fundamental difference in outlook between the two groups was clearly drawn up in the propaganda organ *Skuggsjå*, associated with the NS’s youth organisation *NS Ungdomsfylking* (NSUF). One article in the pamphlet separated the National Socialist tasks for GSSN and *Hirden* according to a pan-Germanic and Norwegian divide:

Our comrades in Germanske SS Norge have as their main task to build a bridge between Norwegians and other Germanic people. The mission of *Hirden* is to bring out the faith in our own strength and destiny, which eventually will lead to national resurrection and the common goal for all sub-organisations: *a National Socialist Norway. In a strong and unbreakable community between all Germanic people.*²⁸

In a confidential report titled ‘The relationship between Germanske SS and *Hirden*’, the *Hirden* leader Oliver Møystad stated in November 1942 that ‘*Germanske SS* is expanding at the expense of *Hirden*. Recruitment to *Germanske SS* must be halted.’²⁹ Møystad’s colleague describes German attempts, especially from Leib, to remove Møystad in response to his attempts to undermine the expansion of the SS in general and *Germanske SS* in particular. In Møystad’s view, ‘GSSN was Leib’s “playhouse” where Leib was preoccupied with turning *Hird* men into GSSN members.’³⁰ From the viewpoint of GSSN, the relationship between the two organisations was given much attention through the monthly reports submitted by GSSN leader Leif Schjøren to the Norwegian head of SS and Chief of Police, Jonas Lie. One report from August 1943 concludes that *Hirden*’s attitudes towards GSSN had become increasingly hostile.³¹ A *Hirden* county leader further stated that there were rumours within NS that there were Germans in certain circles who ‘sought to remove individuals with this nationalist outlook,

²⁶ Report conducted 16 April 1944 and presented 21 September 1945 in Riksarkivet, L-sak Oslo politikammer, nr. 3003.

²⁷ A later agreement between *Hirden* and GSSN dated 4 January 1944 declared that an aspiring GSSN or *Hirden* member would have to choose between membership in one of the organisations. Only in leadership positions was simultaneous membership in NSUF/*Hirden* and GSSN allowed. See ‘Personalavdelingen’ and ‘Betingelsene for opptagelse i Germanske SS Norge’, in *SS-Meddelelser*, 1:1 (August 1944), pp. 16–17.

²⁸ Trond Rønning, ‘Ideologisk Skolering’, *Skuggsjå*, 2 (December 1943), p. 477, (original emphasis).

²⁹ Riksarkivet, L-sak Østerdal politikammer, nr. 3550.

³⁰ Witness testimony, Arthur Qvist, March 1946 in *ibid.*

³¹ Riksarkivet, L-sak Oslo politikammer, nr. 3003.

and replace them with leading positions representing a pan-Germanic outlook, first and foremost GSSN'.³²

These dual structures between GSSN and *Hirden* also represented deeper issues of diverging German lines in Nazi occupation politics. The tensions between Reichskommissar Terboven and the SS were, in Jacobsen's words, indeed a war of 'Germans against Germans' which directly sowed the seeds for a 'Norwegians against Norwegians' conflict in the relationship between *Hirden* and GSSN. It is against the backdrop of these dual wars that we can also see another 'Norwegian against Norwegian' war: the relationship between the two parallel military groups (*Hirden* and GSSN) was effectively translated into a conflict between NS men and NS opponents. In this vein, the mapping of these organisational identities confirms the Norwegian nationalist versus the German pan-Germanic divide, where NS and *Hirden* is positioned against the SS and the GSSN, with Terboven and the Reichskommissariat as the balancing agent. What this image leaves out, however, is a more in-depth look at the rationale behind Norwegian nationalists entering the GSSN. Several GSSN members would later claim that a third type of conflict, 'Norwegians against Germans', actually took place within this SS organisation, thus confirming divergent understandings of pan-Germanism.

With regards to the use of the term 'pan-Germanism', it might appear paradoxical to identify a pan-Germanic thinking on behalf of *Ragnarok* and certain GSSN members who clearly opposed certain pan-Germanic policies of the Third Reich. However, drawing from chapter 3 of this thesis, 'pan-Germanism' was as integral to German expansionism as it was to Norwegian National Socialists, and from there conflicting conceptions emerged. As Emberland states, 'it is easy to assume that *Ragnarok* saw German expansionism as the realisation of pan-Germanism, but that was certainly not the case'.³³

The GSSN leadership: A pan-Germanic Norwegian nationalism

There were Norwegians, including *Ragnarok* members and others, who were not content to call themselves mere nationalists. They would rather speak of themselves as *nationalist advocates of a pan-Germanic order* with characteristic opposition to Quisling's NS. While the nationality factor indeed created natural divisions, the tensions within the pan-Germanic organisation GSSN were ultimately brought about by competing perceptions of pan-Germanism as such. Those *Ragnarok*

³² Witness testimony from Fylkesfører Per Gjerstad, in *ibid*.

³³ Emberland, *Religion og Rase*, p. 154.

members who entered GSSN in 1942 were accompanied by other Norwegians who shared their pan-Germanic ideas. One of them was Leif Schjøren, who functioned as the GSSN Chief of Staff for almost two years. In an article published after the liberation, a Norwegian Social Democratic pamphlet framed Schjøren and Egil Holst Thorkildsen, editor of GSSN's pamphlet *Germaneren*, as a group of 'Quislings in a war against Quisling'.³⁴ A former NS member would claim that Schjøren had seen possibilities for GSSN to 'concentrate all Norwegian forces willing to undermine German assaults in Norway, as well as unfortunate developments within NS'.³⁵ Schjøren was an NS member determined to overthrow Quisling from his leadership position and replace him with more pro-German forces. Schjøren stressed his initial fascination with the National Socialist achievements he had witnessed on his travels to Nazi Germany in 1938, and further pointed to the attraction he felt for the elitist image of the GSSN as a 'Norwegian, purely cultural formation on National Socialist grounds' and a 'formation with the highest possible demands on moral and ethical standards'.³⁶ In his post-war trial, he maintained that his membership in NS had never been opportunistic but was based on a fundamental idealism, an idealism which had ultimately alienated him from the party. This image of the GSSN leader is confirmed in several witness testimonies where Schjøren's idealism was often mentioned explicitly in relation to his outspoken opposition to Quisling and other leading NS figures such as Fuglesang.³⁷

Schjøren's position was thus understood through the lens of the Norwegian nationalist versus German pan-Germanic division, and he was portrayed as one of 'the Germans' henchmen' aiming to transform the GSSN from being Quisling's personal lifeguards into a purely German organisation.³⁸ This conflict eventually led to Schjøren's dismissal from his leadership post as he was called in to Quisling's office in December 1944 with accusations of 'undermining the movement'. He was also ordered to do front service in the Waffen-SS and thus immediately leave GSSN.³⁹ It is therefore clear that despite pan-Germanic idealist intentions that resonated ideologically with the SS's visions, a conflict with Quisling did in many instances lead to German repercussions.

³⁴ 'Quislingenes krig mot Quisling' published in *Arbeiderbladet for Social-Demokraten Hovedorgan for Det norske Arbeiderparti* on 19 May 1945, and located in Riksarkivet, L-sak Oslo politikammer, nr. 3003.

³⁵ Witness testimony by Axel Buhs, 10 November 1945, in Riksarkivet, L-sak Oslo politikammer, nr. 3003.

³⁶ Statement by Schjøren in *ibid.*

³⁷ Witness statement by a former GSSN member, 7 February 1946, in *ibid.*

³⁸ 'Quislingenes krig mot Quisling', *Arbeiderbladet*.

³⁹ Statement by Schjøren in Riksarkivet, L-sak Oslo politikammer, nr. 3003.

Schjøren's colleague Erik Thorkildsen, also an NS member, became an ally in Schjøren's work to undermine Quisling's position. Thorkildsen was offered the role as editor of *Germaneren* and viewed the pamphlet as a potentially fruitful portal for criticising 'unhealthy developments within NS'.⁴⁰ He explained his motivation for joining GSSN as primarily based on its role as a National Socialist alternative to NS:

Those National Socialists in opposition to NS were thrilled by the line taken by *Germaneren* and seized every opportunity to express opinions there which they were banned from publishing elsewhere. This 'negative line' adopted by GSSN met with complaints both from German and Norwegian [National Socialist] authorities.⁴¹

Thorkildsen justified his collaborative role in serving an organisation, which at least formally was subordinated to NS, by pointing to several NS members' misunderstanding of National Socialist ideology: 'an important factor to consider is that the majority of the NS leadership was, in my opinion, not National Socialist'.⁴² One of his weekly editorial columns was titled 'The opportunists' (*korkene*) where Thorkildsen outspokenly stated that

within NS, it is not easy to separate the fools from the good ones. The events since 1940 should indeed have convinced the Norwegian people that their future is in the name of National Socialism, in friendly cooperation and absolute equal relations to Germany. NS has gained so many new members that it is now difficult to keep track of [the ideological authenticity of] each individual [...] Those who call themselves National Socialists must live as National Socialists.⁴³

It was not only members of the NS who in Thorkildsen's opinion perpetuated a wrong conception of National Socialism. He added that he viewed 'those Germans who acted unsympathetically as compromised National Socialists'.⁴⁴ In his definition of 'unsympathetic' actions, Thorkildsen most probably included the joint measures taken by the Reichskommissariat and Quisling against him by the second half of 1944. During the following six months, Thorkildsen was repeatedly called into the Reichskommissariat's press office where he was threatened with being sacked from his editorial position as a result of *Germaneren*'s 'negative line'. By March 1945, and despite complaining about these threats directly to Terboven, Thorkildsen was forced to leave *Germaneren* and was sent to

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Riksarkivet, L-sak Oslo politikammer, nr. 2483.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Editorial Column, 'Korkene', in *Germaneren* (1942), p. 1.

⁴⁴ Riksarkivet, L-sak Oslo politikammer, nr. 2483.

Germany.⁴⁵ Just like Schjøren, Thorkildsen's writings show his idealist outlook where he portrayed himself as a 'true' National Socialist with a mission to purify GSSN and the Norwegian National Socialist milieu from false and compromised followers.

While the attempts to undermine NS also caused strained relations with the German authorities, both Thorkildsen and Schjøren were nevertheless seen by their National Socialist colleagues as followers of a German line. Several witness testimonies would describe Schjøren as 'German-friendly'. Although this was obvious, considering his position within GSSN, Fuglesang's statement confirms Schjøren's relatively high support for the German authorities within the GSSN: 'Although Schjøren held sincere nationalist sentiments, I also had the impression he was not aware of the dangerous implications of a formation like GSSN in Norway.'⁴⁶ In addition to his work in *Germaneren*, Thorkildsen's career during the German occupation makes him appear as a distinguished Norwegian collaborator; in the summer of 1940, he volunteered for a position as translator for the Reichskommissariat as well as serving as an interpreter for the German security department SD (*Sicherheitsdienst*) from 25 August 1940 to 5 June 1942.⁴⁷ As two of eight men, Thorkildsen and Schjøren were distinguished for their worthy efforts within GSSN in January 1945.⁴⁸ Taking this close cooperation with German institutions into account, it was stated in the final verdict of his post-war trial that Thorkildsen 'sought to undermine the [NS] party leadership for its failed capacity to establish National Socialist ideas in cooperation with Germany'.⁴⁹ In this view, Thorkildsen's opposition to NS was motivated by his National Socialist radicalism and willingness to collaborate with the Nazi regime, where NS was simply not radical enough.

The histories of Schjøren and Thorkildsen broaden the framework of National Socialist idealist opposition within GSSN. Since opposition extended well beyond the *Ragnarok* circle, Fuglesang pointedly described the GSSN as 'a composition of oppositional elements to the NS'.⁵⁰ At the same time, Schjøren and Thorkildsen were opponents of sorts; they were being decorated for outstanding SS service and, thanks to their NS opposition, they acted in ways that were regarded as purely 'German-friendly'. This rather clear-cut siding with the SS at the expense of Quisling ran contrary to

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Witness testimony Rolf Jørgen Fuglesang in Riksarkivet, L-sak Oslo politikammer, nr. 3003.

⁴⁷ Riksarkivet, L-sak Oslo politikammer, nr. 2483.

⁴⁸ In *SS-Meddelelser*, 1:3 (October 1944), p. 4.

⁴⁹ Final report, dated May 1947, Riksarkivet, L-sak Oslo politikammer, nr. 2483.

⁵⁰ Witness testimony Rolf Jørgen Fuglesang in Riksarkivet, L-sak Oslo politikammer, nr. 3003.

the rather more ambivalent activities of other members within GSSN. The rest of this chapter draws from these insights into the extent and breadth of GSSN's oppositional identity to focus more narrowly on the activities of the *Ragnarok* members.

II

Ragnarok Activities in GSSN

Several leading *Ragnarok* men shaped both the ideological propaganda organs of GSSN and the practices of ideological education within the organisation. When the first edition of *Germaneren* was released on 25 July 1942, it was not Thorkildsen who held the editorial position but the *Ragnarok* editor Jacobsen. Jacobsen was offered the position in June 1942 by Lie, who ignored Quisling's refusal to accept Jacobsen as the editor of *Germaneren*.⁵¹ In the initial phase of GSSN's establishment, the aim had been simply to incorporate *Ragnarok* into the organisation and use it as the propaganda organ of GSSN.⁵² While Jacobsen rejected the proposal, these plans indicate that the men who outlined the future of GSSN envisioned an ideological profile closer to that of *Ragnarok*.

Ola Furuseth was another *Ragnarok* member who shaped the ideological outlook of GSSN as he joined the organisation in July 1942. Until May 1943, Furuseth functioned as the ideological leader of the indoctrination courses, established by the *Germanische Leitstelle* and executed through GSSN, for aspiring SS men in Norway.⁵³ Since GSSN was responsible for the production of material used in ideological teaching, the so-called 'SS pamphlets' (*SS-skolehæften*), the Norwegians Holst Thorkildsen and Furuseth's successor as ideological leader, Rolf Wessel Karlsen, were the main contributors to this essential ideological curriculum for the SS schools. A second important SS publication in Norway was *Germansk Månedshæfte* (later renamed *Germansk Budstikke*). This pamphlet was published through Jacobsen's own publishing house *Kamban Forlag* which also published the *Ragnarok* pamphlet.

⁵¹ Witness statement Karl Leib, in Riksarkivet, L-sak Moss politikammer, nr. 488, box 1.

⁵² Jacobsen's testimony, p. 18, *ibid*.

⁵³ According to Karl Leib and Leif Schjøren, the SS schools in Kongsvinger, Norway, were firstly dictated through orders from Berlin, secondly approved by chief of police Jonas Lie and thirdly executed by Norwegian GSSN men. In Riksarkivet, L-sak Oslo politikammer, nr. 3003.

Despite Norwegian contributors and publicists, there were limitations to the Norwegian influence on this material. Both the SS pamphlet and *Germansk Budstikke* were dominated by German SS propaganda, and hardly contained the kind of critical commentary that could be found in both *Germaneren* and *Ragnarok* at the time. Moreover, the attempt to influence the propaganda material among the Norwegian ideological leaders of GSSN is a clear sign of deeper tensions between Norwegian and German visions of the organisation. Similar to the criticism Thorkildsen faced as editor of *Germaneren*, Wessel Karlsen's time as ideological leader ended in conflict with Leib over how Wessel Karlsen had conducted his ideological teaching. The German authorities were unsatisfied with the way the Norwegian leader had emphasised that, rather than ideological homogenisation, 'true pan-Germanic unity fundamentally rested upon the consideration of national particularity'.⁵⁴

Ola Furuseth's period as ideological leader had a similar outcome. He described his decision to join GSSN as a result of his opposition to NS, which left GSSN as the only National Socialist alternative at the time. Yet, the high expectations that Furuseth had of the SS in the beginning were soon compromised by his experience of the German SS guidelines for ideological teaching:

I opposed the Germans' attempts to impose a German ideology on school teaching, and for that I stood in opposition to the school board and the Germans [...] I wrote a letter to 'Hitler' at the beginning of January 1945 to share my opinions on the way the school was being run as it had caused hostility towards Germany among the [Norwegian] volunteers [...] The letter prompted my dismissal from the position, and I was sent to the front.⁵⁵

By then, Furuseth had experienced the SS directives on ideological education not only in Norway, but also at the SS school in Berlin. Furuseth was only one of several *Ragnarok* members who expressed clear concerns, and often hostility, towards the German policies within GSSN. A few editions of *Ragnarok* were banned by German authorities for the criticism directed not only against Quisling's NS but also against so-called 'German imperialism'. For example, the April/May edition from 1941 was withdrawn due to *Ragnarok*'s criticism of those circles within NS who merely sought to 'copy the Germans'.⁵⁶ A copy-paste National Socialism with the NSDAP as the model was thus seen as a false and inauthentic National Socialism.

⁵⁴ Statement from 'Rettsbok for Eidsivating Lagmansrett', pp. 12–13 dated 23 August 1945 in Riksarkivet, L-sak Oslo politikammer, nr. 596.

⁵⁵ Ola Furuseth testimony, 18 March 1946, Riksarkivet, L-sak Østerdal politikammer, nr. 651.

⁵⁶ Jacobsen refers to the article by NS opponent Klaus Hansen's 'Ridderen av det Tunge Vann'. Hansen was leader of the Norwegian–German society (NTS) from 1936–1944. In Riksarkivet, L-sak Moss politikammer, nr. 488.

Furuseth was forced to leave his position in GSSN and the corrupt elite he was referring to was the SS leadership in Berlin. After being a witness in a case against a more senior NS man, Furuseth was sent to Berlin and given a position as consultant for the ‘ideological schooling’ of Norwegian Waffen-SS soldiers, with the additional task of editing SS pamphlets.⁵⁷ At this point, the SS school that had been located in Berlin was moved to Kulmbach. Furuseth regarded his position as unnecessary and mere bureaucracy. This situation prompted the above-mentioned letter from Furuseth to Hitler, where the letter was written in the school secretary’s name. According to Furuseth, he was informed that the letter had been received at the *Reichskanzlei*, and he interpreted his dismissal to the front as a sign that his complaints had been read, if not by Hitler then at least by individuals within the NSDAP leadership.⁵⁸ The SS experience had disappointingly proved to be nothing but ‘a dry and irresponsible bureaucracy, where no one had clearly defined responsibilities’ and where his own mission to ‘improve certain conditions for the Norwegians within the SS were diminished’.⁵⁹ In letters and other written material, Furuseth expressed his views that the ‘Germans’ perpetuated a corrupt kind of National Socialism where idealists were pushed aside on behalf of hypocrites. At these grass-roots levels, National Socialism was seen as a pure idea and thus very different from the corruption associated with the imperialist ambitions that had separated the Nazi regime from the pan-Germanic ideals.

III

Contacts in Nazi Germany

The idealisation of the front soldier, the grass-roots dimension of National Socialism and essentially the underdog position were all aspects of the *Ragnarok* intellectual enterprise that went hand in hand with the unfolding of political events in Norway. Historians Emberland and Kott describe that the longer the war went on, the more there ‘was a growing divide between Himmler’s pan-Germanic visions and *Ragnarok*’s own project’.⁶⁰ While the German occupation of Norway must be regarded

⁵⁷ Riksarkivet, L-sak Østerdal politikammer, nr. 651.

⁵⁸ Testimony from Furuseth, 18 March 1946, *ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Emberland and Kott, *Himmler’s Norge*, p. 421.

as the primary cause of tension for the divergent visions of a pan-Germanic political order, *Ragnarok* also got inspiration from voices within Nazi Germany. Like Furuseth, Jacobsen's links to GSSN were significantly loosened after 1943. By then, Jacobsen had spent several years using his German contacts in diplomatic attempts to influence Nazi policies in Norway. He met Himmler for the first time in 1937, at a summer meeting arranged by the *Nordische Gesellschaft* in Munich.⁶¹ In the late summer of 1940, Jacobsen saw it as an absolute necessity to keep Quisling as passive as possible during the ongoing negotiations over the nature of the occupation.⁶² There was no doubt in the minds of Jacobsen and his *Ragnarok* circle that the man they needed to turn to was Himmler. Himmler's personal interest in Nordic race theory and heritage had given them hope of Nordic cooperation. Jacobsen met with Himmler for one hour on 16 August 1940, but he was quickly informed that the Nazi plans to support Quisling's NS were well underway. For pragmatic reasons, Jacobsen thus re-entered NS on 28 September 1940. As one last attempt, he wrote a letter to Himmler right after the meeting and received a reply six months later (by which point NS had consolidated its position) on 30 January 1941. In the letter, Himmler urged Jacobsen and his circle to support recruitment to the Waffen-SS, and above all to acknowledge the leading position of the NS.⁶³ Three years later, Jacobsen once again attempted to contact Himmler, now following the request of the *Ragnarok* contributor Herman Harris Aall, an NS member with a specialism in judicial matters who remained sceptical of Quisling's leadership.⁶⁴ Aall pointed to unacceptable actions taken by the Reichskommissariat, and had evaluated the Norwegian position and the German occupation in the context of international law. This time, however, Jacobsen was unsuccessful in his attempt to arrange a personal meeting with Himmler.⁶⁵

Besides overthrowing Quisling, Jacobsen had additional agendas in Germany. Ejnar Vaaben recalled a meeting with Jacobsen in 1943 where they had discussed the failure of Scandinavian National Socialism under Clausen and Quisling. Jacobsen himself described Terboven as an 'extremely

⁶¹ Riksarkivet, L-sak Moss politikammer, nr. 488. Established in 1933, the *Nordische Gesellschaft*, propagated by Alfred Rosenberg and with Himmler as a board member, worked towards strengthening Nordic–German political and cultural ties. The organisation was ideologically affiliated with Hans F. Günther's focus on Nordic race theory, or 'the Nordic Idea', that had also heavily influenced *Ragnarok*.

⁶² The administrative council that was set up temporarily in April was dissolved on 20 September by the establishment of Terboven's Reichskommissariat.

⁶³ Riksarkivet, L-sak Moss politikammer, nr. 488.

⁶⁴ Harris Aall contributed with several geopolitical articles in *Ragnarok*, from the early 'De Nordiske Kulturstater og Russland', *Ragnarok*, 1:2 (March 1935), pp. 184–191 to 'Den politiska verdenskamp etter Tysklands militere seier', *Ragnarok*, 1:2 (March 1944), pp. 298–318.

⁶⁵ Riksarkivet, L-sak Moss politikammer, nr. 488.

dangerous person' for Norway and he attempted to take matters into his own hands when he heard rumours of Terboven's supposed resignation. Jacobsen already had a replacement in mind, the *Gauleiter* and *Reichsstatthalter* of Thuringia, Frits Sauckel. As a leading propagandist and NSDAP member since 1921, Sauckel came to work directly under Göring through the Office of the Four-Year Plan as Plenipotentiary General for the Utilisation of Labour, and in these matters received complete authority from Hitler on 21 March 1942. Jacobsen had met Sauckel at an event arranged by the *Nordische Gesellschaft* in the summer of 1938, at which Sauckel had personally invited Jacobsen to visit Thuringia to discuss their common interest in social economy.⁶⁶ In December 1940, when Jacobsen then heard the rumours about Terboven, he wrote a letter to Sauckel on 11 December in an attempt to persuade him to consider the position as Reichskommissar in Norway.⁶⁷ Jacobsen was convinced that once Sauckel 'had got to grips with the conditions in Norway he and the other Germans would finally understand the necessity of dissolving the Reichskommissariat'.⁶⁸

It was Jacobsen's and Vaaben's common acquaintance Dr Ohling who had given Jacobsen the information about Terboven's supposed resignation. Although Terboven remained in his position, it was not the final attempt made by Jacobsen to influence German policies. Ohling, a German lawyer and a student in Lund, Sweden, had had several functions within the German propaganda ministry since 1933; he was representative of the official German news agency *Deutsches Nachrichtenbüro* (DNB), which was controlled directly by Goebbels' propaganda ministry and the organisation for German academic exchange, *Deutsche Akademischer Austauschdienst*. Ohling also took part in *Nordischer Gesellschaft*, an organisation with the aim of strengthening German–Nordic cultural and political cooperation. These activities combined made him the face of the German propaganda ministry in Sweden, and he took orders directly from Alfred Rosenberg regarding propaganda activities.⁶⁹ In this context, Ohling invited Jacobsen to attend a European congress in Munich at the end of November 1940. The congress (whose 'European' outlook was in reality limited to Norwegian, Dutch, Belgian, Finnish and possibly Swedish attendants) was organised by VDA, a Nazi propaganda organisation directed towards people of German origin (*Volksbund für das Deutschtum im Ausland*), and Jacobsen brought the *Ragnarok* men Per Imerslund and Geir Tveit with him on the trip.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Bengt Åhsberg, 'Svensk–tyska studentförbindelser 1932–1939', *Scandia*, 69:2 (2008), pp. 199–200.

⁷⁰ Jacobsen's statement, Riksarkivet L-sak Moss politikammer, nr. 488. The VDA was a worldwide organisation providing financial support to various activities of German groups abroad without regard to their nationality. It was

Jacobsen described the event in his testimony as an event that gave him the chance to speak up against the practices of the Nazi occupation authorities in Norway; Jacobsen held a short speech where he particularly criticised the involvement of the Reichskommissariat in Norwegian internal political matters. Jacobsen also had the chance to address the issue with Rudolf Hess, who ‘promised to look into it further’, although Jacobsen never heard back from him.⁷¹ Jacobsen’s initiative in Munich is telling of his general outspokenness regarding Nazi policies in Norway after April 1940. Herbert Noot described Jacobsen as ‘bold and very outspoken within German circles’.⁷² Since April 1941, Noot had led Department III of the SD (*Sicherheitsdienst*) and administrated the monitoring of Norwegian sentiments towards Nazi Germany during the occupation. Noot recalled Jacobsen’s constant disagreements with Terboven’s policies, and stated that Jacobsen had claimed on several occasions that ‘the biggest mistake Quisling had ever made was his passivity towards Terboven’.⁷³

Ernst Zuchner, introduced earlier in this thesis as the *Ragnarok* contact at the NSDAP *Reichspropagandaministerium*, had given Barth-Heyerdahl the advice to join NS and to maintain close ties to Zuchner so that no one could suspect Barth-Heyerdahl’s anti-German sentiments.⁷⁴ On 15 December 1940, Barth-Heyerdahl joined NS, and from the same date until the end of the war, he served the NS foreign office in Berlin. In Germany, he also worked for the *Fremdsprachendienst*, a sub-department of the Ministry of Propaganda providing foreign language services with the main task of adapting Norwegian material for German newspapers.⁷⁵

Barth-Heyerdahl was not the only *Ragnarok* member to make this decision out of strategic concerns. At the end of June 1942, Barth-Heyerdahl wrote a letter from Berlin to the *Ragnarok* editor Hans S. Jacobsen, who earlier in 1940 had decided to join the NS formally. That NS membership was at odds with the *Ragnarok* collective identity is clear in Barth-Heyerdahl’s message:

financed with the aid of the Nazi Government and the League for Germandom Abroad (*Verein für das Deutschtum im Ausland*) (VDA), a semi-official organisation associated with the Foreign Organisation in fifth-column work (i.e. organisational activities within a country to further an invading enemy’s military and political aims) among foreign citizens of German ancestry. Through the VDA, Jacobsen and several Scandinavians, including the *Ragnarok* contributor Otto Engelschiøn, were invited to a one-week trip to Poland, entirely sponsored by VDA, to see German plans for the ‘restructuring’ of the Polish regions.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Statement by Herbert Noot in *ibid.*

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

My conclusion is this: your influence and power still rests on *Ragnarok* and the pamphlet must continue to be published. It must also avoid having any other editor than you. That you are independent, and that you are a member of NS is good I suppose, but your influence and reputation is bound to *Ragnarok*.⁷⁶

Jacobsen's friend Ohling played an influential part in convincing Jacobsen to re-enter the NS after April 1940. Ohling had also been a connecting link between Jacobsen and Ejnar Vaaben since the mid-1930s, and had encouraged closer relations between the two by introducing Vaaben to the *Ragnarok* pamphlets.⁷⁷ In Norway, Ohling had advised Jacobsen to 'associate yourself with those with power, so that you can use them [...] but never get in the position where the SS can give you any orders'.⁷⁸ Jacobsen quickly came to balance his German contacts with the insight that a similar strategic move had to be made towards Quisling. Quisling stated in post-war hearings that he was well aware of Jacobsen's close relations with Ohling, as well as men within the SD, but that 'Jacobsen was not as reactionary and rebellious as others within his circle [*Ragnarok*]' but that he was 'a little too German [in his outlook], and too little Norwegian'.⁷⁹ But when Jacobsen entered the NS autumn 1940, he was torn between not only different versions of Norwegian nationalism, but also by a growing sense that there was a gap between National Socialist ideology and Nazi policies. When he met with a friend the same autumn, Jacobsen revealed that

today I have made a decision that my heart cannot accept, but one which I had to take out of practical concerns. From now on, I will try to overcome my disagreements with Quisling's line, in order to prevent as effectively as possible the Norwegian administration from falling into German hands.⁸⁰

The divergent perceptions between Fuglesang and Quisling on Jacobsen's nationalist outlook perhaps tell the most accurate story of Jacobsen's activities during the war. On the one hand, the bidirectional pragmatism that developed the relations with the SS administration and Quisling had been encouraged by Jacobsen's German National Socialist contacts. But these actions would ultimately conceal the fact that Jacobsen's and the entire *Ragnarok* circle's main intention was to go an entirely independent route, when the circumstances called for it. On the other hand, Jacobsen's fundamental unwillingness to align with either the SS or the NS structures was becoming increasingly clear. As a witness described Jacobsen in his post-war trial, 'he [Jacobsen] was undoubtedly an idealist who never would

⁷⁶ Correspondence from Barth-Heyerdahl to Hans S. Jacobsen dated 22 June 1942 in *ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Statement by Vidkun Quisling, dated 14 September 1945, *ibid.*

⁸⁰ Witness testimony dated 24 February 1948, *ibid.*

compromise on the question of national independence, equally so he held positive attitudes towards the Germans, and remained subordinate to the “pan-Germanic idea”.⁸¹

During the course of the war, Jacobsen volunteered twice for the Waffen-SS, at the end of June 1941 and in March 1943; both applications were dismissed. Jacobsen recalled in 1941 having had conversations with SD’s Herbert Noot regarding the military group *Den Norske Legion*, which Jacobsen had been told would be a purely Norwegian organisation with Norwegian commanders.⁸² Despite his failed attempts to volunteer, Jacobsen was recommended for a position at the unit’s information department, where Walter Fürst, another *Ragnarok* contributor, served as propaganda leader. On behalf of the Norwegian Legion, Jacobsen travelled to Berlin on 9 October 1940 to attend an SS meeting regarding cooperation between the Germanic countries. At the time, it was important to *Den Norske Legion* to gain more information about SS views on the Norwegian character of the organisation, since tensions had developed between Norwegian leaders and the German educational authorities responsible for the legion.⁸³

Despite the members’ initial fascination with SS elitism, *Ragnarok*’s ideological outlook gradually took the role of being the protector of those National Socialists who for various reasons were treated as if they were less worthy than the SS elite. With *Ragnarok*’s intellectual profile, the pamphlet came to serve as a portal for defending and reclaiming the status of those Norwegian National Socialists who experienced mistreatment because of their nationality. In October 1941, Jacobsen sent a report to Quisling regarding ‘The German SS and their attitudes towards Norway and the Legion [*Den Norske Legion*]’ with references to a meeting ordered by Himmler’s subordinate, Berger. Present to discuss the publication of the pamphlet *Germanische Leithefte* were 20 *Höhere SS- und Polizeiführer* (HSSPF) members and the VDA was represented by Ohling among others. *Germanische Leithefte* was aimed particularly at Germanic front soldiers,⁸⁴ and Jacobsen had noted that Berger was clear on the message that ‘there were talks about a “Germanisation” [*Verdeutschung*] of their Germanic brothers, and that this principle was an absolute order from the Reichsführer [Himmler]’.⁸⁵ Jacobsen

⁸¹ Witness testimony, Herbert Noot, *ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Germanische Leithefte* was translated into Norwegian and Danish where the publication was named *Germansk Budstikke*.

⁸⁵ Report from Jacobsen to ‘Føreren’ [Quisling] dated 22 October 1941, ‘Rapport om den tyske SS-innstilling til Noreg og Legionen’ in Riksarkivet, L-sak Moss politikammer, nr. 488.

also had the impression that ‘the Norwegian volunteers are exposed to a great deal of attention from the Germans [...] but they [the Germans] apparently experience difficulties dealing with them’.⁸⁶ Among the front soldiers themselves, the experience of front service and German command had created a wide gulf between perceptions of what was ‘National Socialist’ and what was ‘German’. *Ragnarok* was widely read among front soldiers and it fostered a specific pan-Germanic rhetoric shared by *Ragnarok* and the front soldiers. The growing divide between German directives and Norwegian ambitions was also a shared experience. In autumn 1943, ‘the German aim to dominate and abuse GSSN contrary to his initial impression that it was an organisation built upon Norwegian culture and National Socialist ideology’ forced Jacobsen to distance himself from the organisation and he was removed from his position as editor at *Germaneren*.⁸⁷

IV

Autumn 1943: Active Opposition

The *Ragnarok* members Barth-Heyerdahl, Furuseth, Jacobsen and Strand were all heavily influenced by the main *Ragnarok* ideologue, Per Imerslund. Quisling regarded Imerslund as a particularly ‘dangerous NS opponent’,⁸⁸ and it is clear from his correspondence to Jacobsen in December 1937 that Imerslund had at that point already begun to see a different, less idealist side to the politics of the Third Reich. That did not take away from the fact that he was regarded in the *Ragnarok* circle as the epitome of the movement, or as Imerslund is described in later historical works, an ‘Aryan idol’.⁸⁹ Imerslund had written to Jacobsen to inform him that their NSDAP friend Zuchner was ‘on the verge of being overthrown’ by ‘the psychopathic criminal’ Günther Kern, as Imerslund called him. Imerslund concluded that ‘it is hard staying positive over the thought of cooperating with Germany, when it is represented by such men’.⁹⁰ In his view,

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Jacobsen’s testimony, *ibid.*

⁸⁸ Riksarkivet, L-sak Oslo politikammer, nr. 6331.

⁸⁹ Emberland and Roughvedt, *Det Ariske idol*.

⁹⁰ Correspondence from Per Imerslund to Hans S. Jacobsen, 22 December 1937, Riksarkivet, L-sak Moss politikammer, nr. 488.

a message must be sent to the right place in Germany [...] it is important. It affects the entire German policy in the Nordic countries. If they are allowed to continue having large and small versions of Kern running around in all the Scandinavian countries, then all our work will be for nothing.⁹¹

Imerslund had left NS in 1936, and despite attempts made by Barth-Heyerdahl to convince Imerslund to re-enter,⁹² he remained vehemently opposed to NS. In January 1941, Imerslund joined the early recruitment groups of Waffen-SS volunteers in Norway and was sent to Kiev in the summer of 1941 in the midst of the Nazi war of annihilation.⁹³ He later worked as a war correspondent in Karelia, before a war injury prompted his return to Oslo in May 1942. In the following year, which coincided with the founding of GSSN, Imerslund published several articles in *Germaneren* that were highly critical of NS. The previously mentioned piece on the ‘traitors within our own ranks’⁹⁴ was given significant attention within the SD, who had their eyes on Imerslund. Already in May 1942, the SD in Norway had reported back to Berlin about ‘distancing tendencies’ (*Distanzierungstendenzen*) within Quisling’s NS vis-à-vis German authorities, where the growing tensions were explained by reference to Norwegian opposition to ‘German imperialism’.⁹⁵ When Imerslund’s article appeared in August the same year, the SD reports noted that the hostile elements in GSSN towards NS were exemplified by ‘the SS volunteer Per Imerslund’. The report described how Imerslund claimed that NS was comprised of freemasons who ultimately undermined National Socialism. It further reports that Imerslund’s articles was ‘embraced by young front-soldiers, whilst other circles looked on with disapproval’.⁹⁶ Upon his arrival in Norway, Imerslund had quickly begun to build a network of Norwegian front soldiers around him who not only agreed with his criticism of NS, but most of all the experience of so-called German imperialism. From the point of view of front soldiers like Imerslund, the idea of German imperialism at the expense of ‘true’ pan-Germanism was more than abstract intellectualism.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Barth-Heyerdahl mentions in a private letter from Berlin 25 January 1942 that ‘Per Imerslund is here with me now, and he will most likely join NS tomorrow’. Imerslund, however, finally refused. See Ola Furuseth’s article in the *Ragnarok* publication dedicated to Imerslund’s memory, Furuseth, *Ragnarok*, 9:9/10 (December 1943), p. 247.

⁹³ Terje Emberland argues that there is a likelihood that Imerslund’s brigade, Regiment Westland, played a particularly brutal role in the war, as they had been ordered to be ‘vengeful’ in their actions after a Russian had killed the German Standartenführer Hilmar Wäckerle. See Emberland, *Religion og Rase*, p. 222.

⁹⁴ Imerslund, ‘Sabotører i våre egne rekker’, p. 2.

⁹⁵ ‘Meldungen aus Norwegen’, 6 May 1942, in Stein Ugelvik Larsen, Beatrice Sandberg and Volker Dahm (eds.), *Meldungen aus Norwegen 1940–1945: Die Geheimen Lageberichte des Befehlhabers der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD in Norwegen, Teilband 2* (Munich: R. Oldenburg Verlag, 2008), p. 639.

⁹⁶ ‘Meldungen aus Norwegen, August 1942, in *Meldungen aus Norwegen 1940–1945*, p. 789.

Furuseth's account of his time at the SS school echoes the testimonies among front soldiers about Norwegians being mistreated by German authorities because of their non-German heritage. Emberland writes how 'the political realities of German occupation increasingly diverged from Imerslund's maximalist National Socialist utopia'.⁹⁷ Driven by frustration over this development, and backed up by his Waffen-SS network of young Norwegian volunteers, Imerslund was the mastermind behind the plans to assassinate both Quisling and Terboven. In his post-war trial, Jacobsen recalled taking part in a meeting in September/October 1943 'to discuss actions to be taken against the Germans and others who seemed to use GSSN against Norwegian interests'.⁹⁸ The concrete plans were first to remove the Norwegian Waffen-SS soldiers from German service and second to establish a Norwegian military group independent of the German authorities. Quisling was to be kidnapped and tried by a people's tribunal, and sabotage groups would be formed under the command of Tor Strand.⁹⁹ More than a front soldier phenomenon, these plans were the culmination of *Ragnarok's* oppositional outlook that had been a factor in the Norwegian National Socialist milieu for almost a decade. While Furuseth remained a distant supporter from Berlin, Barth-Heyerdahl, Jacobsen and Strand were just a few of the *Ragnarok* members who were actively taking part in this attempt to form a stable underground movement. The activities came to mark the final stage of several leading *Ragnarok* members' National Socialist careers. The plans ended abruptly as three of Imerslund's men were caught by the Germans while shooting at images of Hitler and were sent to the front.¹⁰⁰ The main event that finally ended these plans, however, was the death of the underground leader himself. Imerslund died suddenly after slipping on ice in early December 1943. Members of *Ragnarok* and good friends of Imerslund would express how the collective fighting spirit died with Imerslund,¹⁰¹ while others saw it as a sign to increase the resistance against German politics.¹⁰² When Furuseth wrote his 'word of warning' letter mentioned above in November 1944, he attached a note stating that 'I will attempt to spread the word as much as possible, in case I drop dead just like Per, which many would probably find very convenient'.¹⁰³ That being said, the collective organisational efforts to sabotage the German stronghold, including the SS, in Norway were dissolved with Imerslund's death.

⁹⁷ Emberland and Kott, *Himmler's Norge*, p. 421.

⁹⁸ Riksarkivet, L-sak Moss politikammer, nr. 488, box 1.

⁹⁹ Witness testimony Håkon Magnus Wessman in *ibid.*, box 2.

¹⁰⁰ Riksarkivet, L-sak Oslo politikammer, nr. 6331.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² Riksarkivet, L-sak Østerdal politikammer, nr. 651.

¹⁰³ Dated 5 November 1944, *ibid.*

As we turn our focus away from the Norwegian case study to the events taking place in Denmark during the same period, there will be striking similarities. First, the position of both of the Scandinavian SS organisations between German expansionism and a pan-Germanic utopia was a dilemma shared by many National Socialists in Norway and Denmark at the time, regardless of their affiliations with the Ejnar Vaaben or the *Ragnarok* circle. Second, the formation of new political and military units in *Schalburgkorpset* and GSSN of dedicated national Nazis in the occupied Scandinavian countries was accompanied by a growing German discontent over Quisling's (or in the Danish case, Clausen's) failure to lead Scandinavian National Socialism in the desired direction. Third, the opposition to the homogenising impulse in the 'political religion' of Nazi imperialism is clear in both national cases, where the calls for acknowledging divergent perceptions of pan-Germanism resemble the National Socialist critique of Christian orthodoxy prevalent during the 1930s that was discussed in chapter 4.

V

Schalburgkorpset

On 1 April 1943, Knud Børge Martinsen, SS Obersturmbannführer and Danish officer of the Waffen-SS battalion *Frikorps Danmark*, announced the establishment of *Schalburgkorpset* in Denmark.¹⁰⁴ It was an armed corps 'with the aim to strengthen our bonds to the battle at the Eastern front and to strive for the expansion of National Socialist ideas'.¹⁰⁵ From mid-1943 to the beginning of 1945, *Schalburgkorpset* had a maximum of 500–600 members in addition to approximately one thousand Danes who were educated at the Schalburg school.¹⁰⁶ At the school, which was led by Ejnar Vaaben

¹⁰⁴ The name *Schalburgkorpset* was taken in memory of Christian Fredrik von Schalburg, the Danish friend of Himmler and chief of *Frikorps Danmark* who died in battle on the Eastern front in June 1942. On von Schalburg, see Mikkel Kirkebaek, *Schalburg – en patriotisk landsforraeder* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2008).

¹⁰⁵ Knud Børge Martinsen's speech at the Schalburg School in Birekrød, a school established with the purpose of recruiting young Danes to the corps through a six-week course. A Danish–German tension quickly developed regarding the purpose of the organisation as it became increasingly clear that *Germanische Leitstelle* and chief Bruno Boysen had aims of establishing a Danish corps which in reality would be subordinated to the SS. Gustav Meissner's testimony, Rigsarkivet, Straffeakt, nr. 404.

¹⁰⁶ 'Hovedrapport vedr. Schalburgkorpset', *ibid.*, box 1.

as the chief of ideological education, the goal was to provide young Danes with ‘a world-view and not a system [...] this belief is Nordic idealism versus foreign materialism’.¹⁰⁷

The establishment of the corps was ordered by the SS department under Gottlob Berger and Himmler in Berlin in late 1942 and adopted by *Reichsbevollmächtigter* (Plenipotentiary) Werner Best in mid-1943; Best sought to use the corps in his personal power struggle against both the SS and the Foreign Office. In order to attract Danes, who in the long term would ideally serve the Waffen-SS, the corps was profiled as a Danish *alternative* to political support for Frits Clausen’s DNSAP, a channel for peripheral National Socialist movements to unite both militarily and politically. In Best’s own words, it was intended as ‘a special department for those established National Socialists who were detached [*abgesplittert*] from the DNSAP’.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, Best acknowledged the three overreaching aims from the perspective of Himmler and the leader of the Danish *Germanische Leitstelle*, Bruno Boysen, regarding the establishment of the corps. It was firstly to recruit Waffen-SS volunteers; secondly it aimed to function as a local, Danish propaganda organ in the common struggle against Bolshevism; and thirdly and finally, the corps represented the consolidation of a National Socialist movement for those Danes not active within the DNSAP.¹⁰⁹ None of these goals was achieved according to Best’s own verdict, and the reason for that failure was precisely the divide created within Danish National Socialism. Regarding the activities of the corps, the Danes would spend the majority of the time ‘focusing on their rivalry with DNSAP’. Therefore, the experience with *Schalburgkorpset* did ultimately put an end to ‘German attempts at political experimentation with Danish National Socialism’.¹¹⁰ The distance between *Schalburgkorpset* and DNSAP was formulated in a German document from September 1943 stating that ‘it must be stressed that *Schalburgkorpset* represents the only solution left in the aim of creating a Danish National Socialist movement that is willing to cooperate openly with Germany’.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ T.I.P.O. Madsen, ‘Baggrunden for Schalburg-Korpsets Arbejde’, p. 7. Rigsarkivet, nr. 10192, box 7. ‘1935-1944: Manuskripter til artikler, taler m.m.’.

¹⁰⁸ Best testimony regarding Schalburgkorpset in Rigsarkivet, Straffeakt, nr. 313, box 1. The ‘power struggle’ was explained by Best as one where Best feared that the *Germanische Leitstelle* was not loyal to Best’s position as *Reichsbevollmächtigter*. In this vein, Best’s decision to support Boysen was made after considering himself to be the sole possibility to maintain influence within the SS and its Danish interests.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

Frits Clausen's Danish DNSAP announced confidentially to its members on 19 April 1943 that 'any membership of a "Germanic corps" would automatically disqualify one from a leading position within DNSAP'.¹¹² This antagonism was a result of a year-long power struggle between the DNSAP and the SS, which had been concretised with the establishment of an SS school in October 1942. Clausen stressed that the DNSAP had nothing to do with the initial establishment of the school, which would take the name *Schalburg-skolen*, but made an active effort to undermine recruitment, as Clausen et al had realised that 'the school was a German rather than Danish product'.¹¹³ One telling example was the German and Danish disagreements over whose photo would be placed in the entrance hall of the school, where a portrait of Himmler is claimed to have disappeared one night to be replaced by one of Clausen.¹¹⁴ The history of this rivalry had yet another peak in February 1943, when Clausen and Best had met and discussed the early plans of the establishment of a Danish–Germanic SS, later renamed *Schalburgkorpset*. Clausen had sought, unsuccessfully, for Hitler's personal guarantees to secure Clausen's position as the sole leader of a Danish National Socialist movement.¹¹⁵

The organisational structure of *Schalburgkorpset* took shape in the wake of Werner Best's arrival in Copenhagen as *Reichsbevollmächtigter*. Best's correspondence with the Foreign Office on 7 December 1942 gives a fairly coherent image of the German leadership's aims. Against the backdrop of the SS and Gottlob Berger's offensive in the occupied Germanic countries, Himmler had ordered the establishment of *Schalburgkorpset*, which 'in informal circles must be understood as Germanic SS in Denmark' where 'the corps is constructed by the SS in full independence of DNSAP'.¹¹⁶ On Best's orders in autumn 1943, the movement *Dansk Folkevaern* ('Danish People's Defence'), comprising former DNSAP members and radical National Socialists from the 1930s, was incorporated in *Schalburgkorpset* as the ideological department of the corps. Ejnar Vaaben was one of them, and until autumn 1944 his role in *Schalburgkorpset* was to lead the department of ideological education (*Afdeling for skoling og verdensanskuelse*), the one department of *Dansk Folkevaern* (later renamed *Folkevaernet*) that had direct cooperation with the military branch of the corps. Vaaben

¹¹² Elly Mogensen, 'DNSAPs forhold til Schalburgkorpset, Folkevernet, Landsstormen og Germansk korps (Redegørelser fra Bovrup-arkivet)', *ibid.*

¹¹³ Frits Clausen's testimony in Rigsarkivet, nr. 1355, Justitsministeriets Psykiatriske Undersøgelseklinik, '1935–1951 Diverse Sager vedr. Besættelsestiden', box 15, 'DNSAP'.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ 'Dr Best's redegørelse for forholdet til DNSAP' in *ibid.* According to Renthe-Fink's testimony in *ibid.*, Clausen clearly separated the interests of the SS and the German Foreign Ministry, where he placed the future of the DNSAP within the support of the latter German institution. As he replaced Renthe-Fink, Werner Best put an end to the previous support given to Clausen, and it is in this breaking-point that we can find the symbolic position of *Schalburgkorpset*.

¹¹⁶ Cited in Lauridsen and Meile (eds.), *Werner Bests korrespondance Bind 2*, p.p 27-28.

personally described *Dansk Folkevaern* as an organisation ‘established with the aim of replacing DNSAP, where the incorporation in *Schalburgkorpset* was accepted with the assumption that the Germans had “sincere” intentions with its establishment’.¹¹⁷

In the years preceding *Schalburgkorpset*’s establishment, Vaaben had reappeared in Danish National Socialist politics, where more effort was put into his projects. In 1941, when Vaaben established *Enhedspartiet*, it was proclaimed that

Now we witness the birth of a movement with the vision of a third way; not the politics of cooperation with its political skeleton, and not an imported ideology, but a Danish movement that provides Danish content to the new ideas of Europe.¹¹⁸

It did not take long, however, until Vaaben yet again realised that his political projects were deemed to fail as long as they remained at the periphery. The future leader of *Schalburgkorpset*, T.I.P.O. Madsen, who led the *Nationale Blok* in the same years that witnessed Vaaben’s activities in the *Enhedspartiet*, had also gradually realised the strategic importance of merging these small movements into one powerful opponent to the DNSAP. On 27 July 1942 came the proclamation that both Vaaben’s and Madsen’s organisations would dissolve and that members were encouraged to join the newly established *Den Nationale Aktion*, in which both Vaaben and Madsen held leadership positions.¹¹⁹ From these Danish initiatives of a DNSAP-opposing coalition, the Germans soon faced the problem of whether or not to actively support these tendencies. Within the SS and especially considering Hitler’s recent order from February 1943 that all relations to Germanic *völkisch* movements in the German-occupied countries would be handled by Himmler, it was decided that some control over the events in Danish National Socialist politics remained desirable. Therefore, on 20 February 1943, a letter to the supervisor of *Generalplan Ost*, Gottlob Berger, from Rudolf Brant read that on the on the basis of the *Germanische Leitstelle*’s reports on Danish National Socialist splinter movements, Himmler had decided to encourage cooperation that would go directly via Werner Best.¹²⁰ This report was based on the decision made in conjunction with earlier contacts with *Den Nationale Aktion* and referred to their reports that were given directly to Himmler in November

¹¹⁷ Ejnar Vaaben’s testimony, Rigsarkivet, P-journaler, nr. 9509.

¹¹⁸ Knud Borgen, ‘Til mine venner omkring Ejnar Vaaben’, *Dannebrog*, 2 (5 February 1941), p. 7.

¹¹⁹ Police Report, 10 June 1945, ‘DNSAP, visse politiske smaapartier og lignende’, in Rigsarkivet, P-Journaler, nr. 24.

¹²⁰ Rudolf Brandt to Gottlob Berger 20 February 1943, in Lauridsen (eds.) *Werner Best’s Korrespondance*, Bind 2, p. 249.

the previous year. The meetings between the leadership of the Danish movement and Gotlob Berger prompted the decision to provide financial support to *Den Nationale Aktion* in order to counter the accusations that the SS were tied to the failed politics of the DNSAP.¹²¹

VI

'Swastika against Swastika'

To sum up this eventful year between 1942 and 1943, one first has to point to the broader context of the dismantling of the 'cooperation policy' between the German occupation regime and the Danish government. More narrowly, the Germans envisioned more widespread support for Nazism among Danes than was to be found in the DNSAP. It thus became increasingly clear that the SS support for Danish National Socialism was to be distributed outside the DNSAP with the backing of Best and his pivotal position as civilian administrator. This process developed in two stages. The first stage, from mid-1942 to the end of the same year, was a 'Danish' stage in the sense that it was less concrete in terms of financial and formal organisation. Ex-members or long-term Nazi opponents of the DNSAP had, independently of German instructions, begun to realise the need to create a united front against the DNSAP. Entering 1943, the second stage had a clearer German vision, with the involvement of the SS and the establishment of *Schalburgkorpset* as a symbolic expression of so-called Danish-German cooperation. In the context of the second stage, *Dansk Folkevaern* was established in April 1943 and led by the triumvirate that was comprised of the two future leaders of *Schalburgkorpset* Knud B. Martinsen and Carl Frants Popp-Madsen together with the recently exited DNSAP member Poul C. Rasmussen.¹²² For the Danes, little had changed since 1942, however, and the ambition remained to establish a movement independent of German authorities. The independence, however, needed to appear friendly and cooperative in the eyes of the Germans.

In fact, the incorporation of *Dansk Folkevaern* into the organisation of *Schalburgkorpset* did not take place until autumn 1943. It was far from clear that a united Danish National Socialist movement would necessarily form around a German-sponsored project. In September 1943, and in the midst of

¹²¹ Gottlob Berger to Rudolf Brandt, 11 January 1943 in *ibid.*, p.p. 115-116.

¹²² Witness testimony by Christian Junior in Rigsarkivet, P-journaler, nr. 9807. For further reading on Popp-Madsen, see Jens Evald, 'Smag av nazitisk jern: Juristen C. Popp-Madsen', in Lauridsen (ed.), *Over Stregen – under Besaettelsen* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2007), pp. 818–835.

organising *Schalburgkorpset*, Martinsen was contacted by Vaaben, *Kamptegnet*'s Arent Lemwigh-Muller and Carl Frants Popp-Madsen with the aim of positioning *Dansk Folkevaern* as the ideological department of *Schalburgkorpset*.¹²³ Martinsen, together with Poul Sommer, had opposed Vaaben's original plans to establish a movement *outside* of *Schalburgkorpset*.¹²⁴ The reluctance among some notable Nazis within the Danish milieu can be explained by their contacts with Best and the SS administration, where at a meeting on 29 August 1943, Best had given them a clear message that attempts to form a movement outside of *Schalburgkorpset* were both unwanted ('*unerwünscht*') and purposeless ('*unzweckmässig*').¹²⁵

Thus, fairly soon a mutual understanding evolved between the German authorities on the one hand and the DNSAP on the other that *Schalburgkorpset* was an organisation whose purpose was to *disturb* the landscape of an 'uncooperative' Danish National Socialism. From the perspective of the DNSAP, it meant a National Socialist 'middle way' which seriously undermined their aims of national ownership over National Socialist politics. In the eyes of the SS, this divide-and-rule tactic would ultimately lead to a questioning of whether such a thing as Danish National Socialism could exist without the aid of the SS. Within *Schalburgkorpset*, however, this 'disturbing' role was welcomed at first, since it corresponded with the general ideological outlook of these men: at the outset, it was a Danish National Socialist movement, freed from its association with the DNSAP, and with an active role as recruiter and warrior in the pan-Germanic and SS-led crusade against Bolshevism in the east. But the vision so prevalent among Vaaben and his Danish colleagues of an independent Danish military corps – a replacement of the Danish army¹²⁶ – was not shared by the SS authorities. In the early stages, the attitude among the Danish *Schalburg* men was one of cooperation and patience. In Popp-Madsen's words, 'we Danish National Socialists are the jolly boat trailing behind, just waiting

¹²³ Rigsarkivet, P-journaler, nr. 8624. Witness testimony of Poul C. Rasmussen.

¹²⁴ Witness testimony of Knud Nordentoft, Rigsarkivet, Straffeakt, nr. 20.

¹²⁵ Rigsarkivet, straffeakt nr. 313. During the summer months of 1943, Best had initially envisioned the SS man and Luftwaffe soldier Poul Sommer as the leader of *Schalburgkorpset*. These plans remained throughout October when meetings were held regarding the corps following the German actions taken against Danish Jews. In November, however, Best had lost his faith in Sommer and decided to give the leadership position to the more authoritative and militarily experienced Martinsen. Rigsarkivet, Straffeakt, nr. 404, box 1.

¹²⁶ Werner Best's statement in the trial regarding *Schalburgkorpset*'s Danish leadership: 'Martinsen would take the advantage of all German support possible, but strive to avoid any German influence on the future of the corps. [...] Martinsen declared to me [Best] that *Schalburgkorpset* was a pure Danish project, independent of German plans. I had the impression that Martinsen in the presence of German authorities did not express his real intentions.' Best's statement is in accordance with those of Martinsen, Vaaben and the majority of the corps' members. Eberhard Loew, chief of dep. RSHA D3 in Berlin underscored this fact as he described Martinsen's reputation among the Germans as being outspokenly against *Germanische Leitstelle*'s imperialistic plans for Denmark. Rigsarkivet, Straffeakt nr. 313.

for the right moment to deviate'.¹²⁷ Gradually, however, the structural framework crafted by German visions of the corps became increasingly obvious and equally constraining. To many of the Danish members, it became a starting point for the realisation that indeed, as Vaaben had expressed it, swastika could stand against swastika.

VII

Disillusion

Vaaben's and *Schalburgkorpset*'s idealist and pan-Germanic battle against liberal materialism was fought on all fronts – against Scandinavianism, fascism, the church and even Danish National Socialist parties. Indeed, the first three years of occupation had carved out the natural targets for these Danish pan-Germanists: for them, the failure of Danish National Socialism lay not primarily in the hands of the Germans, but was a result of the hypocritical Danish cooperation policy and Frits Clausen's missed opportunity to get rid of the corrupt elements within the DNSAP. But this intimate connection between pan-Germanic thinking on the one hand and a pro-German policy on the other was increasingly threatened by a series of events in the latter half of 1943. Vaaben described the year from July 1943 to July 1944 as 'a surreal nightmare' where his political strivings 'were dissolved into nothingness'.¹²⁸

Schalburgkorpset proved to be a short-lived transnational National Socialist experiment. In early July 1944, Ludwig Pancke ordered the removal of the military branch of the corps and by 1 August, the *SS Ausbildung Battalion Schalburg* was established on purely German conditions. Debates over the Danish or German origin of this military corps were no longer necessary, and the true nature of *Schalburgkorpset* had been crystallised within the radicalising framework of the SS's actions in Denmark. At this point, the Danish police was dissolved and nearly 2,000 Danish policemen were sent to concentration camps. On 19 September 1944, *Schalburgkorpset*'s Popp-Madsen personally received an offer from Pancke to lead the reorganisation of the police resources and contribute to its subordination under the SS.¹²⁹ Popp-Madsen declined the offer and instead offered his services to the

¹²⁷ Witness testimony in Rigsarkivet, P-Journal, nr. 9807.

¹²⁸ Vaaben, 'Det var det hele vaerd', part 'For Seint', p. 1, Rigsarkivet, nr. 05640.

¹²⁹ Rigsarkivet, Straffeakt, nr. 313.

foreign ministry in case the action against the police was to be halted. In Best's post-war testimonies, Popp-Madsen is described similarly to *Schalburgkorpset's* leader Martinsen as someone who 'strived for a pure Danish character of the corps and rejected any German involvement'.¹³⁰ Furthermore, Best described how it was obvious that Martinsen must have 'regretted the fact that he early on stuck to the German line and when he no longer found support from the other side (he would have made an excellent saboteur!) sought alternative roads for an activity with no concrete political aims'.¹³¹ The 'nightmare' of the political activities of the year from July 1943 to July 1944 – as described by Vaaben – was in several ways a collective experience of a large number of Schalburg members. Not only Vaaben but larger parts of the Danish leadership including Martinsen and Popp-Madsen all faced the realisation of their fears and brutal confirmation of the validity in their early hesitance towards the German ambitions of the establishment of the corps.

Knud Nordentoft, a lawyer and writer, joined *Schalburgkorpset* in 1941 and functioned as an intelligence agent for the corps. His subsequent diary entries not only document his own experience but also provide a useful source regarding the collective experiences of Danish Schalburg men in the face of the growing dominance of the SS. Nordentoft's diary tells the story of Danish disappointment, where the leader Popp-Madsen had allegedly, and fairly early on on 22 June 1943, made up his mind about the corrupt character of 'the Germans': 'it is as if they are a defeated nation. They are willing to be bribed into anything. This is the politics of Dr Best!'¹³² Nordentoft himself connected this corrupt element in the German leadership to the establishment of *Schalburgkorpset* and stressed that 'this constellation raises serious concerns from a Danish point of view, but is indeed unavoidable'¹³³ and if the war is to be won, Nordentoft continued,

The SS will form a European, but particularly German, elite – great ambition, great dangers. The genius and spiritual prophets are increasingly excluded in favour of the glorification of the secondary's [...] Adolf Hitler would never have passed an SS entry test! Can we find ways of fighting these structures? If not, the revolt is just around the corner.¹³⁴

¹³⁰ Werner Best's testimony in *ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² Entry in Knud Nordentoft's diary, 22 June 1943, *ibid.*

¹³³ Entry 7 September 1943, *ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

In other words, in accordance with the idea of several *Ragnarok* members described in this thesis, Nordentoft distinguished between real and false National Socialists. The glorification of ‘the secondaries’ meant for Nordentoft a tendency he identified within the SS to let the mediocre bureaucrats rise up the ranks at the expense of the ‘real’ National Socialists – the idealists. Despite Nordentoft’s cynical view of the tendencies within the SS and the occupation regime, he nevertheless hoped that Vaaben had the ability to reconcile his role as a spiritual prophet on the Danish National Socialist scene. Nordentoft envisioned Vaaben as a leading mediator between the Danish factions of the corps and the SS. Nordentoft wrote that ‘Popp [-Madsen] continues to recommend Vaaben. He [Vaaben] *has* the network, he *has* admission, it means something. Let us hope so.’¹³⁵

When the cooperation policy between the Danish government and the German authorities broke down after 29 August 1943, Popp-Madsen argued that for Best, *Schalburgkorpset* meant a kind of compensation and the achievement he could use to regain trust from Berlin. Moreover, it required that *Schalburgkorpset* was framed as Best’s personal project.¹³⁶ But he also had to accommodate himself to the directives of *Germanische Leitstelle*, where Boysen in dialogue with Popp-Madsen and Martinsen had outlined a protocol that would establish Danish independence from German authorities in the Schalburg organisation. The protocol contained three important points regarding the conditions for this independence: first, the Germans had to agree that the corps would not be dissolved without the approval of Martinsen; second, *Schalburgkorpset* was independent of any German involvement; and third, Martinsen would have the possibility to turn to the *Germanische Leitstelle* for financial support.¹³⁷ These points laid the foundation for the so-called ‘Protocol Negotiations’ in autumn 1943. It was a formal yet insignificant negotiation that more than anything illustrates the ideological divide that was growing between Danish Schalburg members and the SS ambitions with the corps. Best balanced the agendas of both the SS and Foreign Office and certainly also his own personal position as he declared that the second point in the protocol could not be accepted – that German involvement was a precondition for the establishment of the corps – and in Danish circles this move was disappointing but not surprising. Nordentoft concluded in his diary from 26 September 1943 that

¹³⁵ Entry 20 September 1943 (original emphasis), Knud Nordentoft’s diary, *ibid.*

¹³⁶ Popp-Madsen’s testimony, *ibid.* Best’s independence in the affairs of *Schalburgkorpset* was established through the agreement between Joachim von Ribbentrop and the SS, where Ribbentrop had accepted the corps’ existence and the fact that Best would cooperate with Himmler in all Germanic Voelkisch matters. The acceptance implied the silent permission for Best to work more closely with Boysen and *Germanische Leitstelle*. See letter from Horst Wagner to Werner Best, 31 July 1943 in Lauridsen (ed.), *Werner Best’s Korrespondance, Bind 3*, pp. 313-314.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

‘undoubtedly, it is an old SS ambition to incorporate Danish National Socialists and bring them under SS command’.¹³⁸

The German action against the Danish police on 19 September 1944 was for Martinsen the beginning of the end for his involvement in the corps’ leadership. Moreover, the fate of Martinsen’s role in the corps is both a personal story and a wider reflection of the general Danish involvement in this organisation. Gradually after mid-1943, Danish attitudes within the corps – primarily a growing sense of hostility towards any ‘German’ measures – were influenced by German military hardships and subsequently the SS’s radically more suppressive actions in the occupied countries, including Denmark. Martinsen viewed the German actions against the police as de facto violations of the now one-year-old Protocol Negotiations, and he consequently refused to give orders on *Schalburgkorpset*’s actions against Danish police stations. As a result, he was arrested by German authorities at the beginning of October, accused of uncooperative behaviour and anti-German propaganda. He was sentenced to imprisonment in and managed to escape from Fürstenberg, Germany as late as March 1945.¹³⁹

At this point, Vaaben faced German directives that were less punitive but just as coercive; Vaaben volunteered for Waffen-SS service in July 1944 and was enrolled in October the same year. After months of schooling and preparation in the SS school in Sennheim (Alsace), he received German orders to return to Berlin where a post as *Kriegsberichter* [War Correspondent] awaited him.¹⁴⁰ Vaaben realised he could do nothing but accept that his role as warrior for the pan-Germanic cause would become, in his own words, a ‘paper soldier’ and an ‘absolutely pointless’ bureaucrat.¹⁴¹ By then, Vaaben had already got used to dealing with the German authorities. In 1943, the radicalisation of German occupation policies had prompted Vaaben to propose the establishment of radio broadcasts which through illegal channels would allow the circulation of justified criticism of German policies in Denmark.¹⁴² In this period, the bonds with other Nordic pan-Germanic movements were strengthened through their gradually growing aim to isolate themselves from German involvement. In July 1943, during the meeting between Vaaben and Jacobsen, they had – besides their discussion

¹³⁸ Entry 26 September 1943, Knud Nordentoft’s diary, *ibid.*

¹³⁹ Rigsarkivet, P-journaler, nr. 22198. For a more comprehensive reading on Martinsen and his National Socialist career, see Knud Bøgh, *K.B. Martinsen, Officer og Landsforraeder* (Hellerup: Forlaget Documentas, 2005).

¹⁴⁰ Vaaben, ‘Det var det hele vaerdt’, p. 86, Rigsarkivet, nr. 06540, box 1.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² Rigsarkivet, P-journaler, nr. 18451.

about Terboven's position in Norway – also agreed that the DNSAP in Denmark had failed, and that consequently, 'Danish National Socialism had rotted under German authority and financing'.¹⁴³ Vaaben remembered this moment of Scandinavian unity as a time where he 'believed that something could be done', but one year later, by the summer of 1944, he had 'given up all hopes for change'.¹⁴⁴

In April 1944, Vaaben made a last attempt to affect the internal affairs of the Nazi occupation office in Denmark by leading a group of dissatisfied Schalburg men to propose Karl Hubertus von Schimmelmann as Boysen's successor as leader of the *Germanische Leitstelle*. Schimmelmann was preliminarily appointed, an announcement which allegedly took place behind Best's back. Both higher SS leaders Pancke and Best sent protests against this appointment directly to Himmler and the appointment was subsequently annulled. Vaaben interpreted Best's disapproval as stemming from his dislike of Vaaben's connections with Berlin,¹⁴⁵ but John T. Lauridsen mainly explains the situation as another example of the idealist dreamer and the 'politically impotent' Ejnar Vaaben. In considering that Schimmelmann's aspiration to the leadership position of the *Germanische Leitstelle* was finally turned down, Lauridsen claims that because Vaaben avoided mentioning the fact that his mission failed, his impotence is shown not merely in his limited political influence but perhaps most importantly through his idealistic visions that were fundamentally detached from political reality.¹⁴⁶ Indeed, Vaaben never elaborated or even commented upon this particular failure of negotiation. But it is debatable whether this avoidance of admitting failure indicates that Vaaben was a political dreamer with no apprehension of the structural constraints surrounding his pan-Germanic ideas. When examined more closely, the events of April 1944 seem to be parts of that particular year that were described earlier in this chapter as Vaaben's 'surreal nightmare where all his efforts dissolved into nothingness'. There is nothing to indicate that Vaaben did not include the Schimmelmann affair in this 'nothingness', as another failed attempt to stir German occupational politics in the right – Danish – direction. On the contrary, Vaaben realised his limits enough to place the Schimmelmann affair in the context of one year of political impotence and broken National Socialist dreams, not as an isolated mistake. Because in the end, the year of this surreal nightmare was not defined merely

¹⁴³ Vaaben, 'Det var det hele vaardt', part 'Vendepunktet', p.2.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Lauridsen has described the conflict between Best and Vaaben as partly stemming from Best's suspicion that after the clash with *Germanische Leitstelle*, Vaaben would seek support from Alfred Rosenberg. The internal disagreement around the announcement of Schimmelmann is found in a letter from Werner Best to Heinrich Himmler, 26 April 1944, in Lauridsen (eds.), *Werner Best's Korrespondance, Bind 6*, pp. 113-115.

¹⁴⁶ Lauridsen writes: 'What the politically impotent Vaaben avoids mentioning is that Schimmelmann never became the leader of *Germanische Leitstelle*', cited in *ibid.*, p.113.

politically but rather as yet another sign of what was really going on: the perceived German imperialist corruption of National Socialism. To a colleague at the SS school in Sennheim, in late autumn 1944, Vaaben declared: ‘I am sick and tired of being a *Kulturpriester*, and I am fed up with *Weltanschauung*.’¹⁴⁷

VIII

Chapter Conclusion

In 1944, Denmark’s first National Socialist no longer strived to be a prophet for a belief system that he believed had betrayed him. Ejnar Vaaben’s idealism and his ‘fighting worldview’ had met its opponents in Christian orthodoxy and fascist inauthenticity among rival Danish Nazi movements, and finally among leaders of the Third Reich. This chapter concludes the journey from the idealism of the 1930s to wartime disillusionment that we have seen primarily in the histories of Vaaben and *Ragnarok* throughout this thesis. Testimonies from the individuals discussed in this thesis describe an increasingly claustrophobic experience where their visions of a transnational Aryan *Volksgemeinschaft* ran up against the Third Reich’s imperialistic state machinery. But does that mean that either of these two camps, the idealist dream of *Volksgemeinschaft* or the genocidal Nazi machinery (as it appeared in the eyes of the Scandinavians), was less Nazi than the other? Bayle’s comments on Ohlendorf’s personality that introduced this chapter would reject that binary reasoning. Rather, in criticising the supposed dichotomy between idealism and the murderous consequences of fanaticism, Bayle stressed that ‘these two aspects are not conflicting, as a confessional audience would be inclined to believe. Instead, they fuel one another.’¹⁴⁸

This point is important for the discussion of the National Socialist ‘ideological incorrectness’. For the Nazis, the actual contrasts and the dynamic that was created by virtue of their incompatibility was thus the ‘fighting’ ingredient that separated National Socialism from those confessional worldviews of doctrinal readings and schematic orders. We find the same pattern in the landscape of Nazi collaboration across Europe, and in a particularly illuminating form in the case studies from Scandinavia. The ‘ideological incorrectness’ that has been discussed throughout this thesis was not

¹⁴⁷ Vaaben, ‘Det var det hele vaerdt’, p. 71, Rigsarkivet, nr. 06540, box 1.

¹⁴⁸ Bayle, *Psychologie et Etique*, Rigsarkivet, nr. 1355, box 14.

expressed in antagonism towards the National Socialist ideology; rather, the incorrectness was an ideological feature of National Socialism in its own right. In this final chapter, we have seen that against a constraining Nazi policy of occupation and ideological homogenisation, a parallel and increasingly idealist view of National Socialism emerged in response. Ultimately, *Ragnarok*'s ambivalence about their German contacts was not a sign of declining Nazi convictions or increased disillusionment, nor should Vaaben's attack on *Weltanschauung* be written off as words from a former Nazi. That kind of conclusion is an exercise in essentialism. Instead, these were ambivalent and 'ideologically incorrect' attitudes to the German authorities because their National Socialist identity and its essentially 'fighting worldview' not only allowed but also encouraged them.

Thesis Conclusion

The problem with ‘political religion’-theory today is that it is theorised based on an out-dated historiography that ascribes a dogmatic essence to Nazism. This study has thus set out to show how the ‘ideological incorrectness’ that was central to the way in which National Socialism was understood by its contemporaries emphasises the Nazis’ battle against dogmatism in a way which conflicts with ‘political religion’-theory today. The case study of Scandinavian National Socialism represented Nazi pluralism and its heretical nature – precisely those dimensions of National Socialism that ‘political religion’-theory overlooks today. As the thesis has shown, the contemporary use of ‘political religion’ as applied to Nazism ascribes a far too static and conventional nature to Nazi ideology, when in fact the Nazis themselves sought to break the conventional framework with an unbound and revolutionary ideology. The dogmatism lies in the historiography and subsequently its demonisation of Nazism. The Scandinavian National Socialists in this study did indeed discuss the Nazi state as a system of policies bearing similarities to a ‘political religion’, but this ‘political religion’ was for them a sign of a ‘corrupted’ Nazism rather than an expression of true National Socialist faith.

Indeed, scholars generally regard the demonisation of Nazism as a phenomenon of early postwar historiography. Chapter 1 and 2 in this thesis set out to explain that the issues that scholars now depict in ‘political religion’-theory result from a persisting demonisation of National Socialist ideology. Chapter 1 found that ‘political religion’-theory has polarised into ‘sacred’ and ‘profane’ approaches – assuming that Nazism’s religious nature could be found in either its sacred, inner experience of the individual perpetrators who took part in the Nazi genocide, or in the rituals, ceremonies and pseudo-religious nature of the Nazi totalitarian state. Since the focus on ideology-centred explanations to the Holocaust in combination with a focus on individual agency of the perpetrators has dominated since the 1990s, research has tended to favour the first ‘sacred’ approach. Yet, the thesis has shown that the ‘sacred’ – also called phenomenological – approach often bases its analysis on a rigid notion of Nazi ideology that, despite aiming to address agency and diversity, fails to take on board new research on Nazism’s transgressive side. The ‘profane’ – or functionalist – approach, in turn, receives less attention in studies confined to Nazi Germany, and is used primarily as a comparative tool in transnational research on fascist ideologies in Europe.

As the first analytical chapter established that the phenomenological school of ‘political religion’-theory is the one most commonly applied on Nazism, chapter 2 examines this approach further. The rigid notion of Nazi ideology that tends to accompany these phenomenological analyses has thus caused scholars to see ‘political religion’ as a distorting and reductionist concept rather than as an illuminating one. Chapter 2 reveals that this conclusion on the limitations of the phenomenologist’s ‘political religion’ is not an insight from contemporary research. In fact, it was Eric Voegelin – often mentioned by scholars as the founding father of the phenomenologist ‘political religion’ theory – who much earlier, in the late 1970s, rejected the analytical value of his own concept. He found the concept to be both dogmatic and sacralising, to the extent that it became ahistorical. But the issues with Voegelin’s phenomenological ‘political religion’ gave rise to criticism much earlier than the late 1970s. It is well known that Hannah Arendt fundamentally objected to Voegelin’s ‘political religion’ as a plausible concept for explaining National Socialism. This thesis has argued that the disagreement between the two thinkers has been exaggerated. Voegelin and Arendt have come to represent two polarised schools of thought regarding not only Nazism as a ‘political religion’ but more generally also Nazism and the Holocaust. The gulf that once existed between Voegelin’s and Arendt’s views on National Socialism laid the foundation for the polarised Holocaust historiography that developed in the postwar years. Despite new information about Voegelin’s hesitations about his own concept, the polarisation between his and Arendt’s ideas was vital to the ‘order’ of the scholarly field. The present thesis has shown that Voegelin and Arendt in fact were much closer intellectually regarding their thoughts on Nazism than has been portrayed in the historiography. They shared the insight that the Nazi world-view would challenge any conventional notions of a political ideology – that National Socialism was ‘incorrect’ in the face of old concepts. It is thus an irony that the polarisation between these two thinkers has worked to conceal the fact that both Voegelin and Arendt raised thoughts about this ‘incorrectness’ of National Socialist ideology that has now become established in historiography.

The Scandinavian intellectuals were singled out for this thesis because of their connections with Nazi Germany and their self-acclaimed radicalism. The thesis has discussed their political trajectories in the Scandinavian milieu in the light of Michael Wildt’s notion of the Nazi ‘uncompromising generation.’ We cannot speak of these Scandinavians coming anywhere near an ideal-type of Nazi – like the way that scholars often portray men like Otto Ohlendorf as representative of his generation. Considering their national contexts and the lack of an institutional Nazi framework, however, their ideas and beliefs nevertheless share such similarities to those of men like Ohlendorf that this thesis

finds it fruitful to expand on Wildt's focus on the National Socialist mentality in order to analyse Nazism also outside of Nazi Germany.

The analytical chapters identified two main points on 'political religion' and these points were further discussed in the light of empirical case studies on National Socialist movements in Scandinavia. The thesis firstly compared the two schools of 'political religion'-theory with the ways these Scandinavians discussed the relationship between religion and National Socialism. Secondly, the thesis has made a comparison of Voegelin's and Arendt's thoughts that Nazi ideology, with the ideas among Scandinavian National Socialists regarding their Nazi world-view before and during the German occupation of Denmark and Norway. The comparison shows that both approaches were 'incorrect' towards a too rigid notion of National Socialism, These are not two parallel arguments. Instead, through an examination of these National Socialists' attitudes towards Nazi Germany and religion, this 'ideological incorrectness' becomes even clearer. The Scandinavian movement and individuals in this study raised heavy critique of the despotic tendencies of the Christian religious system, in a similar manner to that of liberal theologians at the time. A sense of 'theological incorrectness' (a concept taken from the field of cognitive studies on religion) informed these Nazi writers and liberal theologians alike in their attitudes to Nazism. They displayed varying degrees of sympathy for Nazism, as they saw this world-view as a first revolt against the dogmas of religious systems. For the Nazi intellectuals, the idea of creating a Nazi 'political religion' was a process that too much resembled the evils of old Christian confessionalism. Regarding the discussion on functionalist and phenomenologist approaches to 'political religion', the thesis clarified that the intellectual output among these Scandinavians described an ideal-type religion much closer to a phenomenologist approach to the concept.

Yet, the existing theories on phenomenologist approaches to 'political religion' assume a National Socialist ideology much more rigid than was actually the case among the Scandinavians in this study. For them, National Socialism was indeed universal and generic. But it was an generic core to Nazism that had emerged as a result of a transnational pattern of divergent National Socialist ideas and practices. This transnational logic behind National Socialism created a legitimate space in Nazi theory as the Scandinavians faced German occupation. There were similarities between the criticism of Christianity identified as a principle of 'theological incorrectness' and the later critique we find among these Scandinavian intellectuals that they directed against the policies of Nazi occupation. The 'theological incorrectness' among the Scandinavian National Socialists' critique of Christianity was the root of the 'ideological incorrectness' that had attracted them to Nazism. Moreover, the

ideological incorrectness developed as both an ideal and political practice among the Scandinavian National Socialists, as the gulf between them and the Nazi occupation authorities grew wider. The ideological incorrectness that characterises their writings on National Socialism further resonates with the transgressive mind-set that scholars today who are working on Nazi Germany characterise as distinctively National Socialist.

The Scandinavian National Socialist critique of the ‘dogmatic’ Nazi political religion that, for them, represented the imperialistic Nazi rule of occupation was a critique of dogmas, homogenisation and corruption. In their view, the Nazi ‘political religion’ corrupted their idea of what true National Socialism was. This thesis has shown that the Scandinavians’ ideas about Nazi imperialism were strikingly similar to the image of Nazism that persists in historiography. In ‘political religion’-theory, Nazism is too closely tied to ideas of the hegemony of Nazi dogmas. Their idea of a *true* National Socialism, however, was one that broke the boundaries of the old world. The transgressive mentality that they shared with men like Otto Ohlendorf was the aspect of Nazism that also caused Hannah Arendt, and eventually Eric Voegelin, to reject the notion of ‘political religion’ as a fruitful analytical tool. This study has sought to theorise ‘political religion’ with a broader image of Nazi ideology in mind. Rather than assuming that the striving for homogenisation that characterises the crimes of the Holocaust were replicated in Nazi perceptions of their ideology, this Scandinavian case study has described another side of Nazism: its ‘ideological incorrectness’. To many, it appears as a less totalitarian side of Nazism. Yet, its ‘ideological incorrectness’ is a side of Nazism that more than anything can help to explain its continent-wide support – and eventually its deadly consequences.

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