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Reber, April Lucille

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THE 'EXTREMIST' NEXT DOOR: NORMALCY AND DEMOCRATIC LEGITIMACY IN GERMANY

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
In
ANTHROPOLOGY

by

April Lucille Reber

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The Dissertation of April Lucille Reber is approved:

Professor Melissa L. Caldwell, chair

Professor Donald Brenneis

Professor Mark Anderson

Professor Maple Razsa

Peter Biehl
Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

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Table of Contents

Preface	1
Chapter 1	7
Chapter 2: Moments of Disruption	64
Chapter 3: Cultural Sounds and Material Symbols	100
Chapter 4: Energy	137
Chapter 5: The Need to be Normal or, Don’t be a Nazi	175
Chapter 6: Legitimacy and Speech	214
Chapter 7: Collaboration	257
Bibliography	287

Abstract

The ‘Extremist’ next door: Normalcy and democratic legitimacy in Germany

April L. Reber

This ethnography analyzes the relationship between extremism and normativity in liberal democracies. For this project, I researched and analyzed a German political party, Alternative for Germany (AfD). My methodology included ethnographic methods such as observation, interviewing, and digital and sound ethnography. I argue that AfD members work against labels of extremism by performing normalcy and democratic legitimacy. Members invoke and play with German speech and performative codes to position themselves as mainstream, legitimate, and “normal.” Instead of viewing the AfD as an irregularity in Germany's history and contemporary political life, I contend that in many cases, AfD members emerge from and draw on mainstream notions.

Organizing my project around nodes of political conflict in Germany, I scrutinize how these nodes, juxtaposed against shifting domestic and transnational power centers, reveal schisms and skepticism about nation-building, liberal democracy, and national identity. The six conflict points through which these repetitive themes emerge are reconfiguring histories, materiality and linguistic changes, energy politics, normativity, democratic legitimacy, and collaboration. Within these conflict points, I research how AfD members craft their political messages alongside other participants crafting and disseminating their own political messages.

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With deepest gratitude, I thank Heather Russell. I could never have accomplished so much without her compassion for my broader well-being, her encouragement and willingness to let me prattle on about my research, her enduring friendship, and her constant kindness.

Preface

> Now it begins, the sorting and testing of words. Remember that words are not symbols of other words. There are words which, when tinkered with, become honest representatives of the cresting blood, the fine living net of nerves. Define rain. Or even joy. It can be done (Thompson 1977: 242).

The first time my mom called me a liberal, we were sitting in the small, main room of our 1600 sq. ft. house that was always too small for our always too big family. The room operated simultaneously as the television room, the dining room, the library, and the den. In that main room, full of my siblings and my dad, I had expressed some opinion, now long forgotten, and my mom responded, You must be a liberal. At that word "liberal," nearly forbidden in the house unless it was used in derision, everyone became quiet.

We were the resident white, conservative household in a lower income, left-leaning, Black, Latinx, and Middle Eastern neighborhood in the larger Los Angeles metropolitan. In what was (and likely still is) a rather racially segregated region, our family lived on the south side of the freeway, while many of the white people lived north. As a teenager, I began debating with my mom about politics, one of the few interests we seemed to have in common. When I received my first ballot with the requisite request to register myself politically, my mom hovered over me as I filled out the paperwork. When I checked the Independent box, my mom exclaimed that I was not courageous enough to take a side and furthermore, all the family were and had been Republicans, almost insinuating that I was turning against the family. Besides, that claim, that "the family" was Republican, was remarkably false. When I

asked my mom about contraceptives, she told me that taking the pill was a sin and additionally, the 1970s women's movement was wrong (I think the actual word she used was "abomination") and an affront to women's rights to get married and have children. My mom was a product of her upbringing and her parents were a product of their upbringing.

The divisions between my mom and me in some ways seemed to deepen when I started studying anthropology but strangely, our discussion topics also expanded. This was the only other thing my mom and I seemed to have in common: an interest in learning everything we could about the world around us – the enclaves of different ethnic, religious, and racial groups in Los Angeles, the art galleries that housed experimental and historical art and literature from around the world that examined universals within the complexity of the particular, the development of scientific and mathematical thought that transformed the world, and the sometimes intersecting, sometimes parallel lines of religion.

While my mom was a very strong conservative with the expected views such a position engenders, it would be wrong to portray my mom as somehow politically static. Always sentimental for fellow poor people, she would say that she knew the inordinate challenges of being poor in the U.S. after living almost five decades as a financially-challenged woman. Her opinions started changing even before she finally received her Bachelor's as a so-called untraditional student in her late thirties and began teaching at low-income Black and Latinx schools. She fought and scrounged for more educational material for her students and (unsuccessfully) solicited funds or

materials from members of my rather affluent, almost entirely white, church congregation. She donated significant parts of her prized library and bought books at auction to give to her students. She paid for meals out of our already limited funds and brought food to school to make sure all students had something to eat after school. When some of her students graduated, she was elated, telling everyone who would listen, even mentioning it at the pulpit at church. When some of her students were shot, especially those who were shot at school in gang-related violence, she would despair, and even more so for their siblings and cousins who were still enrolled at the school and who often were in dangerous circumstances. This despair certainly did not help her medicinal additions. My mom became a union worker, something never imaginable when she was more conservative. She sang "We shall overcome" with the teachers at the national teachers' union meeting each year. She stopped saying that being a wife and mother was her greatest achievement in life and began calling her union work and new-found political activism her purpose.

While the projection is that liberals become more conservative with age, in some ways, my mom became less conservative with age. My mom never identified as a liberal. Instead, she described herself as a different kind of conservative who focused on education, quality housing, and affordable medical care against an insatiable elite.

This ethnography is not an ode to my mom. This ethnography was not spurred on by my family or my mom. Sadly, due to a deteriorating mental condition my mom

stopped talking to me several years before her death and she had nothing to do with my research in Germany. I started this project while working as a volunteer research assistant at the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars. At the time, I read news reports about Pegida shouting German Democratic Republic (GDR) slogans and simultaneously read contemporaneous books on German reunification and the GDR. I heard how people, especially scholars, frantically said that the radical right had returned, and I thought, But they were never absent.

What started this ethnography was the shock and dismay I saw in people who could not understand why, in the age of Barack Obama and a prototype of universal healthcare, that Rightist politics of anti-multiculturalism, anti-migration, pro-closed borders and pro-national identity could emerge as electable stances.

My response to such shock was, Really? What sort of fantastical image of the broader public do people have? And how can I examine such shifts in the electoral public to precipitate an understanding in mixed and broader publics, an understanding that extends beyond voter analysis?

The point of the narrative description about my mom is not about the contradictions between my mom and me. Neither is it validation of conservative thought nor an exposé about people's flexible political persuasions. This short narrative is an illustrative allegory for my larger project.

After my mom died and we went through her many belongings, I found a sign that I paraphrased as, “Please just love me for who I am, not for who you want me to

be." This sign captures the uncomfortable paradox between so-called Left and Right politics and the reality of daily tensions that people, communities, and countries experience: people want to be respected for (or despite of) their personhood, their sexual orientation, political views, religious affiliation, etc. and yet somehow, this respect for another is supposed to or imagined to challenge one's own personhood, sexual orientation, political views, religious affiliation, etc.

My paraphrase of the sign captures the complicated relations at employment, at church, in sports groups, and in university classrooms between the daily and necessarily reciprocal interactions between neighbors, colleagues, and collaborators, and the conflicting ideological stuff that rather unexpectedly (and metaphorically) cuts cords of collegiality with a double-edged sword. While to some people, the interlocutors I describe in the following pages might be considered "deplorable," to me they are humans. They have jobs, hobbies, and people they love.

So, while this ethnography started out as an attempt to understand the pathways of conservative and radical right thought that undergird the perpetuation of radical right notions, this original purpose merged with another purpose: to try to make the world a little better through expanding understanding of the contradictions, tensions, and unnerving connections between and through nodes of all political conflict that linger in intimate and locally public spaces, becoming manifest through reorganized configurations, and which make scholars, pundits, and family therapists always relevant and employed.

What follows is a project to show both the humanist side of these perspectives, as well as the deep-treaded networks of belief that make it possible for politics to endure. May this read be simultaneously pleasurable, intellectually provocative, and result in deepened understanding.

Chapter 1

23 May 2020

The well-dressed Muslim family paused at the edge of the square for several minutes, presumably listening to the rally and looking at the Alternative for Germany (AfD) group that inhabited almost half of the square. The only indication of this family's Muslim faith was the woman's headscarf framing her fair-skinned face. The headscarf matched her flowing, pastel, spring-styled dress that reached to her ankles. They had two little boys with them, one held by the man, the other, perhaps 4 years old, who held the man's hand. The man, sporting short, dark hair which framed his tan complexion, wore a polo-styled shirt tucked into khaki pants and the little boys dressed similarly, simply smaller but striking versions of an equally clean-cut look with dark hair and little white shirts tucked in little dark pants. Perhaps they were native Germans or perhaps they were immigrants or tourists.

They had come from the small, nameless alley that connected the meat market square (Fleischmarkt) on the other side of the city hall (Rathaus) to the main market square (Hauptmarkt) where we were gathered. Their emergence was curious enough for the white, German couple next to me and the others sitting near me on the stone wall near the astronomical clock to turn and look at the family, including the small group of male and female, white German police officers standing behind us. People's curiosity was manifest by them turning and staring at the Muslim family at the edge of the square who, in turn, stared at the AfD group in front of them in the heart of the square. The only one in my vicinity who did not gaze was one of state chairman's

state-issued bodyguards who rarely stirred from his vigil near the bodyguards' parked car on the main market road, his gaze remaining almost entirely fixed on the crowd in front of him, turning only whenever someone got close to the bodyguards' car or to sporadically make a 360-degree scan of the area.

The AfD is a political party in Germany. Founded in 2013, the party was initially popularly dubbed the economists' or professors' party since the party was organized in partly by economists critical of the EU bailout. Over the next decade, the political party refashioned itself several times through power struggles between different members of the political Right. While from an outside perspective, AfD members and their perspectives might seem very uniform, the complexity and diversity of Rightist perspectives is illustrated in the fact that in the first nine years of the party's existence, there have been at least three major exoduses from the party (Bernd Lucke, Frauke Petry, and Jörg Meuthen).

As I looked around me, I saw white German faces turned to the white Muslim family. They simply gazed at the Muslim family standing on the edge of the square. Some members of the demonstration saw the family as well; some turned their heads and stared while others turned their whole bodies to gaze at the Muslim family. Nobody nudged each other, spoke, or pointed. But most of the rally participants were focused on the two AfD politicians standing at the part of the square called the Wenzelsmarkt (in reference to a Christmas market), who gave speeches about the existential threats of migration, Islam, EU bonds, and the general (negative) direction Germany is headed.

Directly in front of the Muslim family, standing in the middle of the square and at the back of the demonstration, was a white German man, perhaps in his early 40s, with the large wooden sign. On one side of the sign was painted the German flag. On the other side was written, “Vor 1400 Jahren zog ein Pädophiler Massenmörder aus, die Welt zu erobern. Heute stehen seine Truppen vor Dresden!” (1400 years ago a pedophile mass murderer [presumably Mohammad] set out to conquer the world. Today his troops stand in front of Dresden).

Before the rally had started, the man assembled his sign behind me and next to the small group of riot police officers in black. I had settled myself on the stone retaining wall in the high back corner of the slanting square near the city hall, by its sundial and astronomical clock, knowing that from this vantage point, I could observe the proceedings, the entire square, and most of the entry points to the square. Since the man was behind me, I only initially heard wood being assembled to wood, but what caught my attention was the loud whispering of police and people around me pointing in my direction. I turned around to see the police officers whispering and pointing to the sign and the man working hard to attach the large wooden block to the long pole. Soon a police officer walked the two paces to the man and asked the man for the city permit that would allow him to carry this sign. The man, perhaps in his forties, promptly showed the police officer the permit. The police officer, a young, white German man, no more than 30, inspected the permit, slowly turning it over in his hands, looking at the back and the front, then again the back and the front, before

handing the permit back to the man. The man said, “Everyone all right?” (Alles gut?). The police officer said, “Alles gut,” and he walked the two paces back to his group.

After assembling the wooden sign, the man hoisted the very large sign up and positioned the pole on his shoulder like a banner carrier. He moved to the center of the square at the back of the demonstration, slowly walking a few paces to the right and then a few paces to the left (direction Wenzelsmarkt), turning to face the rally, then turning to those of us sitting behind the rally, then slowly turning back and repeating the movement. People in the rally began turning around to read the board, then nudged their neighbors and pointed to the board. The neighbors then turned around to read the board. People started taking discreet photographs of his sign. Soon, several Ordner (in this context, two volunteer officials from the AfD instructed to keep rally order) came over to the man. I saw both volunteer officials point to the sign and gesture, as I understood it, to take the sign down. They motioned to the rally and shook their heads while the man responded by nodding his head and pointing to the police. I presume they asked to see his permit, because the man pulled out the permit and handed it to one of them. The man turned over the permit in his hand while the other volunteer official continued to speak to the man and shake his head. The volunteer official with the permit returned the small piece of paper to the man; both volunteer officials spoke to each other and then said some parting words to the man before walking back to their stations in the rally. After this movement of approval, rally participants began taking overt photos of the sign, including one woman who had her photo taken next to the man with the sign.

All of this preceded the arrival of the Muslim family by perhaps ten to fifteen minutes. During this interval, it was rather hard to hear the politicians across the square since they had an old, handheld loudspeaker that only projected their voices in the direction the speaker was facing, meaning that people could only hear phrases and highlights of the rally at any one time and could only hear entire sentences when the speaker faced them for prolonged moments. The loudspeaker was so feeble that after the rally, I made a joke to the middle-aged couple next to me that as this AfD group was so poor, perhaps it should set up a collection to gather money for an actual microphone and speaker system. The couple laughed at my joke but as we continued to speak, I realized that they were supporters. They explained that these rallies occur every Saturday and that the rallies are no longer about the Covid-19 pandemic but are rather about current politics (aktuelle Politik). By this time, the German government had ended its first and most extreme lockdown during the pandemic and AfD rallies had become more explicit about other issues. My neighbors were dressed in jeans, nondescript jackets, and walking shoes – Saturday market wear. Similarly, the crowd seemed to match the chairman's state-issued bodyguards, who always seemed to be in tune with the appropriate dress code for each occasion. Medium-blue jeans, walking shoes, loose jackets for the cool spring day, and t-shirts was the chosen outfit for everyone on this Saturday midday rally in the city center. Perhaps the Muslim family also stood out because of their nice clothes – khaki pants, polo shirts, and a colorful, chic dress.

After several minutes of standing at the edge of the square, looking at the crowd and at the Wenzelsmarkt where the politicians were speaking, and not seeming to acknowledge the gazes directed at them, the Muslim family turned left and slowly walked around the edge of the square to the Wenzelsmarkt. Here they turned right, following the square, but stayed along the outside border of the rally. They walked directly behind the politicians, one of whom barely glanced behind him as the other one spoke about how undemocratic the Covid regulations were and how the AfD was the only truly democratic party. As they walked along this stretch, the family was sometimes obscured from my vantage point by German flags, AfD supporters, and AfD vans, only for the parents' heads to reemerge briefly in between people, flags, and vans. The Muslim family continued walking until the end of the square, where I saw them turn left (and out of sight) onto the narrow, cobblestoned road that becomes the Reichenstraβe.

This town's relative remoteness and size (population about 40,000) make this town different from towns like Dresden, which is still relatively conservative yet has public debates about the appropriateness of using outdated racial terms in museum exhibits. This town is also different from Berlin where locals debate whether street names of former colonizers should be changed, or Mainz or Düsseldorf where both the accents and grammatical errors by actual foreigners and the black and brown skin of actual Germans contest historical notions of who belongs in Germany.

Located in the heart of historical Bohemia, this town's very whiteness splits its official ethnic identity between German and Sorbian, a Slavic minority group of which 60,000 live in Saxony and whose language, traditional clothing, arts, and music are officially protected by the Saxon constitution since 1999. All Sorbs are German citizens but have every constitutional right to attend their own schools, clubs, and churches, and teach and speak their own language. Street and city signs in predominantly Sorbian towns are bilingual (Saxon 2022) and the Saxon minister president, along with other Saxon dignitaries, attend Sorbian festivals and celebrations. Official recognition and overwhelming acceptance of Sorbian cultural and linguistic preservation operates in stark contrast to the unwillingness in this town and others nearby to accept other ethnic minorities who have immigrated to the regions over the generations.

This town is a place where rejection of unliked outsiders, who include different groups at different times but who are identified with the catchall *Ausländer*, what Mandel (2008: 9) translates as foreigner-outsider, is absolute and swift. For instance, after the brief period in September 2015 when then-Chancellor Merkel opened Germany's border to immigrants, townspeople burned down a building that was being transformed into housing for predominantly Middle Eastern and North African asylum seekers. Locals intimated to me that the police and fire departments stood by and let it burn. That September decision had long-standing consequences and proved to be a divisive issue in Germany for the next few years (Blume et. al. 2016).

This town is the kind of town where all signs are in Sorbian and German, where Sorbian celebrations take place alongside German markets, where parents and children are Sorbian and German, but rarely another kind of ethnicity. It is the kind of town where no one wears a headscarf, where the Christian churches hourly toll their bells, where gender is stable, and where the cobblestones are rounded out.

And in this Sorbian and German town, where these markers of belonging are not questioned and certainly not under threat, in the square that signifies the center of German and Sorbian coming togetherness, of community, the square that holds the public indicators of the town's deeply entrenched German and Sorbian heritage such as the city hall, cobblestones, fountains, sundial, and historical clock, the Muslim family stood on the edge, peering in at this spectacle of white people talking about the existentially threatened German state due to Covid authoritarianism, European Union overreach, Middle Eastern and African immigration, and Muslims. Then, in a moment that one simply cannot make up, the Muslim family walked around the rally that stood before them, behind the speakers categorically denouncing people like them, and went on their way to their destination, leaving the crowd behind. This performative scene, with unlikely and spontaneous actors, was observed by us, rally participants, police, curious by-standers, at least one researcher, and state-issued bodyguards.

Islam is not new in Germany, and I imagine that this family was certainly not the first Muslim family to walk around this or any other typical German town. What

was fascinating was not just the prolonged gaze of many of the white Germans near me as if this was the first time they had seen a Muslim woman (and her relations). What was incredible about this scene was the contradiction between the politicians' carefully articulated, and well-received, messaging to members and everyone else on the square listening that focused predominantly Muslims from the Middle East, and the man holding a sign that was overtly Islamophobic and socially unacceptable and who was challenged twice by the police and the AfD. Take away the manicured phrasing and their messages were the same: Muslims are an existential threat to Germany. Yet one speaker received state-issued bodyguards and applause and the other received challenges from police and volunteers. Both the police and the volunteer officials demanded to see the city-issued permit of the man holding the Islamophobic sign at the AfD rally. Such local encounters indicate the complicated terrain of publicly permissible speech, even within conservative and radical right circles, that is contradicted by the legitimation of city-issued documentation that the police and volunteer officials cannot refute. The contradiction between the politicians' words predicting a failed German state if Germans did not take control of their past and future (including through the exclusion of Muslims, Africans, and Middle Easterners) and this man's board that articulated the Islamic threat at the gates of Dresden spoke to similar concerns; yet through their occupation of the same performative space one can observe the sociability of speech rights at play where certain speech is rendered socially acceptable (politicians' speech) while the potential exclusion of unlikeable speech (the wooden board) is at once bolstered by state

legitimation (the permit) while challenged by state arbiters (police) and the community (AfD volunteer officials).

What was also striking about this encounter was the materiality and location of the square and town that messaged that certain kinds of people fit there and no one else does. In this rally was the constant, predictable and yet perennially unexpected presence of the Other, in this case, the Muslim family. It was as if the Other had only been in Germany and Europe for days rather than centuries. Surely Muslim women with headscarves and their relations had been seen in this town before, yet such presence seems to be incessantly unexpected, a new experience each time rather than a habitual occurrence. The material representations of Germanness/Sorbianness, including language, statues, or squares, were as much part of the naturalness and predictability of this rally as the fact that the rallies occurred every Saturday, taking place in the cobblestoned town square between the fountains, sun dial and outdoor café seating. But it was the entrance of the Other from stage right, the performative, predictably spontaneous encounter, that accentuated the materiality of the setting and its location.

And finally, what was remarkable was that all of this seemed to take place as a comedy – absurd or satirical. I do not mean that there was anything humorous about a Muslim family appearing at an essentially anti-Muslim rally. By comedic, I refer to the exaggerated stares by the people around me and some of the rally participants that added absurdity to the sudden appearance of a Muslim family at the essentially anti-Muslim rally. Additionally, by comedic, I mean that their very presence – in their

chic and polished clothing, purposeful gait and two small children – challenged the anti-Muslim scripts of the man's board and the politicians' dire predictions. What was so existentially threatening about a well-dressed family with two small children, especially one that seemed to ignore the rally's anti-Muslim agenda and walk right behind the politicians and in front of all the rally participants? In their appearance (broadly meant), this Muslim family defied the messaging many people had been crafting for years about Muslims.

Thesis

Such public performances that AfD members participate in, and often set the stage for, engage broader debates taking place in Germany and Europe. In this ethnography, I trace how AfD members perform democratic legitimacy and normalcy, drawing on and substantiating already-existing normative notions in Germany. But before I describe these public performances and the arguments presented in this ethnography, I first explain why AfD members need to perform normalcy and democratic legitimacy.

The AfD is broadly seen as extremist, or in terms of the government department tasked with monitoring extremism, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz or BfV), as "suspected extremist." Additionally, everyday Germans also label the AfD extreme through different ways, such as with counter demonstrations or calling AfD members Nazis, populist, radical, and Rechts ("right" as in radical right), terms often conflated with

extremist. Throughout this ethnography, I weave these external labels of extremism into vignettes and anecdotes.

Here, I share some of the ways the AfD is considered extreme and far right. While the AfD's platform is more extensive and complex than what I present here, I indicate the political agenda and commentary that marks the AfD as extreme for both the government and communities. In "AfD leaders and their most offensive remarks," journalists Breitenbach and Hallam (2022) share eleven provocative statements made by some prominent AfD leaders. In their list, they include Christian Lüth's (former AfD press speaker) comment about shooting or gassing people, Alexander Gauland's (former federal co-chair) remark that the Nazi past is bird shit compared to Germany's 1000-year history, Alice Weidel's (co-chair of the AfD group in federal parliament) statement that some German politicians are "pigs," or former AfD co-chair and member Frauke Petry suggesting the use of firearms to prevent so-called illegal border crossing. Beatrix von Storch, a member of the nationwide AfD executive committee and parliament member, misused the gender pronoun of a transwoman parliament member (Zeit Online 2022). These headlining rhetorical clashes made by some of the most famous AfD politicians reflect some of the most provocative statements.

In perhaps one of the most controversial statements made by an AfD politician, Björn Höcke, former leader of the nativist, nationalist "wing" (*Flügel*) suborganization of the AfD, called the Holocaust memorial in Berlin a "monument of shame." In a broader statement against the central way the Nazi period is remembered

in Germany, Höcke called for an alternative way of remembering German history to create alternative German futures. "We Germans, that is, our people, are the only people in the world who have planted a monument of shame in the heart of their capital" (Süddeutsche Zeitung 2017).[1] This statement resulted in both widespread critique and support in news and social media by politicians and everyday Germans.

But there are other AfD positions that do not elicit the same kind of anti-AfD rhetoric as the previous statements. For instance, some AfD campaigns promote traditional families by showing white, usually blonde, heterosexual families. But media, community members, and the BfV do not comment on these corporeal elements that draw on normative notions of Germanness. In fact, as I show in later chapters, part of AfD messaging draws on corporeal normativity in Germany to portray members' normalcy.

The AfD began to appear in the federal and a few states' BfV reports starting in 2016. These annual reports published on the BfV website described the AfD as recipients of Antifa violence but did not consider the AfD as an object of investigation. In the following few years, multiple state offices began investigating the AfD. On 15 January 2019, the President of the Federal Office announced at a press conference that the entire AfD would be classified as a "test case" (*Prüffall)* while the Junge Alternative (JA) and the Wing (*Flügel*) would be classified a

[1]Wir Deutschen, also unser Volk, sind das einzige Volk der Welt, das sich ein Denkmal der Schande in das Herz seiner Hauptstadt gepflanzt hat.

“suspected case” (*Verdachtsfall*). The JA is the youth and young adult section of the AfD; the Wing was a nativist, nationalist section of the AfD.

When announcing at a press conference the BfV would surveil the Wing (*Flügel*) and Junge Alterative (JA – the youth organization of the AfD), the president of the BfV, Thomas Haldenwang stated that the Wing is not compatible with the Basic Law. Haldenwang said

> The positions of the 'Wing' are not compatible with the Basic Law. The previous anti-constitutional clues have intensified. The ‘Wing’ is classified as a right-wing extremist movement. The BfV oriented itself strictly to its legal mandate in the assessment. As an early warning system, we must not only focus our attention on violent extremists, but also on those who verbally ignite the flames. Intellectual arsonists deliberately foment enemy images. Right-wing extremism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and racism seep into everyday perception - be it on the internet, in the stadium, on the street or in the political arena. Violent acts all too often grow out of this breeding ground. We resolutely oppose this and consistently combat right-wing extremist agitation. There must be zero tolerance for extremists (Haldenwang 2020).[2]

The intellectual arsonist comment refers to the high-profile rightist violence that has emerged in the past few years around the same time that AfD rhetoric became more extreme. While AfD members may not be perpetrating such violence, their rhetoric, Haldenwang argued, fosters the sentiment that stokes such violence. The most well-known of these acts of violence include the fatal shooting of Lübcke and the attacks in Halle and Hanau. Walter Lübcke, a regional politician for the

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[2] Die Positionen des ‚Flügel‘ sind nicht mit dem Grundgesetz vereinbar. Die bisherigen verfassungsfeindlichen Anhaltspunkte haben sich verdichtet. Der „Flügel“ ist als rechtsextremistische Bestrebung einzuordnen. Das BfV hat sich bei der Bewertung streng an seinem gesetzlichen Auftrag orientiert. Als Frühwarnsystem dürfen wir unser Augenmerk nicht nur auf gewaltorientierte Extremisten legen, sondern müssen auch diejenigen im Blick haben, die verbal zündeln. Geistige Brandstifter schüren gezielt Feindbilder. Rechtsextremismus, Antisemitismus, Islamfeindlichkeit und Rassismus sickern in die alltägliche Wahrnehmung ein – sei es im Internet, im Stadion, auf der Straße oder in der politischen Arena. Aus diesem Nährboden erwachsen allzu oft auch Gewalttaten. Dem treten wir entschieden entgegen und bekämpfen rechtsextremistische Agitation konsequent. Es darf keine Toleranz für Extremisten geben.

Christian Democratic Union (CDU), was shot in the head in early June 2019. The perpetrator has a violent neo-Nazi past and was reportedly critical of Lübcke's sympathetic migrant policy during 2015 (Bennhold 2019). In October 2019, a right-wing extremist attacked a synagogue in Halle (Saale) in Sachsen-Anhalt (Bubrowski and Bingener 2019). In February 2020, a man attacked a shisha bar, killing nine people with eastern European and Turkish backgrounds before killing himself and his mom (Fuchs et. al. 2020).

Haldenwang argued that observing intellectual arsonists also fell under the purview of the BfV, even if those intellectual arsonists did not overtly conduct themselves as violent extremists or have material evidence of anti-democratic or extremist sensibilities. This was a relatively unusual step for the BfV which typically monitors Islamic terror organizations, neo-Nazis groups, and religious organizations that articulate undemocratic beliefs as well as harbor and pursue violent tendencies.

With this justification, Haldenwang asserted the BfV's right to surveil the AfD, holding AfD members accountable for sparking hate or intolerance even if the connections between violent attacks on synagogues and politicians and the AfD could seem opaque to some people.

In addition to the BfV labeling the AfD as extreme, community members also call the AfD extreme in different ways, using labels such as "Nazi" that are popularly conflated with extremism in Germany. At other times, counter demonstrations would take place alongside AfD rallies and AfD members' private property was sometimes destroyed, homes and offices of AfD members were graffitied, and crude bombs were

sometimes set off at AfD offices. It is in this context of being labeled extreme by the government and community members that AfD members message their normalcy and democratic legitimacy.

This ethnography's argument is that AfD members work against this label of extremism by performing normalcy and democratic legitimacy. Members invoke and play with German speech and performative codes to position themselves as mainstream, legitimate, and "normal." Instead of viewing the AfD as an irregularity in Germany's history and contemporary political life, the argument I am making in these chapters is that in many cases, AfD members emerge from and draw on mainstream notions.

In this ethnography, I take AfD members seriously as people but critically view members' politics and messaging. I do not intend to amplify or give voice to AfD platforms, but instead analyze what these messages are, how they align or diverge from normative notions, campaign a kind of normalcy, and what can be deduced about broader German political culture from these messages. I am interested in questions of political messaging, normativity, and extremism. These interests and my German and Dutch language backgrounds guided my somewhat circuitous route to studying the AfD while following analogous groups in the Netherlands, Belgium, and Austria.

Rather than amplifying the AfD's positions in this ethnography, I strive to provide a nuanced and critical analysis of how the AfD fits within broader German

political life, how the party is enabled by a mainstream (*Mitte*) and its normative notions. I investigate the real-time entanglement between what is considered extreme and mainstream and how these interpretations, notions, and labels build off each other. Like Rosa and Bonilla (2017), I seek to deprovincialize the AfD and the *Mitte*, setting both in "broader historical, political, and economic assemblages" (202).

This ethnography is positioned within two bodies of scholarship. First, this ethnography contributes to scholarship on the political right. Two monographs have particularly shaped this ethnography – Susan Harding's (2001) work on American fundamentalist Christians and Douglas Holmes's (2000) work on integralism and fast-capitalism in Europe. While divergent in their topics, these two monographs overlap in their analysis of how respective groups draw on and are embedded in pre-existing notions. In the case of Harding's work, this broader terrain is modernity. The comparison between my work and Harding's (among others in this direction) is not only researching "repugnant Others," but also in the relationship with more mainstream groups. Harding considers American fundamentalists' relationship with modernity, writing that "fundamentalists were in fact always fully inside modernity" (Harding 2001: 270). It is not the division between such "repugnant" groups and the mainstream (or in Harding's research, modernity) that becomes apparent, but rather the interrogation of and embeddedness of these groups within the mainstream that becomes evident in these kinds of studies.

This ethnography also takes inspiration from Holmes's (2000) study of integralism in Europe. Holmes (2000) places his concept of integralism within

Counter-Enlightenment's moral and intellectual thought as a "protean phenomenon" (8). Integralism is a way, Holmes argues, to analyze how "mundane forms of collective practice can be linked to sublime political yearning [and] how varied and contradictory political ambitions can be synthesized within an overarching integralist agenda" (Holmes 2000: 9).

This ethnography diverges from Shoshan's (2016) work that analyzes forms of moral governance towards avowed neo-Nazis. Instead of studying avowed neo-Nazis, this ethnography examines the murky position of people who are broadly labeled extreme, but who reject and fight against such labels while performing a kind of normalcy to enhance claims to the mainstream.

Second, this ethnography engages theoretical analysis on extremism and democratic legitimacy. I build on a combination between German scholarship on extremism (Salzborn 2011; Butterwegge 2000) and political philosophy. This scholarship conjectures that viable democracy is built on competition (Marchart 2007; Mouffe 2005). I argue that groups like the AfD fulfill this need for agonistic competition in democracy. The relationship between the AfD and the political middle also illustrates the complicated and co-constitutive relationship between the political middle and the extremes that I describe later in this ethnography.

In one sense, the issues I describe in this ethnography are "monstrous" topics. By monstrous, I mean topics of public and private friction, such as what should be ideal and democratically legitimate in a post-Nazi, post-GDR, and 21st century Germany. These topics are monstrous in Cohen' (1996) sense that they capture

"'ambient fear' —a kind of total fear that saturates day-to-day living, prodding and silently antagonizing but never speaking its own name" (viii). Monsters, Cohen wrote, are an extreme version of the marginal that emerges through the boundaries that construct "culture" (Cohen 1996: ix). Monsters unsettle "what has been constructed to be received as natural, as human" (Cohen 1996: ix). In the same way, the monstrous topics I describe in this ethnography are supposedly marginal but unsettle and challenge what is considered normal.

These monstrous moments form nodes of conflict that are juxtaposed against shifting domestic and transnational power centers and which reveal schisms and skepticism about nation-building, liberal democracy, and national identity. These nodes of conflict become the source and reason for carnivalesque and performative behavior with its unique forms of speech, etiquette, and decency.

Within these conflict points, I research how AfD members craft their Messages alongside other participants crafting and disseminating their own Messages. Message is a type of candidate and party platform branding. I take the concept of Messaging from Lempert and Silverstein (2012) who use it to examine how political candidates in the United States transform themselves into "personae who are believable or imaginable as incumbents" through carefully crafted Messages (6). Messaging is a complex style of politics that becomes a kind of social fact. This style focuses on the creation of broad, votable campaigns through creating candidate personae, communicative events, and other semiotic strategies. Messaging becomes a "complex, multitiered process that is embedded and institutionalized in our politics"

(Lempert and Silverstein 2012: 6). Candidates, Lempert and Silverstein write, employ extravagance and hyperbole to portray personal attributes, creating grotesque figures that ironically often use “ordinariness” as an indicator of appeal (7). Through Messaging, candidates become kinds of celebrities for the masses and fans, “for whom every tidbit about the celebrity’s physical, sartorial, characterological, discursive, and other biographical features is worthwhile to their attentive collection and appreciation” (8).

The uniqueness of American Messaging is partially shaped through election seasons that bring together large numbers of people in different roles in macro-level forms of institutionalized communication, write Lempert and Silverstein. While German elections also have macro-level communication during highly mediatized elections, there is also more localized engagement, perhaps aided by the use of public squares and other gathering spaces where politics are publicly performed. Because of this, in this ethnography I analyze how Messaging is inherently relational. As I illustrate in the following chapters, members’ Messaging takes place both in local meetings of predominantly members as well as in more public, antagonistic engagements such as rallies, parliament sessions, and televised and in-person debates. Messaging has both internal and external audiences and the relationality of Messaging means that while some Messaging is strategized as Lempert and Silverstein describe, other Messaging is more spontaneous, responding in the moment in relation to other politicians, audience member questions, or silencing techniques.

In the following chapters, I describe a German form of Messaging by explaining the “cultural figurations” that allow parties like the AfD to campaign normalcy and democratic legitimacy. I focus on the corporeal signs, contemporaneous events that shape the communicative events, and broader social and mass media. Rather than only discuss political candidates, I use the term Messaging to include all kinds of participants in these interactions. To make Messaging applicable to German contexts, I borrow and reinterpret some of the concepts Lempert and Silverstein describe.

In the German context, the grotesque is evident in the absurd and the comical that is often juxtaposed against and given an outlet by “ordinariness,” or what I call “normalcy.” Grounded in the need to be normal, the grotesque, absurd, and comical emerges during conflict points, in turn shaping both Messaging and the ability to give Message a “voice.” AfD members promote Messages through members’ ordinariness – corporeally, socially, and occupationally – but this effort at normalcy and ordinariness is contrasted by both the provocative and sometimes salacious speeches politicians make, racist and sexist tweets by members, and other grotesque Messaging that members create which contrasts with the efforts to Message normalcy and democratic legitimacy.

Individuals’ efforts at Messaging become complicated through the competing interests of participants. In interactions, writes Goffman (1956), participants co-contribute “to a single overall definition of the situation” (4). This definition represents a mutual understanding of which claims will be discussed. But at times

participants with differing purposes or miscommunicated purposes lead to confused and conflicting interactions that result in anomie "that is generated when the minute social system of face-to-face interaction breaks down" (Goffman 1956: 6). Such breakdowns complicate the Messages and communicative events through which Messages are disseminated. For instance, during an incident in western Germany that I describe in chapter two, an AfD speaker tried to Message a shifted view of German history only to be disrupted by other participants throwing noise makers, shouting, burping, and moving about the room. It was during the interaction breakdown, during the anomie, that the AfD Messaging became disrupted, and others' Messaging became evident. Part of the competing Messaging transmitted during the interaction breakdown was caused by absurdity: older and elderly people scurried to look for noisemakers that younger people threw, a man near me shouted insults, agitated building security unsuccessfully tried to restore order, and riot police entered covered in full protective gear with an array of weapons, whose authoritative attire and holstered weapons seemed to be the antidote to ending the disruption, permitting AfD speakers to continue their efforts at Messaging. The absurd, satirical, and darkly humorous encounters become an "emotional aesthetic" that reflect the relationship between comedy, tragedy (Goldstein 2013: 37) and I would add, conflict.

The dark humor described in the following chapters emerges in moments that are highly contentious or when people expressed opinions that were publicly problematic. Sometimes, humor was used to put people at ease and enable the possibility of different alliances. In other ways, humor operated to dispel social

tension or to ridicule ideas. Sometimes, people “kidnapped” power through humor (Mbembe 1992); other times, people broke rules and created subversions (Carty and Musharbash 2008; Dağtaş 2016) or helped authority figures and hegemonic speakers assert their authority (McGowan 2017).

Not all of these moments were humorous, especially to Germans. How the Holocaust should be remembered is no laughing matter to Germans, nor is racial belonging or Germans’ need to be normal. But these topics and the satirical, absurd, and darkly humorous encounters, “rendered darkly through the glass of their collective experience” (Goldstein 2013:3), illuminate the tension of publicly displayed cultural intimacies or the “sore zones of cultural sensitivity” (Herzfeld 2016: 2). Participants engage these sore zones during the “settings” and “personal fronts” of conflicts (Goffman 1956: 13). Goffman describes “settings” as the physical and material objects and geographical habitation where encounters take place. “Personal front” refers to the items that are most individual to the people participating in the interaction (Goffman 1956: 14). In the following chapters, the materials, settings, geography, and individuality play a role in Messaging’s relationality. In these charged, local encounters, people with different backgrounds respond and react to the Messages being transmitted. Through these moments of (dark) humor and absurdity, people’s political performance and competing Messages become apparent.

Organizing my project around nodes of political conflict in Germany, I scrutinize how these nodes, juxtaposed against shifting domestic and transnational power centers, reveal schisms and skepticism about nation-building, liberal

democracy, and national identity. The six conflict points through which these repetitive themes emerge are reconfiguring histories, materiality and linguistic changes, energy politics, normativity, democratic legitimacy, and collaboration. This project is about how people – neighbors, families, colleagues – grapple with each other over Messaging what is permissible, normal and legitimate, what and who belongs in Germany, and imagining alternative German futures.

Additionally, this project adds an ethnographic approach to a predominately political science and quantitative approach to the AfD. Previous scholarship analyzed the AfD and similar political parties through social media analysis, constituents' voting patterns, politicians' rhetoric, and politicians' voting patterns. Much of the scholarship on the AfD analyzes whether the party is radical, academically reproducing popular critiques of these kinds of parties (such as Arzheimer 2015; Berbuir, Lewandowsky, and Siri 2015; Schmitt-Beck 2017). Arzheimer (2015) analyzes whether the AfD could be qualified as a right-wing populist movement using Mudde's 2007 definition to analyze the party's 2013 platform. Schmitt-Beck (2017) analyzes whether the AfD is a "successful right-wing populist" Eurosceptic party in Germany. Berbuir, Lewandowsky, and Siri (2015) similarly ask whether the AfD is a successful "right-wing populist movement in Germany," concluding that the AfD fits the parameters of a right-wing populist party. Schroeder and Weβels's edited volume assess how the AfD fills representative holes in Germany and operates as a radical right populist party. A less common direction compares the AfD with mainstream German views. Hansen and Olsen (2019) conclude that AfD voters in 2017 reflected

mainstream German political parties and that voters did not differ demographically from voters of other parties in terms of gender, education, employment status or union membership. These academic approaches are in addition to the numerous journalistic and personal accounts of the AfD, a political party that has certainly become a common topic of discussion in Germany.

Looking at the AfD ethnographically means considering the local organizations of the AfD as social cosmos of like-minded people, often mechanics, electricians, store managers, mall owners, soldiers, police officers, day-care workers, grandparents, lawyers, students, welfare beneficiaries, doctors, and judges, among others, who frequent these gatherings. My interactions with members were not only through parliamentary party structures. My connections and relationships took place in coffee shops, bars, Biergartens, and restaurants throughout Germany. Typically, the same people took part in these settings. They were not faceless voters or vote-seeking politicians, but people organized according to neighborhood precincts who got together every few weeks to drink beer, talk about politics, and voice their frustrations and successes. While I sometimes describe the AfD as a political party throughout this ethnography, this is to reflect the AfD's political organizational status rather than my methodological or theoretical approach. This ethnography is a collection of observations, conversations, materials, written rhetoric, and social media campaigns and posts.

Through this approach, I get away from statistics and voting patterns and move into smoky rooms of mostly men with tables full of beers and plates of pork

and potatoes. I enter casual conversations about Germanness and foreignness, identity and belonging, and frightful futures, horrific pasts, and present moments worth fighting for. I describe chats strategizing how to remain unseizable (*ungreifbar*) by government organizations tasked with monitoring racism, xenophobia, sexism, and anti-democratic behavior, indirectly talking about being white by overtly talking about people of color and maneuvering how to show potential voters that members are "normal." A major part of these nights of beer, pork and potatoes seemed to be for AfD members to re-enact and rehearse normalcy in potent rhetoric while I listened and watched. These rehearsals and discussions took place over food and ambiances that reinforced German "normativity" and through rhetoric that could then be repeated to ever larger and more public audiences, masterfully translating imagined normalcy into packaged and sellable stability.

While the constituency of this party has already expanded and retracted through several federal and regional election years, it has been a party that demands to be reckoned with, not because of its broad base of supporters, but because of its members' controversial speeches, writings, and social media posts that resonate at some level with a large enough audience to keep the conservative to far-right themes that the AfD broadly represents in circular discourse. The AfD does not represent the re-emergence of rightist politics; re-emergence would presume that such political notions had been vanquished and eradicated. Political notions do not die; adherents revise and adapt political notions to new socio-economic-political encounters.

For instance, in Germany, the Leitkultur (leading or guiding culture) debates emerged initially in the early 2000s among intellectuals and politicians through speeches, opinion pieces in leading newspapers, and other ways public outlets. Other scholars have written extensively about the history of the Leitkultur debates and the ensuing discourse on citizenship and exclusion (see Mouritsen et. al. 2019; Lammert 2006; Pautz 2005). The Leitkultur concept is based on the notion that cultures are distinct and must remain separate to retain their identity and avoid cultural conflicts (Pautz 2005: 40). In these debates, culture "performed the same exclusionary function as race" (Pautz 2005: 40; see also Stolcke 1995).

I only summarize the debates here to help explain the presumptions of a normative 'culture' and how this presumed normative culture was and is used broadly to form exclusionary practices. The term, Leitkultur, was first coined by Bassam Tibi to describe what he understood as a European-wide culture based on "democracy, secularism, the Enlightenment, human rights and civil society" (Tibi 1998: 154). In Germany at the turn of the millennium, the government led by the center-left Social Democratic Party of Germany planned to introduce new laws for integration, citizenship, and immigration that "would eradicate the concept of a people (Volk) tied together by ius sanguinis or blood descent" (Pautz 2005: 40). In response to a government commission to investigate citizenship, the center right Christian Democratic Union (CDU) created its own commission to compete in the "the definition of German identity and the discourse on immigration and the assimilation/integration of immigrants" (Pautz 2005: 40). In the subsequent years,

both the Left and Right took positions on the Leitkultur debate, arguing both about whether Germany had a guiding culture, what that guiding culture entailed, and whether this Leitkultur should be the basis for citizenship and integration. In the following decades, the debate would emerge in many forms, from Sarrazin's controversial book, *Deutschland schafft sich ab* to then Federal Minister de Maizière's list of German characteristics that post-2015 immigrants should understand (Mouritsen et. al. 2019: 638). Mouritsen et. al. (2019) write that these elite debates are "far from the slogans of Alternative für Deutschland)" (638). Perhaps the debates are far from some of the AfD's slogans, but certainly AfD members engage with these same debates, even at times repeating and mimicking the rhetoric expressed over the past two decades. Mouritsen et. al. (2019) argue that the Leitkultur debates over the past two decades have presented German culture as something civic to be "protected against all manners of unmodern unreason – associated with Islam." The Leitculture debates create an "unnegotiable civic trust" that bolsters the otherwise fragile, liberal democracy in Germany (Mouritsen et. al. 2019: 638).

AfD members and leaders similarly, though perhaps not exactly, argue that Islam does not fit into German civic culture based on its Judeo-Christian heritage. While the Leitkultur debate itself dissipated, the rhetoric and arguments were refashioned in different forms over the following fifteen to twenty years. As European nationalism became based on common values, exclusionary practices became based on "civilisational superiority and enforced civic acculturation" (Mouritsen et. al. 2019: 634).

I examine some of these views in this ethnography, such as efforts to remember German WWII victimhood that started immediately after WWII and became expressed through different narratives in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). AfD politicians and members did not create German victimhood; rather, rhetoric on German victimhood has taken diverse forms over the last several decades from proponents whose acknowledgement of German victimhood illustrates more about their agendas than historical fact. AfD members and politicians take up German victimhood in their own way and for their own purposes, but they are not the inventers of German victimhood. In other words, the data I present here may not seem striking or surprising: rather than looking for newness or re-emergence, I examine sites of long-standing public contention in Germany, through which race and ethnicity, normalcy and legitimacy, and migration and nativism are brought into new relational configurations through old discourses of rights, autonomy, and cultural norms.

A note on normativity and normalcy

My framework in this ethnography develops an argument of how normativity and the normal are used in Germany. Before I describe some of the normative notions in Germany, I define the way I use these concepts in this ethnography.

Normative notions are associated with moral judgment. These notions are considered correct and appropriate values, notions, and belief systems. These belief systems uphold what is considered normal. The concept of the normal refers to states

of being, objects, materials, rhetoric, and appearance that are ordinary and every day. Normalcy implies routine and ordinariness.

In this ethnography, I describe AfD claims to normalcy through videos, rhetoric, and other performative effort, such as in chapter (five) to describe how AfD members campaign and Message normalcy. I explain German normative notions in this ethnography through secondary literature. In the following subsections, I describe some of German normative notions to create a basis for this ethnography.

In the book, *Desintegriert Euch!* by Max Czollek, Czollek (2018) writes that normalcy is a "favorite topic of the Germans. Hardly anything in the political discourse in this country is afflicted with such positive affects as this term. Germans want to be normal. Germans finally want to be normal again. Germans finally want to be a completely normal people again" (Czollek 2018: 35).[3] Czollek identifies the desire and need to be normal Germans extends beyond and precedes the AfD. I argue that in many ways, members strive to draw on this normative need. Czollek also describes how the AfD's entry into the Bundestag connects back to historical moments of evolving German patriotism. As Czollek (2018) writes

> After all that has been said so far, is it absurd to establish a connection between the 2006 World Cup and the AfD's entry into the Bundestag in 2017? One meant the normalization of nationalism and national symbols, the other called for the corresponding concepts back to the political center. The fact that a national and nationalistic program in the Bundestag election was intuitively plausible for 12.6 percent of Germans should give one pause. That is part of German normality, German cigarette smoking, if you will, German leading

[3] Ich muss mich nun der *Normalität* widmen, diesem Lieblingsthema der Deutschen. Kaum etwas ist im politischen Diskurs hierzulande mit derart positiven Affekten behaftet wie dieser Begriff. Deutsche wollen *normal* sein. Deutsche wollen *endlich wieder* normal sein. Deutsche wollen *endlich wieder ein ganz normales Volk* sein.

> culture [*Leitkultur*]. It is quite possible that conservative politicians meant something different from what they had called for a German dominant culture [*Leitkultur*] in previous years. But is what they meant, if I can describe what happened afterwards, of any importance (42)?[4]

Czollek (2018) connects historical events through which performances of German nationalism became more acceptable to the AfD's entry into the federal parliament in 2017, itself a remarkable moment and perpetuation of the past century of German post-WWII loss and renewal. In the following subsections, I provide context for some of the normative notions (race and gender specifically) against which I compare AfD normalcy efforts.

Race

Race is ever-present in the meetings and events I attended and the discussions I heard. Here I describe some ways to understand race in Germany and Europe. First is the link between nation and race that emerged during the colonial and nation-building periods. As Müller (2011) writes, a significant part of Germany's local construction of whiteness is the "inextricable link between race and nation" (621). Germany's colonial period was relatively short, officially lasting between 1884 and 1914 (Müller 2011; El Tayeb 2001). This short period contributes to colonial fantasies that

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[4] Ist es nach allem bis hierher Gesagten abwegig, eine Verbindung zwischen der WM 2006 und dem AfD-Einzug in den Bundestag 2017 herzustellen? Das eine bedeutete die Normalisierung von Nationalismus und Nationalsymbolen, das andere beförderte die entsprechenden Konzepte zurück in das politische Zentrum. Dass ein völkisches und nationalistisches Programm bei der Bundestagswahl für 12,6 Prozent der Deutschen intuitiv plausibel war, sollte einem doch zu denken geben. Das ist Teil der deutschen Normalität, deutsches Zigarettenrauchen, wenn man so will, deutsche Leitkultur. Gut möglich, dass konservative Politiker*innen es anders *meinten,* als sie die Jahre zuvor eine deutsche Leitkultur forderten. Aber ist überhaupt zentral, was sie meinten, wenn ich beschreiben kann, was anschlieβiend geschah?

contemporary racism in former colonial powers (like Britain and France) is not an issue in Germany (Zantop 1997; Müller 2011).

Second the terms race (*Rasse*) and racism (*Rassismus*) have been challenged terms since 1945. Bielefeld (1988) wrote, "racism became the ideology of others and a practice of the past" (3), irrelevant or unsuitable to analysis of majority-minority relations. While the terms race and racism are becoming more common in Germany, there is still a "refusal to recognize racism as a European legacy" (Hieronymus 2005; see also Gehring 2016). Non-Europeans and Other Germans are lumped into the category of foreigner and are, thus, excluded from a full participation in German society. Practices of exclusion are based on a racialized understanding of Germanness and result in restricted access to the German labor market, a high unemployment rate, and high school dropout rate among migrants (Hieronymus and Schröeder 2006; Müller 2011:623).

Since the end of World War II, there has been a widescale effort in Germany to eliminate the word 'race' from every day and academic language. Presumed to be associated with the Third Reich and historical racial studies that underpinned the atrocities of Nazi Germany, the term race is not used in mainstream or political discourse (Gingrich 2004). Race in the 'narrow, legalistic, German-language sense of the post-1945 years continues to be a non-word' (Gingrich 2004: 159). Using the term race in relation to people creates suspicions that the speaker is racist; calling a person 'racist' is synonymous with calling the speaker a Nazi sympathizer (Gingrich 2004: 158; Müller 2011). Such assumptions of race and neo-Nazism thwart analysis of

everyday racism; these assumptions create workarounds to avoid naming race such as using the supposedly untainted English term rather than the tainted German version (Wollrad 2005).

Fourth, legislative and official state rhetoric perpetuate assumptions of race in Germany. Gehring (2016) researched how racialized language is used in Germany. "The history of German citizenship is one of ethno-cultural exclusion punctuated by recent reforms that extend legal access, but often maintain obstacles to full membership in German political community" (Gehring 2016: 1964). Everyday language mirrors state rhetoric that distinguishes and equates Germans and white people on the one side and people of color and migrants on the other (Gehring 2016). Gehring (2016) argues that the German state's creation of "immigration background" (*Migrationshintergrund*) permits the state to discuss and analyze the "ethno-racial other without engaging race explicitly" (1962). Gehring (2016) writes that after the 2000 citizenship law went into effect both the media and in everyday discourse, people utilized different terms and finally settled on the government's official term, migration background (*Migrationshintergrund*). "This linguistic reframing has a very real impact, as everyday discrimination based on 'immigration background' is understood by its purveyors as not being 'real' racism. This dismisses the actual impact of racism on society, and erases the lived experiences of those experiencing such discrimination" (Gehring 2016: 1966-1967).

While there are openly racist people in the AfD, members are operating within a larger terrain of racial discourse in Germany. This larger terrain disavows racism

while using coded terms to describe race and racialized communities. Operating within the larger racial discourse in Germany does not justify members' racist rhetoric, but instead offers a critical analysis of normative rhetoric.

Gender, sexuality, and corporeality

In the past several years, organizations and individuals in Germany have been pushing to mainstream diverse gender terms in the German language, leading to debates about gender categories, language legitimacy, and historical obligation. In addition to the socially acceptable form of using masculine nouns as default terms, companies, governments, schools, and other groups are increasingly using an asterisk, colon, or underscore to indicate female, gender nonbinary, and intersex people. Not only are gender terms indicated in this written way, but these terms are also spoken with a glottal stop (Nicholson 2021). A glottal stop is a sound made by obstructing the airflow in the vocal tract, specifically through the glottis. The vocal folds close briefly after making one sound before opening again to make the next sound. The effect of the glottal stop in these contexts is to pause the noun partway through, separating the first part of the noun (the male noun) with the rest of the noun (the female noun) with the asterisk representing gender non-binary and intersex people. The glottal stop sound – the abrupt stop in airflow – represents the gender non-binary and intersex people which is bracketed by the male and female gender nouns.

Yet there is still conflict about such gendered language. In the last decade, advocacy groups and German state parliaments have promoted changes to gender and sex education in schools. In the past year, two bills were presented in the federal

parliament that would have permitted gender self-identification, access to hormone blockers, and other rights for minors without parental consent. Proponents of these positions base arguments on minors' rights to constitutional liberties, such as the right to human dignity, as established in Germany's Basic Law. Additional socio-political justification for revised education is based on high-profile assault and murder cases following increased migration from predominantly Muslim countries in the Middle East and North Africa. This justification reemerges from historical tropes that depict the migrant Other as hypersexualized, religiously fundamentalist, unable to integrate to evolving European norms, and ignorant about post-Enlightenment, "Western values" regarding sexual and gender norms that only recently began to receive acceptance across Europe.

However, in response to proposed legislation, parental organizations have protested educational changes, demanding parental autonomy over minors' sexual and gender socialization and choices. Rightist parties and political groups in Germany have employed anti-migration discourse regarding these politics while simultaneously rejecting so-called gender mainstreaming and revised educational programs.

Writing about the AfD, Hajek (2020) describes how AfD initiatives and members promote the model of a heteronormative family, capable of biological reproduction of society and securing "the social and cultural dimension of reproduction." Hajek argues that this emphasis on biological reproduction of German society connects to Nazi ideology. While I leave the particulars of Nazi ideology to

Hajek, I am interested here in how heteronormativity relates to governance and normativity in Germany.

Hajek (2020) argues that anti-gender politics go beyond the AfD or the radical right to include both conservative and liberal sectors. Hajek (2020) writes,

> Anti-gender politics need to be understood as the result of an ongoing process in which right-wing populist actors use the topics of (anti-)genderism and the family to shift the discursive spectrum to the right. However, this is only possible because parts of mainstream media and conservative political forces are open to these right-wing perspectives, or, even actively take up these positions as they tap into discourses around unambiguous gender identities and the protection of the heteronormative family that are already present in German society.

In other words, AfD campaigns, images, rhetoric, and other materials follow normative notions in Germany. These normative notions are slowly changing to include transgender, diverse and gender non-binary people, but these changes are only recently taking place and at the levels of parliamentary debate and company rhetoric.

In this section, I described some normative notions in Germany that AfD members draw on during campaigns and Messages that promote their normalcy. I include these two sections here because throughout this ethnography, I refer often to markers of corporeality; this section strives to provide the requisite background that each chapter engages. There are other normative notions in Germany that members draw on, such as memory and energy politics, and I describe these in more detail within the chapter they emerge.

Methodology

The AfD is a large, nationwide party and varies from city to city and state to state. To account for the continued East-West, urban-rural, neoliberal and social-state divisions, my research took me all over Germany. Within the AfD, there are political actors across the political Right. Each local and regional group of the AfD is distinct, reflective of local members' political views, social standing, education, and occupation. Sometimes, this distinctness causes conflicting agendas within local and regional AfD groups. Despite such distinctness there are many inter-regional collaborative projects and networks in the party.

I started out my fieldwork with a quintessential ethnographic approach, viewing my arsenal of methods as a toolbox with tools to take out for every predicament and research challenge. I tried conducting traditional interviews with people, but there were several challenges to requesting and succeeding in conducting semi-structured, recorded interviews. First, many interlocutors were simply busy. Second, many members did not seem initially willing to speak to me; some told me it was because they thought I was a journalist or sociologist. There were many opaque and some direct forms of vetting that took place to ensure I was not a "disruptor." I was a conspicuous figure as a non-native German speaker, as a rather obvious outsider (young, female, foreign), and as a researcher.

Third, members sometimes struggled to understand what cultural anthropology is, what cultural anthropology has to do with contemporary politics, and what ethnography is. I quickly realized that as I tried to conduct semi-structured,

recorded interviews, people either began labeling me as a journalist, political scientist, or a sociologist. These assumptions came with attendant stereotypes. More problematically for my research, certain members were sent to speak to me; they employed carefully constructed narratives, something I realized the longer I stayed in Germany. I saw other researchers and students who came to research the AfD, only to hear the same polished points provided by designated AfD representatives. The answers were perfect – too perfect, too polished, too uniform, and too different than what was said in meetings and rallies. I literally threw away the paper with my semi-formal interview template and started listening in to the "gossipy nooks and crannies of real life" (Herzfeld 2016: 5).

I went to every meeting I could go to. I talked to everyone, including with homeless people at demonstrations, migrants working as service employees, Antifa counter demonstrating the AfD, and community members typically unaffiliated with politics. I went to parliament meetings, lectures, readings, and every other event remotely politically related. I became the center of affectionate teasing from members who told me that I knew more members than they did (certainly true since I traveled across Germany meeting people) and that if I were a member, I could become a candidate since I knew so many people. People would joke that I like them so much I just wanted to be around them.

But this teasing came later, towards the end of my second year of fieldwork. For well over the first year and a half, I was subjected to vetting processes by members. To show the kind of vetting process, I include an email correspondence. I

have changed the name of my interlocutor and removed identifying data, but I have kept my imperfect German at the beginning of my fieldwork in the footnote.

> Dear Mr. Montreal, I would like to register for the high school reform meeting on xxx date. Could you please let me know where the meeting is taking place? Thanks very much. Kind regards April Reber
>
> Dear Ms. Reber, I am very happy to put you on the visitor list., What are you doing in City A at the moment? Best regards
>
> Dear Mr. Montreal, Thanks very much! Where is this meeting taking place? I am a doctoral student from the USA and I am interested in democracy, civil rights, and EU rule and state rule. That's why I would like to learn more about the AfD. I've been a visitor to other AfD events and I'm looking forward to attending this lecture.
>
> Dear Ms. Reber, where do you currently work in City A. We do not want to have disruptors of the event with us. How would you like to convey that you are not such ... where did you hear about the event … I can't find you on Facebook. Best regards
>
> Dear Mr. Montreal, I am sorry to learn that you have had interferers at other events. I don't have a Facebook account and I don't have any other social media either. I'm currently working with the Institute for Saxon History and Folklore while I'm staying in Dresden. Ms. Dr. Ira Spieker is the director of the institute and you can email her. I think they [will] shortly post a report on my research here on their Facebook page (at least I passed a text on). I spoke to the city council, Mr. xxx, during his consultation hours and I was also at the Stammtisch with manager Mr. yyy [both are local AfD leaders]. I was also at other public AfD events. I found out about this meeting from the website and I am curious about the subject. I don't want to be stressful for AfD members or visitors. If it would be better if I did not come tomorrow, I understand that. I will try to attend other AfD events (e.g. I plan to visit the AfD citizens' office on Thursday). Best regards, April
>
> [From Mr. Montreal]
> I ask you not to pass on the location ... 18:30 in the xxx ... Please introduce yourself to me personally ... I am pleased to meet you.[5]

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[5] Sehr geehrter Herr Montreal,

ich möchte mich für das Treffen Reform der Oberschule am xxx Datum anmelden.

The email correspondence was only part of the vetting process. When I arrived at the location of the event, a traditional German restaurant, I blundered even

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Könnten Sie mich bitte informieren, wo das Treffen stattfindet?
Vielen Dank.

Mit freundlichen Grüßen
April Reber

Sehr geehrte Frau Reber,
sehr gern setze ich Sie auf die Besucherliste,
Was machen Sie zur Zeit in Dresden?
Beste Grüße

Lieber Herr Montreal,

Vielen Dank! Wo findet dieses Treffen statt?
Ich bin Dokorantin von den USA und ich interessiere mich fuer Demokratie, Buergerlicherechten und die EU Herrschaft und Staat Herrschaft. Darum moechte ich gerne mehr ueber die AfD lernen.

Ich war Besucher schon bei andere AfD Ereignisse und ich freue mich an, bei diesem Vortrag zu besuchen.
Sehr geehrte Frau Reber,
wo arbeiten Sie zur Zeit in Dresden. Störer der Veranstaltung möchten wir nicht dabei haben.
Wie möchten Sie vermitteln, dass Sie keine solche sind…wo Haben Sie von der Veranstaltung gehört…bei Facebook finde ich Sie nicht.
Beste Grüße

Sehr geehrter Herr Montreal,

es tut mir leid zu erfahren, dass Sie Störer bei anderen Events dabei hatten. Ich habe kein Facebook-Konto und ich habe auch keine andere Social Media. Gerade arbeite ich mit dem Institut für Sächsische Geschichte und Volkskunde, während ich in Dresden bleibe. Frau Dr. Ira Spieker ist Direktorin vom Institut und Sie können eine Email an sie schicken.

Ich denke, dass sie kurz einen Bericht über meine Forschung hier auf ihrer Facebook-Seite posten (mindestens habe ich einen Text durchgegeben).
Ich habe mit dem Stadtrat, Herr xxx, bei seinem Sprechstunden gesprochen und ich war auch bei Stammtisch mit Leiter Herr yyy. Ich war auch bei anderen öffentlichen AfD-Geschehen. Ich habe über dieses Meeting von der Website erfahren und ich bin neugierig über diese Thema.
Ich möchte kein Stress für AfD-Mitgliedern oder Besucher sein. Wenn es besser wäre, dass ich morgen nicht käme, verstehe ich das. Ich versuche, andere AfD-Veranstaltungen zu besuchen (z.B. planne ich, am Donnerstag beim AfD-Bürgerbüro zu besuchen).
Beste Grüße

….ich bitte darum den Ort nicht weiterzugeben …18:30 im xxx…
Stellen Sie sich mir gern persönlich vor…
Ich freue mich Sie kennenzulernen

more with the restaurant host who, from our conversation, I gather, was also instructed to vet participants. “Good evening, I'm looking for an AfD event." "I didn't reserve that," said the host, with no further solicitation, making her response seem quite cold. I started to wonder whether I was in the right place and knowing there was a long line of customers behind me at this very popular restaurant, I said, "Oh, maybe it is [naming event’s theme]." Perhaps trying to help me out, the host said, "I have the names, Mr. xx and Mr. Montreal." And I said, "Oh yes, that’s it." "Which of the two names?" the host said. "Mr. Montreal?" I said, knowing that this was the man with whom I had communicated but wondering if this was a trap set to send away “disturbers.” Then the host said quietly, almost as a whisper: "Up the stairs and first door on the right."[6]

I followed the directions and went up the red-carpeted stairs with faux ornate stair railing. Above me, the chandelier was a gaudy, faux 19th century light fixture with large crystals dangling to form an enormous bulb-shape. The ceiling was a large mirror with gold decoration on the outside borders as well as decoratively throughout. Mr. Montreal was waiting for me outside. At the top of the landing, just past Mr. Montreal, was a large moose head and just above Mr. Montreal was a wood panel with the name of the room carved in old German script. The walls were cream colored with large dark brown wooden paneling. While he looked to be perhaps in his

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[6] "Guten Abend, ich suche nach einer AfD-Veranstaltung." "Das habe ich nicht reserviert." "Oh, vielleicht ist es [event’s theme].” "Ich habe die Namen, Herr xx und Herr Montreal." "Oh ja, das ist es." "Welcher von beiden Namen?" "Herr Montreal?" Slightly more quietly: "Oben die Treppen und erste Tür rechts.”

late-40s, Mr. Montreal was smartly dressed with hair gelled and gently brushed to the side. His light brown hair matched flawlessly with his tailored dark blue suit, tie and pressed, slim-fit white shirt and his brown dress shoes. Mr. Montreal asked if I were Frau Reber and I said yes. I was barely on time and had not realized that he would be standing outside waiting for me. The room was already full with two large tables along the sides and a narrow walkway up the middle. The room was not large, and with the 30 or so people in it, it seemed even smaller, but it was a cozy gathering of middle-aged and elderly white Germans.

Mr. Montreal said that he had saved me a seat next to his girlfriend. "Oh great. Another vetting process," I thought, though perhaps he just wanted to make sure I had a place to sit since it was getting crowded. His girlfriend was polished. She wore make-up, but it was limited to powder perhaps and some eye coverage, but no mascara, blush or lipstick. Her hair was brushed straight back. She wore a fall, thick turtleneck that was a tan color that went very well with her complexion, and her black dress pants completed the professional look. She was so polished, not only in her dress but also in her mannerisms. The server asked for my drink order. I was flustered with the overly-crowded room, the vetting process I had just bungled through, and the abrupt server who had many more orders of drinks to write down and serve. When the girlfriend realized I was flustered, this woman deftly assisted me in ordering a pot of tea, just as she had done, placating the server who had started raising his voice trying to communicate with me, I assume partly out of frustration and partly in the hope that speaking louder would help me understand him better.

These vetting processes were not just about making sure I was not a disturber; other moments seemed to be about assessing what kind of foreigner I was and how well I would fit – how well I could belong – in this instance in a 19th century, dark-paneled room with moose heads peering down on me (or were they glaring at me?) with the aroma of potatoes, pork, and beer, and larger men debating local politics. Some vetting I passed, like when members would test me on significant dates in German history (only dates that reflected positive moments in Germany's past); some vetting processes I failed, like when I was asked if I wanted some Rotkäppchen (the name of a local wine) and I thought, why would I want some of Little Red Riding Hood?

I assume that one state's chairman had been told that I was a sociologist because at every meeting that he and I were at for several months, he would dedicate a portion of his allotted time to staring at me while telling the audience that sociology was a waste of a university degree and that universities promote eternal students instead of requiring people to get real jobs. During such moments I noticed many in the audience gazing at me, seemingly seeing me for the first time, while I smiled and thought, Thankfully I am an anthropologist.

Even three years into my fieldwork, when I called to register myself for a meeting in a new AfD group I had not visited yet, the AfD organizer asked me what the UC in my email address meant. I told him it was short for University of California. "But not Berkeley?" (Aber nicht Berkeley?), he asked me. "No, not Berkeley," (Nein, nicht Berkeley) I said, laughing. "Oh good," (Oh, gut) he said also

laughing. He asked me, “Are you a political scientist?” (Sind Sie Politik-Wissenschaftlerin?). “Yes, essentially, I’m an anthropologist,” (Ja, quasi. Ich bin Anthropologin), I said, but as I was starting to say Anthropologin, he cut me off and heard “Soziologin.” “Soziologin,” he said,” ach nein!” “Nein, nein,” I said, “ich bin Anthropologin.” “Oh, that sounds better,” (Oh, das klingt ordentlicher), he said. Yeah, it’s basically Volkskunde,” (Ja, es ist quasi Volkskunde), I answered. After three years of trying to explain the difference between sociology and anthropology and explaining the methodology of ethnography, I broke down in this conversation, and said the German word for anthropology, *Volkskunde*, a term and subject fraught with a complicated past but more palatable than sociology for AfD members seeking to preserve German “culture.” I only used the term *Volkskunde* twice and otherwise avoided the term because of its complicated past and because I was trained as an anthropologist in the US, meaning the intellectual baggage I carry is the English-language anthropology’s history, not the German-language history of *Volkskunde*.[7] As far as I can tell, institutes and universities are increasingly using terms like “Ethnologie” or “Anthropology” instead of Volkskunde, but the naming terrain is still diffuse and troubled in some ways because questions emerge about histories, intellectual engagement, methodology, theories, and purpose. The naming differentiation perhaps leads to intellectual possibility, but also to complications,

[7] The main difference I point to here is the particular history of German Volkskunde, especially during the Nazi period. The terms Volk and Rasse became unfavorable. Additionally, I learned that Volkskunde for people on the political Right often becomes understood and used as essentializing culture, identity, and belonging, providing a basis for exclusion. For more details, see “The German-Speaking Countries” by Andre Gingrich in *One Discipline, Four Ways: British, German, French, and American Anthropology*.

especially in trying to describe to people outside of academia in a foreign country with its own complicated history of social science and contemporary diversity of what social scientists should be doing.

I was introduced at each new meeting and was open about both my research directions, sharing chapter outlines and ideas with anyone who wanted to know more about my study (admittedly few people). Typically, I introduced myself as a doctoral candidate from the US who was researching democracy, citizenship rights, and migration and researching the AfD as an ethnographic part of that larger research project.

When I suspected, even to a small extent, that someone did not fully understand what I was doing at meetings, I did not include what we discussed in my notes or this dissertation. Similarly, I did not write down notes from what turned into, or were meant as, social calls or casual coffee and do not incorporate these conversations in this ethnography. I do not include conversations that seemed more personal, more casual, or were in WhatsApp group chats. There have been times when I asked interlocutors if I could use an anecdote or record their views on a topic we had already discussed, and they indirectly or directly refused. In all these cases, I have respected their wishes. I strive to use politicians' statements that represent common modes of thinking among members that I encountered, and I use publicly available statements and images that members posted or disseminated. Some introductory anecdotes are taken from notes from informal interviews and conversations I had with members, often local leaders, who knew about my project.

These ethical considerations led me to conduct a mixed methods study with a heavy emphasis on physical and digital ethnography, incorporating AfD social media, YouTube videos, and other web-based campaigns, as well as speeches by politicians and leaders. In this ethnography, I include a kind of digital ethnography that illuminates how members project their voice through social media sites. This approach deprivileges the face-to-face contact presumed to be authentic in cultural transmission (see Kunreuther 2014: 22). My research was necessarily focused on areas with active AfD groups that organized events and welcomed visitors. While I was based in Saxony, I visited other areas as well, such as North Rhine-Westphalia, Thuringia, Hessen, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Hamburg. In this ethnography, I do not list locations and gave English pseudonyms to interlocutors to protect anonymity.

As time went on and my fieldwork lasted longer, I began leaving my notebook in my bag and chatted more with people I met, getting to know them better as people. This shift led to new experiences. It meant that I heard more about their families and friends, their hobbies and worries, their gardens, and their summer vacations. It meant sometimes I was asked to give money to the AfD or was invited to campaign for the AfD, neither of which I did. This meant my photo was taken by various observers or participants as I chatted and laughed with members and supporters. It meant I sometimes had to pass through Left or Antifa demonstrations to get to a meeting or stand in an AfD group that was heckled.

But I am not “one of them” and my limited experiences cannot be compared to members’ experiences. Somehow my corporeality seemed to convey to everyone (police, counter demonstrators, AfD demonstrators) that I was not “one of them” – AfD members. And when I spoke, my accent and grammatical mistakes confirmed my outsider status. Not being German or a local community member, never being involved in AfD politics or initiatives, I never had to experience the occasional anger and division in family relationships or friendships. Members had their cars burned, houses and offices graffitied, or bombs set off; some reported being fired after they divulged (and in consequence of) their membership. Several AfD politicians had protection by police bodyguard divisions.

The most I ever saw of violence was limited to rhetorical critique. For instance, at a June 17 memorial event, members stood at a busy intersection in Dresden and held up both AfD signs and signs commemorating the 17 June 1953 uprising against the GDR and Soviet Union. We were standing on the grass at the intersection across from the new synagogue; the Elbe was just below us. The police were on either side of the streets around us, watching. The members had set up a trailer pulling their massive sign along with three posters and a few German and Saxon flags that people held. The set up and clean up were easy and efficient, the number of people required to hold signs and flags was relatively minimal. One person held fliers to hand out to people who might be passing by. As we stood there, chatting with one another, most motorists ignored us. But a few honked horns, shouted out

windows saying, “Nazis,” or “Schämt euch!” (shame on you) or more insulting language.

I chatted with a member who complained about taxes and how some of the older people he knows are unable to stay in their homes because of such high taxes being levied. “Shame on you!” one person shouted out of a passing car window while this man and I were talking. “What did he say,” I asked the man. “Oh, shame on you” the man said as he gestured with his right arm to ignore the comment, and the man kept on talking about the tax problem that many older people are encountering. Another passing car passenger shouted an insult. Again, the man told me what was said and then continued speaking about our original topic. Another passing car passenger repeated the gesture and another man had joined us waved his hand and shouted, Danke! as he smiled and told me that they always needed to be polite.

I share this anecdote to show the limits of what I saw and experienced compared to media and police reports of broader antagonism against AfD members. While I do not give voice to AfD or rightist politics, I do take seriously their concerns about safety and security, and their worries about family, friends, and colleagues. At the same time, because of the reality of extremist violence, especially in this context on the Right, I strive to not minimize the contemporary dangers of Rightist extremist ideas that overtly privilege some people above others, exclude, discriminate, or contribute to efforts that linguistically minimize and reproduce the injustices of the past and present.

Research Settings

In this section, I describe the settings in which my research typically took place to provide a sense of what ethnographic methods means in this ethnography. While I attended demonstrations, information stands, and other public forms of AfD engagement, there are three typical settings in which my research took place: regular, local meetings, campaign events such as *Bürgerfest* (citizen festivals), and *Bürgerdialog* (citizen dialogues).

The most typical setting of my research was the regular monthly meeting, the *Stammtisch*. Boyer (2006) describes the *Stammtisch* as "long-standing political institution in Germany in which a group of *gleichgesinnte* (like-minded) persons, usually exclusively men, gather on the same evening every week to talk work and politics, processing the events of professional and public life" (329). It is a space where participants gather and explore events, politics, and other themes usually over food and drink. Describing the eastern German Stammtisch, Boyer (2006) writes that "the Stammtisch is a communicative space in which the more rigorous and formal expectations of intellectual culture are inverted – humor, polemicism, and irony are common" (329). But people also discuss politics, community, and history at these monthly meetings. The political monthly meetings I observed were slightly different from the ones that Boyer describes; these monthly meetings had themes were socio-political in nature and typically had ten to thirty participants. Popular monthly meetings were ones that well-ordered and promoted engaging debate while still producing *Kumpels* (like "mates" or close male friends; see Boyer 2006). The popular

monthly meetings were temporal and physical spaces where people could create a community, exchange ideas, and practice persuasive rhetorical strategies while having a night out with like-minded people (mostly men).

While intense debate and even side conversations were common, one speaker typically spoke at a time to the group, often standing to claim the right to speak. While some comments were short, other comments were very long, almost monologues, that illuminated not only the speaker's opinion, but the broader views of the speaker, and the linguistic and narrative styles that the speaker has mastered or is practicing. Since these were political monthly meetings, the purpose was not only to exchange ideas but also to persuade. As is common, people showed their affirmation often by repeatedly tapped their knuckles on the table. When new people came into the room, they would often greet each person with a handshake and a greeting, even if this was disruptive to the speaker. When several new people entered at the same time, the meeting would typically stop until the greetings had taken place.

Campaign events constituted another typical setting I attended. During the period I researched, I observed three different federal and local elections. Campaign events usually were outdoor and often in late summer or fall. Event planners tried to create a festive air with local, German bands of two or three middle-aged, white German men, playing a variety of music, but especially German folk music and 1960s and 1970s rock music. Some events had bounce houses for children and inexpensive or free Bratwurst and alcohol. Metal picnic tables were often set out so that people could sit. But at such public campaign events, anti-AfD and Antifa groups would

often join nearby, separated by police from the AfD groups. At times, the whistles, music, chants, and other sounds from the anti-AfD demonstrators would overpower or compete aurally with AfD speakers. Sometimes, speakers would briefly engage or reference the counter demonstrators. The campaign events that I observed always ended with the speakers standing on the podium singing the German national anthem together, often amid jeers and whistles of anti-AfD groups. For popular speakers, the audience could be as large as a few hundred people. Often, though, I was one of fifteen or twenty people who stayed the entire time.

Finally, I attended many *Bürgerdialog* (citizen dialogues). These events are put on by politicians from every political party and government arbiters to hear from constituents. At the citizen dialogues I attended, the organizers sat at a table, typically on a podium, with microphones for each speaker. Microphones were placed throughout the room for citizens to voice their opinions and ask questions. Themes ranged from local to international politics, coalition possibilities with other political parties, and some complaints. Many of the AfD citizen dialogues I attended were organized by federal-level politicians and attendance was often over fifty participants. These events generally took place inside, either in city or federal government or community centers.

The data presented in this ethnography comes predominantly from these kinds of events, observing people talk to, reason or argue with, and try to persuade each other. Physical altercations were also entirely absent, but there were “disruptors,” to use Mr. Montreal’s term, at some of these meetings or outside the meetings.

Description of chapters

This ethnography is organized around six nodes of political conflict in Germany: reconfigured histories, materiality and linguistic changes, energy politics, normativity, democratic legitimacy, and complicity. I chose these nodes because they represent far-reaching political intersections engaged by actors across the spectrum. Nodes – the point at which several lines intersect and branch off – seemed an appropriate term for these six political conflicts. In the nodes I explore and examine in the following chapters, I illustrate how multiple issues converge in memory politics, material forms of patriotism/nationalism, energy and ecological politics, normativity, and democratic legitimacy. I also analyze how Messaging emerges through these various conflicts to reconfigure democratic legitimacy, normativity, racial aesthetics, and knowledge pathways.

Chapter two begins by tracing how Germans generally have reframed the Nazi period and positioned German victimhood alongside, or in place of, German aggression. In this chapter, I scrutinize two kinds of moments of disruption. The first kind of disruption is AfD rhetoric that displaces the traditional centrality of Nazi period in discussions of Germany's past. The second kind of disruption is how critics of the AfD seek to disrupt AfD rhetoric physically and aurally about Germany's trajectory. These physical and aural disruptions seek, in turn, to disrupt AfD imaginaries of Germany's present and future. Additionally, I illustrate how people try to re-Message Germany's past and future by centering their focus on different parts of

German history and projecting alternative German futures. This chapter illustrates how people disrupt, silence, and speak competing Messaging.

Chapter three explores how materiality becomes the center of existential threats and ways of securing German belonging. I analyze two kinds of materiality – the national anthem and the German language. AfD members' efforts to normalize singing the German national anthem form part of their Messaging efforts. Members' critiques of changes to racialized and gendered language draws on normative notions in Germany. I analyze AfD parliamentary petitions to continue these normative notions and challenge language changes.

Chapter four develops my thesis on Messaging racial aesthetics and knowledge pathways through energy politics in Germany. In this chapter I examine how AfD meetings focused on energy and ecological politics become spaces for multiple kinds of actors and perspectives to come into contact, politicizing energy and placing energy engagement into the realm of laypeople. AfD members are re-Messaging energy to comment on coal, the bark beetle, and wind turbines while navigating language performance. This chapter helps clarify some of these struggles by examining how actors engage each other in local debates about energy and climate politics through silencing techniques and logic games.

Chapter five scrutinizes normative Messaging by exploring how normativity emerges in German socio-political situations. I examine how members campaign normalcy while simultaneously striving to shape normativity in Germany. Additionally, in these efforts, members strategize how to assert their own naming

conventions in contradiction to the *Nazikeule* (Nazi club or bat), a fascinating term that I explore in more detail. Briefly put, the Nazi club is used typically by people who are called Nazis by others because of people's original speech that was deemed problematic. In AfD efforts to create new naming conventions, I describe how members also employ racial aesthetics to distance themselves from radical politics.

Chapter six explores scholarly debates on what extremism is and how it should be labeled. I draw on German and English-language academic debates and link these debates on extremism to constructs of democracy and strategies of claiming democratic legitimacy. I explore members' response to the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution's (BfV) claims of AfD extremism. I first establish the stakes involved in BfV labels of extremism and the threat to members if the AfD is labeled by the government as extreme. Because of the need to discredit the BfV's claims of AfD extremism and claim the AfD's commitment to democracy and Germany's Basic Law,[8] members and leaders regularly spoke about how to show others that they are democratic. I detail how members strive to claim democratic legitimacy through creating public statements and web-based campaigns and participating in strategy conversations. I argue that the ongoing competition between the BfV and the AfD makes most sense within these theoretical debates on

[8] Germany's Basic Law was adopted in 1949 as a temporary framework for Germany until reunification would take place. In the Unification Treaty on 31 August 1990, the German governments of the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic, the parliaments of both governments decided to maintain the Basic Law (*Grundgesetz*) and incorporate the five eastern states and reunified Berlin within the German state (Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community).

extremism. I argue that extremism contributes to constructions and expectations of democracy and how people work to claim normalcy and democratic legitimacy.

In chapter seven, I return to the themes that I introduced in the preface and first chapter of this ethnography. These themes include studying unlikeable groups and how these groups craft Messages to communicate normalcy and democratic legitimacy. In this chapter, I first evaluate the importance of studying rightist groups specifically and so-called Repugnant Others. Then I consider two anecdotes where people who have called certain AfD members as radical or Nazi have ultimately consented to these so-called Nazis.

In this ethnography, I argue that the AfD Messaging I examine sometimes operate as ways members strive to promote their normalcy and democratic legitimacy. Messages also draw on and are associated with contemporary discourse in Germany, making these Messages entwined with other already-occurring Messaging. That the AfD can be in Germany's federal and state parliaments indicates more about contemporary German politics generally than about the AfD particularly. Nine years after the AfD was founded, some, though not all, AfD politicians often give the predictable offensive answer or the anticipated stirring speech.

While Germany is known for being a progressive country for women's rights, social state benefits, homosexual rights, and renewable energies, for instance, it is (or should) also be known as a site for debates about gender and language, wind and coal energy, Germany's history, and extremism and legitimacy. What the AfD as a party reveals and reflects, uncomfortably enough, are the schisms that have long been

occurring in Germany despite international imaging efforts through crafted speeches and a careful and moderating presence in NATO, the EU, and other transnational and global meetings and summits.

While this ethnography takes the AfD as a starting point, this ethnography is not just about the AfD. These six broader schisms in German politics have analogues in other countries worldwide. What country is not faced with politics labeled radical, a fraught past, debates about minorities' rights, active strategies of exclusion, debates about environmental, social, and household budgetary costs of energy and climate change, and competing images of democratic legitimacy? This ethnography goes beyond the AfD and Germany to have implications about Messaging normalcy and democratic legitimacy worldwide.

Messaging is relational. Messages become shaped through reactions to other Messages and imagined and potential audiences. Part of the contributing factors of the Messaging efforts described in this ethnography is in response to AfD politicians' speeches and other kinds of (often provocative) public comments.

The purpose of this ethnography is to analyze contemporary politics through the schisms illustrated in the six nodes of conflicts I present, which are buttressed against domestic and international politics. One final comment: The AfD has shifted quite a bit in the past nine years and will continue to shift within the paradigms of its political boundaries. But people change, their opinions change, and their experiences change, sometimes for the better, and sometimes for the worst.

Chapter 2: Moments of Disruption

> I sat with Aaron in the rather bare AfD office. Our conversation meandered through several of the usual topics, such as basic democracy, migration, the GDR, Germany's WWII destruction, and German WWII guilt. I asked Aaron if there was an alternative to German guilt. "What will happen, if Germans don't have to say that they are guilty? What is the alternative?" Aaron answered, "Dass wir stolz sind auf unser Geschichte. Deutschland ist Goethe, Musik," Aaron answered. "Deutschland ist mehr als 12 schreckliche Jahre." (That we are proud of our history. Germany is Goethe, music. Germany is more than just twelve appalling years.)

To my rather obvious question, Aaron gave an obvious answer: if Germans do not have to claim guilt, then they can be proud of their history, which is longer than twelve years under Hitler. Aaron planned on retiring in a few years and had spent half of his life in the GDR. For Aaron, the GDR was not only an experience he grew up with, but it was also family history that was more significant to him than the twelve years of the National Socialist, or Nazi, (NSDAP) government. Our conversation, which lopsidedly focused on the GDR, illustrated how relatively unimportant the NSDAP period was for him. Nor did Aaron pose the GDR as only authoritarianism, though he certainly described that aspect. "We had communism. We experienced communism,"[9] Aaron told me during this conversation. Aaron also told me about how his mom was a *Trümmerfrau* – one of the women after WWII who aided in Dresden's cleanup as a form of work during these years of privation and when many men had either been killed or were still POWs. Aaron wanted to talk about German history, especially in relation to the present and future. In our conversation, he drew

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[9] Wir haben den Kommunismus gehabt. Wir haben Kommunismus erlebt.

comparisons between the GDR and the Hambach Forest conflict (discussed in more detail in the following chapters). Aaron discussed violence and Antifa, which led him to conclude that the AfD is the deepest democratic party. "The AfD is the deepest, deepest...democratic...That's why it's legitimate."[10]

For Aaron, disrupting the popularly perceived way of remembering Germany's past, in which the NSDAP is centrally staged, was a way to talk about other histories envisioned by AfD members that yielded an alternate potential for Germany's present and future. Aaron's configuration of historical events led to his subsequent structured narrative of Antifa violence, the dramas around Hambach Forest, and leftist politics. Hambach Forest is an ancient forest in North Rhine-Westphalia that was to be cleared as part of the Hambach surface mine. Protests started as early as 2012 and Aaron referred to these protests, which included people camping in trees in the forest. Aaron wanted to talk about history – but he wanted to talk about the history that mattered the most to him and that made the most sense in conjunction with the way he structured his narrative of present and future Germany. Aaron participated in the battle for history's image in order reshape Germany's present and future (Salzborn 2011).

In Germany, the NSDAP period can seem to dominate memory politics and discussion of history, but AfD members try to re-Message this focus. In this chapter, I explore how members' Messaging of the NSDAP becomes a point of conflict. By centralizing different histories in place of the NSDAP period, members create

[10] Die AfD ist dem tiefsten, tiefsten [Sinne] demokratisch. Deswegen ist das legitim.

possibilities for alternative German presents and futures, both in terms of Germany's domestic and international standing.

First, I provide a description of the broader history of Germans' evolving perception of the National Socialist past, an evolution that AfD members take part in but do not instigate. Then, I describe moments of disruption. By moments of disruption, I mean moments during which people who are not AfD members disrupt discussions about remembering or claiming guilt for the Holocaust and Germany's NSDAP period. This disruption occurred through physical altercation, audio disruption, silencing techniques, and rhetorical strategies. While these disrupting moments emerged when people talk about the NSDAP period, the broader debates in which these disruptions take part is about Germany's future.

Understanding Germany's changing self-perception

In the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), the initial decade following the end of WWII was dominated by silence about the past while western Germans worked to rebuild the FRG. In the 1960s and 1970s a left-liberal intelligentsia emerged in the FRG. This intelligentsia promoted what became the hegemonic view in the FRG, focusing on *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coming to terms with the past). As Becker (2006) explains, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* "postulat[es] that the social, economic, and psychological preconditions of National Socialism had not entirely disappeared, [and] it demanded that Germans had constantly to account for the loss and suffering they caused their victims in order to prevent repetition" (339). This

view circulated in mainstream society and can still be seen in daily experiences, such as an aversion to wave the German flag, the creation and wide circulation on documentaries, films and television shows about German perpetrators, and school curriculum focusing on German atrocities.

Alternatively, in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), a satellite state of the Soviet Union, German victimhood became the hegemonic discourse within the first few years after the war. The GDR government implicated both fascism and capitalism for Germany's destruction. For instance, Fox (2006) traces how the Dresden and GDR communities described the Dresden bombing as a result of US capitalism, fascism, and anti-communism. In general, while the FRG embraced German atrocity and perpetrator status, the GDR promoted German victimhood.

Germany's reunification proffered new opportunities and challenges for conceptualizing the German nation and its past for both former East and West Germans. In the past thirty years since reunification, many Germans have been changing their image of their country's past, putting the NDSAP and the Holocaust in perspective with other experiences from that period, such as Allied bombing on civilian German populations, expulsion of Germans from former German territories in eastern Europe, and the physical and sexual violence against women by Allied forces (Cohen-Pfister 2006; Fox 2006; Lutomski 2006; Mathäs 2002).

In conjunction with putting the Holocaust and WWII in contexts alongside German victimhood, scholars and commentators point to certain moments that have led to a new sense of nationhood and patriotism in Germany. Becker (2006) argues

that between 1998 and 1999, three events especially reconfigured the politics of memory in Germany: Martin Walser's speech, the army's involvement in NATO's attacks against Serbia in the Kosovo conflict, and the choice to build the Berlin Holocaust Memorial. Fox (2006) argues that in 2005, Saxon's parliament president, Erich Iltgen, requested members hold a moment of silence for the "victims of the National Socialist tyranny" which included the 60th anniversaries of the liberation of Auschwitz and the bombing of Dresden. Fox writes that such joint recognitions of German perpetrator and victim positions were prepared partially by Chancellor Helmut Kohl's 1993 renovation of a memorial site in Berlin for all the victims of Nationalist Socialism. "Thus, Iltgen's request [for a moment of silence for German victims], though it might still raise eyebrows abroad, is currently a common one in Germany" (Fox 2006:137).

Recognizing Germany's victimhood status also comes from international relations. Lutomski (2006) describes how German victimhood emerges in the form of both Germans and Poles acknowledging the expulsion of Germans from Poland following the Yalta summit and during the socialist period. During the 1990s (after German reunification), the Polish and German governments established a year of cultural celebrations to mitigate good relations and crafted treaties that established the Oder/Neisse border as inviolable.

Additionally, parts of German victimhood, such as mass rape, are now becoming more acceptable to debate and discuss. Cohen-Pfister (2006) describes how the rape of German women by the Soviet Army, not without controversy, "defies

essentialist definitions of victim and perpetrator" and "serves as a marker for evaluating the changing perception of Germans' historical roles in the Second World War" (317).

Nostalgia also factors into how people navigate which historical moments to put in narrative sequence (Boym 2001). Nostalgia creates a "counter-present" that corrects, through collective participation, an "insecure present" (Neofotistos 2012: 75) and provides an alternative view of time to a modern concept of linear, irreversible time (Boym 2001: 13). But nostalgia becomes insidious when it creates a history without guilt (Boym 2001: xiv). It can create fantasies of the past based on the needs of the present, but these fantasies reframe reality and directly impact visions (both hopes and fears) of the future. Structural nostalgia – the idealized image of the past – can sustain the idyllic image of the nation despite "winks and nods" revealing imperfections (Herzfeld 2016: 2). But this structural nostalgia not only sustains the nation in productive ways; it also nurtures social and political movements like the AfD that operate within hegemonic narratives to structure conceptions of the present while shaping alternative futures.

The annual performative memorials of the bombing of Dresden reflect these multiple narratives of nostalgia that vie for voice. For instance, Björn Höcke (AfD), co-leader of the now-dissolved AfD Wing, gave a provocative speech in Dresden in 2017 that received nationwide praise and critique. In this speech, Höcke described Germany's broader history in positive terms. He edemanded a 180 degree turn in how Germans think and talk about the past so that Germans can change how they think

and talk about the future. Höcke described the Allied bombing of Dresden as a war crime and compared the rebuilt facades of Dresden to how Germans need to rebuild or reconstruct their image of Germany.

> With the bombing of Dresden and the other German cities, they [Allies] wanted nothing more than to rob us of our collective identity. They wanted to destroy us root and branch, they wanted to uproot our roots. And together with the systematic re-education that began after 1945, that was almost achieved. There were no longer any German victims; there were only German perpetrators. To this day we are unable to mourn our own victims. And that became obvious again with the undignified treatment of the victims of the Berlin terrorist attack. For us patriots, the reconstruction of the Frauenkirche, which Markus Mohr rightly discussed, was a glimmer of hope that this small spark of German self-assertion still exists. But, dear friends, so far it's only facades that have come up again. Up to now, our state of mind, our frame of mind is still that of a totally defeated people (Höcke 2017).[11]

Höcke claimed that through the bombing of Dresden, Allied powers robbed Germans of their collective identity and forced "re-education" on Germans to convince Germans of their perpetrator status. Höcke argued that Germans need to have a 180-degree shift in how they see their past, focusing on their achievements rather than failures.

Alternatively, President Steinmeier (SPD) captured a delicate, contemporary balancing act during his 13 February 2020 speech in Dresden that commemorated the bombing of Dresden. Steinmeier began by describing the horrors of the bombing as experienced by the victims.

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[11] Mit der Bombardierung Dresdens und der anderen deutschen Städte wollte man nichts anderes als uns unsere kollektive Identität rauben. Man wollte uns mit Stumpf und Stiel vernichten, man wollte unsere Wurzeln roden. Und zusammen mit der dann nach 1945 begonnenen systematischen Umerziehung hat man das auch fast geschafft. Deutsche Opfer gab es nicht mehr, sondern es gab nur noch deutsche Täter. Bis heute sind wir nicht in der Lage, unsere eigenen Opfer zu betrauern. Und augenfällig wurde das wieder bei dem würdelosen Umgang mit den Opfern des Berliner Terroranschlages. Der von Markus Mohr schon zu recht thematisierte Wiederaufbau der Frauenkirche war für uns Patrioten ein Hoffnungsschimmer dafür, dass es ihn doch noch gibt, diesen kleine Funken deutschen Selbstbehauptungswillen. Aber, liebe Freunde, bis jetzt sind es nur Fassaden, die wieder entstanden sind. Bis jetzt ist unsere Geistesverfassung, unser Gemütszustand immer noch der eines total besiegten Volkes.

> The wailing of the sirens; the ominous droning of the aeroplanes and the flickering red light in the sky; the mortal fear and the crowding in the cellars; the impact of the bombs, the shattering glass and the exploding walls; the roaring blaze that sucked the air out of the streets, the buildings and the small caverns among the ruins; the bodies of people who had burned to death and the shell of the city (Steinmeier 2020).

Steinmeier continued after a lengthy description of the destruction of Dresden’s city center:

> And I think that we should – indeed must – try today to imagine the fear, pain and desperation of the victims and survivors of this bombing war. I would like to thank all those who work tirelessly here in Dresden and in many other places to keep memories of the past alive – and who at the same time stand up to those who want to exploit this memory to foment new hatred and new resentments (Steinmeier 2020).

Steinmeier reflected mainstream German approaches to Germany’s WWII history by remembering German perpetration *and* victimhood. Steinmeier’s delicate balance is different than Höcke’s approach and reflects the continued controversy that this single event in WWII still creates.

In contrast, some Antifa groups gather in flamboyant clothes, play drums and other instruments, and sing songs to disrupt some of the subdued 13 February memorial proceedings, sometimes calling for another bombing of Dresden. At the other end of the political spectrum, neo-Nazis march through Dresden to memorialize the bombing of Dresden as a symbol of foreign aggression and Germany’s complete victim status, mourning the defeat of Germany and the end of the NSDAP. Such competing narratives around a single event – the bombing of Dresden – illustrate the complicated structural nostalgia that specifically exists around the Nazi past, WWII,

and the Holocaust. This twelve-year period surpasses in intensity and repetition the invocation, debate, and memorialization of other parts of Germany's past.

While Höcke's comments were marginal for many (though not all) AfD members I met, the most consistent approach I observed sought to decentralize the NSDAP period by remembering more other parts of German history. In the following section, I describe how AfD members try to disrupt the preeminent attention that the Nazi period generally receives in memory politics. I also illustrate how people outside the AfD try to disrupt and silence these AfD efforts. The first example comes from a campaign event with Alice Weidel and the second, from a much smaller but likewise intense citizen dialogue. Each example demonstrates competing sounds as forms of voicing and silencing. I share these two examples because they illuminate, in contained spaces and interactions, the competition over performatively speaking about Germany's past and future.

Disrupting the past

Sind wir jetzt schuld oder was?

At the end of October 2019, I traveled to a mid-sized town for what I thought would be a relatively calm meeting featuring Alice Weidel. Since 2017, Weidel has been co-chair of the AfD Bundestag fraction. As a lesbian woman, mother of two adopted children, and formerly in the finance industry, Weidel and AfD members have used her personal life to argue that the AfD is progressive. On my way to this meeting from the city center, I crossed the Schlossbrücke over the Ruhr River to the

city hall where the event was to be held. As I crossed the bridge that evening, I noticed families with small children holding anti-AfD and pro-tolerance signs heading back over the bridge towards the city center. Halfway across the bridge I could already see a large counter demonstration gathered outside the venue. The rap music on the loudspeaker, the cigarette smoke, the alcohol scent in the air, and the crowded bodies pushed together in the small area in front of the building formed a stark barrier to entering the venue. I stood with the counter demonstrators, pushing my way through to the only doors I saw and what I assumed was the entrance of the building, only to find locked doors and a large crowd of anti-AfD activists looking at me.

I turned around, faced the black-clad activists with beers, cigarettes, and e-cigarettes, and uncomfortably asked where the entrance was. One young man explained that this was an AfD meeting. I said, Yes, and where is the entrance? Are people allowed to go in? The people near me looked me up and down and then said that I had to go around to the other side. I pushed my way back through the crowd, excusing myself as I stepped on feet and nudged bellies and shoulders as I passed.

I walked around the police vans and cars looking for the "other side," finding a few spectators gathered near police who were standing at the bus stop on the incline overlooking the venue, parking lot, and crowd. A man was speaking agitatedly to one police officer who blocked a small opening, which was large enough for only one person to pass, between the line of police vans and the bus stop. The vans, the single police officer, and the bus stop structure provided yet another barrier to the entrance.

The man continued to speak to the police officer who seemed to barely listen. I waited for a moment and when the police officer looked at me, I took my chance to interrupt and asked the officer how I could get into the meeting. The police officer looked me up and down and then moved to the side, allowing me to pass and giving me instructions of where to go next, while the man questioned why I should be allowed to go in. I never heard him receive a reply.

I followed the path down (as instructed by the police officer) and found myself before another group of police officers and yet another police barrier. Standing near me were young Germans demanding to be let in. For some reason, I got the sense that these might be anti-AfD demonstrators trying to join the meeting as I had seen done at other events (and I, too, had been seen as a potential disrupter). After listening for a few minutes, I interrupted, explaining that I was a researcher from the US who had come specifically to visit this event and asked if I could be let in. The police officers seemed to barely hear me since the young Germans began talking again, only taking a break to my brief statement, but a middle-aged, smaller man – the only one not a police officer – heard me, whispered to the police officer in charge, who then told his police officers to let me through the barrier.

The middle-aged man and I were then escorted by several police officers down a long, open path to the entrance in open view of all the counter demonstrators. As we walked, I thanked the man for helping me get in. I learned that he was the press secretary for this AfD group. I introduced myself and my research and said that I was surprised that there were so many counter demonstrators tonight. The man

replied that they often have these kinds of problems which is why they require so many police officers.

Inside the room we could still hear the sounds from the outside demonstration, such as whistles blowing, music playing, and people shouting. As we entered the room and parted ways, I made my way to some of the remaining seats towards the back of the foyer in which the event was to be held. I walked past perhaps ten younger people standing in the back of the room while older people sat in the chairs. There were seats for at least fifty people plus standing room for more guests; the drinks served in the dining area. In all, I counted almost a hundred people in the room.

Almost all the seats were filled, but I found a seat next to a man – Mitchell. Mitchell looked rather unkempt in his well-worn and large clothes, his scraggly hair and beard. Mitchell had Weidel's book in his unwashed hands. He showed me the book when I commented on it, saying he was reading and really enjoyed the book. Explaining that I was a researcher from the US who was researching the AfD and politics in Germany, I asked Mitchell about whether he was a member. No, he said, he just votes for the AfD. I had assumed, I explained to Mitchell, that this town would be small and more conservative and was confused by the demonstrations. Yes, he said, this town is a smaller city but that they have everything that the bigger cities in Germany have – especially the migrants. He said that there was once a guy with a woman (or two, it was unclear) in a burka and the man asked Mitchell for a cigarette and Mitchell said he didn't have a cigarette and the man called Mitchell, "Nazi,

Schwein, Rassistisch" (Nazi, pig, racist). Mitchell started getting agitated as he told this story to me. He said very strongly and resentfully, Yeah, but they get what they deserve, "die Schweine" (the pigs). I noticed that several better-dressed Germans around us began gazing at us and whispering to each other. But Mitchell seemed oblivious to these social ques. There was an older, polished, white German couple sitting next to us who whispered to each other and pointed to us.

Immediately after the first story, Mitchell told me another story. He explained that he had still been in his trial period for his apartment, the period during which he or his landlord can terminate the contract without cause. The upstairs neighbors apparently complained that Mitchell was closing the door too loudly and the apartment manager came to him and told Mitchell that he needed to be quieter. So what did I do, Mitchell asked me rhetorically? Mitchell said that he stormed upstairs and knocked on the upstairs neighbors' door. It was during the day and the family who lives there was out, but the man's brother answered. The man's brother can speak German, Mitchell said, but the man cannot (which I think Mitchell added to reaffirm that they were foreigners). Mitchell continued that the brother of the man answered, and they shouted at each other, and Mitchell called him Schwein (pig). Mitchell concluded by looking at me emphatically and expectedly, in what I would call a "I told him" look.

I did not know what to say, partially because I had not heard a story quite like this before, but also because I had noticed how agitated Mitchell became while he told me this story. Mitchell's gestures moved more quickly. He turned his entire body

in the chair to face me and he head jerked back and forth as he described the confrontation between himself and the man's brother.

I also noticed the people turned around and listened to our conversation. While Mitchell told me the story, a man sitting in the row in front of us stared at us for several seconds, long enough to get the point across that he was staring at us. Then the man in front of us nudged the man next to him and said something while pointing at us, after which the second man turned to look at us. Someone else directly in front of us quite obviously turned her body around, stared at us long enough to make her point, and then turned back around and said something to the man next to her who also turned around to look at us. I took these actions to be typical disciplinary behaviors or signs of displeasure at Mitchell's socially inappropriate stories about foreigners and his use of derogatory terms.

Processing these observations and trying to think of what to say, I said nothing and instead sat with my discomfort. Mitchell and I sat quietly after this last story for a few moments, Mitchell settling back down and pushing his body towards the back of his chair. After perhaps thirty seconds, Mitchell continued to speak. He lived in Düsseldorf before coming here and has lived here for six years, Mitchell said. His diction, sentence structure, and narrative style reflected someone without much education. As he spoke to me, Mitchell saw people he recognized whom he called *Kollegen* (colleagues, usually used in employment contexts). He called out to several of them during the next several moments, telling me in confusing, short sentences, how he knew this person and that person. Some of the people he called out to looked

at him and quickly turned back around. Others seemed to pretend not to see or hear him which was obviously impossible in such a small room with Mitchell shouting their names. One man came by and heartily shook Mitchell's hand and offered to buy him a beer, to which Mitchell replied that he would love another beer (he was already holding one). But I did not think he was drunk.

The meeting started thirty minutes behind schedule. The various parliament representatives took turns introducing themselves and their political engagement. A man loudly burped. No one looked at him, following convention to avoid eye contact and acknowledgement when the human body makes an uncomely sound. A younger person in the back of the room loudly sighed and someone else (or perhaps the same person) seemed to shift feet loudly back and forth. Soon, the man burped again, this time louder and more ludicrously, almost as if he were acting out a burp. A few people glanced his way, but most remained rigidly focused on the speakers. When one AfD speaker spoke of foreign, sexual criminality against German women and that the AfD was committed to protecting German women, a German woman of color in the back loudly said, Dankeschön (thank you), the tone seeming to blur sarcasm with sincerity. She and her neighbor, a white German woman, exchanged words, laughed, and the woman of color rolled her eyes, as several of the white Germans near me looked over to watch them.

The speakers answered questions when suddenly there was a loud, repeated thud against one of the locked doors that echoed in the room and sounded like someone was repeatedly hitting a drum. The thudding stopped moments later after

jeers from the crowd suggested that police had intervened to stop the thudding. When the mild-mannered, youthful, white German politician was speaking, we heard commotion outside, louder than before – whistles blowing longer, louder, and more intensely and people shouting to match the whistles. Within a minute, in walked tall, state-issued bodyguards in front and behind the rather short Alice Weidel, who sported her quintessential look – black dress jacket, white dress shirt, dark pants, flat shoes and hair pulled back low. Many people who were sitting in the chairs stood, clapped, and cheered, interrupting the mild-mannered young man. Weidel shook hands with people in the front, smiled, waved both hands above her head to everyone else, and then finally sat down and gestured for the audience to be quiet before politely motioning to the man she interrupted to continue. He concluded his point after which the conversation round resumed.

A single noise maker went off, the beeper sounding like a fire alarm; it was incredibly loud and consistent. Everyone looked around and some asked what was going on. Then someone said that it was a noise maker and one of the younger people in the back had thrown it and that it was under the chairs in front. Older women covered their ears to protect against the deafening beeping. The person under whose chair the noise maker landed looked under the chair, as did her neighbors in front and behind, finally finding the noise maker. She tried stomping on it to no avail when a large man moved her to the side and stomped on it with all his weight, shattering the noise maker.

There was a brief pause as everyone returned to their seats and chatted with their neighbors. The moderator, a calm man who only slightly raised his voice, asked for order so that the speakers could continue to answer questions. The Q&A continued. Then the man a few rows in front of me burped again, this time with significantly more gusto than before, which seemed too uncanny for his neighbors. An older, white German woman in the row in front of him and to his left stood up, faced him, and said, "SSSHHHHH" followed by some expression of exasperation I could not quite make out.

Building security began making more regular appearances, standing next to the row of the burping man, for instance, or standing right behind me and next to the young people in the back. The building security asked the burping man to leave but he loudly refused, saying he had done nothing wrong. The AfD politicians continued to speak, but people in the back began talking more. Another noise maker was set off and the middle-aged and elderly people in the chairs began looking for the noise maker, this time reacting more quickly. Others looked around for the person who threw the noisemaker, but the person remained unidentified. Seven riot police came into the room, helmets still on and batons out and they remained there for a few minutes before returning outside.

Again the moderator asked for order and quiet in his calm, monotone voice. After a few moments of people chatting with each other and putting chairs back in place (they had been moved to find the noise maker), the AfD politicians were able to continue. Again, a noise make went off, but this time, the culprit – the burping man –

was seen throwing the noise maker; his neighbors saw where the noise maker landed and quickly put it out. The security guards insisted the burping man leave but he only agreed to leave when three riot police officers came back inside, went to his row, and told him to leave.

Again, the moderator asked for quiet. When the room was quiet enough, the moderator turned to a man in the back, immediately behind me, and asked for his question. The man, perhaps in his late thirties, started out very calmly and maintained most of his calm, though his voice started quiver a little towards the end of his question. People started turning their heads as he recounted the awful terrors of the 20th century. Because this was a public meeting that was also being recorded by the AfD, I include the transcription below that I took. The English translation is in the footnote.

____ emphasized sound or syllable
: prolonged sound (two or three means very prolonged)
(.) micro pause
[ ] overlapping talk
() unclear
> < increased speaking rates
< > decreased speaking rates

M: Moderator
MI: Mitchell

(1:23:37) Schönen guten Tag. Ich habe eine Frage an den Herrn Geschichtslehrer. Es tut mir

leid., ich bin in der Landespolitik nicht so bewandert, wie ich es gerne wäre. (.) Ämh. Mir ist ihr

Name leider entfallen. (.) Als Geschichtslehrer können sie mir ja bestimmt weiterhelfen. Sie

sprachen gerade um von einem stolzes Erbe des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts.(...) Soweit ich mich

erinnere, ist das 20. Jahrhundert dadurch bestimmt, durch zwei Weltkriege (..) durch 50

Millionen getötete Menschen allein im zweiten Weltkrieg (.) 6 Millionen getötete Juden. Ich weiß

nicht, ob >sie schon einmal in Auschwitz waren. Ich war da schon mal. Das ist kein schöner

Ort.< (.) [1.24.03] Es war geprägt vom Verdrängen von anderen Menschen, von Minderheiten,

Menschen mit anderer Religion. Es war geprägt von großen Ängsten, von großen Armuten (.)

Ja in den 20ern. Äm. Dazu kommt, dass der zweite Weltkrieg in einer ???-Spaltung des

deutschen Staates resultierte um davon, glaube ich, um die 15 Millionen Menschen in einem

Ungerechts-Staat im Osten. Äh (.) Ist das wirklich, >worauf sie stolz sein möchten? Auf so

viele getötete Menschen?< (.) Also die Frage ...??... dazu um (.) und das zu fragen, ob sie
murmuring begins

darauf eben stolz sein möchten. [1.24.32] Oder, auf welche [.] sind sie jetzt gerade stolz? Also

Single, emphatic applause

sagen Sie mich...

turns into more applause

Woman saying something (undistinguishable)

(1:24:40) AfD speaker: Ich warte ja nur bis sie fertig sind.

Women speaking (undistinguishable)

(1:24:43) Y: "Fünfzig- (.) millionen (.) Tote!!!

M Hallo Hallo Hallo Hallo

Joot

(1:24:48) AfD speaker: Jetzt regen sie sich mal nicht auf.

(1:24:49) MI: Sind wir jetzt schuld oder was.

Repetitive, single applause...

(1:24:52) Y: Fünf Jahre und Fünfzig- (.) millionen (.) Tote!!!

Wir haben Wir haben

Repetitive, single applause...

(1:24:58) MI: Ach, mach den Kopf zu, du! Behinderter, du!

SSSHHHHH

Repetitive, single applause...

… leisten möchten, da kommt …

.... Jetzt ist erst mal der Herr … mit der Antwort dran. Vielleicht hat er ja …"

(1:25:06) MI: Meine Fresse, du!??arsch??.

Noise maker set off

(1:25:14) MI: Was, der hat kein recht, Mann. Kein recht, uns zu beleidigen!! (.) Schwein!

(1:25:20) Ich hoffe, das Wasserglas ist noch da, wo man den Gegenstand entsorgen kann, aber

Helmut sagt, die Antwort auf die durchaus kritische ???.

(1:25:20) MI: Fick dich, K***, du Arsch.

(1:25:28) Ja, wenn sie sich einfach mal an(?)-sehen, so sie stehen. … Ich weiß nicht, wie sie

ihren Lebensunterhalt verdienen, aber möglicherweise haben sie ja auch einen Beruf und

können arbeiten. Und sie sehen die Städte und wenn sie in Deutschland herumreisen, dann

sehen sie, wie dieses Land steht und wieviel Geld wir verdienen und in welchem Luxus wir

leben. Und das haben wir geschafft, obwohl es zwei Weltkriege gab, obwohl es zwei

verbrecherische Regime in diesem Land gab. Das eine hat ganz Europa und auch Deutschland

maßgeblich zerstört. Trotzdem habt ihr dieses alles geschafft. Und das hat damit zu tun, dass

neben diesen Verbrechern, die dieses Land terrorisieren – übrigens in der gleichen Weise, wie

wir es draußen gesehen haben – auch Meinungsfreiheit zerstört haben, von vornherein ab

1928/29. Trotz dieser Verbrecher, die also dieses Land zurückgeschraubt haben zu einer

vorzivilisatorischen Stufe, habe wir diese Land wieder aufgebaut, und haben dafür gesorgt,

dass die Menschen, die in diesem Land leben, so gut leben, dass die halbe Welt in unser land

kommen – kommen will. Wenn sie das nicht als Leistung anerkennen, auf die wir stolz sein

können, dann kann ich sie allerdings nicht verstehen. (Applaus) (1:26:49)

(1:26:54) Dann treten sie, und das ist typisch für die linke Einstellung, und das ist das, was ich

mit dem Hass meine. Das ist typisch: die abgrundtiefe Verachtung der Vorfahren, auf deren

Schultern sie stehen. Und deswegen habe sie hier Brot zu essen und können hier gut leben –

weil die dafür gearbeitet haben. Meine Mutter ist aus einer Familie, die aus Schlesien vertrieben

worden ist. Die hätten sie ja mal fragen können, was da los war im zweiten Weltkrieg. Mein

Vater – (Applaus)

.. (1:27:35) Sie reißen jetzt hier ihr Maul auf, und reden davon (drumming, jemand sagt

“Wasserglas”), dass …?... (Applaus)

(1:28:04) Eine Frage!

(1:28:06) Immer einer nach dem anderen. So jetzt lassen wir erst mal den Richard …?. Jetzt

lasst mal bitte erst mal den Herrn an meiner Seite …[12]

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[12] Man: Good day. I have a question for the history teacher. I am sorry, I am not as well versed in national politics as I would like to be. Unfortunately, I have forgotten your name. As a history teacher you can certainly help me. You just spoke of a proud legacy of the 19th and 20th centuries. As far as I remember, the 20th century is marked by two world wars - 50 million people killed in World War II alone, 6 million Jews killed. I don't know if you have ever been to Auschwitz. I've been there before. It's not a pretty place. It was shaped by the suppression of other people, of minorities, people with a different religion. It was marked by great fears, great poverty - yes in the 20s. In addition, World War II resulted in a split in the German state. I think about 15 million of them in an injust state in the east. Is that really what you want to be proud of? So many people killed?

Someone cut in: So the question ... ??
And another person: about this? ..

Man: and to ask if you want to be proud of it. Or, which ones...are you proud of right now? (1:24:40)
AfD speaker: I'm just waiting for them to finish.
(1:24:43) Y: “Fifty million dead!!!
AfD speaker: Don't get upset now. (1:24:49)
Mitchell stood up and shouted, Is it our fault or what.
(1:24:52) AfD speaker: Five years and fifty million deaths!!!
(1:24:58) Mitchell: Oh, shut your head (shut up), you! Handicapped (retard), you!

Moderator: Now it’s the gentleman’s turn to answer. Maybe he is [right].

(1:25:06) Mitchell: My face, you!?? ass. What, he's not right, man. No right to offend us!! Pig!
(1:25:20) Moderator: I hope the water glass is still there where the item can be disposed of, but Helmut says the answer to the very critical.
(1:25:20) Mitchell: Fuck you, K***, you ass.
(1:25:28) AfD speaker: Yes, if you just look at (?) - then you stand. I don't know how you make a living, but maybe you have a job and can work. And you see the cities and when you travel around in Germany, you see how this country is and how much money we earn and what luxury we live in. And we did it even though there were two world wars, even though there were two criminal regimes in this country. One has significantly destroyed all of Europe and also Germany. Nevertheless you managed to do all of this. And that has to do with the fact that in addition to these criminals who terrorize this country - incidentally in the same way as we have seen it outside – also destroyed freedom of

During this exchange, noise makers went off and a woman, who wore on her arm a white fabric with a black cross, got up. She retrieved a glass of water and submerged one of the noise makers in the water. Mitchell moved over to the man asking the question but was separated. In the commotion, security removed two people, one was the man who had thrown one of the noise makers and the second was the man with the dreadlocks who shouted “fifty million dead.” The man in the green jacket was asked to leave by the police; he calmly gathered his belongings and left while the police escort walked behind him. The commotion took several seconds to settle down. Eight seconds passed before the speaker tried to answer the question, but he was unable to fully answer for several seconds after that. One of the young people at the table to the left was removed as well. After things settled down, Mitchell whispered to me, “The hope dies last.”[13]

expression, right from the start from 1928/29. Despite these criminals, who have therefore reduced this country to a pre-civilizational level, we have rebuilt this country and made sure that the people who live in this country live so well that half the world comes to our country – want to come. If you don't recognize that as an achievement we can be proud of, then I can't understand you. (Applause) (1:26:49) (1:26:54) AfD speaker: Then you trample, and that's typical of the leftist attitude, and that's what I mean by hatred. This is typical: the abysmal contempt of the ancestors on whose shoulders they stand. And that's why you have bread to eat here and can live well here – because they worked for it. My mother comes from a family that has been expelled from Silesia. You could have asked her what was going on in World War II. My father - (applause) (whistling) .. (1:27:35) You are now opening your mouth and talking about (drumming, someone says “water glass”) that…(applause)
(1:28:04) Another person: One question!
(1:28:06) Moderator: Always one at a time. So now let's leave Richard. Now please let the gentleman by my side for now... (1:28:20).
Another person: [My name] Name [is] Mr. Stein...Uh, I have one more question: why don't you take up grievances? I would like to say one thing. I know a woman. In fact, it's my mother. She is 93 years old – at the time she had already been in the nursing home for about eight years. That is no longer normal today – I have to say very dryly. And then her money ran out. Then she applied for a nursing home allowance. This care housing allowance was rejected by the City Council and Legal Office because she allegedly generated her need for care, her need for help, even though she did not receive any social assistance until she was 93 years old. She paid her whole life into the social security fund, and when she was in need of care, or in need of help – you have to put it another way, it was rejected by the council and legal office. I want to say Social Democrats.
[13] Die Hoffnung stirbt zuletzt.

I cannot fully capture the intensity of the incident. This climax came because the AfD speaker said that Germans had lived through a century of which they could be proud. The man behind me who asked the question spoke briskly as he described WWII and the Holocaust, parts of German history Germans should not be proud of. He took issue with the AfD speaker's assertion that Germans had something to be proud of and challenged the AfD speaker by isolating the NSDAP period and the Holocaust. The man asked the AfD speaker to clarify what history Germans had that was worthy of pride. As the man behind me transitioned to his question, he paused, and people began speaking.

The cacophony of sounds did not begin until about fifteen seconds later when a man said very loudly, "Fünfzig-millionen Tote!" (Fifty million dead). This statement initiated the disturbance, illustrated the provocative significance of the NSDAP period, and the ruptures between different approaches of remembering this period. People competed for voice while simultaneously silencing others. The man with the dreadlocks again shouted an enunciated "Fünfzig-millionen Tote!" while the moderator repeated "Hallo" during the pauses to reclaim the audience's attention. As the cacophony continued, someone loudly, slowly, and rhythmically clapped for 20 seconds. Then two men alternately cut in with „Jetzt regen sie sich mal nicht auf," (now don't get upset) while Mitchell cut in and said, "Sind wir jetzt schuld oder was," (Are we to blame now or what) as the single, repetitive clapping continued, almost like a metronome keeping time.

The man with the dreadlocks continued again, “Fünf Jahre und Fünfzig-millionen Tote!!!” as the moderator once again said, “Wir haben” (we have) in the brief pauses of the man’s speech, in between “Fünf Jahre” and “Fünfzig” and then again between “millionen” and “Tote.” The repetitive, single applause continued.

Part of what made this incident the central feature of the meeting, or rather, the rupture point of the meeting, was the collaborative disruption that took place. Earlier in the meeting, a single noisemaker was thrown or one man burped. But in this moment, while talking about German pride and guilt, everyone in the room seemed to be engaged in different roles. Some threw noisemakers, other tried to put the noisemakers out, others shouted or clapped or jeered, the security officials tried to restore order, the police escorted people out, and the moderator tried to get people’s attention. People’s physical and aural engagement mirrored the overarching obsession with Germany’s Nazi past and the way it constantly re-emerges in different configurations. While Germans focus on German perpetration as well as victimhood, the AfD politician described pride in Germans’ accomplishments in the last century. Recognizing accomplishments is different than victimhood; while victimhood is an acceptable form of memory politics, variations on pride are still broadly inappropriate as this interaction illustrates.

The competing voices and sounds vie to be heard while also silencing other voices and sounds. In the microcosm of this meeting, people voiced different perspectives that reflected the heterogenous terrain of broader memory conflicts occurring in German society. The sounds and voices replicated the confrontational

relations which are crucial in producing the political community. The conflicting voices and sounds vying to be heard and silence others reflect Mouffe's "conflictual consensus" that operates in democracy's shared space. In this conflicted terrain, the "act of speaking comes to stand more generally for a new set of social relations" (Kunreuther 2014: 4). Amid the cacophony of sounds, this prolonged moment of conflict and the efforts to speak and silence each other illustrate the complex social relations operating in this small room of inter-generational and inter-political, entirely German, and almost entirely white people. "By echoing, transforming, or silencing the voices of others" (Minks 2013: 4), people assert their place in society. While AfD parliament members organized this event, their status as organizers and parliament members was made ridiculous as both their supporters and antagonists dominated the meeting, silencing parliament members and each other. In the end, police in riot gear restored order by forcibly removing not only those who threw noise makers but also the man who asked the question that sparked the conflict and the man who repeatedly shouted, "Fifty million dead." This removal created silence allowing parliament members to answer questions posed by the audience.

There was a certain amount of unexpected comedic absurdity in the city hall by the Ruhr River. Debating to what proportional degree parts of German history should receive attention is not funny, especially to Germans. But burping to express discontent is comedically absurd, especially when the older woman shushed the younger, burping man. Mitchell's racial slurs were not funny, but middle-aged and elderly people sent scurrying under chairs searching for noise makers was ludicrous.

The dark humor in this situation was the reduction of serious questions and topics to silliness and ridiculousness or the obstruction of serious AfD answers by comedic distractions. The commotion broke the sincerity, created chaos, and reduced into absurdity the seriousness of claiming an honorable German history.

"End the *Schuldcult*" (Guilt cult)

The previous example illustrated forms of disruption during a debate centered on the NSDAP period. The next example also takes the NSDAP period as a point of contention about Germany's present and future.

All eight of us sat around a large conference room table with a politician, Mr. Davies. He was hosting his citizen dialogue meeting where citizens (and curious researchers) discuss politics with civic leaders. Framed campaign posters of Mr. Davies lined the walls. Here, he has his arm around the shoulder of a younger, white man, giving a thumbs up, with the text promoting economic growth. There, Mr. Davies is giving a presumably anti-Islamic speech, with the text around the photo claiming that Islam is incompatible with German values. On the table stood a loaf of the powdered raisin bread (Christstollen), Merci chocolates in a bowl, coffee, and sparkling water. Mr. Davies was a part of the wing (*Flügel* – the nativist-nationalist suborganization of the AfD), had been implicated in critique about racist comments posted online from his office, and was broadly labeled a right extremist.

In the anonymous affairs that such political meetings often are, I never knew anyone else's name except for Mr. Davies's name. Mr. Davies has a remarkably

flexible voice that can switch between gruff and forceful and charming and calm. Mr. Davies fluently discussed Bismark, the WWI "*Katastrophe*," and fallen German WWII soldiers who "still have no honored cemetery while Stalin's soldiers do."

We were quite the group surrounding this racist, xenophobic, and snuff-loving man. There were eight of us present: five white men and three white women. All were middle-aged and elderly white Germans except one middle-aged man from the US who migrated to Germany in 1992, solicited himself as a cultural mediator and who did not apologize for his rather thick accent. There was also a Hungarian man over 70 years old, who immediately apologized for his rather thick accent and who had migrated to East Germany as a twenty-year old, who sported thick, white hair, a worn-out Calvin Klein sweater and Jack Wolfskin fanny pack. And there was me in my pink V-neck sweater, earrings and necklace, gray boots and a black skirt. Mr. Davies, with his round face, large, thick hands, and cheeks that sometimes shook when he spoke, sat at the head of the table. Like other members, Mr. Davies tested me on my knowledge of German history. The important years that Mr. Davies tested me on were 1850 (I think he meant the 1848 revolutions), the 30 years' war, 1870 and WWI.

To his left sat a white, German woman I call Ms. Evans. Ms. Evans had simple, yet neat, sophisticated attire, and her easy movement that reflected education, upper class status, and a polished family history. As she explained, she had come to the meeting, in part, to convince members that climate change is real and that academics are not "in it" for the money. She failed to convince them on both

accounts. Next to her sat the Hungarian, and next to him, the American at the end of the table. The American sat quietly in the corner of the table, but every now and again said something to me in English to unnecessarily clarify a word or two. He wore a sweater with a plaid, button-up shirt.

I sat to the right of Mr. Davies. For the first 30 minutes, I sat rather uncomfortably and felt like I was being watched and considered. I shifted in my seat as I felt people gaze at me. I crossed my arms and uncrossed them when I remembered that this was a defensive position. I crossed my legs, uncrossed them, crossed them again, leaned forward with my elbows on the table, my chin resting in my hands, then remembered to look professional and sat back in my chair to help my posture. Then I moved back up to the table and crossed my legs and put my arms in front of my body. After everyone had plenty of time to size me up and no one seemed to pay attention to me anymore, I relaxed and sat in the same position, slightly and comfortably reclined in my chair, listening quietly to everyone's comments and critiques.

The white German man next to me had a round face which encircled his round, large eyes and wore a green sweater with brown corduroy pants. He patiently waited his turn to speak, holding up his index finger to indicate that he would like to say something. He would then be called on (after quite some time) by someone who had bothered to pay attention to him (first the Hungarian, then the US-German). His comments were distinct and brief after which he would put down his finger and sit

quietly again. He slowly ate his Christstollen that Mr. Davies offered to him and smiled at me for several seconds when I took a second chocolate.

The white German woman, Beatrice, sat next to him. Shd and the man on the other side of her regularly looked flummoxed, chagrined, critical, and dissatisfied and told everyone of their views. Beatrice affirmed everything Mr. Davies said with, "*Ja, ja,*" or "*Nein*" or "*Das stimmt*"– that's right. She was short, round and alert. Beatrice would sigh, humph, grunt, and snort a laugh. When really emphasizing her opinion, Beatrice would lean her head across the table and raise her voice, pointing a finger for good measure. The man next to her was thinner with a bald head, a loud voice, and expressed equal parts disdain for academics, Muslims, foreigners who do not "integrate," and elitist politicians, but expressed special contempt for climate change proponents. During the climate change debate that Ms. Evans started, this man was all in, matching Ms. Evans's loudly expressed arguments with his own as he leaned over the table in her direction. While Ms. Evans, much taller than most people at the table, remained seated throughout the evening, this man would half rise when expressing his arguments, almost in sync with the intensity of his convictions. He would rise higher until he had said what he wanted to say, after which he would sit back down and take time to deeply breathe.

Knowing that members call themselves "patriots," I asked about the difference between nationalism and patriotism. Mr. Davies promptly answered with a quote: "a nationalist hates the strange. The patriot loves one's own." The German-American communications' expert said in English that "in the US, nationalism would

be okay, but Germany has problems with 'the nation.'" "For very good reason," replied Ms. Evans in German, referencing the two world wars Germany had started for "the nation."

This led to a moment of silence, during which I asked, "So what does the AfD want?" "To be like other [powerful] countries and pursue our own interests without shaming ourselves for the past" was the collective response, articulated by Mr. Davies with everyone except for Ms. Evans nodding, even the American and Hungarian. Mr. Davies expressed that other countries, the US, England, and France, specifically, did not lose any major wars and because of that, they could be a proud people, but that Germans are not a proud people. Does the AfD want to change that, I asked, apparently interrupting Mr. Davies, because he said, "Normal werden" (become normal) during my question. I responded, "Ok, Normal," to which Mr. Davies responded, Exactly, become normal.

Ms. Evans asked what would have to happen for Germans to become normal. Mr. Davies answered, that we pursue normal politics, our interests. Ms. Evans continued to push by asking for an example, to which Mr. Davies said again, our interest. Ms. Evans said again, but what would specifically have to change and Mr. Davies said, our interests and before he could continue, Ms. Evans cut him off and said, Germany is fine. Germany is highly respected everywhere. Mr. Davies continued, "What I once said: end the guilt cult [*Schuldkult*]." Ms. Evans: "What would that mean concretely?" Mr. Davies: "That would mean that we don't regret/repent of the Holocaust 365 days in the year; rather that we align our policies

with our interests and 2015 is, from my perspective, the best example of that. Crimes committed to the Jews are being rectified to the Muslims that have migrated here. That is total nonsense! That is total nonsense and we are again and again being talked into thinking that we owe the world something." Ms. Evans: "But didn't the Germans [commit] the Holocaust?" Mr. Davies: "The Germans, the Germans (*voice rising*). Which Germans?! (nearly shouting). That upsets me. Was it you? Was it you? (voice crescendo, pointing to people in room). It wasn't you. None of us. Nobody here at the table!" (pounding fist on table; after slowly sitting back down, pours a substance from his engraved box onto the large, webbed skin between his index finger and thumb and loudly inhales it through his nose).

The discussion, initiated by an expressed desire for Germany to be normal, focused on decentralizing and re-Messaging the NSDAP period so that Germans could become normal. Normal, for Mr. Davies, became entwined with remembering the NSDAP period less centrally. Mr. Davies proposed that alternative memory politics would result in an alternative future for Germany where Germans could pursue their own interests. The normalcy Mr. Davies articulated illustrated how AfD members argue the German past and future.

Mr. Davies contended that what AfD members want is that Germany will become normal. In chapter five I discuss the need for the normal in Germany, but in this section, I offer a prelude. With the desire and need for a normal Germany, Mr. Davies argued that normalcy means following a country's own interests. The crux of the debate centered on the Holocaust, but Mr. Davies disrupted the centrality of the

Holocaust in German history to create a dialogic space for Germany's international position and Germans' domestic interests. In response to Ms. Evan's question – what would ending the guilt cult mean concretely – Mr. Davies responded that not only did ending the guilt cult mean not apologizing for the Holocaust every day of the year but aligning Germany's policies with Germany's interests. In an almost stereotypical exchange, Mr. Davies claimed that Germans are talked into thinking they owe the world something because of the Holocaust. Ms. Evans responded that the Germans committed the Holocaust, suggesting that Germans do owe the world something. Speaking past each other while simultaneously using the same elements (Holocaust and contemporary international standing), Mr. Davies and Ms. Evans represent competing views of Germany's current and future international standing which they articulated through the contemporary relationship with the Holocaust.

Conclusion

At a fundamental level, being German often is associated with being the descendants of the *Kriegsanfänger* (starters of war, a term perhaps unique to the political Right), perhaps the most significant identifier from German history in terms of contemporary socio-political debates. The shared hesitations and insecurities associated with being the descendants of the *Kriegsanfänger* and Shoah perpetrators is the point of conflict. Yet, this point of conflict simultaneously creates a unifying identity for Germans, something to perpetually debate with redundant arguments. As Herzfeld (2016) writes, "collective embarrassment" is a central source of "national

loyalty, both in defending the nation's reputation and in finding a guilty but pleasurable commonality within" (Herzfeld 2016: 11).

Earlier in the meeting with Mr. Davies, after the very long climate change debate between Ms. Evans and the passionate German man in the corner, Mr. Davies preemptively ended the climate change debate by saying, "Enough." He then turned to Ms. Evans and asked her what her opinion of Germany is. Everyone at the table became very quiet, knowing that this single question is used to mark out Antifa or the far Left (who are understood to be critical of Germany). Ms. Evans started out slowly and quietly as if thinking simultaneously how to answer this test question. After stumbling through a few incoherent words, Ms. Evans described how she is very happy in Germany, how she has raised her family in Germany and it is her home, and that she is very proud of what Germans have accomplished in rebuilding and creating this wonderful country. When put on the spot, Ms. Evans claimed that she was proud of Germany, though still later identified Germany's history of the Holocaust as a site for local embarrassment. As Ms. Evans' comments illustrate, the debates in this chapter illuminate loyalty and commitment to Germany despite the uncomfortable, embarrassing, or deeply problematic pasts that people work through over Christmas bread and chocolates.

Members do not initiate new ideas of how Germans ought to look at themselves and the German past. Rather members utilize already-occurring discourse and arguments of German victimhood but shift this discourse to include moments of German pride. The crux of the debates hinge on how to change Germany's future

based on diverse configurations of Germany's past. AfD members create a Message of a transformed future Germany through altering the way Germans see themselves and their history. According to AfD members' rhetoric, it is only through a German self-transformation that German patriotism can occur.

The conflicts are about how Germans remember (or do not) the NSDAP period, but such public debates, often reduced to ludicrous engagement and silencing and voicing techniques, create a kind of structural nostalgia. While Herzfeld (2016) writes that structural nostalgia is an idealized image of the past despite "winks and nods," in this context, structural nostalgia emerges as a competition between hegemonic and counter narratives, images, and interpretations of Germany's past and future which openly reveal the nation's imperfections and through which, one can see Germans' changing self-image.

Chapter 3: Cultural Sounds and Material Symbols

> Since World War II, trying to define the German national identity, much less celebrate it, has been taboo. Doing so was seen as a possible step toward the kind of nationalism that once enabled the Nazi regime. Flags were frowned upon, as was standing for the national anthem.
>
> But spurred by a sense of lost control over the country's borders, economy and politics, many Germans are reaching for a shared identity but finding only an empty space. Into that vacuum slipped the Alternative for Germany, known by its German initials, AfD, the nation's fastest-growing party with recent polls showing support at 12 percent, ahead of some mainstream parties.
>
> Only the AfD, whose populism puts it far outside of mainstream political norms, is openly promising to fulfill a desire for patriotism that would be routine in most other countries.
>
> The result is that a social and political norm intended to stifle the far right is now empowering it. That focus on identity has allowed the AfD, even if it is unlikely to win enough votes to govern, to shape the national conversation to its advantage, and to present itself as the champion of ordinary Germans (Taub 2017).

This quote from a 2017 New York Times article captures efforts by AfD members to fill a socio-political void in Germany by creating a more patriotic sense of Germany identity. The norms meant to monitor national identity have resulted in the opposite effect of making the AfD attractive to voters. But, despite its tentative attractiveness, material expressions of national belonging are still taboo in Germany.

For instance, during the Covid-19 "shutdown," Saxon parliament members were required to wear face masks in the plenary sessions. AfD parliament members wore special face masks of the German flag. In Germany, where waving the flag outside of sporting events is taboo, this was an overt act of national identity.

Other parliament members commented on the face masks and reprimanded the AfD. But perhaps the biggest indicator of the social impropriety was when Vice President Andre Wendt (AfD) left his chair in the AfD section to take his place in the president's chair and administer the parliamentary proceedings. As Wendt walked to the stand to the president's chair, he took off his German flag mask and put on a neutral medical mask. Whether he was required to remove the German flag mask or chose to, I do not know. But the act accentuated both the statement the AfD was making (the right to display the German flag) and the continued social inappropriateness of displaying the German flag.

In the previous chapter, I analyzed how re-Messaging and reframing the centrality of the Nazi period is a point of conflict through which people negotiate, debate, silence others, and voice their opinions on the direction of Germany's future. In this chapter, I focus on the conflicts around AfD efforts to re-Message and normalize two symbols of Germany – the national anthem and the German language. First, I examine how members try to normalize singing the national anthem, a historically unifying song, using different modes of transmission. Normalizing singing the national anthem in public is a crucial step in efforts to foster a German national identity and re-imagine alternative German futures.

In the second half of this chapter, I analyze two parliamentary petitions (*Anträge*) that different AfD parliament groups submitted. I investigate how language becomes a material that members need to protect to strengthen a historically linear national identity. By reframing and contradicting recent changes in language politics,

AfD politicians strive to protect a version of the German past that further promotes the imagined future without guilt or obligations, where country leaders are enabled to pursue its own interests. In these parliamentary petitions, this imagined future is articulated in phrases and words, such as "censorship" and "enlightenment," that are embedded in their own historical constructions.

Singing the national anthem

Before I examine how AfD members normalize singing the national anthem, I provide background on Germany's national anthem, including its taboo nature. AfD members actively strive to change this view of the national anthem, making it a "tradition" to sing the national anthem at the end of public events, such as rallies or meetings. That members sing the national anthem at overtly public events like rallies on public squares rather than monthly meetings for members illustrates how AfD members try to normalize this practice for other Germans.

For instance, one lecture hosted by an AfD parliamentary group was about the development of a dual nuclear reactor to resolve energy needs. At the end of the lecture, the group of about 60 people stood for a rendition of the national anthem. While local leaders sang very loudly, the people around me in the audience did not and almost seemed to mouth the words. At different public rallies, participants sang the national anthem, sometimes amid whistles, stomping, jeering, and booing from counter demonstrators. During moments when others jeered at the national anthem, members near me would comment to me and to each other about how unpatriotic

these people were and how much they hated their own country. By instituting this "tradition" to sing the national anthem at public events, members and leaders nationwide have serenaded locals, tourists, and immigrants in town squares with the German national anthem innumerable times over the last several years. While it is still taboo to sing the national anthem, AfD members' redundancy has at least made it normal for them to sing the song.

In the following sections, I provide a history of the German national anthem as well as elements of the melody and text. Then I contextualize and analyze two different recordings I took of members singing the national anthem. I focus on voicing techniques and external mediums to think about "the enculturated nature of sound" (Samuels et al 2010: 330). I consider how the sounds of the national anthem become both sites of conflict and efforts at protecting the supposed cultural sounds of Germany.

Germany's National Anthem

The history of Germany's national anthem represents the German nation's story of pride in the nation and misfortune at its loss and defeat. The national anthem is translated in English as the Song of the Germans (in German, Deutschlandlied). The song was part of the push for unification in the late 1800s. Additionally, the song endured as the national anthem during "the downtrodden national psyche after World War I, the reign of terror (and propaganda) during Hitler's Third Reich, and the elimination of communism with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989" (Hanson 2013:

3). Since the earliest days of Germany's unification in 1871, the national anthem has remained constant, but the anthem's changing context has shaped contemporaneous interpretations of the song "from intensely radical to coolly patriotic" (Hanson 2013: 3).

What would eventually become the German national anthem started as a poem by August Heinrich Hoffmann von Fallersleben, a Prussian patriot and university professor who wanted to popularize the notion of a unified Germany (Hanson 2013: 3). Hoffmann wrote the words in 1841. While the German states would unify in 1871, in the decades before unification, German political leaders were hesitant to take up Hoffmann's then-radical message of unification. Hoffmann was suspended from his university position a year after he wrote the words (Hanson 2013: 4). His publisher eventually found a melody for the text – a song composed in 1797 by the Austrian composer Joseph Haydn. Haydn wrote the melody as a birthday anthem to Emperor Francis II of Austria; the composition was the official anthem of the Austrian empire until 1918. The popular melody is also in the Kaiserquartett's second movement ("Emperor Quartet," opus 76, no. 3) (Hanson 2013: 4). Hanson (2013) writes, "Haydn's melody would provide the perfect partnership with Hoffmann's text to create the patriotic, stirring atmosphere necessary to convey the concept of Germany under a single flag" (4).

The song was first performed by the Hamburg Liedertafel (a men's choir) in 1841. While sung during the revolution of 1848/1849, the song became obscure until the end of the 19th century when it was sung in 1890 when Helgoland became part of

the German Empire. During the Weimar Republic, the song became the national anthem and between the Weimar era and the 1930s, the Song of the Germans was one of the only enduring national symbols (Hanson 2013). During the Weimar Republic, the Song of the Germans represented acceptance of disparate political views and choirs and singing groups regularly sung it in the late 19th century (Hanson 2013: 6). During WWI, the song began to be militarized. In November 1914, a war bulletin in Germany reported of the death of two thousand German soldiers who allegedly sang the Song of the Germans while fighting in the battle of Langemarck. German soldiers apparently sang the Song of the Germans in November 1918 after their defeat in WWI and again in 1919 after the announcement of the Treaty of Versailles punishments. During the Nazi era, the text of the first verse of the Song of the Germans took on new imperialistic meanings (Hanson 2013). After 1933, the first verse was employed by Nazis as a legitimating tool for expansionist war efforts. However, the Song of the Germans was also used as a form of protest by some Jewish musicians to speak against Hitler; these artists would distort the performance of the Song of the Germans to include ludicrous elements (Hanson 2013: 9).

After the Nazi period ended, the Song of the Germans was banned by Allied forces. Four years later, after the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) formed, the national anthem debate emerged. Politicians and the public alike debated whether to write a new anthem, reinstitute the Song of the Germans, replace singing the anthem with a moment of silence, or use different national songs. A new anthem was written but gained little traction. In spring 1952, Chancellor Adenauer and Federal President

Theodor Heuss finally agreed in a series of letters that the Song of the Germans should continue as the national anthem but designated that only the third verse would be officially recognized as the national anthem.

Germany's division created new issues with the national anthems. In 1956, to campaign against the socialist German Democratic Republic (GDR), a group of former SS leaders in the FRG created an additional stanza for the Song of the Germans that reflected the militant anticommunist notions of the early 1930s (Hanson 2013). Rather than use the Song of the Germans, the GDR government chose a different national anthem, "Auferstanden aus Ruinen" (Rising from the Ruins). After Germany reunified, the national anthem issue reemerged; debates followed whether to have a national anthem and which national anthem to use. Following the tradition established by Heuss and Adenauer, in spring 1991, Federal President von Weizsäckler and Chancellor Kohl agreed that the third verse should become the national anthem of Germany (Bundestag 2022). The text of the third verse is

Einigkeit und Recht und Freiheit
für das deutsche Vaterland!
Danach lasst uns alle streben,
brüderlich mit Herz und Hand!
Einigkeit und Recht und Freiheit
sind des Glückes Unterpfand:
/:Blüh im Glanze dieses Glückes,
blühe, deutsches Vaterland! :/

Unity and right and freedom
For the German fatherland!
Let us all pursue this purpose
Fraternally with heart and hand!
Unity and right and freedom
Are the pledge of happiness;

|:Flourish in this blessing's glory,
Flourish, German fatherland!:|

The music reaches across 1.5 octaves, fitting male vocal ranges and choral groups but can be challenging for other lay participants to sing. The song, set in E-flat major, starts out with a dotted quarter E flat note by middle C. The highest note, and climax of the song, is a dotted quarter E flat note an octave higher where one sings the verb "Blüh" (flourish). The lowest note is a B flat, sung during "und" and "heit" in Freiheit (freedom). This lowest note comes after two eighth notes that lead down to the B flat full note. Additionally, the song requires physical power, especially at the climax towards the end, to convey both the power of the words and reach the highest notes. The song crescendos at "sind des Glückes Unterpfand" (are the pledge of happiness). Over the B flat at which one sings "pfand" in Unterpfand is a fermata. Singers hold the note at "pfand" for an extra moment before the song continues with "Blüh" (flourish) at the high, dotted quarter E-flat note that is also held for an extra count (because of the dotted quarter note). The tempo slows down at the final "deutsches Vaterland!" (German fatherland) with singers elongating the vowels in these words. The final note is the same E flat the melody started with, providing a unifying and strong conclusion with "land" in Vaterland (fatherland).

Despite the national anthem still being taboo to sing in public, members singing the national anthem is an ontological experience through which people form solidarity and musically refute the shame and nationalism Germans generally associate with singing the national anthem. Such AfD rhetoric and singing permeates political discourse, participating in already-occurring dialogues about Germany's

future trajectory. As I described in chapter two, the removal of shame creates the opportunity to imagine alternative German futures.

I share two examples through which AfD members and others sing the national anthem in ways that elicit questions about voicing, politics of national symbols, and efforts to make the national anthem – as a symbol of national identity – normal.

Challenging the Verfassungsschutz, 2020

I was in a German state capital that keeps its historic charm through a distinctive castle surrounded by a swan-filled lake and a town center with tilted buildings that have cross-timbered walls and old glass windows. The AfD parliamentary chairmen from five eastern German states gathered to draft a statement challenging the legitimacy and neutrality of the Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz (BfV), the government department tasked with monitoring racism and extremism. In the evening, inside the castle in a dark-paneled room with small white statues of naked women and fruit, the chairmen held a meeting to officially read the statement. The room was packed with state-issued bodyguards, local and regional AfD members, and a few curious people who were invited to attend. The meeting consisted of reading the newly drafted and signed Schweriner Erklärung – the statement challenging the BfV. Additionally, a guest speaker described the complicated history of the BfV and a chairman gave a presentation comparing statements that politicians from other parties had made in the past several decades

that were very similar to current AfD statements. The chairman argued that it was unfair that the AfD should be surveilled by the BfV for saying what politicians said decades ago, and who were at the time not surveilled by the BfV.

I sat next to a woman in her early 40s, Caroline. Caroline mentioned that she was not a member but knew the state chairman's staff member. He invited Caroline to this event, and she came, but, she said, she was surprised that I knew about the event and traveled to see it. Caroline doubted whether people in the city knew about this meeting. She did not think they did because otherwise there would have been protests. Caroline did not dare tell her friends that she was here at the meeting. But she came because she was friends with the staff member and was curious about the AfD.

At the end of the meeting, the organizer announced that they would sing the national anthem according to AfD tradition. They invited everyone to stand, which everyone did except me. People stood and chatted a little with each other, but moments before the group began singing the national anthem, there was a noticeable stillness in the room. After a brief pause, the chairmen started to sing, and everyone joined in. The singers started on different registers and harmonized by the time they got to the word, "Vaterland" at the end of the first stanza. I am not sure anyone noticed that I remained seated except for one of the state-issued bodyguards who stood behind me and Caroline next to me. While I could hear some female voices, the majority were men's voices singing the national anthem in unison. It was obvious that the octave chosen by the chairmen was too low of an octave for some of the singers

who struggled to reach the lowest notes. But the singers typically started and ended each stanza together, pausing with each other and beginning again in tempo. At the end of the anthem, many in the room began applauding for several seconds.

Through insisting on singing the national anthem, these leaders and members hailed “a *particular sound of voice,* which is itself entirely social” (Kunreuther 2014: 18; original emphasis) and this particular sound emanated allegiance to a specific image of Germany and Germans who know their anthem and sing it. Citing R. Murray Schafer, Samuels et. al. (2010) write that soundscapes are “a publicly circulating entity that is a produced effect of social practices, politics, and ideologies while also being implicated in the shaping of those practices, politics, and ideologies” (Samuels et al 2010: 330). These live renditions of the national anthem create (temporary) communities through which notions of patriotism, political voice, and German identity are circulated and reproduced.

After the song, Caroline sat back down next to me and told me that she mouthed the words but did not sing because she felt uncomfortable singing the national anthem. But, Caroline said, she did not want to remain seated as I had since everyone else stood. Despite not wanting to participate in singing the national anthem, Caroline stood and mouthed the words as a kind of compromise. Singing the national anthem illustrates how voice is a political construct – Germans standing together and singing a socially problematic song is an overt political statement. Singing together demanded a kind of unity among audience members and was a sign

of who belonged and who did not based on who was willing to sing the national anthem.

As I looked around the room near me, I seemed to see people who either mouthed the words or sang very quietly since I could barely hear them singing, while others sang the national anthem quite loudly, as if the decibel level of their singing could transform into levels of patriotism. But for those who did not sing loudly, their standing position made up for any hesitation in singing the national anthem. By standing together, people joined their fellow audience participants and the leaders to symbolize their support of the national anthem or subjection to peer pressure.

At the same time, it is curious that Caroline wanted to tell me that she had not really sung the national anthem while simultaneously standing, an action that everyone could see. Her standing position perhaps indicated social pressure, but Caroline's claim that she did not sing the national anthem and her expressed discomfort mirrored Wendt's removal of his German flag face mask. Caroline's discomfort and Wendt's mask change continue to reflect the social impropriety of displaying the flag or singing the national anthem, even as people continue to do it.

Before the opera house, 2021

It had already been dark for several hours and was just above 0 Celsius by the time I arrived at the demonstration. There were several parliamentary speakers, making the demonstration on this very cold night last the full one and a half hours. There were no anti-demonstrators, and the demonstration was remarkably quiet. I did

not even hear the AfD speakers until I turned the corner around the Hofkirche. There were a three or four police vans around and a few police officers standing in front of their vans with perhaps sixty or seventy-five rally participants.

Throughout the event, several people I had met over the past several years came up to talk with me. George told me about the recent action to thank the Polish government for stopping migration from Belarus. He said that several members went to Berlin and to Poland the previous weekend to hold signs in Polish to thank the Polish government. Richard, a university student, also stopped by to tell me that he was working on the AfD's parliamentary petition against the BfV. Other people passed by, like the doctor who said his wife was doing well, and William, who mentioned that he is still on leave from the Justice Department because of the court case regarding the accusation that he attacked a refugee in custody. William must assume that it is public knowledge because he spoke so openly about it and indeed it is – the case has been in the newspaper multiple times with each new, slow development. Another man who I walked with during the Covid demonstrations in spring 2020 was also there and he gave me a kind of hug. He told me that people still gather for walks on Mondays to protest the Covid regulations but that few people gather these days.

There were some members of the Junge Alternative (JA) in the back with a huge sign. I also noticed a few other young men gathered, one with a very nice camera, taking photos and writing notes. These other men all wore masks, separating themselves from the rest of the gathering of anti-Covid regulation demonstrators.

Later, on Twitter, one of these men wearing a face mask claimed that one of the JA hit him with the large flag. In the Twitter post, the JA member wore a Trump shirt.

At the end of the very cold meeting, all the federal and regional parliamentary members who were there, at least fourteen people, got on the stage and began singing the national anthem to a recording. This rendition of the national anthem was different than other ones I had observed because of the use of a recording and a speaker system. Everyone waited for the recording to start – they stood there laughing and chatting in the cold. Suddenly the loud recording began. Though I saw people singing, one could not hear their voices above the pre-recorded audio of the national anthem. As people sang, all elderly or middle-aged, many held up their cell phones above their heads and waved the cell phones with either the flashlights on or the cell phone lit up. Some put their hands over their hearts.

Three and a half years earlier, when I started researching the AfD, singing the national anthem seemed like a form of defiance against convention. Indeed, organizers' comments indicated as much. For instance, several years ago, organizers regularly announced that in accordance with AfD tradition, they would sing the national anthem. But had it really been a tradition, they would not have had to announce that they would sing the national anthem. Additionally, had the act of singing the national anthem been so normal, more people would have participated in singing.

Knowing how taboo singing of the national anthem is and knowing that leaders and members are trying to normalize the song, I was struck by the rendition

that night. Over three years after I started fieldwork, singing the national anthem seemed to be more normal and expected. Three years ago, members seemed to sing quietly and stand stiffly. At the end of 2021, some people held lights above their heads and swayed to the recording as they sang.

That night, almost at the end of the recording, the audio abruptly cut off and the audience was left singing the anthem alone. Only then could one hear their unified voices, harmonizing at different octaves, finishing the anthem without the pre-recording. After a few moments, the recording turned on again and finished the anthem alone, during which my neighbors laughed. At the end of the recording, people applauded. What started as a potential act of social defiance to the taboos of singing the national had seemingly become routine, at least in this stronghold of the AfD. The very routine that members have established of singing the national anthem – the very predictability – is part of the process of normalization.

As people sang the national anthem along with the recording, the recording, the microphone picking up the parliament members' voices, and the phones all operated as unifying mediums. Weidman (2014) writes that technologies used to reproduce, broadcast, and amplify sound "draw attention to the powers and possibilities of voices separated from their originating bodies and can thus help us to see the mediation inherent in all voice–body relationships" (41). The recording provided an official start and amplification to the anthem. After a few seconds the audience began to participate. The difference between the recording and the audience became obvious when the recording failed almost at the end of the song and the

audience continued without it. During the glitch, rally participants sang alone together, without the amplification of the recorded transmission. The microphone amplified the parliament members' voices, but the microphone transporting the voices of the parliament members did not overpower the audience; rather, the voices of the audience blended with the parliament members' voices. Waving lit up cell phones over their heads, these mostly middle-aged and elderly members waved their arms and cell phones in a physical embodiment of solidarity.

The concept of voice emphasizes speakers' individuality (Weidman 2014:42; see also Keane 2000). But singing the national anthem together shows the ontology between singers' individuality and the unity of singing together, of blending voices for a broader purpose. The AfD has singularly made it habitual to sing the national anthem collectively. The repetition has made it predictable: at the end of each AfD public gathering and demonstration, participants will sing the national anthem.

Sprachliche Überarbeitung – Linguistic, existential threats to "German culture"

"How do you pronounce a word with an asterisk or a colon in the middle? And what's the German word for inclusivity? These are just two questions businesses and organizations in Europe's largest economy have been asking themselves as the country tries to advance gender equality.

In Germany, the debate about gender-neutral and inclusive language is complicated by grammar. Just as in many other languages, gender in German isn't denoted by personal pronouns alone. German nouns that refer to people have traditionally been masculine or feminine. So, a male citizen is a Bürger and a female citizen is a Bürgerin. But in the plural, the masculine is traditionally used by default — a point that's been contentious at least as far back as the second wave of feminism in the 1960s."

In the previous section, I analyzed how members sing the national anthem to both normalize singing the song in public and to create space to imagine alternative futures. In this section, I write about two AfD parliamentary petitions that sought to overturn recent popularized linguistic changes in the German language. By extension, this section is about how German identities emerge through language politics.

Identity politics are increasingly understood through language politics. Language politics is "a terrain marked by fears of linguistic estrangement and a public preoccupation with preserving an authentic national interior" (Linke 2016: 84). In Germany, the nation is understood as a linguistic community of ethnic Germans. Language nationalism draws on notions of Germany as a "closed linguistic corpus…organic, essential, and pure" (Linke 2016: 84-85).

Language has become a medium through which conservative and radical right actors strive to preserve a nation in an increasingly integrated Europe that is multi-ethnic, plurilingual and postcolonial. Language ability (in addition to race) has become a way to demarcate inclusion, exclusion, and nationality indicators (Linke 2016: 90).

In the past several decades, Germans have faced socio-political shifts that threaten linguistic identifiers of national belonging. In addition to the challenges of German reunification, EU integration, immigration to Germany, and non-native German speakers who can claim German citizenship have introduced foreign languages within households, schools, and communities (Senders 1999; Mandel 2008; Linke 2016). During the citizenship debates in the late 1990s, Linke (2016)

convincingly shows that liberal and conservative parties argued that linguistic achievement should be made central to immigrants' ability to acquire citizenship. "This formative power of linguistic systems…is also inherently coercive: through the medium of language, and its strategic deployment in citizenship and immigration politics, the nation engrafts a hegemonic memory of Germanness" (Linke 2016: 92). Language politics restores "a fictive ethnicity of Germanness (Linke 2016: 92)." Linke also argues that there is a continued connection between race, language, and rights, illustrating the hierarchical advantages through the access of German language courses and presumptions of Germanness based on ancestry.

German linguistic associations have created literary prizes, Germanized dictionaries, publicized scandals regarding the use of foreign words (especially English words) in different sectors, and public campaigns, such as the still popular campaign that chooses the most German un-word of the year (Unwort) – a form of public shaming that takes place over social and mainstream media (Linke 2016: 94). "Under the impact of global capitalism and European integration, which gave rise to hybrid forms of multilingual communication, Anglicization, and a traffic in foreign vocabularies, the survival of Germanness—signified by German language—is deemed threatened" (Linke 2016: 93). In the following sections, I explore how members' parliamentary petitions illustrate how language becomes a site of conflict that illuminates the importance of German language and national identity.

Relabeling the past (sprachliche Überarbeitung)

The name of one of the most famous exhibits in Dresden's Green Vault is no longer so easy to find. "**** with the Emerald Cluster" is the new title online, together with the addition "historical designation" in brackets. That at least is questionable, because

the historical name of the statuette created 300 years ago in the treasury of Augustus the Strong of a strong, black young man who presents 16 emerald crystals on a tray has always been "Moor with the Emerald Cluster." A heated argument has now broken out about the procedure. There are demands to remove works of art completely or to completely erase names, the SKD replied to a request from the F.A.Z. You don't do that explicitly. Others wanted everything to stay the way it is. As always, the AfD screams the loudest, whose state chairman speaks of a "scandal," senses "left cancel culture" and calls on the prime minister to reverse the renaming (Locke 2021).[14]

The Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden (SKD) is a collection of art museums in Dresden operated by the Saxon state. From 2008, the SKD has been engaged in creating an online databank for all the works of art housed in the SKD. In recent years, SKD personnel have changed the names of a portion of the artwork. According to the SKD, several pieces of art were renamed because of additional research that shed new light on the subject material. Furthermore, the SKD changed names because "Language is changing and what was once common is now considered discriminatory - and vice versa. The SKD want to avoid terms in object titles such as 'N**,' 'Mo**,' '[term for Roma],' as they have a derogatory meaning" (Staatliche

[14] Der Name eines der berühmtesten Ex-ponate des Dresdner Grünen Gewölbes ist neuerdings nicht mehr so leicht zu finden. '**** mit der Smaragdstufe' lautet online der neue Titel nebst der in Klammern stehenden Ergänzung 'historische Bezeichnung.' Das zumindest ist schon einmal fraglich, denn die historische Bezeichnung der vor 300 Jahren die Schatzkammer Augusts des Starken geschaffenen Statuette ei-nes kräftigen, schwarzen jungen Mannes, der auf einem Tablett 16 Smaragdkristalle präsentiert, lautete seit jeher 'Mohr mit der Smaragdstufe.' Die Staatlichen Kunstsammlungen Dresden (SKD) ersetzten nun das seit Jahrzehnten im Deutschen nicht mehr gebräuchliche Wort Mohr durch vier Asterisken.
Um das Prozedere ist nun ein heftiger Streit entbrannt. Es gebe Forderungen, Kunstwerke ganz zu entfernen oder Namen komplett zu tilgen, antworteten die SKD auf eine Anfrage der F.A.Z. Das tue man explizit nicht. Andere wiederum wollten, dass alles bleibt, wie es ist. Am lautesten schreit wie stets die AfD, deren Landesvor-sitzender von einem 'Skandal' spricht, 'linke Cancel Culture' wittert und den Ministerpräsidenten auffordert, die Umbenennungen rückgängig zu machen. Wie hier die 'Sprachpolizei' agiere, sei 'ungeheuerlich.'
How the "language police" act here is "outrageous". Locke, Stefan. "Weg mit den Hottentottenpaar." 16 September 2021.

Kunstsammlungen Dresden 2021).[15] This controversy over the museums terms is primarily about the German language. The AfD parliamentary petition subsequently submitted illustrates efforts to defend historical German terms and portray an unchanging German language amid perceived existential threats to the German language.

The SKD explained that of the 1.4 million objects recorded, the titles of 143 works have been revised because of discriminatory terms. According to the SKD's website, most of these titles do not come from the artists, but from researchers and former museum employees and that the former titles are often not older than 150 years old. Those titles that are historical – that were named by the artist or are established in inventory books and catalogs – are marked with quotation marks and the addition – "(historical title)." The SKD website explained that those titles which are more descriptive have been "sprachlich überarbeitet," or linguistically revised without changing the broader meaning of the work. While not displayed online, the original titles were never deleted but remain in the database for internal research. If discriminatory terms appear in the historical title, these terms are distinguished by asterisks, which the SKD writes only applies to a few titles. One can still display the original term by clicking on the updated title.

[15] Sprache verändert sich und was einst üblich war, gilt heute als diskriminierend – und umgekehrt. Begriffe in Objekttitel wie z.B. „Neger", „Mohr", „Zigeuner" wollen die SKD vermeiden, da sie eine abwertende Bedeutung in sich tragen"Unbenennung von Werktiteln.

Additionally, current audio guides continue to use such terms now deemed discriminatory, such as Augustus the Strong[16] saying, “Mo**”[17] in the historical Green Vault. The SKD explained that in the future, the audio will be changed and a child’s voice will interrupt the speaker and say that this word is discriminatory. The SKD argued that it does not need a political mandate for these changes because in a democracy, science and research are independent of political influence and control. The SKD question and answer website also responds to questions about iconoclasm and censorship.

The AfD parliamentary group submitted a request to the Saxon Ministry of Culture asking about renaming practices at Saxon museums. The ministry’s public response was dated 10 September 2021. Several media outlets reported and weighed in on the issue (Leipziger Volkszeitung 2021). The AfD and other organizations, such as the German Museum Association (Deutsche Museumsbund), spoke against the renaming (Leipziger Volkszeitung 2021). But the predominantly intellectual debate occurring through online and print networks seemed to end there; people did not take to the streets demanding the museums and scientists return to original modes of naming.

The selection of the museum as center of this debate reflects the role of museums as sites of culture, history, and German identity. Museums are bourgeois sites of performing, assessing, and creating culture (Clifford 1997) and function as a

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[16] Augustus II the Strong (August der Starke) was an Elector of Saxony during the late 17th and early 18th centuries. He is credited with transforming Dresden into a center of arts and architecture. It is predominantly his and his family’s collection on display at the SKD’s Historic Green Vault.
[17] A term used historically to refer to Black people; this term is now considered to be derogatory.

"relentless collector and commodifier of 'culture'" (8-9). The SKD operates as a zone for exchange for translocal communities, which include local and international patrons who visit museums, scholars and museum personnel, and other interested parties.

In the mid-November parliament session, the AfD parliamentary group submitted a parliamentary petition (*Antrag*). In this section, I summarize the main points to capture the broader arguments and issues at stake. Based on the AfD's parliamentary petition, a debate about the museum's renaming practices took place in parliament, its own site of bourgeois and elitist politics. Thomas Kirste (AfD) started the parliamentary debate with a speech describing the situation – the renaming of 143 works of art. Kirste specifically pointed out that Rico Gebhardt (Linke party) would want an example of this renamingn. In an impromptu call and response with the parliament members, Kirste began naming examples for the request Kirste said Gebhardt would want, "Aus 'dunkelhäutiger Mann' wurde

(Zurufe: Ein Mann!)

– genau – ‚ein Mann.' Aus ‚Eskimo' wurde

(Zurufe: Inuit!)

ein ‚Inuit,' richtig. Und besonders absurd: Aus ‚Zwerg' wurde „Kleinwüchsiger".

(Heiterkeit)

Auch selbst vollkommen wertneutrale Begriffe fielen der Zensur zum Opfer. Aus „Knabe" wurde „Junge", aus „Eingeborene" wurde „Dorfbewohner". „Türke" ist wohl unterdessen auch schon ein verdächtiger Begriff. Titel wie „Vier Türken und ein Neger im Profil" wurden nicht etwa zu „Vier Türken und ein Afrikaner im Profil"

umbenannt. Das wäre noch irgendwo verständlich gewesen. Nein! Der Titel heißt jetzt – zuhören – „Profilstudie von vier Männern mit Turban und einem Afrikaner".

> (Rico Gebhardt, DIE LINKE: Vielleicht waren es keine Türken?)

Ein unglaublicher Unsinn ist das, der eine Menge Geld kostet und für nichts ist. Es ist komplett irre, was hier passiert und was in den Staatlichen Kunstsammlungen vorgefallen ist.

> (Valentin Lippmann, BÜNDNISGRÜNE: Schlimm, schlimm, weil schlimm!)[18]

After providing a few more examples of the name changes, Kirste posed a question to Minister Klepsch, who was absent that day. "Unfortunately Mrs. Klepsch is not here, but maybe she is listening. Mrs. Klepsch, don't you have anything better to do here? Is that some kind of Corona-Koller that has seized the government here?"[19] Then Kirste critiqued how much money was being spent on the renaming project (which is part of a much larger digitalization project) and said that this money could have been used to protect the historical Green Vault from which valuable and historical art had recently been stolen. Kirste then commented on his gratitude

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[18] Sächsischer Landtag. 7. Wahlperiode – 38. Sitzung. 18 November 2021. Page 2938-2939
"From 'dark-skinned man' became (Shouts: A man!) - exactly - 'a man.' 'Eskimo' became (Shouts: Inuit!) an 'Inuit,' right. And especially absurd: 'dwarf' became "a short-statured person.' (Merriment) Even entirely neutral terms fell victim to censorship. 'Boy' [as in knave] became "boy", "native" [aboriginal/indigenous] became 'villager.' 'Turk' is already also a suspicious term. Titles like 'Four Turks and a Negro in Profile' were not renamed to 'Four Turks and an African in Profile.' That would have been understandable somewhere. No! The title is now - listen – 'Profile study of four men with turbans and an African.' (Rico Gebhardt, DIE LINKE: Maybe they weren't Turks?) It is unbelievable nonsense that costs a lot of money and is for nothing. It's completely crazy what's going on here and what happened in the state art collections. (Valentin Lippmann, Greens: Bad, bad, bad)

[19] Leider ist Frau Klepsch nicht da, aber vielleicht hört sie zu. Frau Klepsch, haben Sie hier nichts Besseres zu tun? Ist das so eine Art Corona-Koller, der die Regierung hier erfasst hat.
Sächsischer Landtag. 7. Wahlperiode – 38. Sitzung. 18 November 2021. Page 2939

(seemingly sarcastically) that one painting that had the word Bär (bear) in it was not renamed to be either "Bär(innen) oder Bär*innen."[20]

Kirste explained that "Such names are just as much a part of our Saxon history as the works of art they designate." [21] Kirste gave the example of "Mohr mit Smaragdstufe" and the Hottentotten figures in the historical Green Vault. Kirste asked, "'Mohr with emerald stage.' Do these names seem out of date today?"[22]

The parliament members in the audience shouted Yes! Kirste answered, Ja. Spielt das eine Rolle? (Does that play a role?) No, people shouted. No, agreed Kirste, just because one can do something does not mean someone should and that name changing is an act of arrogance to past centuries' worldview. Kirste asked again an absent Minister Klepsch, "Ms. Klepsch, another challenge to you: Are you as arrogant as the art collections? Are you attacking our cultural heritage?"[23] Kirste concluded with alternative naming solutions that would continue to use the term "Mohr" while still distancing oneself from the historical naming, such as using quotation marks or the word, so-called before the term. This segment resulted in a brief pause with shouts from the audience.

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[20] Sächsischer Landtag. 7. Wahlperiode – 38. Sitzung. 18 November 2021. Page 2939

[21] Solche Namen sind ebenso Teil unserer sächsischen Geschichte wie die Kunstwerke, die sie bezeichnen.
Sächsischer Landtag. 7. Wahlperiode – 38. Sitzung. 18 November 2021. Page 2939.

[22] Wirken diese Namen heute unzeitgemäß?
Sächsischer Landtag. 7. Wahlperiode – 38. Sitzung. 18 November 2021. Page 2939. Do these names seem out of date today?

[23]Frau Klepsch, wieder eine Forderung an Sie: Sind Sie auch so überheblich wie die Kunstsammlungen? Vergreifen Sie sich an unserem kulturellen Erbe. Sächsischer Landtag. 7. Wahlperiode – 38. Sitzung. 18 November 2021. Page 2939.

Parliament members took turns rejecting the AfD proposal through overlapping arguments, such as the rejection of authoritarian measures, the inappropriateness of political engagement in museums, education, and art, and the continually changing names of artwork as justification for the SKD name changes. Additionally, parliament members from various parties iterated the importance of enlightenment and knowledge through the SKD renaming efforts, claiming that AfD arguments reflected authoritarian measures to keep old names. There were a few micro-provocations, including the standard comment, "Kolleginnen und Kollegen der demokratischen Fraktionen!" (male and female colleagues of the democratic parties) as a regular incitement to call the AfD undemocratic. The broader discussion between all parties was on how knowledge should be purposely complicated, transmitted, produced, and published.

In the call and response at the beginning of Kirste's speech, parliament members responded humorously to Kirste's arguments, making his claims seem at once absurd while reflecting these members own support of the SKD's name changes. When Kirste started by saying, "From 'dark-skinned man' became," people shouted, "A man!" to which Kirste responded, "exactly - 'a man.'" When Kirste said, "'Eskimo' became" people shouted "Inuit!" to which Kirste responded, "an 'Inuit,' right. And especially absurd: 'dwarf' became "a short-statured person'" to which people laughed loudly in the hall. After this brief, humorous exchange, parliament members became more critical of Kirste's arguments and voiced their dissent. But this call and response illustrated a participatory experience for parliament members as

they engaged Kirste. This call and response reflected the dialectic situation between the individual and the collective and between the AfD and the rest of the parliament. Voicing loudly the new names of the artwork, parliament members affirm their support of the name changes, their knowledge of appropriate, contemporary naming conventions, and their critique of Kirste's arguments.

Kirste did not ask for a call and response, but during the impromptu call and response parliament members shouted out the new names for different works of art, signaling their assent and jovially mocking Kirste (even Kirste was smiling during this segment). At the end of the call and response, as the transcriber notes, there was "Heiterkeit" (joviality, amusement, exhilaration). Only Valentin Lippmann (Green) countered with a negative response, repeating the word, Schlimm (bad) three times. Lippmann's response signals (though did not necessarily cause) a shift in Kirste's speech and the audience response. With two more call and responses, critiques of the minister, and an alternative proposal for naming conventions, Kirste ended his speech. The comedy and humor in this exchange contradicted the perceived seriousness of such language changes that Kirste tried to communicate. The parliament members' joviality made Kirste's argument ridiculous, and their responses to him, jokes to each other, and laughter reduced his speech to something amusing. The improvisation of the call and response was a way for the parliament members to humorously engage and "kidnap power and force it, as if by accident, to contemplate its own vulgarity" (Mbembe 1992: 12).

The second round of debates was opened by Martina Jost (AfD) who was also the only speaker since the other parties had nothing more to say on the subject. Additionally, this segment was much more serious. Jost's speech followed Frank Richter's (SPD) speech who had already commented on the AfD's authoritarianism, anti-enlightenment efforts, and desire to return Germany to a prior, imperial era. Responding to this Richter's critical speech, Jost articulated similar concerns as Kirste, including using the same examples. Instead of recounting Jost's speech, I only draw out Jost's post-speech engagement with Frank Richter (SPD). Following Jost's speech, Richter made two remarks at his microphone.

Mr. Richter: I cannot spare myself two remarks at this point. First, Ms. Jost: What is happening through the SKD is precisely educational and not anti-educational, because on the one hand none of the old terms disappear and on the other hand the new terms are explained. The SKD count on mature and intelligent visitors in their exhibitions, also online. That is enlightenment in the best sense of the word.

The second point: Please note that I have a completely different understanding of the term "censoring." Little by little and mostly casually, you use the phrase that the SKD would censor terms (here). I come from the GDR and know what censorship is. This is something completely different. I do not let you get away with the term of censoring with regard to what the SKD is doing so well.

(Applause from the SPD and the Alliance Greens)[24]

[24] Sächsischer Landtag. 7. Wahlperiode – 38. Sitzung. 18 November 2021. Page 2939.
Mr. Richter said: Zwei Bemerkungen kann ich mir an dieser Stelle nicht ersparen. Erstens, Frau Jost: Das, was da durch die SKD geschieht, ist eben genau aufklärerisch und nicht antiaufklärerisch, weil einerseits keiner der alten Begriffe verschwindet und andererseits die neuen Bezeichnungen erläutert werden. Die SKD rechnen mit mündigen und klugen Besuchern in ihren Ausstellungen, auch online. Das ist Aufklärung im besten Sinne des Wortes.
Das Zweite: Bitte nehmen Sie zur Kenntnis, dass ich ein ganz anderes Verständnis des Begriffes „Zensieren" habe. Sie verwenden peu à peu und meistens so nebenbei die Formulierung, die SKD würde hier Begriffe zensieren. Ich komme aus der DDR und weiß, was Zensur ist. Das ist etwas ganz anderes. Ich lasse Ihnen den Begriff des Zensierens im Blick auf das, was die SKD so hervorragend tun, nicht durchgehen. (Beifall bei der SPD und den BÜNDNISGRÜNEN)

Ms. Jost responded: Mr. Richter, that is your opinion, which of course I cannot take away from you. With us that's already censorship; you can just say that. If you take a close look at which terms are being changed, they naturally fit into your worldview. If Mr. Sodann nonchalantly uses terms such as "discrimination, inappropriate designations," why do we have to bring these ideological notions into the historical context? Leave our historical names for the historical works of art, why not? That doesn't necessarily have to do with historical research either. You can always contextualize that, which is what is being done. We're not that far apart. But I would like to criticize the fact that people are now working with asterisks. I would like to explain to my children myself that the word Mohr is no longer used today. Unfortunately, if the name is no longer there, it cannot be done. Thank you. (Applause from the AfD - shout from the CDU: Aha!)[25]

Richter and Jost expressed different understandings of censorship, production of enlightenment, and transmission of knowledge. Richter describes enlightenment as the process of old names or notions disappearing and new names or notions taking their place, operating under the assumption that the past is created by the present. This process of change is enlightenment. Alternatively, Jost promotes "contextualization," which in her words means keeping the original terms, not using asterisks, and explaining the historical context in which such words were used.

The other term that emerges in this exchange between the two final speakers of this debate is "censorship." Invoking the GDR, Richter identifies himself as an

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[25] Sächsischer Landtag. 7. Wahlperiode – 38. Sitzung. 18 November 2021. Page 2939.
Herr Richter, das ist Ihre Auffassung, die ich Ihnen natürlich nicht nehmen kann. Bei uns ist das schon eine Zensur; das kann man einfach so sagen. Wenn Sie sich genau anschauen, welche Begriffe da geändert werden, so passen diese natürlich bei Ihnen in das Weltbild. Wenn Herr Sodann nonchalant Begriffe wie „Diskriminierung, unangemessene Bezeichnungen" anbringt, warum muss man diese Ideologievorstellungen in den historischen Kontext hineinbringen? Lassen Sie doch unsere historischen Namen für die historischen Kunstwerke, warum denn nicht? Das hat auch nicht unbedingt mit Geschichtsforschung zu tun. Man kann das immer kontextualisieren, was ja auch getan wird. Da sind wir gar nicht so weit auseinander. Aber dass man jetzt mit Sternchen arbeitet, möchte ich kritisieren. Ich möchte schon meinen Kindern selber erklären, dass man das Wort Mohr heute nicht mehr benutzt. Wenn der Name aber nicht mehr dasteht, kann man das leider nicht tun. Vielen Dank.

authority on the concept of censorship, an interesting comment since he is speaking to Jost, who was also born, raised, and studied in the GDR.

Jost's responds to how censorship claims align with whether one agrees with what is being omitted or changed. Because Richter is aligned with the changes, he does not see it as censorship, whereas Jost does, Jost argues. Furthermore, Jost contends that terms such as "discrimination, inappropriate designations" are identifiers of contemporary ideological arguments that are being used to label past people and subjects. Jost argues that people should contextualize the past rather than replace the words used.

In this parliamentary petition, Kirste and Jost portray the German language as existentially threatened and with it, the past as it was then lived and experienced. As I heard and later read their speeches, Kirste and Jost agree with the other parties that certain terms are inappropriate in 21st century Germany. The point of disagreement is how terms should be contextualized – either removed or indicated with an asterisk or explained through additional text. Within this understanding, the crucial term censorship, used differently by Richter and Jost, emerges for Jost as a primary existential threat to the German language and by extension, Germans.

In these examples, Jost and Kirste claimed that the SKD changes as threats to German education about its history and a form of censorship. This debate adds to Linke's (2016) description of language nationalism. While Linke describes the assimilation of language as coercive forms of citizenship and belonging, this debate

illustrates how through language, “the nation engrafts a hegemonic memory of Germanness” (Linke 2016: 92).

At one level, this debate is about the fictive constructions of meaning in the German language and the real-time social implications of language. In addition to the threats to the German language that Linke (2016) identified, Jost and Kirste argued that changing the art titles will result in Saxons losing their history, threaten the German language, and indirectly threaten German identity politics. As Linke (2016) writes, language politics is “a terrain marked by fears of linguistic estrangement and a public preoccupation with preserving an authentic national interior” (Linke 2016: 84). The German language becomes a medium through which conservative and radical right actors strive to preserve a nation in an increasingly integrated Europe that is multi-ethnic, plurilingual and postcolonial.

AfD parliamentary petition – Berlin

23 February 2019. Berlin.

I traveled to Berlin to attend the 13th annual memorial march against colonialism, slavery, and racism worldwide. Starting at 11 am, I gathered with almost sixty other participants. The participants I spoke with were from different African countries but had been living and fighting for de-colonialism in various European, North, and South American countries. Not only speaking against colonialism, slavery, and racism, the organizers also advocated for African unity.

The memorial march took place in Berlin and speakers recognized that it was in Berlin during 1884 and 1885 that European imperial powers divided up Africa. That conference also illustrated that Germany had become a major international power by the 1880s and defied contemporary German claims that Germany nothing, or at least very little, to do with colonialism. One professor of history directly refuted notions that Germans have of their colonial innocence.

The march stopped at various colonial sites throughout Berlin's city center such as the U-Bahn Mohrenstraβe, where different speakers commented on Berlin's and Europe's colonial heritage and the postcolonial burdens that continue to be carried by descendants in former colonies. The speakers spoke in various colonial languages, but predominantly English, French, and German.

The above narrative from my fieldnotes has nothing directly to do with the AfD, nor at the time were the organizations involved in this memorial march interested in the AfD. But I share this example to show the broader context in which the following AfD parliamentary petition took place. In the last several years, decolonial efforts have led to discussion and debate in elite circles, such as at universities and parliamentary sessions.

In Berlin, as in other cities, Germany's transnational and colonial heritages emerge in street names, buildings, and other material forms. In the following section, I describe an AfD parliamentary petition against a street name change proposal for the Mohrenstraβe in Berlin. As I indicated in the previous example, Mohr is now a contested term in Germany; the term is uncomfortable to use or write. While not necessarily on par with the N-word in German or English, Mohr represents the historical exotism of Black people in Germany. While the term is largely absent from everyday contemporary use, there are some reminders of the terms, such as the names of pharmacies, streets, or confectionaries. However, organizations and companies are eliminating the term Mohr.

The Berlin transit association (BVG) decided to change the name of *Mohrenstraβe* (Mohrs' street). On 11 August 2020, the AfD group in the Berlin Senate submitted a parliamentary petition to challenge the decision. In the

parliamentary petition, the group wrote that the BVG's decision was undemocratic since the association made the decision "in-house" and not with a public debate. "This very disregard for democratic procedure necessitates an opinion of the House of Representatives."[26] With this statement, the petition claimed that an issue of enduring, contemporary racism and exoticism is actually an issue of democracy.

In the parliamentary petition, the AfD writers paraphrased historian Ulrich van der Heyden's account of the street. According to this account, at the end of the 17th century, a dirt road was called *Mohrenstraße* because a delegation of African representatives from the Prussian colony Groß Friedrichsburg in present-day Ghana stayed at an inn on that street at the edge of the then-city gates. The delegates entered the palace on foot and gathered much attention. Because of this, the way between the inn and the castle became popularly known as *Mohrenweg*. With the expansion of the city, the street was officially called *Mohrenstraße*; the first appearance of name occurred in 1710. The parliamentary petition continues

> According to Ulrich van der Heyden, 'Mohrenstraße' got its name in order to integrate the people in Berlin that were then called 'Mohren' into the cultural patterns of perception. This practice was analogous to the hunters, riflemen, cooks and carpenters whose roads run near Mohrenstraße. Ulrich van der Heyden concludes in his study on Mohrenstraße: The street name was not at all connoted racist or colonialist at the time of its creation, it was at best connoted exotic.[27]

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[26] Diese Missachtung demokratischer Gepflogenheiten macht eine Stellungnahme des Abgeordnetenhauses erforderlich.

[27] Ende des 17. Jahrhunderts sei ein unbefestigter Weg als Mohrenstraße bezeichnet worden, da hier eine Delegation afrikanischer Repräsentanten aus der preußischen Kolonie Groß Friedrichsburg im heutigen Ghana für einige Monate in einem Gasthaus untergebracht gewesen sei. Das Gasthaus, in dem die Delegation einquartiert gewesen sei, habe an einem unbefestigten Weg vor den Toren der damaligen Stadt gelegen. Den Weg zum Schloss hätten die Delegierten zu Fuß beschritten, dies habe bei der Berliner Bevölkerung viel Aufmerksamkeit hervorgerufen. So sei der Weg zwischen Gasthaus

This origin story emphasizes the (presumed) lack of prejudice towards people of color, especially from Africa, during this period and equates the color of skin to occupations. The parliamentary petition claims that calling a street after a group of people adhered to convention and brought that group of people into "the cultural patterns of perception" of that period. According to these arguments, the street was not considered racist or derogatory – rather, people at the time were being inclusive.

The AfD author(s) continue that the word *Mohr* is outdated and only used in historical contexts "without any evaluation."[28] Even the first professor "with African roots in Germany,"[29] Anton Wilhelm Amo, used the term *Mohr* in his dissertation in 1729, "as a self-designation for himself and for people from Africa,"[30] the parliamentary petition explains.

The parliamentary petition continues:

> It is obvious, Ulrich van der Heyden noted, that 'in a typical colonial manner people presume to decide what displeases or should displease Africans and why they are offended and what they are to demand.' The designation 'Mohr' or '*Mohrenstraße*' has not bothered any African for centuries. Polls among African embassies and discussions with African Germanists and students, says Ulrich van der Heyden further, providing no indication that this term might be hurtful to the residents of the African continent. The name *Mohrenstraße*

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und Schloss im Volksmund „Mohrenweg" getauft worden. Mit dem weiteren Ausbau der Friedrichstadt um 1700 sei die Straße dann offiziell „Mohrenstraße" genannt worden. Der Name „Mohrenstraße" sei bereits im ersten Stadtplan der Königlichen Haupt- und Residenzstadt Berlin aus dem Jahr 1710 dokumentiert. Die „Mohrenstraße" erhielt Ulrich van der Heyden zufolge ihren Namen, um die damals als „Mohren" bezeichneten Menschen in Berlin in die kulturellen Wahrnehmungsmuster zu integrieren. Diese Praxis vollzog sich analog zu den Jägern, Schützen, Köchen und Zimmerern, deren Straßen in der Nähe der Mohrenstraße verlaufen. Ulrich van der Heyden kommt in seiner Studie zur Mohrenstraße zu dem Ergebnis: Die Straßenbezeichnung sei zur Zeit ihrer Entstehung überhaupt nicht rassistisch oder kolonialistisch konnotiert gewesen, allenfalls exotisch.

[28] dabei ohne Wertung

[29] der erste Professor mit afrikanischen Wurzeln in Deutschland

[30] als Selbstbezeichnung für sich und für Menschen aus Afrika

> rather underlines the close connections between Europe and the African-Arab region in the medical, scientific, and cultural field, which have existed since the late Middle Ages. Those who want to obliterate the *Mohrenstraße* erase part of the cultural identity of Europe and the memory of the Berlin-Prussian and European relations with other cultures. [31]

Citing Ulrich van der Heyden, the AfD authors argue that changing the street name is a form of colonialism because it presumes that "we" know what "they" – the subordinate Other – wants and needs. The parliamentary petition emphasizes that the term *Mohrenstraße* reflects the close connections between Europe and Africa for centuries, especially intellectually, while omitting that for several of these centuries, that close connection came through subjugation and colonization. The parliamentary petition also ignores many vocal AfD leaders who demean the African continent and Africans generally by stereotyping Africanness (including North African) with criminality. The AfD authors write further that those who try to change the street name try to erase the "cultural identity of Europe," maintaining that this cultural identity is existentially threatened by a single street name change.

Rather than change the name of *Mohrenstraße,* the AfD authors conclude, it would be better to put up informational boards with critical commentary at the subway stop so that the place will tell the story while documenting "the history of the

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[31] Augenfällig sei, so merkte Ulrich van der Heyden an, dass sich „in typischer kolonialer Manier Menschen anmaßen zu entscheiden, was den Afrikanern missfällt oder missfallen soll, weshalb und warum sie gekränkt sein und was sie fordern sollen". An der Bezeichnung „Mohr" oder „Mohrenstraße" habe sich über Jahrhunderte kein Afrikaner gestört. Umfragen bei afrikanischen Botschaften und Diskussionen mit afrikanischen Germanisten und Studenten, so Ulrich van der Heyden weiter, lieferten keinen Hinweis, dass dieser Begriff für die Bewohner des afrikanischen Kontinents verletzend sei. Die Benennung Mohrenstraße unterstreicht vielmehr die engen Verbindungen, die es seit dem späten Mittelalter zwischen Europa und dem afrikanisch-arabischen Raum auf medizinischem, wissenschaftlichem und kulturellem Gebiet gegeben hat. Wer die Haltestelle Mohrenstraße tilgen will, löscht einen Teil der kulturellen Identität Europas und der Erinnerung an die berlinisch- preußischen und europäischen Beziehungen zu anderen Kulturen aus.

African diaspora. The on-site display boards can be installed in the subway station itself or above ground." The authors argue that only through continuing the name "*Mohrenstraße*" can critical awareness and a discussion of the term occur, while omitting the term leads to a lack of critical engagement.[32]

While this parliamentary petition does not challenge Germany's colonial heritage directly, the AfD writers argue that maintaining historical names is a crucial part of communicating history to contemporary and future generations of Germans. This point is like Jost and Kirste's arguments regarding the SKD's name changes. During that parliamentary debate, Jost and Kirste argued that changing historical names was a form of censorship, anti-Enlightenment and anti-educational. Keeping the historical names, these AfD writers and politicians argue, is a way of remembering the past and informing future generations. Embracing the entanglement of language and identity politics, these AfD writers engage language politics as a way to participate in German identity politics as illustrated through the past and future. In this terrain marked by a fear of linguistic estrangement and perceiving imagined authenticity, these AfD petitions fight against shifting linguistic terms that signal changing perceptions of Germany's past and present. Both petitions defy conventional notions of censorship and challenge how and what kind of education should be promoted in Germany.

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[32] der in professioneller Ausgestaltung die Geschichte der Stadt erzählt und gleichzeitig die Geschichte der afrikanischen Diaspora dokumentiert. Die Schautafeln vor Ort können im U-Bahnhof selbst oder oberirdisch angebracht werden. Sie sollen die verschiedenen Ansichten zur Straßenbenennung widerspiegeln und können auch der Auseinandersetzung mit der kolonialen Vergangenheit Raum bieten. So kann gerade das Fortbestehen des Namens „Mohrenstraße" zu einem kritischen Bewusstsein und einer Auseinandersetzung mit der Stadtgeschichte anregen.

Like the memory politics and structural nostalgia, I describe in chapter two, these petitions describe a positivist Germany that allows members and Germans to reimagine Germany's future in terms of international politics, migration, and forms of belonging. By pursuing language politics, the AfD politicians draw on the normative notion of Germany as a linguistic community of ethnic Germans. Through promoting language nationalism, the AfD politicians advocating these petitions draw on perceptions of Germany as a "closed linguistic corpus…organic, essential, and pure" (Linke 2016: 84-85). Language has become a medium through which conservative and radical right actors strive to preserve a nation in an increasingly integrated Europe that is multi-ethnic, plurilingual and postcolonial.

Conclusion

This chapter assessed how the German national anthem and language are symbols of national identity. AfD members strive to normalize singing the national anthem in order to combat German shame (as described in chapter two) and imagine and Message alternative German futures. I contextualized and analyzed two different recordings of members singing the national anthem, focusing on voicing techniques and external mediums to think about "the enculturated nature of sound" (Samuels et al 2010: 330). The sounds of the national anthem become both sites of conflict and efforts at protecting what is portrayed as the cultural sounds of Germany. In these examples, the national anthem was reproduced through the technologies of political voice, shaping AfD members' social and political practices. These live renditions of

the national anthem created (temporary) communities through which notions of patriotism, political voice, and German identity were circulated and reproduced. These sounds created allegiance to a particular image of Germany and Germans who know their anthem and sing it.

Additionally, understanding the German language as a symbol of the nation, AfD politicians speak against linguistic changes or omissions to the German language. Such changes or omissions are framed as existential threats to the German language, trajectory, and identity. In the parliamentary petitions I shared here, members expressed worries about what future Saxons and Germans will learn about the German past if certain terms are erased or replaced. Simultaneously, AfD politicians maintained the innocence, or at least, educational value, of historical and contemporary terms of exclusion that continue to define belonging in Germany.

AfD politicians argued that keeping problematic terms would complicate and contextualize knowledge while maintaining German heritage. These arguments are as much about changing linguistics as they are about the construction and maintenance of German futures. These parliamentary petitions did not necessarily dispute the need to change or update terms. Rather, the parliamentary petitions position the debate as one of maintaining the authenticity of German history and future.

Chapter 4: Energy

"The trace gas CO2 is indispensable as a prerequisite for all life. The increase in the concentration of CO2 in the atmosphere has contributed to the greening of the earth in recent decades. No one denies recent global warming. However, the AfD doubts that this will only have negative consequences. Instead of fighting a hopeless fight against climate change, we should adapt to the changed conditions, just as plants and animals do. The history of mankind shows that warm periods have always led to a flowering of life and cultures, while cold periods were associated with hardship, hunger and wars. To this day, it has not been proven that humans, especially industry, are largely responsible for climate change. The recent warming is in the range of natural climate variability, as we know it from the pre-industrial past" (Alternative for Germany 2021b: 174-175).[33]

Energy politics in Germany is an all-encompassing issue with widely divergent opinions. Because of this, I include this topic, with its related theme of climate change, in the six nodes of political conflict. AfD politicians and members talk often and regularly about energy politics; this topic is one of the most enduring issues because it affects everyday habits and lifestyles.

In this chapter I examine how AfD meetings focused on energy and ecological politics become spaces for multiple kinds of actors and perspectives to come into contact, politicizing energy and placing energy engagement into the realm of laypeople. AfD members are re-Messaging energy to comment on coal, bark beetles, and wind turbines while navigating language performance. This chapter helps clarify

[33] Das Spurengas CO2 ist als Voraussetzung für alles Leben unverzichtbar. Der Anstieg der Konzentration von CO2 in der Atmosphäre hat in den letzten Jahrzehnten zu einem Ergrünen der Erde beigetragen. Niemand streitet die jüngste globale Erwärmung ab. Die AfD bezweifelt aber, dass diese nur negative Folgen hat. Statt einen aussichtslosen Kampf gegen den Wandel des Klimas zu führen, sollten wir uns an die veränderten Bedingungen anpassen, so wie es Pflanzen und Tiere auch tun. Die Menschheitsgeschichte belegt, dass Warmzeiten immer zu einer Blüte des Lebens und der Kulturen führten, während Kaltzeiten mit Not, Hunger und Kriegen verbunden waren. Es ist bis heute nicht nachgewiesen, dass der Mensch, insbesondere die Industrie, für den Wandel des Klimas maßgeblich verantwortlich ist. Die jüngste Erwärmung liegt im Bereich natürlicher Klimaschwankungen, wie wir sie auch aus der vorindustriellen Vergangenheit kennen.

some of these struggles by examining how actors engage each other in local debates about energy and climate politics through silencing techniques and logic games.

The conflicts I describe in this chapter emerge from Germany's Energiewende, or energy transition, a widely debated package of policies with far-reaching consequences that has been occurring in Germany for many years. The Energiewende is a term that has been used for several decades in Germany but has recently become more common through increased attention to climate politics. "The Energiewende has become emblematic for an approach to climate policy which recognizes the urgent need for emissions reduction, and seeks to bring about a decisive shift away from reliance on fossil fuels towards a low-emissions economy" (Müller and Morton 2018: 137). Germany's Energiewende has been a combination of creating renewable energy sources, phasing out nuclear plants, and reducing CO2 emissions (see Müller and Morton 2018).

Through the popularization of Germany's Energiewende, political actors across the spectrum engage now in climate and energy politics, alternately reproducing old alliances and creating new networks. The result is a series of local and national conflicts.

I organize this chapter around three main sections. First, I start with coal, a practical and symbolic energy source in Germany. The politics around coal and energy production are "bound up with the fabric of everyday life…with social practices and processes, the making of meaning, and the experience of time" (Müller and Morton 2018: 142). I explain how coal is symbolic of reliability and

independence in Germany that unfolds in a broader, conflicting g terrain of economic, environmental, and political dramas. As part of these dramas, “energy” stands in for independence and sovereignty amid chaotic international positioning.

In the second section, I analyze part of an AfD citizen dialogue meeting. In addition to energy as a symbol for German sovereignty, debates also emerged in this meeting about credible knowledge and expertise that were juxtaposed with humor and ridicule. In these examples, rightist critique of energy and climate politics move beyond fears of energy shortages to include other contemporary politics, such as migration.

In the final section, an addendum to this chapter, I examine how energy politics intersect with migration as two threats to Germany (in addition to the threats elaborated on in chapters two and three). I analyze how racial aesthetics emerge rhetorically and corporeally through racialized Others who are also present at these AfD meetings.

By racial aesthetics, I refer to the way that migration from certain countries intersects with dominant debates, in this case, energy politics. While I could call this simply migration, the term migration does not fully capture the racialized component of people often glossed as “Ausländer.” Mandel (2008: 9) translated this term as foreigner-outsider, which captures both the non-Germanness and the perpetual outsider status of people about whom the term is often used.

While I cannot guess the religious affiliation (if any) of the people I describe in the addendum, they come from countries that are predominantly Muslim in the

Middle East and northern Africa. El-Tayeb (2011) writes that “contemporary tropes around the Muslim presence in Europe are framed not in the language of race, religion, or nation, but in that of culture and gender” (83). Likwise, the term, culture, replaces racialized concepts in Europe (see for instance Stolcke 1995; Pautz 2005). But there is a way in which race continues to be a defining feature of the perpetual Outsider as I indicated in chapter one, while race is often unnamed(M’Charek, Schramm, and Skinner 2014).

While scholarship often focuses on one (culture) or the other (race) as dichotomous labels of difference, when I use the term, racial aesthetics, I recognize the perceived cultural, racial, intellectual, and religious divide between Europe and the Middle East and Africa. By using the term, racial aesthetics, I position my arguments within scholarship that identifies race – manifested corporeally through skin color – as the first indicator of Otherness. Additional markers of Otherness might be articulated as foundations for exclusion (intellectual, religious). But despite claims to a post- or non-racial Europe, race still often forms the basis for Germanness/Europeanness and Otherness. It is this dichotomy between articulated exclusion based on Islam, anti-Enlightenment, or other features supposedly counter to present-day Europe on the one hand, and the unarticulated exclusion based on race on the other hand, that is reflected in the juxtaposed racial aesthetics of belonging and exclusion. I examine these issues through the presence of service workers of color at these meetings.

I gathered this data predominantly during autumn 2019 and beginning of winter 2020, just before politics became absorbed by the Covid pandemic, and when discussions about Nord Stream 2 were dominating international politics and media coverage. The views described in this chapter reflect standard narratives on the political Right. Coal becomes symbols of hope translated into warmed homes in frigid winters and paychecks that pay for children's clothes and aged parents' medical bills and funeral costs.

At another level, the narrative I describe here is about Germany being independent from the international dramas circulating the world, such as Russia and China collaborating, or Russia and the US weighing in on Germany's energy needs, or Germany needing the Middle East while simultaneously wanting to decline admittance to their migrating populations or engagements in their conflicts. Since energy circulation influences every part of life, energy generally, and coal specifically, become key sites to debate German independence and reliability while assessing Germany's past and projecting its future.

Coal

Joshua and I were talking about energy, the advantages of coal and the unreliability of electricity. "Ich habe den Winter '78 und '79 erlebt," (I survived the winter of '78 and '79) Joshua said, as he described what it was like living during one of the coldest winters in recent German history. They had no gas or electricity and the only thing that saved them, Joshua said, was the brown coal. "Das einzige, was uns geholfen hat, war die Kohle," (The only thing that helped us was the coal). This led Joshua to make a passionate explanation of the benefits of coal that was framed by the narrative of trauma – the winter of 1978-1979.

On the first Advent weekend in 2019, coinciding with the Madrid climate conference, the anti-coal organization, Ende Gelände [here and no further], organized several protests in different coal plants in the Lausitz region of eastern Germany. A local newspaper published the following report:

In view of the violent protests in 2016, similar actions are feared for this weekend in the region. At that time, thousands of opponents of coal occupied equipment in the Welzow opencast mine, blocked coal railway tracks and stormed the Schwarze Pumpe [Black Pump] power plant. The then operator Vattenfall complained of losses in the millions.

Against this background, the protest in Lusatia met with little approval. After the municipal councils of Schleife and Trebendorf had spoken out against the end of the site, many more followed. Brandenburg's Prime Minister Dietmar Woidke (SPD) also referred to the right to demonstrate but announced in an interview with the Tagesspiegel that he would crack down on criminal offenses.

Elsewhere the tone becomes rougher. The Facebook page "Zukunft Heimat" [Future Home] calls for resistance against the ‘dictatorship of the Green Khmer.’ Here they want to demonstrate at the Schwarze Pumpe power plant, emphasizing non-violence. Resistance is also forming in several Facebook groups, coupled with openly right-wing extremist slogans and fantasies of violence.

Ende Gelände spokeswoman Mahlhaus responded to this possible threat with little de-escalation: ‘We have anti-fascist protection structures that help us to deal with the Nazi threat on the ground.’ According to the police, a total of 24 demonstrations have been registered – half of them coal opponents and half in favor of coal (Helm, Hennig, Hoeflich and Reinhard 2019). [34]

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[34] Mit Blick auf die gewaltsamen Proteste im Jahr 2016 werden in der Region ähnliche Aktionen für dieses Wochenende befürchtet. Damals hatten Tausende Kohlegegner unter anderem Geräte im Tagebau Welzow besetzt, Kohlebahngleise blockiert und das Kraftwerk Schwarze Pumpe gestürmt. Der damalige Betreiber Vattenfall beklagte Verluste in Millionenhöhe.
Vor diesem Hintergrund stößt der Protest in der Lausitz auf wenig Gegenliebe. Nachdem sich bereits die Gemeinderäte von Schleife und Trebendorf gegen Ende Gelände ausgesprochen haben, folgen viele weitere. Auch Brandenburgs Ministerpräsident Dietmar Woidke (SPD) verwies zwar auf das Demonstrationsrecht, kündigte im Interview mit dem Tagesspiegel aber hartes Durchgreifen gegen Straftaten an.
An anderer Stelle wird der Ton rauer. Die Facebook-Seite "Zukunft Heimat" ruft zur Gegenwehr gegen die "Diktatur der Grünen Khmer" auf. Hier will man am Kraftwerk Schwarze Pumpe demonstrieren, betont gewaltfrei. Auch in mehreren Facebook-Gruppen formiert sich Widerstand, gepaart mit offen rechtsradikalen Parolen und Gewaltfantasien. “Ende Gelände: Es bleibt bei einem Demotag.”
Ende Gelände-Sprecherin Mahlhaus antwortet auf diese mögliche Bedrohung wenig Deeskalatives: "Wir haben antifaschistische Schutzstrukturen, die uns helfen, mit der Nazi-Bedrohung vor Ort klarzukommen." Laut Polizei sind insgesamt 24 Demonstrationen angemeldet - jeweils zur Hälfte von Kohlegegnern und -befürwortern.

This news article was printed in early December 2019 by the regional newspaper, *Sächsische Zeitung*, as protests for and against coal descended on the Schwarze Pumpe plant that straddles Brandenburg and Saxony in Germany, reaching almost to the Polish border. Coal production, an important energy and financial source, is supported by mainstream parties which have little support for demonstrations that could shut down coal production. Additionally, coal plants also become conflict sites where Nazi and anti-fascist actors vie for demonstration space to compete over questions of coal as part of their larger incompatible perspectives.

Much of anthropological scholarship has focused on oil's predominance in contemporary capitalism and strategic political realism (Szeman 2007; Mitchell 2011; Huber 2013). But in the first part of this chapter, I focus on the political Right's enduring relationship to coal, not oil, as a bedrock of strategic realism (to borrow Szeman's term). Szeman (2007) defines strategic realism as a common discourse used in relation to strict realpolitik to suspend or minimize concerns about oil and, in the case of this chapter, coal. Strategic realism emerges through power relations between different countries and the flow of energy out of, through, and into different countries.

The central actor of strategic realism is the nation-state. Energy decisions are based on the need to protect the nation-state's energy security. The process engages "often brutal geopolitical calculations in order to secure the stability of national economies and communities" (Szeman 2007: 811). While on the political Left, rhetoric often takes the form of ecological disaster (Szeman 2007), on the political Right, the narrative often consists of the disaster of energy dependence and insecurity.

Coal has been a central feature of German energy for decades. As early as 1981, the German government had agreed to another energy package to continue coal extraction for energy production. "Coal was seen as a domestic resource and seven new coal fired power stations were commissioned…In spite of major debates on nuclear safety, most elites in Germany supported the expansion of coal and nuclear as the best guarantees for energy security (Renn and Marshall 2016: 227).

The Chernobyl disaster in 1986 proved to be a turning point in German energy production, increasing the significance of coal in Germany while nuclear energy became less popular. However, in the intervening years, the government decided to phase out hard coal by 2018.

But lignite coal was excluded in the phase-out plan for economic and energy security purposes. "Lignite was regarded as a national reserve that should continue to be supported" (Renn and Marshall 2016: 228). There are several reasons why lignite coal continues to be mined in Germany. In the 1990s, climate change became a more significant political topic and as part of this debate, hard coal came under critique. Not only were environmental concerns raised but mining hard coal in Germany was much more expensive than importing it from other countries.

But the ruling SPD continued its support of coal miners and unions. During these early debates, public concerns were raised about the far more polluting lignite coal which also requires more extensive land use and agricultural destruction. However, lignite coal is much more profitable because it could be produced in more inexpensive open mine pits. Since at the time most environmental groups were

focusing on fighting nuclear energy and the phase-out of hard coal was already controversial, the production of lignite coal emerged as a consensus between all parties to secure Germany's energy supply (see Renn and Marshall 2016).

German reunification fostered new perspectives of coal. In the years after Germany's reunification,

> Germans were suddenly confronted with partially contaminated or devastated areas in the Eastern coal-mining districts…While these impressions confirmed the image of coal as dirty they also encouraged many pro-coal activists, union members and politicians to demonstrate that 're-naturalization' efforts could compensate for the destruction in both 'East' and 'West'. By re-naturalization, the West could show the East the benefits of capitalism (Renn and Marshall 2016: 228).

After reunification and through the West "showing" the East, coal became a broader symbol of national rejuvenation, the success of capitalism over socialism, and democracy over authoritarianisms. By re-naturalizing coal-depleted regions, companies, union members, politicians, and pro-coal activists worked to transform the image of coal as dirty and into a life-sustaining energy resource.

In 2011, all parties in the Bundestag voted in favor of the Energiewende with only a few members voting against or abstaining. The law phased-out nuclear power plants by 2022, reduced fossil fuel use from over 80% in 2011 to 20% in 2050, and strove to increase energy efficiency by 40% (Renn and Marshall 2016: 229). While through this law and other Energiewende policies, Germany can be seen as leading the industrialized world towards climate action, Germany's nuclear exit has made it possible for coal industry supporters to frame (brown) coal "as a transitional energy

source or bridging technology on the road to future decarbonization" (Morton and Müller 2016: 280).

As the Energiewende has gained more traction in contemporary politics, CO2 production also increased "because lignite remained competitive in the liberalized energy market" (Renn and Marshall 2016: 230; see also Morton and Müller 2016:). In this sense, the Energiewende reflects the competition for "power over energy" which "has been the companion and collaborator of modern power over life and population from the beginning" (Boyer 2011: 5). Similarly, Mitchell (2011) writes about the constitutive relationship between the development of democracy and the use of oil. Mitchell (2011) argues that the

> political possibilities were opened up or narrowed down by different ways of organising the flow and concentration of energy, and these possibilities were enhanced or limited by arrangements of people, finance, expertise and violence that were assembled in relationship to the distribution and control of energy (8).

By investigating energy politics, statecraft, political economy, and democratic imaginaries emerge in different configurations, illuminating how energy currents drive economies, foreign policy, and international relations. As Boyer (2011) writes, "The staggering significance of energy as the undercurrent and integrating force for all other modes and institutions of modern power has remained remarkably silent, even in this era of so much talk about climate change, energy crisis and energy transition" (5). This chapter investigates these issues by analyzing how people talk about position energy and ecological politics in spaces shaped by AfD politicians. I also examine energy's centrality in the following section by relating an extended tour

of the Schwarze Pumpe that I had with Ms. Taylor. I illustrate how Ms. Taylor described coal, its conflicts, and role in providing Germany independence and energy reliability. While Ms. Taylor is not an AfD member, her comments reflect broad sentiments I heard among members across Germany.

Schwarze Pumpe, 2019

The Schwarze Pumpe mine and plant is on the border between Brandenburg and Sachsen and is owned by LEAG. In our conversations, Ms. Taylor drew in relational configurations coal as a symbol of reliance, security, and independence, the GDR and contemporary international relations, and coal's continued importance to German energy needs.

I made the trip to the Schwarze Pumpe in the Lausitz with public transit. It seemed that the further I got from Dresden, privileged for rebuilding efforts because of its sympathetic history, the more ramshackle the structures became. I had never seen something like this in Germany. While some parts had old charm, many buildings and even whole villages seemed dilapidated, and, because of lack of use, were left in disrepair. Two story buildings that had perhaps once been businesses with apartments on top lacked windowpanes; some windowpanes were broken, others were simply gone, like someone took the windowpane.

Some business signs still hung over doors or vertically on the outside walls over sidewalks, but the doors and windows were boarded up. Two of the train stations I transferred at were completely empty, their large brick structures were sealed up and

a single train operator worked with a small space heater at a modest desk surrounded on the main platform. Perhaps the biggest indicator of the limited economic opportunities was the lack of people at public areas like town squares and train stations.

Schwarze Pumpe was remote, but the empty and decrepit structures (train tracks, government buildings, homes, sheds) indicated a past that must have been much more populated. During my tour, Ms. Taylor said that 200,000 people had left the region after eastern Germany's transition from socialism to capitalism. The area, Ms. Taylor said, has never recovered. Much of the remaining population, Ms. Taylor told me, is directly or indirectly dependent on LEAG as an employer. I was the only person on the tour and we sat in an old Jeep that did not have a working heater as Ms. Taylor took me from the offices to the coal pit. We took stops along the way to see different parts of the coal pit. Ms. Taylor described in general terms how the coal pit and plant worked, the different technology used, and LEAG's efforts at regenerative environmental strategies.

Throughout the tour, Ms. Taylor described her identity in relation to coal energy production. I had asked her twice about the Ende Gelände demonstration that took place in December (to which the earlier news article referred). The first time I mentioned that I heard the demonstration had happened, Ms. Taylor glossed over it in her response. The second time I referred to the demonstration, Ms. Taylor said that it was an emotional topic for her. I apologized for bringing up the subject and she said in German, No, this is what I am paid for. But she still barely talked about the

demonstration at that point. She waited until we drove down into ground zero to point out where Ende Gelände demonstrators had stood and what their arguments were.

We stood at ground zero – the lowest level of the pit. Above and all around us were walls of coal and soil, differentiated by texture and color. To our right and behind us was the one-lane dirt path that wove its way up to the asphalt road that ringed the pit. To our left, the workers would have mined the coal on a regular working day, though that day, Ms. Taylor explained was a day off.

Pointing to wall of coal near us, Ms. Taylor explained that one could tell the different kinds of coal by color. The ground was very muddy and I gingerly walked around in my shoes in the frigid cold while Ms. Taylor described the different kinds of coal, picking up handfuls of the different types and showing me the varieties in her hands before dumping the coal back on the ground. Ms. Taylor had already mentioned that her grandpa helped open the mine and that her dad worked there for 49 years. Ms. Taylor also talked about how she and her husband work there now. It is an identity, she said. And this is where she seemed to become frustrated as her eyes filled with tears.

With the stage set, Ms. Taylor finally discussed the Ende Gelände demonstration that took place in December. She said that when the Ende Gelände organization came, they came from all over (not necessarily Germany). Her boss went through the group and said he heard many different languages spoken. Ms. Taylor said that they shouted things like, “You have destroyed Germany” (Sie haben Deutschland zerstört). And that is what she found so frustrating. Working there is an

identity, she said, and when people say that for the past several decades, workers have been destroying Germany, it is really hurtful. Ms. Taylor said that in her view, she, her dad, and her grandpa have been helping people, helping kindergartens have power, helping older people who have diseases and illnesses and who need power to have the energy they need to live, building communities through providing energy to the area. To be told that they are destroying when they see themselves as building is really awful, Ms. Taylor said.[35]

Ms. Taylor explained that the Winter-Kampf (winter fight) was a reminder for the older people who lived through the winter of 1978-1979. This example proved the usefulness of coal. "We are a bridge, a bridge is final. We know that. We accept that…The Energiewende is necessary. We must accomplish that." (Wir sind eine Brücke, eine Brücke ist endlich. Das wissen wir. Das akzeptieren wir…Die Energiewende ist notwendig. Das müssen wir machen.")

Ms. Taylor did not deny that coal production increased CO2. Rather, she acknowledged the problems caused by CO2 production and said that LEAG was working on ways to reduce its CO2 emission.

Ms. Taylor explained how Ende Gelände went to ground zero (they went through forests and trees nearby where there is no security). Apparently, they did the

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[35] Bergmann ist ein Beruf, man lernt nicht nur mit identifiziert man sich irgendwann. Und das …, ich meine, wenn ich hier stehe, mein Vater hat hier gearbeitet, 49 Jahre, mein Grossvater hat aufgestossen Tagebau, und beide müssen sich jetzt den (…) fallen lassen, "Ihr habt unsere Zukunft zerstört." Nein, wir haben über 60 Jahre lang dafür gesorgt, dass Kindergarten Gerät oder Küchen…kontrollieren, dass in Schule Lichten …, dass die Erlösungmachine funktioniert, uzw. Das hat für mich nichts mit zu tun. Und deshalb ist es für viele auch so eine emotionalle Geschichte, dass man am End-Effekt für Arbeit die übergenommen für was gutes leistet.

same thing in 2016 as well. There were about 300 people, she said, and they tried to stop the mining. Ms. Taylor described how frustrated workers were at the coal plants – how they are asking, What do people want from us then? Ms. Taylor talked about how there is uncertainty (Unsicherheit) for the people who work at the plant because they do not know what will happen to them and their jobs. Ms. Taylor mentioned that the coal phase-out (Kohle Ausstieg) needed to be dealt with to prevent the uncertainty that people have.[36]

Ms. Taylor said that the Lausitz area tested well for CO2 reduction – in 2016 there was a 46% reduction of CO2, she explained. Ms. Taylor expressed irritation that NGOs, other organizations, and most recently Greta Thunberg and Fridays for Future, have just started getting involved in the broader discussions that people in the energy industry have been having for decades. Commenting that Thunberg was a very interesting development, Ms. Taylor argued that it was not demonstrations or something similar that would enable "us" to live well here, but research and development.

Ms. Taylor explained that countries buy and sell energy with other countries. Germany often has an energy deficit, she said ,and so they are always needing to buy energy from other countries. This means that other countries get the financial benefit of mining energy resources. That is fine, Ms. Taylor said, Germany can afford to pay

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[36]In die Glass-Kühe können niemand von uns gucken und das bedingt die Unsicherheit und deshalb ist echt ganz wichtig, dass wir dieses Kohle-Ausstiegs-Gesetz seit nagrind mit Sicherheit hat für die Leute. Sie sind alle komplet irritiert und denken, Was ist denn? Was wollt ihr von uns?

for the energy, but the problem is that other countries have a limited supply of energy. If countries are unable to produce enough energy for Germany or if Germany needs more and must rely on their reserve supply, then Germans will be in trouble, Ms. Taylor concluded.

This is not a patriot feeling about energy, it is a realistic view about energy, she said. Ms. Taylor told me how she and her husband have become a little paranoid about their preparation. They have considerable storage and have been setting up their own energy resources so that they can be completely independent in case of energy shortages. In her opinion, people are not prepared for an energy catastrophe in Germany.

Ms. Taylor also discussed the benefits of wind and solar. She and her husband are planning to include solar on their house, but, Ms. Taylor said, after 20 years, they must throw the solar panels away and remove the panels in special ways. Implicating solar energy in environmental problems, Ms. Taylor rhetorically asked how they make sure that the solar panels are properly taken down and do not end up in an Indian landfill?

Towards the end of the tour of Schwarze Pumpe, Ms. Taylor took me to the part of the plant that LEAG has rebuilt. The area had a biking and walking path that wove through a wooded area, grassy vistas, and picnic benches. As we drove, Ms. Taylor pointed out the vineyards and rows of trees. LEAG makes these areas available to tourists. While LEAG does not matter much money from tourism, Ms. Taylor said, these areas help bring tourism to the Lausitz region.

Ms. Taylor said the LEAG works with both the Brandenburg and Saxon governments, which, she said, is not challenging because the minister presidents from each state came from this background and know what the coal industry is all about. Ms. Taylor said that it would be ridiculous to even contemplate ending coal (my paraphrase). Ms. Taylor argued that wind and solar energy plants were already at capacity levels and these energy plants needed either batteries or needed a more reliable, consistent form of energy.

In this narrative, the GDR past emerges through the development of the coal industry. This mine was opened during the GDR and provided energy for GDR residents because, according to Ms. Taylor, the GDR did not have the ability to use other energy resources. Through traumatic memories such as the winter of 1978-1979, coal stands in for reliability, security, and a life-saving resource for these former GDR citizens. As the way Ms. Taylor described it, after the GDR ended and Germany reunified, LEAG became a sustaining force in the community, something that kept people tethered to their homes and families. In a story that usually emphasizes post-reunification loss, migration to western Germany, and disillusionment with capitalist democracy, LEAG and the coal power plant have remained a constant form of employment and rejuvenation as the company works to revitalize parts of the pit and open these areas up for tourism.

Yet the tension between the GDR past and the capitalist, environmentalist future emerged in Ms. Taylor's emotional debate with herself as she cautiously

critiqued Fridays for Future, whose very title proposes its emphasis on what will come rather than is remembered. Fridays for Future is an organization of predominantly youth that demonstrate for climate protection legislation. Rallies normally take place Friday afternoon, sometimes conflicting with school classes, leading to more critique of these teenagers and young adults. AfD members and other community members I spoke with often criticized Fridays for Future protestors for skipping school to demonstrate for climate change.

Ms. Taylor was very careful to say she thought demonstrating was fine and she was glad that children and teenagers were becoming engaged ("sie engagieren sich"). But the whole energy system is complex and when 16–17-year-old teenagers or the radio or television programs simplify this complexity, then Ms. Taylor thinks, why did I study for over ten years? Why did I study when young kids can take to the streets and get media coverage? Part of Ms. Taylor's evident frustration is educational and generational. Ms. Taylor, Joshua, and others remember the GDR past when coal sustained communities; Ms. Taylor and her husband studied at universities before working at Schwarze Pumpe. Yet in the popularized and sensationalized coverage of energy and ecological politics, teenagers taking to the streets gets more attention than middle-aged employees of a power plant who hold university degrees.

Coal, as Ms. Taylor described it, was a bridge to other forms of energy that LEAG was also exploring. Ms. Taylor explained that when they opened the mines, they knew the coal would not last forever. But they opened the mines because people needed energy. Ms. Taylor told me that her mom was diabetic and needed insulin five

times a day. The insulin required energy. The coal they produced, Ms. Taylor argued, kept people alive. The coal did not destroy Germany; it built Germany up.

As Ms. Taylor described it over the course of our conversation, the implications of the Energiewende are not captured by the term "energy transition," which can downplay "the turmoil and conflict caused by energetic uncertainty. Unlike 'crises', 'revolutions' and 'mutations', which can be structural, critical or violent, transitionist imaginaries suggest a gentle, gradual, consensual change" (Loloum, Abram, Ortar 2021: 4). Joshua, Ms. Taylor, and other interlocutors describe coal as a historically reliable source of energy that continues to provide Germans with daily stability and well-being, but the transitions caused by the Energiewende create insecurity (Unsicherheit) through rapid phase-out programs and open-ended, competing spaces for alternate voices (as illustrated in the next section).

My discussion with Ms. Taylor reflects Morton and Müller's (2016) conclusions that these energy contests are between competing visions of modernity "in which the coal industry continues to sustain mass employment and prosperity for the 'silent majority' and nourish a sense of pride and identity" (281). Coal provides Germans security and independence, however imagined, as they pursue their own energy needs and interests.

Energy independence

During our conversation, Joshua said that gas makes Germany dependent (abhängig) on Putin, Trump, and Qatar. We do not want to be dependent on other countries, Joshua said.

31 December 2021: 55 degrees, windy

11 January 2022: 30 degrees, windy
17 January 2022: 42 degrees, windy
29 January 2022: 45 degrees, windy
5 February 2022: 49 degrees, windy

"Hopes are rising that Europe will avoid a winter energy crisis that some feared would play to Russian President Vladimir Putin's advantage as Moscow prepares for a possible invasion of Ukraine. A record influx of liquified natural gas, combined with mild and windy weather, has slowed withdrawals from the region's heavily depleted underground gas-storage caverns. A boost to flows of gas from Russia via Ukraine is helping, too" (Wallace 2022).

Energy independence from other countries forms a critical argument in Energiewende debates. In this section, I examine how energy independence and German sovereignty emerge in a regional debate from a small town in Germany about local energy and ecological politics.

The meeting took place in a small town in western Germany. I found out about this event from online AfD advertisements and traveled to the small town for this event. The event took place at an event hall called Halle 32. At Halle 32, a hall that usually hosts musicians, parties, and weddings, where the downstairs is a dance floor and the upstairs has several rooms with refrigerators full of drinks, there were two building employees, one young man, one middle-aged. The younger man told me he was from Syria, and I presume the older man was also from Syria or a neighboring country.

I had a large bottle of water and a large handbag for my overnight stay. The building employees insisted I unpack my entire handbag and then my jacket, while the middle-aged man graciously waved in middle-aged and elderly, white Germans with charm and excellent manners, only to then look critically at me. After unpacking

my entire purse and before I undid my jacket, I demanded to know why these elderly and middle-aged Germans received privileged treatment while the women were carrying larger bags that I had, and the men had huge overcoats. The older man gave me a rather unbelievable excuse that it was important that they check my bag. They then asked for my documentation, and I refused, demanding to know why I was treated differently before I would offer my documentation. The older man asked me who I was and what I wanted there at an AfD meeting.

I told the man that I was a researcher from the US. Since they were also non-native German speakers, they did not realize from my accent that I was not German until I explained my situation. The older man excused himself and said he thought I was from the Green party. Why would you think I was from the Green party? I asked him. Because you are a young, white woman and I thought you were German. I wanted to ask him more questions as I repacked my bag, but he turned to greet a large group of elderly Germans who entered the building.

The citizen dialogue meeting lasted an hour and a half. While the invited politician spoke briefly at the beginning, most of the meeting consisted of audience members asking the regional politicians questions. While there were many elderly and middle-aged Germans, there were also some teenage and younger Germans in the back. People asked both pro- and anti-AfD questions centered on migration and energy politics, reflecting the broad attraction this meeting held for community members of different political persuasions. Though some questions and moments

could be called intense, such as when my neighbor called someone an asshole, there were other moments full of laughter, both with and at people.

I examine parts of a ten-minute discussion between the AfD parliament member, Mr. Matthew, and several audience members from different political backgrounds. This conversation captures how migration, energy politics, knowledge construction, and humor are entwined in these discussions. By knowledge construction, I mean that laypeople become participants in “socio-technical experiments” (Mitchell 2011: 240), claiming knowledge and articulating arguments alongside experts. Perhaps in the past, nature was understood as facts where only experts were capable of exploring, analyzing, and reporting their finding to the political world in “incontestable form” (Mitchell 2011: 246), but now laypeople participate in making knowledge and integrating knowledge of nature into the subjective political world. With the politicization of climate change and energy politics, laypeople participate more in the economic and political debates of climate science, drawing on their own experimental knowledge and passionately arguing their rationalities. As nature enters the realm of subjective politics, nature becomes understood through its relationality to sustainability and independence.

First I provide some background on the mines, forests, and other ecological, energy, and economical features that participants described. Garzweiler II is a lignite surface mine in North Rhine-Westphalia. It has been controversial not only because of lignite coal mining but also because of the number of towns and people who have had to be moved in order to open up both Garzweiler mines. Hambach Forest is an

ancient forest in North Rhine-Westphalia that was to be cleared as part of the Hambach surface mine. Protests started as early as 2012 and these protests, including people camping in trees in the forest. The Datteln 4 hard coal power plant is another controversial site. Producing energy since 2020, the legal dispute over the plant's construction has been going on since 2009 with community members, environmental activists, the Datteln company, and the city government taking sides (Zeit Online 2021a and 2021b).

This segment builds on some of the previous themes described in this ethnography, such as the cacophony of sounds and silencing techniques that occur in AfD meetings, laughter and ridicule, and the appearance of the grotesque that emerges in Chinese coal, people living in treehouses, and the destructive bark beetle.

Finally, this section concludes, leading to the addendum at the end of this chapter on migration and racial aesthetics. The section's organization follows the progression of the discussion and I break it into four sections: German energy independence, German *Heimat*, science, and energy, and migration.

Part 1: German energy independence

During the question-and-answer period, a man in the audience posed the following questions: "Are you in favor of the continuation of Garzweiler II, and secondly, do you agree with me that the closure of the last collieries was a mistake? Because with the perpetual costs, 200 million euros are spent for nothing and again

nothing, to put it casually. Why can't one at least keep a few mines running with this money?" [37]

Mr. Matthew responded:

> First of all, be it Garzweiler II or the energy/electricity generation from lignite in general, we cannot do without them at all. We cannot do without them because the well-known renewable energies are not at all in a position to even come close to guaranteeing the security of energy supply without the conventional power plants. And since we have now phased out nuclear energy quite quickly, briskly and at short notice, there is not much left apart from gas-fired power plants and coal-fired power plants. As far as hard coal is concerned, I completely agree with you, I've always seen it that way. Incidentally, there is a hard coal-fired power plant in Datteln 4. This is the most advanced technology and the world's cleanest hard coal-fired power plant. It probably won't even go into operation after the coal compromise. It has been put there for billions [of euros], it will not be put into operation, and I have always been skeptical about saying: We are giving up exploiting our own raw materials, our own energy raw materials, such as hard coal, because it seems too expensive for us. There is the cheap hard coal from China, which is exploited accordingly, where workers have to work under the respective conditions and die there in droves from accidents. But that doesn't matter to us. We must not give up our own sources of energy and make ourselves more and more dependent on the supply of energy sources from abroad. That's why I was against the closure of the coal mines from the start.[38]

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[37] Sind sie für die weiterführung von Garzweiler II, und zweitens, sind sie wie ich der Meinung, dass die Schließung der letzten Zechen im … ein Fehler war? Denn bei den Ewigkeitskosten, da werden 200 Millionen Euro für nichts und wieder nichts, salopp gesagt, ausgegeben. Warum kann man mit diesem Geld nicht wenigstens noch ein paar Zechen aufrecht erhalten?

[38] Erstens, sei Garzweiler II oder die Energie-/Stromerzeugung per Braunkohle insgesamt, auf die können wir gar nicht verzichten. Auf die können wir deswegen nicht verzichten, weil die berühmten erneuerbaren Energien überhaupt nicht in der Lage sind, die Energieversorgungssicherheit auch nur annähernd zu gewähren, ohne dass die konventionelle Kraftwerke...Und da wir ja nun recht schnell, zügig und kurzfristig aus der Atomenergie ausgestiegen sind, ist außer Gaskraftwerken und Kohlekraftwerken nicht mehr viel übrig. Was die Steinkohle anbetrifft, da gebe ich ihnen vollkommen recht, das habe ich schon immer so gesehen. Im Übrigen gibt es ja ein Steinkohlekraftwerk Datteln 4. Das ist fortschrittlichste Technologie und das weltweit sauberste Steinkohlekraftwerk. Das wird nach dem Kohlen-Kompromiss wahrscheinlich gar nicht in Betrieb genommen. Ist für Milliarden [Euro] dahin gesetzt worden, wird nicht in Betrieb genommen, und ich bin immer skeptisch dagegen gewesen, zu sagen: Wir geben die Ausbeutung unserer eigenen Rohstoffe, unserer eigenen Energierohstoffe, wie beispielsweise Steinkohle, auf, weil uns das zu teuer erscheint. Es gibt ja die billige Steinkohle aus China, die auch entsprechend ausgebeutet wird, wo Arbeiter unter entsprechenden Bedingungen arbeiten müssen und dort reihenweise ums Leben kommen durch …-Unglücke. Aber das ist uns ja dann egal. Wir dürfen nicht unsere eigenen Energieträger aufgeben und uns immer mehr in die

In this opening segment that sets the stage for the following exchange, Mr. Matthew argued that Germany cannot do without coal since renewable energy sources supported by government policies do not produce enough energy. Mr. Matthew argued that Germans should not give up their own sources of energy to become more dependent on energy sources from abroad, especially on China. He continued that Germany's resources enable Germany to be independent of international politics and foreign energy supplies. Mr. Matthew's arguments follow Joshua and Ms. Taylor who both argued for coal's reliability and security against foreign dependence. Joining the already-politicized debate about energy, Mr. Matthew re-Messaged coal to argue for German independence in international politics and speak against Chinese coal.

Part 2: German Heimat

In this next segment, the discussion transitioned to the importance of home (Heimat) in relation to energy politics. A man in the audience said that Heimat was important and argued that the Hambach Forest was being destroyed while the man next to me said, "Mein Gott! Arschloch." The first man was asked to put his statement in the form of a question, but Mr. Matthews answered anyway.

> Yes, *Heimat*, important. Nature conservation is also part of *Heimat*, of course, [that] is part of it. And we are also very conscious of *Heimat*…But the question is: What is the relationship when I talk about the Hambach Forest, woods – whatever you like to call it - then I'm talking about a relatively manageable stock of trees. But if at the same time...I build wind turbine fields everywhere, with concrete

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Abhängigkeit der Zulieferung von Energieträgern aus dem Ausland machen. Deswegen war ich von Anfang an gegen die Schließung der Steinkohlenbergwerke (1:45:25)

> bases that protrude deep, deep into the earth, then I have to ask myself: What is the relationship between this – really – fight in the Hambach Forest and what they are doing with our landscape. I have nothing against wind turbines per se, to be honest. But the question is: where do I put them? Which forest has to die then? Which areas must be cut in order to set up…somewhere? What heights are sealed afterwards because of all these giant towers? Well, you have to say: Sure, trees - great story. But what is the relationship to everything else that is happening right now? And especially by the Greens, and all the – shall we say – industry that surrounds them. I can understand you well. But … how do I deal with it in an ecologically sensible way?[39]

The concept of *Heimat* has a long history, debated and disputed in English and German language research (Blickle 2002; Schlink 2000; Boa and Palfreyman 2000) and my short list of references here does not adequately capture the extent of the scholarship on this single term. In this section, I only summarize a portion of this research to clarify the relation of *Heimat* to energy and ecological politics. Ahrens (2021) described *Heimat* as "a topos" that communicates

> individual belonging to Heimat as the homeland. Herein, personal identity matches with social identity; even more precisely, the former is conditioned by the latter—the habits by which it is framed, the landscape in which it is situated, the atmosphere that is created through a merging of origin by birth and the esthetics unfolded by sound, smell, and, foremost, memory (314).

[39] (1:46:30) Ja, Heimat, wichtig. Auch Naturschutz ist Heimat, klar, [das] gehört dazu. Und auch wir sind ganz bewusst für Heimat…Aber die Frage ist doch: In welchem Verhältnis steht das, wenn ich über den Hambacher Forst, Wald – wie auch immer sie es nennen mögen – spreche, dann rede ich über relativ überschaubaren Bestand an Bäumen. Wenn ich aber gleichzeitig…Windräder-Wälder baue, überall, mit Betonsockel, die tief, tief in die Erde ragen, dann muss ich mich fragen: In welchem Verhältnis steht dieser – wirklich – Kampf im Hambacher Forst zu dem, was sie mit unserer Landschaft machen. Ich hab gar nichts gegen Windräder an sich, ehrlich gesagt. Die Frage ist nur: Wo stell ich sie hin? Welcher Wald muss da dann sterben? Welche Schneisen müssen geschlagen werden, um…irgendwo aufzustellen? Welche Höhen sind nachher versiegelt, wegen dieser ganzen Riesen-Türme? Also, da muss man auch mal sagen: Klar, Bäume – tolle Geschichte. Aber in welchem Verhältnis steht all das andere, was gerade passiert? Und gerade durch die Grünen, und all die – sagen wir mal – sie umgebende Industrie. Ich kann sie gut verstehen. Aber…wie gehe ich ökologisch sinnvoll damit um? (1:47:46)

Heimat is constructed through the co-constitutive nature of the personal, social, and topographical identities. The concept's topographical and phantasmic vagueness and lack of strict definitional delineations provides the term expansive political and social flexibility. The socio-political flexibility often emerges in the way *Heimat* creates cultural and social belonging through exclusion.

> *Heimat* is not just some natural space that comforts people, but rather it is strongly linked to the production of difference and exclusion. The concept of *Heimat* would be inconceivable without this notion of exclusivity. As a cultural concept, *Heimat* serves as an idea of clear-cut identity production and also as a resource against the increasing anxiety toward those alien Others, foremost represented by the image of the global migrant (Ahrens 2021: 316).

Both the question and Mr. Matthews's answer translated ecological politics into the rhetoric of *Heimat* which in turn translates ecological politics into strategies of exclusion. The inclusion and exclusion of *Heimat* in this discussion, and in ecological politics generally, entangles the migrant Other into Germany's ecological politics as much as coal entangles Chinese exports, CO2 exchange, and German energy independence with German coal. While I end this chapter with an addendum discussing how migration becomes connected to energy and ecological politics, here I point to how energy and ecological politics become woven with terms of exclusion. Migration is not brought up in Mr. Matthews answer, nor am I trying to argue that it was unconsciously meant in any of the statements on *Heimat*. Rather, I am pointing to the assumptions tied with *Heimat* precede and infiltrate the uses in which the term *Heimat* emerge. In the question and Mr. Matthews answer, protecting *Heimat* becomes a way to discuss German land and German sovereignty.

Part 3: Science and energy

Mr. Matthew then set the stage to challenge scientific arguments of climate change using qualifying language about evidence of climate change and those who convey such knowledge (scientists):

> It is always said that we have to meet the Paris climate protection goals. So I ask myself: what are they actually? Well, we're now assuming that CO^2 is actually this devilish mixture that is almost solely responsible for climate change. Let's just assume that's the case, even though a bunch of scientists say: You can't really say that it's like that 97% of the scientists. We'll get to that in a moment.[40]

At this point, a woman interrupted and said something inaudible from my position in the room. Mr. Matthew responded, “Yes, they are safer. I just wonder where they get that security from. But you're more than welcome to come back and ask a question if you want to,” after which he continued to speak. But the woman continued to talk while others mumbled and someone said, “Hello, hello!” to the woman. Despite all these other sounds, Mr. Matthew with the microphone continued his answer.

> So it is that according to the Paris Climate Agreement, the four nations that emit 60% of the CO^2 are not affected by this climate agreement at all. Namely: The USA left, the Russians didn't even join, and China and India are part of the climate protection agreement with the result that they can increase their CO^2 emissions as much as they want by 2030. [They] don't have to do anything, don't have any binding goals. This means that China is expanding coal-fired power plants every year in such a way that the emissions in China are increasing each year, which we would save if we could switch off all coal-fired power plants from now on. Zero effectiveness.
>
> On the other hand, it is always said: Renewable energies save CO^2. No, they don't do that through emissions trading. Because even if something were to be saved, it can also be emitted elsewhere within the framework of emissions

[40] Es heißt immer, wir müssen die Pariser Klimaschutzziele erfüllen. Da stelle ich mir die Frage: Welche sind das eigentlich? … Also, wir gehen jetzt mal davon aus, CO^2 sei tatsächlich dieses teuflische Gemisch, das für den Klimawandel quasi allein verantwortlich ist. Gehen wir einfach davon aus, es wäre so, obwohl ein Haufen Wissenschaftler sage: Das kann man doch gar nicht sagen, ob es so ist. … 97% der Wissenschaftler gesprochen. Da kommen wir gleich mal drauf zu sprechen.

trading. So this fairy tale is simply not true either. And now we come back to your question. You know, a colleague of mine recently said – and I'm trying to sort it out. So inimitable, the one who says that, I can't do that, but - the SPD, for example, has made social justice a priority (laughter). What does it mean ... 40% of the federal budget is social benefits from 2017 to 2018: increase of 3.2% Rising costs (rent, energy, CO^2 tax) and no increasing wages means more dependence on the state. The real task of the state: making people independent. The welfare state does not fulfill the task (applause).[41]

Woman: I really only have one interceding question for the young man. How high – you are studying that – how high are the CO2 emissions in China? How high, as a percentage...(several people talking)...What does fairly high mean? What does pretty high mean? (more people talking)...more than eight points ... here in Germany we are at 2%.

Mr. Matthew: By the way, China is 11 billion tons a year. The Federal Republic of Germany is 800 million tons. But you were next with a question.

A young man in the back said that he thought the AfD only argued about migration issues but was glad (perhaps sarcastically) that the AfD also discussed energy politics. The same young man talked about lignite coal power plants and CO2,

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[41]Ja, sie sind sich sicherer. Ich frag mich nur, woher sie diese Sicherheit nehmen. … Aber sie können sich ja gerne gleich noch mal melden und eine Frage stellen, wenn sie das möchten."
The woman keeps on talking. Also other people mumble. Someone says "Hallo, hallo!"
"Es ist also so, dass laut Pariser Klimaschutzabkommen die vier Nationen, die 60% des CO^2 emittieren, überhaupt nicht von diesem Klimaschutzabkommen betroffen sind. Nämlich: Die USA sind ausgestiegen, die Russen sind gar nicht erst beigetreten, und China und Indien sind Teil des Klimaschutzabkommens mit dem Ergebnis, dass die bis 2030 ihre CO^2-Emissionen steigern können, soviel sie wollen. [Sie] müssen nichts tun, haben keine verbindlichen Ziele. Das bedeutet, dass China pro Jahr den Ausbau von Kohlekraftwerken in einer Art und Weise vollzieht, dass sich der Ausstoß in China pro Jahr erhöht, die wir bei uns einsparen, würden wir von jetzt auf gleich sämtliche Kohlekraftwerke abschalten können. Effektivität gleich null.
Zum Anderen wird ja immer gesagt: Die erneuerbaren Energien sparen CO^2. Nein, das tun sie durch den Emissionshandel eben nicht. Denn selbst, wenn etwas eingespart werden würde, kann das an anderer Stelle im Rahmen des Emissionshandels zusätzlich ausgestoßen werden. Also auch dieses Märchen ist einfach nicht wahr.
Und jetzt kommen wir nochmal zu ihrer frage zurück. Wissen sie, ein Kollege von mir hat vor Kurzem gesagt – und ich versuche das mal so einigermaßen auf die Reihe zu kriegen. So unnachahmlich, die der das sagt, kann ich das nicht, aber – die SPD hat sich ja beispielsweise soziale Gerechtigkeit auf die Fahne geschrieben (laughter) Was heißt also … 40% des Bundeshaushalts sind Sozialleistungen von 2017 zu 2018: Anstieg um 3.2% steigende Kosten (Miete, Energie, CO^2-Steuer) und keine steigernde Löhne - mehr Abhängigkeit vom Staat eigentliche Aufgabe des Staates: Menschen unabhängig machen der Sozialstaat kommt der Aufgabe nicht nach. Applause

arguing that 99% of scientists say that climate change exists and is man-made. During this period, background sounds and competing voices became louder.

In this conversation and in the larger meeting, participants debated scientific knowledge and the logic behind "symbolic politics." The young man argued that 99% of scientists agree that climate change is man-made; Mr. Matthew said that 97% of scientists agree about climate change but in a disparaging way that allowed him to challenge 97% of scientists' expertise. Additionally, Mr. Matthew repeated the explanation of emissions trading but interpreted this argument to mean that Germany should continue mining coal and use its other natural resources to maintain energy independence.

The broader discussion focused on the ethics of clearing land for wind turbines, beetles that destroyed trees, and, since the German government shut down nuclear plants, the increasing importance of coal in keeping Germany independent from other countries, such as China.

In this particular quote, Mr. Matthew called scientific discussions of renewable energies saving CO2 a "fairy tale." Part of Mr. Matthew's logic includes the freedom certain countries have in emitting CO2 and the continued increased CO2 emissions despite other countries' renewable energy efforts. Because of emissions trading, he argued, purchasing hard coal energy from China rather than procuring German coal is ineffective, and worse, because it results in German dependence. With this explanation, Mr. Matthew took a break to make a humorous comment. He related that the SPD has made social justice a priority and followed this brief comment with

an explanation that the SPD makes people more dependent on the state, the reverse of the state's purpose.

During this meeting, people laughed with and at others. People showed their disagreement through grunting, chiding, and making other sounds to voice their dissent. For instance, one man said that someone near him claimed that the bark beetle, who infested many trees, were aided by CO^2.

I pause here to include background information on the bark beetle. Bark beetles are small beetles that spend most of their lives in the host tree by feeding and reproducing within the tree bark. Easily vulnerable, bark beetles must locate their host trees quickly using "visual and olfactory cues" (Fettig and Audley 2021: R419). Beetles then bore into the outer bark while initiating "gallery construction in the phloem (that is, the innermost layer of bark that transports photosynthates) (Fettig and Audley 2021: R419). Once inside, the beetles releases aggregation pheromones to attract conspecifics. The conifers fight back by releasing oleoresin to encapsulate and kill pioneering beetles. In order for beetles to successfsully overcome this and other tree defenses, beetles must employ a "mass attack" over several days with several hundred beetles. Against healthier trees, more beetles are required. After mating, eggs are laid on the edges of the bark "galleries."

> "Upon eclosion, larvae excavate feeding tunnels in the phloem and/or the outer bark. Bark beetles carry a variety of phoretic organisms that may be introduced into the tree as well…However, tree mortality occurs primarily by girdling of the phloem during gallery construction and larval feeding. Following pupation, adult beetles of the next generation tunnel outward through the bark and initiate fight in search of new hosts (Fettig and Audley 2021: R419).

After this comment about CO_2 helping the bark beetles, many of the people in the room laughed. The comment was humorous because of its absurdity linking two distinct elements that did not seem connected in the way this man's neighbor said they were associated. As McGowan (2017) writes, "In a comedy, two elements that seem unrelated to each other become necessarily connected, and the unlikely nature of this connection produces the comic effect" (McGowan 2017: 5). The notion that CO_2 should be helping the bark beetle destroy the trees in Hambach Forest seemed too ludicrous for many in the audience and resulted in spontaneous laughter that both contradicted the man's (and his neighbor's) seriousness in posing this reality and the intense moments of this meeting.

At the same time, this man (or his neighbor) had a voice in this meeting to articulate an alternate perspective. In these meetings, alternative voices can be heard both for and against hegemonic environmental arguments. In the security of these meetings, laypeople can speak authoritatively about energy issues by claiming what they know. "Alternative voices are often overshadowed in energy debates by hegemonic discourses based on expert knowledge, technocentric thinking and other forms of authority" (Loloum, Abram, Ortar 2021: 1-2). But open meetings like this one organized by the AfD create spaces for multiple kinds of actors and perspectives to come into contact, politicizing energy and placing energy engagement into the realm of laypeople.

At the same time, this comment about CO_2 collaborating with the bark beetle to destroy the Hambach Forest trees put social actors with varying degrees of power into conversation with each other. In these settings

> energy implicates citizens and subjects in multiple relations of power that affect their political identity, sense of belonging, territorial anchorage, collective emotions, knowledge, conceptions of the future, and their access to states and to human rights (Loloum, Abram, Ortar 2021: 2).

Even though this comment seemed ridiculous to many in the audience, Mr. Matthews still responded to this comment when the laughter subsided. "If I want to cut down 200,000 trees – they have to be cut down [because the bark beetle destroyed trees] – what a loss of CO^2 storage and oxygen producer. That's absolutely absurd, how can one express such an opinion? On top of that, a thousand tons of concrete have to be placed in the ground for each wind turbine." The AfD moderator with the microphone said: Five thousand. That is five thousand, I know that for certain (Fünftausend. Das sind fünftausend, weiß ich genau). In the background, ignoring this response to a ludicrous comment, others in the audience discussed $C0^2$ emissions in China during this conversation.

Addendum

In this final section, I point to the way that migration was brought up alongside these discussions centered on energy politics in parallel fashion. I also acknowledge how race and perceived foreignness factor into these meetings. At a different meeting (not mentioned here), people of color worked alongside one white man as the building coordinators. Dressed in red uniforms, the young men of color

operated the microphones, helped patrons find the restroom, and otherwise stood quietly in the back of the hall, equally spaced at different exits. These men moved about the room and helped patrons as AfD politicians and members argued that Afghans should not be allowed into Germany after the US-led coalition departed Afghanistan, that Middle Easterners, Africans, Persians, and Islam do not fit into German culture.

Several of these meetings that were predominantly about energy and other contemporary politics were held in the context of the rather invisible presence of migrants and people of color who are the object of negative rhetoric of enough AfD politicians and members. These employees are in these spaces but not of the spaces or do not fully participate space like patrons do. While in these discussions, migration and energy are kept relatively separate, it is ironic that migration is considered an existential threat while immigrants literally guarded the doors of the events.

After the meeting I described earlier, while people drank and ate the provided hors-d'œuvres paid for by the AfD, I went downstairs to speak to the building employees – the Syrian men. I asked them how they liked working at the event hall. They said it was fine, but the younger man made a gesture towards the ceiling, as if pointing to the AfD and rolled his eyes. He started saying something and from his disparaging grunt, it sounded like a negative comment. But the older man stopped him and said not to say anything bad about the AfD.

I asked if they liked it in this town and the younger man mentioned he would like to leave. The older man said it was all right as he seemed to look into an unseen

distance out the door. I mentioned that I understood that Dresden was also a smaller town. The younger man said he would like to go to a bigger city and do different work. The older man, glancing at the younger man before staring out the door again, said it was a good job.

I tried to say that I understood because it was hard for me here in Germany too. It is tough being a foreigner, I said, and I meant that sincerely. They did not seem to disparage that comment, but I felt the absurdity of that comment. Over the past few years, I had met many people from the Middle East, Africa, and Central Asia living in Saxony and whenever I tried to express the challenges of being a foreigner in Germany, some called me out on the ridiculousness of such a comment coming from me. They said, you have different skin color. Because you have different skin, eye, hair color, you get treated differently than we do.

When a young man from Syria invited me to an event meant to help foreigners improve their German, the leftist German volunteers told him that this event was not for people like me. This Syrian man said to them, She is a foreigner and must improve her German.[42] This double-bladed comment pointed to leftist pity of particular foreigners identified by their skin color with all sorts of perceptions about their visa status (migrant or refugee), and their educational and economic backgrounds. Incidentally, this Syrian man told me that his family owned several businesses in Syria, that his parents had many children, and his oldest brothers were educated at universities. He decided to become a businessman and had owned and operated two

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[42] Sie ist ein Ausländer wie wir und sie muss ihr Deutsch verbessern.

businesses before he was thirty. He left Syria and his businesses in the care of his parents and joined his brother in Turkey because he did not want to be drafted into Assad's army. When the German borders speed in 2015, he decided to join many other men he knew and go to Germany.

At other centers around Dresden that offered such opportunities to learn German to foreigners, I was similarly initially excluded. Germans argued that these centers were not meant for people like me, while other Germans argued that this was discrimination, and Germans should be helping everyone who comes to them.

The concept of Ausländer is fraught with all sorts of perceptions, but the core of the term, as one AfD member told me, is that Ausländer is a term used for unlikeable foreigners. According to him, I should not call myself an Ausländer, something I disregarded. Mandel (2008) defines Ausländer as a "foreigner-outsider" (9) and from these examples, I would add to Mandel's definition that Ausländer is often used to describe a particular kind of foreigner that is often racialized with assumptions about education, occupation, and the ever-elusive concept of fitting in Germany. As Eliot, an astute AfD member, said to me, If you were a Black (female) scientist, then some in the party would surely not speak with you.[43]

To return to Halle 32 and these Middle Eastern interlocutors: They asked me a few questions about myself and my work. But since people were leaving, the older

[43]Wenn du eine schwarze Wissenschaftlerin wärst, dann würden bestimmt manche in der Partei nicht mit dir sprechen.

man returned from wherever his far-off gaze took him and went back to his gracious, solicitous self to bid the elderly Germans goodbye.

I watched him for a moment, noticing how he spoke politely to the attendees, wishing them a wonderful night, opening the door for the elderly ladies, helping them with their jackets and purses. The younger one hung back a bit until the older one gestured for him to help and asked him to get something for one of the elderly Germans, at which point, the younger one participated in the necessary performance. I thought about my performances that were necessarily solicitous, because the three of us needed something from these patrons.

Migration and energy are placed together as two contemporary threats to Germany. As often happens, many themes overlap through the physical presence of people. The presence of people of color serving, directing, and checking bags in each of these meetings is the physical evidence of what M'Charek, Schramm, and Skinner (2014) call the "absent present-ness" of race (461).

Conclusion

Germany's Energiewende forms the crux of the conflict illustrated in this chapter. Changes to Germany's energy politics reveal enduring schisms between coal as a symbol and enduring energy source despite efforts to produce less CO_2 and promote renewable energies. Coal plants becomes sites for new configurations of old discourses in Germany, such as neo-Nazism, Germanness, and anti-fascism. The Energiewende is not just about producing alternative forms of energy; through

Energiewende struggles emerge novel coalitions and continued debates about racial aesthetics, forms and arbiters of believable knowledge, and existential threats to Germany's future. Such debates link Germany's future to energy and migration and add to the debates about Germany's trajectory.

Energy and ecological politics become a site to examine relationships with people and countries, German sovereignty, and sites of knowledge. While not overtly discounting the need for alternative energies, these AfD members challenge forms and arbiters of knowledge and promote their own logics and arguments as counter-narratives to scholarly hegemonic discourses on energy and climate.

Finally, racial aesthetics emerge discursively and corporeally in these meetings. While the participants were almost entirely white in these meetings, most of the staff were people of color. Racial aesthetics continue to be an "absent present-ness" in these contexts, complicating the contexts in which energy and ecology are discussed.

Chapter 5: The need to be normal, or Don't be a Nazi

"I must now devote myself to normality, this favorite topic of the Germans. Hardly anything in the political discourse in this country is tainted with such positive affects as this term. Germans want to be normal. Germans finally want to be normal again. Germans finally want to be a completely normal people again."[44]

In fall 2019, I joined the regular monthly meeting held by a local chapter of the AfD. It was the table full of older men ranging between 70 and 90 years old. Randy was the exception at 40 years old. The regulars at this table were a rather unique combination, a combination I joined out of chance. I had arrived early the first time I met with this local, regular meeting and sat down at a table in the back corner by the door. Soon, other men came and sat near me, one by one taking his regular seat and the one whose seat I inadvertently took sat in the corner of the table.

The eldest of the group, the 93-year-old, was a proud member of the AfD, though he often whispered so loudly to me that the rest of the local, regular meeting in the small dining area of the restaurant would shush him in rare moments of directness and lack of deference to elderly people. Two other men at the table were polished middle-aged men, one an engineer and the other a businessman, making articulate arguments, only drinking one or two beers during the night, chiding others who said inappropriate comments to me, explaining to me why people were talking about certain issues at the local, regular meeting, and cordially introducing me to people who greeted them.

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[44] Ich muss mich nun der *Normalität* widmen, diesem Lieblingsthema der Deutschen. Kaum etwas ist im politischen Diskurs hierzulande mit derart positiven Affekten behaftet wie dieser Begriff. Deutsche wollen *normal* sein. Deutsche wollen *endlich wieder* normal sein. Deutsche wollen *endlich wieder ein ganz normales Volk* sein (Czollek 2018: 35).

The final man at the table was a rather quirky, middle-aged man, short, stout, and socially awkward. The first time I met him, he bounded into the restaurant, plopped himself on the only empty chair remaining at the table, which was opposite to me, and placed his hands around his chest as if he were holding imaginary breasts and exclaimed to me (because I was opposite, not because he realized I was a woman) that he had just seen a woman with the largest breasts. I stared at him with what felt to me like a quizzical look, never having had a man tell me such a comment before, and the engineer, observing this encounter, swiftly and gently chided the man for saying such a thing to me.

One of the main debates that night was whether members should participate in a local initiative that was broadly seen as necessary but unlikely to pass. The local initiative sought to repeal taxes on media. In Germany, every household is required to pay a monthly tax to support the public media. Many conservatives complain that the media has become too liberal and openly anti-conservative and, as they argue, since media is politically left, it should not be supported by taxpayer money.

The question that night was, Should members spend their valuable volunteer time on such an anti-media initiative that would require considerable in-person campaigning such as walking the streets, putting up flyers, setting up and manning informational booths, and otherwise acquiring signatures for the proposed referendum?

Dr. Patrick, a very active city council member who participated in his local neighborhood government, stood up to say that this initiative was a chance to show

other people outside the AfD that members are different than how the media portrays them, as he stated. “They [members] are nice, wear good clothing, have hair stylists and [because of these normal attributes] that they [others] can vote for the AfD." In this chapter, I examine why it was so crucial for members to Message their normalcy in this local initiative and illustrate other examples through which members describe and campaign their normalcy.

Dr. Patrick, Dr. Daniels (a physicist) and Dr. Jones (a successful dentist) took turns explaining to the skeptical members how AfD members should work the information stands and walk neighborhoods promoting the initiative. In different ways, each said that it was important for the image of the AfD, a necessary opportunity to show people outside the AfD that members are “normal people,” and that the AfD is acting with regard to the real issues people face.

This was a turning moment for me in my fieldwork. I had already spent almost two years researching the AfD and had never heard members talk so bluntly and for so long about the need to be perceived as normal. What did Dr. Patrick mean with his emphasis of the corporeality of normal people – people who have hair stylists and wear good clothing?

Why was it so urgent to project normalcy and what sparked the rhetorical shift to the word, “normal?” This concern with being normal opens up bigger questions about how members of the AfD see themselves and position themselves within German debates. Why is it so important for members to Message their normalcy and what should scholars make of German claims on normativity?

In the first example, I analyze how members campaign normalcy through material mediums. In the second section, I describe how members discuss how to respond to naming conventions and explore the Nazi bat (*Nazikeule*). Through challenging naming conventions, at least internally, members seek to transform and re-Message the narrative told about them and the way they are positioned by providing alternative labels for themselves and the party.

While I strive to examine AfD members' claims to normalcy, members and supporters make these claims within a longer history of rightist violence that many critics see AfD members participating in, even if inadvertently. It is within such violent incidences (and others like them) that the BfV president called AfD members and leaders "intellectual arsonists." While AfD members may not be perpetrating such violence, their rhetoric, the BfV president argued, fosters the sentiment that stokes such violence.

The most well-known of these acts of violence include the fatal shooting of Lübcke and the attacks in Halle and Hanau. Walter Lübcke, a regional politician for the CDU in Hesse, was shot in the head in early June 2019. The perpetrator has a violent neo-Nazi past and was reportedly critical of Lübcke's sympathetic migrant policy during the 2015-2016 migration (Bennhold 2019; Schuetze and Eddy 2019). In October 2019, a right-wing extremist attacked a synagogue in Halle (Saale) in Sachsen-Anhalt (Bubrowski and Bingener 2019; Bingener and Jaeger 2019). In February 2020, a man attacked a shisha bar, killing nine people with eastern

European and Turkish backgrounds before killing himself and his mom (Fuchs et. al. 2020).

This project has implications beyond Germany. Radical parties and extremist leadership are not limited to the geographical, racial, or temporal confines of 21st century Germany. Extremism is a global reality that manifests in different settings. While political leaders and people may tap into extremist rhetoric and perspectives, such perspectives can only be tapped into *because* they already exist in the quotidian views of people representing every social category. The very fact that radicality knows no bounds, the way it creeps into language and actions, forces this project beyond intellectual circles, demanding further analysis in how re-Messaging normalcy within existing normative notions occurs.

Before I describe some of the normative notions in Germany, I define the way I use the concepts, normative and normalcy. Normative notions are associated with moral judgment. These notions are considered correct and appropriate values, notions, and belief systems. These belief systems uphold the normal. I describe German normative notions in this ethnography through secondary literature. In the following subsections, I describe some of German normative notions to create a basis for this ethnography. The concept of the normal refers to states of being, objects, materials, rhetoric, and appearance that is ordinary and every day. Normalcy implies routine and ordinariness.

Messaging normalcy

In this chapter and the next, I am interested in how members Message (Lempert and Silverstein 2012) their normalcy and democratic legitimacy to each other, potential constituencies, media, and government organizations. In the examples I share in the following pages, I show how people talk with each other about their normalcy and campaign their normalcy to others, engaging both internal and external audiences. While the examples I share in the following pages may not fully capture the relational phenomenon that Messaging is, these examples occurred in response to other Messaging from media, government organizations, neighbors, friends, and other community members. As often as possible, I indicate this relationality.

In this chapter, I focus on how members Message normalcy. In chapter six, I describe how members Message democratic legitimacy using the concept of the *Mitte* (middle, mainstream). I provide a brief description of *Mitte* here because the political *Mitte* and normalcy are entangled concepts.

In German language debates, extremism is construed as the two extremes that buttress a mainstream, or *Mitte*. Normative notions of extremism reinforce normative foundations of democracy. In other words, rhetoric which is considered radical, while it might be democratic, is still broadly labeled as extreme.

The extremism-mainstream relationship should not be understood as a spectrum, but rather as a horseshoe. The *Mitte* (or middle/mainstream) is in the middle of the horseshoe while the extremes surround it and almost seem to connect back to each other. This symbolism is purposeful – from the middle's perspective, the

Left and Right extremes are very similar. This "horseshoe" construction of extremism and normativity increases pressure to be normal, to have mainstream notions, and thereby not be extreme.

Like other long-lasting debates, the continuing aspects of the *Leitkultur* (leading culture) debates of the early 2000s intersect this *Mitte*-extremism dichotomy. The *Leitkultur* debates centered on the notion that Germany has a guiding culture based on Christian, democratic, and Enlightenment values that immigrants would need to be able to integrate to. These elements – democracy, Enlightenment and Christian values – underscore normative values in Germany while contemporary versions of the *Leitkultur* debate emerges in new outlets.

In his 2018 popular analysis of Germany, integration politics, and normativity, Czollek (2018) captures a peculiar sentiment in Germany – the need to be normal, or at least perceived as normal.

> I must now devote myself to normality, this favorite topic of the Germans. Hardly anything in the political discourse in this country is tainted with such positive affects as this term. Germans want to be normal. Germans finally want to be normal again. Germans finally want to be a completely normal people again.[45]

Czollek drew a connection between the 2006 World Cup and the 1990s Leitkultur debates that normalized German patriotism. This normalization was exemplified by the public display of the German flag and the AfD's election to the Bundestag in 2017.

[45] Ich muss mich nun der *Normalität* widmen, diesem Lieblingsthema der Deutschen. Kaum etwas ist im politischen Diskurs hierzulande mit derart positiven Affekten behaftet wie dieser Begriff. Deutsche wollen *normal* sein. Deutsche wollen *endlich wieder* normal sein. Deutsche wollen *endlich wieder ein ganz normales Volk* sein (Czollek 2018: 35).

> After all that has been said so far, is it absurd to establish a connection between the 2006 World Cup and the AfD entry into the Bundestag in 2017? One meant the normalization of nationalism and national symbols, the other brought the corresponding concepts back to the political center. The fact that 12.6 percent of Germans felt that a völkish and nationalist program in the Bundestag elections was intuitively plausible should give you food for thought. That's part of German normality, German cigarette smoking, if you will, German Leitkultur. It is quite possible that conservative politicians meant something different when they called for a German Leitkultur in the years before. But is it really important what they meant if I can describe what happened afterwards?" (Czollek 2018: 42)?[46]

While the Leitkultur debates of the 1990s focused on German exceptionalism – a singular culture worth protecting – Czollek points to a different kind of contemporary Leitkultur. This Leitkultur emphasizes German normalcy that is on par with other nations in terms of expressing national identity through national symbols. What Czollek (among others) indicates is the shift in how Germans think about themselves and their country. This shift, tangled up with how Germans perceive the Nazi past, is the latest iteration of the evolution I described in chapter two. The evolution I refer to is the changing perceptions Germans have of German perpetration and victimhood. After almost a century since the Nazi period began, German normalcy emerges in the form of increased German sovereignty and standing in

[46] Ist es nach allem bis hierher Gesagten abwegig, eine Verbindung zwischen der WM 2006 und dem AfD-Einzug in den Bundestag 2017 herzustellen? Das eine bedeutete die Normalisierung von Nationalismus und Nationalsymbolen, das andere beförderte die entsprechenden Konzepte zurück in das politische Zentrum. Dass ein völkisches und nationalistisches Programm bei der Bundestagswahl fiir 12,6 Prozent der Deutschen intuitiv plausibel var, sollte einem doch zu denken geben. Das ist Teil der deutschen Normalität, deutsches Zigarettenrauchen, wenn man so will, deutsche Leitkultur. Gut möglich, dass konservative Politiker*innen es anders *meinten,* als sie die Jahre zuvor eine deutsche Leitkultur forderten. Aber ist überhaupt zentral, was sie meinten, wenn ich beschreiben kann, was anschlieβiend geschah? (Czollek 2018: 42).

international politics and a party (the AfD) that openly promotes national symbols such as the flag and national anthem.

Within this broader rhetoric of German normalcy, members campaign and Message their normalcy against labels that they are Nazis and extremist. Indeed, much of the pressure for members to promote their own normalcy comes from local and national labels that members are Nazis, a label broadly conflated with extremism. For instance, on 30 October 2019, Max Aschenbach, a Dresden city councilman for the satirical political party, *Die Partei*, gave a speech in which he said that Dresden is in a *Nazi-Notstand* – by which he was generally understood to mean that Dresden is in a state of emergency with the prevalence of Nazism.

The parliamentary petition was supported by the Left, Green, Free Democrats (FDP), and Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD). National and international media picked up the story with BBC, Al Jazeera, CNN and Fox News reporting on it (for instance, Al Jazeera 2019; BBC 2019; Woodyatt 2019). Aschenbach explained that Dresden" has a problem with Nazis. He quoted Karl Popper who wrote in his 1944 book, "*Die offene Gesellschaft und ihre Feinde* "

> Unrestricted tolerance necessarily leads to the disappearance of tolerance. Because if we extend unlimited tolerance even to the intolerant, if we are not ready to defend a tolerant social order against the attacks of intolerance, then the tolerant will be destroyed and tolerance with them.[47]

[47] Uneingeschränkte Toleranz führt mit Notwendigkeit zum Verschwinden der Toleranz. Denn wenn wir die unbeschränkte Toleranz sogar auf die Intoleranten ausdehnen, wenn wir nicht bereit sind, eine tolerante Gesellschaftsordnung gegen die Angriffe der Intoleranz zu verteidigen, dann werden die Toleranten vernichtet werden und die Toleranz mit ihnen.

The problem, Aschenbach continued, is not left extremism, the problem is right extremism. The word, *Notstand*, Aschenbach explained, has two meanings in German. For him, the second one listed in the dictionary is important: a dangerous situation that requires constitutional law. Not everyone, Aschenbach stated, is a Nazi, of course. Some are simply anti-democratic, racist, anti-Semitic, and fascist. But, Aschenbach boldly said, Saxony's AfD chairman should be called a Nazi.[48]

Despite Aschenbach and his supporters' efforts to call Dresden a Nazi state of emergency, and the successful passage of this proposition (39-29 votes), the mayor and other members of the city council and community were critical of the term, fearful that naming the city a *Nazinotstand* would negatively affect tourism and the city's application to be the EU's 2025 *Kulturhauptstadt*, an award that would bring tourism and economic help to the city (Süddeutsche Zeitung 2019).

It is in such contexts of being labeled Nazis, radical right, and right-wing extremists that AfD members Message their normalcy. Such Messaging efforts were parts of local, regular meetings. For instance, I sat in a local, regular planning meeting for the upcoming election. At the end of the planning session, the chairman of this local, regular meeting, Dean gave a pointed speech to the members there. Dean told them that he knew they were very busy and would be as the election period continued. But, Dean said, "You all are the AfD. You all are the AfD."[49] His point, as he further explained it, was that these members were the direct representatives of the

[48] 4.30-4.52 min;
[49] Ihr seid die AfD. Ihr seid die AfD.

AfD more than any campaign material. People would judge the AfD based on members rather than slogans or signs. Dean emphasized the corporeality of campaign efforts.

At a different local meeting I attended, a discussion took place about how to create a more positive image of the AfD to combat negative local attention. Several men exchanged complaints about the critique and negative publicity the party received. During a brief pause in the exchange, one older lady, Colleen, at the end of the long table stood up, commanding everyone's attention. She explained in definitive tones that she was doing her part to disseminate the AfD Message. Colleen said that she talked with her children and grandchildren about the AfD and the problems that Germany is encountering. After Colleen spoke, she sat down amid people rapping their knuckles on the table to affirm what she said.

On another occasion, a younger member, Travis, told me how he convinced his mom and dad to at least vote for the AfD. Travis said that when he told his parents he had joined the AfD, they were very confused. Travis's parents struggled with his decision to join the party, but he showed his parents texts and speeches from AfD leaders. Travis described how he works hard to be visible and vocal, especially on social media, because he wants to give people another image of the AfD rather than what people normally see of the party – the radical elements. Travis also invites his parents to AfD events he co-organizes in their local area and introduces them to leaders.

The effect of these Messaging narratives, shared typically at local meetings, is to rhetorically share with each other the efforts one takes to represent the AfD. Such narrative recollections encouraged members to talk to their friends and family about the party while providing examples of positive rhetoric one could incorporate when discussing the AfD with one's own friends and family. Similarly, during special campaign efforts or holidays, members would be encouraged to take materials with them to share as gifts with friends and family (such as the coasters I describe later in this chapter).

The emphasis on members' actions and their physical embodiment of the AfD Message were regular discussion points in local groups. One local group held a BBQ to discuss future actions that they would take. Before members separated into smaller groups, one city council member, Samuel, reminded his fellow members that "No one [outside of the AfD] cares about what AfD members think. All they [non-members] care about is what they see AfD members doing." Samuel reminded the members of how important it was that they be seen engaging political and social action outside of AfD circles.

At a different local, regular meeting, the leader encouraged members to get involved in the local neighborhood governments. The leader told the members that they needed to "do something good in the name of citizens."[50] He continued that members needed to "show how basic democracy functions"[51] by participating in these

[50] Etwas gutes im Namen des Bürgers tun.
[51] zeigen wie Basis Demokratie funktioniert

meetings. This participation would allow people to meet members and engage with AfD local political views firsthand. Like Dr. Patrick's point at the beginning of this chapter, this leader argued that members should use their physical appearance and their social engagement to promote the AfD Message at these lowest levels of the multitiered process of political Messaging.

"Message has, with some interesting exceptions, long foregrounded and elevated 'ordinariness' as a measure of appeal" (Lempert and Silverstein 2012: 7). While I can only point to polls to indicate broader appeal to AfD Messages, what is significant in this context is that ordinariness, or what I call normalcy, is often foregrounded in Messages that people construct. These AfD members promote Messages through members' ordinariness – corporeally, socially, and occupationally. They use their ordinary bodies, as Dr. Patrick encouraged them to do, to show others that AfD members have hair stylists and jobs. As Dean and Samuel argued, AfD members are the AfD Message and should remember that they themselves are the best campaign strategy. And finally, as I showed with Colleen and Travis, members talk to each other about their Messaging efforts, relaying the rhetoric with which they try to naturally introduce the topic of AfD politics and Message. Through talking about how to portray their own normalcy, members strategize how to combat government, political, social, and media labels of AfD extremism.

Campaigning normalcy

Members often engage normalcy as a campaign Message. In this section, I describe material forms of campaigning normalcy, specifically through the 2021 federal election campaign video and AfD coasters to be given to friends and family.

During the 2021 federal election, AfD's campaign slogan was "Germany. But normal." Created and disseminated during the Covid pandemic, the official video touched on Covid abnormality but moved beyond Covid to engage other normative notions in Germany. I analyze just a few of the normative notions that this video tries to capture. I argue that AfD creators engage these normative notions to assert AfD normalcy against labels of extremism.

The film starts with someone typing on a laptop; the next scene is an online dictionary with the word "normal" being typed out. The narrator says

> Normal - what is it today? It used to be said that normal was somehow boring, perfectly normal, and bourgeois. [Images are of old video clips from the mid-20th century such as a man smoking, a child jumping into a man's arms.] But today? Isn't normal what we lack all of a sudden today? [Scenes of Covid masks, signs requiring masks, empty restaurant seats.] What we actually want because the world around us has somehow gone so crazy. [scenes from a Fridays for Future demonstration; Antifa flags; fires in a city.] And suddenly we notice that normal is actually something very special [a multi-generational, presumably heteronormative family sitting at dinner with wine glasses raised] Because it is normal to be very close to your neighbor [children with older people]. It is normal to get up [child waking up] and do your job [young children walking to school]. Normal is home [garden gnome], safe borders [mom and child painting a garden fence], clean roads [person in handcuffs], and clear roads for free citizens [small dog on a roomba vacuum cleaner]. And yes, Germany is also normal. [A woman holds a German flag and wears a German flag shirt; aerial scenes of a German city and village.] Normal is simply beautiful. Normal is what we all need again [Scenes of a woman setting chairs outside of a restaurant]: a normal future [a boy playing soccer]. Sounds good, right? [close-up of the victory column in Berlin] Germany, but

normal [aerial of a metropolitan city with an iconic television tower in the center] (Alternative for Germany 2021a).[52]

This simple, short video illustrates AfD efforts to convey normalcy through its promotion of national normalcy and German normative notions. I analyze just a few of the normative notions that this video tries to capture.

First, normal emerges through the construction of abnormality. At the point when the narrator says, Normal is "What we actually want because the world around us has somehow gone so crazy," the video shows images of Fridays for future, Antifa flags and fires in the city streets. Fridays for Future is a movement where school children and teachers sometimes skip school on Friday afternoons to demonstrate to bring attention to climate change. What is controversial in Germany, what AfD creators draw attention to, is that parents are not allowed to take their kids out of school, but teachers and children sometimes deliberately skip school to demonstrate for climate action, a topic not everyone on the political right thinks is important or believable. AfD members I spoke with were highly critical of Fridays for Future for violating the law, for teachers "indoctrinating" children instead of teaching math and reading, and not adhering to school responsibilities.

[52] Normal – was ist das eigentlich heute? Früher hieβ es ja immer, normal wäre irgendwie langweilig, stinknormal und spieβig. Aber heute? Ist nicht heute normal auf einmal das, was uns fehlt? Das, was wir eigentlich wollen, denn die Welt um uns herum, die ist irgendwie so verrückt geworden. Und wir merken auf einmal, dass normal doch eigentlich etwas ganz besonderes ist. Denn normal ist, seinem Nächsten ganz nah zu sein. Normal ist, aufzustehen und seinen Job zu machen. Normal ist eine Heimat, sind sichere Grenzen, sind saubere Straβen oder freie Fahrt für freie Bürger. Und ja, normal ist auch Deutschland. Normal ist einfach schön. Normal ist das, was wir alle wieder brauchen: eine normale Zukunft. Klingt gut, oder? Deutschland, aber normal.

Furthermore, when the narrator says that the world around us has gone crazy, the viewer sees images of Antifa flags and fires. Antifa stands for antifascist and many Antifa I have met are non-violent. But Antifa flags and fires in a city often associated with violence. In some cities in Germany, there are Antifa sections where violent clashes with the police regularly occur and at times there is also destruction of public and private property. These images of Antifa flags and schoolchildren supposedly skipping school are meant to illustrate abnormality. The implication is that it is normal for children to be at school on Friday afternoons, normal people do not set off fires in the city streets, and normal people are not members of the far Left.

The normal also emerges through images of gender and sexuality. When the narrator says, "And suddenly we notice that normal is actually something very special," the viewer sees a multi-generational, presumably heteronormative family or group sitting at dinner with wine glasses raised. This is a normal image based on normative notions of gender and sexuality in Germany despite the recent shift in transgender language changes and LGBTQI rights. Some of these shifts have only started occurring in the last few years. While some recently proposed German legislation, companies, schools, and other groups have started to use asterisks or colons (spoken with a glottal stop) to indicate female, gender nonbinary, and intersex people, these organizations remain a relative minority (Nicholson 2021). There is still considerable conflict about such gendered language and AfD members often create campaigns and parliamentary petitions to challenge gender education in school and renaming conventions.

In this video, the AfD creators reinforce currently normative notions in Germany of heterosexuality and biological reproduction. Writing about the AfD, Hajek (2020) described how AfD initiatives and members promote the model of a heteronormative family, capable of biological reproduction of society." But, Hajek (2020) argued, anti-gender politics go beyond the AfD or the radical right to include both conservative and mainstream sectors.

> Anti-gender politics need to be understood as the result of an ongoing process in which right-wing populist actors use the topics of (anti-)genderism and the family to shift the discursive spectrum to the right. However, this is only possible because parts of mainstream media and conservative political forces are open to these right-wing perspectives, or, even actively take up these positions as they tap into discourses around unambiguous gender identities and the protection of the heteronormative family that are already present in German society (Hajek (2020).

In other words, AfD members draw on prevailing normative notions of gender and sexuality. This video and other campaign efforts become accessible and recognizable to broader constituencies because they are based in some German normative notions of gender and sexuality. The AfD's embeddedness in conversative and mainstream gender normativity strategically challenges the claim that the AfD could be extreme. AfD creators draw on what many other conservative and mainstream media, politicians, and community members already express.

Third, the AfD creators reenforce racial normativity through this video by showing repeated images of white people. Racial normativity in Germany continues to be associated with whiteness. As Müller (2011) writes, a significant part of Germany's local construction of whiteness is the "inextricable link between race and nation" (621). Linke (1999) analyzes how whiteness continued to be a marker of

Germanness across the political spectrum after 1945 and the fall of Nazism; Linke traces the "cult of the white body" to suggest that social memory is transmitted through "corporal iconographies," creating a social anchor for Germans and "sustaining the aesthetics of white skin across historical space" (24). Mandel (2008) and El-Tayeb (2011), among others, analyze the challenge that racialized minorities in Germany and Europe encounter as they remain perpetual outsiders through "political racelessness" (xxviii).

This AfD video fits within normative German notions of German race. As with gender and sexuality, this video draws on already-occurring racial norms by presenting white people in the video as a stand-in for normal Germans. By drawing on normative notions, AfD creators promote normalcy and reinforce normative notions in Germany.

Finally, AfD creators efforts portray exhibiting German national symbols as normal. When the narrator says, "And yes, Germany is also normal," the video shows a woman holding a small German flag and displaying a small German flag on her white shirt at a public space. This image directly contradicts normative notions of appropriate, normal behavior in Germany, where individuals waving the German flag are still associated with neo-Nazis, as I described in chapter three.

There is a void of patriotism in Germany that AfD members strive to fill by publicly singing the national anthem and displaying the German flag. Expressions of German identity through the German flag and national anthem are still rather abnormal. But in this case, this video reinforces how AfD members promote actions

that might seem new, but in fact draw in evolving approaches to Germany's history (as I discussed in chapter two). AfD members strive to normalize displaying German national symbols, but these efforts build on Germans' changing perceptions of themselves and German history.

Except for displaying the German flag, perhaps, AfD creators shared images of what is broadly perceived as normal in Germany. This video makes the AfD accessible and recognizable to broader constituencies. Creators not only produced the video but communicated an envisioned and experienced normative Germany: white people in multi-generational families who work, go to school, and talk with neighbors. Campaigned during the Covid pandemic, the video plays on the often-repeated phrase, the new normal. The text of the video begins by framing normal as desirable and currently beyond reach with the background images of Covid, Antifa and Fridays for Future. The narrator argues that normal is special, framing normal as now unique. In the final segment, the narrator claims that Germany is normal and argues that "we" need a normal future.

Campaigning normalcy and ordinariness, this video operates as a communicative event through which AfD creators convey a current iteration of much broader, historical discourses. This video, and the coaster campaign efforts I describe next, materially engage broader efforts at normalcy and normativity in Germany.

During the Christmas season, a local group handed out beer coasters to be given away as a kind of AfD campaign. The theme was "As [negative assumption

about AfD] as [a recognizable and beloved part of Dresden/Saxony].”[53] One stated, “Almost as sexist as the Church of our Lady”[54] with “Typisch Dresden” and a smiley face beneath it. Other coasters included, “Almost as extremist as…Eierschecke”[55] and “Almost as radical as…steamboats.”[56]

These coasters try to humorously refute various charges of extremism and radicality in the AfD, charges I explained in more detail in the introduction. Kidnapping the charges laid against them, these AfD creators humorously contested these claims through these beer coasters, themselves a mundane material, and employing decades or centuries’ old materials that have become normative symbols. The beer coasters’ humor avoids any direct conflict with people charging the AfD as extreme or radical. These beer coasters operate “within and through - rather than against - existing cultural and political express” (Dağtaş 2016: 13).

These coasters have a few different operational and rhetorical strategies. First, these coasters establish a basis of “normal” that is a recognizable part of daily life for their audience. In Dresden, steamboats line the docks of the Elbe River and take tourists up and down the river. Dresdner *Eierschecke* is sold throughout the year in every bakery and homemade versions are served at all kinds of parties. The Church of our Lady (*Frauenkirche*) is arguably the symbol of Dresden’s history, especially of its WWII destruction and post-reunification rejuvenation.

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[53] *So radikal wie…*
[54] Fast so sexistisch wie …Frauenkirche” referring to the famous Dresden Frauenkirche
[55] Fast so extremistisch wie… Eierschecke.” Eierschecke is a traditional Saxon and Thuringia confectionary.
[56] Fast so radikalisiert wie…Raddampfer.

The examples of normativity that these coasters illustrate are "traditional" in the sense that they have been around for many years – in the case of the *Frauenkirche*, for several hundred years. While these coasters reference daily scenes, these coasters also indicate a certain kind of normal Dresden, Saxony, and Germany. Because these coasters bring together the image of "normal" steamboats and *Eierschecke*, the message on these coasters is that the AfD is as normal and recognizable as these daily features of Dresden. These coasters also illustrate a certain kind of "normal," a normal that enjoys a German identity based on a stereotypical view of Germanness for Germans: baroque churches, European confectionaries, and steamboats.

Second, while establishing a normal, these coasters also play on the sense of what is radical. Steamboats once were "radical" in that they were novel and innovative but turned out to be "good," "normal," and historical, something of value to communities and countries to improve trade, communication, and travel. The Message continues that by extension, the AfD might seem radical now, but in the long term, the AfD will be validated. *Eierschecke* was likely once new but is such a part of the regular confectionary experience Dresden as anything but normal and quotidian. Likewise, the AfD might seem new, but it is already part of the daily social-political experience.

Finally, these beer coasters are intended for daily use and as gifts to friends and family. Useful, typical, and found in almost every household, beer coasters are easy to give to people outside of the AfD. While playing the notions of normal and

radical, these coasters establish a sense of a “German normal” equated with the AfD. These beer coasters remain quotidian and elude a more confrontational, high-profile engagement of radicalism that typically occurs between the AfD and wider segments of the German population including politicians, media, and community members. These materials reflect members’ multitiered Messaging efforts to claim normalcy while also expressing an image of German normativity.

All three of these campaign strategies I discussed so far in this chapter – members’ corporeality, the campaign video, and these coasters – are ways that AfD members strive to Message normalcy to counter the hegemonic rhetoric of their extremism. These AfD efforts celebrate German normalcy on the individual and national levels. By drawing on German normative notions, members create an alternative narrative of themselves and their party that defies broader labels of AfD extremism. In the following section, I discuss alternative naming conventions – another way that members strive to combat labels of extremism.

Creating new naming conventions

The witness, a man from Syria, explained that while he and the two alleged murderers were eating döners at the döner shop, several Nazis walked into the shop. The lead judge interrupted the witness’s testimony, asking him how he knew that the men were Nazis. The witness said, "Sie waren Deutsch, stark und groβ” (They were German, strong and tall) at which point the victim’s friends (all white German) laughed loudly and even the stoic, supposedly neutral, journalists snickered.

It became a joke among the Germans; they all laughed about the definition the witness gave and the boyfriend of the woman with the dyed red hair, who is very tall and looks physically strong, said that by that definition, he would be a Nazi.

This segment from my fieldnotes was taken from a court case I followed in Germany. The court case was about the murder of a Black German man by Syrian and Iraqi Kurds. While the case focused mostly on the details of the crime, in moments like these, Germany's Nazi heritage reemerged. This example illustrates distinctly the ease with which the term Nazi is used in German settings. The term Nazi is used often enough in daily contexts in Germany that a non-native German speaker, who has only been in Germany for a few years, can pick up on and use the term, although in rather unique contexts.

In this section, I examine the rhetorical strategy of the Nazi club (*Nazikeule*), and how members try to create alternative naming conventions for themselves to combat the extremist label. First I explain the linguistic tool – the Nazi club – and how members describe the Nazi club. I conclude this section by describing how members respond to being called Nazis and how they work on reframing naming conventions and disavow a Nazi status.

At the beginning of this chapter, I described the *Nazinotstand* speech that Max Aschenbach gave in Dresden. Aschenbach argued that while some people are not Nazis, the AfD Saxon chairman should be called a Nazi. Members would call this label the Nazi club. "Club" in this context refers to an object used to beat someone, as in to club someone with the label of Nazi because of what that person said.

Nazi club is what frustrated recipients call the linguistic moment when people call them (or others) Nazis or a synonym (extremist, populist, for instance). For instance, person A says something that might be socially problematic; person B

responds by labeling person A as a Nazi, neo-Nazi, populist, or radical right, thereby socially and politically positioning person A as extremist and undemocratic. Person B's rhetorical efforts to call person A Nazi is what person A (or another) would call the Nazi club.

AfD members are not the only ones affected by, or who complain about, the Nazi bat. As Seitz (2013) explained in a news article

> The comparison with Nazis, a most often completely failed historical parallel or analogy, emerged as a dominant pattern in the political debate on post-war democracy. It rose to the quintessential manslaughter argument. It knows neither a political nor a generational risk group, is at home on the Left and Right, thrives not only at regulars' tables or in party tents. The Nazi club has also survived all the intellectual milestones and historical caesuras: the Cold War, the era of detente, the historians' debate, the Epoch break from `89, the Bonn Republic and especially 9/11.[57]

In other words, the word Nazi is so pervasive that anyone can call another or be called a Nazi no matter their political orientation, age, gender, race, and the socio-political context. Nor is the term Nazi limited to just German contexts; the term is used often enough in casual English contexts when describing someone who is rigidly adhering to rules seen as unnecessary or ridiculous. While English usage of the term Nazi is often more casual (meaning there are few social or political consequences), when used in German contexts, the term Nazi has significant social, political, and economic outcomes for individuals.

[57]Der Nazivergleich als meist völlig verunglückte historische Parallele oder Analogie hat sich als ein dominantes Muster in der politischen Auseinandersetzung der Nachkriegsdemokratie festgesetzt. Er stieg zu dem Totschlageargument schlechthin auf. Dabei kennt er weder eine politische, noch eine generationelle Risikogruppe, ist rechts wie links zu Hause, gedeiht nicht nur an Stammtischen oder in Festzelten. Die Nazikeule hat zudem alle intellektuellen Wegmarken und historische Zäsuren überstanden: den Kalten Krieg, die Ära der Entspannung, die Historikerdebatte, den Epochenbruch von `89, die Bonner Republik und erst recht Nine-Eleven.

My purpose here is not to comment on whether AfD commentary is Nazi-esque. Rather, I am interested in the Nazi club as a strategy and how members and supporters strategize how to re-Message naming conventions that socially, economically, and politically position people and their views as extremist. While the threat of the Nazi club is not limited to AfD members, members engage this term to claim their own political legitimacy.

On one occasion, I sat with Mr. Miller, a member who lost his job because, as he put it, he campaigned locally for the AfD. We sat in his office, and I asked him about German guilt. In combination with German guilt¸ Mr. Miller said, is the Nazi club. "The Nazi club is used against everyone who is against mainstream,"[58] he said. He talked about how the "Nazi club is used against the AfD."[59] That is because the AfD is patriotic, which means that they want a "safe [land] and live in peace."[60] But it is not just the AfD that is the victim of the Nazi club, Mr. Miller told me. For instance, he said, look at Uwe Steimle. The Nazi club was used against him. He was critical of MDR [a news station] and he got fired for it, Mr. Miller explained. The Nazi club, as critics describe it, is used to enforce mainstream norms and perspectives.

Naming conventions people use for the political Right that indicate a kind of linear spectrum of political views (Minkenberg 2003; Blee and Creasap 2010). Such naming conventions can reflect the political views of members of the political Right,

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[58]Die Nazikeule wird gegen jeden benutzt, der gegen Mainstream ist.
[59] Die Nazikeule gegen die AfD verwendet wird.
[60] Sicheres Land und in Frieden leben

but also indicate the relative political position of the speaker. AfD members (and others on the political Right) capitalize on such relativity in naming conventions to counter labels of extremism and campaign their normativity. Marcks (2016) comments on how far right actors have worked to gain political acceptance through reframing naming conventions. “In the last two years,” writes Holger Marcks (2016)

> far right actors have experienced a remarkable gain in political acceptance – on the streets, in the booths and in the talk shows. In this case, it could be argued that their success in protest and electoral mobilizations as well as their disproportionate high presence in the media rests on communication politics that effect a normalization of far-right positions previously disreputed in public discourse. Through this creeping habituation by society, they are able to gain momentum in situations of crisis, producing themselves successfully as a legitimate agent of the “anxious citizens” disappointed by the government.

The AfD is part of this movement, promoting their own sense of normalcy through practiced rhetoric, strategized action, and, as Dr. Patrick expressed, by simply being present, visible, and normal. Many members demand their own naming conventions in conversation, speeches, and on social media, rather than accepting the ones assigned to them. For example, Frauke Petry, former leader of the AfD, said that in some contexts she rejects labels such as right-wing populist or far right and instead prefers “liberal-conservative” (Connolly 2016). Many members I spoke with identified themselves as “conservative.” Several disagreed with being categorized with the *Neue Recht* (new Right), a category that includes identarian movements, Pegida, and other far right groups.

But, as Marcks (2016) explains, there are also problems with taking for granted the self-identifiers rightists groups employ. Marcks writes that

> the movement [AfD] likes to present itself as carried by the "normal" people disappointed by the government. Its adherents often refuse to be called a "Nazi" or even a rightist. And if they recognize their right-wing contents, it is framed as "normal," too: They just fill the conservative gap which has been created by an alleged shift to the left by the *Christian Democratic Union* (CDU). AfD and PEGIDA, so the narrative, just represent the will of the people ("We are the people!") ignored by the state.

Reclaiming or self-labeling is a strategy of normalizing a party image and directing the narrative constructed about AfD members. AfD members craft their own narratives and Messages. To illustrate this point further, I describe an event where members debated with each other what they should say when others call them Nazis. The conversation lasted about fifteen minutes and I include only a few comments that illustrate the general responses.

As part of an effort to show constituents what they did in parliament, parliament members had invited members to take a tour of the parliament building. We walked through hallways, passed by the offices of the opposing parties, and stopped by the plenary hall where local members could sit and take photos of themselves in parliament chairs or speak at the podium. The tour concluded with a large meal in one of the parliamentary conference rooms.

There were about twenty of us sitting around a large conference room table. The participants were almost entirely white German men. Some were dressed well, but most were dressed in jeans and older jackets that contrasted with the formal décor of the parliamentary room where we sat. These members lived in more rural parts of the state and were employed in various skilled and unskilled occupations. Their

various socio-economic status and educational attainments were illustrated in their diction and argumentative style.

The Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz or BfV) had recently announced that it was going to evaluate the AfD generally, and some of the subgroups in the AfD specifically, for extremist notions (I provided background on the BfV in chapter one). This announcement gave credibility to groups, politicians, media, and others who had been calling AfD members extremist for several years. With the BfV's announcement, AfD members also seemed to be called Nazis more often. It was within this context that the following conversation took place.

One member, Arthur, argued that "If someone calls me Nazi, I say: I am bourgeois, conservative, and think nationally. And if that signals a Nazi today, then I'm a Nazi." He explained how East Germans and eastern Germany are similarly stigmatized as "Dunkel-Deutschland," (dark Germany). Arthur continued to argue that as the AfD continues to solve local problems, members will not need to worry about whether they will be called Nazis because members will have been open and proven their value. Arthur explained that in the coming months, the AfD in parliament would be promoting improved kindergartens and addressing corruption. Arthur concluded, "We can have academic, scientific disputes about what is a Nazi and what is not a Nazi if we have the definitions. But we don't have them." Then Andrew broke in that Nazi is a very emotional term and that if people call others Nazis who are not Nazis, then they make a fool of themselves.

Guy asked, “What remains?” when members say things like, “I am not a Nazi.” Nazi, he answered. Guy said that members need to ignore the term Nazi altogether and say something positive instead when they are called Nazis. What could they say instead? “We are civically-minded [also translated as middle-class] national, conservative.” These terms, Edward said, were positive values that traditional CDU voters could vote for. He ended by arguing that members should present themselves not as against something but rather for something.

Jack claimed that it did not matter how members presented themselves, that the influences and assertions from outside would come either way. If members passively respond to the comments that they are Nazis, then people would assume that the members are Nazis because members do not assertively respond to these claims. Jack continued that if the AfD can push through a local initiative, then people will assume that it is just Nazis doing it since the initiative would be associated with the AfD. Jack concluded that “I stand for conservative values.”[61]

This discussion started out by a parliament member describing how their colleagues from other parties try to undercut the AfD by positioning members as Nazis and in this context, Nazism is equated with extremism. The ensuing conversation was dominated by local members who discussed the challenges and frustrations of being labeled a Nazi when they did not think it applied to them. These members strategized how to address this Nazi label. Members emphasized responding to accusations of Nazism by showing others the values of the AfD through legislation

[61] Ich stehe für konservative Werte.

and positive action, responding proactively to these comments, and using these responses as opportunities for self-identification.

Mr. Miller (who I referred to earlier) had another way that he described his response to the Nazi club. Mr. Miller regularly engaged journalists and the public as part of his staff responsibilities. During our conversation, he began discussing how and why members are called Nazis.

"What is a Nazi anyway?" and he answered his own question. "Nazi - the perpetrators from back then. So that means I could never be a Nazi. Why? Because I'm too young for that. I didn't live then – so I can't be one. The term Nazi means people – the perpetrators from back then. Not more. Then there are people who are fans of those who say: 'Oh, that was great!' These are neo-Nazis. Then there's a break. Now we're going to another region. Now we're coming to the right extremes. Right extremes have three characteristics: 1. All foreigners are bad. 2. The Germans are so much better. 3. The current system must be fought; we want to have a leader again. They don't have to be neo-Nazis. They want a different system...Therefore, that is right-wing extremism. Does not apply to the AfD. Right-wing extremists: All Foreigners are bad; the Germans are so much better. That is not the AfD either. And now there is another break. Now you can be on the right. What is negative about the right? What is associated with the right? Mostly Nazis – does not apply to the AfD. Neo-Nazis – does not apply to the AfD. Right-wing extremist – does not apply to the AfD. But right-wing extremist – there are few, very few members in the AfD who can and must necessarily be classified in this group. But they are few. That does not apply

to the entire party. And so I can be right…Conservative, closeness to home, love of home."[62]

In this quote, Mr. Miller reframes what constitutes being "Nazis." By his definition, it is impossible for him to be a Nazi because he lives in a different century than Nazis. He then defined how the other negative terms that people use to label the AfD, "radical right," "right extreme," also do not apply and he explained why. At the end, Mr. Miller emphasized that members are conservative and asked what conservative means for him? A focus on a love and closeness to home. Mr. Miller's response represents many other members I spoke with who use the Nazi club issue to promote AfD normalcy and Message what they argue are the AfD's middle-class, conservative values. Members fight the Nazi club by re-Messaging their naming conventions.

At the beginning of this section, I shared a comment made by a non-native German speaker to illustrate the predominance of the term Nazi in German rhetoric.

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[62]Was ist eigentlich eine Nazi? and he answered his own question. "Nazi - die Täter von damals. Das heiβt also, ich könnte niemals ein Nazi sein. Warum? Weil ich zu jung dafür bin. Ich habe ja damals nicht gelebt -- also kann ich keiner sein. Der Begriff Nazi betitelt die Menschen -- die Täter von damals. Mehr nicht. Dann gibt es Leute, die sind Fans von denen, die sagen: 'Ach, das war klasse!' Das sind Neo-Nazis. Dann gibt's 'nen Bruch. Jetzt kommen wir in eine andere Region. Jetzt kommen die Rechts-Extremen. Rechts-Extreme haben drei Merkmale: 1. Alle Ausländer sind schlecht. 2. Die Deutschen sind so viel besser. 3. Das aktuelle System muss gekämpft werden, wir wollen nochmals einen Führer haben. Die müssen nicht Neo-Nazis sein. Sie wollen ein anderes System…Also von daher, das ist rechts-extrem. Gilt nicht für die AfD. Rechtsradikales Merkmal: Alle Ausländer sind schlecht, die Deutschen sind so viel besser. Auch das ist nicht die AfD. Und jetzt gibt's wieder 'nen Bruch. Jetzt kann man rechts sein. Was ist denn das Negative an rechts? Was wird assoziiert mit rechts? Meistens Nazis -- betrifft die AfD nicht. Neo-Nazis – betrifft die AfD nicht. Rechts-radikal – betrifft die AfD nicht. Aber rechts-radikal – es gibt wenige, sehr wenige Mitglieder der AfD, die man in diese Gruppe einordnen kann und muss, notwendigerweise. Das sind aber wenige. Das gilt nicht für die ganze Partei. Und demzufolge kann ich rechts sein…Konservativ, Heimat-Nähe, Heimat-Liebe.

Members' responses to the Nazi club create opportunities for members to craft naming conventions and discuss how to transform their Messaging.

We are not Nazis: Race and Nazism

In this final section, I investigate one other example of how AfD members reframe the use of the term, Nazi. A group of us had been sitting around a table at the bar and restaurant long after the regular monthly meeting had ended. This restaurant is a favorite local restaurant for these members because smoking is allowed inside. The restaurant is small and rather basic. When one walks in the front door of the restaurant, one is hit by cigar and cigarette smoke. At the barstools, I have always seen middle-aged, white Germans served by a white German serving staff. There are plaques and photos along the walls of the small dining area, hard to see in the dimness of the room.

AfD meetings are always held in the party room, a dimly lit room made even more opaque by the smoky haze. The dark-paneled walls and carved dark wood, the strictly German food, the old party streamers, and the predominance of men at the meetings give the room a likely unsolicited, yet intersecting aura of celebration, maleness, and Germanness.

At about 10.30 pm, there were only a few of us left. There were several older, white German men, a younger white German man, and me. In the dim lighting of the smoky room, we talked about German history, democracy, politics, and how people call members Nazis.

While discussing this last point, the younger man, Sam, gestured to the door through which a woman had left about 10 minutes before and said to the group, "If we were Nazis, then that woman would be dead."[63] Several men nodded in agreement and the conversation continued by men taking turns to describe how wrong it was to label AfD members as "Nazis."

The woman Sam referenced was a South Asian scholar, Elizabeth. Elizabeth had left perhaps ten minutes earlier, long enough for her to be well outside of earshot, but short enough for her presence to still be felt in this all white, entirely male gathering. No one else had left since she did, she was the only person of color, and she was the only woman (other than me), several elements that made her entrance and exit noticeable.

Occurring in what I am calling "white private space," paraphrasing Page and Thomas (1994), I presume that what Sam was getting at was Elizabeth's race and skin color, but Sam never mentioned her skin color or race, following the mainstream, post-1945 linguistic signal to indicate that he is not racist and not a neo-Nazi. The careful avoidance of racial identifiers comes from a post-Holocaust curation of difference that makes race invisible as an effort to never again perform the atrocities of the Nazi past. Sam referenced hypothetical violence, but the reality of Elisabeth's different skin color, to which such hypothetical violence was directed at, was never mentioned.

[63] Wenn wir Nazis wären, dann wäre die Frau tot.

Since the end of World War II, there has been a widescale effort in Germany to eliminate the word ‘race’ from everyday and academic language. Gingrich (2004) writes that the term race is not used in mainstream or political discourse because the term race is presumed to be associated with the Third Reich and historical racial studies that underpinned the atrocities of Nazi Germany. Using the term *Rasse* (race, though it can also be used to refer to animals’ breed) in relation to people creates suspicions that the speaker is racist; calling a person ‘racist’ is synonymous with calling the speaker a Nazi sympathizer (Gingrich 2004: 158; Müller 2011). Hieronymus (2005) and Gehring (2016) write that while the terms race and racism are becoming more common in Germany, there is still a “refusal to recognize racism as a European legacy” (Hieronymus 2005; see also Gehring 2016).

Using their interactions with Elizabeth, who remained nameless and raceless, discursively referred to as “that woman,” these members explicitly claimed that they were not Nazis. But it was through mainstream discourse, perpetuated by media, politicians, and government organizations, that removes “race” and “racism” from consideration in Germany and attributes it to either neo-Nazis or the Nazi past, that makes it possible for these members to rhetorically signal themselves as “non-radical,” and not racist.

While Gingrich, Hieronymus, and others wrote about these issues almost twenty years ago, contemporary scholarship continues to build on this research and describe what M’Charek, Schramm, and Skinner (2014: 461) call the “absent present-ness” of race. But additional research has also traced the emergence and engagement

of both the word race and of racism in academic and broader circles. Further complicating this socio-political linguistic terrain is the remarkable transnational and German-based movements to counter racism and gain visibility for Germans of color.

Nonetheless, I still find this decades' old research evaluating the entanglement of the word race to the Nazi past valuable because contemporary politicians and mainstream community members continue to try to expunge the word race. While transnational discourse of racism and postcolonialism increase visibility for underrepresented populations, debates fostered in Germany perpetuate the historical efforts to eliminate the word race. The very linguistic markers that are supposed to delineate the nonracist mainstream from racist neo-Nazis are used by Sam and his fellow nativist nationalists to assert to themselves their nonracist, non-Nazi status.

Sam and other AfD members participate in broader discussions about the term race in Germany. Following the European-wide demonstrations protesting for Black lives in the US following the murder of George Floyd, a debate re-emerged in Germany kicked off by an op-ed written by a Green state parliament member and a co-chair of the Green party. Aminata Touré, an Afro-German, female, young, Green parliament member and Robert Habeck, the middle-aged, male, white German Green party co-chair, co-authored an opinion piece arguing that the term race should be eliminated from Germany's Basic Law in a step to fight racism because "there are no races. There are people" (Touré and Habeck 2020). In the ongoing debate, politicians and speakers of different parties have taken turns assessing whether the term "race" needs to be removed from the Basic Law. Succinctly put, politicians on the Left

including the Social Democrats, Greens, and the Left wanted to remove the word race from the Basic Law to eliminate beliefs in the genetic/biological reality of race. AfD politicians wanted to keep the word race as an acknowledge of the reality of race. And more mainstream, rightist parties like the Christian Democrats and the Free Democrats were more ambivalent on the issue.

But in a place like Germany, where Germanness is synonymous with whiteness (Linke 1999; Linke 2016), removing the word race does not create a raceless terrain but a white terrain. Dr. Ursula Moffitt (2020), in a rebuttal opinion piece to Touré and Habeck's, put it this way: "A new cultural reckoning is needed, not with the Holocaust, but with how Germanness intertwines with whiteness. Who has access to citizenship, who is othered as a 'migrant,'…are shaped by racialised notions of belonging that predate World War II." The linguistic removal of the word race results in rhetorically enabling a white terrain. But in this anecdote, it is not just Elizabeth's appearance, but also her disappearance, that enabled Sam to make his comment proving that members are not Nazis. It was only after Elizabeth had left that Sam made this comment among white people in a demarcated white space. The absence, the disappearance, of people of color also plays a role in the disavowal of racism. Sam's speech says that he and the others are not racist because Elizabeth was among them and remained alive – in other words, her living, bodily presence proved these members were not racist. But only in her absence, and only to a white woman, could or did Sam claim his non-racist status and only then in extremely coded terms.

As Weidman (2014) writes,

> Voice is an implied, but undertheorized element of the 'calling' or 'hailing' in the process of interpellation…Attention to the numerous ways in which subjects are interpellated through direct and mediated means illustrates that the force of the voice comes not only—as Althusser implied—from its power to name, but also, and perhaps more often, from its sonorous, material, and affective qualities (46).

The intersectional corporeality and physical relationality of each person permits such declarations of being, but in the case of Sam and Elizabeth, the declaration is based on absence. It is post-departure interpellation. It is a kind of afterword, commenting on Elizabeth's race to allow Sam and his friends to explain their nonracist status. This post-departure interpellation raises the question: What are the broader implications if disavowal of racism and the reproduction of white space and white talk is built on the physical absence of people of color?

I presume that these men did not need to remind themselves that they were not Nazis. I conclude that Sam was directing his comment at me. Why prove to me, using the absent body of a woman of color, that they are not neo-Nazis? I never had the chance to ask Sam why he made the comment that he did. Because of this, my analysis is educated supposition based on three years of discussing these themes with members. While there are several conclusions I could focus on, I want to focus on one: nativist, nationalist misrecognition of me. Aside from being a white researcher, I was sometimes misrecognized as German, not by nationality or language ability, but by what scholars have described as an even stronger marker of Germanness among the radical right, my imagined ancestry put in terms of "blood" or "roots." Blood and roots are words that nativist, nationalist interlocutors used to describe me. Most people accepted that I was a foreign researcher from the US. But some people cited

my paternal last names (both of which are German nouns) as a kind of evidence of my supposed German heritage.

Sam once told me when I mentioned that I would return to Germany after a brief visit to the US, "Of course you are coming back. One goes again and again [or one always goes back] to the roots."[64] In addition to my paternal last names, my white skin made a difference. Eliot, an astute university student who eschews the nativist, nationalist part of the AfD when speaking to me but is too socially savvy to openly disdain this powerful subset of the AfD, once showed me racist tweets from members about fellow members of color. Eliot said that the party did not need these racist idiots, but then turned the situation to me. If you were a Black (female) scientist, then some in the party would surely not speak with you.[65]

Strategically employing already-occurring linguistic markers is a powerful strategy to name and claim one's own normative, nonracist, non-extremist status and, in these instances, can work in tandem with the timed absence of people of color and the timed presence of whiteness and supposed Germanness of other people. In these narratives, Sam, Eliot and the other members are marking the terms of belonging through both access to information (in the form of research) and AfD legitimation by asserting that they are not neo-Nazis. By asserting that they are not Nazis, Eliot and his colleagues express legitimacy by utilizing already-occurring discourses of Nazism and racism in Germany.

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[64] Natürlich kommst du wieder zurück. Man geht immer wieder zurück zu den Wurzeln.

[65] Wenn du eine schwarze Wissenschaftlerin wärst, dann würden bestimmt manche in der Partei nicht mit dir sprechen.

Chapter 6: Legitimacy and Speech

"As an early warning system, we must not only focus on violent extremists, but also on those who ignite verbally. Intellectual arsonists deliberately stir up enemy images. Right-wing extremism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and racism seep into everyday perception – be it on the Internet, in the stadium, on the street, or in the political arena (Haldenwang 2019; see also Niederlausitz 2020)."[66] – Thomas Haldenwang, President of BfV

Haldenwang, president of the BfV, made this comment while announcing the BfV would surveil parts of the AfD. In response to such labels, AfD members craft Messages of AfD democratic legitimacy. In this chapter, I evaluate how members craft this Message and argue that members' re-Messaging should shift theoretical understanding of the extremism-mainstream relationship.

First, I provide some background on Germany's Basic Law (*Grundgesetz*). The Basic Law was adopted in 1949 as a temporary framework for Germany until reunification would take place. In the Unification Treaty on 31 August 1990, the parliaments of both governments (Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic) decided to maintain the Basic Law and incorporate the five eastern states and reunified Berlin within the German state (Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community).

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[66]Die Positionen des ‚Flügel' sind nicht mit dem Grundgesetz vereinbar. Die bisherigen verfassungsfeindlichen Anhaltspunkte haben sich verdichtet. Der „Flügel" ist als rechtsextremistische Bestrebung einzuordnen. Das BfV hat sich bei der Bewertung streng an seinem gesetzlichen Auftrag orientiert. Als Frühwarnsystem dürfen wir unser Augenmerk nicht nur auf gewaltorientierte Extremisten legen, sondern müssen auch diejenigen im Blick haben, die verbal zündeln. Geistige Brandstifter schüren gezielt Feindbilder. Rechtsextremismus, Antisemitismus, Islamfeindlichkeit und Rassismus sickern in die alltägliche Wahrnehmung ein – sei es im Internet, im Stadion, auf der Straße oder in der politischen Arena. Aus diesem Nährboden erwachsen allzu oft auch Gewalttaten. Dem treten wir entschieden entgegen und bekämpfen rechtsextremistische Agitation konsequent. Es darf keine Toleranz für Extremisten geben.

The Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz (in English, Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution) or BfV is a department in the government that was created after World War II to protect the constitution and the democratic state. The BfV accomplishes this task nationally and state-wide by collecting information on efforts "directed against the free democratic basic order or against the existence of the security of the Federation or one of its States" (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz 2020). The BfV investigates all kinds of terror and extremism, including left and right terrorism, Islamic terror, foreign threats, cyber defense, and racism.[67]

In an earlier version on its website, the BfV described the historical challenges and subsequent vulnerability that German democracy has faced since the end of the German empire and the start of the Weimar Republic. This statement succinctly reminded one of the authoritarian regimes that existed in Germany. This text framed German democracy as inherently fragile, emphasizing points where anti-democratic actions have either toppled German democracy or thwarted the development of democracy. The authors used stark language such as "constant threat to our democracy" and described Germany's first attempt at democracy as "failed" because of democracy's "defenselessness." This narrative of German democracy's fragility is the origin story of the BfV. Without this origin story, the BfV turns into a government department that has the ability and mandate to monitor citizens, politicians, and

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[67] While the BfV as a bureaucratic institution is beyond the scope of this project, I describe the basic components of the BfV here. "BfV" is the acronym for the federal office. I often use BfV when I mean the *Verfassungsschutz* collectively. LfV is the acronym for regional offices in each of Germany's *Bundesländer*.

organizations (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz 2020). As an earlier version of the BfV's website, updated in 2022, described this fragility in more detail.

> In Germany the Weimar Republic, our first democracy, was despised and attacked by the right and left fringe of the political spectrum, and it was ultimately destroyed because of its own defencelessness. This paved the way for the National Socialist tyranny, whose protagonists then established an inhuman system of government, committed unprecedented crimes and started a war that claimed millions of lives. This war also brought about the division of Germany. Even after the war, millions of Germans in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) were denied democracy for many more decades.
>
> The Parliamentary Council's work in 1948/49 was therefore shaped by the idea that the Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany should not only be a counter-model to the Constitution of the Weimar Republic but also constitute a reminder based on the lessons learnt from history. Neither war nor tyranny were to emanate from German soil ever again. This is why our Basic Law is the constitution of a democratic state governed by the rule of law that strives to have peaceful relations with its European and non-European neighbours.
>
> In addition, the Basic Law encourages and requires commitment from the state as well as from civil society. A free society depends on its citizens' general readiness to stand up for democracy and human dignity. But the state and its institutions also have to ensure the existence of and protect a free society wherever its key values, which are guaranteed by the constitution, are called into question.
>
> The Federal Constitutional Court describes the political system of the Federal Republic of Germany as a democracy determined and able to defend itself ("militant democracy") (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz 2022).

This 2022 version of the BfV created an updated image and origin story for the BfV. This version emphasizes the "militant democracy" aspect of the German government, a borrowed term long used in academia to describe certain kinds of German democracy. The term, militant democracy, or its German counterpart, "streitbare Demokratie," was coined by Karl Loewenstein, a Jewish refugee who emigrated to the U.S. when Hitler first came to power. Loewenstein developed the

concept as a response to fascism's misuse of democratic rights and privileges (Loewenstein 1937; see also Capoccia 2013).

Developing his idea over a decade and through a number of articles, Loewenstein argued that a democratic government must relinquish its outdated view of democracy where citizens have an equal right to participation and expression, and instead, adopt measures to prevent fascist leaders from subverting democracy. In Loewenstein's view, fascist leaders exploit democratic rights to undermine democracy from within (Loewenstein 1937; Capoccia 2013). Minkenberg (2006) argues that the German government is a "militant democracy" that has previously (in 2003 and more recently in 2013) attempted to ban right-wing organizations (specifically the NPD). The state only provoked hardened supporters to create better strategies to avoid bans.

The BfV enables this so-called militant democracy by investigating and monitoring extremism and threats to democracy. The BfV's mandate is to protect human dignity (§1 Abs.1 GG) and the basic principles of the state order, such as democracy and the rule of law, as stated in §20 GG (GG refers to the Basic Law; Verfassungsschutz Bericht 2019: 14). The free, democratic basic order, as clarified by the BfV website (Freiheitliche demokratische Grundordnung 2022), does not mean the Basic Law entirely, but the "unalterable supreme value principles as the core of democracy" (Freiheitliche demokratische Grundordnung 2022)[68] such as free, equal, secret elections, reinforcing the legislative's, judiciary's, and executive's commitment

[68] sondern die unabänderlichen obersten Wertprinzipien als Kernbestand der Demokratie.

to the rule of law, and upholding the rights to human dignity and non-violence (Freiheitliche demokratische Grundordnung 2022).[69]

The BfV website describes the BfV as an information service. As the Saxon regional office writes in its annual report, the BfV and its regional offices (LfV) inform interested citizens and people in relevant industries (social workers, scientists, students, etc.,) on “extremist aspirations.” “The information offered makes an important contribution to prevention and is intended to promote the social confrontation with extremism, because only informed citizens can actively campaign for freedom, democracy and use the rule of law” (Sächsischer Verfassungsschutz-Bericht 2018).[70]

The mission of the BfV is to mobilize citizen activism so that there might be a social response to extremism and not just a state response (which, in Germany, has eerie similarities to past authoritarian states). But the BfV is marred by various scandals (after WWII, former Nazis became BfV employees) and its own

[69] das Recht des Volkes, die Staatsgewalt in Wahlen und Abstimmungen und durch Organe der Gesetzgebung und der Rechtsprechung auszuüben und die Volksvertretung in allgemeiner, unmittelbarer, freier, gleicher und geheimer Wahl zu wählen, die Bindung der Gesetzgebung an die verfassungsmäßige Ordnung und die Bindung der vollziehenden Gewalt und der Rechtsprechung an Gesetz und Recht, das Recht auf Bildung und Ausübung einer parlamentarischen Opposition, die Ablösbarkeit der Regierung und ihre Verantwortlichkeit gegenüber der Volksvertretung, die Unabhängigkeit der Gerichte, der Ausschluss jeder Gewalt- und Willkürherrschaft, die im Grundgesetz konkretisierten Menschenrechte.

[70] Der sächsische Verfassungsschutz ist kein „geheimer Dienst“, sondern ein Informationsdienstleister für die Öffentlichkeit. Er informiert interessierte Bürger, Pädagogen und Mittler politischer Bildung, Schüler, Sozialarbeiter, Verwaltungsmitarbeiter, Bundeswehrangehörige oder Wissenschaftler sowie die Medien über Erkenntnisse zu extremistischen Bestrebungen. Das Informationsangebot stellt einen wichtigen Präventionsbeitrag dar und soll die gesellschaftliche Auseinandersetzung mit dem Extremismus fördern. Denn nur informierte Bürgerinnen und Bürger können sich aktiv für Freiheit, Demokratie und Rechtsstaatlichkeit einsetzen.

contradictory, and sometimes oblique research and labeling methods (Sächsischer Verfassungsschutz-Bericht 2018: 14).

A central part of the BfV's efforts is to determine whether different organizations, including religions, political parties, and individuals are extreme and anti-democratic on a scale of three designations: a test case, suspected case, and observation case. In a test case, organizations show early signs of extremist endeavors. In this case, the means that the BfV can use are limited. Only publicly accessible sources may be evaluated. Suspected case are those in which organizations are not clearly extremist but have sufficiently weighty "factual evidence" to suspect extremist activities. The BfV is allowed to monitor these organizations more closely. Members may then be observed and bugged, and the finances may be inspected - but all of this only with a court order. In observation cases, the extremist and anti-constitutional suspicion has been confirmed in the organization. The BfV can use the full range of intelligence resources – the judicial approvals are then granted more easily (Deutschlandfunk 2021).

The BfV structure is overseen by courts, the Interior Minister, parliamentary commissions, the public, and data protection officials. Such diverse oversight and the publicity about such oversight is likely meant to ease concerns about state policing that played important roles in Germany's history. But this diverse oversight also calls into question the potential for the BfV to be politicized, concerns that AfD members and politicians articulate. As some AfD politicians argue, BfV and LfV employees

and directors operate in and are influenced by the socio-political terrain of contemporary Germany.

Such potential for subjective perspectives is omitted in BfV and LfV reports that use diction that reflects fact and data. The publication of methodologies on the BfV website adds scientific credibility to BfV reports as factual and objective. However, BfV reports open to the public do not always include a methods' section of how the information was attained and assessed.

While the BfV does not have policing powers, it is an information gathering bureau with the ability to determine what constitutes extremism with far-reaching social effects. Additionally, Germany's Basic Law protects parties, creating loopholes for astute AfD lawyers when confronted with BfV surveillance who have claimed a violation of party rights ensured by Germany's Basic Law. Despite limitations and a complicated history, the BfV still maintains an enduring status as the central monitoring service of extremism and anti-democratic activity.

In addition to being an information service, the BfV's designations carry weight when it comes to civil servants' job security. I was told by several AfD members, and it also became obvious during discussions in the AfD, how concerned civil servants were with BfV designations. In fact, the strategy discussion I refer to later in this chapter began with this kind of background – police officers leaving AfD WhatsApp chat groups because of problematic language and messages that were being sent over WhatsApp.

The AfD began to appear in the federal and a few states' BfV reports in 2016. These initial reports described the AfD as recipients of Antifa violence but did not consider the AfD as an object of investigation. In the following few years, multiple LfV (state offices) began putting parts of the AfD under surveillance (Vorreyer 2020).

On 15 January 2019, Haldenwang, President of the BfV Federal Office, announced at a press conference that the entire AfD would be classified as a "test case" (*Prüffall)* while the Junge Alternative (JA) and the Wing would be classified a "suspected case" (*Verdachtsfall*). The JA is the youth and young adult section of the AfD; the Wing is a nativist, nationalist section of the AfD.

In his press release announcing that the BfV would monitor the AfD and its suborganizations for extremist notions and networks, Haldenwang justified the BfV's monitoring of the AfD with the statement by which I introduced this chapter. In this statement, Haldenwang specifically targeted intellectual arsonists (in this case members and leaders) who "ignite verbally," isolating and adding verbal forms of extremism to the qualifications of extremism.

In this chapter, I investigate the entanglement between democratic legitimacy, speech, and Messaging. How does speech operate as the central form of legitimacy and extremism? How does speech stand in for extremism and how does this create its own contradictions, incongruities and spaces through which members can skillfully operate? I contextualize these questions through examining broader research on

extremism and legitimacy before relating strategy conversations and a campaign meant to challenge the BfV.

Theorizing Extremism and Legitimacy

While the BfV's task is to monitor and warn citizens of extremism and anti-democratic threats in Germany, scholars argue that confrontational relations are crucial in producing the political, democratic community (Nancy 1991; Kaika and Karaliotas 2016; Marchart 2007; Mouffe 2005). Mouffe (2016) writes that creating effective democratic politics relies on establishing us/them relations that are constitutive and "compatible with the recognition of pluralism" (2-3). Mouffe recognizes the "shared symbolic space" of democratic politics, the "conflictual consensus" of the basic tenants of democracy.

Extremism and political normativity, based on the *Mitte* or mainstream, operate within these confrontational relationships. The precondition of extremism is a normative center presumed to be democratic; what is understood as extremism comes from outside this "democratic" center (Salzborn 2011). Often, government departments and other actors label extremism based on popular conceptions of which thought, behavior, and action are normative and anti-democratic (Salzborn 2011). Assessing extremism often relies on the "empirically untenable postulate of a non-extremist political center" (Salzborn 2011: 13).[71] Research on extremism too often is

[71] das empirisch nicht haltbare Postulat einer nicht-extremistischen politischen Mitte.

based on and reproduces this perception (Salzborn 2011: 13).[72] In German language debates, extremism is often understood to mean that which is opposed to the "democratic constitutional order in the normative sense and thereby both through its negative as well as its positive determinateness in opposition to democracy" (Salzborn 2011: 14).[73]

One philosophical understanding of democracy requires the collaborative opposition or confrontation of extremism and people operating in the *Mitte*. In this perspective, democracy relies on understanding people as equal and capable of discursive engagement (Niesen 2002). Normative notions of extremism reinforce normative foundations of democracy; consequently, radical critique which might still be democratic is pushed out (Salzborn 2011; Butterwegge 2000). In terms of democratic legitimacy, the political middle/mainstream becomes what is considered politically normativity.

In practice, such confrontation exudes uncomfortable and even democratically threatening situations. In numerous local, and at least one state level collaboration, AfD members collaborated with other parties. Sometimes these collaborations ended in political conflict. The Thüringen election in 2019 is a prime example of attempted collaboration. After five months of failed coalition talks, the FDP formed a government with the CDU and the AfD. So much political backlash ensued that

[72] bleibt die Extremismus-forschung zugleich oft relativ farblos hinsichtlich der Wahrnehmung von antide-mokratischen und antiaufklärerischen Tendenzen, die ihren sozialen Ursprung in der Mitte der Gesellschaft haben.

[73]Es geht um ein Verständnis von Extremismus, nach dem dieser im normativen Sinn der demokratischen Verfassungsordnung entgegensteht und dabei sowohl durch seine negative wie durch seine positive Bestimmtheit in Opposition zur Demokratie definiert wird.

Kemmerich, the FDP leader, stepped down soon after. I discuss this example more in chapter seven**.** These real-time practices feed into Holmes's (2016) argument that there is a contemporary fascism emerging in Europe that is fostered by mainstream political parties. Mainstream political parties easily "assimilate the ideas incubated by the extreme right – most notably those concerning the status of migrants and refugees – while decrying their racism and xenophobia" (Holmes 2016: 2).

In this chapter, I am interested in localized legitimacy – members' and supporters' efforts to claim democratic legitimacy, a cultural as well as political process (Riles 2021). As I show in this chapter, members and supporters strive to claim democratic legitimacy through social media and other discursive and corporeal measures. In the following examples, I examine how members strategize collectively how to avoid being caught by the BfV and how members (specifically politicians and their staff) publicly question the legitimacy of the BfV via social media platforms. Such combined "communicative events" illustrate longer AfD re-Messaging efforts.

Strategy conversations

In the following example, a strategy conversation, I examine how members discuss maintaining what they argue are their civic speech rights by discussing how to remain untouchable by the BfV. By strategy conversations, I mean local, often spontaneous conversations working out how members may say what they want without being surveilled by the government or other groups. This strategy segment acknowledged that one could not always socially or legally say whatever one wanted

but sought ways to promote speech rights that members understood were being limited in Germany.

In the exchange I describe below, members debated how to go about speech rights and express racial slurs while effectively side-stepping the BfV. At one level, this conversation is a discussion about racism. On another level, it is about speech rights and strategizing speech efforts. Members strive to carve out space for racist language amid worldwide discussions of antiracism and antiblackness.

Examples like the one I share below make apparent the continued openness of such racist speech. In this segment, I investigate the murky linguistic intersections between legally defined human dignity and speech rights. This example fits into broader discussions about white talk – white discourse that reflects an unequal, racialized access to particular words or phrases. Writing about the political Right in Europe in the mid-1990s, Stolcke (1995) writes that since the late 1980s a rhetoric of cultural fundamentalism has emerged. Cultural fundamentalism describes a kind of exclusion, "a new form of racism," that postulates that immigrants predominantly from less affluent countries have a different kind of culture that is antithetical to the host country's culture. Stolcke (1995) writes that cultural fundamentalism reflects old and new forms of racism in that it draws on unresolved contradictions of belonging.

These enduring views result in codewords for racial demarcation, often used with the sometimes-derogatory term, "Ausländer." In these conversations, the enduring German race aesthetics extend beyond German citizens to include foreigners that are placed within linguistic hierarchies of racial and cultural belonging.

This strategy segment filled up the beginning half hour of a local meeting. This conversation took place in a typical German restaurant. We sat in the basic special events room. Since many people were still ordering beers and dinner, the meeting had not officially begun. Staff would occasionally open the large doors to bring in more drinks and then close the doors again.

But even with the closed doors the conversation was not meant to be secretive. The relative openness of this conversation was evident because it was brought up by Charles before the meeting officially started (general conversation occurs before and after the meeting) and because later, when someone referenced internal critique of a high-ranking AfD politician's handling of a sensitive issue, he was reprimanded by Charles and others for talking about internal AfD themes when guests were at the meeting. While I do not have a transcript, I narrate the conversation, using as often as I can the terms and phrases that people used and their style of speaking.

While I met members who did not use racial slurs and were appalled by some members' racism, I also met other members who readily acknowledged their racist views and use of racial slurs. While members articulate perhaps more bluntly these racialized views of Germans, *Ausländer*, and Germans with a *Migrationshintergrund* (migration background), members draw on already-occurring perspectives, including pre-Nazi notions of Germanness (Gehring 2016; Linke 2016; Müller 2011; M'Charek, Schramm, and Skinner 2014; Mandel 2008).

In this discussion, the term "political enemies" is used broadly, and this conversation came after members and supporters made competing claims to

democratic legitimacy and extremism. This conversation is about members exploring how to say things, strategizing how to say what is generally perceived in Germany to be intolerable in a liberal, multicultural, post-Holocaust society like Germany.

All the speakers were middle-aged and retired, white German men, but there were some middle-aged and retired, white German women in the room. As the final drinks were being served and in the interlude before dinner was brought in, one of the members brought up a concern about how the chat network was being used by some people. No one seemed to care whether the terms used here are offensive. The debate was about when and where to use these terms, not whether the terms are appropriate.

Sitting near me in the middle of the room, Charles brought up a concern that people were using the WhatsApp chat to share links or to say things that are inappropriate or would create problems for members. He said that 29 police officers had already left the WhatsApp group because of the problematic things that were being written in the chat group. Charles said that the WhatsApp group should only be used as a way to communicate important dates or official campaigns for the AfD. Then he motioned to Edward the lawyer, sitting near us along a wall, and said that Edward could probably shed more light on the issue.

Edward rose to the task while literally rising to his feet and, elongating his 5' frame as much as possible, he explained to everyone that there are certain topics that are off limits, that they would need to phrase things in a way so that they are not attackable (angreifbar). He said that for instance, the Holocaust, Jews, and Muslims are off limit subjects. Edward said, if someone writes that Islam does not belong in

the West or Muslims are something (he did not clarify, just said "etwas"), then that is considered by the BfV as violating Article 1, the human dignity (Menschenwürde).

Then Devin sitting in the front joined the conversation, saying, "Then all of us would be Muslim friendly," (Dann werden wir alle muslimfreundlich sein) and he laughed. Edward said that he was hostile to Muslims (muslimfeindlich), but that the way he gets around not being able to be hostile to Muslims is by quoting the Koran with the parts he deems problematic, like, Kill all the unbelievers. He quotes it and lets the sections stand for themselves and shows his hostility to Muslims that way.

Edward also said that he asks questions and, in that way, says the things that would be controlled. But he also emphasized that it was important to note that these topics were not off limits necessarily, but that people needed to be careful (vorsichtig) how they went about talking about these themes, specifically the Holocaust, Jews, and Muslims. One could ask questions or phrase comments in such a way so that one is not surveilled (kontrolliert).

Then the quirky old man in the corner piped up that this really was so and gave a personal experience that rambled on and was hard to follow but, he concluded, that the Left can say something, and it is fine because of the way they say it. Edward said that this example was exactly what he was talking about – people can say things but they must be careful how they say things in order to avoid being controlled (kontrolliert).

Charles briefly said that it was important that they not offend (beleidigen) people, that the WhatsApp group should not be about giving offense. Charles said

that someone had written a message about Jews in the chat network that was not appropriate for the WhatsApp venue.

Robert, who sat along the back wall with several other men who had murmured dissent and made sounds of disapproval during these points, said that he did not like this and began speaking louder and more intensely. He asked, "Where do the scissors start?" (Wo fängt die Schere an?) I later asked Edward what that meant. Edward explained, "When I limit my ideas myself, when no one else does that, but I do it myself." (Wenn ich selbst meine Ideen beschränke, wenn niemand anders das macht, aber ich mache das selbst.)

Robert continued to argue that it was not all right to force people to limit their opinions and that this issue was about freedom of opinion (Meinungsfreiheit). Charles responded by matching Robert's intensity that nothing on WhatsApp is internal, that everything is constantly to surveilled (mitgelesen), nothing is a secret and that they should not give more to their political opponents (politische Gegner).

Alfred jumped in after Charles and added that they should not provide any ammunition to the political opponents or the media. Instead, they should have the media focusing on the AfD's points, like retirement pension, and other such issues, instead of giving them ammunition.

Then a man in the corner in the front, Archibald, said, I joined this party because I am tired of people restricting freedom of opinion (Meinungsfreiheit). The party should not restrict what people can say. I say things like N**, Jew, and *Z***

[contemporary slur for Roma people] and I should be allowed to say these things. I should not have to restrict myself, Archibald concluded.

To this, Charles responded, I too use N**, Jew and Z** but that does mean that we need to have it written in the WhatsApp group because the WhatsApp group is surveilled. It is there and our political enemies can use it against us. There is no need to offend. There is no need to provoke.

Andy then jumped into the conversation and said that one could say things and that is fine, but the problem is that when it is written. Even in a WhatsApp group that is meant to be internal, that there is a written (schriftliche) trail of these words or opinions and that is a big problem because it can be used by our political opponents. We should never create a written trail. There are holy places (Heilige Orte), Andy said, and just like there are holy places that one should stay away from (not provoke) there are also burned terms (verbrannte Begriffe) that one just cannot touch and they [AfD members] needed to understand that so that their political enemies cannot use these things against them. This response led to widespread approval, evidenced by many people rapping their knuckles on the tables.

Then the old man in the front who had given the perfect example of avoiding concreteness (greifbarkeit) by saying things carefully, spoke again and said that this is how Merkel did it with the whole migration issue – she said things but there was no written trail to document the policies she was implementing regarding 2015 migration and that worked to her advantage, making her untouchable (ungreifbar). This was sort of a conversation staller. No one quite knew what to say next. After a brief pause,

someone said that they needed to be careful about what was written in the WhatsApp group because everything was surveilled and so that their political enemies cannot use it against them. After that, the leader suggested that they start the meeting since they were now officially late.

A central part of this debate is about the role of self-monitoring. As these members articulate, they are not changing or moderating their views or language for the BfV, but they discussed how to portray their talk for political opponents and the BfV. These members talked about how to talk, or in this specific case, how to write when members (and many other people) know that the BfV and others are surveilling chat networks, meetings, publications, and events. Edward and Charles claimed that they use racial slurs and promote anti-Islamic positions. As they explained, their point is not to eliminate such expressions, but to find the right time, space, and method to express such perspectives. In other words, Charles, Edward, Andy, and the old man in the corner promoted a kind of self-monitoring of speech rights. But Robert and Archibald posited freedom of opinion and speech rights as the unbridled expression of their thoughts. To paraphrase Archibald, he joined the AfD so that he could have freedom of opinion (and speech).

Second, this conversation is limited to talk, not action. It is simultaneously talk about how to avoid being rhetorically vulnerable to the BfV and talk about speech as a right. These interlocutors' arguments about speech rights, and their act of speaking the things they should not write, stands in for their set of social relations

(Kunreuther 2014: 4). Archibald and Charles did not dispute their right to use racial slurs. But the broader question is whether they should modify their speech in certain contexts to maintain broader successes and freedoms as members of a political party. This conversation is not only another example of rightist people saying racist things. It is an example of people, in this case white and politically right, openly discussing where and how to frame racist and anti-Islamic language in such a way that remains untouchable by the BfV and political opponents, thus ensuring what they define a speech rights. These interlocutors historically have had considerably more access to these rights to speech than other groups. These members codified what is overtly racist language and transformed it into language that is perhaps not blatantly objectionable or offensive. In this conversation, racist or Islamophobic language was part of a right that needed to be mediated to take place in the right form to be passable in order to remain untouchable. But such open AfD discussions indicate that BfV assessments on racism could be limited or reduced to linguistics or word games.

I share the next example as one final anecdote to illustrate how the BfV, speech rights, and the Muslim migrant intersect. During one meeting, a local leader whom I will call Liam, gave a rather long monologue description about the Rechtstaat (rule of law) and the BfV. The leader warned of the need to have new, younger, German judges who are conservative, since the judges in his age range, who all joined around the same time and are all relatively conservative, will retire. Liam warned that there is an organization called “Forum Recht” (Forum Right) that was recently founded. The organization will use taxpayers’ money to create movies/TV shows

Where Ali, where Mohammed would be made judges, (Wo Ali, wo Mohammed, zu Richtern gemacht werdern würden) to prepare the minds of the people for non-Germans as judges in the German court system. Liam continued, In the GDR, one called that right-wing propaganda, (In der DDR nannte man das Rechts-Propaganda).

After a brief reference to the political organizations that own newspapers, Liam took themes from the GDR period. He made a reference to the popular narrative that during the GDR, the government spied on people by monitoring the comments that their children made. Liam described how he did some research and figured out that the BfV is not constitutional (verfassungsgemäß). Liam presented examples of how the BfV is not appropriate in the *Rechtstaat* (constitutional state) in some situations. Not that the BfV engaged in unconstitutional practices, but in theory it could, Liam said. Liam continued that he had done this research by looking in the Stasi files (since he did not grow up in the GDR). Liam ended that just as the GDR state security system failed, he has hope that the BfV will fail through its efforts against the AfD.

Liam began his monologue by connecting the German Rechtsstaat to Germanness, explaining that soon there will be foreign judges in Germany's Rechtsstaat. Liam's example, however, focuses on a specific kind of migrant, on "Mohammed," a place-holder name to refer in this case to a Muslim man from North Africa or the Middle East. Referring to the media platforms that will be airing shows featuring a Judge Mohammed, Liam brings in the GDR for the first time in this

segment, saying that this kind of program would be call Rechts-Propoganda in the GDR.

Changing examples, but not topics, to the BfV, Liam argued that the minimum for those who could be observed by the BfV would be lowered and that soon children would be used to report to the BfV, alluding a second time to the GDR. A common narrative about the GDR is that teachers would ask schoolchildren about the television shows they watched at home and other intimate details about their home life to ascertain loyalty to the GDR state. As a judge, Liam used his legal background to argue that the BfV is not constitutional. At this point, Liam compared the Stasi directly to the BfV. In this way, Liam, who is from western Germany and moved to eastern Germany after reunification, discredited the BfV.

At the same time, however, Liam worked to alleviate any concerns constituents might have about the BfV investigation, since, as Liam puts it, it is like the Stasi – Stasi files came to nothing and the BfV files will also likely come to nothing. Liam explained to his constituents what can protect them from BfV investigation – fast AfD growth. Once the AfD is large enough, Liam explained, the BfV will not work anymore. This final comment by Liam seemed to indicate that the BfV is not objective and once a political party is established enough according to membership and voting patterns, the BfV will no longer be able to investigate the AfD or will no longer find the AfD extreme because the party will represent the mainstream.

Liam's assessment is different than the strategy conversation I shared earlier. In the earlier discussion, individual members discussed how to avoid BfV surveillance while still maintaining the integrity of their opinions and their right to speak those opinions. These members also spoke about their right to speak. Members spoke about this right as their own rather than treating language as separated text that might injure the human dignity of certain demographics. In Liam's view, however, the AfD just needed to expand to make BfV surveillance impotent. But each of these comments challenges the democratic illegitimacy of the BfV and the need to avoid, subvert, and challenge the BfV.

The strategy conversation that I paraphrased relates a more everyday effort to speak and act around the BfV, sometimes choosing avoidance rather than critique, choosing strategic silences along with carefully calculated racist and Islamophobic utterances. The discussion in the strategy conversation does not seek to eliminate problematic speech, but rather, the discussion sought to strategize how to employ problematic speech productively and without being surveilled by the government.

Liam also spoke against the BfV's legitimacy in his conversation with members, comparing the BfV to the former GDR government. While Liam represents the more radical element of the AfD, the Wing, the strategy conversation I described represent the enduring and open-endedness of these debates of how to say racist and Islamophobic things without being caught by the government office tasked with monitoring anti-democratic (exclusionary) language.

Gemeinsam für das Grundgesetz campaign

Anthropologists and media scholars have focused on the role of mediating technologies to convey social relations and power. Sound transmission technologies like video or audio recordings separate the sound from the body, allowing sound materiality to take on new lives as sound transmits beyond its original articulation. Weidman (2014) writes that "Technologies of sound reproduction, broadcasting, transmission, and amplification…draw attention to the powers and possibilities of voices separated from their originating bodies and can thus help us to see the mediation inherent in all voice–body relationships" (41). These voice-body relationships become valuable mechanisms through which members Message their normalcy and democratic legitimacy, especially when these Messages are amplified through social media that has the potential to reach diverse and even future audiences.

In this section, I refer specifically to YouTube videos, Facebook posts, and other online campaigns. Social media's increased popularity makes it an intermediate technology of voice production and dissemination among AfD groups. Regional and federal AfD groups use social media sites extensively to promote campaigns, broadcast live and recorded meetings, speeches, and other kinds of speech practices.

While engaging digital ethnography is a new and complicated methodology for anthropology, I engage it from the angle of mediating technologies of voice. In some ways, voices on social media are circulated separately from the human bodies that produce them, as Schäfers (2017) writes. These voices are mediated by complex technologies that allow voice to be separated from the body and expand to diverse

audiences. As I show below, corporeality and voice travel together in the virtual world while still being removed from the contemporary personhood of the producer.

In the following section, I analyze a social media campaign that the AfD conceived at least as early as fall 2019 and published spring 2020. From this social media campaign, I draw out how AfD politicians create and harness a certain Message emphasizing democratic legitimacy and normativity. Members claim democratic legitimacy through challenging the BfV's legality and interpret Germany's Basic Law. I argue that reinforcing normative, and privileged, conceptions of Germanness is part of members' efforts to Message the AfD's democratic legitimacy. Members rhetorically entrench their political views into the Basic Law as they use their bodies and personhood to combat notions of extremism.

While regional LfV offices began to monitor the AfD for extremist tendencies, in 2019 the BfV announced that it would monitor the AfD generally, and parts of the AfD such as the JA and the Wing specifically. In 2019 the AfD national leadership developed a campaign called "*Gemeinsam für das Grundgesetz*" (Together for the Basic Law). The campaign includes a website, Facebook page, Twitter account, and a YouTube channel. On these sites, the AfD creators shared videos and graphics promoting specific Basic Law articles and in-depth interviews with AfD leaders about what the Basic Law is and how it is threatened.

While engaging the "public" to the small extent of typically several hundred comments, shares, and likes, the campaign offers members controlled spaces to authoritatively interpret the Basic Law. The Basic Law campaign creates a controlled

platform for AfD leaders to express their views on citizenship rights and affirm their commitment to the Basic Law. According to one chairman, the *Gemeinsam für das Grundgesetz* campaign was a direct response to the accusations that AfD did not support the Basic Law. I provide a background on the campaign and begin discussing normativity, voice, and corporeality through mediated technologies.

Facebook Site

The Facebook site has several graphics along with links to the YouTube video clips I describe below. The graphic designs, like advertisements for the Basic Law, show an object representing an Article in the Basic Law. For instance, a chocolate bunny symbolizes religious freedom (posted around Easter), a toy dinosaur facing a toy rubber duck represent equality before the law, a mechanical hand raised represents the worth of people established in Article 1, a disco ball represents the right to personal freedom, and a miniature red, double-decker bus with the words, "Visit *Beautiful* Mecklenburg!" represents Article 11, freedom of movement.

Each graphic design includes a brief introduction to the Article followed by a portion of the Article as quoted in the Basic Law. For instance, the *Gleichheitssatz*, Article 3, Equality before the Law, portrays a toy dinosaur and a toy rubber duck facing each other and the text reads as follows:

> The so-called equality principle obliges the state to consider its citizens as individuals, regardless of whether they belong to a certain gender, an ethnic group, a religious community, a political current or a disability. Quotas fundamentally contradict this fundamental right because they divide people into groups.

> Article 3: (1) All people are equal before the law. (2) Men and women have equal rights. The state promotes the effective enforcement of equality between women and men and works to eliminate existing disadvantages. (3) Nobody may be disadvantaged or favored because of their gender, their descent, their race, their language, their home and origin, their belief, their religious or political views. Nobody may be disadvantaged because of his disability (original emphasis) (Gemeinsam, Facebook 2020).[74]

This graphic and the description state the article. But this description simultaneously asserts AfD support of the Basic Law. The AfD writers also took the opportunity to interpret this article in the final sentence of the introduction, "Quotas fundamentally contradict this fundamental right because they divide people into groups." Several AfD leaders have argued against women and minority quotas. In the AfD party platform, the authors write

> The AfD rejects gender quotas in education or at places of work, since quotas are detrimental to performance, are unjust, and often create renewed and new discrimination. The AfD believes that quotas are not an appropriate means to accomplish gender equality between men and women. We also reject the establishment of special female courses at universities. Instead, the AfD strongly emphasizes the constitutionally guaranteed equality of men and women in the sense of equal opportunities. However, we reject a gender equality policy with regard to equality of results (Manifesto for Germany 2016: 54-55).

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[74] Der sogenannte Gleichheitssatz verpflichtet den Staat, seine Bürger als Individuen zu betrachten, unbeeinflusst von der Zugehörigkeit zu einem bestimmten Geschlecht, einer Ethnie, Religionsgemeinschaft, politischer Strömung oder einer Behinderung. Quoten widersprechen diesem Grundrecht fundamental, denn sie teilen Menschen in Gruppen ein.
Artikel 3
(1) Alle Menschen sind vor dem Gesetz gleich.
(2) Männer und Frauen sind gleichberechtigt. Der Staat fördert die tatsächliche Durchsetzung der Gleichberechtigung von Frauen und Männern und wirkt auf die Beseitigung bestehender Nachteile hin.
(3) Niemand darf wegen seines Geschlechtes, seiner Abstammung, seiner Rasse, seiner Sprache, seiner Heimat und Herkunft, seines Glaubens, seiner religiösen oder politischen Anschauungen benachteiligt oder bevorzugt werden. Niemand darf wegen seiner Behinderung benachteiligt werden.

In this graphic, the writers connect the AfD position to a “correct” interpretation of the Basic Law while simultaneously affirming their own commitment to the Basic Law.

YouTube Video clips

The AfD’s social media presence also extends to videos posted on YouTube. The title of each video is, “My reason for the Basic Law.”[75] The speakers introduced bits of personal information, discuss a Basic Law article and how the government currently infringes on this article. Speakers often invoked their previous occupational experiences (lawyer, judge, engineer, nurse, teacher, parent, etc.) to speak authoritatively about what the Basic Law articles really mean and how these articles should be applied to considerations like women’s quotas, wind farms, left extremism at universities, social censorship, the constant threat of authoritarianism, and the right to assemble.

The videos always end with the positive, communal tagline, “For this reason, let us fight together for the Basic Law.” These videos range from one to two minutes and have a lively theme song to introduce and close the videos. The videos were all staged with a gray backdrop and the shots of the speakers oscillate between head and upper body images. All the participants dressed in business wear: suits, jackets, and ties for men; dresses, skirts, or dress pants and jackets for women. This attire and the overall style of the videos point to a specific kind of “normal” that members try to

[75] Mein Grund für das Grundgesetz. My translation.

exude, a kind that is middle-class, educated, heteronormative, and white, upholds the Basic Law and explains how to correctly interpret it. Almost weekly the campaign creators published videos of AfD federal and state parliament members and staff across Germany and at the time of this writing, over 40 videos have been published. I share some of these videos to illustrate the ways that members use this platform to not only show their democratic legitimacy by knowing Basic Law articles and speaking of the importance to fight for and protect the Basic Law, but also how they interpret these articles to promote the party's political stances.

One video posted on the campaign's YouTube Channel was of Nicole Höchst, a 50-year-old mother of four children and federal parliament member (Höchst 2020). The caption of the video is "School director Nicole Höchst is worried about Germany as an educational location, as the freedom of teaching and science is increasingly having to give way to an intolerant left-wing ideology at our universities."[76] In the video, Höchst says that her favorite Basic Law article is the fifth which protects the right to opinions and the freedom of the press and information. As her party's representative for education politics, she tells the viewer, the third paragraph of Article 5 is close to her heart; Höchst then quotes it. Höchst explains that freedom of research and teaching is threatened in Germany and that at universities, opinions that do not conform with a left, politically correct *Zeitgeist* are often suppressed. She remembered the past Winter semester when Left extremists interrupted lectures of the

[76] Schuldirektorin Nicole Höchst macht sich Sorgen um den Bildungsstandort Deutschland, da die Freiheit von Lehre und Wissenschaft zunehmend einer intoleranten linken Ideologie an unseren Universitäten weichen muss.

former parliament member and AfD founder Bernd Lucke along with the stage ban placed against Free Democrats leader Christian Lindner at the University of Hamburg. Ladies and gentlemen, she continued, research and teaching must be free, free from ideological restrictions and blinders so that the scientific base may continue to contribute to Germany's prosperity. Höchst claimed that information and opinions are threatened, specifically by Left extremists and political correctness.

Höchst emphasized basic democratic rights denied during different German authoritarian eras, especially the freedom of speech, which Höchst defined as education and research. The examples that Höchst invoked are one where professors and politicians were demonstrated against before or during their presentations. Höchst claimed democratic legitimacy through citing the Basic Law, interpreting the article through applying the article to contemporary issues.

Wearing make-up, Höchst dressed in a black v-neck button-up top, a light blue jacket with gold buttons, sporting black, curly, shoulder-length hair which showed pearl earrings. While her upper body remained stiff, her hands and head moved to her words, nodded as she discussed the Basic Law, tilted her head left and right, then jerked her head left and right when discussing left extremism at universities, and finally smiled as she concluded that she and the viewer should work together to fight for the Basic Law. With her calm demeanor and articulate rhythm, Höchst reached out to conservatives affected by speech limitations at schools and universities. In conventional, professional clothing with no extremist identifiers, she detected a Basic Law article that, in her opinion, was not fully implemented, and she

called for the full application of Article 5, not for her own political satisfaction, but for the very intellectual and economic prosperity of Germany. In an articulate and professional manner, she taught what the article means and how and why it should be properly applied.

Another video, created by Erich Heidkamp, described the importance of family. Erich Heidkamp was born in 1948, is married, and has a daughter. Heidkamp explained that he was a successful business manager in different countries in Latin America, Asia, and Europe. He joined the Hessian state parliament in 2018 and is his party's Speaker for Budget and Finance**.** He maintained that the German Basic Law is one of the best in the world. As an engaged family dad, Article 6, Paragraph 1 is especially important to Heidkamp. This article states that families and marriages are under special protection of the state. Families and children form the basis of the "our nation and our culture" (Heidkamp 2020) and are necessary to protect, strengthen and promote a strong, prosperous society, Heidkamp explained. Dressed as other politicians in professional settings such as parliament or on media shows, Heidkamp clad in a fitted navy-blue suit coat, light blue dress shirt, red tie with stripes tied in a large knot, sporting large glasses with thin brown rims, and a wedding band. He kept his hands clasped in front of his abdomen most of the video, his upper body straight, and he moved his head back and forth as he smiled and talked. Heidkamp's facial expressions became serious when he said that the German Basic Law is one of the best in the world and he leaned forward and clenched his right hand into a fist in front of the camera when describing his political activity in defense of the Basic Law.

Heidkamp started out by establishing his success as a cosmopolitan businessman, creating a tolerant, open nature to others outside of Germany and Europe and his ability to live and work with them. Friendly and open, Heidkamp almost exuded a grandfatherly air as he promoted families and children in Germany. Like Höchst, Heidkamp argued that thoroughly implementing this article is critical to a prosperous Germany, and suggested, like Höchst, that a successful Germany is what the AfD strives for. Heidkamp's facial expressions, and to some extent his body movements, are open and welcoming, and like Höchst, he dressed professionally and without radical markers. His words, demeanor, and clothing gesture to conservativism, not extremism. In all the videos, clothing, jewelry, hair styles, occupations, educational attainments, rhetoric and diction, and other signals of AfD personhood lack markers of extremism.

These videos take as their starting point people who look, act, and dress in such ways that render them "normal" and unmarked. The style of this campaign reinforces an image of members (even though they do not self-identify as AfD) as people with families, hobbies, and careers. Members are simultaneously presentable to several demographics (businesspeople, engineers, parents, teachers, environmentalists, etc.), and members harness this presentability to embed party stances within the Basic Law, a Basic Law that they argue is threatened and needs to be protected. Every part of this campaign – texts on the website, in-depth interviews with high-level leaders of the AfD, and short video clips – questions how legitimate

the current German government is, the neutrality of the BfV, and the interpretation of the Basic Law through the lens of AfD politics.

While many videos, graphics, and images typically are only limited a few hundred responses in the form of “likes” or views, perhaps reflecting a limited public (though some have over a thousand), this campaign illustrates the narrowing field between extremism and normalization. Here is a party that the BfV has identified as at least partially extremist and a threat to the democratic order and that politicians and the media label as “far right” and radical. In response, members created their own platform to fight back in a way that other groups identified as extremist have not been able to (Islamist groups, neo-Nazi organizations). Rather than images like extremist or terrorist groups around the world, these AfD leaders dress in fitted suits and dresses, speak eloquently, measured, and with considerable education. While mainstream physical appearance and normalized markers of personhood do not eliminate or modify one’s extreme positionality, members perform such a mimicry of quotidian Germanness and Western language and imagery (since this is the milieu from which they often come), it is hard to identify where the “extremism” begins that the BfV, media, and opposing politicians’ reference. In each short, orchestrated speech, text, and interview, the leaders make it easy to be understood as democratic. By democratic, I refer to these members articulation and interpretation of the Basic Law articles in a way that presents members as democratic.

These videos are focused on showing how AfD are democratically legitimate while drawing on normativity, emphasizing participants’ knowledge of the Basic Law

and calling into the question on the website and through some of the interviews and videos the reliability of the BfV. As I discuss in chapter five, part of the normalcy that members in these videos exude is the heteronormative family and whiteness. The bodily power that members employ, along with their rhetoric, strives to convey democratic legitimacy in these videos. Members leverage their bodily power interesting, especially in a world of Black Lives Matter in Europe, discussions of white supremacy, colonial heritages, and other ways that have problematized and complicated the racial justice in US and western European democracies.

There is a particular power and effectiveness in these visual representations of people in the moment the videos are recorded because these videos are showing actual AfD leaders in a particular light. These are video representations of people as normal, educated, sophisticated and as such, these videos are a powerful way of trying to mainstream the message or their position in such a way that the viewer could relate.

Members harness and transmit the systematic inequalities of power that translate directly onto their privileged citizenship status through sometimes subtly, sometimes overtly, corporeal means. While these videos reflect a performative normalcy that defies assumptions of members' extremism, it is members' pre-existing privileges (educated, affluent, etc.) embodied in their personhood and mannerisms (hand gestures, diction, white bodies). These privileges perpetuate the systematic inequality inherent in democratic structures that they are part of. I emphasize here that it is not just their whiteness. But it is the combination of attributes, whiteness

included, that these members embody that gives them their power. Not all citizens have the same access to, or are able to equally implement, democratic rights, but some bodies are especially privileged in democratic structures. Despite being called "extreme," these members capitalize on their privileged citizenship to challenge such labeling and try to assert their democratic commitment. At the time of recording, the corporeality and voice of these people were associated with their personhood, but with the passage of months and years, this corporeality and voice continue on, perpetuated through reconfigured and ever-changing online networks. These voices become separately circulated from the people that produced them.

In addition to voices, these AfD representatives also employ gestures to communicate their arguments in these videos. Along with words, gestures are an additional resource to fashion conversations (Kendon 1997: 114) and to create intimate communication in public spaces (Herzfeld 2009: 133). These gestures are daily occurrences, "the spontaneous, unwitting, and regular accompaniments of speech" (McNeill 2005: 3). In the following section, I briefly analyze how gesture adds to the text that these politicians articulate to claim democratic legitimacy amid labels of extremism. While these gestures are not in themselves indicative of AfD branding but explain how these gestures work in tandem with rhetoric and corporeal imaging to permit these AfD members to claim normalcy and democratic legitimacy while they were being threatened with state labels of extremism that would severely limit their voting constituencies.

Politicians' gestures create political party branding at a crucial time and campaign when AfD leaders needed to illustrate to the broader public their normativity, democratic legitimacy, and commitment to Germany's Basic Law. These politicians' gestures are mediated expressions in the "long, sinuous semiotic pathways that run from co-speech gesture to [political party] brand" (Lempert and Silverstein 2012: 171). I show how Heidkamp and Höchst build on one basic gesture to convey normalcy, openness, and solicitation for the audience to engage with these AfD members. I focus on the double-handed, palm presentation (PP) gesture in the Open Hand Supine ('palm up') family and what I call the hand-in-hand gesture. While gesture does not "directly index [political party] brand," gesture participants in this branding in multifaceted ways (Lempert and Silverstein 2012: 171).

The double-handed palm presentation that I describe is part of the Open Hand Supine ('palm up') family of gestures. The gesture is made by extending the arms with the elbows still slightly bent and the palms are faced upward or at an upward angle with all fingers extended. Kendon (2004) writes that palm presentation gestures are usually one-handed, but here I describe a two-handed palm presentation. At times, the double-handed palm presentation is completed by turning at the wrists body-facing hands outward and upward in a rapid motion. At other times, the hands are already extended at the elbows with the palms facing upward. Kendon (2004) writes that speakers use these gestures "in contexts where the speaker is offering, giving or showing something or requesting the reception of something" (248). "The PP gesture is typically used in association with passages in the verbal discourse which serve as

an introduction to something the speaker is about to say, or serve as an explanation, comment or clarification of something the speaker has just said" (Kendon 2004: 266). While Kendon (2004) writes that the PP gesture can operate as a discursive transitional status, I see the PP rhetoric operating as an invitation with the public to consider the speakers' words. Additionally, I describe a hand-in-hand gesture that keeps the hands at the waste clasped together. This position was often the starting and ending position for many speakers and often formed the base gesture in between the palm up gesture.

Legend:
PP – beginning of palm presentation
HH – beginning of hand-in-hand
Italics – emphasized words
[.] – brief pause

Erich Heidkamp (Translation in footnote)[77]

0.04 Guten Tag. Mein Name ist Erich Heidkamp.
HH PP HH

0.08 Baujahr '48, verheiratet, und wir haben eine Tochter.
PP Partial PP

0.11 Beruflich war ich erfolgreich als Geschäftsführer in verschiedenen Ländern in Lateinamerika, Asien und Europa tätig.

[77] Hello. My name is Erich Heidkamp. Born in '48, married and we have a daughter. Professionally, I have worked successfully as a managing director in various countries in Latin America, Asia and Europe. I have been a representative in the Hessian state parliament since 2018 and am spokesman there for my [parliamentary] fraction on budget and finance. My role in the European Committee is just as important to me. I consider our Federal Republic to have one of the best constitutions in the world. As a committed family man, Article 6 paragraph 1 is particularly important to me. "Marriage and family are under the special protection of the state order." Families and children of our own are the foundation of our nation and our culture. They are to be specially protected, strengthened, and promoted. They are the basis and prerequisite for a strong, prosperous society. Therefore let us fight together for the Basic Law.

Camera zooms in to chest and head

0.19 Ich bin seit 2018 Abgeordneter im Hessischen Landtag und dort Sprecher meiner

Fraktion für Haushalt

Camera zooms back out

und Finanzen.
Pointing gesture to camera

0.27 Ebenso wichtig ist mir meine Rolle im Europaausschuss.
HH

0.31 Ich halte unserer Bundesrepublik für eine der besten Verfassungen unserer Welt.

Camera zooms in to chest and head

0.38 Als engagierter Familienvater ist mir dabei Artikel 6 Absatz 1 besonders wichtig.

0.44 "Ehe und Familie stehen unter dem besonderen Schutze der staatlichen Ordnung."

Camera zooms back out

0.49 Familien und eigene Kinder bilden das Fundament für unsere Nation und unsere

Kultur.

0.55 Sie sind besonders zu schützen, zu stärken und zu fördern.

Camera zooms in to chest and head

0.59 Sie sind die Basis und die Voraussetzung für eine starke, wohlhabende Gesellschaft.

Camera zooms back out

1.06 Deshalb [.] *lassen Sie uns streiten*, gemeinsam für das Grundgesetz.

PP

The HH operates as a comfort position in the discomfort of speaking into a camera and to an imaginary public. The hands resting around the waist is a natural public speaking position. But this pose also makes Heidkamp's PP gestures more pronounced. He begins with the rapid PP gestures at the beginning as Heidkamp said his name, birthyear, and that he has a daughter. But during the rest of his short speech, Heidkamp remained with his hands enclosed until the last sentence when he said, "Deshalb lassen Sie uns straiten gemeinsam für das Grundgesetz" (Therefore, let us fight, together for the Basic Law"). Heidkamp's gesture serves as an invitation for the public to join him in the fight for the Basic Law. Heidkamp's words and gestures suggest a transitional status – Heidkamp gave a proposition to work together and offered this proposition to the public who then must choose whether to take it up by supporting the AfD (in its fight to discredit the BfV). Heidkamp's gestures work in tandem with his rhetorical appeals and corporeal imaging as he claims democratic legitimacy through interpreting a Basic Law article. Heidkamp's gestures create individual and party branding during a crucial fight against the BfV. The entire video depicts Heidkamp's corporeality, clothing, and rhetoric about success and normalcy.

Nicole Höchst (Translation in footnote)[78]

[78] Hello. Good day. My name is Nicole Höchst. I am 50 years old, mother of four children. I am a representative in German Bundestag. There in the family committee, in the education committee, and in the inquiry commission. My favorite article of the German Basic Law is Article 5, which protects, among other things, freedom of expression, freedom of the press, and freedom of information. There is no censorship, it says. As an education politician, the third paragraph of the fifth article is close to my heart. There it says: "Art and science, research and teaching are free." The freedom of research and

Legend:
PP – beginning of palm presentation
HH – beginning of hand-in-hand
Italics – emphasized words
[.] – brief pause

0.05. Hallo. Guten Tag. Mein Name ist Nicole Höchst.
PP HH

0.09 Ich bin 50 Jahre alt, Mutter von vier Kindern. Ich bin Abgeordnete im Deutschen
PP HH PP HH

Bundestag.

0.15 Dort im Familienausschuss, im Bildungsausschuss, und in der Enquete
PP

Kommission.

0.22 Mein Lieblingsartikel des deutschen Grundgesetzes ist der Artikel 5, welcher
PP HH

unter anderem die Meinungs-, Presse-, und Informationsfreiheit schützt.

0.31 Eine Zensur findet nicht statt, steht dort.
Air quotes -------------------- HH

0.34 Als Bildungspolitikerin liegt mir besonders der dritte Absatz des fünften Artikels

Herzen.

0.41 Dort heiβt es: „Kunst und Wissenschaft, Forschung und Lehre sind frei.“
PP HH

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teaching is under threat. All too often, opinions are suppressed at German universities that do not correspond to the left-wing, politically correct zeitgeist. I remember the event just last winter semester, in which Left-wing extremists disturbed, the MP, former MP Bernd Lucke. The appearance ban of the member of the Bundestag from the FDP Christian Lindner in Hamburg. Ladies and gentlemen, research and teaching must be free, free from ideological restrictions and blinders, so that Germany as a center for science can continue to contribute to our prosperity as before. So let us fight together for the Basic Law.

Camera zooms in to chest/head

0.46 Die Freiheit von Forschung und Lehre ist bedroht.

0.49 Allzu oft werden an deutschen Universitäten Meinungen unterdrückt, die nicht

dem linken, politisch-korrekten Zeitgeist entsprechen.

Camera zooms back out

0.58 Ich erinnere nur an die im Veranstaltung im letzten Wintersemester, die von

Linksextremisten gestört worden, das Abgeordneten, ehemaligen Abgeordneten
PP wider PP HH

Bernd Lucke.

1.08 Das Auftrittsverbot des Bundestagsabgeordneten von der FDP Christian Lindner
PP HH

In Hamburg.

Camera zooms in to chest and head

1.15 Meine Damen und Herrn, Forschung und Lehre müssen frei sein, frei von

ideologischen Beschränkungen und Scheuklappen, damit der

Wissenschaftsstandort Deutschland weiter wie bisher zu unserem Wohlstand

beitragen kann.

Camera zooms back out

1.28 Deshalb lassen Sie uns streiten, gemeinsam für das Grundgesetz.
PP HH

Höchst alternated her gestures somewhat more often than Heidkamp did, spreading her arms and hands into a PP gesture at least nine times during her video. Höchst initially made the PP gesture as she introduced herself, her age, her favorite Basic Law article, and when she quoted a sentence of that article. In each of these moments, Höchst used the PP gesture to corporeally introduce a new topic. When Höchst switched to providing an example to clarify and develop her argument, she used the PP gesture when she said "Linksextremisten," holding this position before expanding her arms even wider when referencing Lucke as "Abgeordenten." Additionally, Höchst made the PP gesture as she said, "Das Auftrittsverbot," holding that position for a few words.

In this section, Höchst made her case that intellectual freedom is under threat in Germany by Left extremism (and not by her party or the radical Right) and invited her public to consider these examples through the open PP gesture with her arms outstretched and her palms facing upward. Höchst concluded with a final PP gesture when she invited the public to fight together for the Basic Law. Höchst also used air quotes to draw attention to the specific quote about censorship in the article she chose. Through such gestures, Höchst incorporated her imagined audience to consider her arguments for less social censorship and more opportunities for (Rightist) opinions.

Conclusion

Extremism and the political mainstream (*Mitte*) work in tandem with each other, offering confrontational relationships that produce contemporary democratic

political conditions. The normative center forms the precondition for understanding and labeling extremism. Often, government departments and other actors label extremism based on popular conceptions of which thought, behavior, and action are normative or anti-democratic (Salzborn 2011). AfD members strategize how to challenge the BfV while claiming their own democratic legitimacy, perhaps turning the question of radicalism on its head. These strategies come from local discussions as well as national social media campaigns to remain democratically legitimate. Additionally, through these strategies, members express their normalcy in different performative measures, such as through dress, diction, and gesture.

Such internal exchange between members illuminates the themes of permissibility and democratic legitimacy. Members debate what is permissible to write or say in different sites and how to strategize how to say these things without being labelled extreme by the government. The strategy conversations combine racial terms with claims to legitimate language, crossing terms of belonging with legitimacy. The social media campaign, *Gemeinsam für das Grundgesetz*, seeks to delegitimize the BfV by reinterpreting Germany's Basic Law and simultaneously legitimize the AfD as a democratic party. Taken together, the elements of the *Gemeinsam für das Grundgesetz* campaign that I analyzed here signify legitimacy and normalcy campaign efforts that AfD members engaged in. Such efforts build on campaign strategies I described in chapter five, where I described how members campaign normalcy through their own corporeality as well as material and linguistic forms. Each of these efforts illustrate the ways that members strive to brand their

political party and craft a Message that counters both the BfV and people who label the AfD as extremist or Nazi. This campaign – *Gemeinsam für das Grundgesetz* – is extraordinary in a few ways. While the AfD is not the first organization to try to discredit the BfV, this campaign reflects remarkable mediatized and rhetorical agility that other groups deemed extreme by the BfV and its regional offices either do not possess or have not illustrated.

Chapter 7: Collaboration

"Whoever walks with Nazis is one him/herself."[79] – Demonstrators at Berlin's Covid demonstrations, August 2020.

In this concluding chapter, I return to the themes that I introduced in the preface and first chapter of this ethnography: studying groups often called unlikeable and how community members, local politicians or others collaborate and consent to these groups. In this chapter, I first evaluate the importance of studying rightist groups. Then I evaluate forms of local political collaboration with the AfD. I conclude with an anecdote of consent between an AfD member and a community member.

Studying Rightist Groups

"How can you talk to those freaks? I never could." I was shocked when a professor said this to me about the AfD and my research. I was stunned by how blunt he was about his repulsion. While his disgust was directed at the AfD, it extended to me. After all, I am the one who can apparently "talk with freaks." What does this ability say about me?

As with other scholars studying "unlikeable" demographics, the ethics of my research and my methods are under regular scrutiny when I speak with other scholars. The questions I am regularly asked include, "Do they know that you are a

[79] Wer mit Nazis läuft, ist selber ein Nazi.

researcher?" "How do you plan on not reinforcing white supremacy/rightist ideology/Islamophobia/anti-Semitism through your publications?"

Scholars studying the so-called "repugnant Other" (Harding 1991) too often become the recipients of questions that border on interrogation rather than a healthy exchange of ideas. These interrogations can lead to unproductive defensiveness of the value of research or sensationalized storytelling to try to satiate the seemingly never-ending appetite for stories of the repugnant Other.

With the increasing interest on the political right, scholars are producing more literature on how to research this demographic ethically (for instance, Blee 1993, 2007; Minkenberg 2003; Blee and Creasap 2010; Shoshan 2016). While there are real and justifiable concerns about reinforcing supremacy or radical ideologies through studying these groups, there is not enough discussion about the ways scholars inadvertently reinforce supremacy or radical ideologies by ignoring or by keeping their academic distance from these groups or in other ways reinforce social and academic status quos.

A failure of anthropology – as a humanist field to understand the human condition – is that there are not enough studies of this kind that reflect the diverse human experience. Groups that embrace right-wing politics are often antithetical to the politics of most anthropologists. But the discipline's focus on the human experience requires scholars to address the very human reasons why people join extremist organizations and follow such notions. In demonizing or distancing

themselves from so-called extremists, scholars fail to promote education and participate fully in engaged anthropology.

Engaged anthropology comes by understanding why people perpetuate and participate in extremist notions. Engaged anthropology that is capable of contrasting radical and extremist trends emerges from field research (Herzfeld 2010) that questions, challenges, and debates with radical ideas, occupying the space on radical politics with anthropological research that is often dominated with political theory and science. Moving beyond the term applied anthropology, engaged anthropology evolves through intellectual pursuits that simultaneously illuminates real-time dilemmas and ethical complexity that people face. These intellectual pursuits illustrate how "the experiential reality of social structure always (and only) emerges in the actual performance of social interaction—in everyday life and in field research—and in which it is made palpable by creative play with its conventions" (Herzfeld 2010: 265).

In doing anthropology of sympathetic groups, some scholars might experience anosognosia (a lack of awareness of one's own condition) about the far-reaching and historically entrenched nature of their intellectual heritages and their own research with sympathetic topics or interlocutors. I first came across the term, anosognosia, from Renya's (2020; 2010) critique of anthropology. In this critique, Renya argues that some anthropologists struggle with epistemic anosognosia, "an empirical discipline's epistemological limitations with regard to truth-making practices" (Renya 2010). I refer here to the lack of awareness that some anthropologists have for the far-

reaching and uncomfortable ways that their research becomes interpreted or employed.

Commenting on the shock after Donald Trump's election and anthropologists' contention that they could provide a better perspective through ethnography, Rosa and Bonilla (2017) wrote that this claim "elides anthropology's complicity in reproducing the broader sociocultural and intellectual climate that enabled the rise of and the reactions to Trump" (202). Anthropologists' avoidance of certain demographics creates a one-sided field that can contribute, however inadvertently, to the hegemonies and norms that fosters illiberalism. I agree with McGranahan (2017) that ethnography can be an important way of "bearing witness from inside worlds" (247), but only when anthropologists engage with all worldviews can the witnessing be completer and more transformative. Similarly, Gusterson (2017) argued that while universities "seek to performatively erase prejudice, they can, perversely, function as engines of a liberal illiberalism that is complicit in creating new social schisms" (211; see also Makovicky 2013).

The "presence of racialized bodies in strategic, often highly visible, positions" (Rosa and Bonilla 2017: 202), the absence of a Holocaust, and the performative and repeated efforts to omit the word race from the German language are some of the strategies through which Germans can imagine an AfD that is non-normative, extreme, and an aberration. But the image of the AfD as extreme, constructed by members of the *Mitte* (mainstream) seeking to distance themselves from the AfD, does not examine how the *Mitte*'s normative notions foster parties like the AfD.

Such anosognosia contributes to scholars' critique, or at least hesitation, to studying "deplorable," or unsympathetic Others. Anosognosia becomes apparent when anthropologists and other scholars talk about "them" and "those people," as if scholars' ideological distance could possibly map onto linguistic or geographical distance from "those people" who are often neighbors, volunteers, colleagues, and other kinds of people who make up the collaborative experiences of life. The "self-sustaining extremism…being replicated across Europe" (Holmes 2016) is sustained through mall owners, small business operators, police officers, teachers, and other people who circulate in everyday settings. This self-sustaining extremism is based on views and notions that often merge with and sometimes come from the mainstream, making it possible for groups like the AfD to gain influence where the extremes and the *Mitte* are two pieces of the whole.

I examine the "inner cultural truths" that make so-called contemporary fascism easily aligned with middle-class, mainstream politics (Holmes 2000; Holmes 2016). While describing and discussing "hard truths" (Renya 2010), I have tried to create an engaged ethnography that is "knowledge grounded in experience and acknowledged as a product of human intellectual process" (Herzfeld 2018: 143). This ethnography differs from other scholarship on the AfD and radical politics that illustrates the AfD as a time-bound, coherent party of practitioners. Instead of creating neat answers, this ethnography reflects the uncertainty, incompleteness, and lack of lucidity in interlocutors' experiences and in everyday matters.

What I have tried to show in the nodes of political conflict that I discuss in this ethnography is a version of the 'fellowship of the flawed' (Herzfeld 2009: 133). While my interpretation of this phrase goes beyond what Herzfeld initially wrote, I think the phrase aptly applies to the German context, especially with the advent of the AfD. In these political conflicts, Germans recognize and engage each other through the "flaws and foibles [of the nation] rather than through their idealized typicality as heroic representatives of the nation" (Herzfeld 2009: 133). Despite the government organizations, fellow politicians and community members, and the media calling the AfD extreme, there is a mutuality and a relationality, uneasy at times, to groups labeled extreme and normative.

Groups like the AfD engage, often provocatively, in the already-existing discomforting political junctures. From his political affiliation, it is understandable that the professor would call AfD members "freaks" and over time, my own shock at his bluntness has dissipated. But freaks or not, acknowledging the fellowship of the flawed does not excuse or justify unlikeable politics. It simply recognizes that no matter the subject or group, there are inevitably disagreeable attributes.

In his essay, "The Uses of Complicity in the Changing Mise-en-Scène of Anthropological Fieldwork," George Marcus (1997) traces crucial shifts in anthropologists' approaches to both fieldwork and ethnography during the 20th century. From two main texts, Marcus traces how anthropologists dealt with what he termed complicity in their fieldwork sites over the decades. Each of these historical

texts precipitated changes in anthropological work and researcher's subjectivity and reflexivity.

First, Marcus analyzes Geertz's essay "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight." Marcus writes, "In [Geertz's] cockfight anecdote, complicity makes the outsider the desired anthropological insider. It is a circumstantial, fortuitous complicity that, by precipitating a momentary bond of solidarity gains Geertz admission to the inside of Balinese relations (the means to ethnographic authority)" (Marcus 1997: 89). In this fortuitous complicity, the beneficiary is the anthropologist with privileged status who gains entry into a community that otherwise ignores him, while maintaining his rather innocuous status as researcher who is later able to read and interpret this community.

Next, Marcus describes Rosaldo's essay, "Imperialist Nostalgia," to describe a different kind of ethnography that reflects an alternate complicitous relationship with agents of change. "Rosaldo captures and indicts the characteristic rhetoric of ethics that pervades ethnography, at the same time pinpointing the primary relation of complicity in fieldwork-not with the informant or the people, but with the agents of change" (Marcus 1997: 94). Rosaldo, Marcus writes, approaches both fieldwork and ethnography differently – through his own role and complicity from his position in precipitating change in the community he is researching.

Transitioning from these earlier shifts in the way anthropologists have done fieldwork and approached ethnography (in relation to complicity), Marcus describes Holmes's (2000) work on illicit discourse circulation in Europe. Marcus (1997)

perceptively writes that these illicit discourses “are not alien or marked off from respectable ranges of opinion but in fact have deep connections with them” (102). Marcus continues by arguing that such discourses (of which the AfD is a part), deserve

> “to be listened to closely before being exoticized as a figment of the politically extreme or being ethically condemned too precipitously. This calculated and imposed naivete, necessary for fieldwork to be conducted at all, is potentially the source of greatest strength and special insight of ethnographic analysis, leading to both the ‘complex or involved’ sense of complicity as well as exposure to complicity's other sense, of ‘being an accomplice, partnership in an evil action’ (102).

Such radical notions and illicit discourse are already embedded in prevailing perceptions; this means that such radical notions cannot be exoticized or easily labeled extreme without necessarily implicating normative discourse as complicit in this illicit rhetoric. Researchers employ strategic naivete, Marcus writes, to unravel the way these discourses are entwined and even co-constitutive, while also revealing complicity’s negative sense of becoming partners. Marcus (1997) continues that “the doctrine of relativism, long considered a partial inoculation of the anthropologist against ethically questionable positions in far-off places, does not work as well in fieldwork among fascists and Nazis” (101). Fieldwork among fascists, Nazis and other exclusionary groups that promote extremism and authoritarianism challenge the doctrine of relativism that anthropologists have long heralded. This kind of fieldwork exposes the limitations of relativism and the ideals of anthropologists. This kind of research shows that the doctrine of relativism is never any kind of inoculation. Relativism enables anthropologists to ignore ethically questionable situations and

notions, but the perceived inoculation that comes from promoting relativism is the consequence of misunderstanding one's inevitable complicity.

Gomberg-Muñoz (2018) illuminates this relationship between perceived inoculation and ignored complicity. Gomberg-Muñoz, writing in a context different than this ethnography, calls for complicity through becoming accomplices with communities that are disempowered. Without inappropriately equating Gomberg-Muñoz's argument to my research on communities that are empowered and too often innocuous, I find Gomberg-Muñoz's description of complicity useful here.

> Calling attention to the distinction between accomplices and allies is not merely a question of political action, but seeks to disrupt broader racialized binaries of innocence and criminality. By its very nature, allyship is typically a position of relative innocence: if you identify as an ally, you are likely white, middle-class, and occupying a social status where you are perceived as innocuous. This perception confers some protection from state violence and oppression—and it is precisely that protection that makes a person an ally rather than someone who is 'directly targeted' by the state (Gomberg-Muñoz 2018: 36).

Gomberg-Muñoz's emphasis on one's innocuous positionality as protected from state retribution (and I add social, economic, and political reprisal) determines whether one is an accomplice or an ally. Opening oneself up to the reality of complicitous relationships reveals the reality of one's own tenuous position. Acknowledging complicity, whether by researching radical groups or choosing complicity in the way that Gomberg-Muñoz describes it, requires researchers to recognize how their position is or could be fraught and the ways in which they may not always recognize as a power-laden researcher.

As Herzfeld (2018) writes, to take a realist position, scholars must recognize the political implications. “No anthropological observation ever stands free of the political and ideological perspectives either of the anthropologist or of the local social actors” (Herzfeld 2018: 144). Considering ethnography’s constant entanglement, with political and ideological forces, engaged, anthropological work is a form of labor in that it is always a negotiated effort between theoretical views that are shaped by political elements and hegemonic perspectives that shape research possibilities. As Herzfeld (2018) writes that “the work we do offers a critical perspective on an increasingly dominant set of prefabricated truths promulgated by national governments and other powerful entities, including, increasingly, transnational financial players” (144). Being part of broader, real-time debates requires a shift in anthropologists’ perspective. Nader (2018) writes about anthropologists’ silence around the first Gulf War. Nader argues that while anthropologists might want to offer media outlets “the greater depth that anthropology can offer,” anthropologists often fail to be engaged in the real time politics, instead reproducing hegemonic perceptions and norms (Nader 2018: 372). “Anthropologists, of all people, should be the most sensitive to being caught by cultural hegemonies. Our work suffers, so do the people we study, and so does our country” (Nader 2018: 374).

To give a partial answer to the professor whose quote I began this section: talking with “those freaks” (AfD supporters) acknowledges the ways he and I are already like many of them (white, educated, heteronormative) and how these normative statuses already have privileged us in numerous and unarticulated ways. It

recognizes that AfD rhetoric builds on social norms and other political parties' efforts to continue to privilege people like us, keeping up protected from state or social interference. Additionally, talking with "those freaks" acknowledges the ways we are different, putting us into sometimes painful and uncomfortable interactions that we might otherwise not have and making more apparent the ways that our views collide, connect, and comply.

Collaborating with the AfD

In this section, I consider in more detail the issue of democratic legitimacy through different parties' political collaborations with the AfD. These real-time practices substantiate Holmes's (2016) argument that there is a contemporary fascism emerging in Europe that is fostered by mainstream political parties. As Holmes writes, mainstream political parties easily "assimilate the ideas incubated by the extreme right – most notably those concerning the status of migrants and refugees – while decrying their racism and xenophobia" (Holmes 2016: 2). Through AfD members' practical alignment and collaboration with other parties in local government and parliaments, the social and political labels of extremism can seem unbelievable, almost as if they are a strategic way to publicly dismiss AfD members as extreme while simultaneously collaborating with them.

In this case, how believable is the process and social identification of labeling extremism when local collaborations undermine the extremist label? How useful are theoretical concepts of extremism that are crucially based on an easily defined *Mitte*

(mainstream)? More importantly, if the AfD is based, at least partially, in normative German notions, then what does that say about the broader German political landscape that can enable a party not only to exist but to flourish and collaborate with parties identified as the mainstream?

It is precisely these uncomfortable questions that make it easier for scholars, community members, and politicians to call AfD members extreme. Anything other than an extreme AfD, whose members are supposed to be Nazis, would call into question what is normal, normative, and extreme in Germany and how these labels and notions come about. Recognizing the normative elements in AfD politics would mean reckoning with the national heritages that continue to foster such political views too easily dismissed as "extreme," but which are already embedded in the mainstream.

If one assumes that groups like the AfD are not too far outside the norm, then what does that say about ordinary Germany? How does the *Mitte* (mainstream), and everyone who considers themselves mainstream, become implicated or entrenched in an "extreme" that might not be so far from the normative, or that is certainly entwined with the *Mitte* (mainstream)?

To paraphrase Harding (1991), radical elements do not "simply exist 'out there' but are also produced by modern discursive practice" (374). Rather, radical elements, which of course is a designation based on the speaker's perception, are everywhere, inhabiting every social strata, as I have tried to make clear in this ethnography by writing my interlocutors' occupation. This reality – that radicality is

continually ever-present – is disturbing to binary frameworks of clear-cut radical and normative people and ideas. Phrases such as "Whoever walks with Nazis is one him/herself,"[80] are catchy because they demand simplicity and clearly delineated definitions of complicity. But localized, individual complicity is rarely so clearly demarcated.

In each of the examples I describe below, complicity is also relational – people are complicit with each other or with ideas, for instance. Just as relational Messaging has an audience who contributes to new or re-Messaging, complicitous actions occur between and with people. For instance, local collaborations contribute to AfD acceptance. Members participate in these local levels of government, reporting back in their respective local, regular meetings about their experiences and successes. One volunteer, Harry, explained to me that his neighborhood government was finally able to pass a resolution to put in a much-needed stoplight at an intersection. This success was only possible because members of the Green party were not present; this party had always prevented the other parties from collaborating with the AfD. Since the AfD had suggested the stoplight, the other parties refused to collaborate. But with the most vocal opposition absent from the meeting, Harry said, they were finally able to collaborate and get the stoplight installed.

Such local collaboration has been reported on in media and by researchers. In a *New York Times* article, Bennhold (2019) reports that the "official line from mainstream political parties is clear: Any alliance with the far right is categorically

[80] Wer mit Nazis läuft, ist selbst einer.

banned" to prevent any legitimation of the "far right's nationalist populist agenda" that would "undermine the values that underpin German democracy" (Bennhold 2019). Bennhold (2019) quotes Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, who was at the time the leader of the CDU and Merkel's successor, as accusing the AfD of creating an

> 'intellectual climate' in which a far-right extremist shot Walter Lübcke, a regional government official, in June — the first far right assassination of a politician in Germany since World War II. Whoever toys with the idea of working with the Alternative for Germany, or AfD by its German initials, Ms. Kramp-Karrenbauer said recently, 'should close their eyes and imagine Walter Lübcke.'

But as Bennfold writes, "enforcing a ban on the local level has proved tricky. In small towns, the local face of the AfD may be the doctor or firefighter. Political ideology feels less of an obstacle [for local politicians to collaborate] when the issues of the day are things like road repair or renovating the nursery school." This is one reason, she writes, that local parties have worked with the AfD. The German news organization, ARD, published findings from the ARD program, *Report Mainz*, that surveyed almost 60 community parliament in Saxony and Thüringen and found that in 18 communities the CDU and AfD have worked together (Bennhold 2019). These reports raise concerns about the normalization of radicality (embodied in the AfD) and the willingness for mainstream parties like the ruling CDU to work with the AfD despite the directive from federal party leadership to not work with the AfD.

The Thüringen election took place in the fall of 2019 along with state elections in Saxony and Brandenburg. The AfD did well in all three states. But in Thüringen, parties struggled to form a government. While the reigning Left gained percentage points, its past coalition partners did not. For the Left to continue to lead

the government, it would have to form a minority government with other left parties. After five months of negotiating and in an unexpected vote, the FDP member Thomas Kemmerich won the election with the help of the CDU and the AfD. The political collaboration with the AfD caused quite a stir nationwide with protests and dramatic actions (flowers thrown at the feet of Thomas Kemmerich) and statements referencing Hitler's first win that also took place in Thüringen (Hermsmeier 2020).

The ensuing debate[81] in Thüringen focused on how democracies function, collaboration with extremism, and the pervasive notion of the imagined *Mitte* (mainstream) that is both shaped by and shapes political interests. This incident – the collaboration among the FDP, the CDU, and the AfD – showed explicitly how collaborations with the AfD were imagined as possible while simultaneously reflecting the ensuing political firestorm that emerged for the FDP and CDU for collaborating with the AfD. In a *New Republic* assessment of the Thüringen vote, Adrian Daub wrote that a discussion of "the *Mitte*" (mainstream) reflected the debate over what happened in Thüringen. Daub (2020) notes

> For certain politicians and journalists, there seems to be something *self-evidently legitimate* about this 'center,' whatever it might entail; something self-evidently illegitimate about whatever does not belong to the 'center;' and, most important, an equivalence between the left and the right—no matter how far to the right the right goes (see also Hersmeier 2020).

[81] In addition to Thüringen, the AfD made gains in the city of Gera, which is in Thüringen. The election took place in May 2019 and the AfD had received the most votes (28.8%). After fifteen months, Reinhard Etzrodt, a former doctor, received twenty-three of forty votes for the chairman of the city council chairman. Since the AfD only had twelve seats in the city council, this meant to Etzrodt received eleven votes from other parties. While not receiving nearly as much nationwide attention as the Thüringen election results, the Gera election was reported on by the *Spiegel* and MDR. See Spiegel 2020 and MDR 2021 in bibliography.

In the horseshoe concept of politics in Germany, the *Mitte* is self-evidently legitimate, in the words of Daub, while both Left and Right are suspect. Because of the self-evident legitimacy of the *Mitte*, those in the *Mitte* never have to justify their views and are used as the measuring stick of extremism and radicalism. Of course, the problem with the *Mitte* is that its legitimacy is not self-evident, but comes because it is not "extreme." Daub (2020) continues

> Indeed, in the debate over what had happened in Thuringia, talk of 'The Center' (*Die Mitte*) was never far. The concept of *Die Mitte*, and its stranglehold on the imagination of a particular political class in Germany, will be familiar to American voters who have heard paeans to this shifting, elusive middle ground. For certain politicians and journalists, there seems to be something self-evidently legitimate about this 'center,' whatever it might entail; something self-evidently illegitimate about whatever does not belong to the 'center;' and, most important, an equivalence between the left and the right—no matter how far to the right the right goes.
>
> Germans know this 'both sides' argument all too well. It is a ghoulish calculus that equates far-left punks setting a trash can on fire with an entire political party advocating for ethnic cleansing. It is not just a rhetorical device: For decades German law enforcement, above all the Constitutional Protection Service (*Verfassungsschutz*, roughly Germany's FBI), has suspected the far left of harboring terrorist influences, while being blind to very obvious terrorist tendencies that thrive among active, self-identified neo-Nazis.

As Daub, Bennhold, and others point out, the Thüringen election complicated how extremism can be understood in real-time elections and coalitions. Putting the response to this initial FDP-CDU-AfD coalition, coalition partners ignored federal leadership and considered the AfD normative and centered enough to create a coalition with them after five months of no government. But after national attention and considerable critique from fellow party members federally and in other states, the FDP and CDU disbanded the coalition.

In democracy, there is a collaborative opposition between extremism and the *Mitte*. Evaluating extremism and normativity often relies on the "empirically untenable postulate of a non-extremist political center" (Salzborn 2011: 13).[82] The extremist ends buoy up the *Mitte*, even though the *Mitte* itself shifts. The confrontational relations between extremism and the *Mitte* work to reinforce the normative *Mitte*. Without the powerful concept of the *Mitte* as normative, safe, and right in the imagination of voters and politicians, it would be unnecessary to name extremism and claim democratic legitimacy. The need for normalcy and the *Mitte* reinforces the processes of and stakes involved in naming extremism.

By positing the AfD, and any collaboration with the AfD, as collaboration with extremism, critics position the AfD as binarily extreme, inherently opposed to the normative *Mitte.* But this imagined construct, the *Mitte*, operates so strongly, it requires politicians and parties to appeal to its misleading sense of normality and legitimacy. Without these exclusionary efforts, the AfD would not need to work so hard to "normalize" their image. Further, as Bennhold writes, "Refusing to cooperate with democratically elected representatives strikes many constituents as undemocratic. 'It is an insult to the voters," said Uwe Junge, a state legislator for the AfD and former Christian Democrat. "As if we were the undemocratic ones!' As populists win more seats, policies to exclude them can backfire by appearing to validate the far right's claim to represent the will of the people against a corrupt mainstream elite" (Bennhold 2019). Many members I spoke with made this claim,

[82] "das empirisch nicht haltbare Postulat einer nicht-extremistischen politischen Mitte."

that they were truly democratic because they were always willing to collaborate with their colleagues, and that the mainstream parties were no longer democratic. From parliament members to local AfD councils, members would emphasize how they "live democracy" by giving everyone a voice, their collaborative nature, and their commitment to issues of "the people." But such claims only gain credibility against the backdrop of "exclusionary" mainstream parties that "ignore" the percentage of AfD voters.

Perhaps Mouffe's theory of democracy as contested pluralism should give one comfort, knowing that democracy operates best when agnostic political parties (of which the AfD is one) alternatively compete and collaborate, yet ultimately respect one another's right to compete in democratic paradigms.

> Contrary to the antagonistic friend/enemy relation in which there is no shared symbolic terrain and in which the different sides aim at eliminating their opponent, in an agonistic relation adversaries share a common symbolic space and they recognize, to some degree, the legitimacy of the claims of their opponents of "conflictual consensus" exists between the various groups (Mouffe 2012: 632-633).

But somehow Mouffe's theory, at least when it comes to the threat of radicality and extremism, is not comforting, nor is it obviously applied even in contemporary governmental structures. Perhaps why Mouffe's argument for a recognition of agnostic relations in healthy democracies is unsatisfying when it comes to parties like the AfD that are legitimately elected and represented at all levels of government, is that its presence makes bare the discursive and politically acted out complicity between normative and radical discourse. This disturbing complicity

comes out especially in localized contexts where discourse becomes reflected in people – neighbors, family, friends, colleagues, and service providers, such as doctors, hotel and mall owners, and lawyers.

In Mouffe's theory, there is no recognition of complicity and how it operates in both discourse and practice. By this, I mean that there is no recognition of the way people perceive complicity between the normative and radical being a driving factor in socio-political efforts. This lack of recognition between complicitous relationships, especially among protected populations such as middle-class and elite groups, makes it possible to subsequently ignore how this complicity between normative and radical elements leaves bare communities that are historically unprotected from the state and social repercussions.

Laughing with so-called (or actual) Nazis

In this background I draw broadly on research done on comedy and satire to draw out elements that frame the examples I share below. In theorizing comedy and humor, anthropologists have often considered these subjects in relation to the state (Herzfeld 2016; Mbembe 1992) as a form of resistance and mimicry (Boyer and Yurchak 2010; Redmond 2008). But since my research does not analyze the state but rather contemporary conflicts in Germany, I diverge from viewing humor as only a relationship between subjects and the state and instead look at humor and comedy through degrees of relationships.

Additionally, throughout this ethnography, I analyzed some of the conflicts through humor to illustrate how the serious questions underlining these conflicts

become ludicrous and absurd. In this chapter, I continue this analysis and focus on different humorous moments between people. Rather than thematically organizing anecdotes and narratives, I instead include different kinds of humorous moments to reflect the broad range of comedy that occurred but also to explore the questions I listed above.

Writing about humor in the postcolony, Mbembe (1992) writes, “but rather the way in which the people who laugh kidnap power and force it, as if by accident, to contemplate its own vulgarity” (Mbembe 1992: 12). Mbembe (1992) continues that “with the conscious aim of avoiding such trouble that people locate the fetish of state power in the realm of the ridicule; there, they can tame it, or shut it up and render it powerless” (12). Jokes and humor generally reflect the localized nuance through “the inversions, reversals, subversions, the breaking of rules and crossing of invisible lines” (Carty and Musharbash 2008: 213).

However, McGowan (2017) argues that even when authorities permit ridicule of themselves this does not indicate successful subversion. “Comedy can assist the authorities in cementing their authority just as easily as it can undermine that authority” (163). Comedy, McGowan further argues, is politically (and I would add socially) ambivalent, perhaps relying on what Mbembe (1992) recognizes is space for improvisation that arises through societal plurality and contradictions (11). Additionally, as Dağtaş (2016) writes, “novel aesthetic forms of humorous activism that emerged during the Gezi Park protests operated within and through - rather than

against - existing cultural and political express" (13). In the following example, I draw on this previous research of humor, power, and normativity.

On the Day of German Unity in Germany, I traveled to the Baltic Sea coast to observe an AfD rally. Police barricades divided up the New Market square and over twenty police vans and riot police ringed the perimeter and the barricades. The main Antifa force stood to the right of the podium and a smaller anti-AfD group on the left of the podium, both outside of the barricades. Police distanced themselves 1.5 meters apart along the streets and along the barricades.

Everyone was white except for a few police officers of color. Before entering the rally, members and supports were required to sign in because of the Covid regulations. Additionally, each person received a small German flag as they entered. Two people had German flag umbrellas on which was written "I (heart symbol) Germany" in English. Scheduled to start at 16.00, the rally began late. At 15.57 there were only 16 people, including one young woman. At 16.00 there were 21 people. At 16.15 there were 40 people and eventually by the middle of the event, there were 50 participants.

Covid was perpetually part of the proceedings. During the speeches, the police announcer spoke over the loudspeaker to remind people that the Covid regulations included keeping 1.5 meters away from each other and wearing a face mask. The police announcements were usually quite startling, stopping the first speech by a man in a three-piece suit with a pipe in his mouth and the Antifa shouts.

The AfD's parliament chairman in this state gave a speech dressed in his tourist black cowboy hat, fitted jeans, and gray flat shoes. Ignoring the whistleblowing and Nazi name-calling during his speech, the chairman smiled and waved at the end as he disembarked the podium. After his speech, one of the older white men on the side behind the podium at one edge of the Markt shouted something like, go away Nazi (I certainly heard the word Nazi).

The chairman shouted back with a smile as he walked towards the man, "That is freedom of opinion (Das ist Meinungsfreiheit). He and the man started talking to each other, energetically moving their bodies as they spoke as other leaned in to hear what they were saying to each other. Soon, both men were laughing, and Kramer would within minutes' walk back to the rally.

A homeless man made his way past the Antifa demo, across the no-mans-land to the AfD rally, laboriously walked along this rally, pushing his large cart of bags. The clothes he wore were old but not tattered, his ankles swollen, his face red, his white hair hanging at his shoulders. He made his way past the older people shouting Nazi and blowing whistles behind the AfD podium, past the chairman and his laughing interlocutor. They stopped and stared at him as he slowly came, then moved out of the way of his cart before resuming their whistleblowing. The homeless man continued his way to the end of the market square near where I was sitting and to the street. One of the police officers saw him almost enter the street as oncoming cars came, gently pulled him back on to the side of the road and helped steer him to the

pedestrian side of the road. I watched the homeless man push his bags until he was out of sight.

The man continued to stand there after the chairman left and people continue to blow whistles and shout things, but that moment – when the chairman (the alleged Nazi) and the man laughed with each other – was demarcated for me. I was too far to hear what the chairman and the man were saying to each other above the whistles and jeering, but I and many others watched as the chairman seemed to disarm the man through humor. What did that laugh mean? What were the kind of "piled-up structures of inference and implication through which an ethnographer is continually trying to pick his way" (Geertz 1973: 313). What does it indicate when one can laugh with a so-called Nazi (and the chairman has been cited for racist and anti-female language as well as borderline pro-Nazi sentiment)? And what value is there for the so-called Nazi to make someone laugh? To what extent is humor complicitous? Not all humor is complicitous, and whether or not it is emerges through the context and thick description in which the humor takes place, "to show how (and why) at that time, in that place, their copresence produced a situation in which systematic misunderstanding reduced traditional form to social farce" (Geertz 1973: 314).

In this example, the chairman is "kidnapping power" (Mbembe 1992: 12) through joking and laughing with a critic. The chairman portrayed himself as a congenial person who affirms the freedom of speech and opinion of critics. In this example, the chairman tamed and rendered the critique momentarily powerless and

affirmed his own position of power by silencing through humor the man who called him a Nazi.

This section comes after three years of fieldwork and reflections on how often laughter filled the events I attended. Realizing how little media and scholarship about the AfD mentioned laughter, I want to share how much humor took place in many of the events I attended. Humor provided a sense of unity, resolved tense situations, and created a sense of congeniality. There was not always laughter, but there was a lot of laughter, whether it was elderly members explaining to me through deep belly laughter what Swingers were at the 13 February commemoration of the bombing of Dresden, contradicting or ignoring the sobriety of the event, or members making fun of candidates' speaking abilities. In drafting this chapter, I am not ignoring the somber, uncomfortable, or highly problematic encounters. As Herzfeld (2016) writes, "To laugh, to appreciate the grim humor of this illusory condition, is not to ignore the tragedies that it has entailed. It may perhaps, however, offer a way of working back from the farce that Marx saw as the effect of history's repetitious tendencies" (4).

As I conclude this ethnography, I share one more anecdote – a joke I told to an AfD member, Joe. Joe met me for tea in town. As we sat together, Joe told me how he and other AfD members are often called Nazis, expressing how unjust that is, but that many others who have gone against the mainstream are also called Nazis. Joe mentioned that Green party members often call AfD members Nazis and during a moment of silence, I blurted out a joke about white German Green party members who advertise their cosmopolitanism through eating Indian food, their

environmentalism through iPhones and Teslas, and their anti-racism by protesting anti-Blackness in the US. I thought it was funny because it juxtaposed the hubris and political morality against the reality of the continued environmental and racial harm that is often unknowingly done by such surely well-meant political morality. I imagine that Joe and I interpreted the joke in different ways, coming from different political backgrounds. My joke was a critique of the entangled politics of the mainstream that upholds the hegemonic social and economic constructs it simultaneously denounces, of which the Green party is now a part.

I had not planned the joke, nor did I expect the joke to be well-received because of my non-native German skills, but Joe laughed heartily. He said that his son voted for the Green party; the other night, Joe and his wife visited his son and the son's girlfriend. The younger generation took Joe and his wife to an Indian restaurant and that is why, the man said, he thought the joke was so funny – because they vote for the Green party and they took him and his wife to an Indian restaurant – Joe said as he continued to laugh. I immediately apologized and probably blushed, not realizing that my joke about a nondescript Green party member could have had such a personal meaning, but he said it was alright, it was funny.[83] I assume my joke was funny because it reminded Joe of his son who is a Green party voter, while Joe is an AfD voter. Perhaps it diffused some of the tension this man later told me he had with

[83] I also made jokes about the AfD to members and non-members. This joke about Green party members did not help me when I told Sachsen AfD members that I often found Rico Gebhardt's (Left) speeches interesting.

his son over their different political views or opened up new areas of discussion for us.

This joke signaled a change in our relationship. At this point, we barely knew each other, and the joke eased our conversation. We continued to talk occasionally but quite openly about our different perspectives. At a different meeting months later, Joe came to my defense when someone questioned that I was a researcher – meaning that he wondered what kind of researcher I was (Green party affiliate, Linke, Antifa, generally against the AfD, etc.). Joe hurriedly said that I was all right, and then, after a brief pause, added perhaps for emphasis, She is a supporter. Startled by this designation, though perhaps not realizing at the time that it was perhaps just a way of saying and doing several things to help me out, I quickly explained that I was a researcher from the US and was interested in broader topics and was looking at the AfD as an example.

My joke about the average Green party member was just that – a joke – meant to comment on potentially detrimental publicized, political morality and was by no means meant to be grounds for later being labeled as an AfD supporter, especially when I had been openly critical about certain perspectives, so much so that I had offended some members and had then been derogatively labeled as "a Green party member" and a disturber. Perhaps part of my joke came because enough members and building security had presumed I was either a disruptor or a Green party member. As one person said, I was a young, white women; another person made that assumption because of my educational level, and another person said I was likely

considered a Green party member because I asked critical questions (not seen positively).

Jokes and laughter demarcate those who understand or are part of the joke. “Laughter is a boundary thrown up around those laughing, those sharing the joke. Its role in demarcating difference, of collectively identifying against an Other, is as bound to processes of social exclusion as to inclusion. Indeed, the two are one” (Carty and Musharbash 2008: 214). In this setting, Joe and I shared a laugh at the expense of Green party members, particularly those who fit the stereotype expressed in the joke, shoring up our own connection while demarcating ourselves from the Green party. As Carty and Musharbash (2008) write, “learning the laughing lines, getting the jokes, coming to share a ‘sense of humour’ is perhaps the central yet strangely nebulous heart of understanding, and belonging, within social relationships” (209).

But as I briefly mentioned elsewhere in this ethnography, I also made jokes at the expense of AfD members, such as in my introductory anecdote in chapter one where I mocked AfD “poverty.” While this joke about Green party members could be considered temporary collusion or complicity of some degree and established a timestamped connected between Joe and myself, this joke plays a role in the broader context of my relationship with Joe or other members in the AfD. Even the term relationship is fraught. Jokes, and the relationships that emerge out of them, are often socially and politically ambivalent. Just as the chairman and his heckler in the audience I mentioned earlier) likely did not develop a long-term relationship after they shared a laugh, Joe and I did not develop a deep and abiding relationship based

on this single joke. Stemming from improvisation, the ambivalence in both joke-making and receiving can create, if only temporarily, alternate social relations or reify existing relations. "The evaluation of comedy must examine not only its source or object but take into account its effects…The radical potential of comedy lies in the specific way that it disrupts our everyday lives and our everyday understanding" (McGowan 2017: 164). The broader effects of the Green party joke was one of several initial steps to establishing an identity for me. The tension, and the discomfort in laughing with alleged or actual Nazis, is what McGowan (2017) writes is the speculative part of comedy and forces people to confront their own subjectivity.

Laughing with so-called (or actual) Nazis show the heart of this tension in complicity. These humorous moments fostered temporary connections between opposing actors or between interlocutor and researcher. And yet sometimes, laughing with or at so-called Nazis or competing political actors diffuses tensions and reflects congeniality.

Perhaps the Saxon AfD petition about the SKD from chapter three can shed some insight on this tension. During the plenary session, several members of parliament from different parties responded to Kirste's smiling demeanor as he began his speech with an improvised call and response. What court transcribers called "Heiterkeit" (amusement) was laughter among several of the parliament fractions, telling each other jokes and laughing with each other. From my angle, I could see Rico Gebhart (Left) look over towards the Green and CDU fractions and laugh; I could see SPD members leaning over the aisle to speak to and heartily laugh with

Linke members on the one side and Green members on the other aisle. Since this session took place during Covid and members were required to sit apart from each other, there were several parliament members sitting in roll chairs in the back who leaned over to each other and across each other to say something and then erupt in laughter. The remarkably unruffled Kirste continued and even seemed to enjoy the joviality.

While the humor may not be translatable on paper to an English-speaking audience, the improvised call-and-response was so funny that I struggled hard to stifle my laughter. The parliament members openly indicated their "merriment," as written by the transcribers, by laughing loudly and even Kirste laughed. Part of the humor, at least for me, came because Kirste was trying to argue against the naming conventions and in his rhetorical call and response, seemed to be pointing to the absurdity of these naming conventions. Instead of agreeing with the absurdity of the naming conventions, parliament members engaged Kirste by participating in an impromptu call and response where they seemed to signal their assent to the naming conventions by loudly exclaiming what the new names were when asked to do so, both indicating their knowledge of and agreement to the new names.

In this ethnography, I analyzed the rightist political group, Alternative for Germany, to understand the entanglements between the mainstream and the extremes. My argument is that while the AfD is perceived as an extremist political group, some of their views are not so different from the German mainstream. In fact, in some

cases, it is the *Mitte* (mainstream) that may make the AfD possible. AfD members Message their normalcy and legitimacy by playing with German normative ideals about race, gender, and migration, making those norms – and the AfD – seem to be a normal, ordinary part of the German community. AfD efforts are largely performative, invoking German speech and performance codes to position members as ordinary, mainstream, and in some ways likeable.

That AfD members are able to do so points to how members are connected, and based in, the German mainstream. While individual politicians' comments are considered extreme and radical, the broader political stances and local AfD Messaging of normalcy and democratic legitimacy work to perform an ordinary and mainstream image of the AfD, a party often labeled as extreme.

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