Reactionary Postmodernism? Neoliberalism, Multiculturalism, the Internet, and the Ideology of the New Far Right in Germany

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REACTIONARY POSTMODERNISM? NEOLIBERALISM, MULTICULTURALISM, THE INTERNET, AND THE IDEOLOGY OF THE NEW FAR RIGHT IN GERMANY

A Thesis Presented

by

William Peter Fitz

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“Perhaps one will view the rise of the Alternative for Germany in the foreseeable future as inevitable, as a portent for major changes, one that is as necessary as it was predictable.

What is meant here is not only the oncoming economic collapse, or the latency of the Euro crisis, but also the gradual questioning of the fraudulent modus vivendi upon which the state doctrine of recent decades has been based: Europe and ties to the West as a definitive solution to the German Question, the nation-state as an anachronism, checkbook diplomacy and the creation of peace without weapons, an existence hemmed in by friends, economy as destiny, the welfare state as a matter of course, immigration as an asset, consumerism as a sedative, Auschwitz as a founding myth, the Sonderweg [Germany’s “path of uniqueness”] as the cause of all evil on Earth. None of this will endure, and in the upcoming struggles for resources, it will be not only over material resources, but also and especially intellectual ones.”

--Karlheinz Weißmann, New Right author

The turn of the 21st century, now quickly fading into history, was a moment of celebration of the “end of history” as global capitalism and liberal democracy triumphed over Soviet communism. It was assumed that new social developments and nascent technologies such as the internet would be imbedded in and reinforce these trends. Interconnected economy and communication would lead to a worldwide homogenization of values, as all people could have equal access to the markets of goods and ideas. Yet the conditions were already developing for a deviation from this dream; not for the first time, the presumption that mankind had found its highest form of organization permitted complacency. Several crises in the global economic and political order-- the 2008 financial collapse, the 2009 Eurozone crisis, and the 2013 migrant crisis-- as well as the festering of unaddressed inequalities prompted the demand for an alternative to the still newly-hegemonic system.

This vacuum, left unaddressed by mainstream neoliberal and neoconservative parties across the Western world, has allowed the radical right to build a momentum that has not been

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seen since the 1930s. In the Federal Republic of Germany, only a united country for less than three decades, the longstanding suspicion of such movements acquired by its guilt from the past is waning. Its two main parties, Angela Merkel’s ruling center-conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and its wavering coalition partner, the center-left Social Democratic Party (SPD) have both seen significant segments of their voters pulled over to the far right Alternative for Germany (AfD), which has become the parliamentary voice for nativism, xenophobia, and Euroscepticism since its inception in 2013. Other, more democracy-hostile social movements have also emerged: Pegida (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamification of the West) seemed to erupt spontaneously on the streets of Dresden, concentrating the anger of up to 25,000 participants on Muslim foreigners.2 The Identitarian Movement (IB), a pan-European white identity crusade directly influenced by the intellectual New Right, embraces a militant postmodern personality and skillfully manipulates digital media. What used to be small, underground networks of neo-Nazi punks has grown the face-- and body-- of a respectable movement which attracts millions combined.

From 1945 until the last few years, Germany was known as a “blank space on the map” for far right populism.3 Commonly held to be “the European country least prone to nationalist rhetoric, and one that has consciously sought to refashion its identity within Europe,” the only successes of far right parties until recently had been mostly limited to the state level.4 While it is true that Germany has had a strong “societal consensus” against Nazism, 1945 did not sever the

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lineage of right-wing authoritarian attitudes in the country.\textsuperscript{5} The first far right party in the new democracy emerged before the year was even over; the anti-denazification Association for Economic Reconstruction (WAV) was joined in the next few years by the German Conservative Party--German Right Party (DKP-DRP) and the Action Group/European People’s Movement of Germany (SzT/EVD). Combined, these parties with independent ultranationalists managed to win more than 10\% of the votes in the first West German Bundestag (federal parliament) elections, running on overtly neo-Nazi platforms. A number of other parties, mostly representing individual regions, emerged shortly afterwards. Within a few years, however, the first (and to this day only) constitutional ban on a right wing party was imposed on the fledgling Socialist Reich Party (SRP), which claimed that Admiral Dönitz, Hitler’s hand-picked successor, was the “only legitimate authority.”\textsuperscript{6} The rest continued to exist, identifying themselves with the political and intellectual cousin to Nazism, the “Conservative Revolution” of the Weimar era, and calling for “the release of all the war criminals, re-establishment of the historical frontiers of Germany, and reconstitution of a new Reich founded upon ‘authentic German culture.’”\textsuperscript{7} These parties fell apart over the next 20 years,\textit{ in spite of} a continued prevalence of Nazi nostalgia and apologism among the general population.\textsuperscript{8}

In the wake of the prohibition of the SRP, the far right began to organize instead through informal subcultural organizations to avoid the weaknesses of public political parties, in effect

\textsuperscript{7} Zimmermann, E. and Saalfeld, T. ’The Three waves of West German Right-Wing Extremism’, in Merkel, P.H., and Weinberg, L. (eds.), \textit{Encounters with the Contemporary Radical Right}. (Boulder: Westview, 1993), 53, quoted in Ibid., 65.
\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., 65–66.
circumscribing the powers of the German Constitutional Court.  

It was in this time that the “Naumann Affair” surfaced, which indicated that the extreme right had changed strategies; rather than building its own parties, it sought to hijack others which had already gained legitimacy. Werner Naumann, named successor to Goebbels in Hitler’s testament, evaded capture after the war. While working as a manager in a trading company, Naumann began to reestablish contacts from the SS and Hitler Youth, intending to build a circle of underground conspirators to infiltrate mainstream political parties, especially the Free Democratic Party (FDP). The plot was discovered and Neumann was arrested by the occupying British government in 1953, reaching national and international news. However, the affair was not a point of heavy research into right-wing extremism until years later.  

It was not until 1964 that the next viable far right party was formed. The National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD), a still-existing neo-Nazi party, attempted to hide the Nazi pasts of many of its leaders through a platform of “Prussian conservatism.” Though it obtained a presence in seven state parliaments, it ultimately failed to meet the 5% minimum threshold for the national parliament in the 1969 elections. This occurred against the backdrop of two important moments in the republic’s history: the 1966-67 economic crisis, which marked the first time unemployment rose since 1945, and the growing leftist student movement which strongly fought the NPD. The first certainly had a positive impact on the NPD’s numbers-- as Pierre Ignazi points out, the legitimacy of democracy in Germany could not initially be built on a strong national “civic culture,” but stood more on the ‘output legitimacy’ of its economic  

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accomplishments. This explains the rise of the NPD alongside the 1966 crisis, and could very well apply just as well to today. While trust in democratic institutions has certainly grown in Germany, the “strictest relationship” of faith between democracy and the German populace depends on the health of the economy. Nevertheless, the NPD’s failure in 1969 drove it into an internal crisis, especially with the younger generation of right wingers. Neo-Nazi militarism rose, loosely organized into ‘groupuscules,’ while another more educated group of conservatives set itself the task of creating a new intellectual basis for right wing action. Following the French intellectuals of the time, the German “New Right” began to adapt the ideas of the postmodern left, from Antonio Gramsci’s “cultural hegemony” to Alain Badiou’s “metapolitics,” with the goal of covertly injecting right wing worldviews into the mainstream through cultural means.

Two new far right parties surfaced in the 1980s: the German People’s Union (DVU) and the Republicans (Republikaner or simply REP). The former served more as a “collector of various ‘action groups’” until the 1987 election, in which it cooperated with the NPD. The Republikaner took up the ideas of the New Right, as did the NPD with its new “three pillar” platform of “fighting for the streets, fighting for the parliament, and fighting for people’s minds.” With reunification in 1991 the parties broke through to a large electorate of “marginal and frustrated” East Germans, whose experiences under the regime of the Socialist Unity Party (SED) and their economic disadvantages made them prime targets for völkisch (ethnic-popular) radicalization. Despite some gains in state parliaments, the parties did not grow through the

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12 Ignazi, Extreme Right Parties in Western Europe, 63.
13 Ibid.
15 Ignazi, Extreme Right Parties in Western Europe, 69.
17 Ignazi, Extreme Right Parties in Western Europe, 70, 73.
1990s-- in fact, by the 2000s they had declined. Hans-Gerd Jaschke suggests, however, that this was due more to mainstream parties picking up the xenophobic rhetoric that used to be the purview of the far right.

For instance, in 2010 a central bank executive and former Social Democratic minister of finance of Berlin named Thilo Sarrazin published a book titled “Deutschland schafft sich ab,” “Germany Does Away with Itself”, in which he warned of the German population becoming “increasingly stupid” from the lower IQs of non-German ethnic groups, blaming multiculturalism and excess tolerance for the supposed gradual death of German culture. His focus was on the Turkish population in Germany, who had immigrated in the postwar decades as “guest workers.” While it was expected that most would remigrate back to their homeland, they became a significant and permanent part of the German demography. Sarrazin provoked immediate controversy, but his points were received with support from much of German society. The well-respected magazine Der Spiegel published an article dubbing him “hero of the people,” the second largest weekly magazine Fokus made the “Sarrazin Affair” its cover story, and “all relevant political talk shows on television gave the agitator the floor.”

The SPD’s official website declared his ideas “incompatible with social democratic core values,” yet upon internal arbitration he was allowed to keep his SPD membership, likely because the party had realized how much of a popular issue he had tapped into. Franz Greß et. al consider this a success of the New Right’s attempt to “cross the cordon sanitaire that had been erected as a supposedly clear dividing line between extremist subculture and mainstream public discourse by extending the

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19 Jaschke, “Right-Wing Extremism and Populism in Contemporary Germany and Western Europe,” 27.
limits of the discourse.” Rohrmoser notes that the now-accepted statements in the CDU about the “foreignisation of the German people” used to be a talking point of the Republikaner, especially since the further influx of immigrants with the refugee crisis.

Far from pacifying the far right, however, the mainstream parties’ adoption of its discourses enabled it to grow into its own movement. In 2013 the Alternative for Germany (AfD) was founded by Bernd Lucke, Konrad Adam, and Alexander Gauland as a Eurosceptic party for conservative “economists, academics, publicists, and captains of industry disaffected with Merkel’s approach to the Euro crisis.”

Yet in 2015, the height of the refugee crisis, it was overrun by a “younger, more populist, less technocratic leadership” that gained immense success on a social platform that followed Thilo Sarrazin, bashing “political correctness” and embracing its appeal as a protest party for common discontent-- in the November 2017 elections, it gained 12.6% of the vote and 94 seats from its previous zero. Because of this combination of laissez faire economics with conservative nationalist, often outright xenophobic narratives and propaganda-- simultaneously promoting the free market and private profit while attempting to limit its behavior to within the nation-state-- scholars have had difficulty agreeing on whether it can truly be considered populist. Yet the influence that populist movements such as Pegida have

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24 Salzborn, “Renaissance of the New Right in Germany?,” 53.
on the AfD is clear, leading some to consider it as a “missing link” between mainstream conservatism and xenophobic populism, and some scholars have noticed that the “mix of market liberalism and right-wing authoritarianism” is a “winning formula” which bridges the two only so long as it is politically convenient. The former East German Democratic Republic (GDR) has become the hotbed of AfD support, as the AfD has become the voice of the so called “losers of modernization”: the unemployed, socially immobile, undereducated, very young or very old, and predominantly male strata of society that have found their living standards threatened by the social cutbacks of austerity programs in the past few decades. In the east this is particularly true, and immigration’s supposed threat to cultural identity is often pointed to as the explanation for their material stagnation and decline in the so-called “crisis of multiculturalism.” Merkel herself claimed that “Multikulti” has failed in the wake of the Sarrazin controversy and reiterated her belief in 2015, calling multiculturalism a “Lebenslüge” (“lifelong lie”), lending further legitimacy to that narrative.

The contemporary right encompasses a wide range of tendencies, from outright neo-Nazism to the AfD’s anti-egalitarian capitalism to more populist strands of the ruling CDU/CSU. There are two ways of defining the relationship between the mainstream and the extreme tendencies: the “bridge” conception and the “gray zone” conception. The former is concerned with organizations as the main political actors—-from neo-Nazi subcultural groups to populist street movements to political party youth organizations to the parties themselves— and how they act as nodes that form “bridges” between one another. These bridges fill the divides that used to

exist between the mainstream right and right wing extremism (that used to be firmly excluded by the center), legitimizing more and more right-leaning political organizations and discourses. The “gray zone” conception, on the other hand, is interested in the ideological gradient between mainstream and far right, along which individuals and ideas can slide organically from more innocuous politics to outright xenophobic nationalism. Naturally, both patterns reinforce one another, as far as individuals interact both formally with political organizations and informally with social discourses. This provides opportunities for all political actors to try to capture and retain supporters, adjusting their rhetoric and issue focus according to what builds the most political power. In this way, groups from all areas of the spectrum are able to exert pressures on one another, but the far right has been the most successful in shifting the rest of politics towards its end of the spectrum.28

The focus of this paper is on the “new” far right— the groups such as the AfD, Identitarian Movement, and Pegida that completely dissociate from Nazism, attempting to be a “fresh” conservatism that is not weighed down by the associations of the past. These are far more successful than the “old” far right, groups such as the neo-Nazi National Democratic Party (NPD) and skinhead gangs, that still openly display nostalgia for National Socialism and use Nazi imagery. Yet, as previously mentioned, both the “bridge” and “grey zone” conceptions understand that ostracized fringe groups are able to disseminate their ideas into mainstream politics, aided by the economic conditions, discursive shifts, and new technologies of the last three decades. The intellectual New Right, the subject of chapter three, has been instrumental in

providing this channel between the old and new far right, repackaging many of the ideas of older right-wing extremism into a format which raises less suspicion.

This thesis is concerned with the relationship of the far right to the respective economic, discursive, epistemic, and technological dimensions of postmodernity, as the contemporary far right is strongly shaped by such conditions that differ immensely from those of the 1920s and 30s. Neoliberalism, the “failure” of multiculturalism, the philosophical issues of meaning and truth with which the New Right occupies itself, and the internet as a revolutionary form of communication have both enabled the preexisting right wing as well as engendered the growth of new movements and their acceptance in the mainstream public sphere. The term “postmodernity” is used rather than “late modernity” for a few reasons. First, the intellectual right wing is strongly and openly influenced by postmodernism, whose relativism is embraced against “modernist claims to universality” (universal principles). Secondly, the processes against and out of which the contemporary right wing grows have been described most comprehensively by theorists of postmodernism and/or who primarily use the term postmodernism, such as Hans-Georg Betz, Zygmunt Baumann, and Michael Minkenberg. They use a definition advanced by Jean-François Lyotard: “simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity towards metanarratives.”29 Here, postmodernism refers not to an “after” modernity or an opposite to modernity, but “an increasingly reflexive process of modernization and a new, self-critical posture towards modernity.”30 In practical terms, Hans-Georg Betz claims that postmodernism has entailed

a new skepticism and ‘incredulity’ towards the grand narratives of enlightenment, emancipation, and legitimation; the transformation of the structures of late capitalism into

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a postindustrial, information, and consumer society characterized by increasing automation of production and the manipulation of information; the realization that modernity has left us with a waste land of ‘detritus, decomposition, and disaccumulation’ against ‘the background radiation of parody, kitsch, and burnout,’ a panic scene dominated by the simulated spectacle of the hyperreal or the spread of an ‘eclectic and amorphous culture exhibiting plurality, mixed lifestyles and new attitudes based on immediate gratification, fantasy, novelty, play, hedonism, consumption and affluence.’

Betz argues that postmodernism emerged primarily as a “new wave of philosophical thinking” in France, while emerging first in architecture and art in the United States. In Germany, however, it manifested as a “‘diffuse feeling towards life’ (Lebensgefühl) which quickly began to influence political action.”

The erosion of trust in universal narratives of progress and truth alongside perceived threats towards traditional forms of collective belonging (nation, class, family, etc.) prompted a response from the right, ranging from internet-savvy xenophobic populism that targets the disillusioned working class to the intellectual New Right, which accepts postmodernism’s concentration on the subjective “lived and particular” over objective fact.

As an abundance of literature on inter-party politics and statistical analyses of far right voting patterns already exists, this paper is more concerned with the greater structural developments which Betz characterizes as “postmodern.” Atomizing capitalism, the discursive turn to culture, and the rise of the internet, for instance, have weakened the democratic consensus in various ways. This arises from a concern with the true relationship between far right wing

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34 List them
resurgences and mainstream liberal-democratic society. The statistical analyses analyzed here
tend to treat the far right as an external phenomenon, the resurgence of a virus that occurs under
the right conditions in a society that has become unhealthy. It takes a common conception of the
rise of the Nazis-- that economic crisis (unemployment, etc.) was the main factor driving voters
into the arms of political “outsiders” such as the Nazis-- and attempts to identify the factors that
cause deviation from the normal functioning of a modern European society.

While it is undoubtedly true that times of hardship incite desperate and radical politics,
other scholars, such as Stanley Payne, George Mosse, and Zeev Sternhell have put increasing
emphasis on a different conception of fascism (and by implication, contemporary right wing
extremism) in their work. George Mosse, for instance, argues that fascism cannot be understood
“as an anti-phenomenon defined in terms of what it opposed, but in terms of its specific
ideological and cultural values.”35 If we understand it as the latter, we find that fascism’s lineage
is just as natural to European culture as Enlightenment democracy. It was and is not an outburst
of resistance, an interruption to European culture, but a natural part of it. This also means that it
is not simply a deviation from the “normal functioning” of society, but it has rather arisen from
the status quo itself in many ways, through the same ideas of nation and culture which uphold
modern European societies.36 Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, two German social
theorists who lived through the rise of Nazism, contended that Nazism constituted the fulfillment
of a “Dialectic of Enlightenment,” in which the Enlightenment project of reason had
metamorphosed into a regime of domination through its failure to cast off the myths against
which it attempted to arise. Turning reason into an instrument of domination of man over nature

35 Alberto Spektorowski, “The New Right: Ethno-Regionalism, Ethno-Pluralism and the Emergence of a Neo-
Fascist ‘Third Way,’” Journal of Political Ideologies 8, no. 1 (February 2003): 113,
https://doi.org/10.1080/13569310306084.
36 Ibid.
(and man over other men), Enlightenment’s logical conclusion was a system which attempted to “reason” total control over society.\textsuperscript{37}

Similarly, Jeffrey Herf contended that fascism represented a synthesis of conservative dreams and modern technological and political means of achieving them: a “reactionary modernism,” seeking to establish a “third way” between the traditions of left and right, reconciling the contradictions of European civilization.\textsuperscript{38} Zeev Sternhell documents how fascism took populism, solidarity, mass mobilization, and revolutionary politics from the Marxist left while rejecting democratic participation for a conception of “the people” that was rooted in supposedly organic, natural identities and hierarchies that had some greater continuity with the past. The fascist utopia is one in which all of the benefits of modernity are kept while its drawbacks and contradictions are ascribed to an “Other”-- to the Nazis it was Jews, while today it is primarily Muslims (though anti-Semitism still plays a part of anti-globalist conspiracy theory).\textsuperscript{39} I argue that the contemporary far right is best understood as a reactionary postmodernism which, unlike traditional conservatism, does not look to the past for solutions but rather to impose its own form of postmodernity on the future. While fetishizing traditional hierarchies and cultural/racial divisions, it embraces postmodern politics, discourses, philosophy, and technology and philosophy in order to reify romantic myths. The tools of postmodernism were primarily developed by the “New Left” associated with the 1960s and 70s with emancipatory politics in mind, attempting to grasp and overcome the exclusion of women and


minorities in society, but the far right has found no difficulty in appropriating these ideas for their own ends.\textsuperscript{40}

In examining the relationship between the contemporary far right and mainstream society, the thesis is less interested in the most extreme, violent subgroups such as the NSU terrorist cell than in the broader movements that exert direct influence over democratic politics. The Federal Office for Constitutional Protection draws a distinction between extremism and radicalism along this line. Right wing extremism is closer to what one thinks of historical fascism. It opposes the democratic state on principle, shows outright disdain and hatred of minorities, and usually operates more in the criminal underground than in politics.\textsuperscript{41} On the other hand, radicalism does not aim at ending Germany’s constitutional democracy but sits on the outer limits of what it allows, attempting to push those limits further to the right or left.\textsuperscript{42} Of course, there is often not a clear line between the two; many radical organizations harbor individuals who make statements far outside acceptability, or have ties to extremist organizations. This has often impeded the German government’s attempts to crack down on extremists that do not directly violate the constitutional laws against Nazi symbols and Holocaust denial.\textsuperscript{43}

The thesis will explore right wing \textit{radicalism} in Germany: right wing politics that is organized in legal, (nominally) pro-democracy groups and attempt to gain political influence in the public sphere rather than through vigilante violence. The four chapters correspond to a few major aspects of postmodernity, some aspects of which the contemporary right wing arises

\textsuperscript{40} Spektorowski, “The New Right,” 126.
\textsuperscript{41} Woods, \textit{Germany’s New Right as Culture and Politics}, 13; Minkenberg, “The Renewal of the Radical Right,” 172.
\textsuperscript{42} Woods, \textit{Germany’s New Right as Culture and Politics}, 13.
\textsuperscript{43} Manuela Caiani and Parenti, \textit{European and American Extreme Right Groups and the Internet}, 34, 41, 636.
against and other aspects which it accepts and grows out of. The first chapter takes a materialist point of view, combining comparative statistical research on factors such as unemployment with systemic analyses of globalized neoliberal capitalism. In many ways, right wing politics are a response to the erosion of old identities stemming from the “growing disorganization of capitalism”-- the “extensive international division of ownership and production, the separation of financial and industrial capital, the decline of regional economic centers, and the growth of the service sector.”\textsuperscript{44} The second chapter will explore discursive developments of the last three decades, in which neoliberalism’s atomizing effects motivated reconstitutions of identity along the lines of culture, directly drawing from postmodernism’s turn to subjectivity. In Germany, culture discourses have taken over by way of the \textit{Leitkultur} (leading culture) debate and preoccupations with “failed integration,” the proper place of Islamic headscarves, and so on. The third chapter focuses on the ideology of the New Right. What is the philosophical basis of the far right worldview? What are the underlying ontologies and epistemologies that form the logic of the current right wing, and how do the intellectuals of the New Right mediate their ambivalent relationship to postmodernity? Finally, the fourth chapter will examine the far right’s relationship to the new world of the internet. As a cheap, accessible, and increasingly ubiquitous form of media, it makes reproducing propaganda and building radicalized communities much easier. It has also fostered the creation of a distinct \textit{“Erlebniswelt Rechtsextremismus”} (right wing extremist life-world) which, through aestheticizing political sentiments, allows group identities to form in online communities that have their own symbols, merchandising, music, memes, and lexicons.\textsuperscript{45}

\textsuperscript{44} Betz, \textit{Postmodern Politics in Germany}, 135.
The sources utilized come from a wide range of perspectives. Statistical, comparative research is used predominantly in the first and fourth chapters, on far right voting patterns and on the organization of the far right’s online networks, respectively. Other sources include political-economic theory, historical accounts of debates such as the *Leitkultur* debate and how they have changed and gradually become more prominent, intellectual history, and my own firsthand research on far right internet communities, which was carried out over a year on a variety of sites from Facebook to far-right online merchandise outlets to anonymous forums. The variety of sources and methods employed here is meant to illustrate the interrelatedness of the economy, discourses, epistemology, and technology of the postmodern world and their relationships to the modern far right. These relationships also demonstrate that the far right is a movement very much *within* postmodernity, though many of its members decry it, that grows *out of* and *reflects* contemporary conditions just as much as it seems to be a reaction against them. Altogether, this project attempts to characterize the contemporary radical right as a movement which cannot be so easily pathologized as a group of frustrated outsiders, but as a growth that mobilizes and radicalizes pre-existing forces and sentiments from the mainstream. We cannot discount it as pure reaction, but rather must look deeply into German society for the elements that spawned and stimulate it, to understand the true threat that it poses from within.
Chapter One: Neoliberalism and Xenophobia

One of the predominant explanations for the resurgence of the far right draws from what is known as the “modernisation losers thesis.” The theory focuses on “macro-structurally influenced” grievances in sections of the population that feel economically deprived and socially disaffected by crises, perceived or real, driven by changes in society. 46 The “profound transformation of the socioeconomic and sociocultural structure of advanced Western European democracies,”47 as articulated by the theory’s creator Hans-Georg Betz, has led to frustrations that drive the “losers” of these transformations towards the far right. Though widely used to explain the rise of Hitler’s Nazi party in the interwar period as well as in the contemporary situation, the modernisation losers thesis still leaves many questions unanswered. Why do some countries in such periods of economic crisis see right-wing extremism grow (the present-day United States, Great Britain, and to a lesser extent Germany) while the “losers” of other nations also significantly turn to the left, illustrated by the (albeit precarious) successes of Podemos in Spain and SYRIZA in Greece? Do unemployment and/or class status directly correlate to right-wing sympathy, and if not, what material indicators do? And can this theory be read in a strictly materialist manner, in which culture is overdetermined by economics, or are cultural anxieties deserving of their own attention? To explore the role of the globalized, postindustrial neoliberal economy in the political climate, one must examine the specifics of the model.

Ironically, though many far right groups stand on anti-materialist philosophical foundations, much of the scholarly analysis of the resurgence of such trends of thought concerns

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itself with materialist explanations.⁴⁸ Studies which concern themselves with economic interest and the “losers of modernization” use comparative research, quantifying factors such as unemployment, social welfare benefits, immigration levels, and similar metrics across Western European countries. These materialist studies attempt to identify direct causal relationships between the aforementioned factors and right wing support. Daphne Halikiopoulou and Tim Vlandas, for example, examine the relevant question: “what is the effect of the economy on far-right party support?”⁴⁹

They argue that most of the studies which have claimed that national identity is more important to potential right wing voters than economic interest are either too small scale or too generalized and turn their attention instead to the cross-national impact of economic factors. They notice that, across the 2014 European Parliamentary elections, the most economically disadvantaged countries had quite a wide variation in far right success. In fact, the countries with the lowest unemployment had the most significant rise in far right party support, while real GDP growth, debt, and deficits had no statistically significant impact at the national level. The true determining factor according to their analysis seemed to be the strength of labor market institutions, which influence the risks and costs of unemployment for individuals:

where unemployment benefits and dismissal regulations are high, unemployment has no effect [on far right wing voting], but where either one of them is low, unemployment leads to higher far-right party support. Unemployment benefits – but not dismissal regulations – have a statistically significant negative relationship with far-right support.⁵⁰

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⁵⁰ Ibid., 651.
These statistics show that where individuals feel more economically secure, whether employed or not, they are less likely to seek out far right wing alternatives. As of the most recent statistics in 2013, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) ranked Germany third in the world for the most stringent dismissal regulations of permanent workers, behind only Venezuela and China and tied with Belgium.\textsuperscript{51} Germany’s 2015 unemployment benefit generosity, as measured by average net replacement rates (NRR) over five years (the percentage of unemployment benefits as compared to previous income over the 6 months after the loss of one’s job) ranks at 15th in the world and 13th in Europe; the average unemployed person receives 62\% of their previous income from unemployment benefits.\textsuperscript{52} Since 2009, the German net replacement rate has declined from 73\% (7\textsuperscript{th} in Europe) while other nations such as Austria, Finland, and Luxembourg have either raised their rates or kept them more constant.

Relating to the findings of the Halikiopoulou and Vlandas study, Germany seems to have one of the criteria which would limit far right support but lacks in unemployment benefits (which negatively impact far right voting) compared to many other European countries. The study claims that a drop in the NRR of about 14\% correlates with a 3.6 to 6.8\% increase in the voting share of the far right. Given this, it is possible that the 11\% drop in the German NRR has contributed to the recent growth of far right extremism by decreasing the sense of economic security in the population—though the increase in AfD votes was 12.6\% over this time, two to four times higher than would be predicted by this model.

To further explore the role of the economy, a number of studies have compared unemployment with other factors. Finding that unemployment on its own actually (very slightly) decreases support for the far right and increases it for social democratic parties, Jesuit et al follows with another question. What are the effects of income inequality and the general state of social welfare institutions on social capital? Robert Putnam describes social capital as the characteristic of “social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit”—in other words, the mutual support and trust that one feels in one’s community. Through statistical analysis across Western Europe, they find a rather surprising result. Fiscal redistribution, the measure of social welfare programs of reducing income inequality, actually increases support for far right wing parties. The study offers a few possible explanations: 1) more social welfare spending requires higher taxes, which contributes to feelings of economic squeeze and consequently increases anxieties related to foreign competition; 2) voters who are accustomed to generous social programs have greater fears of losing them to heightened government spending on immigrants, and 3) benefit generosity on its own does not account for the varying “universality” of these social institutions. Relating to the last hypothesis, a Swank and Betz study finds that welfare states with more “comprehensive coverage of citizens within risk categories, a generous social wage, and well developed active labor market programs” significantly depress far right wing support compared to “corporatist” welfare states which, though usually imposing similar tax burdens,

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tend to privilege the long-term employed (usually meaning economically privileged) in their social benefit programs.\textsuperscript{56} The OECD statistics mentioned above suggest that Germany mostly belongs to the latter, as while Germany ranks third for protections of permanent workers, it ranks 44th for protections of temporary workers (though the long- and short-term NRRs are close to equal).\textsuperscript{57} In addition, Rottmann and Ferree characterize Germany as on the corporatist side based on political qualities such as the “institutionalization of strong parties […] and positive law.”\textsuperscript{58}

Jesuit et al. turn their attention, then, to the state of social capital in Western Europe. Their study, along with Kyung Joon Han’s study, finds that the actual efficacy of social safety nets largely depends on the state of social unity. More income inequality can actually increase class identification rather than cultural/ethnic identification, the former benefitting the SPD and the latter increasing the appeal of right-wing answers.\textsuperscript{59} The lack of social capital and the absence of strong social norms, what Emile Durkheim called “anomic,” seems to be the effectual component in that economic circumstances produce different senses of group belonging.

Likewise, on its own, the presence of higher numbers of immigrants as a factor does not seem to automatically increase support for the far right\textsuperscript{60}—in fact, many of the most right wing areas in Germany have the fewest immigrants, like Saxony and Mecklenburg-West Pomerania in ex-East Germany\textsuperscript{61}. Some research even suggests that higher contact with immigrants begets \textit{more positive} perceptions of them.\textsuperscript{62} When high immigration and high unemployment coincide,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{56} D. Swank, “Globalization, the Welfare State and Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe,” \textit{Socio-Economic Review} 1, no. 2 (May 1, 2003): 224, https://doi.org/10.1093/soceco/1.2.215.
\item \textsuperscript{57} “OECD Indicators of Employment Protection”; “Benefits and Wages: Statistics - OECD.”
\item \textsuperscript{59} Han, “Income Inequality and Voting for Radical Right-Wing Parties,” 56.
\item \textsuperscript{60} Halikiopoulou and Vlandas, “Risks, Costs and Labour Markets,” 649.
\item \textsuperscript{62} Sprague-Jones, “Extreme Right-Wing Vote and Support for Multiculturalism in Europe,” 539.
\end{itemize}
however, far right support increases as cultural awareness and identification are heightened and immigration can be exploited as a scapegoat by the far right, offering an ostensible solution to voters who would otherwise tend to choose the SPD. It can be inferred from this that status anxiety is more closely related to far right support than the state of deprivation itself.

The limit of the strict comparative approach is the impossibility of addressing the endless number of interrelated factors that simultaneously influence different countries; the same factor could even have different effects within specific cultural and historical contexts. Indeed, Jesuit et al. points out that Swank and Betz (2003), Veugelers and Magnan (2005), and Kitschelt (1997), all of which identify criteria across European countries, compress them into quantified generalized factors, and extract patterns from the relationships between them, nevertheless contradict each other depending on variations in their analytical approaches. Comparing Germany’s score of welfare universalism to that of the UK, or the varying prominence of xenophobia in the policies of the AfD and the pro-Brexit UK Independence Party can give us statistics to grasp, but it does not give us the broader context explaining why the far right is returning across the board. Richard Saull contends,

Consequently, a discussion of the impact of trade relations, unemployment, immigration and supranational (European Union (EU)) forms of regulation as evidence of materialist factors shaping the far-right need to be contextualised within a wider international or global political economy rather than in comparisons between different states as

exemplified by the plethora of comparative studies of far-right parties and electoral systems.65

One of the fundamental differences between the conditions of the interwar period and the contemporary situation is the penetration of global affairs into national life. More so than ever before, the economic circumstances in Germany or any other country are dependent on the global flow of labor and capital, determined greatly by inter- and supranational institutions as well as complex economic patterns that cannot easily be ascribed to a defined group of actors. Consequently, a materialist analysis of sources of economic discontent should attempt to situate Germany within the greater international economic processes which have shaped politics in domestic locales everywhere: the context of neoliberalism.

Richard Saull claims that, although the far right “cannot be reduced to the playing out of a global logic of capitalist development,” it is also reductive to read it simply as “a crisis of domestic political institutions and party competition.”66 Considering the arguments of Antonio Gramsci and others, he suggests that studying the “uneven” character of capitalist development—the construction of core and periphery, debtor and creditor nations—provides us with a model that relates “structural socio-economic developments at the international level to domestic dynamics” such as the specifics of far right support, class relations, and political institutions in the national context.67 Alongside Saull, Ray Kiely and Neil Davidson attempt to explain neoliberalism’s relationship to the far right through neoliberalism’s macro-structural characteristics.

66 Ibid., 33.
67 Ibid.
The term “neoliberalism” can be used to describe three things: first, the ideology of the Chicago school of economics in the 1930s to 50s, which opposed Keynesianism and other forms of state intervention into the free market. Second, the strategy adopted in the 1970s by politicians and employers to transfer power from labor to management and the market, as a practical rejection of Keynesian state capitalism. And third, the era which began as this strategy began to be applied, “a new settlement weighted in favour of [the free flow of] capital” which was achieved by the late 1980s and consolidated its hegemony after the collapse of the communist bloc.68 Neoliberalism became the consensus in the 1990s and began through its mass media machine to organically control the “image-world” of individuals:

[it] limited not only the forms of possible resistance but even the conceptualization of experience. In mainstream society now, neoliberalism was not discussed, let alone politicized or contested: its benefits were simply too obvious. The longstanding definition of ideology was fully realized: “They do not know it, but they are doing it.”69

What began as “‘vanguard’ regimes of reorientation,” the targeting of labor organizations and the weakening of social democratic institutions, became “‘social’ regimes of consolidation,” as new areas of social life became commodified and new neoliberal institutions were created.70 Though this pattern is markedly more pronounced in the Anglosphere than in Germany, this has left the German working class in particular-- though this holds across class lines-- “fragmented and disorganized” with neither the former strength of the social democratic consensus nor with the systemic alternative to capitalism which collapsed in 1991.71 In seeking to reclaim forms of

70 Davidson and Saull, “Neoliberalism and the Far-Right,” 710.
71 Ibid., 711.
collectivity which have been weakened under neoliberalism, many with economic anxieties and nostalgia for the past have turned to nationalism, ascribing the breakdown of the old order to cultural and ethnic outsiders while employing a whitewashed revisionism to the 20th century social democratic consensus. Through racializing the social, political, and economic changes of the past three decades, the economically disaffected have turned their labor market grievances into a narrative of “insider” and “outsider,” and the right wing answer to this is reserving social programs for the cultural/ethnic/racial insider.\textsuperscript{72}

The relatively stable global order of post-1945 limited the political spaces available to the far right, as domestic social classes integrated into an international “historical bloc” under US hegemony which “made the international co-ordination and management of economic crises more effective”.\textsuperscript{73} Western Europe’s old geopolitical rivalries were kept in check by this liberal form of international organization, and the sections of society which were once much more economically marginalized were integrated into European social welfare structures and institutions.\textsuperscript{74}

The fall of the Soviet bloc, however, opened that half of the world to globalization, and the vacuum left by communism was filled by a neoliberalism without the constraints of hegemonic bipolarity. This development triggered a new era of mass migration as global markets absorbed countries with large sources of potential labor. The now less-hindered flow of capital triggered economically-driven movements of people (and masses of goods) across borders, encouraged by new supranational neoliberal institutions such as the EU.\textsuperscript{75} At the same time the “mutually binding social contract between elites and unfortunate” began to erode, and this “de-

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{73} Saull, “Capitalism, Crisis and the Far-Right in the Neoliberal Era,” 33–36.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 37.
\textsuperscript{75} Crowley and Hickman, “Migration, Postindustrialism and the Globalized Nation State,” 1225.
solidarization” negatively impacted previously secure economic factors such as male employment security (especially in unskilled and semi-skilled workers). Subsequently, Saull outlines three characteristics that describe globalization’s relationship to far right acceptance since the early 1990s. First, immigration, trade liberalization, and globalization have become a more important political preoccupation for voters. Second, the far right has tended to do well “in those geographical locales noticeably affected by perceived patterns of globalisation (most notably immigration and labour market restructuring/ job insecurity).” And third, far right propaganda and campaigning have increasingly concentrated on international processes as the primary causes of national problems, “requiring a reconstitution of the national–international relationship.”

In Germany, globalization has prompted what is known as the Standortpolitik (locational politics) discourse. Before the 1990s, German capitalism rested on the “Rhine model,” defined by “high wages,” “strong export orientation,” an “elaborate system of social welfare” and an “intricate system of corporatist collective bargaining.” Facing globalized investment flows, the costs of reunification, economic stagnation, and a decreasingly-competitive manufacturing sector, however, Germany attempted to make itself more competitive through aligning itself with the “cost-cutting, neoliberal politics” taking place elsewhere in the EU at the time. Moving from quality-competitive to cost-competitive production, the German economy under Kohl (CDU) and then Schröder (SPD) reduced social services and protections while re-spatializing the

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79 Ibid., 320, 327.
national and subnational economies; while the Rhine model featured the federal government in a strong and active role in the economy, the Standort conception relied on competition between the sixteen federal states while the national government retreated from direct regulation of labor, taxes, and social services. Angela Merkel left this in place and further consolidated the scheme of decreased federal spending and regulation with a constitutional amendment requiring a balanced budget, making public policy “ever more inflexible and out-of-joint with changing social needs and problems.”

The economy of social solidarity and common good is thus giving way to “fierce competition [and] stoic acceptance of rising uncertainty.”

The development of neoliberalism has relied significantly on the opening up of labor markets, which puts “competitive pressures on the social wage” in two ways: firstly, by outsourcing production sources to areas with low wages (i.e. China), and secondly by encouraging migrants to enter labor markets which exert downward pressure on wages in high-wage areas (i.e. Poles or North Africans migrating to Germany). Simultaneously, structural adjustment policies through neoliberal institutions-- the IMF, World Bank, and European Commission-- have compounded economic insecurities and inequalities within developing countries, driving the migration of people from the “developing” periphery to the wealthier core. In the mass movement of labor, poor migrant-sending countries lose their own workforces, including members of their educated middle and upper classes, which in turn makes them further dependent economically on rich countries. Crowley and Hickman claim that this

81 Ibid., 512.
82 Davidson and Saull, “Neoliberalism and the Far-Right,” 711.
83 Ibid.
migration is largely forced; “Europe’s changing and expanding requirements for economic
migrants are being met in part through the persistence of gross inequalities that generate
mobility” to serve the needs of core countries’ increasing service sector needs. They claim, using
the British context, that the rise of far right support is partially due to these significant changes in
the composition of the economy; as previously-stable manufacturing jobs (those worked by
native Britons) have disappeared, migrants have filled the structural unemployment created by
the opening of service sector jobs.  

Germany’s position differs from other countries such as the UK or the US, however, in
that globalization has not shifted employment demographics as significantly from manufacturing
work to the service industry. From 1997 to 2014 manufacturing jobs shrank by approximately
10%, while the UK lost around 40% and the US lost 38%. Though the process of
deindustrialization certainly began earlier, and was especially pronounced when the East was
integrated into the more advanced West German economy, this could be another potential reason
for the far right’s limited success in Germany compared to the other two countries. Crowley
and Hickman’s “transition to postindustrialism” thesis, it could be called, must therefore examine
another dimension of the changed labor world.

The exponential development of technology has promoted a significant rise in the
importance of education for economic mobility. A job that once required only a high school

85 Crowley and Hickman, “Migration, Postindustrialism and the Globalized Nation State,” 1232.
86 Wolfgang Dauth, Sebastian Findeisen, and Jens Südekum, “Sectoral Employment Trends in Germany: The Effect
of Globalisation on Their Micro Anatomy,” VoxEU.Org (blog), January 26, 2017,
Job Loss Outpaces Other Leading Industrialized Countries | The Innovation Files,” accessed October 18, 2018,
https://www.innovationfiles.org/how-americas-manufacturing-job-loss-outpaces-other-leading-industrialized-
87 Richard Stöss, Rechtsextremismus im Wandel, [3., aktualisierte Aufl.], Neuauf (Berlin: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung,
degree, if such a job still exists, now often requires at least a university education. Two strata of society have consequently arisen in what some have dubbed a “two-thirds society.” The top two thirds, whose access to education has allowed it to retain employment and social mobility and receive many of the benefits of technological progress, is relatively secure. On the other hand, the other third has found its security waning as it has neither the training to keep up with the decline of unskilled labor nor the financial wherewithal and mobility needed to maintain a career in the global economy.88 This segment is particularly concentrated in the old GDR, where far right groups have attempted to “proletarianize” to take advantage of the “family break-ups,... consumerist lifestyles… new rules in the job market, and.... globalization” that have disproportionately affected the East and urban centers.89 The unlucky third in the contemporary “risk society”90, dubbed the Deklassierte (“underprivileged”), is primarily made up of male blue-collar workers, low-level employees, pensioners, and unemployed people.91 As the 2017 parliamentary election showed, the AfD was strongest with voters with only vocational high school or intermediate-level high school certificates and the working class (Image 1).

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88 Betz, Postmodern Politics in Germany, 114.
89 Jaschke, “Right-Wing Extremism and Populism in Contemporary Germany and Western Europe,” 24; Ignazi, Extreme Right Parties in Western Europe, 81.
90 Ignazi, Extreme Right Parties in Western Europe, 81.
91 Betz, Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe, 176–77.
The election numbers, however, find that only 34% of defectors-- people who left the parties they chose in 2013 for the AfD-- were former left-party voters (SPD, Die Linke, and Grüne), and a comparable 36% were former conservative CDU/CSU voters. Of the six main parties, Die Linke lost the highest percentage of its former voters to the AfD (11%), though the CDU/CSU was next (5.7%). Die Linke, however, is not the left party which represents the working class the most; its share of votes is relatively even across workers, white-collar workers, and self-employed. Another difference between Die Linke and the AfD is that higher education levels positively correlate to Die Linke voting. Table 2 shows that voters who had abstained from the 2013 election were the highest contributors to the AfD compared to the existing parties. Table 3 breaks down the composition of the AfD’s voters in the 2017 election.

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92 Blickle et al., “Wahlverhalten.”
93 Ibid., calculations are my own
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Share of total votes (%)</th>
<th>Votes lost to AfD</th>
<th>% of 2013 voters defecting to AfD</th>
<th>% of total shift to AfD of all parties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CDU/CSU</td>
<td>32.9</td>
<td>1,040,000</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>36.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPD</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>510,000</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Die Linke</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>420,000</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grüne</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other parties</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>730,000</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>25.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FDP</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>120,000</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AfD</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First time voters</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>130,000</td>
<td>4.4*</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-voters from 2013</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>1,470,000</td>
<td>8.1*</td>
<td>51.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Electoral shifts from other parties to the AfD.\textsuperscript{95} *these figures are naturally not defectors, but percent of that category voting for the AfD.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Former party</th>
<th>% of 2017 AfD voters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AfD</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDU/CSU</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPD</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Die Linke</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grüne</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Parties</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FDP</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First time voters</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-voters from 2013</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Composition of the AfD, by the share of its 2017 voters’ previous parties.\textsuperscript{96}

\textsuperscript{95} Blickle et al., “Wahlverhalten.”
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid.
Through these statistics we find that in the 2017 election, a sizable plurality of new AfD votes came from voters who did not have a party affiliation four years earlier--though 18% of working-class voters chose the AfD, it does not seem that most of them had been left-wing voters in the previous election. Compare this to the 1994 election, however, and one finds that the SPD has drastically lost its blue-collar support. In both the 1987 and 1994 elections, the SPD carried around 52% of this socioeconomic group compared to its current 23%.\(^{97}\) Seeing as the non-voters group in the above statistic does not include first time voters, it can be suspected that many of the working class voters whom the SPD lost over two decades no longer voted until they were recaptured by the AfD. This possibility is supported by the statistics on voter participation, which dropped sharply from 1998 to 2013 before rising again in 2017.\(^{98}\)

The breakdown of the “social contract between capital and labour mediated by the social democratic state” has increased competition for access to employment and social services, and the influx of migrants has consequently become a central focus point on which to displace the resulting anxieties.\(^{99}\) The “so-called ‘white working class’” has emerged as a “key political constituency” through this, as social insecurity has become a permanent fixture of life for many. The neoliberal project has involved the retreat of the state from social programs while also de-unionizing labor, especially in the East, which had high union membership before the fall of its manufacturing sector.\(^{100}\) As this process has unfolded over the last few decades, the native (and

\(^{97}\) Terri E. Givens, *Voting Radical Right in Western Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 54.


predominantly male) workers who once had the security of a social safety net have been
disenfranchised, and their response has been assembled with xenophobic imaginaries.  

These imaginaries include a belief in welfare chauvinism, the idea that those who 
conform to the cultural values supposedly rooted in a nation are more deserving of economic, 
social, and political resources than “culturally deficient” outsiders who “refuse” to assimilate. 
This fuels a revisionism of the 20th century welfare state that places migrants (and 
multiculturalism as their vehicle) as the “other” who disrupted the previous social democratic 
consensus. The implication of this, of course, is that this previous consensus relied on cultural 
homogeneity, with the influx of foreigners having disrupted this cultural settlement and left 
natives as the disadvantaged group.  

Anyone old enough to remember the days of relative 
social welfare stability will likely also remember the much more ethnically-German composition 
of society back then and can easily ascribe social and economic changes to the concomitant 
demographic changes. Though the media and popular conversations place a specific emphasis on 
refugees (presumably because of fears of terrorism), asylum seekers have still remained a 
minority of total immigration. Likewise, the segment of foreign-born German residents who 
comes from the war-torn middle east, a group particularly feared in the current political climate, 
is only about 11%, and irregular migration into the Eurozone has dropped a sharp 96% since 
2015 (Tables 4 and 5). 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Immigrant arrivals to Germany</th>
<th>Arrivals of asylum seekers</th>
<th>Percentage of asylum seekers to total arrivals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>1,720,190</td>
<td>722,370</td>
<td>41.99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>2,016,241</td>
<td>441,899</td>
<td>22.07%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>1,342,529</td>
<td>173,072</td>
<td>12.89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>1,108,068</td>
<td>109,580</td>
<td>09.89%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Immigration to Germany

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total population of foreign-born people living in Germany; (as a percentage of total population of Germany)</th>
<th>10,039,080 (12.14%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population of Syrians, Afghans, and Iraqis; (as a percentage of total foreign-born population)</td>
<td>1,118,525; (11.14%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4

Migrants are not the only target of xenophobia, however. As noticeable since the 2009 Eurozone crisis, anti-outsider rhetoric has had a dimension within the EU itself. Germany, which has always had a central role in the Eurozone economy, has been responsible for much of the economic bailouts of Greece, Spain, and other debtor nations. The perception that outsiders were taking economic opportunity away from Germans extended to stereotypes of lazy, “greedy Greeks” who were receiving resources which rightfully belonged to Germany (this, despite the fact that Germany actually profited to the tune of €1.34 billion in the crisis, though the money presumably went to banking elites rather than the working class). The confidence that these economic policies afforded to nationalist rhetoric stems, Davidson and Saull argue, from a class-

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104 [https://www.destatis.de/EN/FactsFigures/SocietyState/Population/Migration/Tables/MigrationForeignCitizensBetweenGermanyForeignCountries.html](https://www.destatis.de/EN/FactsFigures/SocietyState/Population/Migration/Tables/MigrationForeignCitizensBetweenGermanyForeignCountries.html)
denying conception of Europe as made up of homogenous nation-states—each acting as distinct single entities competing in global markets rather than being made up of a plurality of interests.  

Neoliberalism did not enable xenophobia through labor market grievances alone, however. On the contrary, against claims that our age is a post-racial one based on individual consumer citizens “stripped of culturalized identities pursuing competitive market behaviour,” Davidson and Saull respond that “the pathology of racism continues to be reproduced out of the social regime of neoliberal capitalism.” They claim that neoliberalism’s state of perpetual “collective socio-economic insecurity,” in which unions and social democracy are weakened forms of collective belonging, has facilitated cultural and racial identification as the remaining one. Not only has this form of identity arisen to replace economic collectivity, but “nationalist ideological tropes have been utilized by political parties committed to implementing neoliberal policies as a way of mobilizing a ‘democratic’ constituency.” In other words, proponents of neoliberalism have relied on nationalist language, constructing insiders and outsiders, to garner legitimacy for their programs. Austerity in particular, as a “collective socio-economic insecurity,” has necessitated the resurgence of a national group identity that easily takes on racial connotations. Davidson and Saull’s argument, then, is that the anomie needed for neoliberalism to function economically have not only left a vacuum for far-right nationalist populism, but have directly aided it and legitimized its narratives by producing a specific conception of identity.

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109 Ibid., 714.
110 Ibid., 716.
The attack on welfare dependency pursued largely beginning in the 1970s and 80s bred stereotypes of welfare abusers while also disproportionately hitting ethnic minorities. Simultaneously, categories of “acceptable” and “unacceptable” immigrants and refugees have risen through the language of the management of migration, further exacerbated by heightened national security concerns. These policies and the conceptions upon which they are based have played into the hands of far-right rhetoric, as the language of “cultural difference” employed by the needs of neoliberalism are easily paired with popular notions of insider and outsider identities. The language of neoliberalism is not explicitly racial, Davidson and Saull claim, but causal explanations for problems such as economic marginalization are increasingly reliant on culture as the “explanatory residue” for problems that do not seem to conform to the “meritocratic neoliberal subjectivity” of the post-racial consumer citizen. By this they mean the tendency of neoliberalism to individuate financial success and failure as personal responsibilities. For instance, the economic disadvantages of migrant communities (even of descendants of migrants) are explained as being due to a failure on the part of the communities to integrate culturally. As “identities around class, gender and politics have been erased as explanations for social patterns and pathologies,” defining the culture of outsiders is easily capitalized upon by the far right as standing in opposition to “Germanness,” whatever that means to them. These discursive developments will be discussed in depth in the next chapter.

Neoliberalism’s formula for efficiency and competition drives demand for economic migration and insecure labor, but Davidson and Saull argue that the exclusionary social imaginaries needed to maintain this economy enable the growth of a right-wing element

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113 Ibid., 716.
incompatible with globalization at its core.\textsuperscript{114} This is underscored by what David Goldberg terms the “privatization of race.” In the process of reconfiguring the welfare state, governments have withdrawn from the social institutions and programs which once provided democratic and public oversight to managing inequality and preventing racial discrimination.\textsuperscript{115}

The neoliberal welfare state, in removing democratic or legal attention to racial equality, begins to rely on a “racialized spectre of citizenship rights that neoliberalism exposes through the underlying racist assumptions that welfare is no longer a universal right of citizenship but is, instead, for those who actively demonstrate that they deserve it through mimicking neoliberal subjectivities.” Non-assimilation, welfare dependence, and crime are all explained as results of these cultural differences, and as “Germanness” counterposes the stereotypes of foreigners, it becomes the indicator of the native in-group deserving of social welfare benefits. To review, neoliberalism has not only created spaces for the far right by causing economic grievances, but its “epistemological and ontological dimensions [...] as a social regime” have also configured an understanding of social and economic rights as requiring restrictions based on cultural identity.\textsuperscript{116}

After the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the resulting “fracturing and disorientation of the left, the era of mass democratic politics appears to be in terminal decline.”\textsuperscript{117} Neoliberalism has since redrawn the political sphere because of its disinclinations against allowing democratic institutions to intervene in the market economy, and the far right is attempting to close in on the growing vacuum by positioning itself as populists against the establishment pro-EU, pro-bureaucratic consensus. Especially since the Eurozone crisis, the far

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 711.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 715.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 711, 715.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., 716.
right in Germany (as elsewhere) has had strong opportunities to capitalize on the perceived
democratic deficit of the EU and the role of supranational economic decisions that operate
largely above democratic oversight.

Davidson and Saull claim that the far right has an advantage here over the left in that it
has the ability to exert pressure on the traditional right parties. Though it opposes economic
globalization, it doesn’t in theory threaten the core economic capitalist principles like property
rights within the national context. It can operate, at least economically, as an “internal
opposition,” pressuring the CDU to move right on fiscal and social issues. 118 The AfD, though
now more strongly controlled by its young populist currents, originally began as the party of
academics and “captains of industry” who simply opposed the fiscal programs of the EU,
advocating (among other things) the restoration of the Deutschmark. 119 In 2013, the year of the
AfD’s founding, Germany was still known in Europe as being the country least prone to
nationalism as well as “one that consciously sought to refashion its identity within Europe.” 120
The splintering of the traditional party topography in that year began within the CDU over
ordoliberalism— the German economic orthodoxy of strong state oversight of economic
institutions without direct intervention in boom/bust cycles, somewhat of a compromise between
neoliberalism and state control— and the German role in European economic regulation. The
AfD formed on the right flank of this debate and has only since then become the party of right
wing populism after an internal power struggle in 2015. 121 The nationalist wing, led by Frauke
Petry, Marcus Pretzell, Alexander Gauland, and others ousted founder Bernd Lucke with a more
nationalist program, adopting more radical terms like “Volk” (“people,” though it has a

118 Ibid., 717.
120 Ibid., 8.
121 Ibid.
chauvinist historical connotation) and moving closer to the xenophobic populist movement Pegida.122 This power struggle represents a larger debate within the right wing between neoliberal economics (e.g. privatization) and the desire to bring back the 20th century welfare state, and the AfD does not seem to have reached a consistent position yet. Its most recent (2017) party program, for instance, demands both the deregulation of labor and a universal basic income and state compensation for having children. What is clear is that the nation-state is the locus of these politics, and the boundary drawn for making these programs exclusive to ethnic German insiders.123

Since as early as the 1980s, new right wing populist movements have largely operated on platforms of economic neoliberalism, as the frictions of “postindustrial individualized capitalism” have been explained away as due to the two sides of internationalism: multiculturalism and supranational institutions. “Its rejection of social policy is a consequence of its faith in the market,” Luci Ricolfi claims; “its lack of trust in the state a consequence of its belief in civil society.”124 This anti-statism and exaltation of individual freedom (though limited to cultural insiders) is also one of the fundamental differences between new right populism and 1930s fascism. At least one similarity does nevertheless exist here. As fascists claimed that the contradictions and anxieties of industrialization were due to the Jewish “other,” which was both an external and internal threat, the new far right ascribes the chaos and confusion of late capitalism to the “others” of (primarily Muslim) cultural foreigners and internal politically-correct cosmopolitans, who have supposedly threatened a previously-stable sense of national

identity. The image of the Muslim is used as the personification of the fluid, constantly shifting economic and cultural landscape of globalization which is responsible for economic and cultural anxieties.\textsuperscript{125}

Samuel Salzborn highlights the neoliberal aspects of the AfD’s platform, finding a rather strange relationship between neoliberalism and anti-egalitarianism. On one hand, it presents itself as other neoliberal voices do-- as the proponent of “neutral,” “non-ideological” economic fact (David Bebnowski contends that this is illusory in general) and advocates for a technocracy by economic experts. Yet where this technocracy is challenged as undemocratic, the AfD’s counter is none of the usual responses from neoliberals-- that the market itself is democratic, not based on hegemony-- but rather that this system is the natural expression of the “‘true’ will of the people,” requiring rootededness in the nation. This notion of consensus based not on voting but on the unity of the \textit{Volk} and \textit{Volksgemeinschaft} (people’s community), both terms which the AfD has tried to rehabilitate, assumes that all true Germans would inherently support this state on the basis of cultural oneness. This terminology can be directly traced back to the Conservative Revolutionary Carl Schmitt and was the Nazi regime’s fundamental claim to legitimacy.\textsuperscript{126}

The far right’s issue with neoliberalism is, then, rooted in neoliberalism’s moves towards “international technocratic regimes” managing complex global networks of economic relations, which are held less and less accountable to the national-level democracies with which citizens feel more closely involved. “The political-legal and institutional framework that upholds private property and market rules is determined at the supranational levels,” they point out, “while democratic oversight is still substantively rooted in the nation-state. (718)” This perception of a lack of democratic oversight among supranational organizations and networks such as the

\textsuperscript{125} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{126} Salzborn, “Renaissance of the New Right in Germany?,” 58.
European Commission or the Eurozone as a whole reifies the nation-state as the only proper “ontological space for deliberation and authority,” and further affirms the nativism associated with reasserting nationality, of “taking one’s country back”.

While Davidson and Saull argue that today’s far right should be seen as a result of neoliberalism’s crisis in the same way that fascism was a reaction to the crisis in the Weimar Republic’s nation-state capitalism, they also recognize the difference in class dynamics that sets the modern far right apart from its 1930s counterparts. The elite classes that represent the bureaucracy of the European Union do not rely on right wing “political mobilizations from below” for legitimacy or for insurance against the left, which posed a far greater threat to stability in the Weimar Republic than today. The thorough success of the far right would be disastrous for the mainstream neoliberal parties as well as for the international system as a whole, but Davidson and Saull contend that neoliberalism’s demand for cheap, insecure labor is nonetheless aided by far-right hostility to migrants. Conversely, the neoliberal need to manage migration-- the attempt to ‘open and close the door’ by the needs of the market-- relies on restrictive immigration laws which justify themselves on narratives that lend credibility to images of foreigners as economic threats.

The “double relation of dependency,” the push-pull dynamics of migration described by Crowley and Hickman which are fundamental to the global economy, places the plight of migrants in perspective. The choice for individuals and families is either to stay in economic deprivation (not to mention war, environmental destruction, and/or political oppression) or to seek opportunities for advancement in countries where they will be ostracized simply for being

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127 Davidson and Saull, “Neoliberalism and the Far-Right,” 718.
128 Ibid., 719.
129 Crowley and Hickman, “Migration, Postindustrialism and the Globalized Nation State,” 1225.
cultural outsiders. The introduction of this “other,” some scholars argue, has been essential in “native” attempts at the reconstitution of identity in European countries, playing an important role in sustaining the status quo. As Demmers and Mehendale write: “neoliberalism may be technically agnostic on matters of culture and race, but the neoliberal project is well served by the permanent construction of an enemy (either within or without) who can satisfy the otherwise alienated consumer-citizen’s need for inclusion and belonging.”

In their 1972 book Anti-Oedipus, French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari described a trend in global cultural capitalism that they dubbed “deterritorialization.” The historical trend towards individualist capitalism and the decreased importance of geographically-rooted authority, deterritorialization claims, has resulted in the erosion of old identities (both real and retrospectively imagined), replacing them with the individual consumer citizen. Demmers and Mehendale argue similarly that “the rise of xenophobia [is] part of a larger process of a mostly market-controlled reclaiming of symbolic forms of collectiveness in an increasingly atomized society,” against what Bourdieu called the “methodical destruction of collectives.”

National governments, they claim, have been sidelined to the “global regime of competing states” while global economic tides are left to market actors and supranationals. Labor organizations have lost membership precipitously as labor and wages have been “individuated” to supposedly reflect “individual competences.” The pursuit of romantic and sexual relationships is less organized by social networks of parents and friends, and more by faceless companies which advertise their services as if selling any other commodity.

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130 Demmers and Mehendale, “Neoliberal Xenophobia: The Dutch Case,” 68.
131 Ibid., Deleuze and Guattari anti-oedipus
132 Ibid., 54, 61.
as a social unit as age groups have been separated as advertising targets as well as following the longstanding trend towards individual financial independence.\textsuperscript{134}

As other spheres of life are increasingly subsumed under “the economic” (a pattern which was presciently described by Carl Schmitt in 1932), more “liquid” forms of belonging have emerged.\textsuperscript{135} These are much less satisfying to many, however. Nation, race, ethnicity, and family have been fundamental identifiers for individuals for hundreds of years at the least. The reduction of the individual to a participant in the ubiquitous flow of capital, though it has in some senses emancipated the individual from old burdens of duty to family, nation, community, etc., has also cultivated alienation.

Deterritorialization provoked “reterritorializations.” For instance, fear mongering tabloid-style media competing for viewership with sensationalist nationalism and xenophobia, selling reassuring worldviews and scapegoats for profit. According to Demmers and Mehendale, in Dutch society at least, the mid-1990s saw a rise in “silent marches” and “popular ceremonies” around ‘easy’ issues like crime, serving as “instant satisfiers for the atomized citizen’s need to belong” to broader social organizations. This failed, however, to reconstitute clear or durable identities. They elaborate:

[the loss of] even the illusion of a national economy left the cultural field as the main battleground for political constituency-building and opened a "market" for ethnos-based politics. Minorities soon became the flashpoint for heated public discourse that marked the invasion of "others" [...] into sites of contestation.\textsuperscript{136}

\textsuperscript{134} Demmers and Mehendale, “Neoliberal Xenophobia: The Dutch Case,” 61.
\textsuperscript{136} Demmers and Mehendale, “Neoliberal Xenophobia: The Dutch Case,” 64.
Davidson and Saull claim that the media has responded to this opening by elevating three archetypes: the criminal taking what isn’t theirs, the incompetent (e.g. politician) who is ruled by political correctness, and the intruder (immigrant) who acts as the former but is invited and housed by the latter. Controversial SPD member Thilo Sarrazin’s 2010 book *Germany Does Away with Itself* demonstrates that these narratives of national degeneration have been met with tacit approval even from the center-left-- the SPD retained him during and after the controversy, likely because they knew how much of an important political issue immigration is for many Germans.\textsuperscript{138}

The ‘economic competition’ theory posits that immigrants are feared as threats to socioeconomic security. Yet this is not the only anxiety affixed to them. National identity, now more sensitive and abstract, is easily perceived as threatened by cultural outsiders:

In the context of societal atomization and the loss of collective standards, the consumer-citizen has become increasingly sensitive to the drawing and maintaining of identity boundaries. And since "we" can exist only in relation to "what we are not," there is a now-flourishing market for the ritualization and eviction of the "other."\textsuperscript{139}

The Italian sociologist Umberto Melotti claims that the globalization of capitalism has flooded the world with new configurations of multi-racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious social formations that represent increasingly interdependent pluralisms (e.g. sexual pluralism, cultural pluralism, etc.).\textsuperscript{140} Hans-Georg Betz believes that this is fundamental to the resurgence of the far right. As old forms of identification decline in relevance and are replaced by “a culture based on informal networks and individual promotion,” those who see themselves as having little “cultural

\textsuperscript{137} Davidson and Saull, “Neoliberalism and the Far-Right,” 711.
\textsuperscript{138} Jaschke, “Right-Wing Extremism and Populism in Contemporary Germany and Western Europe,” 27.
\textsuperscript{139} Demmers and Mehendale, “Neoliberal Xenophobia: The Dutch Case,” 65.
\textsuperscript{140} In Betz, *Postmodern Politics in Germany*, 170.
and social capital” have little to lose and much to gain by turning to the far right. These are people who are less educated, less networked socially and professionally, and overall less fitting to the ever-changing image of the ‘successful member of society’ venerated by mass consumerist media.\textsuperscript{141}

This raises the important debate noted earlier, over whether actual material disadvantages or other perceived sociocultural insecurities more closely correlate to right wing sympathy. The “reverse post-material thesis,” as it is called, claims that far-right support, especially in Germany, stems from a resistance to a perceived shift in societal values from “traditional class and economic interests” to social and environmental justice. Post-materialism appeals to the young and college-educated, but unskilled males find that this agenda neglects their interests, as do the traditional left parties that have followed this trend. Die Zeit claims that the SPD campaigned “squarely” on social justice, but 80% of German citizens responded that the party failed to communicate exactly what this meant for its actual policy intentions.\textsuperscript{142} These “politics of recognition” represent a convenience for many political actors. It is almost just as easy to draw cosmopolitan voters with lip-service to minority equality while ignoring (even perpetuating) the forces that preserve inequality as it is to draw consumers with an LGBT-themed rainbow Oreo.\textsuperscript{143} One can easily deduce the supply-side implications of an underclass of alienated white male workers facing economic squeeze and a center and left unfocused on them. When established parties are perceived as of out of touch, carrying platforms which are not relatable, a vacuum is created. This vacuum was and continues to be filled by the AfD.

\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., 176.
\textsuperscript{142} Blickle et al., “Wahlverhalten.”
Together, many of these factors—reactions to post-materialism, reduced national belonging, fear of immigrants as cultural threats, etc.—help explain the unique aspect of Germany’s position in Europe as having both a (fairly) longstanding tradition of capitalist democracy in the West, like France or Great Britain, and an eastern portion which has only recently begun the transition from authoritarianism like Hungary and Poland. As of 2015, xenophobic violence in the old GDR was twice as prevalent as in the West; in the mid-1990s, this ratio was eight to one. The infamous NSU terrorist cell, responsible for the killings of nine immigrants and one policewoman between 2000 and 2006, was composed of East Germans from Jena. In 1992, the largest xenophobic attack since 1945 took place in Rostock, where several hundred right-wing militants outnumbering police firebombed a dormitory for Vietnamese workers to the cheers of about 3,000 onlookers. In 1991, a group of twelve young racist thugs beat up a Sudanese man on a train and threw him out of the train car. He found sympathy neither from a group of girls on the train, nor from the conductor herself, nor even the police. The electoral situation is not much better. The AfD received nearly twice as much support in the east (an average of 21.5%) than in the west (11%) in the 2017 election.

Freya Klier, formerly a GDR citizen and activist under the Communist regime, asks why the most xenophobic part of Germany today is the part with the fewest foreigners. Could it simply be that closer proximity exposes the irrationality of such a fear? Klier examines the history of East Germany as a regime which she claims was a “right-wing extremist state” posing under the name of socialism, directly inheriting the “behavioral patterns acquired and inculcated

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during the Nazi period." The Communist regime, though claiming “solidarity with the peoples of the world,” kept guest workers heavily segregated. Vietnamese and Moroccans who were brought in as workers were rotated back home every three years, during which they were housed only among themselves, not allowed to leave the city or go to the “regular pubs”, discouraged from learning German, and were even--by treaty with the Vietnamese government--obligated to leave on their own dime if they became pregnant and refused an abortion. Jews were few and far between, their communities were ignored just as they had been before 1933, and the Nazi crimes were blamed on the West. It is no stretch to imagine why Franz Schönhuber, former member of the NSDAP and the Waffen-SS, and later founder of the far right wing populist Republikaner party, bemoans the collapse of the GDR: “The GDR was much more German than the Federal Republic. There they still had family values and not this society of every man for himself.”

Almost immediately after the wall fell, Schönhuber began recruiting in the former socialist republic.

Another aspect of the east German situation is the economic lag felt across the eastern states. In 1996 the unemployment rate skyrocketed to 20% due to reunification and remained there until 2005. As discussed earlier, unemployment rates on their own do not seem to cause far right voting, but Gerhard Schröder’s Third Way neoliberal reforms (similar to those of Tony Blair and Bill Clinton) cut back the social welfare institutions that could have been critical to the economic security of the east German populace. The ex-GDR saw the first appearance of the “new urban under-class” of young males, overcome by disenchantment with politics

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147 Ibid., 273.
(Politikverdrossenheit), who flocked to the right-wing DVU in the 1998 election. This marked the first time since the Nazi period that any demographic other than elderly undereducated males were overrepresented in the radical right in Germany. The old East Germany seems a perfect illustration of the relationship between economic insecurity and the acceptance of xenophobic imaginaries; nearly 30 years since the celebrated reunification, GDP per capita is €10,000 higher in former West Germany than in the old east. A graphic from The Guardian illustrates a correlation between average income and AfD votes as well as that between ethnic homogeneity and AfD vote share in each of the constituencies in Germany (Image 2).

![Image 2](image_url)

These points demonstrate that even areas with lower average income and lower percentages of foreign nationals in the West do not choose the AfD nearly as much as areas in the East,

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150 Ignazi, *Extreme Right Parties in Western Europe*, 80–82.
suggesting some extent of cultural difference between the two—recall the GDR’s attitude toward Vietnamese “immigrants”. At the same time, the East is overwhelmingly stuck in the low income and low diversity brackets compared to the West. The combination of these two factors, economic status and ethnic homogeneity, with the legacy of cultural isolation helps explain the AfD’s popularity in the ex-GDR.

Although the pattern appears clear, most of the studies cited in this chapter urge caution against boiling causation down to a few material factors-- as we have seen, the same factor can cause far right support to go up or down or have no effect at all depending on the countless additional factors that make up a nation of millions of people and the global forces beyond them. Though AfD votes tend to correlate to low incomes and low diversity, some areas with high levels of immigration also have significant AfD support, and as Jesuit et al, Veugelers and Magnan, and Han all demonstrate, causality is extremely difficult to establish among the complexities of the interactions among labor market institutions, immigration, postindustrial transitions, political systems, historical particularities, and social capital. Individual studies with their own particular scope and methodology can find patterns, but often contradict one another depending on how their foci and methodologies differ. The next chapter explores how material conditions have produced discourses-- the language, imaginaries, and leitmotifs through which mainstream society and the right wing alike assemble systems of meaning to make sense of the material world’s relation to subjective experience.

A 2012 study by Lucassen and Lubbers suggests that the concepts of scarcity and competition can be expanded to cultural identities and values, and that perceived cultural/ethnic threats actually more strongly predict far-right voting patterns than economic insecurities do. Finding that lower GDPs result in stronger perceptions of cultural threats, they also notice that the same countries surprisingly have lower levels of far right wing voting. Cross-nationally, it is those who are the most well-off that tend to vote far right.\(^{153}\) Likewise, Piero Ignazi’s study of right-wing support in Germany shows that attitudinal and subjective elements have a “stronger explanatory power than the structural factors (economic crisis, unemployment).”\(^{154}\) This suggests that we must also look more closely at how neoliberalism as an economic regime relates to the discursive regime of contemporary Europe. We must explore how xenophobic discourses—the expressions of perceived “cultural” threats—“configured to the needs of the ‘neoliberal state’” and arise through declarations of the “crisis of multiculturalism.”\(^{155}\) As Lentin and Titley claim, the narrative that the social “experiment” of multiculturalism has failed has developed since the 1970s as a focus for concentrating anxieties of disempowerment stemming from the socio-economic impacts of neoliberal restructuring and the general implosion of class-based politics, the transfer of powers and borders incrementally involved in membership of the European Union, and the multiplicity of formal and informal adjustments and dilutions of state autonomy and sovereignty associated with international structures and systemic globalization.\(^{156}\)


\(^{154}\) Ignazi, *Extreme Right Parties in Western Europe*, 80.


\(^{156}\) Ibid., 29.
Neoliberalism’s alienating effects drove the production of discourses attempting to identify “what went wrong” with neoliberalism—why social cohesion has broken down, why there are still ghettos of immigrants, etc.--without attributing it to the economic regime which has often been accepted as the only possibility in this supposed “end of history.”¹⁵⁷ The discursive approach is more systemic/synthetic than analytic in nature-- less quantifiable by breaking the whole down into statistical parts, and more about how narratives act as, in Foucault’s formulation, “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak.”¹⁵⁸ Simply put, the symbolic world we create through our particular speech about a subject becomes our functional relationship to that subject. Michael Minkenberg claims that a strictly “objectifying” materialist interpretation, postulating a “direct relationship between social and economic change and individual political behavior”, warrants skepticism. Borrowing from Ernst Bloch’s concept of “dis-simultaneousness,” he claims that there is always a chasm between objective and subjective dimensions of politics which are mediated by a social and political construction of reality.¹⁵⁹ This implores a study of the “losers of modernization” defined in a subjective sense, through the discourses which produce such individuals’ perceptions of themselves as losers and immigrants as privileged over them.

Chapter Two: Multiculturalism and Cultural Identity

The western world, it seems, is beginning the transition to post-multiculturalism. What “multiculturalism” ever meant before the 21st century is unclear. Neither a coherent state-led plan nor even a consensus of cultural acceptance, the term has been used to describe the failings, both real and perceived, of every aspect of the liberal 20th century welfare state order.\textsuperscript{160} From left to right, from Slavoj Žižek to Angela Merkel, from Antifa to the Identitarian Movement, “multiculturalism,” under one meaning or another, has been understood as the cornerstone of the centrist social-democratic consensus of the last few generations in Europe as well as the source of its decline. It has been deemed at best a noble but idealistic experiment which was doomed to fail against the realities of globalization and cultural difference, and at worst an elite (even Jewish) conspiracy against the purity of Europe.\textsuperscript{161}

The left has attacked multiculturalism defined as centrist liberal “block-thinking” about minorities, racial paternalizing based on privileged conceptions of “tolerance”, and objectifying cultural outsiders, while the far right has attacked multiculturalism as an unnatural prioritization of difference over similarity as well as the imposition of “equality” where none truly exists. On the post-Marxist left, Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek has attacked the “progressive liberal” center as commodifying diversity into a form of cultural capital-- in other words, virtue signaling-- which, while nominally praising tolerance and cultural equality, also keeps the cultural Other at a distance through imposing expectations of assimilation as well as tightening immigration under the guise of “reasonable” balance.\textsuperscript{162} Meanwhile, right wing radicals have

\textsuperscript{160}Lentin and Titley, \textit{The Crises of Multiculturalism}, 11.
\textsuperscript{161}Saull, “Capitalism, Crisis and the Far-Right in the Neoliberal Era,” 30.
\textsuperscript{162}Lentin and Titley, \textit{The Crises of Multiculturalism}, 5.
accused mainstream parties of kowtowing to political correctness, in the process bringing in harmful outsiders associated with terrorism and rape.

Criticisms of modern “Multikulti” society have not only come from the fringes, however. Lentin and Titley argue that positioning “the center” as the bastion of multiculturalism facing siege from both sides fails to account for the way in which centrist politics themselves have picked up the “failed multiculturalism” narrative, mainstreaming the right wing position to protect votes from far-right parties but in the process lending more legitimacy to xenophobia.\(^{163}\) The CDU’s Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany, declared that “the approach of multiculturalism has failed, absolutely failed” in 2010 after the publication of SPD politician Thilo Sarrazin’s \textit{Germany Does Away with Itself}.\(^ {164}\) She reiterated this point in 2015, calling multiculturalism “still a lifelong lie.”\(^ {165}\) To see such agreement among the two long-standing mainstream parties on the “end” of multiculturalism (or at least tolerance of the narrative) certainly indicates that this has become a recited truth even in the center. Lentin and Titley and others contend that this had made the center extremely vulnerable to influence from the xenophobic right wing through refocusing “anxieties of disempowerment”, engendered by neoliberalism’s economic restructuring and the “implosion of class-based politics” onto culture and cultural outsiders.\(^ {166}\)

German playwright Roland Schimmelpfennig’s timely production \textit{Wintersonnenwende} (Winter Solstice) demonstrates the insidiousness of extremism. In the play, a polite old man shows up on the doorstep of an educated, cultured, modern family on Christmas Eve and is invited to stay. The old man turns out to be a Nazi sympathizer, and one by one the entire liberal

\(^{163}\) Ibid., 6.
\(^{164}\) “Integration: Merkel Erklärt Multikulti Für Gescheitert.”
\(^{165}\) “Merkel Zur Flüchtlingskrise: ‘Multikulti Bleibt Eine Lebensläge.’”
\(^{166}\) Lentin and Titley, \textit{The Crises of Multiculturalism}, 29.
bourgeois family is drawn in by his rhetoric about a fractured world which needs to be brought back together. Just as the Nazis only made gains once they eschewed the hardline anti-Semitic line and made themselves presentable to the average voter, Schimmelpfennig argues that the modern far right is adept at identifying sentiments that can be exploited to draw the center closer to the right.¹⁶⁷ For instance, fears of terrorism and rapes like the 2015/16 New Year’s Eve incident, perceptions of the failure of multicultural integration, and even mainstream conceptions of cultural identity have been used to aid the far right wing’s resurgence.

“Failed integration” became a buzzword for both right and left as early as 2000. In that year an essay from a Dutch socialist titled “The Multicultural Drama” (also translatable as “The Multicultural Disaster”) argued that the cultural and economic integration of immigrants had failed and that multiculturalism as a policy had “locked up migrants in their inward-looking communities, creating an apathetic, isolated underclass.”¹⁶⁸ The essay demanded assimilation (distinct from integration) through coerced learning of Dutch history and language. The key difference between integration and assimilation involves the new culture’s relationship to the native one. Integration expects a new culture to fuse into the native ones, not losing its distinctiveness but becoming a functional community within the greater society, contributing to the local culture as a whole; assimilation demands that new cultures adopt the native culture rather than contribute to it.¹⁶⁹ The same kind of rhetoric has swept Germany since the beginning of the millennium, a “culturalist regime of truth” which places cultural differences between hosts


and migrants at the center of the shortcomings of integration. This chapter will examine the discursive developments of the last three decades through which “failed integration” became a recited truth and out of which contemporary assimilationist xenophobia has arisen.

Whether multiculturalism ever was one “thing” or whether it really has failed is not the focus of this chapter. The recited narrative is that whatever it was has failed, and groups across the ideological spectrum have begun to cohere to new models of social (dis)integration. The subsequent discourses of culture, national security, and assimilation have created an atmosphere in which xenophobia, one-sided conceptions of “tolerance”, and “identity liberalism”—the idea that liberal tolerance is vulnerable to Islamic extremism so Europe must be illiberal to protect its foundations—have found increasing justification. These mainstream justifications, such as cultural essentialism and the placement of the burden of integration onto minority groups, have in many ways provided the foundations for the new right as well as setting up an easy discursive slope from moderate xeno-skepticism to explicit nationalist or white chauvinism.

The *Leitkultur* (leading or dominant culture) debate illustrates the pushes and pushbacks in Germany’s shifting cultural landscape since the concept’s introduction by sociologist Bassam Tibi in 1998. The term proposes a variant of cultural pluralism (Tibi viewed *Multikulti* as the result of a European guilt complex) which permits all cultures so long as they agree to a set of core values which overarch the society as a whole. *Leitkultur* was specifically intended to describe a model of identity as primarily *European* rather than connected to specifically-German traditions, and “oriented toward the values of democracy, secularity, individual human rights, secular tolerance, pluralism and civil society rather than toward concepts such as ‘Volk’ and ‘our customs’.” This arose out of a specific political moment in Germany, as the new SPD-Greens

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coalition of 1998 attempted to detach citizenship from blood descent and pursue more globalization-responsive immigration and integration laws.\textsuperscript{171} The longstanding platitude that ‘Germany is not a country of immigration’ like the United States but rather a homogenous cultural and political entity came under heavy fire, as immigrants were up to this point often colloquially referred to as “guest workers”-- a term which evoked more of a temporary quality. The SPD-Green coalition wanted to acknowledge that the Turkish and other diasporas were there to stay-- no longer “guests”-- and assert that they deserved social and political rights which reflected their status as an equal part of modern German society.\textsuperscript{172}

In 2000 the CDU/CSU highlighted Ausländerpolitik (policy on foreigners) as a focal point in the upcoming elections and accused the SPD-Green government of threatening “German cultural identity.”\textsuperscript{173} It was in this context that Leitkultur began to be referred to as German Leitkultur rather than European Leitkultur. The debate has faded and reemerged a number of times since the turn of the millennium, but Tibi’s concept has significantly shaped German discourses about multiculturalism, preserving native culture, and imposing cultural education onto migrants as a condition for equal rights while “[reconstructing] the national state’s authority by drawing new boundary lines between nationals and immigrants.”\textsuperscript{174} Hartwig Pautz claims that the attempt to define a German Leitkultur has even coincided with contemporary Vergangenheitsbewältigung (coming to terms with Germany’s past) debates. Some forces in German society have pursued a “normalization” of German identity through first historicizing the Holocaust as a “closed chapter,” no longer relevant to today’s republic, and second by

\textsuperscript{172} Pautz, “The Politics of Identity in Germany,” 40.
\textsuperscript{173} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{174} Ibid., 41.
characterizing it as no more unique than any other genocide. This stems, he claims, from a desire on the part of conservatives to have a “normal” national consciousness like that of other European nations which have not had to consciously and constantly revisit their pasts and reshape their images.\(^{175}\) This identity revisionism as well as *Leitkultur*’s insinuation that immigrants are threats to ‘native culture’ have thus “problematised immigration and integration policies in a way that is hardly distinguishable from the positions of the extreme right,” Pautz claims.\(^{176}\)

The mainstreaming of right wing sentiments in Germany has been underway for over a decade, as former conservative journalists with well-respected news outlets began to assert a hardline stance on immigration and German homogeneity. Udo Ulfkotte, formerly a writer for the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (Germany’s second most-circulated newspaper), became a conspiracy theorist after 9/11. In 2003 he wrote an “incendiary tract” titled *The War in Our Cities: How Radical Islamists Undermine Germany*, in which he railed against a supposed Islamist conspiracy against Germany.\(^{177}\) This cost him his job, but he subsequently founded the right populist group *Bürgerbewegung Pax Europa* and worked with Pegida until his death in January 2017.\(^{178}\) Eva Herman was fired from her job on Channel One in 2007 after praising Hitler’s support payments for mothers and Nazi labor policies in a conversation about Germany’s low birth rates. She had also published a book, “The Eva Principle: For a New Womanhood”, which aimed to encourage middle-class women to stay in the home and have

\(^{175}\) Ibid., Fekete, “Flying the Flag for Neoliberalism,” 8.
\(^{176}\) Pautz, “The Politics of Identity in Germany,” 50.
more children through a return to traditional gender roles and “re-mythologized motherhood.”

Though these people faced strong repercussions from their employers, they had given voice to the xenophobia and revisionism that had not been acceptable in public for decades after 1945, but that many sympathized with. Ulfkotte went on to organize the thousands of people whose taboo sentiments he had touched upon, and Herman put together a pseudo-news channel on Youtube which receives hundreds of thousands of views. Like Sarrazin, their status as outcasts from the very mainstream that brought them to prominence has helped them establish a wide following.

Established tabloid newspapers such as Bild (which has the highest readership of any paper in Germany) also played a role in bringing right wing talking points to the mainstream, overtly expressing support for Thilo Sarrazin and printing sensationalist fearmongering headlines. Simpson and Druxes claim that this rightward move is not only occurring within the traditional conservatives; every party except for the Greens is shifting their rhetoric to the right. Even Der Spiegel, one of Europe’s most respected (and arguably left-leaning) magazines, published a front page featured article titled “Mecca Germany” about the “silent Islamicization” of the German nation.

This demonstrates the supply side of right wing growth. Both to reflect the new discourses and capture voters taken in by them, the mainstream parties and media have aided the proliferation of xenophobic and chauvinistic narratives. “The new right has become adept,” Simpson and Druxes observe, “at promoting a more acceptable form of casual racism via

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179 Druxes, “Manipulating the Media: The German New Right’s Virtual and Violent Identities,” 125.
nationalist language couched in terms more acceptable to the mainstream." To view the rightward shift as simply the result of influence from the right onto a malleable center, however, fails to ask how the mainstream consensus has formed this way in a specific historical moment as "something associated with the exercise of various forms of power and knowledge production, with the arbitrary production of categorizations, with the kinds of majority-population subjectivities produced in the context of contemporary economic restructuring." In other words, how have the mainstream discourses (which are shaped by state and corporate power), such as the constructions of group identity based on culture--the fundament of multi-culturalism-- or the collective subjectivity of native Germans (e.g. seeing themselves as tolerant hosts) undergirded the specific logic which the right wing now uses? Is the right wing an outsider with its own discourses and logic, attempting to impose them onto the center, or has the far right found an opportunity in the language of the center and repurposed it for its own goals? Both are to some extent true. In some ways the modern far right is avowedly anti-postmodern, but it is also true that it has taken to the language of cultural difference, identity, and even diversity with ease.

One of the dominant responses to “failed multiculturalism” is a loosely-defined thought system known as “identity politics” or identitarianism. Though “idpol” first grew out of and is widely associated with currents that consider themselves on the political left (an American example would be Black Lives Matter), focusing on minority identities, identity politics have been co-opted by right wing groups such as the transnational Identitarian Movement through shifting attention to majority identities. Commonly ascribed to postmodernism, identitarianism

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eschews materialist explanations (e.g. class conflict), coherent belief systems (e.g. Marxism or liberalism), or party affiliations in favor of an emphasis on power relations as well as a politics of recognition and advancement of people predicated on racial, sexual, or gender groupings (to name a few). In 2005 Austrian cultural studies expert Peter Stachel observed “a more and more inflationary use of notions of ‘identity’ in social and cultural studies’ as well as a willingness to “speak of identity without specifying who or what was identical with whom.” One of his contemporaries, Hans-Ulrich Wehler, characterizes the current use of the term “identity” as an “amorphous, always-applicable word with an unclear meaning.” He and Stachel make the oft-levied accusation that identity politics embodies a distancing of social sciences from clear and precise empirically-supported concepts in favor of flexible language.

Identity is usually treated in identitarian politics as a “largely stable nucleus” made up of essential differences (race, sexuality), in contrast to other theories which consider the self as less hermetic. Relational theory and symbolic interactionism, for instance, suggest that individual identity is a fluid process which depends on social contexts; Fabian Virchow understands identity as “the result of a psychosocial formation process that operates throughout our lives as we participate in social practices,” to which labels are more difficult to assign. Nevertheless, the predominant conception of identity in supposedly “post-multicultural” politics-- in its left and right wing incarnations-- is essentialist, intentionally or unintentionally defining identities by

189 Ibid., 396.
191 Ibid.
essential, irreducible qualities. According to Stachel, essentialization is problematic because concepts of identity develop relationally-- Germanness for example, only forms in relation to something else-- and because this results in a postulation of “collective identity as a given and uniform ‘totality.’”\textsuperscript{192} In defining identities as fixed and total, identitarianism falls short of its own project. It posits itself as recognizing some vast multiplicity of relations known vaguely as “identity” but uses essential groupings in its political rhetoric which do not differ from the groupings known by multiculturalism. It simply unleashes the former aspect as a weapon because it cannot be pinned down by precise language; it is more difficult to hit a moving target.

Sexual, racial, and ethnic “identities,” whatever they may be, are the focal point of contemporary emancipatory politics and arguably the nucleus of new consumerism. Eschewing the economic solutions of the traditional left in favor of solutions categorized by clearly-demarcated identity groups, identity politics tends to accept neoliberalism’s privatized politics and attempts to further minority status within it.\textsuperscript{193} The ease of expressing solidarity with consumerist politics, Jodi Dean argues, has made solidarity-signaling into a product: “Antiracist? Wear a Malcolm X t-shirt. Gay friendly? Fly a rainbow flag. The ease of political expression, the quick availability of the affective thrill of radicality, could let more people feel that they were politically engaged…”, and ‘big corporate’ has caught on with McDonalds and Coke both experimenting with LGBT marketing campaigns.\textsuperscript{194} Even the individualism central to neoliberalism plays a part, as “group differences are conceived categorically and not relationally, as distinct entities rather than interconnected structures or systems” created artificially through

\textsuperscript{193} Jodi Dean, Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics (Duke University Press, 2009), 34.
the social repetition of concepts such as whiteness or blackness. The focal point of identity politics in action is consequently the individual “[taking] on the mantle of the victim,” and the identitarian responses to intolerance have distinctly focused on the “protection of individuals from abuse by other individuals.”\footnote{Scott points out that this has caused a disconnect between minority and majority individuals. If the abused minority individual can be a victim, why can’t a white male who has been harassed be equally victimized?} As Chandra Mohanty acutely puts it, “the 1960s and 70s slogan ‘the personal is political’ [was] recrafted in the 1980s as ‘the political is personal.’”\footnote{Individualized, commodified identity can then not only coexist with, but also complement the neoliberal ideology of autonomy of choice and personal responsibility for failure.}

In a similar vein, Lentin and Titley claim that identity politics is a form of depoliticization of real socio-political problems-- a deflection of sorts-- which arose in response to the criticism of welfare-based integration programs in the 1980s that they were not producing sufficient “labour market integration.” Beginning in the early 90s,

a mainstream rhetoric of implacable differentialism [focus on differences] was progressively suffused with a moralized assessment of migrant failure to integrate. This discursive shift is congruent with a demonstrable ‘ideological shift [in the early 1990s] from support for group needs to promoting individual identity.’\footnote{Ellie Vasta, “From Ethnic Minorities to Ethnic Majority Policy: Multiculturalism and the Shift to Assimilationism in the Netherlands,” \textit{Ethnic and Racial Studies} 30, no. 5 (2007): 733. quoted in Lentin and Titley, \textit{The Crises of Multiculturalism}, 109.}
The consistent exclusion of migrants from equality in labor markets (and the continuing economic inequality this entailed) was, in other words, displaced onto the cultural incompatibility of the migrants. The failure of the neoliberal political economy to show results consistent with its nominal program of post-racial inclusiveness was blamed on the migrants themselves. Lentin and Titley argue that the germination of identity politics from this condition is justified with the same logic imposed onto the migrants since the 1990s. Identity politics is a reaction to perceived “cultural problems” with “cultural solutions,” while attempts at structurally-focused anti-racism—aiming at the economy, labor market exclusion, and migrants’ status as culturally-unwanted but economically-exploited “guests”—are pacified.199

This pacification, in which migrant socio-economic frustration is easily painted over as cultural friction, has limited the efficacy of grassroots organizations by migrants unified around political-economic demands and instead fostered a “politics of communal identity” in which communities are reduced to one dimension— their cultural identity— and are only capable of lobbying for change “through the promotion of their own inward-looking sense of victimization.”200 This has a number of consequences. First, by focusing on difference rather than commonality, it coerces minority communities into the “language and logics of cultural difference, [...] forcing them into forms of collective self-formation that are [fictive], by driving them into the cul-de-sac of (racialized) identity politics” which imposes an artificial and intransgressible identity onto minorities.201 Second, by heightening perceptions of “community competition and white disadvantage” as native Germans perceive these (coerced) inward-looking communities as isolationist and unwilling to integrate. Finally, by marginalizing those within

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200 Ibid., 40.
such communities who decry these politics out of frustration, especially those second- and third-
generation members who have been raised in Germany yet still not been accepted as cultural
Germans.202 It is quite widely discussed that second-generation “immigrants” are
disproportionately likely to be engaged in crime in Germany and elsewhere, and it is not difficult
to imagine that the kind of frustration described could be one influencing factor. 203 This has all
functioned to solidify the “construction of an enemy (either within or without)” to serve
neoliberalism’s need for depoliticized subjects and to position culture as the only remaining
“explanatory residue for apparent behavioral traits that do not conform to a ‘meritocratic’
neoliberal subjectivity”. 204 Lisa Duggan drives the point home:

Neoliberalism was constructed in and through cultural and identity politics and cannot be
undone by a movement without the constituencies and analyses that respond directly to
that fact. Nor will it be possible to build a new social movement that might be strong,
creative, and diverse enough to engage the work of reinventing global politics for the new
millennium as long as cultural identity issues are separated, analytically and
organizationally, from the political economy in which they are embedded.205

The notable demographic changes in Germany created a situation in which the identity and
cultural discourses tied to integration of minorities has raised a question in the minds of sections
of the majority: “what about me?”206 As they anxiously perceive the decline of their dominance,
new cultural “competition” over the identity of their homeland, as well as economic and social

203 Krishnadev Calamur, “Are Immigrants Prone to Crime and Terrorism?,” The Atlantic, June 15, 2016,
204 Saull, “Capitalism, Crisis and the Far-Right in the Neoliberal Era,” 715; Demmers and Mehendale, “Neoliberal
Xenophobia: The Dutch Case,” 68.
205 Lisa Duggan, The Twilight of Equality?: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy (Boston:
206 Patricia Anne Simpson and Helga Druxes, eds., Digital Media Strategies of the Far Right in Europe and the
resources, they begin to look inwards with the rhetoric of pluralism. The racial and ethnic categories highlighted by identitarian social justice politics-- Turkish, Arabic, African people, etc.-- are juxtaposed with what “native” people think of themselves as: Germans. The supposed failure of integration or multiculturalism served as the spark for animosity’s justification: ‘we Germans brought these groups into Germany, granting them use of our institutions, and they still refuse to adopt our values.’ The group label “we Germans” attempts to reify the homogeneity of Germany, ignoring its long history of migration, changing identity (it was not even one state until 1871), and integration. This becomes either implicitly or explicitly associated with Germanness-- as Demmers says, “‘we’ can exist only in relation to ‘what we are not’”-- and while only the very far right openly refers to race, the more moderate xenophobic currents refer to “culture” (though in practice, the same groups are stereotyped as inferior or uncivilized). Likewise, both radical rightists and moderate xenophobes make claims to German identity and counterpose it to foreign identities through the *Leitkultur* debate.

Here identity has become a powerful tool for the right wing, for capturing those who simultaneously feel the de-solidarizing social breakdown, the loss of economic security, and political alienation. Ijoma Mangold of *Die Zeit* warns of the danger: although it can obviously also be used for emancipatory purposes, “the appeal to identity is a powerful instrument of exclusion and anti-individualism.” Recognition of minority subjectivities is vital to giving equal opportunities to underprivileged groups, but the turn away from politics of tangible

208 Demmers and Mehendale, “Neoliberal Xenophobia: The Dutch Case,” 65.
solutions has left large segments of the population feeling abandoned and picking up the surrounding language of identity as the means of understanding their own plight.

It is no surprise then that one of the newest and most transnational xenophobic groups is the Identitarian Movement (Identitäre Bewegung, IB), an international activist organization which stages high-profile actions to condemn multiculturalism and declare themselves defenders of European civilization. The first issue of its magazine “Identitäre Generation” explicitly addresses its namesake: “being born French, Italian, German alone does not define” identity, it says. Identity was “dynamic and capable of change” before the modern nation-state, but lost this quality once peoples formed a collective “inner being and (ethno-cultural) identity” that “markedly determines the awareness and actions of an individual” and gives “all the diverse peoples of the world their own singular uniqueness.” The unofficial manifesto of the Identitarians, a 103-page tract written by an Austrian millennial named Markus Willinger, claims that the multiculturalism forced upon society by the “68ers” (akin to the American baby boomer generation) has ignored the fundamental human pursuit of identity: “If there were no women, masculine identity would play no role for men. If Europe was alone in the world, the European identity would be meaningless. He who says ‘Europe’ must also say ‘Asia’ and ‘Africa’ in order to define its boundaries.”

210 Conversely, the “losers of modernization” feel that discursive attention is only being given to the identity of “Asians” and “Africans”-- or Muslims and Jews, or Arabs and Turks-- and respond to the identity-drawing of the “outside” with a reification of the identity of the “inside.” The difficulty with constructing hermetic identities, however, is that “German” identity never was one thing in the first place. Lentin and Titley argue that the cultural narrative which is

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now commonplace in the mainstream-- that the shortcomings of integration are due to differences in essential cultural identities of immigrants and their German hosts-- should be read as a distinctly conservative myth.211 As political issues become subsumed under cultural identity politics, the operative identity of Europe is dominated by its omission of the segments of European societies which have always fought the conservative language of “threats to national identity” in the name of egalitarianism and internationalism. Other political groups have throughout European history expressed solidarity with “outsiders” like Jews, Turks, and now Syrians, welcomed these peoples as part of their own idea of “European culture” that is progressive in nature, and been hostile to their state’s domestic discrimination and international military and political interventions. The “them vs. us” mentality of “insider and outsider” culture is arguably just a dilution of the “clash of civilizations” narrative which European liberal and left universalism has historically opposed. A narrative that identifies “German culture” as an essential entity which has inherently always conflicted with other cultural entities is to whitewash the history of so many Germans who have resisted racism while simultaneously rejecting radical conservative Islamism; it defines Germany only by its more conservative constituents.212

The Identitarian Movement, “confined with the impossibility of being precise about what might constitute ‘Volk’ with specific characteristics,” betrays its namesake when it is asked to concretely define what it means to be German: “every German (who is not a German citizen in name only) knows deep down who or what is German and who or what is not,” one representative of IB replied.213 It is not clear whether the IB actually finds this description

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211 Lentin and Titley, The Crises of Multiculturalism, 57.
212 Ibid.
satisfying. Willinger’s manifesto does not provide clear answers either. It comes perhaps a little
closer to a definition in its claim that Germanness is “derived from the ‘narrative of the nation’,
in which ‘the nation itself is the narrative, the master plan, that conjoins everything.’”
However, as discussed in the previous paragraph, this “narrative of the nation” tends to be a
rather specific romantic, nostalgic narrative that excludes the presence of progressive elements,
diversity, and changes in German identity throughout history. The right wing’s attempted
monopoly on “continuity” with the past assumes a linear, conservative national history that has
supposedly only recently been disrupted by Others. Any study of history will show the naivety of
this worldview, but the more important point is that “identity” functions as a social unifier for
Identitarians regardless. Though it may not be a concrete, stable, self-contained aspect of an
individual like name, skin color, or family background, identity is a fundamental part of one’s
self-formation in contemporary identity-focused society. The prevailing trend of identity politics
makes one instantly and constantly aware of one’s identity, especially as it relates to the
highlighted minority groups in contemporary discourse, and the right wing has succeeded in
infiltrating politics focused on Muslim/black/etc. identity by applying the same logic to
“white/German identity.” In other words, the politics of identity of outsiders/minorities left a
vacuum— it offered nothing for the rest of the population—and the right has filled that vacuum
with a politics of the identity of insiders/majorities.

The appropriation of identity politics by the right wing has been facilitated by another
important aspect of late modern discourses: the “culturalization” of race, which has veiled racial
politics under seemingly-innocuous language which bypasses the offensiveness and suspicions
raised by speaking directly of “race” itself. As mentioned earlier, hard far-right groups such as

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214 Ibid., 179.
neo-Nazis still openly refer to “blood and soil”, but the vast majority of xenophobic discourse circumscribes this political suicide by referring to the *culture* of outsiders as tainting Germany rather than their genes. “The culturalist defense that ‘people are equal, cultures are not’ or ‘we are not against Muslims, we are against Islam’ did not have any of the emotionally charged and messy connotations that associated racism with Holland's traumatic, Nazi-occupied past,” Demmers and Mehendale observe; German right-wingers would obviously have even greater incentive to avoid stirring up the specters of 20th century racial politics. The weightiness of an accusation of racism in the 21st century has driven many (often those complacent with habitual prejudice) to speak as if we now live in a post-racial society—littals, leftists, and right-wingers alike. Charges of racism by groups that claim it still exists are now also perceived as alarmist, using the “*trump card*” in an overbearing political correctness. The “failure of multiculturalism” as neoliberalism’s explanation for the failures of economic integration has become imbricated with a “culturalization of race” which reduces migrant communities’ relationship to the rest of society to the one dimension of culture, ignoring their own internal complexities. This has occurred at the expense of not only socio-political-economic considerations, but also considerations of the ways in which race “remains deeply ingrained in the political imaginaries, structures, and practices of ‘the West’.” Lentin and Titley expound on the contemporary attitude:

*For any act of violence or exclusion to be considered ‘racist’, it must be provable that the victim was passive, and did not possess any attribute nor be open to any ascribed difference beyond a dark(er) skin colour. As soon as the victim can be found to be*

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216 Lentin and Titley, *The Crises of Multiculturalism*, 49.
217 Ibid., 52.
218 Ibid., 49.
involved in practices or possessed of cultural attributes that set her apart from dominant society, or that she was in any way not passive, the violence and exclusion are something other than racism.\textsuperscript{219}

Because of the taboo of referring to “race,” they claim, the definition of the term itself has been narrowed to only count skin color and other biological phenotypes, relegating any other discrimination to “non-racial” discrimination. Racism has, however, always functioned on social imaginaries and cultural attributes-- as “race” itself has never simply referred to biology, but rather as a combination of “nature” and “culture.”\textsuperscript{220} Charles W. Mills claims that the concept of race has always rested on assigning certain cultural tropes to groups of people deemed “capable of mastering nature, and [to groups deemed] incapable of emerging from a state of nature.”\textsuperscript{221} Claims of post-racialism are consequently only evaluated on a revised and lenient definition of race which never existed to begin with, tacitly opening up spaces for a veiled xenophobia. This more comfortable, palatable language no doubt allowed groups like the AfD to sound more reasonable and to appeal to common sensibilities.

“Culturalism” is now the primary medium for understanding different groups of people, operating on the basis that every culture is defined by one essence “and then explains politics as a consequence of that essence” --a concept referred to as “cultural essentialism.”\textsuperscript{222} Even without considering its inherent elision of race, the cultural essentialist narrative is problematic in the unequal applications which emerge from it. Majority German culture and minority outsider cultures naturally hold different places in German society. Differences in power inherently

\begin{footnotes}
\item\textsuperscript{219} Ibid., 52.
\item\textsuperscript{220} Ibid., 26.
\end{footnotes}
coincide with differences in position, and so power relations must be accounted for. Though nominally discussed through the rhetoric of cultural relativism, the principle that all cultures are fundamentally equal as variations of social formations (also meaning that no universal values can be imposed upon them), foreigners are viewed as subjects of culture, ruled by it, while Europeans rule themselves and “enjoy culture fruitfully” as only one aspect of their lives.\(^{223}\) Just as the narrative of waning German culture proceeds on the basis of omitting the historical cultural (and political) diversity of Germans themselves, the essentialist cultural relativist paradigm proceeds on the basis that migrants are somehow first and foremost “cultural beings” reduced to one dimension which is supposedly responsible for the difficulties of integration, throwing economics, psychology, education, and all other aspects of their lives aside.

Essentialism has further precipitated the replacement of “race” with “culture” through strictly defining peoples by a static component rather than a fluid one like economic status; consequently, “culture” as it is referred to in the contemporary discourse is “able to perform the same exclusionary function as race” had before.\(^{224}\)

It has also allowed the new right’s attempt to monopolize Enlightenment values—democracy, human rights, etc.—as distinctly European, despite the cross-cultural applications of these concepts. ‘All cultures are equal,’ they strategically concede to relativism, ‘but our culture is democratic and theirs is not; to maintain our values, we must keep our culture here and their culture there.’\(^{225}\) This “differentialism” of the new far right fits surprisingly well into the mainstream anxieties involved in the Leitkultur debate—the acceptance of ‘separate but equal’ between cultures—which first essentializes outsiders as hosts of a cultural virus and then

\(^{223}\) Lentin and Titley, *The Crises of Multiculturalism*, 57.
\(^{224}\) Pautz, “The Politics of Identity in Germany,” 40.
\(^{225}\) Demmers and Mehendale, “Neoliberal Xenophobia: The Dutch Case,” 65.
contrasts their culture with a “German” one which must be preserved above the others, lest the culture of democracy and free speech succumb to the culture of a stereotyped authoritarian Islam. Kultipluralismus (cultural pluralism)—a “heterogeneous world of homogenous communities” -- is suggested as the alternative to multiculturalism, recognizing the supposed need for the imposition of cultural education on migrants. As CDU politician Jörg Schönbohm expressed it, “we will have a pluralism of cultures in Germany but German culture must be its basis. That is what it is all about.”

A focus on culture inherently begets a focus on cultural difference. If the issues in contemporary Germany were viewed as economic or political ones, class or political inequality would form the explanations for the same woes. Instead, the (exaggerated) differences between “German” and “Islamic” culture are used to “[interpret] social facts in the daily lives of majority and minority populations in Germany, so as to make sense of social, political and economic differences in a way that would legitimate the exploitation and exclusion of foreigners.” Pautz also points out that the “exclusionary mechanism of cultural racism is an extremely flexible one,” in that the state has the power to decide who is “culturally integrated” enough and who is not, selectively granting German legal rights to the former and denying them to the latter. Likewise, the discursive focus on cultural difference inherently eclipses the political differences within Islamic cultures. Many in Muslim countries are pro-democracy and many are against, but when the problem is made one of culture rather than ideas, the dichotomy is no longer a universal “democracy vs. anti-democracy” but a relativist “German vs. Islamic”.

227 Pautz, “The Politics of Identity in Germany,” 44.
228 Ibid., 48.
229 Ibid., 50.
In this discourse Islam is often contrasted from the “Christian values” out of which the modern German state arose, and to which many also credit the Enlightenment concept of religious tolerance—“a strong imprint of Christianity remains in German liberalism,” Coury contends.\textsuperscript{230} The founder of Pegida, Lutz Bachmann, created the group with preserving “Judeo-Christian Western culture” in mind, which is supposedly threatened by Muslims who do not accept tolerance or gender equality and support fundamentalism. The symbol of the Church vs. Mosque has become an important image in this debate, which is highly charged in the context of the German state’s hesitance to give the same “public corporation” status to Islamic groups that Christian and Jewish groups have. This formal recognition allows religious groups to “receive Church taxes collected by the government, organize religious education (RE) in public schools, and provide social welfare services.”\textsuperscript{231}

Judith Butler, the prominent American feminist theorist, made a rather poignant observation about the implications of the \textit{Leitkultur} approach: “a certain paradox ensues in which the coerced adoption of certain cultural norms becomes a requisite for entry into a polity that defines itself as the avatar of freedom.”\textsuperscript{232} In other words, “tolerance” itself becomes a form of social capital that is given selectively. Sometimes, the claim goes, one must be intolerant to protect tolerance. Of course, this argument isn’t necessarily paradoxical by pure logic alone; limitations on freedom of speech (such as against Nazi protests) could be accused of “intolerance,” but any system of rights requires limits to sustain itself. What Butler is describing, though, is that discourses focused on tolerance alone obfuscate the power involved in who gets to

\textsuperscript{230} Jennifer Schellhö, ed., \textit{Grosserzählungen des Extremen: Neue Rechte, Populismus, Islamismus, War on Terror}, Xtexte (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2018), 106.


\textsuperscript{232} Demmers and Mehendale, “Neoliberal Xenophobia: The Dutch Case,” 68.
decide the objects and extent of tolerance, as which actions are “deserving” of it and which actions are not. It further reaffirms the pattern of insiders and outsiders, civilized makers of culture and uncivilized subjects of culture: “good” diversity, which is to be tolerated, and “bad” diversity, which is to be excluded. The difference between the two is assembled through the same cultural relativism as Leitkultur, which logically necessitates a clean division that can only be sustained through a culturalized myth of the homogenous insider. The empowered insider creates an “impossible subject” who is ostensibly supposed to behave completely within the bounds determined by the sensibilities of the native Germans. Any transgression against the conditions of tolerance, though it may be completely natural or justified-- a community not dropping a certain unpopular aspect of the subject’s home culture, expressing anger over discrimination or economic inequality, never “doing enough” to distance itself from terrorist attacks perpetrated by people it has no real relation to-- permits the insider to blame migrants for stepping out of line and being “intolerant” to their hosts, warranting intolerance in return. The accompanying contrivance of “good” and “bad” (or “too much”) diversity, respectively embodied by cultural pluralism and failed multiculturalism, supposedly cherishes cultural recognition but conflates it with an acknowledgement of equality. It desires a “‘detoxified’, unproblematic Other” -- categories of groups which meet selective expectations--while ignoring the power relations that cause “problematic” Others like asylum seekers and refugees as well as economic and social inequality.

The images of “good” diversity and “bad” diversity—idealized, successful cultural integration versus the unregulated “excess” of cultural tolerance that doomed multiculturalism—have been elevated in the context of national security concerns in the age of terrorism, referred to as the “securitization” of the immigration discourse. Lentin and Titley argue that 9/11 is an “arbitrary point of historical transformation” in the beginnings of anti-Muslim xenophobia, as fears of “Islamic Fascism” had been stoked as early as 1995 in the Yugoslav wars. Yet its importance as a discursive tool for rebuilding the mythos of ‘threats to Western civilization’ informs a broader picture of how 9/11 became a justification for a “before” and “after” modality used to impose “new rules of the game” in immigration policy. The “war on terror” opened up opportunities for states to expand powers and redefine themselves in many ways: international intervention, surveillance, discretion on immigration, and suspicion of (especially Muslim) minorities, creating what Didier Bigo termed the “governmentality of unease.”

Every terrorist attack in the West, from Theo van Gogh’s murder in 2004 to the 2015 Paris attacks to the 2016 Berlin truck incident, “have been framed as ‘I told you so’ moments that strip political developments of their complexity, and instead normalize the need for restorative action against the excesses of multiculture.” Multiculturalism is blamed for being too lenient on the prerequisites for inclusion and consequently allowing foreign groups now associated with the war on terror to enter Germany. What began as the depoliticization of the failures of integration became a displacement onto essentialized cultures, and securitization discourses

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237 Lentin and Titley, The Crises of Multiculturalism, 33.
239 Lentin and Titley, The Crises of Multiculturalism, 33–34.
241 Lentin and Titley, The Crises of Multiculturalism, 34.
242 Crowley and Hickman, “Migration, Postindustrialism and the Globalized Nation State,” 1223.
easily absorbed the distinction between homogenous insider and ominous outsider into “object of security” and “threats to security.” The simplified monolithic “Islamic community” was easily indexed to terror.

The war on terror necessitates a defined cross-national enemy that encompasses both hostile regimes in the Middle East and their agents within Europe; thus the focus on Islam both 1) offers a pretext to securitization as a “political technology” to assert a state-private security complex which relies on fear for popular acceptance (directly contributing to the propaganda of the far right) and 2) provides a justification for excluding immigrants, new or settled, as not only insufficiently integrated but also as an object of suspicion. Right wing populists then have an incredibly strong rhetorical platform, as any political opponent who supports refugees or attempts to close the distance between the feared migrant communities and the majority population is blamed for the penetration of Germany by terrorists. Attempts to attenuate the economic, social, etc. exclusion of migrants are consequently disabled by fear-based politics that have raised the stakes of “bad” diversity-- give “them” too much tolerance, and they may cut your head off. The depoliticization of minority issues reaches its ultimate conclusion in the construction of a universalist “good vs. evil” fiction that justifies nativist domestic and international policies.

Another advantage the far right has had in discourses focused on threats from intolerant outsiders is the opportunity to become accepted political insiders, as the defenders of values in which everyone believes but which have been threatened by illiberal migrants-- socially progressive values, even, such as LGBT rights. All across the new populist right-- from the Dutch Pim Fortuyn to the (now politically dead) Milo Yiannopoulos to Alice Weidel, a lesbian

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and the current leader of the AfD in the Bundestag—homosexuality seems well-accepted in the parties themselves (though many of their more reactionary voters likely do not share this social progressivism). As of 2016, the AfD polled at a surprising 17% for gay men, only a negligible 1% difference from the national average for men. The cause, fears of migrant homophobia (physical attacks on LGBT people have indeed risen with increased migration), is certainly difficult to navigate without falling into the discursive trap of essentializing and stereotyping Muslims. A *Spiegel* article on “gay hate crime” makes two points in response to this. First, Germany already has native homophobes, but are less feared because they are more familiar. Second, Russians make up the other most homophobic group in Germany, and are obviously not Muslim. The real problem is one of “machismo,” claims a Berlin social worker interviewed in the article. Homosexual acceptance has been strategically incorporated into right wing rhetoric, allowing the undeniable homophobia among right wing native Germans to be smoke-screened by indexing homophobia to migrants. This has arguably even been assisted by groups such as the Lesbian and Gay Federation in Germany (LSVD), which attempted to make itself an ‘integration expert’ by targeting migrants for reeducation, blatantly drawing the line between German LGBT and heterosexual foreigners in particular. GLADT, the “Gays and Lesbians from Turkey” group, has publicly disassociated itself from LSVD for this reason.

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247 Ibid.
Feminism, or at least a strategic lip service to it, has also become an odd staple of the German populist right, and anti-Islam rhetoric has also found acceptance with some mainstream feminists. Prominent *Bild* writer and publisher of the populist feminist magazine *Emma* Alice Schwarzer, for instance, raised controversy by comparing the hijab worn by Muslim women to the yellow star forced on Jews by the Nazi regime, and equated wearing such garb to forced marriage.\(^249\) Additionally, right-wing rhetoric consistently plays up fears about reports of refugees raping German women, further “proving” the threat of illiberal outsiders who do not share European values of respect for women. A *Der Spiegel* investigation of the accusations found that about 20% of sex crimes in the first half of 2017 were committed by individuals in refugee housing (compared to the ~11% of the population made up of refugees).\(^250\) However, those individuals are also disproportionately young, male, and poor, three of the criteria most closely correlated to criminal behavior (much more so than being a Muslim), as well as being more likely to have PTSD.\(^251\) Nevertheless, reports of foreign-looking men sexually assaulting women leave a strong mark on the German national consciousness and add a strong emotional charge. Most notably were the spontaneous mass sexual assaults in Cologne on New Year’s Eve 2015/16, during which hundreds of sexual crimes took place alongside a much larger number of thefts and other crimes, mostly perpetrated by asylum seekers and illegal immigrants.\(^252\)

It is, of course, a fact that many Muslim countries are more patriarchal than most Western countries. One cannot deny that feminists have *very* good reason to be critical of conservative


Islam. Likewise, it is beyond the scope of this paper whether western feminism has a right to universalism (which, as Rottmann and Ferree remind us, has long been used as a justification for colonial power for “liberating” Muslim women-- including as recently as the invasion of Afghanistan), or whether cultural relativism is enough to justify a “live and let live” approach to regimes which still execute women for witchcraft.253 The importance of this discourse is, rather, the imaginaries reinforced in how it plays out in German society as a medium for other issues.

Victims are the “spiritual food of Leftists,”254 Lentin and Titley proclaim. The effect of this in the context of the veil debate (Kopftuchstreit) is, following the logic of culturalist narratives, reducing both the agency of the veil-wearer and the nuances of feminist debates within Islam to the “insider vs. outsider” formulation.255 The obsession with veil-wearing Muslim women as inherently victims is pervasive (the Federal Parliament has even passed a ban on the burqa and niqab), and is easily conflated with an image of the “free woman” as one who cannot be Muslim.256 These associations of a simplified “the West” vs. a simplified “Islam” are prime propaganda for the radical right, which infuses its own obsession with sexuality and ostensibly “cultural” purity.

254 Lentin and Titley, The Crises of Multiculturalism, 64.
Rottmann and Ferree contend that Germany is a rather special example of the headscarf debate across Europe, as both pro-headscarf and anti-headscarf positions figure prominently in contemporary German feminism. The “double engagement with the politics of modernity,” formed on one side by the transnational qualities of feminism (defining and comparing Europe with the Islamic world), and on the other side by the interpersonal politics of how individual women decide which “local and global identities” to embrace, is in many ways a perfect illustration of the broader discursive developments of the debate. The authors highlight the 2004 SPD-Green attempt to introduce a law banning discrimination in housing, credit, or public facilities on the basis of ethnicity, race, sexuality, age, religion, worldview, physical ability, or gender. The ADG, as it was called, failed to pass as it was even attacked by prominent members of the SPD-Green government-- including the Minister of the Interior, the Economic

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258 Rottmann and Ferree, “Citizenship and Intersectionality,” 484.
259 Ibid., 482.
260 Ibid., 489.
Minister, and the Finance Minister, as a “bureaucratic monster.” Yet contemporary feminists were rather silent on the ADG, already more interested in the “otherness” of Muslim women’s clothing and the regulation thereof. “Inclusive intersectionality,” which prioritizes women's advocacy around “multiple axes of difference” such as class, ethnicity, and religion, was already passed over in favor of an exclusive intersectionality. Exclusive intersectionality is interested only in a universal “free vs. unfree woman” dichotomy, arguing that ethnic or class-based oppression obscures the visibility of universal gender oppression. Both pro- and anti-headscarf positions had thus given way to the same politics of difference that characterize the mainstream culturalist narrative as a whole, implicitly affirming insider/outsider notions of freedom and unfreedom, affixing patriarchy to the cultural outsider while taking the cultural inside for granted as already enlightened and sexually modernized. Forming a comprehensive model of women’s liberation in a world full of intersecting “dominant/subordinate hierarchies of nation, race, and religion” as well as “the public/private politics of gender” is naturally extremely difficult, but neither side of the contemporary debate seems to make this a priority over debates about specific symbols such as the burka.

Pro-headscarf positions are less interested in “individual free choice”—this is much more rare in German feminism than in America—and more interested in permissiveness as a possible means for integrating Muslim women into a German society of tolerance, where Muslim communities will self-‘modernize’ their gender relations. Anti-headscarf positions see a burka ban as state intervention against the oppression of Muslim women in their communities. Both

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261 Ibid., 490.
262 Ibid., 485.
263 Ibid., 484.
264 Ibid., 485.
265 Ibid., 500.
perceive the Muslim woman as needing liberation, to be brought into the “German public sphere as a realm of freedom.”\(^{266}\) In this way, they are simply different versions of *Leitkultur*, one of which sees a *Leitkultur* based on negative rights and another which prioritizes positive rights, both displacing the problem of sexism onto cultural outsiders-- just as problems with social capital, economic welfare, and national security are displaced onto Muslim communities as a whole.\(^{267}\)

This chapter has focused primarily on the origin of narratives and identity politics in the mainstream, arising out of the material solidification of neoliberalism. It has examined their implicit associations-- the Muslim with outsider-ness, for example-- and how these casually xenophobic talking points drew many Germans rightward, legitimizing more radical political rhetoric that would not have been accepted just a few decades ago. “Leftist” identity politics, focused on and privileging minority culture, have opened a space for right-wing identitarianism for members of the majority who also feel disenfranchised, and who pick up the language of identity rather than the economic and social grievances such as their diminishing social welfare institutions. This returns us, however, to a question raised earlier. To what extent is the right wing simply reflecting pre-existing language, and to what extent are contemporary rightist politics built on their own basis? The difference seems to be between the political wing of the new far right-- parties, mainstream movements and voters, and the more intellectual wing known as the New Right, informed by Heidegger and other 20th century thinkers, who pioneered the right wing use of neo-Marxists such as Antonio Gramsci as a response to the leftism of the 1960s.

\(^{266}\) Ibid., 501.
\(^{267}\) Ibid., 499.
The next chapter explores this second category, tracing the new far right’s origins in the Nouvelle Droite, Neue Rechte, and other variants of the New Right which developed across Europe since 1968. It will examine how this movement of well-educated Europeans began, the ideas it created, and then, in the last chapter, how those ideas have become employed rather recently in large-scale right-wing politics that have transcended academic circles. Of particular interest are the distinctly modern (and postmodern) aspects of the New Right and its descendants, such as its use of leftist and postmodernist theory alongside a revival of interwar Conservative Revolutionary thought, and its expansion from nationalism to pan-Europeanism. It hopes to show a different side of the far right-- one which cannot be pathologized as the product of economic and political contingencies, but as having philosophy of its own that must also be taken seriously.
Chapter Three: The Philosophy of the New Right

A full half century after the cultural, moral, and political “awakening” of 1968, many of that year’s impacts are now taken for granted. Diversity, sexual freedom, and individuality have since become norms of their own and staples of everyday life (though not wholly uncontented). Another movement also arose from the liberalization of the 1960s and 70s, however. The German New Right (Neue Rechte) emerged from the ranks of both intellectual conservatives, disquieted by the breakdown of traditional behavior, and some of the leftists who became disillusioned with their generation. This latter group, defectors from the “68ers,” believed that the cultural revolution of the time had collapsed into American consumerism and lost its emancipatory potential. Together, these academics and fringe political leaders began to attack problems in German society from a new angle, aiming at the intellectualization and revitalization of the right and a “synthesis of revolutionary right wing and New Left ideals.”

This chapter is concerned mainly with the theoretical underpinnings and influences of the intellectual New Right, incubated in academies in France and developed further in Germany. Similar to the way right-wing chauvinism decries “identity politics” while using their own form of it, its supposed hatred of postmodernism signals less of an unambiguous opposition to its ontology and epistemology, and more of a rejection of its leftist excesses. Rather than attempting to return us to a state before postmodernism, the certainty of 20th century universalist narratives, it seeks to use that trend of thought to reassert traditional imaginaries-- in effect, to impose its own right-wing version of postmodernity. To explain what this means, we must first understand the history of the New Right.

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268 Salzborn, “Renaissance of the New Right in Germany?,” 38.
269 Betz, Postmodern Politics in Germany, 8; Bar-On, Where Have All The Fascists Gone?, 4–5, 61.
In 1968, before the backdrop of mass student protests, a then 24 year old Alain de Benoist founded GRECE, the Research and Study Group for European Civilization, with a specific frustration in mind: how could the “de-Europeanizing forces of Americanization, consumerism, and the liberal capitalist regimes” introduced in the post-1945 restructuring of the country be dissolved while the culture itself was still overwhelmingly liberal? The anti-liberal fight, then, must be waged on-- and with-- culture and identity. This concept was invented on the political left-- it was the Italian neo-Marxist Antonio Gramsci who first claimed that (class) struggle had to fight against the “cultural hegemony” of the state capitalist system, a war for minds, before the material conditions of socialism could be brought about. Benoist, well acquainted with this term’s adoption by the 68ers, repurposed it for the goal of establishing a new European identity. According to Michael O’Meara, the New Right author credited by the right-wing’s alt-Wikipedia “Metapedia” as having brought the thoughts of the European New Right to the Anglosphere, GRECE perceived the roots of “European identity” as “pagan rather than Catholic, postmodern rather than anti-modern, European rather than Western.” Soon this militant attitude was disseminated to Italy, Belgium, and Germany, and by the time of its discovery by the mainstream media ten years later, the “Gramscians of the Right” and its allies had a strong foothold on the intellectual right of much of Europe.

The ideas of Benoist and the French “Nouvelle Droite” were carried over to Germany in the 1980s by an adviser to Franz Schönhuber, then leader of the far right Republikaner party and former voluntary member of the Waffen-SS. He asked his “old friend” Armin Mohler (who had

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applied for the SS but was rejected), now widely considered the intellectual father of the German *Neue Rechte*, to take a more active role in the German right after the electoral failure of the NPD in 1968, and attempted to create a new “philosophy of action” which would bring the discourses of the New Right “onto the streets.” 274 Mohler, who criticized the German right wing of his day for being outdated, sought to reinvigorate the German right through a return to the ideas of the Conservative Revolution as contained in the 1920s and 30s works of authors such as Ernst Jünger, Oswald Spengler, Carl Schmitt, and Edgar Julius Jung, who grappled with the meaninglessness and despair of the post-WWI world as well as that of modernity as a whole. The writers of the Conservative Revolution, some more closely related to the Nazi movement than others, attempted to overcome these existential problems in a variety of ways—united mainly by a rejection of liberalism, cosmopolitanism, and democracy as well as socialism and communism—and hoped to inspire a new kind of “organic society” that did not rely on a simple return to the past. 275 In Mohler’s words,

> The Conservative Revolution is a counter-revolution in the sense that it primarily attacks a liberal ideology that has totally destroyed society. But it is also revolutionary because it does not believe in the possibility of restoring the past. In other respects, it in fact attacks modernity with the weapons of modernity, even post-modernity. 276

The Conservative Revolution wanted to violently shift technology “out of the sphere of civilization and into that of culture,” taking the technology produced by modernity but throwing away its decadent social ‘byproducts’ such as democracy. 277 Mohler and the German New Right took aim less at democracy (and are more interested in an inward-facing Europe than

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275 Spektorowski, “The New Right,” 120.
276 Ibid., 119.
277 Ibid., 120.
warmongering) than at a newer, post-1945 aspect of modernity: *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, the German “coming to terms with the past,” which has figured prominently in its national consciousness. The New Right claims that the 68ers in particular attempted to shackle Germany to a guilt complex which has prevented the German people from being in touch with their natural cultural identity— from having a “normal” national consciousness like most other nations, who have moved on from their dark periods, instead of a reflective or “self-flagellating” national consciousness.\(^{278}\) The postwar generation, they assert, moved past simply confronting Nazi crimes and the collaboration of their parents into forming a “culture of contrition in which every conceivable political issue is viewed through the prism of the Nazi past.”\(^{279}\) This was perceived especially during the Historikerstreit (historian’s controversy) of 1986, a sudden explosion of debate around whether the Holocaust was a unique, unprecedented phenomenon that needed to remain at the center of German identity or if it should be relativized and treated as a closed chapter of history.\(^{280}\) The Historikerstreit, German reunification, and the 1996 firebombing of a refugee housing quarters in Lubeck all ignited national conversations during which many intellectuals who had previously been associated with the political left began to blame the rise of neo-Nazism on the suppression of a “normalized historical understanding.”\(^{281}\) Botho Strauss, Ernst Nolte, even Klaus Rainer Röhl, founder of the underground communist newspaper *konkret* and former husband of journalist-turned-terrorist Ulrike Meinhof of the Red Army Faction, and the widow of former SPD Chancellor Willy Brandt, Brigitte Seebacher-Brandt, all associated with this line of argument.\(^{282}\) In this time, new “think tanks” and journals began to emerge out of


\(^{279}\) Ibid., 82.


\(^{281}\) Heilbrunn, “Germany’s New Right,” 81, 85, 89.

\(^{282}\) Ibid.,
the fledgling New Right, such as the Thule Seminar, *Criticon*, *Junge Freiheit*, and *Elemente*, with the dual purpose of providing future far right political movements with an intellectual guide as well as legitimizing the right wing and building cultural hegemony in the mainstream.\(^{283}\)

The intellectual New Right, unlike many of the extremists it inspires, roundly condemns the National Socialist period. It does, however, “remain preoccupied with Nazism” in a number of ways. In its attempt to find an unstigmatized cultural identity, it has had to first relativize the Nazi period as no worse than Stalinism or British or American Imperialism and secondly search for a lineage of conservative values separate from National Socialism. It has particular trouble with the latter. Many of the authors of the New Right seem all too aware that the “absolute values” for which they long could never be more than contrivances-- a trouble with which the Conservative Revolution itself struggled -- and the alternative conservatism which they attempt to find in that movement is perpetually undermined by the philosophical closeness between the Conservative Revolution and the Third Reich, despite the political distance taken by many associated with the former against the latter.

The distinctly “new” aspect of the New Right, as briefly mentioned, is its admission of the postmodern turn towards the “metapolitical” factor of culture over material explanations of politics as a self-justified category. Benoist found his footing in the works of postmodern leftists such as Althusser and Badiou, which placed an emphasis on what could be called the “pre-political sphere”-- the ways in which *ideology*, defined as the subjective, unconscious structure of reality constructed by an individual finding reference points in the world, overdetermines politics.\(^{284}\) As Robert Darnton explains, historians are moving towards a focus on “how thought organized experience and conveyed meaning among the general citizenry” in any given epoch.

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\(^{284}\) Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics* (Verso, 2005).
Thought itself is “denoting, referring, assuming, alluding, implying, and performing a variety of functions” which convey meaning through language. Language, as one of the “paradigms which order ‘reality,’” John Pocock claims, “are part of the reality they order… we are studying an aspect of reality when we study the ways in which it appeared real to the persons to whom it was more real than to anyone else.” To the New Right, culture is the concept that most captures this quality of pre-political thought, the subconscious foundation which ultimately informs the political structure of a society. The New Right magazine Junge Freiheit defines culture as

The complex network of behavior patterns that acts as a guide for people and enables them to shape their world. Cultural identity involves rules of behavior and provides common goals for life. Identity is therefore the rootedness of the conscious self in a culture. It is a feeling that is hard to describe in rational terms, a feeling of being at one with oneself and of existing in harmony and sympathy with shared traditions, experiences and knowledge, of being part of a system of values and norms that is greater than the individual.

Before they were further developed by postmodern leftists, these ideas first emerged in the work of Martin Heidegger, the German philosopher famous for Being and Time as well as for his political affiliation with the Nazi Party. Heidegger asserted that philosophy up to his time had ignored an essential aspect of understanding the world: being there (Da-sein). In other words, any ontology of the world presupposes an “ontic standpoint”—a certain conception of how one exists, how one initially simply is in the world. His interest in the question of Being lent well to the right wing conception of “timeless essential structures of human existence” that ground the

285 Woods, Germany’s New Right as Culture and Politics, 23.
individual in his historical-cultural community (though it can be interpreted in other ways), and his idea of the “authentic” life that resisted reason was easily heroized. 287

New Right author and ex-Bundestag member Alfred Mechtersheimer grounds culture in a national context (otherwise, a universalist culture could just as easily fit this definition) by emphasizing the nation as the natural expression of the “political will” of “a people” held together by culture, language, religion, or history. The nation “manifests itself properly in a political consciousness of common values, intentions, and a wish to prevail,” asserting its right to difference. 288 The “right to difference” is of particular importance because it implies that culture cannot be simply a “collection of values,” but must be a “sphere in which the individual has a fixed place” that excludes other spheres. 289 Nominally, the New Right claims that all cultures are equal in their right to exist. However, it also claims that European culture is the culture of technology. 290 All other cultures should be allowed to seek their own versions of modernity, but Europe is still expected to reign supreme in terms of actual global power. 291

The New Right’s emphasis on culture is, as we have seen, not specific to the right wing. Culture has become the “explanatory residue” to make sense of what remains in a world with disappearing forms of belonging, an attempt to locate all of the aspects of life experience that do not reduce themselves easily to economic or political explanation. 292 Though the French New Right and many German neo-conservatives move directly from culture to a battle plan for cultural hegemony, the German New Right is much less convinced. At times, it is even outright hostile to political action. 293 The intellectuals of the German New Right are in the ideal position

287 Ibid., 143.
288 Woods, Germany’s New Right as Culture and Politics, 37–38.
289 Ibid., 37.
293 Woods, Germany’s New Right as Culture and Politics, 17.
to push a right-wing Gramscian metapolitics, yet it often cannot bring itself to do so.\footnote{Ibid., 27.} This is because it is torn between two conceptions of culture: what it \textit{wants} culture to be, what Roger Woods terms “feelgood” culture, and the insufficient category which culture turns out to be once one tries to find absolute values in its depths. Feelgood culture wants culture to be a “source of reassuring certainty and the foundation for political values in the midst of uncertainty.” Finding none of this inherent spiritual guidance in cultural identity, however, the New Right is also forced to view culture as “a medium for reflecting on chaotic human experience which renders politics irrelevant.” Woods continues: “…whatever certainty the New Right aims to provide has to coexist with doubt and despair.”\footnote{Ibid., 35.} He urges caution against viewing this contradiction as inherently discrediting, however. The playwright Botho Strauss, one prominent New Right intellectual, claims that the right wing does not exist to compete with the left’s hopes for salvation in some future world order. To him the right is a “profound remembering,” an “imagination bound up with loss and not with (earthly) promises.”\footnote{Ibid., 55.}

On the more intellectual side of the contemporary right wing, then, Woods claims that Habermas’s usual characterization of neoconservatism as bound up in the need for an “affirmative past” is largely irrelevant.\footnote{Ibid., 97.} The less militant members of the New Right know that no past will affirm them. Their goal is, rather, to find a \textit{process} rather than a solid position that can come to terms with the constant state of loss which Strauss describes. Yet the orientations of specific writers between feelgood culture and cultural pessimism still differ across the New Right. The more political than philosophical wing, such as that of the magazine \textit{Junge Freiheit} and members such as Pierre Krebs, Karlheinz Weissman, and Alfred Mechtersheimer, tend to be
more hopeful. They find motivation in Ernst Jünger’s conceptualization of national identity: when one is forced to confront the powerlessness of the individual (a feeling he became well acquainted with under the artillery fire of World War One) and the “collapse of the belief in progress”, he said, one can either give in to nihilism or one can elevate nationalism to an absolute value that overwhelms all else and comes to provide existential meaning.  

Others, such as Strauss and Hartmut Lange, notice Jünger’s more pessimistic side: “ultimately the nightmare gains supremacy: dread, the anxiety of living dominate everything.” Strauss emphasizes that the “central metaphors of mankind” in which the right wing hopes to find solace are little more than “makeshift belts and restraints by means of which man attempts to hold his disintegrating form together.” The impossibility of forming a solid foundation through culture is one that leaves the modern man at the mercy of grief: “grief, mankind’s most honest feeling, will never provide a manifesto, or a suggestion for reshaping the world, or a doctrine or prophesy.” Lange claims that Heidegger’s image of existence defined by Geworfennheit, “thrownness” (in that we are thrown into the world with no inherent sense of purpose), makes political action completely futile:

How could anyone who is propelled out of the void into this world, having to accept the void itself as a foundation and work it off like some kind of guilt, be impressed by party programmes or any other kind of politically motivated promises of help?... “Existence means being held out into nothingness”— no nationalist slogan or yearning for some long lost völkisch identity can stand up to this decision.”

298 Ibid., 21.
299 Ibid., 46.
300 Ibid., 48.
301 Ibid., 49.
The split (often found just as much within New Right individuals themselves as between them) between feelgood culture and cultural pessimism mirrors a much deeper contradiction. The New Right is a movement within postmodernity that laments the alienating modern and postmodern modes of life—technology, globalization, the chaotic postmodern *Lebensgefühl* (feeling towards life). Because of this, they have a difficulty locating the source of the problem itself. Krebs, Günter Rohrmoser, and other believers in a natural, instinctive German culture attack multiculturalism as a result of the Nazi guilt complex and the main threat to the rediscovery of a German cultural identity based on what Nietzsche called “eternalizing forces,” a spirituality that proclaims an absolute truth.302 In particular they incriminate the United States for imposing liberal individualist multiculturalism onto Germany (supposedly with the help of figures such as Theodor Adorno), which Germany would have resisted were it not so preoccupied with its own guilt to form a specifically German modernity.303

Strauss, Lange, and the younger wave of the New Right represented by the essay collection *Wir 89er*, believe that the problem is endemic to modernity itself rather than an external conspiracy.304 Modernity is in their eyes a “creative destruction” that calls all norms of behavior into question, giving greater freedom to the individual but resulting in “isolation, indifference towards others, and selfishness”—*postmodernity*, as the questioning of modernity itself, further exacerbates the problem.305 Without a clear hierarchy of values or “signposts and cultural landmarks to which we can turn for guidance and reassurance”306, liberalism and social democracy (as products of modernity) created a world without myth, heroism, or transcendence--

302 Ibid., 58, 114.
303 Heilbrunn, “Germany’s New Right,” 94.
305 Ibid.
306 Ibid., 39.
categories for which humans have an innate desire to sacrifice themselves, according to Simone Satzger. The philosopher Günter Figal, whom Woods situates on the fringes of the New Right, believes that Nietzsche was the first to recognize the nature of modernity as an order without a fixed foundation. Rather, modernity’s foundation is a belief in change itself, which it calls progress. Nietzsche called this a “sovereign becoming” -- a becoming which presents itself as universal and treats each Will equally to the other Wills with which it struggles -- and denounced it as “hostile to life, an agent of the dissolution and destruction of man, a secret path to nothingness.” Progress is an illusion, as it reduces the eternal struggle of Wills to a narrative of change from “bad” to “good”.

The New Right’s response to the Leitkultur debate has been disorganized because of this split over modernity; some believe that a general Leitkultur would serve the purpose of containing foreign culture so it does not contaminate German purity. Others believe that Leitkultur should not be a point of political mobilization. Strauss, for instance, believes that the concept should be confined to a secret cultural elite that is aware of and lives according to the memory of an unbroken lineage of German tradition going back through Wagner to the middle ages (which is currently obstructed by the inconvenient memory of the Nazis). This elite would ostensibly guide Germany in a more spiritual than political sense. Yet if “German culture” must be guided and defined by a conscious elite, what is really organic about it? Would this elite not be tastemakers like any other art critics, but entrusted with some secret (presumably state-sponsored) power to impose their ideals on what is actually “organically” produced?

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307 Ibid., 40.
309 Woods, Germany’s New Right as Culture and Politics, 41.
310 Ibid., 42.
Regardless of the New Right’s disagreements on a diagnosis for Germany’s ills, at its core it more or less agrees on a dichotomy at the basis of life: one chooses either a spirit which strives for mastery over all aspects of existence, or a “commitment to reason which knows no community, only isolation.” Its interest in this, somewhat ironically, comes from the description of fascism offered by the prominent liberal historian Zeev Sternhell. Though some New Right figures such as Armin Mohler have attempted to claim Sternhell as one of their own because of his critiques of the Enlightenment— he suggests that fascism exposed real problems of the Enlightenment, that its optimism is premature and unconvincing— Sternhell has since made explicit remarks warning against a resurgence of fascism in the current day, in which he sees many of the same “symptoms of decay” which foreshadowed fascism’s birth. He implores democracies not to abandon Enlightenment ideals though they may not be justifiable on the self-evident level claimed by strict rationalists.

For the New Right, however, Sternhell’s criticisms often lead it to the answer of a second fascism. Karlheinz Weißmann and Mohler take Sternhell’s characterization of fascism in France, a project which “never got beyond the theoretical stage” and so was “spared those unavoidable compromises with the official ideologies of regimes which always distort it,” as a starting point for a revisionism of the Third Reich: ‘Nazism wasn’t real fascism.’ In having to constantly contend with the memory of the Nazis, the German New Right has adopted a number of strategies to relativize the Nazi period, explain where it went wrong (as opposed to the parts of it which were not so bad), or emphasize the elements of conservative Germany that opposed or distanced themselves from the regime.

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311 Ibid., 66.
312 Ibid.
In 1995 Weiβmann wrote *The Way into the Abyss*, claiming that Nazi Germany was no worse, in either intention or action, than its enemies; he does not ignore the Holocaust in the book, but spends just as much space discussing sports in the Third Reich and the comfortable quality of life of the average German citizen under Hitler’s dictatorship. As to the Holocaust, he points to Sherman’s march to the sea in the American Civil War and the British rule of South Africa as examples of the normality of war crimes, implying an equivalency to the mass concentration and murder of minorities that Germans perpetrated in the 1930s and 40s. He further indicts the Western Allies for their reluctance to support the July 1944 assassination plot, claiming that their failure to kill Hitler “completely discredits them.”\(^{314}\) Recalling his interview with Weiβmann, Jacob Heilbrunn says the gist of Weiβmann’s focus on the aforementioned point was that “it was not so much ordinary Germans who were at fault during World War II as the Allies.”\(^{315}\) In fact, Weiβmann claims, blaming Germans legitimized a war of annihilation against the German people in the form of civilian bombing (practiced by both sides and initiated by the Germans), called rather heavy-handedly a “holocaust” by New Right author Wolfgang Venohr.\(^{316}\) Günter Rohrmoser focuses instead on relativizing the theoretical aspect of Nazism, absolving Germany of responsibility because, he claims, modern racism was invented by the French and implemented as policy by British imperialism, and finds Hitler’s Social Darwinism to be an invention of the ancient Greeks.\(^{317}\) One wonders, given Rohrmoser’s interpretation, whether the Germans of the 1930s had any agency at all.

The New Right has also employed a strategy of idolizing the military of Nazi Germany (the Wehrmacht)—both its individual soldiers and as an institution—as heroic and separated

\(^{314}\) Heilbrunn, “Germany’s New Right,” 89.

\(^{315}\) Ibid.

\(^{316}\) Woods, *Germany’s New Right as Culture and Politics*, 74–75.

\(^{317}\) Ibid., 78.
from the Holocaust in an attempt to find some element of the Nazi period as deserving of admiration. This is known as the “clean Wehrmacht myth,” widely dismissed by historians because of the military’s well-documented complicity in the Holocaust.\textsuperscript{318} Interestingly, the Western Allies whom the New Right accuses of imposing an eternal guilt on the German people actually had a hand in creating the myth; in its efforts to justify the rearmament of West Germany, it supported a “Memorandum on the Formation of a German contingent for the Defense of Western Europe within the framework of an International Fighting Force” which called for them to “stop the ‘defamation’ of the German soldier and ‘rehabilitate’ him by means of a public declaration.”\textsuperscript{319} President Eisenhower supplied the public declaration, claiming that there was “a real difference between the regular German soldier and officer and Hitler and his criminal group.”\textsuperscript{320} This has since been discredited beyond dispute by records detailing the Commissar Order, participation in the Holocaust, and “anti-partisan” warfare which targeted and massacred civilians.\textsuperscript{321} Nevertheless, much of the New Right considers the Wehrmacht to have spared Germany from Communism, and figures such as Günter Rohrmoser extol the Wehrmacht as “the German institution that offered the strongest resistance to the spirit of Nazism” as in the July 20th plot among Wehrmacht elites to assassinate Hitler.\textsuperscript{322} Though Rainer Zitelmann admits that the plotters would be considered extreme right by today’s standards, others are more interested in them symbolically—as an attempt to save Germany’s honor in the eyes of the world—than in the “corporative” fascist state which they planned as a replacement should the attempt succeed. Harald Holz in \textit{Criticon} openly admits this preference for what the plotters represented.

\textsuperscript{318} Ronald Smelser, Edward J. Davies (II), and Edward J. Davies ll, \textit{The Myth of the Eastern Front: The Nazi-Soviet War in American Popular Culture} (Cambridge University Press, 2008).
\textsuperscript{319} Donald Abenheim, \textit{Reforging the Iron Cross: The Search for Tradition in the West German Armed Forces} (Princeton University Press, 2014), 55.
\textsuperscript{320} Ibid., 70.
\textsuperscript{321} Rolf-Dieter Müller, Hitler’s War in the East
\textsuperscript{322} Woods, \textit{Germany’s New Right as Culture and Politics}, 77.
(over what they really were) when he calls for an annual “Day of National Honor” on the anniversary of the event.\textsuperscript{323}

When relativization and apologism are insufficient to dislodge the obstacle that the Nazi period represents for a “normal” national consciousness, New Right authors turn to the movement which it sees as its spiritus rector: the Conservative Revolution. The New Right’s hopes to find certainty in a non-Nazi conservative lineage still fails with this movement-- not only was much of the Conservative Revolution itself uncertain (as discussed in relation to Jünger), but much of it was also not even non-Nazi. Nevertheless, New Right authors have looked to rhetoric borrowed from postwar writings of leftists, from Thomas Mann to the communist Alexander Abusch, who asserted that Germany was not synonymous with its dark period of fascism and emphasized the presence of an “Other Germany” which opposed Nazism from the start. While Mann and others intended this “Other Germany” to mean the left and anti-fascist liberals, which were clearly politically and philosophically opposed to the Nazis, the New Right attempts to present the Conservative Revolution in the same way.\textsuperscript{324}

While the Conservative Revolution had its own difficulties setting out a clear purpose, it can be characterized by the general interests which the New Right shares with it: a desire for “rootedness” and a search for “bonds, wholeness and unity that [replaces] the search for freedom.”\textsuperscript{325} Edgar Julius Jung, a proponent of the Conservative Revolution, defined the “Conservative Revolutionary principle” as a belief that the foundation of all communities is a \textit{metaphysical} unity, and that conservatism is the recognition that those absolute values must be

\textsuperscript{323} Ibid., 88.
\textsuperscript{324} Ibid., 82.
\textsuperscript{325} Hugo von Hoffmannsthal, ‘Das Schrifttum als geistiger Raum der Nation’ (Munich, Bremer Presse, 1927), 31. quoted in Ibid., 84.
preserved. Mohler goes on to interpret the interwar movement as the theory and Nazism as the practice, but asks whether the theory could have been applied differently. Mohler and others tend to emphasize the writers who distanced themselves and even clashed with the Nazis— which certainly happened to no small extent— but in doing so they also overlook the nuances in the writers’ relationships with the regime, which were often extremely ambivalent.

Oswald Spengler, for instance, author of the influential texts *The Decline of the West* and “Prussianism and Socialism,” distanced himself from the Reich as time went on. His 1933 book *Years of Decision*, dubbed the “first fundamental critique of National Socialism” by Günter Rohrmoser, criticized the Nazi political vision as lacking clarity and a sense of reality. Spengler called National Socialism “the organisation of the unemployed by the workshy,” but as Woods points out, the work contains no philosophical objections to Nazism itself. In fact, his work was received with enthusiasm by many Nazis, who were confused as to his retreat from the movement. His strong opposition to the use of moral considerations in politics remained at the core of his worldview through the Nazi years, despite his calling Hitler “too stupid.”

Similarly, Ernst Jünger distanced himself from the Nazis beginning in 1926 but continued to believe that society would be saved by a “new elite which would combine primitive man’s will with the technical expertise required by the modern warrior.” Albrecht Erich Günther, Wilhelm Stapel, and Werner Best all swore allegiance to the regime— Best even joined the SS and became a chief in the Gestapo. Edgar Jung, though he was later executed in the Night of the Long Knives, took credit for “paving the way for the German people to vote for National Socialist candidates”

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326 Ibid., 83.
327 Ibid., 84.
328 Ibid., 87.
329 Ibid., 85.
through the Conservative Revolution’s intellectual influence. Friedrich Hielscher, the subject of one of Weißmann’s studies, supposedly formed a “resistance group” to undermine Nazism from within. Weißmann himself notes, however, that one of the members of Hielscher’s group oversaw medical experiments on the prisoners of the Neuengamme Concentration Camp. Despite Hielscher’s defense of his compatriot in the Nuremberg trials, he was convicted and executed for crimes against humanity. Weißmann also cites historians who cast doubt on the credibility of Hielscher’s actual resistance.331

Though some New Right authors note the contradictions within their predecessors, their fascination in these figures remains-- as Holz admitted about the July plotters-- more for the tradition that they could be held to represent rather than the historical reality that they do represent.332 Relativizing the Nazi period while retroactively distancing the Conservative Revolution from it are what allow Armin Mohler to regard the Conservative Revolutionaries as the “healthy Trotskyites” compared to Hitler’s “travesty” (making a comparison to Stalin).333 It also allowed him to proudly declare “I am a fascist” by making a distinction between fascism’s historical reality and the “fascist style.”334 While Mohler sits on the more extreme side by openly considering himself a fascist, the German New Right as a whole attempts to find an alternative German history through the strategies discussed above.335

Pierre Krebs, founder of the Thule Seminar, believes that the New Right aim of reclaiming an organic German identity had its lucky break with reunification, claiming that the

332 Woods, Germany’s New Right as Culture and Politics, 88.
334 Woods, Germany’s New Right as Culture and Politics, 67.
335 Bar-On, Where Have All The Fascists Gone?, x.
reintegration of the East is prompting a reconnection with the “essence of what is German.”

The nation, as the natural modern political community, has a “specific pathos” which the New Right believes cannot be replaced by any other form of community, and “satisfies the human need for clarity.”

Germans as a Volk are held together by a shared wish to survive and prevail, given meaning by their knowledge of past sacrifices made for their community and a willingness to sacrifice for its future.

Henning Eichberg sees the present as the prime moment to regain this. The fall of the Soviet Union removed the communist enemy from the traditional right and the systemic alternative to capitalism from leftists, and even the neoliberal proclamation of the “end of history” is now giving way to the “fears of a clash of civilizations.”

He claims that both traditional right and left are now drifting without any sense of direction, and “even if there are no intact values on offer, at least the paradoxical formula of the Conservative Revolution can provide a philosophical context.”

The unification of East and West Germany into one state, the New Right claims, eliminated Germany’s duty to choose between being Eastern (characterized either by spirituality or Marxism) and being Western (functionality or capitalism). Reunification is the chance to become a third way Mitteleuropa (Middle Europe).

They see Germany as closer to the Third World as a “colonized people,” with the narrative and education imposed on it by the US as a “second Versailles” of demanded “moral reparations.” The way forward, Eichberg claims, is to decolonize the minds of the German people from their guilt, protecting peace by becoming a

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336 Woods, Germany’s New Right as Culture and Politics, 93.
337 Karlheinz Weissmann, Alles, Was Recht(s) Ist: Ideen, Köpfe Und Perspektiven Der Politischen Rechten (Stocker, L, 2000). quoted in Woods, Germany’s New Right as Culture and Politics, 94.
338 Woods, Germany’s New Right as Culture and Politics, 96.
339 Ibid., 97.
342 Betz, Postmodern Politics in Germany, 98–100.
unified nation that can simultaneously have its own sovereignty and balance the forces of East and West.\textsuperscript{343} The New Right strategically capitalized on the left’s popular anti-Americanism (Krebs hoped to “send the Dallas thugs and Ronald Reagan back to their cow pastures”) as well as programmatic populism (some called for a tax on the rich to fund reunification). The tactic paid off, as the political parties tuning into the New Right’s message took their opportunity in the 90s to bring Schönhuber’s talking point into the mainstream: “we want to become a self-confident people again.”\textsuperscript{344} This “political-intellectual spectrum” shift allowed the New Right to stimulate debate over the continuity of German values.\textsuperscript{345} Was the German orientation with Western democracy a genuine “intellectual reorientation” of values, as Habermas claims, “grounded in convictions and guided by principles,” or was it the imposition of American cultural hegemony onto a people whose true spirit lies elsewhere?\textsuperscript{346}

The New Right nevertheless remains cautious toward optimistic nationalism. Even Benoist, who once believed in the ultimate supremacy of the “fatherland,” has recognized since the fall of the Berlin Wall that identity is dynamic, and a return to an idealized past is simply a naive nationalism of the traditional right. He claims that 1989 “marked the start of the postmodern era, in which all political remains of Modernity have been rendered obsolete.”\textsuperscript{347}

The bureaucratic nation-state has become too big to actually address the needs of its citizens and globalization has made it too small to deal with global threats like terrorism, the climate, and the heavily intertwined world economy. Benoist notices that globalization heightens the individual’s perceived need for identity, but “I am a German” no longer has a natural, absolute foundation--

\textsuperscript{343} Ibid., 100–101.  
\textsuperscript{344} Ibid., 120.  
\textsuperscript{345} Ibid., 104.  
\textsuperscript{346} Ibid., 134.  
\textsuperscript{347} Woods, Germany’s New Right as Culture and Politics, 102.
everything is thrown into question by postmodernity. In this sense, reunification actually had the effect of stimulating more internal debate within the New Right, as more self-critical voices have arisen to challenge the optimism of many of the older New Right figures. Wir 89er, the younger branch of the intellectual New Right, seems intent on quashing and demystifying any hope for a conservative future:

All attempts by the New Right to create a national identity are bound to fail because the nation exists only as a myth-- it is a vague feeling: no particular borders can construct the nation (just think of the Germans outside Germany), nor can culture… and genetic differences can be ruled out from the start… since not even a myth of the nation still exists, the concept today is defined by a vacuum. Anyone who still talks about the nation these days is talking about a historical phenomenon that has had its day.348

As Strauss claimed in his 1993 essay “Anschwellender Bocksgesang” (Swelling He-Goat song), the “right wing imagination is not to do with promises of a better life but with loss."349 Other quite arresting self-criticisms have also emerged. Writing in Criticon, Gunnar Sohn attacks conservatives for hoping for a one-dimensional “natural or historical community,” which, because of its claim to universal validity, discounts individual freedom and restraints on state power in favor of vague anticipations of a totalizing “community of the mind” which renders those concepts unnecessary.350 One could hardly find a more postmodernist scorn of universalism, even on the left.

With no fixed points on which to build a satisfying identity, then, what can a nation actually be? Many in the New Right look to the Conservative Revolution for a model. Some

348 Ibid., 104.
349 Ibid.
350 Ibid., 105.
figures in that movement also deliberately distanced themselves from traditional conservatism. Edgar Jung claimed in 1933 that true conservatives are not “intent on stopping the wheel of history” but on finding new paths; others decried conservative “restorationism” that tried to ignore rather than make use of the present and its characteristics, from technology to the modern city to the industrialized proletariat. Heimo Schwilk compares Ernst Jünger’s decentered, alienated soldier, reduced to a “nameless ‘worker-soldier’” at the mercy of industrial warfare, to the mechanized, specialized individual who is subject to globalization. Both attempt to elevate the nation-state to reclaim an identity for themselves.\textsuperscript{351} But whereas the Conservative Revolution responded to the alienation of modernity with a (sometimes cynical) attempt to find a redeeming universal truth underneath, that option is not even available to the New Right. For Armin Mohler, postmodernism injected new imagination into stale German conservatism, freeing politics from “one-dimensional” universals such as those of liberalism, Christianity, and Marxism. Postmodernism allowed pluralism to exist and justify itself-- uncoupling the particular (Das Besondere) from the need to be described as part of a universal scheme (Das Allgemeine). In the face of an “infinite chaos,” an “immense jungle of reality,” Mohler contends that we should turn our attention to the particular, the “lucid” experience of life itself.\textsuperscript{352} Nominally, this applies to all peoples, and the “right to difference” embodies this call for the “recognition and the cultivation of [a people’s] special existence and particularity” that makes a national identity.\textsuperscript{353}

The New Right claims that this has nothing to do with racism or xenophobia. Ethnopluralism is but a variation of the postmodern image of diversity, in which particular subjectivities are separated in order to let them keep their particularity.\textsuperscript{354}

\textsuperscript{351} Ibid., 107.
\textsuperscript{352} Betz, \textit{Postmodern Politics in Germany}, 93.
\textsuperscript{353} Ibid., 96.
\textsuperscript{354} Ibid., 96–97.
equality is the “greatest possible intolerance,” intolerant of diversity, originality, and particularity. Humans can only develop, Mohler claims, in the hierarchies of their own cultural groups. Incompatibility between “particularities” is responsible for the social ills of multicultural societies. Mohler, the attempted SS-man, even claims that he pities refugees, for whom living in an alien culture might not “make up for the murder, from which [they] escaped.” As we have already discussed, however, the same “cultural incompatibility” narrative is an increasingly prevalent explanation for the failures of multiculturalism across the political spectrum in Germany.

The postmodern focus on cultural subjectivity and the metapolitics of cultural hegemony lends itself well to the fascist “style” with which Mohler identifies. Though the political wing of the New Right often goes out of its way to express support for democracy, it is not referring to the liberal representative democracy of most of Europe. Instead of a democracy built on the Enlightenment principles of universal equality and multiculturalism, the New Right’s democracy would be based on the organic unity of a Volk. Taking the local-style participatory democracy advocated by much of the post-1968 left, the New Right claims that this could only function where everyone is united by language and culture; social democracy has more difficulty operating in the tumult of a diverse and demographically-shifting society because common consensus can be more difficult to reach.

One should closely scrutinize the underlying message conveyed by these sentiments. This ethnocentric social democracy is, according to the New Right, supposed to come about not through public debate and pluralist consensus-building but through an imposed cultural power

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355 Ibid., 93.
356 Ibid., 94.
357 Woods, Germany’s New Right as Culture and Politics, 92.
which supposedly represents all Germans so naturally that rational debate is not needed, and so to question power would be unnatural. Every true German, because of their shared spirit, would agree on the terms of such a society-- this a democracy, but an imagined democracy in which everyone already agrees on most questions. Any German who does not agree is not a true German, and there is absolutely no space there for the millions of migrants and cultural minorities who have been a part of Germany for decades. What happens to them, practically once “ethnopluralist democracy” achieves its hegemony? Are they removed, an act which would require force and a humanitarian disaster? And what about the insight of the more pessimistic New Right authors, who see ethno-cultural identity as little more than contrived “belts and restraints”? Mohler responds to this last question in *Liberalenbeschimpfung* (Liberal Abuse):

> As far as fascism is concerned the relationship to concepts is instrumental, indirect and supplementary. What is of primary concern is the commitment to a gesture, a rhythm, in brief: to a ‘style’. Certainly this style can express itself in words-- fascism is not silent; on the contrary, it loves words, but they are not there to establish logical connections. Rather, they set a particular tone, create an atmosphere, and evoke associations. In summary one can say that fascists can easily come to terms with theoretical contradictions. Their communication takes place in a more direct way-- through ‘style.’

In other words, the bloodless yet “culturally assertive and ‘clean’ of migrants” society for which he advocates may indeed not make any sense. But it does not have to, in his view; ideas are “a mobilizing force which [are] not meant to be analyzed.”

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360 Ibid., 27.
One can interpret Mohler’s characterization of fascism as an attempted synthesis of the naive nationalism and resigned pessimism which plays out within much of the German New Right, though many of its members actually deeply struggle with theoretical contradictions and would disagree with the fascist label. For political parties associated with the New Right, Mohler’s metapolitics are satisfying enough. But for figures such as Strauss and the writers of *Wir 89er*, this style is not capable of providing meaning. Strauss has his own hypothetical solution, the “remythologization” of language to provide symbolic reference points, but accepts this as a lost cause. Similarly, Franco Volpi actually argues *against* the “reactivation” of myths because that carries the risk of reawakening “irrationalism, anarchy, and chaos.”

Woods claims that the New Right’s nationalism must be seen as the product of a process, characterized by the relationship between the desire for fixed points and the knowledge that there are none. “Given this process,” Woods says, “there can be no simple nationalist commitment, only a complex and reflective one which must by its very reflectiveness undermine the wish for values beyond question.” To give in to Jünger’s temptation of elevating nationalism to an absolute value in the face of nihilism— to be what Nietzsche called an “active nihilist”— is to remain captive to ungrounded and obsolete values which threaten order more than they sustain or reconstitute it. Günter Figal writes, “nihilism is, according to Nietzsche, a ‘pathological transitional condition’ in which one cannot actually live but in which one nevertheless tries to do so.” One knows and remains forever aware of the empty space left by the demystification of absolute values— they are always in view, but only in memory— and this leaves one with a choice to become either an “active” or a “passive” nihilist. A passive nihilist gives in to meaninglessness, forced to regard all values as equal and action as pointless. The active nihilist,

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361 Ibid., 110.
362 Ibid.
on the other hand, chooses by his own will to follow certain values. Figal finds this choice unconvincing for the same reasons found in Jünger, against the universalizing potential of Mohler’s “style.” One can only give oneself to nationalism in a tentative sense; it is a process of dealing with the futility of attempts to reconstruct the nation, and realizing that this project is always undermined from within. The memory of values which are no longer viable makes the process of the intellectual New Right, as Strauss claimed, bound up more in grief than hope-- it can only grieve the past, not rebuild it. 363

Yet the potential this “process” holds for the more political wing of the New Right is immense. It is not constrained by the pessimism of Strauss and Wir 89er, and consequently reflective process is converted into metapolitical style. In theory, the two are very similar; both notice and accept the philosophical disintegration brought on by postmodernism. But while reflective process grudgingly accepts postmodernity as the death of a dream, metapolitical style instrumentalizes postmodernism with the intent of realizing absolute truths underneath. Its (mis)understanding of postmodern relativism means roughly: concrete identity x cannot be judged by the standards of concrete identity y-- rather than there being no fixed points, the political New Right’s relativism asserts multiple independent but culturally-specific fixed points. Only between these points is everything relative. Its argument against individualism, the left-liberal celebration of relativism, is claiming that it actually represents a universalism-- each individual is an “atom” but above all of them is a vague universal image of “humanity.”

Reflective process laments the “loss of world orientation”-- the collapse of faith in a “recognizable meaning of human life,” believing that this disintegration renders all political action pointless. One can only find solace in nostalgia, Strauss’s "profound remembrance,” and

363 Ibid., 108–10.
364 Betz, Postmodern Politics in Germany, 93.
grieve for the inevitable death of nation and values. In other words, Strauss and the pessimists seem genuinely bothered by the lack of political possibilities based on reason-- failing to find the “will to believe in something,” it can only become a pale shadow of this: more “the will to will than the will itself.” Mohler and Krebs, on the other hand, employ this as a strength; if one’s movement is not bound to reason, vagueness can be a strategy, devaluing rational discussion and avoiding the kind of clarity that risks alienating allies. While Strauss accepts but feels uneasy about the breakdown which has accompanied postmodernity, Mohler fully and ruthlessly embraces fluid postmodernist politics.

The philosophical and political wings of the New Right are split close to same fault line that characterizes debates within postmodernism in general-- one can find a similar split on the left, for instance, between the postmaterial politics of the Greens and the thought of sociologist and philosopher Zygmunt Bauman. Bauman argues that there are two basic directions in which one can take postmodernism:

...a postmodern conceptualization of life can either maintain itself as a corrective force, looking back upon the past “as a movement in a direction unlikely to be followed, as perhaps even an aberration, the pursuit of a false track, a historical error now to be rectified”… or it can tune itself into the postmodern Lebensgefühl, not only accepting the emergence of a chaotic, fragmented world, but enjoying the demise and loss of certainty and finite authority, rejoicing in the decentering impulses and indeterminacy characteristic of the postmodern age, “a life in the presence of an unlimited quantity of

365 Woods, *Germany’s New Right as Culture and Politics*, 57.
competing forms of life, unable to prove their claims to be grounded in anything more solid and binding than their own historically shaped conventions.”

Mohler’s “fascist style” and Nietzsche’s eternally struggling Wills are affirmed by the latter conception of postmodernism, though not through individualism, which would seem to be the simplest manifestation of the infinite “competing forms of life.” Rather, the optimists of the New Right intend to use “chaos and fragmentation” to elevate the authoritarian state to absolute power while also making this absolutist ethnostate embody the “form of life” competing against all others-- not individual others, but collective cultural ones. Chaos and fragmentation are not regrettable effects of postmodernity-- they are the nature of the world, and must be used to create the ethnic (völkisch) order which is the only natural refuge from chaos.

The pessimists do not fit with Bauman’s second category, but they also fall somewhat short of the first. Postmodernity as a “corrective force” seems to more closely describe the thought of figures such as Habermas, with his “constitutional patriotism” based on pride in principles over tradition (though Habermas does not associate with postmodernism, as neither does Bauman, who prefers to speak of “liquid modernity.”) Yet the philosophical New Right still sees the short historical period of the nation-state as an “aberration,” a myth which was once comforting but can no longer hold up to reality. What they lack is the optimism that this realization can generate something better; that would seem to be exclusive to the left by definition. They are unable to access the “unambiguous experience of life” because it would require, as Jünger believed, the “sacrifice of the intellect”-- they are not willing to take Mohler’s

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idealistic leap of faith into politics.\textsuperscript{368} Their response is process rather than unchanging position, though this process is more reflective than \textit{reflexive}-- preoccupied with the loss of a past rather than in using its lessons to create a future-- though it often ultimately arms the political wing when taken without its self-critical pessimism.

Without such crippling doubt, the political New Right (which has had influence on parties from the Republikaner in the 90s to the AfD today) has the confidence to define their own version of European postmodernity.\textsuperscript{369} As we have seen, the optimists and pessimists disagree on the source of contemporary problems, identifying them either as impositions from East and West “Vodka-Cola imperialism” or as endemic to postmodernity itself.\textsuperscript{370} While the postmodern, postmaterialist Left created the idea of the “right to difference” with the meaning that immigrants had a right to retain their own culture, the political wing of the New Right believes that each culture has its own relative modernity-- they laud the Iranian Revolution for instance, as the Shia Muslim world’s version of emancipation.\textsuperscript{371} For this reason, this side of the New Right is not as anti-European as it is anti-EU. Its objection to the EU is that the EU is an \textit{economic} union, creating economic identity, rather than a cultural union creating cultural identity. “In the Mitteleuropa conception, Spektorowski claims, “the ethnic federation of peoples is not necessarily anti-capitalist, but posits ethno-cultural over economic priorities. Only a strong cultural unity may serve as protection against globalization.”\textsuperscript{372} To achieve this, the political New Right combines the concepts of local participatory democracy and anti-Americanism one

\textsuperscript{368} Woods, \textit{Germany’s New Right as Culture and Politics}, 127.
\textsuperscript{369} Salzborn, “Renaissance of the New Right in Germany?,” 45,52.
\textsuperscript{370} Minkenberg, “The Renewal of the Radical Right,” 181.
\textsuperscript{372} Spektorowski, “The New Right,” 125.
usually finds on the left with right wing chauvinist social and cultural ideals.\textsuperscript{373} As Michael O’Meara puts it, the New Right is prepared to ally with a “modernity” faithful to Europe’s daring spirit—that is, to a modernity that frees Europeans from what is dead in their culture. At the same time, though, it rejects everything seeking growth not in Europe’s expansive spirit, but in its negation—specifically in the functional—and ethnocidal—culture fostered by liberal market societies.\textsuperscript{374}

Interesting to note is that O’Meara considers himself a postmodernist; this is taken from a book titled “New Culture New Right: Anti-Liberalism in Postmodern Europe. Yet here he refers to establishing a modernity. This speaks to the fundamental contradiction within the New Right’s project—using the relativist, cynical, postmodernist worldview to assert absolute, fixed points with the confidence of modernity. In any case, Benoist believes that O’Meara’s “expansive spirit” indicates a conceptualization of a united Europe as more of an “empire” than a nation, as an empire “is not primarily a territory but essentially an idea or a principle. The political order is determined … by a spiritual … idea.”\textsuperscript{375}

The ideas of protecting a non-material “spiritual idea” and opposing the functionalizing ideology of neoliberalism actually unite the political New Right with the New Left-inspired politics of the Greens— in more of a philosophical than programmatic sense, but this too holds political potential for the right wing’s metapolitics. As the political New Right represents the right-wing celebration of the chaos of postmodernity, the Greens embody the left-wing counterpart of the dichotomy described by Betz. Like the New Right, the New Left began as an

\textsuperscript{373} Minkenberg, “The Renewal of the Radical Right,” 174.
\textsuperscript{374} O’Meara, \textit{New Culture, New Right}, 51.
opposition to the penetration of functionalist “economic rationality” into more and more spheres of life, “redefining [social, political, etc.] relations in terms of consumption” and “bureaucratizing the conditions of life.” “What is at stake,” Habermas warned, “is the symbolic reproduction of the life-world itself.” However, the Greens and the New Left as a whole adopted “individual autonomy” and “self creation” as its challenge to deterritorialization, a choice which Betz asserts was “highly compatible” with exactly the same alienating postmodernity it attempted to counteract. Individualism only accelerated the commodification of “lifestyles… based on immediate gratification, fantasy, novelty, play, hedonism, and consumption and affluence”.  

How does this relate to the politics of the New Right? Betz claims that the New Left, though glorifying the fragmentation engendered by postmodernity, misunderstands postmodernism-- in the end, it is still seduced by the Enlightenment promise of “full emancipation.” The New Right does this as well-- the absolute nation-state simply takes the place of individualism in their schema-- but individualism fails to satisfy the demand for social belonging, while the ethnostate simply promises an updated “social democratic [re]understanding of the fatherland.” In relation to the Greens in particular, this has even allowed the radical right to co-opt ecology into its programs, with the usual chauvinistic spin that ascribes the problem to the “other” and accordingly creates the collective identity lacking in individualism.

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377 Ibid., 159.
378 Ibid., 166.
379 Heilbrunn, “Germany’s New Right,” 93.
Fears of overpopulation and overburdened infrastructure were easily picked up on as early as the 1970s, as New Right figures such as Eichberg attempted to lay claim to the nascent Green movement. Virtually all were expelled from or left the Party, but continued to push their own right-wing ecology.\textsuperscript{380} From comparing environmental pollution to ethnic pollution to claiming that only a uniform, native Volk had the spiritual connection to a land which is required to be good stewards, the New Right was able to absorb an issue that already had wide appeal, and synthesize it with the mobilizing force of xenophobia.\textsuperscript{381} The Green Party’s share of the vote has levelled out to approximately between 7% and 10% since 1994; the AfD already has 30 more seats in the Bundestag than the Greens, and as the far right continues to take popular issues and combine them with simple narratives and vague promises, it could continue gaining political power. The AfD did not steal many votes from the Greens in 2017 (1.4%), as the Greens strongly holds members of the more educated, well-off top two thirds of the “two thirds society.” However, the incorporation of green politics into the AfD’s politics makes it yet another weapon in its arsenal, and another problem which can be blamed on the catch-all issue of immigration. This is exactly the intent of the right wing’s metapolitics; to undermine the legitimacy of all other solutions, using the concreteness of real programs as a weakness, and inserting their own ambiguous “style” in order to “push the boundaries of what is considered permissible in German political discourse.”\textsuperscript{382}

While the New Right-- even its more zealously political members-- understands the contemporary world as a postmodern one (for better or worse), its strategies and promises hold a strong appeal for the sections of society most aggravated by the turn to the postmaterial politics

of social justice, environmentalism, and culture. The losers of modernization, the underclass of undereducated and unemployed mostly young men, and the typical Green voter are two sides of the same Zweidrittelgesellschaft (two-thirds society) created by the acceleration of technology and the coinciding increased specialization of labor. While those who have had the opportunities to keep up with these processes have the luxury of engaging in postmaterial politics-- the socially, economically, and geographically mobile employees in social and cultural services such as education and journalism-- there are also those who do not have their material needs satisfied or even find them threatened. These Deklassierte (underprivileged) can feel more represented by far right parties that promise to recapture a lost standard of living by excluding wealth and opportunities to outsiders. The political New Right intentionally and systematically appropriated the leftist concept of cultural revolution, fusing it with the Conservative Revolution’s image of a “separate” right wing past from Nazism, attempting to provide new right wing parties and movements such as the AfD and Pegida with a “clean slate” with which to push the right wing worldview without the burdens of the Nazi past.

This chapter has discussed the ideological philosophy of the New Right, a surprisingly diverse collection of intellectuals, and their relationship to postmodernism and postmodernity. But how does the political New Right’s chosen strategy of metapolitics, carried out at varying levels from internet chatrooms to international coalitions of nationalists, actually play out? How has it simultaneously provided a basis for new right wing action while also having succeeded in pulling established parties rightwards? The next chapter is concerned with the processes of communication, legitimization, and radicalization sought by extremist groups and how the new far right utilizes means such as the internet to creep closer to cultural hegemony.

384 Betz, Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe, 176–77.
Chapter Four: The Internet and Meme Warfare

The New Right’s metapolitical focus first inspired the factions of the “old” right which it avoids, such as the neo-Nazi Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (NPD), as it coincided with the necessity to circumvent established means of cultivating political power. In its 2002 party manifesto, the NPD introduced what it called a “3-pillar approach” for broadening its scope of action in the wake of the prohibition of multiple other far right groups by the federal government. The pillars, “fighting for the minds, fighting for the streets, and fighting for the voters,” were intended to begin a new strategic era for the far right which had up until then never won more than a few regional seats. Wary of the Office for Constitutional Protection’s oversight and infiltration of any centralized political organization, both the NPD and the more radical free-floating neo-Nazi groups began to systematically adopt the more metapolitical style advocated by intellectuals in the previous decades—partially for practical reasons, as that style lends itself well to decentralized and horizontal activism that is much more difficult to spy on or outlaw.

First advocated in the 1980s and pioneered in the 1990s, the tactic of developing right wing extremist subcultures, “organizations without organization,” made them “invulnerable to state repression.” Groups known as “freie Kameradschaften” (free fellowships) or “freie Nationalisten” (free nationalists) began to form on the local and regional levels, organizing themselves loosely but communicating with one another through “info-telephones”—which when called simply play a voicemail of news, protest details, and the numbers of other info-telephones.

385 Woods, Germany’s New Right as Culture and Politics, 11.
388 Virchow, “The Groupuscularization of Neo-Nazism in Germany,” 60.
telephones; magazines, informal networks of friends, and increasingly group websites and social media.\textsuperscript{389} These “groupuscules” are united by the common but vague goal of increasing the general presence of right wing extremism in Germany-- in effect, to normalize it and thereby desensitize Germans from the shock that most still feel when confronted with open National Socialists. Across this disorganized, multiplicitous landscape, groups are able to employ a wide variety of tactics to influence mainstream conservatism, intimidate opponents, and create emotionally charged senses of identity and camaraderie for their members. Instrumental to all of this is the use of symbols, rituals, fashion style, and behavioral expectations to bridge the gap between subculture and political engagement:

Style and symbol—that is: clothes (or single pieces of garment like boots, belt, parts of uniforms), colour, habitus, the way of speaking (or single keywords) as well as aestheticized signs as expressive symbols for opinions and behaviors—signal the public which tendency an individual or a group belongs to. (…) At the same time style and symbol refer to existing or desired lines of tradition that are implored and occupied for the present.\textsuperscript{390}

While this “aestheticization of politics” is nothing new to right wing extremism (Walter Benjamin used this phrase to describe the Nazis in 1935), the rise of internet communication has become central to the contemporary far right’s strategies in a number of ways-- in the words of the American white supremacist David Duke, “internet proficiency is as important to our cause


as was learning to use a sword in the Middle Ages or a long rifle in the American Revolution.”

The Internet has not awoken the silent majority that many on the right wing had hoped for, but it has enabled the expansion of nationalist and pan-nationalist radical networks while “simplifying the coordination and diffusion of tactics and ideas.” In fact, the German security service has itself declared that “the internet has become the most important medium of communication for right wing extremists,” and admitted in 2010 that it has significant difficulties with neutralizing online hate networks given their fast movement, ease of regeneration, and hosting in foreign domains (such as the U.S., Russia, and Singapore) where the German government has no jurisdiction.

Given the innate suspicion and hostility faced by right wing extremists and radicals in the German context, right wing groups have had to be stealthier and smarter than their counterparts in Russia or France. Strategically choosing issues like the Dresden bombing and Wehrmacht memorials and campaigning on anti-crime, anti-capitalism, anti-war, pro-environment, and even pro-animal rights platforms rather than on explicit National Socialist nostalgia, the new far right has been adept at co-opting the issues and symbols that were once considered the domain of the left. Combined with a wide diversity of tactics, from traditional street demonstrations to music festivals to cyberattacks to mimicking news and academic websites, the far right has crafted its own opportunities to assert a presence (even an acceptance) in German society that would once have been unacceptable. It has also engendered the formation of what one scholar has called an

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392 Ibid., 6–7.


Erlebniswelt Rechtsextremismus, a “right-wing extremist life-world” -- a subcultural network that encourages radicalization and, from the inside, appears to be a public sphere of its own, allowing (internal) debate, the selling of products, the identification of groups to be excluded, and the setting of behavioral standards. 395 This chapter will focus on the online component of the far right community, which mirrors many of the same processes of identity formation, legitimization, and assertion that occur in “real-world” interactions.

The role of technological evolution in effecting real-world progress is subject to debate. Some, Walter Benjamin as an example, argued that technological progress inherently spurs social progress. Others, such as Theodor Adorno, emphasized the potential for the same innovation to more quickly benefit regressive ideologies such as fascism. Simpson and Druxes meet them halfway, declaring “media technologies alone have no political agency: constituents from any point on the political spectrum can empower themselves and expand their virtual sphere of influence.” 396 What we do know is that the internet has completely changed the epistemic landscape of communication as a whole; knowledge is produced, disseminated, and apprehended by individuals in a radically different way, and its potential implications for the future of politics and democracy are immense. 397 This is especially true of “Web 2.0,” describing the interactive changes that have taken place as social media hubs replaced individual websites as most people’s primary means of navigating the internet. The difficulty of sifting through fact and fiction in a bottomless ocean of fast-paced, fragmented information, Peter Dahlgren claims, has fundamentally shifted the individual’s relationship to knowledge. It is easier than ever to integrate affirming information into our personal paradigms and ignore information that

396 Simpson and Druxes, Digital Media Strategies of the Far Right in Europe and the United States, 14.
challenges us. Even our awareness that we cannot trust streams of information can reinforce this problem—skepticism is turned into cynicism by the dislodging of “cognitive certainty,” as incredulity often becomes part of confirmation bias. Cynicism does not prevent us from finding communities that immediately appeal to our own views and subsequently appear legitimate to us. However, it is easy to then only apply our skepticism (“you can’t believe everything on the internet”) to facts and narratives that contradict our preexisting worldview. Social media and self-isolating internet subgroups intensify this effect through doing the filtering work for us, with algorithms or collective narratives that preclude exposure to information that is incompatible with our worldviews. The overall result is the “erosion of memory, empathy, sensibility (that is, a fundamental transformation of our subjectivity), and on the other hand, a decreasing capacity to impact in an efficacious manner on this new world.”

It is questionable whether these developments really do constitute a “fundamental transformation of our subjectivity.” Dahlgren lends himself to the “post-truth” narrative, that “objective facts” have become “less influential in shaping public opinion than emotional appeals.” The term itself begs the question: when was the “truth” era? When were people more motivated by reason than subjective appeals? When was “fake news” not a regular fixture of the public sphere (tabloids, yellow journalism, etc.), and when was politics defined by agreement on what “the truth” even is? Whether this truly marks a different direction for human behavior or has merely exaggerated our natural cognitive processes is not important for the subject of this chapter, but it is clear that the tendency of the internet to favor Balkanization is extremely

398 Ibid., 21–23.
399 Ibid., 23.
beneficial to the far right (as to any other group seeking homogeneity of thought, or even not actively seeking diversity).

Domonkos Sik has a similar understanding of the epistemic dimensions of the internet, one that does not assume the rational individual to have been the center of politics before the internet, but notes the enhanced ease of dogmatic communication. Writing about the Hungarian far right, Sik notices the similarities between the patterns of its online behavior and Habermas’s concept of the “imitated public sphere”-- a community that mimics all of the aspects of a normal deliberative public sphere but is in reality only based on “ritualized communicative acts” that reinforce the cohesion of the in-group and hostility to other groups. In other words, radical online communities mimic free, open debate as if they are a pluralistic democratic society but are in actuality only fostering conversation in order to homogenize and radicalize the community.

Ideally, the medium of communication is the “free debate of equal partners,” which realizes its potential to be a rational tool that “fulfills its democratic function, provides a space for creating legitimate norms, and for experiencing freedom and mutual understanding.” The public sphere is supposed to be a “mediator between the everyday lifeworld and the administrative or economic systems.”

The internet functions in a way that impedes this kind of communication, however. Groups no longer rely on mutual understanding of the world but instead on having “connectedness to the same network of information,” making information less like input into a system of knowledge and more like a continuous stream of stimuli that replaces “reflexive and communicative practices with the unconscious, real time following of the streams of

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information.”  

Politics thus becomes characterized more by dogmatic and strategic uses of information than by debate. Groups are incentivized to produce whatever sensational, eye-catching, and emotionally-charged “facts” and propaganda that best influence and control the relevant streams of information, and this privileges the radicals who are willing to do so. For the far right, this largely takes the form of negative rituals, emphasizing and sometimes inventing narratives of being oppressed by mainstream society (for instance in relation to “authoritarian political correctness”) and by constructing caricatures of enemies to be mocked and hated (backwards Islamic “hordes”, purple-haired genderfluid feminists, etc.).

In this sense, the internet was exactly the kind of space the far right needed-- these tactics have existed for far longer than the internet, but the characteristics of the internet as a medium much more closely fit the needs of radical ideologies, especially those which set their sights on disaffected individuals, than they have benefitted democracy.

While Sik’s analysis is centered on frustrations in Hungary, many of the same qualities apply to the post-communist East German states, where an astounding 77% of German far right protest Facebook pages are hosted, according to one study. He outlines a number of specific qualities of Hungarian society that make it prime ground for the far right, but his examples directly correspond to the same predicaments which we have discussed in regard to East Germany: an ideological heritage of intolerance, economic disadvantages, prejudice towards minorities, distrust of democratic institutions, and feelings of being unrepresented (known simply in German as Politikverdrossenheit, “political disenchantment”). The only element that

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402 Ibid., 147., italics mine
403 Ibid., 151; Salzborn, “Renaissance of the New Right in Germany?,” 52.
404 Sik, “The Imitated Public Sphere: The Case of Hungary’s Far Right,” 150.
was missing for a right wing resurgence, Sik claims, was a “communicative space, where they could organize their specific collective identity, independently from the dominant central parties.”^406 If anything, this is more relevant to the German far right. Hungarian ultranationalists simply did not have the resources to spread their message before the internet, while online spaces have allowed a once-underground, explicitly illegal movement to communicate freely and openly and circumvent constitutional law, which bans neo-Nazi hate speech.

The imitated public sphere is also produced in a positive and constructive way, through “building up fraudulent virtual resumes via cheap and accessible Internet publicity, which in turn allow them to enter into publishing contracts with unsuspecting publishers, award each other prestigious prizes, make themselves into public figures, and generally mislead the public.”^407 Fringe political groups have always had their own circles of “intellectuals,” newspapers, and so on, but the internet has opened up more space for these circles to mainstream themselves, exerting a rightward pressure on established politics.^408 Following the lead of the New Right magazine *Criticon* and the Thule Seminar, founded by Pierre Krebs in 1980 as somewhat of a “think tank” to “provide the cultural foundations for political initiatives” (named after the organization which cradled the early Nazi Party), the New Right assembled a number of new projects while they regrouped at the turn of the millennium.^409 The two most important organizations, both founded in 2000, were the Institut für Staatspolitik (Institute for State Politics, IfS) and the Bibliothek des Konservatismus (Library of Conservatism). Their names were strategically chosen, as *Institut* is a label almost exclusively used by universities but is not a

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^408 Ibid., 127.
legally protected term, and naturally a library immediately makes one think of wisdom and intellectual integrity. Both “institutions” have offices in Berlin.\textsuperscript{410}

The IfS, headed by Karlheinz Weißmann and Götz Kubitschek, publishes the newspaper \textit{Sezession} as well as conducting “summer and winter academies… and publishing the most important lectures held there in the form of essays and brochures.”\textsuperscript{411} The Bibliothek des Konservatismus, whose creation was led by the former head of \textit{Criticon}, aimed at eventually “setting up a conservative think tank with various types of events, perhaps even with an academy or a higher-education offshoot,” is now interlocked with magazine \textit{Junge Freiheit} with both being headed by Dieter Stein.\textsuperscript{412} While officially meant to be separate institutions, members and leaders of each regularly participate in one another’s events and write for each other’s journals--Kubitschek has been chief commentator in the “Security and Military” section in \textit{Junge Freiheit}.\textsuperscript{413} To an unsuspecting visitor, the formal nomenclature and the “variety” of opinions could easily be misleading. Indeed, the purpose of these initiatives was to enhance the ease of creating the illusion of a large and well-established political movement even when it is quite small in reality. With the internet, one can costlessly propagate as many forums, organizations, and news sites as one has the capacity to run, and multiple sources can be run by the same person or few people.\textsuperscript{414}

During the 2010 Thilo Sarrazin controversy, the right wing’s imitated public sphere pretended to present a lively debate within itself. IfS published a “pseudo-academic study” called “The Case of Sarrazin” while the “pseudo-scientific” news website Lifegen.de (subtitled “Living

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{410} Salzborn, “Renaissance of the New Right in Germany?,” 36–45.
\bibitem{411} Ibid., 47; Woods, \textit{Germany’s New Right as Culture and Politics}, 29.
\bibitem{413} Ibid., 47.
\end{thebibliography}
facts for life sciences”) also weighed in on the controversy with shameless plugs of the site owners’ blatantly chauvinist book “Worst Case,” making no reference to the fact that it is written by the same people who most likely wrote the anonymous article. Another publication, made by a privately-funded “think tank” and claiming to be the 15th volume in a series of scientific analyses by a nameless team of experts, uses proper citations and an academic style to examine the Sarrazin case, depicting him as a hero of truth against a conspiratorial political correctness agenda. Druxes explains:

Like the book by Sarrazin himself, these publications purport to be well-researched, and present spurious evidence for their claims. They quote “experts” in a format that simulates “balanced” debate, instrumentalizing bona fide publications and embedding these in a welter of pseudo-scientific propaganda that is suffused by an apocalyptic tone. Clever visual design choices and veiled rhetoric that carefully skirts the hate speech laws professionalize, modernize, and mainstream their hate messages.

By citing anything from mainstream newspapers like the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung to tabloids such as Bild and Welt to their own sister publications (IfS quoted Junge Freiheit as a source in its analysis of the Sarrazin controversy, for instance), the far right is able to mimic intellectual and political legitimacy until it is granted to them. It does not stop there, however. Sezession and Junge Freiheit have both created and then awarded one another (as well as Kubitschek’s wife) the “Gerhard-Löwenthal prize” for journalism. Gerhard Löwenthal was a deceased TV journalist and concentration camp survivor whose widow was tricked into letting these journals re-publish her husband’s memoir and attach the proceeds to the prize. They have

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since given the award to unsuspecting actual academics, some of whom have accepted it and therefore been photographed at and unintentionally legitimized the ceremonies of Junge Freiheit and IfS.417

The effect of these strategies is twofold. From the inside, the far right looks to be much more of a coherent, populous community than it really is, and from the outside the “institutes” and “academic journals” are unwittingly allowed to influence the mainstream. Their abilities to do so are also compounded by the particular connective structure of the German far right’s online network. Manuela Caiani and Linda Parenti’s comparative study of radical right internet networks in six countries finds a number of qualities of the German network that makes it adept at communication and mobilizing its constituents.418 Focusing more on the “old web” than on social media, they analyze the far right’s webpages and the interconnectivity of them. These inter-page networks, they note, can serve a variety of purposes: fostering real world action, allowing nearly costless dissemination of information, facilitating exchanges of resources (including funding) and information, crowdsourcing leadership and coordination, and encouraging parallel, simultaneous actions both domestically and across borders.419 However, different countries’ right wing communities actually differ in their digital architectures, giving them a variety of advantages and disadvantages.

Caiani and Parent note that the internet has been especially beneficial for German extremists because of the limited space available to them in real life. The web was the prime space to form “more modern and complex extreme right coalitions.”420 Along with France, Germany had a stronger online far right than Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United

417 Ibid., 131–33.
418 Manuela. Caiani and Parenti, European and American Extreme Right Groups and the Internet, 103.
419 Ibid., 10, 11.
420 Ibid., 69.
States, in terms of being cohesive and homogenous.\textsuperscript{421} Each web page of a far right wing organization, referred to as a “node,” has on average 5.6 links to other nodes, the highest of the six countries, making the German network the densest. The distance between right wing organizations is also the shortest of the countries analyzed-- there are only 2.4 nodes on average between them, meaning that one who uses one of these websites is going to find it easier to find more like it without being exposed to anything outside the right wing bubble. Not only are they close and dense, however. They are also extremely active. Germany also has the highest degree of interconnectedness between political parties, which are more highly visible and more in the center of the network than in the other countries, and other organizations. The NPD has strong links to its youth organization for instance, and the youth organization is a quick conduit of information from much more radical sites.

What they find overall is that the German network resembles a star: highly centralized, in which “fast and efficient diffusion of communication and information among the various actors is guaranteed,” but the most peripheral actors have more difficulty influencing the system as a whole. This centralization does not prevent determined radicals from doing so, however. Subcultural youth groups are the most popular in the German network than in any of the others, and have a role as “very important ‘brokers’” between political parties and more fringe sites.\textsuperscript{422} This helps German organizations form four well-defined blocks with “strong and reciprocal exchanges between all blocks,” comprised of a political parties and movements block, a block of other political movements and “revisionist groups,” a third block made up of subcultural organizations, and finally, the weakest block, the neo-Nazis. “In instrumental terms,” Caiani and Parenti clarify, “this extensive web of contacts between blocks is useful to increase the flow of

\textsuperscript{421} Ibid., 66.
\textsuperscript{422} Ibid., 71.
information, allocate responsibility and increase the flexibility of collective action."\(^{423}\) While neo-Nazi sites outnumber those of political movements and subcultural organizations, they are not very powerful.\(^{424}\) This star structure particularly enhances the general tendency of the internet to encourage consensus seeking, and extremist groups are privileged. The web is “boundless, difficult to be controlled, in a state of continuous change” and “is the ideal place for those at the boundaries between legal politics and illegal activities.”\(^{425}\) In the German context, being illegal has made the online extremist community more close-knit: “cohesive, centralized, and apparently equipped with resources” that make them a greater danger to democracy.\(^{426}\)

It is not difficult to imagine how the “more dynamic Internet platforms”\(^{427}\) like Facebook and YouTube ease all of the functions for which the radical right uses the internet, especially increasing visibility. A more recent study by Schelter and Kunegis finds a host of primarily local- and issue-based Facebook pages e.g. “No to the [refugee] shelter in Köpenick,” that not only connect frustrated people but also openly advertise right wing organizations. Analyzing over 1 million interactions by more than 200,000 users across 136 pages, they find low cooperation between cities (low correlation between geographical distance and number of shared users), a surprisingly low incidence of “co-likes” (meaning that the users vary wildly aside from agreeing on these political issues) and a strong affiliation with the AfD. Another study with an even wider scope (11 million interactions, 1 million users, but across the established political party pages) finds a strong overlap between the AfD and the NPD on one side and the CDU on the other, making the AfD an effective bridge between dissatisfied ex-conservative voters and

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\(^{423}\) Ibid., 77.
\(^{424}\) Ibid., 63, 77.
\(^{425}\) Ibid., 10.
\(^{426}\) Ibid., 110.
\(^{427}\) Ibid., 7.
the extreme right. Mainstream centrist Facebook users who come across the AfD are likely to find comments from and links to the extreme right, facilitating direct contact between traditional conservatism and neo-Nazis. This opens the potential for easy radicalization, as former CDU voters participate in a community where much more radical opinions are expressed and normalized, and extremist news and propaganda images offer to confirm their latent prejudices. Likewise, users from the extreme right have a destigmatized platform on which to communicate compared to the NPD’s Facebook page or forums. This supports the claim that the AfD functions as a “missing link” that filled the longstanding chasm between the mainstream and extreme right in German politics.

The AfD also has the highest number of followers on Facebook of any of the major parties at approximately 433,000 as of August 2018. Though this number is likely higher because it is a newer party which was built on the internet since the outset, it is significantly more than the next party, Die Linke (264,000), followed by CDU (207,000), SPD (201,000), the Greens (193,000), and FDP (163,000). Interestingly, the Bavarian CSU, somewhat of a little sister party to the ruling party (but one which has recently attempted to move the CDU rightwards), has more likes than the CDU itself at 216,000.

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429 Ibid.
digital media indeed led to a new logic of ‘connective action’ where communication becomes a prominent part of the organizational structure, giving birth to new types of mobilized actors based on personalized content sharing across media networks… In these new forms of mobilization high levels of organizational resources are no longer required for the development of action, nor the formation of a collective identity.\textsuperscript{433}

The Identitarian Movement (IB) and Pegida (an acronym for Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamification of the West, though often written as a normal word) are perfect examples of movements that have seemed to emerge almost spontaneously out of these new forms of political organization, making skillful use of the internet as a medium and the pre-existing network’s resources. While the AfD represents a more traditional attitude towards parliamentary political gains, the former two groups closely resemble the metapolitical style outlined by New Right intellectuals.

The IB, after emerging on Facebook in 2012 as the German chapter of the pan-European group Generation Identity (GI), has primarily mobilized its members for dramatic public spectacles-- in 2016 members climbed the Brandenburg Gate and hung a banner reading “secure borders, secure future,”\textsuperscript{434} and in 2017 Generation Identity raised over $178,000 for the “Defend Europe” project, chartering a ship and crew in the Mediterranean with the intent of finding boats of refugees/immigrants and reporting them to the Libyan coast guard. This enterprise ran into a number of rather amusing setbacks-- on its way to the Mediterranean, port inspectors in Cyprus found that 20 of the “professional crew” hired by the Identitarians were actually Sri Lankan zeitung.de/inhalt.drohende-trennung-von-cdu-und-csu-die-scheidung-wurde-damals-nicht-vollzogen.398bd965-537d-40c0-97cd-6707aa37f744.html.

\textsuperscript{433} Manuela Caiani and Parenti, \textit{European and American Extreme Right Groups and the Internet}, 7.

migrants with counterfeit identification, who had paid smugglers $12,000 each to get to Europe via the ship, renamed “C-Star” and carrying a banner reading “NO WAY-- YOU WILL NOT MAKE EUROPE HOME.” Identitarian Activist Alexander Schelyer was subsequently arrested on charges “related to human trafficking.” After finally reaching its target area, C-star attempted to harass a Doctors without Borders ship over radio; the ship promptly blew them off with a “thank you for your information.” The Identitarians were then blocked from refueling by Tunisian fishermen who blocked the refueling channel with their boats, holding “no racists” signs. Finally, less than two weeks after starting its mission, the Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre in Rome-- one of the same organizations that picks up migrant boats-- received an emergency distress call from the C-star, which had broken down and needed rescue. It then retracted the distress call but made no new progress in the following week. The mission was then declared an “undisputed success” by Sellner and disbanded.435

Despite this rather embarrassing example, Generation Identity is still rather internet-savvy. Its “actions,” as it calls them, rarely involve more than a few people, but they are high profile and easily appropriate the image of an exciting, revolutionary movement-- their videos feature exciting music and cinematography that one would find in an action film.436 The vast majority of their presence is actually only on the internet, however-- their real world actions seem to be secondary, only serving the purpose of creating material for their (quite sleek and modern) website. At least one study has raised the question of whether the IB should even be


considered a social movement in the traditional sense at all, or if it is a completely new type of movement: an internet phenomenon.\textsuperscript{437}

The internet facilitates the simulation of continuous protest activity with little expenditure that is maintained supra-regionally, even transnationally and internationally networked, so that a discrepancy arises between the real “on the street” actions that are often carried out with no more than a dozen activists, and the virtual echo that these actions illicit due to viral proliferation on the internet.\textsuperscript{438}

Consequently, the Identitarian Movement is able to communicate political messages through a primarily \textit{aesthetic} mode rather than an explicitly political one. This allows it to appear as if it does not have any connection to the right wing despite standing for the same “misanthropic ideology” (“menschenverachtende Ideologie”) as its allies. The writers “plead” that the Identitarian Movement is recognized as a “special transnational phenomenon” that cannot be underestimated, “because precisely the first signs of an institutionalization and arrangement of a new social movement are becoming clear… it carries the name of a movement, but isn’t one--but it could nevertheless become one.”\textsuperscript{439}

Modeled somewhat after Greenpeace, the guerilla environmentalist activist group, the Identitarian Movement attempts to connect itself to the past with its Lambda symbol, supposedly carried by the Spartans in their defense against Persia at Thermopylae in 480 BC. Yet these “wolves in skinny jeans” also make skilled use of postmodern media and cooperate increasingly closely with other national groups, from the French chapter of GI to the American alt-right.\textsuperscript{440}

\textsuperscript{438} Ibid., 9.
\textsuperscript{439} Ibid., 20.
Pegida, though it has been largely confined to large cities and a national focus rather than a pan-European organization or orientation, has somewhat of an opposite real world presence. It amasses thousands of people on the streets rather routinely, even pulling together 25,000 people in January of 2015. Camus and Lebourg claim that “the organization’s postmodernity is clear”: it uses social networks to garner attention and participants from its rallies, in which both educated middle class and radical far right protesters chant a combination of anti-immigrant slogans and easily recognized slogans from the 1989 demonstrations that brought down the Berlin Wall—“We don’t want any Asylum seeking pigs!” with “All clear for the turnaround! [Klar zur Wende!]” and “We are the people! [Wir sind das Volk!].” It displays particular enmity for the mainstream media, calling it the fourth arm of the state, and multiple journalists who examined Pegida’s overlap with extremist, neo-Nazi level discourses have had their homes attacked. Despite constant claims from its spokespeople that it is not a racist organization, its web pages are strewn with the worst examples of violent and anti-intellectual rhetoric. Druxes claims that these qualities make Pegida best classified as an “antipolitical” movement— it eschews a coherent political program in favor of a much more slippery, fluid general collective anger (easily manipulated by radicals), disregarding the free press (removing an “objective external corrective”), in turn justifying a feedback loop of animosity that can and has led to violence against immigrants and politicians. It is a form of political action defined by antagonism, “moral outrage and rebellion” to everything, that seeks out the disorganized, direct

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441 Camus and Nicolas Lebourg, *Far-Right Politics in Europe*, 207.
442 Ibid.
443 Druxes, “‘Montag Ist Wieder Pegida-Tag!,’” 20.
444 Ibid., 19.
445 Ibid., 20.
446 Ibid., 22.
447 Ibid.
448 Ibid., 26.
participatory “democracy” of internet organizing as an alternative to liberal democracy. Pegida has exerted a “magnetic attraction” on the AfD. A study by Karsten Grabow finds that it is a “beneficial bridgehead into… lower middle class” strata, transporting hard anti-Islam lines from extremists to the AfD while providing opportunities for political connection to alienated individuals.

The two most prominent New Right media outlets of today, Sezession and Junge Freiheit, actively play a supporting role for the activism of the IB and Pegida as well as the AfD. For instance, Götz Kubitschek’s journal Sezession regularly publishes pieces from Martin Sellner, the leader of the Identitarian Movement of Austria. Both magazines have given full page interviews to Pegida founder Lutz Bachmann. Junge Freiheit has great hopes for Pegida to: form a kind of pre-political space; not identical, but similar to the AfD support base. A gathering place for those who no longer feel represented or understood by the established parties; a kind of German “Tea Party,” which could very well gain political influence through its agenda setting.

These platforms do not limit themselves to explicit metapolitics, however, opting instead to use every tool in their arsenal. Having “offered itself as an unofficial mouthpiece of the AfD,” Junge Freiheit “regularly publishes full-page interviews with AfD officeholders, alongside guest articles and the party’s advertisements. Though the party began as an old-fashioned “bring back the Deutschmark” party led by conservative Eurosceptic economists, the New Right has

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watched the AfD’s growth with interest, eager for its potential as a “portent for major changes, one that is as necessary as it was predictable.”\textsuperscript{454} \textit{Blaue Narzisse}, founded in the recently-infamous city of Chemnitz (where violent far right protests erupted in late August 2018), speaks meanwhile to those who are not yet in the movement, operating on the internet as a “gateway institution” to extremism aimed at young people who may stumble into the trap.\textsuperscript{455} Right wing news is thus able to report on right wing demonstrations and politics, the participants and voters of which are likely to read the coverage of right wing news sites over the mainstream \textit{Lügenpresse} (lying press) -- and out of this circle emerges a symbiotic, self-feeding relationship between misleading information and outraged action while maintaining the illusion of a fully-fledged (mini-) public sphere.\textsuperscript{456} This can persuade “even the most ardent extremist that he is not alone, that his views are not, in fact, extreme at all.”\textsuperscript{457}

Not only has the internet opened up new potentials for the practical mobilization and dissemination of information, but it has also aided the formation of an “Erlebniswelt Rechtsextremismus” (right wing extremist lifeworld) through the creation of reference points around which group identities form.\textsuperscript{458} The internet’s implicit tendency towards separation narrows the horizons of possible thought, the limits of which are then consolidated by a process of identity formation. The production of collective identity is a much-studied topic in regard to the far right, as rituals, symbols, entertainment media, and even consumer products have been central to its appeal--this was as true for the Nazi Party as it is for today’s far right:

\textsuperscript{454} Weißmann, “Ruhe bewahren.” quoted in Salzborn, “Renaissance of the New Right in Germany?,” 55.
\textsuperscript{455} Salzborn, “Renaissance of the New Right in Germany?,” 49.
\textsuperscript{456} Ibid., 51.
\textsuperscript{458} Druxes, “Manipulating the Media: The German New Right’s Virtual and Violent Identities,” 128.
The aesthetic character of (historical) fascism has been widely underlined, stressing the power of its discourse, including the nonlinguistic forms (rituals, myths, and images), as an essential element in the formation of the regime’s self-identity, the construction of its goals and ends and, in sum, the making of its success… indeed, as it has been argued, more than mere means of political legitimation, rituals, myths, cults, and speeches are fundamental to the construction of power, its specific physiognomy, its political vision.\(^{459}\)

The intent is to “sacralize politics” into a mode that promises to assert order against chaos, to conquer alienation and uncertainty.\(^{460}\) The internet has greatly expanded the opportunities for the modern far right to do the same, both to present itself in offline spaces as well as to create online ones, appearing as a movement with a coherent, all-encompassing Weltanschauung (worldview) that demands fanaticism and obedience. The internet’s capacity for immediate access to such a community, complete with symbols, rituals, entertainment media, and even consumer products energizes “‘places of congregation’, providing an instant sense of community in an increasingly disconnected, disjointed world.”\(^{461}\)

Though it was originally an invention of the working class and Jamaican immigrants in Great Britain, skinhead subculture became an important recruiting tool for the far right, especially in 1990s Germany.\(^{462}\) Producing its own subgenre of hard rock, “White Power music,”-- based on heavy metal and oi punk, appropriating its mosh pit dancing and aggressive, frustrated lyrical styles-- its music festivals organized by the NPD and neo-Nazi groupuscules

\(^{460}\) Ibid.
have played “a prominent role in recruiting, holding, and activating followers.”

Over time skinhead culture provided “a unifying ideology, a common language, and a perfect example of globalization.” The last point refers to the transformation of skinhead culture into a multimillion-Euro industry across Europe as clothing brands such as Lonsdale, Pit Bull, and Thor Steinar have recognized their status as signifiers for far right subculture and pander to it with neo-Nazi and Norse symbols. Commercialization has not only created “an economic incentive for the continuation and exploitation of skinhead and racist culture,” but also aided the internationalization of the subculture, “creating international ties where there were none, and [inspiring] an ideological pan-Aryanism that has broken down the walls between racist groups.” It has solidified the sense of common identity that is often the appeal for skinhead culture to disaffected youth, as they search for a “mutual understanding of the world.”

Skinhead culture has declined in importance for the far right, however, as its associations with violence, drugs, and general blockheadedness (even the hardcore neo-Nazi movement views skinheads as mostly “useful idiots”) have made it counterproductive for winning a perception of public legitimacy. As the far right has asserted a more mainstream internet presence it has changed its aesthetics in a number of ways, taking to a much more laid-back image of its movement. Once again appropriating from the left, “Gangsta-style” clothing such as “baggy trousers, hoodies with logos of far-right bands or political slogans, baseball caps and skate shoes

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465 Ibid.
466 White Pride Worldwide 2001. Intelligence Report, Fall, Southern Poverty Law Center, AL, 24. quoted in Ibid.
467 Sik, “The Imitated Public Sphere: The Case of Hungary’s Far Right,” 144.
have replaced bomber jackets and combat boots, permitting a much more “autonomous-alternative culture.” One ex-”Autonomous Nationalist” explains, “we wanted to have a modern and cool dress in everyday life – just as any other youth. And we just wanted to sell our ideology through saying that you can be a Nazi, but do not have to dress like a skinhead.”

The music scene has also evolved to reflect changing tastes. Pegida has featured open neo-Nazi rap artist “MaKss Damage,” who has produced songs with names such as “88 lines” (88 referring to HH, Heil Hitler) and an album titled “2033” (20th of April, Hitler’s birthday, and 1933, the year he came to power), well-known neo-Nazi codes. The Junge Nationalisten, the NPD’s youth wing, also has downloadable “hate rock” and xenophobic rap music on its website. As ex-leader of the British National Party Nick Griffin said, “people will listen to a song over and over again and… take all the words in a way you’d be very lucky to get one in one hundred [people] to come and listen to a speech.”

Alongside music, consumer products like T-shirts, books, magazines, posters, stickers, and calendars are popular opportunities for individuals to express their allegiances in public (as well as raising money for their causes)—51.7% of websites in Caiani and Parenti’s study had merchandise pages. One website, phalanx.europa.com, linked to by other right wing sites, sells a variety of products, including shirts with “edgy,” often offensive material. To list a few: a shirt with “MEGA-- Make Europe Great Again;” one with “Deus Vult,” (“God wills it”), a motto of

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471 Ibid.
472 Ibid.
475 MacIntyre, Donal. ‘Nazi Hate Rock,’ Channel 5, Britain, 2006. quoted in Ibid., 236.
the crusades; “Schmiss happens,” a reference to the traditional dueling scars still inflicted and worn as a badge of honor by (primarily right-wing) fraternity students; “Lampedusa Coast Guard,” a reference to an island in the Mediterranean that has become a hotspot for migrant boats and the site of two shipwrecks claiming the lives of at least 393 men, women, and children; and an assortment of Lambda logos and Sparta references, the symbols of the Identitarian Movement.477

Perhaps the strangest manifestation of the new far right’s aesthetics, however, are its online mascots. “AfD-chan,” (-chan being an endearing suffix in Japanese culture), an anime-style cartoon girl representing the movement, is commonly found on the anonymous forum website “4chan,” (known as “one of the darkest corners of the Web”)478 as well as having “her” own accounts on Facebook and Twitter and a constant presence on Reddit’s subcommunity /r/dieAlternative.479 Usually sporting blue hair and drawn by any number of unknown internet artists, she appears in images with her friends, other far right mascots such as Pepe the Frog (claimed by Richard Spencer, top neo-Nazi in the United States who popularized the term “alt-right”) and “Putsch-chan,” who symbolizes anti-democratic German militarism:

Bottom right images say “Everything will be ok,” “Election-Champagne 2017” on the bottle and “Vote for the AfD”.

It is interesting to note the composition of the “/pol/, Politically Incorrect” 4chan forums in which AfD-chan features. While the majority of posts are marked with German and Austrian geotags, only about half of the comments are in German; the rest are in English, as the conversation is joined by posters from the United States, Finland, the UK, France, Switzerland, and Russia. The forum threads themselves are usually started as updates of the AfD’s status, followed by links to “meme dumps,” collections of memes for followers to spread; English- and German-language analyses of the current situation; motivational and self-improvement materials.

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(e.g. workout regimens); opportunities to get active in the AfD, IB, etc.; maps of supposed rapes and assaults by migrants; motivational tracts addressed to each of the three “strategic echelons” of the alt-right (“Facefaggers/Sturmpionier,” offline activists; “Shitposters/Bandenkampf,” online activists; and “The Homebase/Heimatfront,” inactive members); repeating tasks for the future; and finally links to “AfDwave/ Fashwave” YouTube videos, which combine fashionable vaporwave music and aesthetics with images, references, and sound bites of far right heroes from Nigel Farage to Julius Evola. There is no way to track the volume of traffic on 4chan, but one can approximate activity based on the YouTube views of the AfDwave videos, which receive about 10,000 views in the first month— not a sizable portion of the AfD’s electorate, but a considerable number of active participants in this small subsection of the far right community.481

After the main post, the 4chan forums devolve into post-ironic jokes about eugenics, immigrants, and the Holocaust alongside racist (especially Jewish) caricatures and dozens of images of Taylor Swift, for whom they seem to have an obsession as the ideal of “Aryan beauty.” Sometimes “drawthreads” are started, in which participants post images of AfD-chan alongside the entire “*chan” family, from “Putsch-chan” to “Rachel Purity” to “Christ-chan” and even a 19th century symbol of German nationalism, “Deutscher Michel”:

481 “Xurious Music,” YouTube, accessed October 19, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC897ctV7MkQTVQ1db1hAQNQ.
Top right: Rachel Purity, mascot of SS worship, Putsch-chan, and Christ-chan, mascot of the traditional, subervient Christian wife. Top center: Rachel Purity. Top Right: AfD-chan attempting to wake up Deutscher Michel (representing German nationalism) with coffee. These mascots would be impossible to discuss without a mention of the implicit and often explicit sexualization that accompanies them—some of the drawings of the figures are semi-pornographic, and there are often requests in the forums for “Hentai” and “Rule 34s” (slang for pornography) of the different characters as well as comments such as “I want to sexually molest AfD-chan.” References to sexual violence are quite common on 4chan, and the community is

known for being overwhelmingly male. Anonymity and a web etiquette (web etiquette) of hostility towards women-- as outlined by the “no girls on the internet” rule, in which anyone who identifies themselves as a woman is harassed, asked for “proof,” and dismissed as having useless opinions-- makes 4chan an identity-building space for redrawing masculinity without the constraints of what is now considered acceptable public behavior.

Kristin Witte characterizes these patterns as the formation of a “manly gender habitus”-- the “staging” or “production” (Inszenierung) of masculinity. Focusing on right-wing propaganda videos produced by the Autonomous Nationalists, scattered across YouTube and other sites, she finds that most of the videos and accompanying forums are “exclusively male spaces” where females may be allowed physically (such as mouthpieces, wearing “modest clothing and long blonde hair”), but their function is to consolidate expectations of male behavior. Often embedded into discourses of “Volksgemeinschaft” (“People’s Community, a central term in the Nazi lexicon), these online spaces represent masculinity as being “bodily strong, young, courageous, aggressive, and comradely.” Sexuality is “construed as a duty of the Volksgemeinschaft,” assembled through racial identities. The communities (prominently “altermedia.de,” which was shut down in 2017) obsess themselves with defining the bounds of womanliness, fixated on women who have relations with non-Germans (or even too many German men) and, through this “slut discourse” (Schlampendiskurs), find reasons to claim the necessity for control over women’s sexuality. Non-German men are caricatured as libidinous (triebhaft) and connected to rape, with an explicit focus on Muslims because of their perceived

484 Claus et al., Was ein rechter Mann ist..., 167.
486 Ibid., 179.
487 Ibid., 19.
“primitive” attitudes towards women. One of the most morbid examples, found on a recent 4chan AfD update, is a photograph of a naked female corpse, presumably raped, with the caption (originally in German): “At least she had the Grundgesetz” (the German constitution). This is somewhat ironic considering the aforementioned language of sexual domination used about the right wing’s anime mascots.

The more mainstream right wing internet presences rarely make references to the “purity” of German children or the racist and sexist imaginaries littering anonymous forums, similar to a pattern noticed by Caiani and Parenti on “Web 1.0”: organizations commonly have ‘clean’ sites on which their images are polished and disassociated from violence, but it only takes a few links to get from these to the real face of the movement. For instance, the Facebook and Twitter pages of AfD-chan are much more memes- and news-oriented, focusing on more relatable content:

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489 Claus et al., Was ein rechter Mann ist..., 15.
490 “/Pol/ - Politically Incorrect » Thread #181248484.”
491 Manuela. Caiani and Parenti, European and American Extreme Right Groups and the Internet, 94.
Left: “German is the country of the Germans”/ “Where is that written??”/ “In the name. Germany.” This image evokes a stereotype of postmodern leftist identity politics: the overweight, colored-haired, androgynous feminist. Right: Björn Höcke, prominent AfD politician: “Angela Merkel is weakened. We can push her into a minority coalition!” /Merkel: “Germany needs a stable government. Think of your state-political responsibility!” / Martin Schulz, leader of the SPD in the 2017 election: “We could make people’s lives a little bit better” / Höcke: “At what cost? We will not survive four more years of the grand coalition. Then we won’t have any credibility left!” /Merkel: “Together we have the power to save Europe” /SPD party convention votes to accept coalition talks* /Schulz: “What have I done?” /Merkel: “Be my vice chancellor, and learn to use the dark side of politics.” Star Wars is an extremely popular source for meme templates across the internet because it is an easily accessible cultural reference.
Left: Merkel: “This is fine.” This is a redrawing of a popular meme featuring a dog in a burning house, whose “this is fine” is often used either as a personal statement about stress or the kind of political statement seen here.

Right: This is an instance of the “distracted boyfriend meme” from 2017, in which Germany’s “girlfriend” Angela Merkel is upset because Germany is “checking out” Frauke Petry of the AfD.

Though the American far right is generally more proficient at manipulating the virtual world than its European counterparts (the first interactive right wing website was created by the American group Stormfront in 1998, three years before Wikipedia), the German right seems to have learned substantially from the Americans, having planned a “meme jihad” in the weeks leading up to the 2017 Bundestag election. The composition of the “AfD General” reports also tend to be more bilingual and diverse today than they were even a year ago.493

Between active online/offline organizations and the disorganized world of social media and forums, radicalization can simultaneously occur in two different ways. On one hand, institutions that link to one another, forming a multi-noded “bridge” between mainstream

conservative groups and far right ones, directly organizing people who can exert pressure in either direction. On the other hand, we find a much more fluid “gray zone” in such anonymous forums that pulls people rightward through subculture rather than organizations by fostering certain kinds of communication and behavior in its aesthetics and rituals.\textsuperscript{494} These channels mutually assist one another as the right wing accumulates both indoctrinated radicals and defectors from the mainstream.

According to Caiani and Parenti’s comparative research, electoral success of far right wing parties is positively associated with the presence of an active online component. The ease and cheapness of spreading information, the anonymity, and the shifts in knowledge production as a whole have facilitated the connection of people who are disillusioned, angry, and hopeless, and far right groups have been ready to provide them with opportunities to find community and organize outlets for these feelings. It is yet to be seen whether these networks will solidify into longstanding political blocks, or if the transient nature of internet phenomena will make these communities fall apart and reconstitute in some other way as spontaneously as they emerged. Nevertheless, the internet’s potential as a medium for extremism cannot be underestimated.

It is also unclear what a solution to the negative impacts of the internet may look like. There have been many “crises of democracy” in history, and it is one of the inherent qualities of the proclamation of a “crisis” that it justifies interventions and consolidations of power that would have been unacceptable beforehand. If something must be done to counteract the internet’s inclination towards radical thought, whether the state or Facebook is trusted to carry it out, such regulation could carry with it the same danger for any thought that challenges the dominant narrative (or the narrative that whichever censor aims to impose). The internet has

\textsuperscript{494} Salzborn, “Renaissance of the New Right in Germany?,” 45.
opened up the way for the democratization of knowledge production. We are no longer subject to
news only chosen and censored by governments and private companies. Like the invention of the
printing press, it has exacerbated fears from elites that the common man cannot be trusted with
such access to the means of knowledge production. At the same time, the internet’s workings are
not neutral-- no technology is-- and far from creating a global “e-democracy,” it seems instead to
have exposed the most chaotically sinister and perverse faces of human behavior. 495 While it is
problematic to pathologize right-wing extremism as mental illness or abnormality-- as we have
seen, it can be grounded on real philosophical principles-- we can nevertheless ask whether the
people found in these dark corners might not have been drawn to them were they less alienated
and “better” socialized to a healthier sexuality and to tolerant values. Perhaps the internet itself is
not the problem to be regulated-- its form does privilege extremism, but it is also possible that
fewer people would be drawn to it under different social/economic conditions than the ones
discussed in the first two chapters. Whether, like the printing press, it could be turned into a tool
that assists democracy rather than inducing chaos is yet to be seen. It has existed for only a few
decades, younger than a significant part of the world’s population, and will likely transform
immensely in another three, five, and ten decades.

495 Manuela. Caiani and Parenti, European and American Extreme Right Groups and the Internet, 1.
Conclusion

The last three decades in the Western world have seen major transformations to life, thought, and knowledge itself that are far beyond any individual’s ability to influence. It seems an inevitability of the post-Cold War, post-9/11, digitally-integrated world that humanity would become subject to an altogether new kind of existence. As modernity gave rise to industrialization, mass culture, and mass politics, postmodernity has consolidated the individual’s alienation as a mere atom in the inescapable aggregate of relations between people, things, and ideas that we know as advanced Western society. Not only are we passive subjects of the global economy, but also increasingly unable to imagine alternatives from the machine of discourses, sign values, and commodification which structures our reality. As the Conservative Revolution and Nazism were among many attempts to come to terms with man’s reduction to a subject of mechanized economy, society, and warfare, the New Right and new far right pick up the task of preserving meaning in an interconnected age in which existential reference points seem to be disappearing completely. Escape from the domination of discursive regimes-- the “failure of multiculturalism,” or the wider turn to culture narratives-- is just as difficult as escape from domination by material forces.

The rise of far right extremism in Germany and its success in shifting power is a response to these developments, and just as Nazism turned the Conservative Revolution’s ideas into raw political power, movements such as the AfD and the Identitarian Movement recklessly attempt to reclaim certainty with the notion of the welfare chauvinist ethnostate. In this way it is not a truly radical alternative from the system in place. It simply seeks to reify the aspects of society that provide security, such as the social safety net and cultural identity, while removing all of the aspects that carry uncertainty-- democracy, globalization, progressivism—by ascribing them to
an “un-German” outsider. It opposes the pairing of capitalism with political liberalism, embracing its own forms of “market fundamentalism” and consumerism. Its promise of social security, consequently, is arrived at through inner cultural homogeneity rather than by consensus-driven political process like that of the 20th century social democracy. National Socialism conceived of the world similarly. It wanted all of the benefits of modernity without the anxiety, and its solution to redraw certainty was to force a dichotomy between insiders and outsiders.

The contemporary radical right encompasses a wide range of tendencies, from the Identitarian Movement’s grandiose ethnostatism to the AfD’s anti-egalitarian capitalism. But though they may differ strongly in radicality, political organization, tactics, and specific platforms, their basic orientation is the same, based on a conception of the world as made up of distinct peoples which must be kept separate. Following out of this are “ethno-nationalist ideas, elevating the collective identity to the category of a fetish, the insistence of inequality as a fundamental ontological and axiological category, and the defense of a bellicose conception of existence” found across the far right. This leads a number of scholars to examine the similarities between the contemporary scene and fascism. Fascism has often been treated as a specific historical phenomenon, connected with militarism, mass mobilization, faith in a single leader, and the political styles of Hitler and Mussolini. In addition, “the accent put on socioeconomic factors, on the Communist threat, and on the fact that it was a particular response to an inter-war cultural crisis” in the common characterization of fascism “left almost no space for treating fascism as a generic phenomenon that can reproduce itself under different historical and social conditions.” Treating fascism instead as an “ideological phenomenon more than a political

496 Salzborn, “Renaissance of the New Right in Germany?,” 53.
regime,” Stanley Payne, George Mosse, and Zeev Sternhell have argued, allows for a better understanding of the ways in which these movements emerge out of European culture as a part of it rather than as an interruption to it.498

That fascism does not have to look like the Third Reich has been admitted by neo-fascists themselves, and it makes much more political sense from their perspective that it would not. Who would fall for the same overt tricks again, given how wary (and probably mocking) people today would be about the heavy-handed Nazi style of politics or a Hitler-style orator? Maurice Bardeche of the French New Right is conscious of this: “With another name, another face, and with nothing which betrays the projection from the past, with the form of a child we do not recognize and the head of a young Medusa, the Order of Sparta will be reborn.”499 That far right extremism today seeks its domination through “metapolitical, democratic, and legal means” should make it no less conspicuous-- once again, the far right attempts to “revise and supersede” leftist solutions with a paradigm of national chauvinism.500 It seeks to entrench the benefits of the universalist, progressive project-- welfare, universal healthcare, strong legal protections for citizens-- with an identity relativism that would make it exclusive to insiders of the community, in order to “save” it from the weaknesses of the open, pluralistic society that brought about this progress in the first place. Incidentally, it was this political and social openness which made such progress possible in the first place. In the 1930s the far right responded to the dreams of modernist leftism with a National Socialism-- mass mobilization, solidarity, unity, but asserting that it could only be realized on a national level, dependent on racial homogeneity. Today it

499 Bar-On, Where Have All The Fascists Gone?, xi.
500 Ibid., 3,15.
appeals to internet culture, identity politics, and alienation with the same promise that reasserting national homogeneity is the solution.

This is what makes the new far right best characterized as a “reactionary postmodernism.” The AfD, Pegida, Identitarian Movement, and intellectual New Right all consider themselves in some way opposed to the characteristics of postmodernity. Yet they all willingly engage with postmodernity in their own ways, using its political and technological tools to its advantage and even conceptualizing itself using postmodern thought. The AfD presents itself as an alternative to the neoliberalism of the center left and right, but it does not oppose neoliberal capitalism on principle; its solution to the contradictions of the global economy is a simple one, to exclude the foreigner while yet continuing the SPD-CDU project of privatization. Pegida and the Identitarian Movement speak of traditional values and idealize a “mythical past,” but their methods are decidedly postmodern, using the internet for mass mobilization and/or creating dramatic spectacles, selling merchandise, and creating new age music videos.\textsuperscript{501} The intellectual New Right, though split between passivity and metapolitical activism, recognizes the western world as having entered a new stage that has either killed the myth of the German nation or finally enabled nationalism’s power to sublate every other aspect of life under culture. All of these are attempts to synthesize contradictions in contemporary society: “instinct and culture; rationality and irrationality; hypermodernism/postmodernism and tradition; ecology and technological development; nation and supranational community (Europe); the maximum sovereignty of the state and individual economic freedom; right and left; individual sacrifice and freedom and/or collective happiness.”\textsuperscript{502} In doing so it constitutes a

\textsuperscript{501} The Economist, “Meet the IB, Europe’s Version of America’s Alt-Right.”
response not just to the political, economic, and existential questions of postmodernity but also to
the process of questioning in the first place. It abhors uncertainty, and the fragmentation and
increasing complexity of everything from the economy to knowledge itself brought on by
postmodernity has spurred a resistance from those who find their livelihoods and identities most
threatened by this disorganization.

Nazism represented a “reactionary modernism,” a use of the tools and thought of
modernity towards the end of reasserting a supposed organic unity of the *Volk* that would
eliminate the insecurity of modernity. Similarly, the new far right is not so much of a negative
“reaction” as it is often understood. Rather, though it has a reactionary agenda, it is a movement
that very much celebrates the postmodern: the internet, identity politics, cultural relativism,
metapolitics, and even in some ways the neoliberal economics which it mobilizes against. This
last point is perhaps where it differs from the far right of the 1930s; removing the outsider does
not seem to require a political revolution, replacing the existing system with something new. The
existing democratic nation-state can remain largely the same in composition— it must simply be
reoriented inwards, excluding outsiders from democratic rights and diminishing global trade’s
role in the national economy. Though it may be a watering down from 20th century fascism, this
conception still assumes that it can decouple all hitherto progress from the struggle which gave
birth to it, ascribing its beneficial side to Germanness and anything undesirable to outsiders. This
is rooted in the notion that human communities are not inherently full of contradictions, forces
within them that create change, but instead represent some inherent inner life that unites (and
supersedes) all of its individuals. When alienation and uncertainty seem to grow, the far right
answer is to remove outsiders who do not share this inner life. The contemporary far right gives
this a banner of nominal equality with “cultural pluralism,” but the fundamental claim is the same: diversity is an artificial imposition on the “true nature” of Germany.

What both the new and old far right fail to see is the absurdity of any hermetic notion of “a culture” in historical perspective. The Nazis believed that the German nation, as an aggregate of all the ethnic groups that integrated into it until that point, was as “German” as it could be and had to stay pure. One could have said the same thing at any point in history, between any one of the migrations or border changes that have occurred hundreds of times in Europe, and it has in fact been said every step of the way. The contemporary far right thinks that 2018 is the year in which it is finally clear who and what is German and who and what is not. What has changed is that more and more people are once again falling for this myth that identities do not change, or at least that throughout centuries of change there has always been some clear lineage of “Germanness.” As we have seen, the legitimization of this narrative and with it the political opportunities of the far right have largely been driven by the frictions and “de-solidarization” of society under neoliberalism, the language used to mediate and explain these changes, and the concomitant domination of public discourse by the politics of cultural identity. 503

One can see a reflection of Conservative Revolution author Oswald Spengler’s The Decline of the West in this rejection of cultural fluidity. 504 Culture, the “totality of the ways of being humankind” attached to a particular homeland, Spengler claims, has become civilization. Culture disintegrates in a community that has become too introspective, too focused on a rationality that undermines it from within. 505 Many in the intellectual New Right reject any attempt to turn the clock back. To attempt to recover myths of identity, Baal Müller claims, is to

503 Druxes, “Manipulating the Media: The German New Right’s Virtual and Violent Identities,” 125
504 Oswald Spengler. The Decline of the West (Oxford University Press, 1991).
505 Woods, Germany’s New Right as Culture and Politics, 54.
lend oneself straight to conspiracy theories about the “outsiders” responsible, whether Jews, leftists, or Muslims.\textsuperscript{506} Likewise, Franco Volpi warns that the reawakening of myths is a slippery slope to irrationalism and anarchy, defeating the purpose of any attempt to reclaim any sense of rootedness.\textsuperscript{507} Yet the politically ambitious flank of the New Right fully embraces these myths as points of mobilization, and their cooptation of concepts such as metapolitics was given its deus ex machina in the form of internet communication.

We have seen how the workings of the globalized neoliberal economy and the mass movements of people and capital have produced anxieties in the strata of society that are often not the most vulnerable but have something significant to lose: job security, pensions, and their traditional places as the sole breadwinners of the family. While modernization has provided great benefit to much of society, it has left a significant outclassed element that does not have the education or mobility now needed to stay competitive in the job market. This has been especially pronounced in former East Germany, which has had to undergo a “double process of modernization” of both trying to catch up from its economic GDR-era asymmetries and simultaneously experiencing the West’s postmodern transformations in economics and politics. Meanwhile, established political parties have turned to a postmaterial politics to capture the votes of the advantaged and consequently left a significant portion of German society feeling unrepresented-- especially the SPD, which used to carry a much higher proportion of working class voters, who now most strongly support the AfD.\textsuperscript{508}

We have also seen how the language needed to justify the state-economy-borders relationship under neoliberalism, such as the management of migration and the preservation of

\textsuperscript{506} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{507} Ibid., 110.
\textsuperscript{508} Blickle et al., “Wahlverhalten.”
the social welfare system, picked up the postmodern discourses of cultural identity which then underscored conversations like the *Leitkultur* debate. Narratives such as the failure of multiculturalism justified a shift from diversity to assimilation as the goal of immigration, demanding the incorporation of “German values” by peoples deemed “culturally incompatible,” while retroactively explaining the 20th century welfare state as only having existed because of relative cultural homogeneity. The configuration and imposition of one-dimensional identity onto minorities stimulated a reflection within the majority population, reifying native identity as a contrast to outsiders. The crisis of security accompanying the declaration of the “war on terror,” with the urgency it carried, only raised the stakes and further emotionally charged debates revolving around headscarves and the limit of tolerance. The right-wing concept of ethnopluralism, a “heterogeneous world of homogenous communities” appeared compelling as an alternative to mediating the increasingly-decaying multicultural settlement.509

These developments prompt Michael Minkenberg and many other scholars to label right-wing radicalism as a “normal pathology” of advanced societies. In other words, it arises among crises in the normal functioning of the society. When fast moving societies such as ours confront periods of accelerated change, the latent potential of fascism is activated and extremist political movements emerge to organize and channel this frustration. As we have seen, however, the contemporary far right cannot be seen solely as a political outsider that emerges against the workings of the mainstream and its discourses, as it has also germinated out of trends (such as the turn to culture) that began in the center or the left. Cas Mudde claims that this makes the far right better understood as a “pathological normalcy”—a radicalization of mainstream views.510

509 Bar-On, *Where Have All The Fascists Gone?*, 125.
The far right does not need to change people’s minds on foreigners-- 39% of Germans believe that foreigners come to Germany to exploit the social system (though it is worth noting that trust has somewhat recovered since 2015)-- it simply has to direct them towards immigration and away from socio-economic issues and exaggerate the stakes to stoke fear.\footnote{Paul Hockenos points out that while anomie, economic crisis, and disorientation increase the far right’s allure, these are “catalysts that activate pre-existing prejudices.”\footnote{Paul Hockenos, “Making Hate Safe Again in Europe,” The Nation, September 19, 1994, 274.} This is why, as Kai Arzheimer and Elisabeth Carter claim, “the [right wing] extremist vote will not be curbed by simply looking after economic conditions.”\footnote{Kai Arzheimer, “The AfD: Finally a Successful Right-Wing Populist Eurosceptic Party for Germany?,” West European Politics 38, no. 3 (May 4, 2015): 439, https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2015.1004230.} It is also unlikely that the 20th century social democratic economy could even be viable within a globally-integrated economy.\footnote{Brenner, “Building ‘Euro-Regions,’” 327.} Pathological normalcy supports the conception of a reactionary postmodernism, in its emphasis on the ways in which contemporary right wing extremism grows out of a tendency deeply within German culture and the postmodern condition into which it has evolved.

Political repression, then, only responds to the symptom of the problem, “[exonerating] the political establishment for its softer versions of the same ideas, while attempting to keep embarrassing spectacles like vandalized Jewish cemeteries and the charred quarters of foreign refugees out of the international spotlight.”\footnote{Hockenos, “Making Hate Safe Again in Europe,” 274.} In addition, it justifies the use and expansion of the state security/surveillance apparatus which could be employed against any other challenge to the political establishment and encourage corruption.\footnote{Ibid.} Statistically, what has seemed to impede the far right the most in Germany compared to France and other nations has been the presence of a
strong center-- close coalitions-- in which mainstream parties ostracize the far right, and the CDU/CSU have had a strong monopoly on conservative politics. At the same time, in their strategies for maintaining power, these mainstream parties have followed rhetoric rightwards, adopting what used to be much more right-of-center talking points (for instance, Merkel’s two proclamations of the death of multiculturalism). The German model of “Wehrhafte Demokratie” (defensive or militant democracy) has also in some ways unintentionally legitimized right wing populism. Despite historically impeding the growth of parties beyond the state level, its outright ban-threatening hostility to those on the right who do not feel represented by the CDU/CSU allows populists to claim that it is actually the mainstream that is undemocratic, and that it is the job of a popular metapolitical movement to restore democracy on its own terms.

For obvious reasons, permissiveness is also not a successful response to right wing radicalism, which stands directly in opposition to democratic values regardless of whatever “free speech” slogans it strategically (and misleadingly) appropriates. Yet legal responses and state repression are often counter-productive. Mudde claims, then, that the most likely reason for Germany’s strength (or at least the delay) against right wing extremism is its historical memory of the Nazi period, which has made it more defensive to anything resembling fascism. It is important to note, however, that this memory is collectively sustained. It cannot be imposed by the state as a whip nor left to maintain itself. Germany’s past and present identity must be consciously and constantly reflected upon, and events such as the recent xenophobic riots in Chemnitz must be condemned on the streets in addition to the media. The metapolitical strategy utilized by the far right is one that fundamentally depends on subtly gaining acceptance in the

518 Mudde, Youth and the Extreme Right, 21.
mainstream. It benefits the fringes when mass politics becomes trapped in discourses of crisis and cultural difference. Identifying where this is happening-- in the preoccupation with identity politics, for instance-- and attempting to break out of these limits of imagination is necessary to combatting the “war for minds” that the new far right wages.

The New Right is aware of this. While the more pessimistic strand begrudgingly accepts the disorientation and anxiety of a condition whose self-reflectiveness precludes the possibility of comforting reference points, a more militant political wing is willing to use postmodernism as a means to an end that promises the harmonization of society. Like the Conservative Revolution, an anti-modern movement that yet recognized itself as within modernity, the intellectuals of the New Right understand to varying extents the end of self-justified universals like national identity. For those who did not resign themselves to mourning, the program of metapolitical style that they co-opted from leftist postmodernists became their project, and internet communication came into being at the perfect moment-- right after unification, supposedly Germany’s chance to regain its national identity. With its highly participatory, disorganized, and anonymous system, extremists were given a second public sphere to toy with-- one which could not be so easily regulated by state authorities, and which made cultural media such as music, fashion, and memes into easily apprehensible, cheaply produced, and quickly distributable intermediaries for spreading political sentiments. It encouraged the consolidation of pockets of radicals within a star-shaped system that both 1) facilitated communication and mobilization and 2) generated group identities with strong appeals to alienated individuals.

Postmodernity has entailed “an increasingly reflexive process of modernization and a new, self-critical posture towards modernity in which “cultural orientations, a sharpened sense of

519 Woods, Germany’s New Right as Culture and Politics, 6.
crisis, the primacy of the ‘life world’,” and a focus on “education, language, and communication” dominate explanations of the relationships of individuals and collectives to the broader world.\textsuperscript{520} In this turn to examining subjectivity, it has supplanted materialist explanations, universalism, and universalist concepts such as “progress” with a relativism that mirrors the increasingly fragmented, fluid social and economic life brought on by globalization and the internet. Zygmunt Bauman claims, however, that the end of modernity’s “conviction of its superiority” and “its pretension to universal validity” does not necessarily signal the end of meaning.\textsuperscript{521} Rather, as Habermas insists, this self-critical attitude can be utilized for a forward-thinking but cautious commitment to Enlightenment values (it is for this reason that Habermas actually rejects the term “postmodernism” as a whole, as he claims that “the critique of modernity has always been a part of philosophical modernity itself.”)\textsuperscript{522}

This is where the New Right figures such as Botho Strauss, who otherwise fully accept that we live in postmodernity, fall short. Preoccupied with the loss of old dreams, they are unable to imagine the redemption of the modern project. Unable to ground social belonging in an unquestionable authority such as the “narrative of the nation,” the New Right either gives up on meaning or attempts to impose it by force.\textsuperscript{523} It takes Spengler’s ‘decay of civilization’ seriously, a narrative that implies that there is no way to find meaning or purpose in an existence which questions itself. Once this happens, and one can no longer be absolutely sure of one’s place in the universe, “authentic” life is no longer possible. Just as civilization did not fall apart after Spengler published his book (the closest thing to it was the fascism he inspired), Germany’s current “crisis of identity” is in many ways only a declaration of crisis-- which is not to say that

\textsuperscript{520} Minkenberg, “The Renewal of the Radical Right,” 177.
\textsuperscript{521} Betz, \textit{Postmodern Politics in Germany}, 9.
\textsuperscript{522} Zoeller, “Habermas on Modernity and Postmodernism.”
\textsuperscript{523} Virchow, “The ‘Identititarian Movement’: What Kind of Identity? Is It Really a Movement?,” 179.
it should not be taken seriously, as the declaration of crisis can become the crisis, as when one yells “fire” in a theater. As Richard Löwenthal pointed out, however, it has long been a characteristic of Western civilization to be caught in a “loss of world orientation.” The “long-term process of loss of meaning,” however, only signals the end of civilization to those who cannot live with an identity that is not fixed, but rather built on self-reflexiveness-- an identity that integrates change as a fundamental value of itself.

In such an advanced world which has given rise to such advanced levels of alienation, the politics of identity is alluring to all individuals in the search for a sense of belonging. But identity can be, as Stuart Hall claimed, “a construction, a process never completed.” Identifying oneself as a part of something can always be “conditional, lodged in contingency” rather than an “unchanging ‘oneness’.” Zygmunt Bauman likewise claimed that postmodernity could be a “corrective force” for the projects of progress rather than the end of it.524 For instance if the power of identity is to be reclaimed from right and left identitarianism, Europe must find a conception of its own identity as one which “allows for individual life forms while securing social cohesion and giving rise to a responsible, autonomous organization of one’s own life.”525

The current postmodern left fulfills the first criteria but, trapped in its relativism, is inadequate to provide the grounds for common belonging on a level any higher than essentialized racial, sexual, or class groupings. The populist right, true to the form of right wing radicalism, meets neither of these needs in any real sense, but obscures this lack through its promises to elevate aesthetic and romantic notions of nation, masculinity, beauty, etc. above the realm of politics, rendering democracy and diversity unnecessary. The New Right is either unable to salvage any

524 Betz, Postmodern Politics in Germany, 9.
optimism from the loss of myths in postmodernity, or instrumentalizes its chaos to subordinate human life to “higher” values; to accomplish Hitler’s dream that “the beautiful should reign over humans.”

On the other hand, the postmodern left has “[tuned] itself into the postmodern Lebensgefühl [feeling of life], not only accepting the emergence of a chaotic, fragmentized world, but enjoying the demise and loss of certainty and finite authority, rejoicing in the decentering impulses and indeterminacy characteristic of the postmodern age,” celebrating individualism at the expense of social solidarity.

Both are trapped within the same discursive bubble. Left and right are stuck with the same limited imagination in solving the problems of globalization. The anti-neoliberal left (e.g. the Greens or Die Linke), attempting to reclaim the 20th century welfare state, cannot but help relying on the construction of the nation-state as the locus of social democracy. This puts them at an inherent disadvantage in the current antagonistic political climate-- they need the discourses of “national identity” that are required to sustain the nation-state against deterritorialization.

Though national identity can be conceived of differently, as based on principles rather than on shared ethnic ground, “nation” is an inherently geographical term, always bound up with the politics of borders. This is why democracy seems at such a standstill. Against the effects of globalization, the answers (right and left) are still to either expand democracy upwards, into supranational bodies like the EU, or to delegate it downwards towards a more local level. Both rely on a conception of nation, however, that seems unable to sustain itself without specifically-regional identities that become increasingly obsolete as people become more mobile, moving from country to country for work, and as communication has less and less to do with geography.

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527 Betz, Postmodern Politics in Germany, 10.
But democracy could expand horizontally, through the workplace, across national lines just as fluidly as transnational corporations move. It would only be possible with an emphasis on human commonness rather than differences of identity, but it could provide an alternative solution to the frustrations on which the right capitalizes, providing a sense of identity based on values, as a process, rather than on inherent qualities.

The discourses of “national identity” are much more easily manipulable for the right, which can openly declare who is German and who is not while the left must defend multiculturalism. But if the goal is to revive the national welfare state, why go to such great pains to make it a diverse one? Why not just aim for homogeneity, which supposedly precludes the difficulties of maintaining social solidarity in a multicultural, pluralistic society? On this stage, the left is always on the defensive. The reification of the nation state ultimately aids the right more than anyone else, especially with the predominant emphasis on identity politics.

While the intent was to achieve recognition for minority identities and subjectivities, majority populations presented with politics limited to these social categories have responded with their own reassertions of national identity on the same terms.

In this way, postmodern relativism was a catalyst for the new far right. It took the death of objective universals for granted, turning attention to the particular and the subjective. The turn to cultural identity allowed the assertion of fundamental, irreconcilable differences between cultures and the neglect of common ground. But restoring certainty in the grand narratives of modernity cannot be the aim of a viable new identity, if it is to avoid the pitfalls of the past. Alternatively, the end of certainty brought on by postmodernism should, as Baumann says, “maintain as a corrective force, looking upon the past ‘as a movement in a direction unlikely to be followed, as perhaps even an aberration, the pursuit of a false track, a historical error now to
be rectified.”528 The left praises atomization and the disintegration of universalism into infinite relativisms, while the right either consigns itself to history or inverts its pessimism into a violent but motivated cynicism.

There is a possibility here, an unfilled category, that is left out in the postmodern left and right. This is a pessimistic left that thinks of history like Baumann’s “corrective force,” which does not blindly trumpet “progress” with a disdain for the past nor turn its relativism into exclusivity. As Adorno wrote of Spengler in 1950, “culture is not […] the life of collective souls in the process of unfolding themselves; rather, it arises in men’s struggle to acquire the means to reproduce themselves. Culture thus contains an element of resistance to blind necessity—the will to determine oneself on the basis of knowledge.” This struggle, the will to determine ourselves and our conditions based on knowledge, transcends national, cultural, and political divides. Its incarnations vary wildly from person to person and community to community, and they are often completely incompatible. Nevertheless, the struggle itself can be interpreted as the universal beneath the particular which, as Hegel argued, can only be fulfilled as far as a community acknowledges that all individuals seek recognition without having to deny it to another. The appeal of the new far right’s dream to impose a reactionary postmodernity on Germany stems from the failure of any other politics to recognize the real difficulties of hundreds of thousands of Germans, primarily young men and the working class, as valid. It is not enough to prove that the far right solution is illusory; its appeal remains so long as it can promise security for those who live with uncertainty. A real alternative must be conceived to the present mode of politics, which divides for the wrong reasons in its relativism. The values of democracy, justice, and fundamental equality, for instance, may not have access to the simple identities of nationalism or

ethnicity, but it is possible to provide certainty with malleable values rather than those “fixed” conceptions of collective belonging. They may not be universally justifiable in the way that the Enlightenment had hoped them to be, but they remain the best products of the faculty of human reason and for guarding human rights. Only by doubling down on these identities as a process rather than as essential qualities— and by asserting that a self-critical attitude towards these universalist projects can be included within this process— does democracy in Germany and the rest of the Western world have any chance of surviving the threat of the new far right.
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