

**“I joined for my grandchildren”: Women in the AfD**

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy (Politics and International Relations)

School of Law and Politics, Cardiff University

March 2023



# Summary

The resurgence of the populist radical right (PRR) across Europe and further afield has been the focus of much scholarly and media attention in recent decades. In the German context, the election of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) to the German federal parliament in 2017 represents a major turning point in the country's domestic politics, where, since the end of the Second World War (WWII), the PRR and broader far right have largely been relegated to the fringes of the political mainstream. The high visibility of women in the AfD itself as well as the large numbers of women who appear to have voted for the party across Germany's sixteen federal states has led to questions about what it means to be a gendered political subject in a changing world. Given the party's seeming popularity among women, this thesis investigates the relevant socio-cultural, political, and historical factors which underpin their support for the AfD. Viewing women's AfD support through a critical feminist poststructuralist lens, this thesis uses Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA) to interpret the testimonies of 9 female AfD members interviewed in 2019, as well as relevant documentary sources. The thesis unpacks not just how and why women come to support the AfD, but where and when this support is located. In contrast to the dominant assumption that women do not find the ideas of the PRR appealing, this thesis shows that women's AfD support is complex, multi-faceted, and located within a distinctly German discursive ecosystem. The thesis underlines the argument that it is important to engage directly with women in order to gain a deeper insight into their reasons for supporting the PRR, as well as assessing the influence of time, space, and place when it comes to navigating the tricky epistemological terrain of subject motivation.

# Acknowledgements

I would first like to say a big thank you to my supervisors Dr Claudia Hillebrand and Professor Hanna Diamond, not only for their continued belief in me, but the thesis itself. Their encouragement and support has helped me to navigate the profoundly rewarding undertaking that has been my PhD. I am indebted to them for sharing this journey with me and challenging me to look at my thesis from different perspectives when times were tough. With their guidance, I finish my thesis feeling empowered, excited, and optimistic for the future.

Thanks must go to the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) for funding my research and giving me the opportunity to pursue my own research ideas. I am also grateful to Professor Gordon Cumming for interviewing me for the 1+3 programme and supporting my application, and Professor Victoria Basham for giving me insightful feedback on my thesis at the various stages of its evolution within the remit of her role as panel reviewer. The day-to-day administration of my PhD would not have been possible without the help and support of the administrative and facilities staff at the School of Law and Politics, namely Sharron Alldred and Sarah Kennedy.

Dr Rosemary Deller of the London School of Economics Review of Books not only supported my initial PhD application, but gave me the chance to share my thoughts on new books and hone my writing skills in the process. Klavdija Erzen and Robert Jones of the Jewish History Association of South Wales generously gave me some valuable transcription experience, setting me in good stead for transcribing my own research interviews later down the line. Nick Waters tutored me in German over the summer of 2019 and bolstered my confidence ahead of my fieldwork trip. Ian Jones, Dr Nerys Owens, Nicholas Draper, and Dr Joanne Coates were very welcoming and accommodating during my three-month PhD internship with the Welsh Government in 2021. My administrative colleagues at the Clinical Research Facility, University Hospital of Wales, have been an endless source of tea, biscuits and inspirational quotes. Thank you, all.

I treasure the friendship and support of the many wonderful Cardiff PGRs I have met during the course of my PhD studentship, particularly Isobel, Rachel, Eira, Elena, Rosa, Angela, Jennie, and Shaun.

Dr Verena Adamik not only let me stay at her home during my period of overseas fieldwork in 2019, but has been a continued source of inspiration since we met that fateful day at Swansea University in 2010. I am indebted to Verena not only for her friendship and wit, but her generosity and mentorship.

I would be entirely remiss at this stage if I did not mention my partner Liam and thank him not only for his unwavering love and support, but for sacrificing his evenings and weekends for the past year so I could write up my thesis. You are the absolute best and I could not have done this without you.

Last but not least, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to my interviewees for taking the time to talk to me back in 2019 and for sharing their stories.

# Table of Contents

Abbreviations.....	vii
Glossary.....	xi
Note on Translation.....	xiii
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1. Making sense of the PRR.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>1.1 The PRR on the far-right spectrum.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>1.2 Scholarly work on the AfD.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>1.3 Gender and the ‘losers of modernisation’ thesis.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>1.3.1 <i>Are men in blue-collar occupations overrepresented in the academic literature on PRR support?</i>.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>1.3.2 <i>Gender, race, and class in the post-modernisation era</i>.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>1.4 Gender and the ‘structural revolution’.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>1.4.1 <i>Is feminism really for everyone?</i>.....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>1.4.2 <i>Women as ‘gender-conscious political actors’</i>.....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>1.5 Gender and political interest.....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>1.5.1 <i>Are women really less interested in politics than men?</i>.....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>1.5.2 <i>Different ways of ‘doing’ politics</i>.....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>1.6 Gender, religiosity and support for the PRR.....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>1.6.1 <i>Are religious women really less likely to support the PRR?</i>.....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>1.6.2 <i>The ‘Islamisation’ of Western Europe</i>.....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>2. Towards a feminist poststructuralist examination of women in the AfD... 45</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>2.1 Case study rationale.....</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>2.2 Feminist poststructuralism and gender.....</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>2.2.1 <i>Feminist approaches</i>.....</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>2.2.2 <i>Poststructuralist approaches</i>.....</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>2.3 Reflexivity.....</b>	<b>53</b>

2.4 The subject of agency .....	57
2.5 Sampling .....	59
2.6 Interviewing.....	61
2.7 Analysing documentary sources .....	64
2.8 Foucauldian discourse analysis.....	67
2.8.1 <i>The benefits of FDA</i> .....	67
2.8.2 <i>Willig's six-stage FDA framework</i> .....	69
2.8.3 <i>Negotiating Foucault's 'blind spots'</i> .....	71
2.9 Validity, reliability, and generalisability.....	73
2.10 Ethical considerations.....	74
2.11 Translating language, translating culture.....	78
Conclusion .....	82
<b>3. Heimat, freedom, and belonging: The multi-layered role of national identity in the AfD.....</b>	<b>85</b>
Introduction.....	85
3.1 A reunified Germany's failure to bloom .....	87
3.2 Perceived challenges to freedom of expression .....	99
3.3 The emotional appeal of Heimat .....	107
3.4 Germany's humanitarian responsibilities .....	113
3.5 The perceived bureaucratic overreach of the EU .....	121
Conclusion .....	126
<b>4. "No-one can accuse the AfD of any militant activities": The AfD, Islam, and Violence.....</b>	<b>129</b>
Introduction.....	129
4.1 Sexual violence and white German women .....	131
4.2 The misrepresentation of official crime statistics.....	142
4.3 The quest to save Muslim women from Muslim men.....	147
4.4 The complex intersections of agency and extremism .....	152
4.5 Women's tolerance of violence .....	158
Conclusion .....	166

<b>5. Genderwahn! The AfD's Familienpolitik .....</b>	<b>168</b>
Introduction .....	168
<b>5.1</b> The centrality of the heteronormative family .....	<b>170</b>
<b>5.2</b> Same-sex marriage debates and performative allyship .....	<b>180</b>
<b>5.3</b> Women as gender-conscious political actors .....	<b>190</b>
Conclusion .....	200
 <b>Conclusion .....</b>	 <b>202</b>
 <b>Appendices .....</b>	 <b>214</b>
<b>Appendix A</b> Interviewee Summaries .....	<b>214</b>
<b>Appendix B</b> Examples of Interview Questions .....	<b>217</b>
<b>Appendix C</b> Information Sheet for Participants (EN) .....	<b>218</b>
<b>Appendix D</b> Information Sheet for Participants (DE) .....	<b>221</b>
<b>Appendix E</b> Consent Form for Participants (EN) .....	<b>224</b>
<b>Appendix F</b> Consent Form for Participants (DE) .....	<b>229</b>
<b>Appendix G</b> Addendum to Ethical Approval .....	<b>234</b>
 <b>Bibliography .....</b>	 <b>236</b>

# List of Abbreviations

<b>ADL</b>	Anti-Defamation League
<b>AfD</b>	<i>Alternative für Deutschland</i> /Alternative for Germany
<b>ANES</b>	American National Election Studies
<b>BBC</b>	British Broadcasting Corporation
<b>BfV</b>	<i>Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz</i> /Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution
<b>BMI</b>	<i>Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat</i> /Federal Ministry of the Interior
<b>BNP</b>	British National Party
<b>BpB</b>	<i>Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung</i> /Federal Agency for Civic Education
<b>BUF</b>	British Union of Fascists
<b>CDU</b>	<i>Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands</i> /Christian Democratic Union of Germany
<b>CSE</b>	Child sexual exploitation
<b>CSU</b>	<i>Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern</i> /Christian Social Union in Bavaria
<b>CWA</b>	Concerned Women of America
<b>DBK</b>	<i>Deutsche Bischofskonferenz</i> /German Bishops' Conference
<b>DE</b>	German (Language)
<b>EDL</b>	English Defence League
<b>EN</b>	English (Language)
<b>ESRC</b>	Economic and Social Research Council
<b>EU</b>	European Union



<b>FAZ</b>	Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung
<b>FDJ</b>	<i>Freie Deutsche Jugend</i> /Free German Youth
<b>FGM</b>	Female genital mutilation
<b>FES</b>	Friedrich Ebert Stiftung
<b>FDA</b>	Foucauldian Discourse Analysis
<b>FDP</b>	<i>Freie Demokratische Partei</i> /Free Democratic Party
<b>FN</b>	<i>Front National</i> /National Front (France)
<b>GDF</b>	<i>Gemeinschaft Deutscher Frauen</i> /Society of German Women
<b>GDR</b>	German Democratic Republic
<b>GLES</b>	German Longitudinal Election Study
<b>GOP</b>	Grand Old Party
<b>GWR</b>	Geographically Weighted Regression
<b>IFS</b>	<i>Institut für Staatspolitik</i> /Institute for National Policy
<b>JA</b>	<i>Junge Alternative</i> /Young Alternative
<b>KDNP</b>	<i>Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt</i> /Christian Democratic People's Party
<b>KKK</b>	Ku Klux Klan
<b>LGBTQ+</b>	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Plus
<b>LHA</b>	Life histories approach
<b>MdB</b>	<i>Mitglied des Deutschen Bundestages</i> /Member of the German Bundestag
<b>MdL</b>	<i>Mitglied des Landtages</i> /Member of the State Parliament
<b>MMA</b>	Mixed martial arts
<b>NF</b>	National Front (UK)

<b>NPD</b>	<i>Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands/National Democratic Party of Germany</i>
<b>NSDAP</b>	<i>Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei/National Socialist German Workers' Party</i>
<b>NSU</b>	<i>Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund/National Socialist Underground</i>
<b>PEGIDA</b>	<i>Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes/Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident</i>
<b>PIS</b>	<i>Prawo i Sprawiedliwość/Law and Justice</i>
<b>PRR</b>	Populist radical right
<b>PVV</b>	<i>Partij voor de Vrijheid/Party for Freedom</i>
<b>RAF</b>	<i>Rote Armee Faktion/Red Army Faction</i>
<b>RN</b>	<i>Rassemblement National/National Rally</i>
<b>RNF</b>	<i>Ring Nationaler Frauen/Circle of Nationalist Women</i>
<b>SED</b>	<i>Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands/Socialist Unity Party of Germany</i>
<b>SNP</b>	Scottish National Party
<b>SPD</b>	<i>Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands/Social Democratic Party of Germany</i>
<b>SRA</b>	Satanic ritual abuse
<b>SREC</b>	Cardiff School of Law and Politics Research Ethics Committee
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom
<b>UKIP</b>	United Kingdom Independence Party
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>US</b>	United States
<b>USSR</b>	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

<b>VAA</b>	Voting Advice Application
<b>VB</b>	Vlaams Blok
<b>WCF</b>	World Congress of Families

# Glossary

<b>Brandner, Stephan</b>	Deputy chairperson of the AfD in the Bundestag
<b>Bystron, Petr</b>	AfD member of the Bundestag
<b>Chrupalla, Tino</b>	Chair and leader of the AfD in the Bundestag
<b>De Buer, Sybil</b>	AfD mayoral candidate in Burghausen, Bavaria
<b>Ebner-Steiner, Katrin</b>	AfD representative in the Bavarian state parliament
<b>Feineis, Harald</b>	AfD representative in the Hamburg state parliament
<b>Gauland, Alexander</b>	Former AfD leader in the Bundestag and former AfD representative in the Brandenburg state parliament
<b>Gehlmann, Andreas</b>	AfD representative in the Saxony Anhalt state parliament
<b>Höchst, Nicole</b>	AfD member of the Bundestag
<b>Höcke, Björn</b>	AfD leader in the Thuringia state parliament
<b>Hohmann, Martin</b>	Honorary chairperson of the AfD in Fulda, Hessen
<b>Kalbitz, Andreas</b>	Former AfD representative in the Brandenburg state parliament
<b>Kögler, Gerd</b>	Former AfD representative in the Bavaria state parliament
<b>Kositza, Ellen</b>	Author and AfD associate
<b>Lucke, Bernd</b>	Former AfD leader (2013-2015)
<b>Malsack-Winkemann, Birgit</b>	Former AfD member of the Bundestag

<b>Merz, Heiner</b>	Former AfD representative in the Baden-Württemberg state parliament
<b>Meuthen, Jörg</b>	Former spokesperson for the AfD
<b>Nerstheimer, Kay</b>	Former AfD representative in Berlin
<b>Poggenburg, André</b>	Former AfD representative in the Saxony-Anhalt state parliament
<b>Petry, Frauke</b>	Former AfD leader (2015-2017)
<b>Schreiber, Franziska</b>	Former AfD party member, author, and whistleblower
<b>Seitz, Thomas</b>	Member of the AfD in the Bundestag
<b>Tassis, Alexander</b>	Former AfD representative in Bremen
<b>von Storch, Beatrix</b>	Deputy AfD leader and member of the European Parliament
<b>Weidel, Alice</b>	Leader of the AfD in the Bundestag and AfD representative in Baden-Württemberg
<b>Wittmann, Nico</b>	Former AfD district councillor in Berlin Tempelhof-Schöneberg

# Note on Translation

All translations of German-language literature, primary and secondary documentary source materials, and interviewee testimonies in this thesis are the author's own. Any mistakes or mistranslations are thus the author's sole responsibility. Certain terms have been retained such as *rechtspopulistisch* because of their weight of meaning in German and the difficulty of articulating an equivalent English translation.

# Introduction

The news broke in December 2022 that a far-right group, *Patriotische Union* (Patriotic Union) plotted to overthrow the German government by violent means; twenty-five people were arrested with “far-right and ex-military figures [...] said to have prepared for a “Day X” to storm the Reichstag parliament building and seize power,” seemingly by any means necessary (Kirby 2022a). Among the conspirators was Birgit Malsack-Winkemann, a former elected representative of the *Alternative für Deutschland* (Alternative for Germany, AfD), who, at the time of her arrest, worked as a judge on the Berlin court circuit (Stuttgarter Zeitung 2022). Reports suggest that Malsack-Winkemann would assume the role of Justice Minister in a post-Day X Germany, had the coup led by minor aristocrat Prince Heinrich XIII proved a success (ibid.). Germany is no stranger to female extremists; the trial of Beate Zschäpe, for example, the last surviving member of the *Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund* (National Socialist Underground, NSU), ended after five years in 2018, leading to questions surrounding the extent to which women are involved in German right-wing extremism. While the examples of Malsack-Winkemann and Zschäpe can best be located at the extreme end of the far-right spectrum and inevitably command the attention of the media and wider public, there are lots of other women involved in the wider far-right realm whose political engagement often flies under the radar. This thesis seeks to broaden this tunnel vision to some extent, and demonstrate the critical role that women often play in their respective groups and parties, as well as highlight the substantive impact this engagement has on national and global politics. With all this in mind, Malsack-Winkemann’s involvement with *Patriotische Union* and its recent attempted assault on German democracy also comes at a time when political and social disillusionment is seemingly at an all-time high, and ties in to the broader resurgence and burgeoning popularity of the populist radical right (PRR) across Europe and further afield.

In the last fifteen years or so, PRR parties led by both men and women have done increasingly well at the polls: Viktor Orbán’s Fidesz, for example, returned to power in Hungary in 2010; Poland’s *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (Law and Justice, PiS)

currently hold a parliamentary majority; and in Sweden, three centre-right parties formed a coalition with the far-right Sweden Democrats, giving the latter the opportunity to directly influence government policy for the first time in the party's history (Henley 2022). Former reality television star and failed businessperson Donald Trump became President of the United States (US) in 2016, pledging to Make America Great Again by enacting a range of exclusionary policies disproportionately targeting ethnic minorities, Muslims, and women. The far-right politician Jair Bolsonaro was elected president of Brazil in 2019. Giorgia Meloni, leader of the far-right Brothers of Italy, became the country's first female prime minister in 2022, winning 26 percent of the vote and forming an alliance with Matteo Salvini's far-right Lega Nord and Silvio Berlusconi's centre-right Forza Italia (Kirby 2022b). While Marine Le Pen's *Rassemblement National* (formerly *Front National*) did not win the 2017 French presidential election, they did very well, securing 33.9 percent of the national vote (BBC 2017). And, in Germany, the AfD won over 90 seats in the Bundestag following the 2017 German federal election. Given that the PRR and far right in Germany have largely been 'contained' since the end of World War Two (WWII) (Art 2018), this unprecedented victory provides a vital context for the concerns of this thesis.

The PRR's success across Europe and elsewhere has led observers to speculate about what it means to be a political subject in a changing world, as well as reassess normative assumptions surrounding gender and political behaviour in this context. Women are thought to be less likely to vote for the PRR and broader far right, if they even vote at all. Much to the surprise of many academic and media commentators, however, women have had a hand in the reshaping of global political landscapes and appear to support the PRR in larger numbers than first thought (Chrisafis *et al.* 2019). In the US, for example, 48 percent of American women voted for Donald Trump in the 2016 US presidential election (BBC 2016). In the case of the AfD, 13.5 percent of women voted for the party across Germany's sixteen federal states (Arnett 2017). The AfD's relative popularity among female voters presents this thesis with an opportunity to explore the factors underpinning women's support for the PRR in the German context. The thesis investigates the role of women in the AfD, exploring not just *how* and *why* women came to support the party, but *where* and *when* this



support can be located. It takes a heuristic approach, aiming to shed light on the unexpectedly active, and often enthusiastic, participation of women in a party environment which, despite its high visibility of female elected representatives, can be described as a *Männerpartei*, or men's party (Mudde 2007).

In order to situate the thesis and its investigation into the contextual factors underpinning women's support for the AfD, it is pertinent to provide some historical insight into the rise and fall of the PRR and far right in Germany, as well as the conditions which led to the emergence of the AfD in 2013. As Kruglanski *et al.* (2020) point out, the disasters of WWII did not necessarily spell the end to far-right political parties in post-war Germany (p. 14). Parties such as the *Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (National Democratic Party of Germany, NPD), however, never quite managed to reach the five percent threshold of votes needed to win seats in the Bundestag (Ibid.). Given the long history of the far right in post-war Germany, the formation of the AfD is regarded as a late development by some scholars (for example, Rosellini 2019, p. 90). Despite the endurance of parties like the NPD, founded in 1964, the legacy of Germany's Nazi past has "[put] considerable constraints on openly mobilising a right-wing electorate" (Minkenberg 1995, p. 257). Initially, the AfD managed to bypass this association by calling for EU reform and modest changes to German immigration law (AfD *Wahlprogramm* 2013; Rosellini 2019, p. 91; Schwarz 2020, p. 33). Formerly known as *Wahlalternative 2013* (or, 'electoral alternative for the 2013 German federal election'), the AfD emerged onto the German political stage as a Eurosceptic party "founded by disgruntled members of the CDU" in light of the German government and EU's perceived mismanagement of the 2008 global financial crisis (Arzheimer 2015, pp. 535, 540). Under the leadership of Bernd Lucke, a professor of macro-economics, the AfD's initial ideological and programmatic remit held "a rather narrow focus on the European debt crisis" (Schmitt-Beck 2016, p. 126). Concordantly, the party's first manifesto centred around the idea that Germany "should not guarantee any foreign sovereign debt, that all members of the Eurozone should be free to reintroduce national currencies or to join new currency unions, and that any further transfer of German sovereignty should be subject to a referendum" (Arzheimer 2015, p. 541). In stark contrast to parties like the NPD who openly incorporate tenets of national socialist

ideology, “the AfD [in 2017] did not merely clear the five percent hurdle required for representation: it soared over it on its way to 12.6 percent of the national vote and ninety-four seats in the Bundestag” (Art 2018, p. 76). This initial Eurosceptic focus would later shift as the AfD experienced bitter internal disputes between its various factions and a revolving cast of party leaders.

Following the unceremonious ousting of Bernd Lucke, the AfD’s first party leader and one of its founding members, the party was set on a more starkly rightwards trajectory by his successor, and first female party leader, Frauke Petry. The AfD’s stance on issues such as Germany’s national identity, Islam, and traditional families became framed in increasingly nationalistic terms. In an indication of the direction the party was taking under Petry, the AfD made attempts to rehabilitate the Nazi-era term *völkisch* to give it a more positive spin (Bochum 2020, p. 15). The 2015 Syrian refugee crisis presented the AfD with an opportunity to revive its flagging fortunes in the aftermath of Lucke’s departure; in 2016, the party polled as high as 16 percent while the approval ratings for the *Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands* (Christian Democratic Union of Germany, CDU) fell below thirty percent (Ibid., p. 19). Seemingly no match for party hardliners, Petry’s tumultuous relationship with Alice Weidel, Alexander Gauland, and Björn Höcke saw her resign in 2017, shortly before the AfD’s election to the Bundestag. The AfD today is currently under the leadership of Alice Weidel and Tino Chrupalla. The party’s valorisation of ‘tradition’ and Western European norms and values has been interpreted as a response to the perceived threat of Islam to German culture and society. This also appears to form the bedrock of the AfD’s increasingly, and seemingly unabashed, *völkisch* outlook; Bochum (2020) refers to this state of affairs as the AfD’s “cumulative radicalisation” (p. 29). As a result of this, the AfD’s evolution from a Eurosceptic party to one that is currently under investigation by the German domestic intelligence services for its links to right-wing extremists makes it a compelling case study. Additionally, the high visibility of prominent AfD women such as Alice Weidel, Frauke Petry, and Beatrix von Storch has not only raised eyebrows but important questions relating to their own personal political trajectories. With all this in mind, this thesis seeks to contribute to discussions on women’s support for the AfD by gaining a deeper insight into their

roles and motivations through its direct engagement with subjects—both elected AfD representatives and rank-and-file party members.

The core research question underpinning analysis throughout the thesis is: Why do women join the AfD? Given women's active involvement with the PRR more broadly, unpacking their roles and motivations is an essential task. Not only does this involve interacting with women directly wherever possible, but recognising their political agency, and locating the discursive ecosystems within which their political choices are made. The thesis seeks to make an important contribution to the existing literature on the topic of women's support for the PRR. Using a feminist poststructuralist approach and focusing on one qualitative case study, the AfD, the thesis centres women as research subjects in their own right. Based on semi-structured interview data and relevant documentary source materials, the thesis seeks to address the questions of a.) how applicable normative assumptions regarding women's political behaviour in the existing literature are to the case of the AfD and PRR more broadly; and b.) to what extent existing approaches oversimplify the experiences of women in the PRR. The thesis attempts to identify key themes, giving it the opportunity to more deeply explore women's roles, motivations, and political behaviour. In utilising a qualitative approach which will pay close attention to issues such as agency and subjectivity, the thesis is able to effectively investigate how subjects become discursive sites upon which certain processes can take place, i.e., society, culture, and history; the women interviewed for the thesis are henceforth referred to as 'subjects' in line with its epistemological and methodological approach. The analysis which follows will critically interrogate the relationship between discourse, what subjects think and feel, what they may or may not do as a result of this, and the contextual factors which make this all possible. Given the changing nature of PRR mobilisation across Europe and elsewhere, as well as the ways in which parties make themselves attractive to potential members, the thesis explores the idea that a (re)turn to the qualitative may provide additional insights into women's PRR support in the German context.

# Chapter One

## Making sense of the PRR

Given the resurgence of the PRR, their success at polling stations across the world and their seeming popularity among female voters, it is necessary to review the existing literature about women's participation in this context. There are four dominant assumptions underpinning the idea that women are not attracted to the PRR and broader far right: their alleged economic security in an era of modernisation, acceptance of Western feminist values, lack of interest in politics, and higher levels of religiosity (Barisione and Mayer 2013, pp. 3-5; Bows 2018, pp. 171-173). Furthermore, the sole focus on male group members or white working-class men in academic literature on the topic has, in the view of some scholars, 'deformed' theoretical understandings of women's PRR engagement and led researchers to "underestimate" the PRR's appeal to certain demographics (Blee 1996, p. 681; Bows 2018, p. 169). As a result of this, "painfully little" is known about women and their identification with the PRR despite a growing academic interest in the subject (Dauber 2017, p. 60). This critical literature review thus investigates whether the dominant assumptions which guide research on the topic of women's PRR support are still relevant today, or whether they fall short of fully accounting for this in light of contemporary political upheaval following events such as the Trump presidency, and the election of the AfD to the German federal parliament.

Following a brief exploration of where the PRR sit on the far-right spectrum, as well as existing academic work on the AfD itself, the chapter focuses primarily on the four dominant assumptions outlined above. It begins with an exploration of the scholarly literature in relation to the influential 'losers of modernisation' thesis, i.e., the idea that men in blue-collar occupations are more susceptible to PRR ideology as a result of modernisation. It then investigates how this foundational thesis intersects with the issues of gender, race, and class, and the prevailing scholarly idea that the proliferation of Western feminist thought sees women turn their backs on the PRR and broader far right. The chapter then critically engages with the assumption that women demonstrate lower levels of political interest than male peers; an idea

explored extensively in academic work surrounding both gender and political engagement more broadly, as well as gender and support for the PRR. Lastly, this critical literature review unpacks the assumption that women's alleged religiosity makes them less likely to support the PRR, as well as the ways in which the PRR appear to adopt religion as a 'master frame,' irrespective of the religiosity of their supporters.

This thesis as a whole takes the view that women are important political actors in their own right. However, there are no simple answers when it comes to enduring questions surrounding voter motivation and the concomitant development of voters' political subjectivity. With this in mind, this chapter's engagement with the four dominant assumptions guiding analysis on women's support of the PRR and the intersection of these with gender is vitally important. The discussion presented here "suggests [that a] major re-examination of what we think we know about political life" is needed and offers an insight into "how political life has developed and will change" (Lovenduski 1998, p. 336). Identifying these intersections becomes all the more important when, as Downing (2013) observes, "maleness is seldom seen to require analysis" (p. 27). Despite the prevalence of the four assumptions outlined throughout this introduction, a significant part of the so-called gender gap, i.e., the differences in political behaviour between women and men, remain underexplored (Coffé 2017, pp. 200-201). While the core research question guiding analysis throughout this thesis is, why do women join the AfD? this chapter shows where this question is located within relevant scholarly literature, and identifies supplementary research questions which will broaden and deepen this investigation into women's support of the PRR in the German context. It starts with a discussion of the terminology relating to where the PRR sits on the broader far-right spectrum.

## 1.1 The PRR on the far-right spectrum

'Far right' is an umbrella term which refers to a range of political ideologies to the right of mainstream politics. There is no consensus about terminology among academics, and according to Mudde (2018), perhaps "never will be" (p. 1).

Extrapolating upon this further, Miller-Idriss (2020) observes that "no single term currently in use captures the broad range of ideologies, frameworks, and actions espoused by the far right in one phrase" (pp. 15-16). It is, according to the author, "the best bad term" academics have available; it would be more helpful, for example, to "[view] the far right as a spectrum or as a cluster of overlapping ideologies and practices" (Ibid., pp. 17-18). What is less disputed is that the term 'far right' is said to encompass two groups: the radical and extreme right (Mudde 2018; Pirro 2022; Rydgren 2018). The fundamental difference between the two camps concerns their attitude to democracy; while both are nativist (i.e., xenophobic and nationalist), the extreme right is anti-democracy, often advocating the *Führerprinzip* or leader principle—the idea that the basis of political authority lies in a hierarchy of leaders—the radical right tends only to be opposed to democracy in its liberal forms (Mudde 2018, p. 1; Stocker 2017, p. 16). The radical right typically opposes "the way that existing democratic institutions actually work" and argue that they alone represent "true" democracy (Rydgren 2018, p. 2). Muddying the epistemological waters further, Rydgren (2018) notes that researchers can also consider the radical right to be extremist despite their rejection of "cleavages and division lines within "the people"" as they also reject pluralist values (Ibid.; Müller 2017, pp. 4-5). It is thus difficult to make a "watertight distinction" between the radical and extreme right, particularly when representatives of the former maintain contacts within the latter (Rydgren 2018, pp. 2-3). In the case of the AfD, the activities of its now-defunct nationalistic faction Der Flügel (The Wing) raised "concerns [regarding] its compliance to democratic principles" (Pirro 2022, p. 8), and demonstrates how the extreme right can sometimes form a constitutive part of the radical right whole.

Definitions also vary on a country-to-country basis, and this is particularly important when it comes to discussions relating to Germany. For example, "[...] in the German environment the term radical right is perceived as a transitory category between the

extreme and moderate (conservative, Christian democrat) right” (Kopeček 2007, p. 284). Resultantly, German groups and parties are categorised as being either *verfassungswidrig* (opposed to the constitution), or *verfassungsfeindlich* (hostile to the constitution); radical right groups are representative of the former, and extreme groups of the latter (Mudde 2000, p. 12; Miller-Idriss 2020, p. 17). In practical terms, this is a crucial distinction as extremist parties in Germany are closely monitored by the Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz (Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, BfV), and can be banned from operating altogether. The alleged disbanding of Der Flügel in 2021 has not stopped the BfV from formally monitoring the AfD as a whole due to its suspected links to right-wing extremism (see: *Chapter Four* for more discussion on Der Flügel).

Despite the epistemological ambiguity inherent in discussions regarding definitions and terminology, a distinction between left and right is still an important one to make. Adding to the confusion, however, the two distinctions “may decide to recycle [themselves] as something totally new, something which goes beyond the traditional distinction (neither left nor right or combining the positive values of both sides to produce a modern, innovative movement)” (Bobbio 1996, viii). A wealth of new terms have made their way into the field, including “right-wing populism, radical right-wing populism, national populism, new populism, [and] neo-populism” (Mudde 2000, p. 13). Von Beyme (1988), for example, also conceptualised the ebb and flow of the post-WWII PRR as representing three distinct “waves”: the period between 1945-1955 (neofascism), 1955-1980 (right-wing populism), and 1980-2000 (radical right) (Mudde 2019, pp. 12-20). A proposed fourth wave is characterised by the mainstreaming of the far right following the events of 9/11, the 2008 global financial crisis, and the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis (Ibid., p. 20). With all this in mind, all forms of populism, both left and right, include some appeal to “the people” while denouncing an “elite” (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017, p. 5). The authors unpack this further and define populism as a “thin-centred ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic camps, “the pure people” versus “the corrupt elite,” and that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people” (Ibid., p. 6). Defining populism as “thin-centred,” the authors argue, is advantageous because it helps researchers to

understand the malleability of populism as a concept: populism unlike “full” ideologies (fascism, liberalism, socialism) has a “restricted morphology,” often attaching “to other ideological elements” (Ibid.), which then in turn appeal to a broader range of supporters.

The contemporary radical right is also a populist one. As Betz (2018) observes, many contemporary PRR parties owe their electoral successes “to strategic and programmatic decisions that constitute a decisive break with the past” (p. 86). Betz gives the example of France’s *Front National*—recently rebranded as *Rassemblement National* (RN), or National Rally—who have allegedly abandoned its “ideological heritage” to instead derive its “persuasive power” from avenues “fundamentally different” than those invoked by the traditional extreme right (Ibid.) In this view, the PRR can both be radical and right-wing because of its “rejection of the established socio-cultural and socio-political system and their advocacy of individual achievement, a free market, and a drastic reduction of the role of the state,” as well as their rejection of integration, multiculturalism, and thinly disguised appeals to xenophobia (Betz 1993, p. 413). Given the resurgence of the PRR across Europe and beyond today, it is evident that researchers must consider such parties populist as well as radical right considering their strategic instrumentalisation of voter anxieties and appeals to ‘the people’ in response to the alleged machinations of an omnipotent but seemingly indifferent political ‘elite.’

In contrast to Betz, Pirro (2022) asserts that the label ‘populist radical right’ is limited in its analytical capacity and, as such, can only describe the “general tendencies” of parties like the AfD (p. 8). The author instead advocates the use of ‘far right’ as it better encapsulates parties’ extremist tendencies (Ibid.). The thesis, however, utilises the term PRR. In line with Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017), the malleability of the concept is advantageous precisely because it facilitates a broader investigation of important ideological elements which may also constitute the AfD ‘whole.’ Given the unprecedented electoral successes of the AfD in Germany today, this thesis makes the case that the catch-all term ‘far right’ is not sufficient to explain why the policies of the AfD have struck a chord with different groups of voters. The definition of PRR employed by this thesis enables it to examine not only the strategies the AfD has



utilised to ensure its electoral success across Germany's sixteen federal states, but how subjects negotiate their own positionalities in relation to the party's evolving ideological and programmatic remit. Resultantly, this approach can also consider the AfD's so-called 'cumulative radicalisation,' as well as the increasing influence of prominent AfD party members with proven links to right-wing extremists. The following section briefly outlines how the AfD's electoral successes have been approached in the literature on German politics and elections more broadly.

## 1.2 Scholarly work on the AfD

Since the AfD emerged onto the German political stage in 2013, a number of important studies have investigated the party's electoral successes at the European Parliament, and federal and state elections in Germany. The AfD secured its first electoral victory at the 2014 European Parliament election, winning seven seats. Using content analysis of the AfD's programmatic 'agenda,' Franzmann (2016) investigates how the AfD "strategically formulated a balanced 'thick programme' based on economic libertarian and ordoliberal ideas and classical conservatism" in order to facilitate this win (p. 473). The study shines a light on how the AfD was able to effectively lay the discursive foundations for their later political success, despite various party controversies and protracted in-fighting. With regard to the 2017 German federal election, Reinl and Schäfer (2020), examine AfD supporters' attitude to democracy using survey data from the German Longitudinal Election Studies (GLES) of the same year. The authors show that issues relating to political representation and protest voting are particularly significant for AfD voters, many of whom feel disillusioned with mainstream politics (pp. 475-476). Wurthmann *et al.* (2020) explore the AfD's capacity to attract voters from the CDU and *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (Social Democratic Party of Germany, SPD) using quantitative data from a Voting Advice Application (VAA), *ParteiNavi* (p. 870). Their analysis reveals that voting for the AfD appears to be connected to some "demographic variables," namely, sex, location (i.e., living in an East German state), and education level, as well as the failure of the CDU and SPD to address specific concerns relating to immigration (p. 879). In their use of GLES data from the 2017 federal election, however, Hansen and Olsen (2018) come to a different conclusion:

their statistical analysis finds that AfD voters are not driven by economic anxieties, but “solely” by “their attitudes towards immigrants/refugees and anti-establishment sentiment/satisfaction with democracy in Germany” (p. 1). Furthermore, expanding on Wurthmann *et al.*’s discussion of ‘vote switching,’ the authors show that, in the eastern German states at least, the AfD won the vote of 430,000 former supporters of Die Linke (The Left), representing “the largest proportional losses of any party” during the 2017 federal election (p. 15). While there appears to be a lack of consensus among academics as to the factors which drove voters to support the AfD in the pivotal 2017 federal election, one branch of this scholarship trains a critical lens on the overrepresentation of the AfD in the eastern German states, as the following paragraph outlines.

In response to the idea that support for the AfD in eastern Germany is particularly strong, Schulte-Cloos (2022), examines the extent to which “the mobilisation of deep-seated nativist sentiments” have consolidated the AfD’s electoral success in the eastern states (p. 1). Using municipal election data, as well as historical data on the electoral performance of extreme right parties in Germany, the author suggests that the AfD have been able to “broaden its electoral appeal among local communities with an extreme right sub-culture,” particularly in the East (p. 11). Similarly, Jäckle (2022) also explores the role of historical and local context, using spatial analysis and Geographically Weighted Regression (GWR) to unpack the AfD’s success at the 2017 federal election vis-à-vis “spatial points” such as the location of former Nazi concentration camp sites, refugee facilities, and distance to the eastern German border (p. 163). The study confirms the significance of the latter ‘spatial point,’ but contends that the “casual relationships” between these areas in the East and AfD support require further investigation (pp. 195-196). Weisskircher (2020) also considers support for the AfD in the eastern states and reflects on the impact of German reunification and the so-called East-West divide on voter attitudes. Taking a more qualitative approach to the question at hand, the author posits that AfD support may well be overrepresented in the eastern German states, and suggests that researchers consider the “multi-faceted causes” behind the party’s rise and subsequent electoral successes, given the diverse ways in which voters find the AfD’s ideological and programmatic remit attractive (p. 620). With all this in mind, it is

clear that issues surrounding historical and local context are crucial when it comes to determining the factors underpinning individuals' support for the AfD, and requires further critical investigation.

The purpose of this short section was to explore the ways in which the AfD's electoral successes have been broached in the relevant scholarly literature. The studies discussed here, while by no means exhaustive, have provided a snapshot into electoral dynamics in Germany, as well as the emerging significance of historical and local context. What the studies examined here do not do, however, is expand upon how these factors intersect with gender beyond a cursory mention of sex as a socio-demographic independent variable used for the purposes of statistical analysis. This thesis takes the view that "the use of sex as a simple, dichotomous variable will distort [research] unless it is located in a gendered frame of reference" (Lovenduski 1998, p. 339). With its focus on the intersections of gender and political participation, this thesis as a whole contributes to an expanding discussion on women's support for the PRR in the German context. The section which follows moves on to explore the first of the four dominant assumptions outlined in the introduction to this chapter, namely, the influential 'losers of modernisation' thesis and its contribution to the academic literature in terms of gender and PRR support.

### 1.3 Gender and the 'losers of modernisation' thesis

The existence of the PRR is not a unique characteristic of post-WWII Western European democracies; they are a "transnational phenomenon" with roots firmly planted in history (Betz 1994, p. 22). To contextualize this claim, Betz (1994) gives the example of the Poujadists in France in the 1950s, as well as the Danish and Norwegian Progress Parties of the 1970s (p. 23). In the United Kingdom (UK), the extreme right National Front (NF) were a significant, albeit short-lived, political presence during the 1970s, even winning a quarter of a million votes in the 1977 Greater London council elections (Copsey and Worley 2017, p. 2). The PRR and far right have also proliferated in Canada, India, and Russia—all nations with political systems approximating Western-style democracy (Ibid., p. 24). Consequently, the potential for radicalisation exists in most industrialised societies and should be considered "a 'normal' pathological condition of modern democracies" (Scheuch

and Klingemann 1967 cited in Betz 1994, p. 22). Advanced industrial societies have faced profound socio-cultural, political, and economic transformation following the dissolution of the Soviet Union (or Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, USSR), with individuals fearing socio-economic displacement coming to regard themselves as the “losers of modernisation” (Betz 1994, pp. 24-25, 27). The global dominance of capitalism today, as well as the move away from traditional modes of production, has had serious implications on the composition of the workforce. Male blue-collar workers are regarded as at most risk of unemployment due to technological advancements and the cross-national digitisation of knowledge that requires workers to have higher levels of education and non-traditional skill sets (Ibid., pp. 27-28). In theory, this leaves male blue-collar workers vulnerable to PRR and far-right ideology.

As per the ‘losers of modernisation’ thesis, the overhaul of the workforce has had consequences for traditional class distinctions and “subcultural class identities” due to the processes of diversification and individualism heralded by modernisation (Beck 1987, p. 341). The erosion and potential destruction of these distinctions and their concomitant identities has led individuals to question what it means to be a political subject in an ever-globalising world; the socio-economic changes which accompany modernisation have led to the perceived fragmentation of values that have traditionally reinforced cultural codes privileging masculinity and the heteronormative family. Resultantly, it has been argued by scholars that men are more likely to support the PRR under these conditions as men tend to dominate blue-collar work (Betz 1994; Givens 2004). Women, on the other hand, are said to dominate secure jobs in the public sector and seemingly do not share the same concerns as their male peers (Bows 2018, p. 171). If right-wing radicalisation is a ‘normal’ part of pluralistic democratic processes, then the relative lack of substantive empirical research on women in this context has serious implications for researchers’ understandings of women as political actors.

Following Lovenduski (1998), this thesis asserts that claims regarding women’s alleged lack of interest in the PRR are implicated in a “discipline-wide” failure to recognise women as political actors (p. 333). This in turn reinforces women’s exclusion from the public (i.e., political) sphere altogether. At this stage, an important

question is raised: Does the assumption that male blue-collar workers are more susceptible to PRR ideology following the dissolution of the USSR and subsequent modernisation processes hold true in relation to Germany? This question is particularly relevant in light of the resurgence of the PRR in Europe and further afield, as well as the historical origins of PRR grievances. In the aftermath of the reunification of Germany in 1990, for example, “some three million jobs, most of them in traditionally male industries, were lost over two years. The working-class heroes of socialism became the working-class losers of capitalism” (Bennhold 2018a). Consequently, PRR parties like the AfD have been able to exploit decades of animosity towards political elites, and capitalise upon fears that young male economic migrants and refugees arriving in Germany will reduce the number of job opportunities even further. The sub-section which follows explores the ‘losers of modernisation’ thesis in greater depth, particularly the dominant idea that blue-collar men are more susceptible to PRR ideology in comparison to female peers.

### *1.3.1 Are men in blue-collar occupations overrepresented in the academic literature on PRR support?*

The ‘losers of modernisation’ thesis remains influential and has had a tangible impact on scholarly work on the topic of the demographics who support the PRR. Givens’ 2004 analysis of the PRR gender gap in France, Denmark, and Austria, as well as Ford and Goodwin’s 2010 investigation of supporters of the extreme right British National Party (BNP) are two well-known examples of this thesis. Using exit poll data from her three case study countries, Givens (2004) contends that the gender gap can be explained in three primary ways: differences in attitudes toward immigration, employment and/or socio-economic status, and political attitude (p. 33). Ford and Goodwin’s study operates along similar hypotheses, with survey respondents reportedly expressing concerns about “exceptionally high levels of immigration” (2010, p. 1), but differs in that it utilises a specially constructed sample based on data collected and aggregated by market research company Ipsos-MORI between 2002 and 2006 (ibid., p. 8). The most salient of these hypotheses is that women’s participation in the workforce is ‘safe’; Givens (2004) posits that women have benefitted from the expansion of the public sector as their positions are allegedly

“less vulnerable to redundancy” in contrast to male peers (p. 37). The author demonstrates that a gender gap persists across her three case studies of France, Denmark, and Austria when controlling for socio-economic factors. However, it remains unclear whether being employed in certain sectors makes an individual more likely to support the PRR despite claims that male blue-collar workers are hostile toward socio-cultural and political change (Ibid., p. 48). This analysis leads Givens to contend not only that women do not find the PRR attractive in this context, but that it would need to make major changes to its ideological and programmatic remit to attract more female supporters.

Reflecting Givens’ approach, Ford and Goodwin (2010) attempt to confirm the existence of a gender gap in terms of individuals’ support for the BNP in the UK. The authors argue that this support is located primarily among “older, less-educated, working-class men living in the declining industrial towns of the North and Midlands region” (2010, p. 1). In this context, women do not appear to have been taken in by the BNP’s belated attempts to moderate its image and appeal to a broader audience (Ibid., p. 8). Despite the BNP’s own claims that many of their supporters are disaffected Labour voters, Ford and Goodwin (2010) cannot adequately determine where BNP support is located in political terms, particularly as there are no relevant longitudinal studies which provide an insight into individuals’ prior voting behaviour (Ibid., p. 10). Even in specifically constructed samples, the number of self-declared PRR voters is “sometimes too small to allow for any serious statistical analysis” (Mayer 2015, p. 395). This approach also risks distorting perceptions of individuals’ voting behaviour due to survey questions being asked out of context, i.e., a long period of time before the election itself, or even after the event has taken place (Ibid., pp. 394-395). This may also be exacerbated by individuals’ reluctance to reveal accurate information about their voting preferences due to the social stigma attached to supporting the PRR or far right more broadly.

While the ‘losers of modernisation’ thesis has contributed enormously to understandings of individuals’ support for the PRR and far right in Europe following the dissolution of the USSR, it falls short in its exploration of gender. In the case of Givens’ study, this is compounded by the fact that the sample for the study was

drawn from countries where the PRR have already achieved some degree of electoral success and for that reason consolidates what is already known about PRR support in France, Denmark, and Austria. Ford and Goodwin (2010) focus exclusively on English BNP supporters, excluding Wales and Scotland from their analysis; the authors attempt to justify this exclusion by noting the established tradition of nationalist parties in the two nations (p. 8). This is a missed opportunity—and something of a misrepresentation—given the left-wing credentials of mainstream nationalist parties such as Plaid Cymru or the Scottish National Party (SNP). This is especially puzzling when Welsh communities have experienced high levels of deindustrialisation and the socio-economic decline of rural towns and villages once fully reliant upon the now-largely defunct mining industry. As per the ‘losers of modernisation’ thesis, this would also surely be fertile ground for PRR support, pointing to a weakness in this argument.

The studies explored in this sub-section hypothesise that men are overrepresented in blue-collar occupations, but Mayer (2015) is careful to point out that this is not generalisable across different countries; in the French context, women are in fact overrepresented in unskilled jobs, “accounting for one third of the unskilled blue collars and some 80 per cent of the unskilled employees” (p. 397). Additionally, while the claim is made that women have more job security, their pay is often lower due to a gendered division of labour that sees women having to work part-time to accommodate caring responsibilities. Analysis by Eurostat (n.d.) reveals that the gender pay gap across the EU member states stood at 13 percent in 2020, with women on average earning 0.87 cents to every euro earned by men. In Germany, the gender pay gap stood at 18.3 percent for the same year (Ibid., n.d.). The seemingly deteriorating position of women within the broader workforce could, in theory, bolster their support for the PRR; socio-economic precariousness is not the exclusive domain of blue-collar men. In the German context, scholars such as Weisskircher (2020) point out that support for the AfD is in fact overrepresented in the eastern German states. Resultantly, this thesis asks: to what extent do socio-economic issues resonate with subjects following German reunification? Discussion in the next sub-section moves on to explore how issues relating to gender, race, and class have

been explored in the scholarly literature relating to PRR support, and the idea that certain social groups are responsible for the election of ‘bad’ candidates and parties.

### 1.3.2 *Gender, race, and class in the post-modernisation era*

The assumption that working-class men are more likely to support the PRR has gained currency, but like women, they are not a monolithic voting bloc. Focus group discussions in three BNP strongholds in the UK, for example, observed that a core of working-class participants were “hostile” toward the group and would not consider supporting them under any circumstance (Boon 2010, p. 28). Nonetheless, the idea that working-class demographics vote against their own best interests when it comes to the election of so-called ‘bad’ candidates is not a new one. In the US context, Frank (2005) argues that white working-class voters are hoodwinked into voting for the Republican party through a heady mix of “race baiting, fear mongering, or other values-based manipulations” (cited in Glas *et al.* 2016, p. 159). Frank (2005) outlines what he perceives as the “incalculable, historic harm [done] to working-class people” by Republican socio-economic policies (p. 6), but does not expand on how far this demographic can be said to have fully embraced the core tenets of US Republicanism or articulated this alleged support in other ways. Furthermore, empirical data collected by the American National Election Studies (ANES) between 1972-2008 tells a different story; white working-class voters in the US have voted overwhelmingly for Democrat candidates during this period in comparison to their wealthier peers (Glas *et al.* 2016, p. 161). Despite empirical evidence to the contrary—in the US context at least—the idea that working-class voters are singularly to blame for the election of ‘bad’ candidates endures, as the following paragraph explores further.

Following the election of Donald Trump to the US presidency in 2016, the stereotype of irrational white working-class voters resurfaced. Exit polls revealed that 51 percent of individuals without a high school diploma voted for the unconventional Grand Old Party (GOP) candidate (BBC 2016). Most surprisingly, these figures also indicated that 48 percent of white women voted for Trump (*Ibid.*). Given the chaos surrounding the 2016 US presidential election as a whole, it is perhaps only ‘natural’ to seek answers as to how such a candidate could even be elected in the first place



(Isenberg 2017, xiii). This search, however, has led to the construction of a “false dichotomy” in which certain groups are said to have significantly tipped the polls one way or another (Ibid.). Such a perception is compounded when the ‘qualities’ associated with ‘good’ voting behaviour can be difficult for citizens to negotiate: “being fully informed, politically sophisticated, and involved in politics [is] costly and cognitively difficult” (Glas *et al.* 2016, p. 162). That is not to say, however, that white working-class voters are uninformed about the candidates they vote for, but rather, that their access to political life may have been limited due to socio-economic inequality and other structural factors. Furthermore, following Trump’s 2016 victory, analysis revealed that “far from being purely a revolt by poorer whites left behind by globalisation [...] Trump’s victory also relied on the support of the middle-class, the better-educated and the well-off” (Henley 2016). Among the 64 percent of US voters who earn in excess of \$50,000 per year, for example, over 49 percent voted for Trump in contrast to 47 percent for Hillary Clinton (Ibid.). Similarly, in Germany, while working-class voters comprised a large percentage of AfD voters, a significant percentage of voters overall—between ten and twelve percent—are those in white-collar occupations such as the civil service or private industry (Glaser *et al.* 2018, pp. 29-30). This is a trend also reflected in the recruitment practices of groups such as the pan-European Generation Identity which increasingly targets middle-class students and other young professionals (The Independent 2019). In a UK context, anti-extremism charities that work closely with PREVENT, the UK’s counter-terrorism strategy, have witnessed a demographic shift, with a rise in referrals from individuals from more affluent social backgrounds (Dearden 2019). The assumption, then, that working-class men are more attracted to the ideas of the PRR and broader far right in comparison to their financially secure counterparts proves to be outdated given what is known about the demographics instrumental in securing victory for the Trump campaign in 2016, and the election of the AfD in Germany in 2017.

The overrepresentation of working-class men in the relevant scholarly literature is due, according to Betz (1994), to “some unwritten law” (p. 142). This inadvertently reinforces the notion that the male-dominated state of politics is intrinsic, or even natural. Given that “much of the research on women and voting between 1945-1979 was very perfunctory [and] tended to rest on untested popular psychological

assumptions about women and politics and implicit beliefs about appropriate behaviour” (Lovenduski 1999, p. 196), much of the foundational scholarly work on women’s support of the PRR does not challenge these outdated assumptions. Givens (2004) concludes, for example, that “[far-right] parties are not attractive to women and would likely have to make major changes in strategy to attract more female voters” (p. 51). Perhaps unwittingly, this bypasses a number of important historical studies on women’s in-depth, complex, and active involvement with a range of groups from Oswald Moseley’s British Union of Fascists (BUF), those women who joined the Nazi party in Germany, to the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) in the US (Blee 1991; Durham 1998; Gottlieb 2003; Koonz 1987). This rich heritage of scholarship effectively unpacks the intersections between tradition and modernity, as well as gender and politics, vis-à-vis women’s historical support of far right and extremist groups. Women have thus historically occupied “all sorts of positions in and in relation to electoral politics” (Bacchetta and Power 2002, p. 6). It makes sense, then, to investigate the enduring appeal of the PRR and broader far right to women, albeit in diverse contexts, and by means of different epistemological and methodological approaches.

*Section 1.3* as a whole has discussed the provenance of the ‘losers of modernisation’ thesis and how this has been explored by scholars. The section which follows extends this discussion by investigating how this influential thesis informs scholarly thinking on the relationship between gender, feminism, and support for the PRR, as well as the idea that women adhere more closely to left-wing political ideologies in an era of modernisation.

## 1.4 Gender and the ‘structural revolution’

The profound socio-economic and political transformations heralding the dissolution of the USSR in the 1990s led not only to an overhaul of the workforce macrostructure, but the assumption that working-class men are more susceptible to the ideology of the PRR and broader far right. Unlike their male peers—or the so-called ‘losers of modernisation’—women are seen to benefit from modernisation given their increased participation in a non-manual workforce, for example, in the civil service. Taking this idea further, Inglehart and Norris (2003) argue that

modernisation processes which first took root in the late 1980s also culminated in a “structural revolution” or “gender realignment” (pp. 79, 88). This ‘structural revolution’ saw women turn away from heteronormative discourses surrounding so-called traditional family values and to the left of the political spectrum, seemingly embracing the “gradual diffusion of feminist ideas across all levels of society” (Ibid., p. 88; Bows 2018, p. 172). The assumption that all women subscribe to Western feminist ideals is a pervasive one, but as this section demonstrates, this requires further nuance in the context of women’s support for the PRR.

In order to fully understand women’s alleged ‘turn’ to the left, the roles that both structural and cultural factors play must be taken into consideration. Following the end of WWII, social class, region, and one’s religious affiliation were typically viewed as some of the most important political cleavages in Western European nations as they reflect “long-standing social and economic divisions within [societies]” (Lipset and Rokkan 1967, p. 88). Resultantly, political parties were able to mobilise certain “coalitions” of social groups by appealing to their class-specific interests (Ibid.). Gender, a central political cleavage today, was put on the back-burner as ‘women’s issues’ were often merged with other established cleavages, namely, class, ethnicity, and age (Ibid., p. 89). The relatively contemporary phenomena of ‘gender realignment’ can be explained in part by a “broader loosening of traditional ties” between social groups and political parties, particularly in relation to social class (Ibid.). In structural terms, this ‘loosening’ is demonstrated by the transformation of post-industrial Western European nations during the 1980s and early 1990s and results in a divergence in the socio-economic status of women and men. Consequently, gender is now an important socio-political cleavage said to reflect the distinct political interests of women as a voting bloc.

In cultural terms, the perceived “gradual erosion of class-based politics” has seen a shift toward placing greater value on one’s personal freedoms, self-expression, and gender equality (Inglehart and Norris 2003, p. 91). Issues considered taboo before—abortion, confronting workplace sexual harassment, access to education, and affirmative action—rose to prominence (Ibid.). According to Inglehart and Norris (2003), this tangible move toward Western feminist ideals and gender equality was

“the catalyst producing the modern gender gap in party support” (pp. 91-92). While the events of the 1980s did not conform to “neat typology or trajectory,” the decade which heralded modernisation witnessed “contentious politics” intersect with both political parties and public organisations, and resulted in the mass mobilisation of women across the world (Mackay 2008, p. 21). A salient example of this relates to the Greenham Common peace movement which saw tens of thousands of women peacefully demonstrate against the planned siting of nuclear missiles at Greenham Common airbase in Berkshire, UK; at one point, 30,000 women joined hands around the nine-mile perimeter fence which surrounded the airbase (Ibid.). There is also a rich heritage of women’s political activism in the German context. The student movement that emerged in West Germany in the 1960s as a response to the controversial *Große Koalition* (Grand Coalition) between the CDU and the SPD boasted a high number of visible women who were instrumental in leading peaceful protests against the perceived hypocrisy and latent authoritarianism of the West German government. In this case, however, the lack of consensus within the student movement ultimately led to the emergence of groups such as the militantly left-wing *Rote Armee Fraktion* (Red Army Faction, RAF) (Bauer 2008; Becker 1978). The subsection which follows broadens and deepens discussion by exploring claims by scholars that the gradual diffusion of Western feminist ideals makes women less likely to support the PRR today.

#### 1.4.1 *Is feminism really for everyone?*

Despite the “seismic shift” in women’s rights over the last forty years, the idea that women are in fact more conservative than men is a “persistent and well-tested phenomenon” (Winter 2010, p. 588; Inglehart and Norris 2003, p. 75). The gender gap in voting between women and men in Western European nations in the 1950s and 1960s in particular was fairly marginal, though women were more likely to vote for centre-right parties (Inglehart and Norris 2003, p. 77). In a contemporary UK context, for example, the Conservative Party retained a “small advantage” among female voters in both the 2005 and 2010 general election (Campbell 2012, p. 705). At face value, this example supports the claims of scholars that women are more prone to “central tendency” voting, i.e., only voting for parties to the left/right centre

of mainstream politics (Hofmann-Göttig 1989 cited in Mudde 2007, p. 114). Following analysis of longitudinal data from the Eurobarometer and World/European Values surveys, Inglehart and Norris (2003) counter this and posit that since women in wealthy post-industrial societies have “experienced the greatest transformation in their lifestyles and sex roles,” women have realigned to the left of the political spectrum (pp. 79, 88). These socio-cultural shifts are contingent upon a number of institutional and context-specific conditions; access to education, for example, has come to be seen as “the prime road to social mobility” in Western societies (Betz 1994, pp. 28-29). In terms of individuals’ support for the PRR, studies have shown that, in a UK context for example, higher levels of education are consistent with lower levels of support for the PRR (Goodwin 2013). This emphasis on individuals’ education, however, has “heightened the sense” that interchangeable qualifications are the overarching “[precondition] for success” in the post-industrial age (Betz 1994, *ibid.*). It also cannot adequately explain lower levels of support for the PRR among women; the findings of Goodwin’s 2013 study, for example, broadly apply to both women *and* men (Bows 2018, p. 172). As touched upon in *Section 1.3.2*, given that the PRR today are going to great lengths to recruit middle-class individuals and young professionals—the majority of whom are university-educated—the idea that *only* less-educated individuals are more susceptible to the ideological and programmatic remit of the PRR does not hold up.

In terms of women’s alleged predisposition toward feminism and collectivism, the “erroneous” assumption that all women hold modern feminist views exposes researchers’ own “preoccupation” with PRR ideology, particularly the idea that the PRR regard women as child-bearers first and foremost, and not active political subjects in their own right (Mudde 2007, p. 92). Nonetheless, as Kitschelt (1995) observes in his influential work, gender issues have always been a central characteristic of PRR ideology in its many guises and subsequent electoral appeal (p. 20). A number of contemporary scholars have pointed out the centrality of gender to the PRR today across a number of country contexts (Akkerman 2015; de Lange and Mügge 2015; Deckman 2016; Pearson *et al.* 2020; Miller-Idriss and Pilkington 2019). However, compounding the situation is the fact that “there is not a single consistent attitude to the family and its social relations among far-right movements” (Kofman

1998, p. 91). The relationship between the PRR and issues surrounding feminism and gender equality is thus complicated and nuanced (Gwiazda 2020, p. 591). Scholars demonstrate, for example, that the cornerstone issues once characteristic of the PRR such as the traditional family, abortion, and the role of women in society, are constantly in flux (Coffé 2018, p. 203). Some parties appear to take a more “flexible” approach to issues such as same-sex marriage and gender equality, as demonstrated by the seemingly liberal policy positions of the Dutch *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (Party for Freedom, PVV) (Akkerman 2015, pp. 38-39). With regard to the AfD, scholars find that, like its counterparts in Europe and elsewhere, gender and its concomitant issues are a core tenet of the party’s ideological and programmatic remit (Fangen and Lichtenberg 2021; Sprengholz 2021). Despite the high visibility of female and LGBTQ+ AfD members, to what extent do the party take a hard-line stance on issues relating to gender equality, same-sex marriage, and LGBTQ+ rights?

While the PRR and broader far right today often complain about the perceived insidious influence of ‘gender ideology’ on heteronormative families and children, the idea that this is a ‘new’ development is unpacked by de Lange and Mügge (2015). The authors draw an interesting parallel between the role of gender in the PRR today and the ideologies underpinning historical colonial policies and nation-building projects (p. 62; Enloe 2000). This is also reflected in the German context: Harvey (2004), for example, notes women’s outrage at the presence of African troops during the French occupation of the Rhineland in the 1920s (p. 158). A number of right-wing women’s organisations “seized upon” stories of assaults on German women, and “by implication” the German race as a whole (Ibid.). In which ways has the AfD today instrumentalised the alleged need to protect white German women from a non-white ‘Other’ following the 2015 sexual assault of women in Cologne, as well as the sexual exploitation and murder of young white girls? While feminist scholarship on the topic of women and the PRR has been particularly adept in its exploration of the “governing ideologies” of the right and left, it has typically paid little attention to variations within these ideologies, and as a result, “offers few clues” as to how ideas relating to gender vary within the PRR and among its adherents (de Lange and Mügge 2015, p. 65). Given that a central area of interest for this thesis is how gender

intersects with women's motivations in relation to the AfD, it offers a tangible insight into the ways in which the AfD's strategic operationalisation of contemporary and historical gendered discourses are negotiated by subjects.

Despite the PRR's seemingly renewed interest in issues relating to gender, "it is far from clear [...] whether this incidental and rhetorical support for the principle of gender equality represents a more general and coherent ideological change" (Akkerman 2015, pp. 39-40). Akkerman's analysis of European PRR party manifestos uncovers that while the *Front National* (now *Rassemblement National*) is found to be the most conservative party over time, this has changed since Marine Le Pen assumed leadership of the party in 2011 (p. 46). In attempts to moderate the party's image and distance herself from the views of her father, erstwhile *Front National* leader Jean Marie Le Pen, Marine Le Pen promotes herself as a "woman of her times...free...modern...divorced, a mother of three" (Sénac and Parodi 2013 cited in Akkerman 2015, p. 46). A tentative distinction, then, can be made between parties which hold "neo-traditional" or "modern-traditional" views; the goal of the former is to provide a "favourable climate" for women to be "mothers and housewives," and the latter promotes a combination of women's gainful employment, raising children, and supporting equal pay for equal work (de Lange and Mügge 2015, p. 71).

Unsurprisingly, there is no consensus among academics regarding the nature of variation in the PRR's often strategic use of gender (Ibid., pp. 66, 74). How are discourses relating to gender received and interpreted by prominent female AfD members and subjects themselves? Having investigated scholarly work on the idea that women are predisposed to feminism and collectivity in this section, the discussion moves on to explore normative conceptualisations of 'women's issues' in survey-based electoral studies and what this may reveal (or not) about the factors underpinning women's support of the PRR today.

### 1.4.2 *Women as 'gender-conscious political actors'*

The lack of consensus among academics vis-à-vis the PRR's ideological and programmatic remit as it pertains to gender is compounded by the fact that parties often express "quasi feminist statements," albeit ones situated within strictly "anti-feminist discourses" (Félix 2015, p. 169). Furthermore, women active in the PRR often live their lives in ways that are markedly different from those they advocate for other women (Mudde 2007, p. 95). As the example of Marine Le Pen aptly demonstrates, women's own circumstances do not appear to prevent them from establishing successful careers in the PRR altogether. In the German context, the fact that AfD parliamentary co-leader Alice Weidel is a lesbian and shares two adopted children with her Sri-Lankan heritage partner has not harmed her political career despite the AfD's opposition to same-sex marriage and LGBTQ+ couples' adoption of children. This raises some important questions, however, as to the extent to which the AfD 'cares' about the sexuality or gender identity of its elected representatives, chooses to ignore this facet of Weidel's life due to her professional competence, or uses her as a sign of 'tolerance' in the face of accusations that the party discriminates against the LGBTQ+ community. For scholars such as Rommelspacher (2001), these contradictions between party programmes and representatives' own lives reflects, more or less, a critique of party doctrine (p. 209). While Le Pen and Weidel appear to have 'emancipated' themselves from the patriarchal strictures of party life, to what extent does this 'freedom' come at the expense of other women and underrepresented groups?

Alford (1967) observes that class interests are not homogenous and for that reason cannot easily be broken down into neat dichotomous distinctions such as 'privileged' and 'oppressed' (p. 69). By this line of reasoning, then, neither can gender. Schreiber (2014) expands on this idea and posits that in order for researchers to truly gauge the 'nature' of women's support of the PRR, they must first stop conflating 'women's issues' with those topics most commonly associated with the Western feminist movement (p. 276). While figures like the AfD's Alice Weidel give the impression that the PRR are more tolerant toward the LGBTQ+ community, for example, this platform is often used "to draw a contrast with a perceived Islamic threat from increased



migration to gay and lesbian rights, tolerance for sexual difference, and secular modernity” (Miller-Idriss and Pilkington 2019). Consequently, researchers must bear in mind that not all women identify as feminists, or may even be actively anti-feminist. Nonetheless, such women can be recognised as “gender-conscious political actors” as they collectivise on behalf of like-minded women on issues central to their own worldview (Schreiber 2014. p. 276). Deckman’s work on Tea Party women in the US reflects this observation; Second Amendment rights (i.e., the right to bear firearms) are a fundamental component of women’s political activism in this context and pose a distinct challenge to normative ideas surrounding what constitutes ‘women’s issues’ (2016, p. 16). These examples demonstrate the importance of socio-cultural, political, and economic factors in the unpacking of the issues which may appeal to women across different country contexts.

Clearly, not all advocacy undertaken on behalf of women by women is feminist, particularly when PRR women seek to secure their own “political and social rights” while conveniently disregarding or blatantly ignoring the structural and institutional barriers facing other groups of women (Bacchetta and Power 2002, p. 13). A simplistic take on all of this is that women who support the PRR are “co-opted into either defending male interests, or acting like men, that is, being not quite women” (Aretxaga 1997, p. 10). Following the election of Donald Trump to the US presidency in 2016, for example, some media commentators suggested that women simply voted the way of their husbands or male family members, and that all Trump supporters are “garbage people” with “bad teeth” (Graves 2017; Phillips 2018). This rhetoric is unhelpful and obscures serious analysis of the topic at hand. It also does not expand on the contextual factors which led women to vote for Trump across an already extremely partisan US. Later analysis on the success of Trump’s bid for the presidency, however, demonstrated that the Trump campaign was extremely successful in bringing together a seemingly nebulous group of female voters, from so-called soccer moms to Christian evangelicals (Setzler and Yanus 2018, p. 1). To this end, these examples demonstrate that women’s support of the PRR is not only complex and multifaceted in terms of the issues which engage individual women, but that this depends on a range of contextual factors located in particular socio-cultural, historical, and economic discourses. With all this in mind, the recognition of the

diverse factors and discourses which underpin women's support for the AfD in the German context informs the approach of this thesis. *Section 1.5* moves on to unpack the dominant idea that women are less interested in politics than their male peers and how this has impacted scholarship on women's support for the PRR.

## 1.5 Gender and political interest

At first, and although “hard and reliable” data sets are not always readily available (Mudde 2007, p. 117), a rich heritage of empirical research on the topic appears to corroborate the claim that women are less interested in politics and exhibit lower levels of political efficacy, or self-confidence (Mayer 2013; Mudde 2019; Spierings and Zaslove 2015; Tolleson Rinehart 1992; Verba *et al.* 1997). Indeed, Andersen (1975) posits that “it has been widely argued—and demonstrated empirically—that the political socialisation of women, as distinct from that of men, tends to produce a lack of concern with the sphere of politics, a sense of distance between one's daily concerns and political events” (p. 440). As Randall (1987) wryly observes, “of all the charges brought against women's political behaviour, apparently the most solidly founded is that they know less about politics, and are less interested, and less psychologically involved in it than men” (p. 79). While contemporary research confirms these findings to a certain extent, it recognises both that the concept of ‘politics’ itself needs further clarification, given that ‘politics’ invariably means different things to different people, as well as the gender bias inherent in normative interpretations of the concept itself (Coffé 2013, p. 324; Campbell and Winters 2008). Conventional measures of political interest pay scant attention to what ‘politics’ means to individual women and men and merely reinforces the idea that politics is only about “institutional, partisan, or national politics” (Coffé 2013, p. 324), and not at all relatable to individuals' everyday lives and experiences.

In the previous section, reference was made to Inglehart and Norris (2003) who argued that processes of modernisation ushered in a “structural revolution” which saw women reject the traditional constraints of patriarchal societies and embrace feminism wholesale (p. 88). As a result of this, more women are seen to be “running for and being elected to national parliaments than ever before” (Coffé 2013, p. 323). If this is indeed the case, how can the persistent gender gap in some types of

political participation in post-industrial Western European nations be explained, if the so-called 'structural revolution' did in fact usher in an age of unprecedented socio-cultural and political opportunities for women? The following sub-section explores the entrenched scholarly assumption that women are less interested in politics than men, and the ways in which this idea has impacted upon understandings of women's support for the PRR.

### 1.5.1 *Are women really less interested in politics than men?*

The topic of women's alleged lack of interest in mainstream politics, let alone the PRR or broader far right, is one that has been explored extensively in the relevant scholarly literature. In their influential study, for example, Verba *et al.* (1997) posit that not only are women less interested in politics than male peers, but less-well informed and less-efficacious (p. 1051). In their view, while gender differences in political participation are deemed to be specific to politics—as opposed to individuals' personal attributes—a “puzzling” gender gap remains (*Ibid.*). Using data from the US-based Citizen Participation Study (n=2,517), the authors take a three-fold approach to this ‘problem.’ Firstly, they use descriptive data to explore gender differences in political “information, efficacy, and interest”; secondly, they attempt to demonstrate that gender differences in political participation have real-world “consequences”; lastly, they seek to explain how gender differences in information, efficacy, and interest may interact with other socio-cultural characteristics such as occupation (*Ibid.*, p. 1052), and thus gain a deeper insight into the topic at hand.

In addressing women's alleged lack of interest in politics, Verba *et al.* (1997) concede that this issue finds its roots in women's traditional lack of access to political power and its associated benefits but fall short of naming the elephant(s) in the room, i.e., the gendered division of labour within the home, and the historical exclusion of women from political life. The authors posit that women's lack of interest in politics may in fact be the result of a “constructed preference” that is not freely chosen by women themselves—in other words, gendered socialisation sees women estranged from politics—but pay little attention to the ways in which women may participate in politics by other means or identify further structural and context-specific factors which delay or even prevent this participation altogether (*Ibid.*, pp. 1053-1054).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Verba *et al.*'s analysis reveals that women are fundamentally disadvantaged when it comes to their political participation or lack thereof, regardless of statistical interactions between gender and other measures such as occupational status (Ibid., p. 1060). Furthermore, the authors suggest that gender differences in political interest and participation "seem to reflect a genuine difference in the taste for politics," but are "reluctant" to attribute this seemingly entrenched disparity in preferences to the "personal idiosyncrasies" of individuals (Ibid., p. 1070). They do, however, suggest a potentially fruitful avenue for future scholarly work on the topic: an investigation into women's "political socialisation" (Ibid.). While the study of Verba *et al.* (1997) does not facilitate a deeper insight into the 'perennial' issue of subject motivation or the contextual factors underpinning an entrenched gender gap, it nonetheless gives a valuable insight into women's political efficacy in the US context.

In contrast to Verba *et al.* (1997), Campbell and Winters (2008) consider how gendered socialisation impacts on individuals' political participation and investigate the "underlying causes" behind women's alleged lack of interest in politics (p. 53). The authors argue that "simple unidimensional [measures]" like those featured in a Likert Scale—for example, asking respondents to rate their political interest on a scale from "not at all interested in politics" to "very interested in politics"—are unlikely to fully capture respondents' political interests (Ibid., p. 54). This argument is also reflected by Coffé (2013) in a later work which advocates the "need to consider political interest from a detailed perspective than using a general measure of political interest" (p. 329). To this end, Campbell and Winters (2008) conducted a series of focus groups in London and Colchester in the weeks prior to the 2005 UK general election to assess the ways in which male and female participants responded to questions on their broader political interests (pp. 54-55). They discovered that there were "qualitative differences" in the ways women and men responded to the questions asked; men expressed views on the forthcoming election in terms of the tactics and strategies of parties, whereas women were "more expressive of their internal emotions," especially when politics had a direct impact on their lives or that of their family (Ibid., p. 55). Crucially, many women mentioned the difficulty in keeping up with politics while raising their families and caring for children, giving the

authors an insight into how a gendered division of labour has an impact on women's ability to fully participate in politics. Campbell and Winters (2008) explore the role of gendered socialisation and in doing so, appear to consolidate the "well-known" fact that girls are socialised into developing "an interconnected sense of self" while boys see themselves as "autonomous actors" (p. 64). The notion that women are more inclined to organise in a "more democratic way" is dominant in normative political discourse, particularly when scholarly literature on the topic has reinforced the idea that women "favour intergroup relations to be equal rather than hierarchical" (Stasulane 2019, p. 59). Taking a different approach to Verba *et al.* (1997), Campbell and Winters' research demonstrates how a qualitative method can yield meaningful and empirically rigorous results in its exploration of respondents' understanding of politics and how they identify and negotiate their political interests.

In her analysis of the origin stories of AfD women elected to Germany's federal parliament, Xydias (2020) finds that women and men have distinct political backgrounds, with "men more than women [reporting] prior party affiliation and have held prior political office" (p. 120). Furthermore, and regardless of their backgrounds, "women more than men explain their support of the AfD as a choice to enter into politics, and men more than women explain their support of the AfD as a choice to leave another party" (p. 105). Conversely, however, Xydias' analysis also reveals that "women appear to have higher rates of prior office holding than their [male] counterparts" (2020, p. 120). Nonetheless, the idea that women are less interested in politics than male peers is an assumption which continues to underpin scholarly work on support for the PRR and broader far right. Mayer (2013), for example, posits that "women are late comers on the electoral scene, they still pay less attention to politics, seen as a man's world, and would be less prone to support outsiders than long established parties" (p. 163). According to Spierings and Zaslove (2015), the small number of women who vote for the PRR is ultimately a reflection of their lower levels of political engagement more broadly and that "it remains unclear why more men than women vote for populist radical right parties" (p. 135). The authors do, however, concede that a deeper exploration of local context would be an "interesting avenue" for future scholarly work (*Ibid.*, p. 158). Similarly, Mudde (2019) argues that not only do women's "lower levels of political self-confidence (efficacy)" set them

apart from male peers, but that they demonstrate a “much lower tolerance for violence” (p. 161). To what extent does the idea that women are inherently non-violent hold up in relation to the AfD and its members?

An emerging body of scholarly literature is challenging the idea that women are uninterested in politics and outlines the crucial role of context. In their investigation into the relationship between “gender-socialised personality traits” and different types of political engagement, Coffé and Bolzendahl (2020), for example, find that holding more “communal/feminine traits” is unrelated to one’s political engagement (p. 113). In fact, their analysis suggests that women participate as much as men in politics in the Dutch context (p. 127). In her study on the Slovakian radical right, Rashkova (2020) outlines the importance of context when it comes to analysis of women’s political engagement in the “post-communist regions” and how this may differ from that of their Western European counterparts (p. 85). For example, the PRR in Slovakia appear to be more responsive to “women’s issues” than their mainstream counterparts, thus indicating “clear differences” in the PRR’s approach to gender and politics and how this ‘speaks’ to eastern European women (Ibid.). Echoing this, Gwiazda (2020) observes that the PRR in Poland has come to represent the interests of (conservative) women and even “advocate an aspect of conservative feminism” (p. 580). In light of what Coffé (2013) describes in an earlier study as “women’s lower expectations of their own political potential” (p. 334), to what extent are the AfD in Germany able to effectively mobilise female voters and bolster their political efficacy? The following sub-section explores how the ways in which women engage with the PRR today are explored in the relevant academic literature.

### *1.5.2 Different ways of ‘doing’ politics*

The notion that women broadly demonstrate lower levels of political interest than male peers is an accepted “fact” as the studies explored throughout *Section 1.5* have demonstrated (Campbell and Winters 2008, p. 53; Spierings and Zaslove 2015; Mudde 2007). Such a notion continues to hold sway over normative political discourse; Elshtain (1987) describes this as a “standard repetition”; in other words, the idea that women are politically passive is so pervasive that new observations lack the weight to change public opinion (p. 180). The idea that Woman has an essential

character and is predisposed to collectivity is one that finds its origin, in part, in a feminist ethics of care (Gilligan 1982; Downing 2018). In this view, women are “inherently relational, responsive beings” with the “human condition [being] one of connectedness or interdependence” (Ethics of Care 2011). The assumption that women are inherently more peaceful than men explains away the possibility that women make conscious political decisions but nonetheless holds currency with some feminist scholars. Simply put, women are agents of peace in normative political discourse, while men assume the time-honoured role of citizen-warrior in this view (Elshtain 1987, p. 180). To what extent does the idea that women are a homogenous voting bloc who hold the same (or similar) political interests regardless of context or individuals’ own lives and experiences hinder analysis of their motivations for supporting the PRR?

In contrast to some of the studies explored throughout this chapter as a whole, Mudde (2007) asserts that there is no discernible gender gap when it comes to voting for the PRR or far right (p. 113). This ultimately suggests that the reason why fewer women support the PRR is because fewer women hold PRR views (Ibid.). In Siller’s view, however, this line of thinking is nothing more than “indefensible wishful thinking” on the part of researchers (1997, p. 25). Women appear to vote differently from their male counterparts when it comes to the PRR and far right, but the reasons for this have been underexplored (Amesberger and Halbmayr 2002). This does not, however, mean that there are fewer female supporters of the PRR. To this end, Birsl (1996) suggests that “the reticence of women towards extreme right parties and right-wing violence is not the result of their being the ‘peaceful sex,’ but rather that their attitudes are expressed differently because of sex-specific socialisation” (p. 61). Contemporary scholarly work appears to back up this claim in the German context. A 2019 study by Pfanzelt and Spies, for example, observes that while there is a detectable gender gap among German adolescents, there is “no pattern of young German women showing less willingness to engage politically; rather, we observe different preferences for certain forms of participation between the sexes” (p. 45). According to the authors, young German men tend to gravitate toward “institutional and expressive forms of participation,” while their female counterparts are more likely to become involved in “non-institutional, protest-orientated activities” (Ibid.).

This type of observation may also account for the disproportionate overrepresentation of men in the PRR and studies exploring political behaviour; gendered socialisation means that both women and men are conditioned by society into “knowing their place” (Connell 1987; Bows 2018, pp. 171-172). History has shown that women have been prevented from ‘transcending’ the confines of gender, often remaining immanent in a world where men were, and still are, at the centre of political life (de Beauvoir 2010). Traditionally, politics has been understood throughout history as a domain dominated almost exclusively by men and characterised by masculine attributes, whereas women were and still are most commonly associated with the private sphere, i.e., the home and family.

Despite women’s alleged lack of political efficacy, empirical studies have in fact demonstrated that women have employed different strategies to ensure that their voices are heard. Berg (2019), for example, outlines how women in Germany have used social media platforms to plan protests in response to the deaths of several young German women at the hands of their Muslim boyfriends. How have these events impacted on subjects’ attitudes toward Islam and their subsequent support of the AfD? Marczewska (2019) demonstrates how, in Poland, the PRR’s co-option of zines, “handmade, self-published, non-commercial, small-run periodicals, usually photocopied, [and] characterised by a cut-and-paste aesthetic and amateur feel,” has become an increasingly popular way of exploring one’s political affiliation (p. 108). In a US context, Deckman (2016) shows how Tea Party women have adopted a form of “kitchen table conservatism” which bolsters their political participation, whether that be through voting, campaigning, blogging, or simply identifying with a party one way or another (p. 117; Diamond 1995, pp. 4-5). Influential female figures from the so-called Alt Right have carved out successful broadcasting niches for themselves via YouTube channels and even their own TV stations (Mattheis 2018; Mudde 2019). Expanding this discussion further, Miller-Idriss (2020) explores the digital and real-world cultural spaces within which the PRR and far right attempt to engage potential new members: these include YouTube cookery shows, mixed martial arts (MMA) gyms, college campuses, and online platforms such as Reddit or 4chan. This engagement, however, is often complex, and at times highly contradictory. The scholarly literature explored through this section confirms that, in some instances,



women do not necessarily demonstrate a lack of interest in politics, but in fact articulate their political interest through the outlets and avenues most conducive to their own lives and circumstances. For these reasons, then, it is incumbent on researchers to not only explore the different types of issues which engage women in relation to their support of the PRR, but how they engage with politics, and the contextual factors which provide the epistemological foundation for this engagement. The final section of this chapter moves on to explore the scholarly literature on the relationship between women, their alleged higher levels of religiosity, and support for the PRR. This is an important topic given how the PRR today utilises tenets of Christianity in its opposition to Islam and the ways in which this may appeal to women irrespective of their religiosity.

## 1.6 Gender, religiosity and support for the PRR

The processes of diversification and individualisation heralded by modernisation have not only had an impact upon the composition of the workforce and traditional class-based social identities, but postmodern identity politics, pluralism, and the perceived denigration of “religious and rational-legal authority” (Beck 1987, p. 341; Minkenberg 2018, p. 373). Resultantly, scholars argue that the contemporary re-emergence of the PRR from the fringes of the political mainstream, and concomitant “return of religion,” can only be understood within a context of “far-reaching social and cultural change” in post-industrial Western European societies (Minkenberg 2018, p. 373). Despite the secularisation inherent in modernisation processes, many existing, and emerging, PRR parties have used religion to legitimise their ideological positions and situate their activism within the guiding principles of Christian morals and values (Bows 2018, pp. 171-172). The disintegration of traditional social networks is often thought to be the catalyst behind the re-emergence of the PRR, with those individuals “detached” from churches perceived as more likely to support the PRR as they are not integrated into community life and are thus “less subject to social control” (Billiet 1995, pp. 320-321). It is possible that some individuals are more likely to be attracted to the PRR precisely because they offer a sense of belonging in a post-modernisation era (Montgomery and Winter 2015, pp. 380-381). As this section demonstrates, however, the PRR’s fundamental opposition to Islam

presents an additional layer of complexity when it comes to discerning the role that religiosity plays in women's PRR support more broadly and identifies this as a significant area of questioning for the thesis.

The reassertion of Christianity among political actors today functions as “a relevant context factor and frame for political mobilisation” (Minkenberg 2018, pp. 366-367). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the nature of this political mobilisation is inherently gendered: post-WWII scholarship suggests that the gender gap in PRR support is explained in part by the idea that women are more religious than men and are thus less likely to support such parties (Mudde 2007, p. 115). Other scholars argue that the relative “stability” of the religion cleavage means that religious voters will “remain unavailable” to the PRR (Arzheimer and Carter 2009, p. 988). The “truism” that practicing Christians, particularly Catholics, are unlikely to be moved by PRR ideology is one that finds historical provenance in Weimar Germany, when a majority of Catholics opposed the emerging Nazi party (Minkenberg 2018, p. 379). Suffice to say, this truism has already been proven unreliable given that many Catholic-majority countries experienced a profound turn to the right following WWII, as well as the fact that other Christian denominations such as the Mennonites appeared to embrace tenets of Nazism (Ibid., pp. 370-371; Goossen 2017).

At this point, it is unclear how a perceived lack of community cohesion in the years following modernisation would disproportionately affect women and lead them to support the PRR, particularly when it is broadly accepted by scholars that the PRR does not attract religious voters—the overwhelming majority of whom are thought to be women. Underpinning the PRR's alleged return to religion, however, is their renewed opposition to Islam and the perceived Islamisation of Western Europe following the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis. The PRR's leveraging of this issue means that religion has been turned into a “master frame” through which the PRR can more effectively establish a link between themselves and the political mainstream (Minkenberg 2018, p. 374). To what extent has the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis consolidated the AfD and subjects' opposition to Islam in Germany? It can be quite difficult to discern exactly where the PRR stand on various socio-cultural and political issues given that they often “[show] different faces in different policy domains”

(Akkerman 2015, p. 56). As discussion in this section shows, the chameleon stance adopted by the PRR enables them to strategically instrumentalise the topics of the day, many of which affect, and are important to, women. Given what is known about the religiosity of voters today, the assumption that women's alleged high levels of religious belief makes them less likely to support the PRR is explored in the following sub-section.

### *1.6.1 Are religious women really less likely to support the PRR?*

Empirical research on the topic of religiosity and individuals' support for the PRR argues that the actively religious are less likely to vote for PRR parties (Mudde 2007, p. 115). In his influential study, for example, Billiet (1995) explores the hypothesis that Belgian churchgoers are less likely to support the PRR or "negative ideas" about immigrants than non-religious or non-Christian individuals (p. 303). The primary focus of the study is the 1991 Belgian general election in which the extreme right Vlaams Blok (VB) won more than ten percent of the national vote (Ibid.). The "pillarization" characteristic of Flemish Catholicism makes for an interesting case study and provides an insight into how Flemish society is organised on a religious or ideological basis while being simultaneously influenced by the humanistic aspects of the social doctrine of the Church and its embrace of "schools, hospitals, youth movements, cultural associations, [and] newspapers" (Ibid., p. 305). Using multivariate analysis, the author comes to the conclusion that Dutch-speaking practising Catholics in Flanders are less likely to vote for the PRR; those individuals "who are involved in the Church are more integrated into the associative networks and consequently [are] more loyal to the traditional political parties" (Ibid., pp. 305-306, 321). The study undoubtedly gives researchers an insight into the diffusion of Catholicism across all levels of socio-cultural and political life in Flanders, but while Billiet's study is often cited by scholars in relation to women's religiosity and their alleged non-support for the PRR, gender does not appear to form any significant part of its analysis. The solitary mention of gender can be located in a footnote in which the author states that "gender had no net impact, either on voting behaviour or on ethnocentrism, after controlling for church involvement, education level, and professional activity" (Ibid., p. 308). Given that voting is mandatory in Belgium, a

breakdown of voting preference by gender would have proven beneficial in this context and given a more rounded idea of how many women actually voted for Vlaams Blok in the 1991 general election.

In another influential study, Falter (1994) observes that, in a German context, high levels of religiosity and *Kirchenverbindung* (connection to the church) correlates with individuals being less likely to vote for the PRR (p. 80). This finding is particularly salient in regard to Germany's Catholics who typically vote for the centre-right CDU, or *Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern* (Christian Social Union in Bavaria, CSU) in Bavaria (Ibid.). Giving some valuable insight into the historical context underpinning religiosity debates in Germany today, Falter (1994) unpacks the legacy of the *Kulturkampf*—the 'culture struggle' between the Roman Catholic church and the emerging German nation-state in the period 1871-1887—on modern German society. He posits that the processes of industrialisation, urbanisation, domestic migration, and secularisation throughout this period in German history were responsible, in part, for the rise of the *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (National Socialist German Workers' Party, NSDAP) and the erosion of civil society more broadly (Ibid., p. 81). Transplanting this insight to the 1990s, the author assesses figures from a 1993 Konrad Adenauer Stiftung survey and posits that an individuals' lack of *Kirchenverbindung* represents an above-average tendency for individuals to vote for the PRR (Ibid.). Despite Falter's assertion that this *Kirchenverbundenheit* has a significant correlation with other factors such as age and gender (1994, p. 81), it is not entirely clear where German women stand on this issue at the time this study took place.

The finding of correlation between age, gender, and PRR support only serves to reinforce the idea that older women are more religious and thus less likely to support the PRR. This idea is also reflected in more contemporary studies; using data from the 2010 European Social Survey, for example, Montgomery and Winter (2015) posit that despite the PRR going to considerable lengths to defend "Christian identity and values," they do not typically attract religious voters, particularly older women (p. 398). In this respect, the authors suggest that the PRR may even have something of a "vaccine effect" upon constituents (Ibid., p. 382). However, it has been observed in

some countries that an individuals' religiosity strengthens their inclination to vote for the PRR; Mudde (2007) gives the examples of Croatia, Slovakia, and Poland, all countries which experienced a pronounced turn to the right in the years following WWII (p. 115). While the variable of religion "might account for the underrepresentation of some female voters in some countries, it leaves much unexplained" (Ibid.). Further study on the topic is needed in this regard.

In one of the few cross-national empirical studies on religiosity and voter preference, Arzheimer and Carter (2009) observe that while traditional social cleavages like religion "continue to be important in structuring partisan alignments and electoral choice," this cleavage has in fact weakened, with levels of church membership and religious participation in decline (p. 986). In a British context, for example, figures from the 2021 Census reveal that fewer than half of people in England and Wales identify as Christians (Russell and Farley 2022). Furthermore, the number of people identifying as non-religious has increased by a quarter to 37.2 percent (Ibid.).

According to figures from the German Bishops' Conference (DBK), 359,000 Catholics left the church in Germany in 2021, with 228,000 Protestants of various denominations leaving their respective churches (Deutsche Welle 2022a). In the German context "shifting cultural norms, child abuse [scandals], and the COVID-19 pandemic" appear to have influenced this decline in church membership and attendance (Ibid.). At face value, these figures lend credence to Billiet's notion that those individuals without cohesive (religious) community links are more susceptible to the PRR's ideological and programmatic remit (1995, pp. 320-321). However, given that church membership and attendance has fallen dramatically in countries such as the UK and Germany, the broad assumption that women are less likely to support the PRR because of their religious beliefs falls short. In the UK context, for example, the gender gap on this issue has seemingly closed, with a majority of both men and women not attending religious services (Bows 2018, p. 172). Despite this steady decline in religious attendance, organised religion has continued to assume a privileged place in Western European socio-cultural and political life in recent decades (Arzheimer and Carter 2009, p. 986). In the post-9/11 era, there have been "considerable domestic tensions" between Christian majorities and a "host" of minority groups that become increasingly defined—by themselves and others—in

religious terms; this is particularly salient in regard to Islam (Ibid.). The sub-section which follows moves on to investigate the scholarly literature on the gendered religious rhetoric deployed by the PRR and whether parties' anti-immigrant and anti-Islam platforms are more likely to garner women's support, regardless of whether they are religious or not.

### 1.6.2 *The 'Islamisation' of Western Europe*

The PRR have not been regarded by scholars as providing "credible alternatives" for religious voters in Western Europe (Immerzeel *et al.* 2013, p. 946; Arzheimer and Carter 2009). However, many European PRR parties have capitalised on anti-immigrant and anti-Islam sentiment in recent years, shrewdly emphasising religious divisions "by presenting themselves as the safeguards of [...] 'Judeo-Christian societies'" in the face of the perceived threat posed by Islam and Muslim immigrants (Immerzeel *et al.* 2013, p. 946). Following the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis, for example, the PRR have used gendered religious rhetoric to champion issues such as gender equality and LGBTQ+ rights in order to reinforce and reproduce normative discourses surrounding "the core [Christian] civilisational values of the West" (de Lange and Mügge 2015, p. 64; Akkerman 2015; Allen 2014; Bows 2018; Farris 2017). The PRR campaigns against "harmful cultural practices" vis-à-vis Islam, namely, forced marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM), and the wearing of burkas and headscarves (de Lange and Mügge 2015, p. 64). Underpinning all of this inflammatory rhetoric is the idea that Islam is fundamentally incompatible with Western European norms and values.

The anti-Islam, and seemingly pro-Christian, stance of the PRR has been consolidated following a number of high-profile incidents involving the abuse and exploitation of young white girls by Muslim men. The Rotherham case in the UK, for example, has "fuelled the narratives of PRR and extremist groups who have cynically capitalised upon the experiences of survivors to declare their support and protection of British values and British white women" (Bows 2018, p. 174). In Germany, the rape and murder of Susanna F. by her Iraqi boyfriend has "been swept up in a grand argument about the lingering effect of the refugee crisis and the future of [Germany]" (Mounk 2019). As such, Islam is clearly identified by the PRR and broader far right as

a “destructive and alien doctrine” which must be opposed by any means necessary (Allen 2014, p. 357). The now-defunct Britain First, for example, saw themselves primarily as a defence against “the rapid growth of Islam” and claimed that they alone could provide “frontline resistance,” a phrase which echoes the “leaderless resistance” approach taken by US extremist groups (Ibid.; Kaplan 2018, p. 512). While it is unclear whether Britain First’s followers are also adherents to its own particular brand of “apocalyptic Christianity,” their campaigning evidently resonated with a cross-section of the British public; in 2014, Britain First’s Facebook page had over 477,000 ‘likes,’ more than the Conservative and Labour parties combined (Allen 2014, pp. 354, 358). While Facebook ‘likes’ do not equate to votes at the ballot box, this case demonstrates the popular appeal of groups like the former Britain First, particularly its opportunistic use of social media and constant “drip-feed [of] nationalistic and Islamophobic content” to a largely passive audience (Ibid., p. 358). The PRR and broader far right have successfully instrumentalised the cases outlined here and this appears to resonate with individuals regardless of their religiosity.

In contrast to the idea that the PRR do not offer a ‘credible alternative’ for religious voters, the AfD’s Christian members played an integral role in the development of its foundational doctrine. While, ostensibly, the AfD began life in 2013 as a Eurosceptic party, it expanded its Christian wing under the remit of erstwhile party leader Bernd Lucke, a devout Calvinist (Kemper 2014, p. 17). According to Lucke, this move was wholly in line with the party’s organising principles: “I welcome the fact that there are Christians in the AfD organizing in working groups [...] That fits our profile as a value-orientated party” (Ankenbrand 2014 cited in Kemper 2014, p. 18). Following Lucke’s unceremonious ousting from the AfD in 2015, however, the party’s stance on a range of social issues became increasingly hard-line, in part, through the influence of affluent members such as Christian evangelical Beatrix von Storch (Sundermeyer 2018, p. 119). Von Storch and her husband, for example, are the founders of *Netzwerk Zivile Koalition e.V* (Civil Coalition Network), a right-wing conservative amalgamation of websites which campaign on issues from tax reform to abortion and the ‘protection’ of heteronormative family life and maintain close links with Germany’s burgeoning anti-choice movement.

The AfD's embrace of Christian evangelicals is not an isolated phenomenon; the PRR on both sides of the Atlantic have been particularly adept at using "Christian symbols and language in order to appeal to voters' concerns about national and cultural identity" (Cremer 2021, p. 1). Furthermore, scholarship has revealed that PRR parties like the AfD are typically not only part of influential domestic networks, but transnational ones. The ideological and programmatic messages of the PRR are thus disseminated by a "broad front" of right-wing actors who may not have previously cooperated, "among them mainstream conservatives and far-right groups as well as fundamentalist Christian and Muslim groups" (Grzebalska and Pető 2018, p. 165). In 2017, for example, the annual conference of the controversial World Congress of Families (WCF) took place in Hungary, with the Hungarian government offering its financial and operational support to the event organisers (Félix 2018, p. 112). In the US, despite erstwhile US president Donald Trump's inconsistent endorsement of cornerstone Republican issues, he managed to secure the support of several anti-choice and Republican women's groups such as the National Federation of Republican Women, Concerned Women for America (CWA), and the Susan B. Anthony List in the run-up to the 2016 presidential election (Williams 2018). The extent to which Trump himself adheres to this worldview remains unclear; it is likely that this 'turn' to the Christian right was merely a cynical ploy designed to win support from hard-to-reach demographics. However superficial, Trump's advocacy of these issues has given the Christian right in the US an extremely powerful voice and offered a 'credible alternative' to other, more 'mainstream' candidates.

Empirical studies on the topic of religiosity and PRR support typically conclude that "religious people are neither more nor less hostile toward ethnic minorities and thereby neither more nor less prone to vote for a radical right party" (Arzheimer and Carter 2009, p. 985). Discussion in this section suggests, however, that researchers need to cast a critical eye over the contextual factors which broaden the popular appeal of the PRR. While figures show that fewer people are attending religious services across countries such as the UK and Germany, the PRR's co-option of gendered religious discourse as it pertains to Islam appeals to women and is thus "absolutely essential for racist and authoritarian demands and right-wing mobilisation" (Berg 2019, p. 80). Furthermore, this strategic deployment of so-called



Christian norms and values on the part of the PRR enforces discursive distinctions between “genuine” and “fake” citizens and destabilises community cohesion even further (Allen 2014, p. 357). Even if individual women do not identify as religious themselves, religion remains an integral component of the PRR’s ideas surrounding Western European socio-cultural and political identity. This use of religion as a so-called ‘master frame’ enables the PRR to effectively exploit hot-button topics such as gender-based violence, an issue which many women have a vested interest regardless of their background. As touched upon in the introduction to this section, Islam has been identified as a topic warranting further analysis in the German context following the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis, and this has been consolidated following several high-profile cases of rape committed by Muslim men against white German women, as this thesis seeks to explore in greater depth.

### *Conclusion*

Drawing together the four analytical strands discussed throughout this chapter, it becomes evident that a reappraisal of how women identify with the PRR and continue to find its ideas appealing is long overdue. Dominant ideas surrounding women’s alleged socio-economic security, wholesale acceptance of Western feminist values, innate lack of interest in politics, and religiosity reveals very little about individual women’s motivations or the contextual factors underpinning their engagement with the PRR today. Given that, in recent decades, the PRR has been extremely successful in its attempts to recruit female members and seemingly maintain their interest, discussion throughout this chapter suggests that a new epistemological and methodological approach is needed in order to scratch beneath the surface of dominant discourses surrounding women’s political behaviour in this context. In this chapter’s exploration of the existing scholarly literature on gender and support for the PRR, a number of supplementary research questions have also emerged which will help to broaden and deepen this thesis’s exploration of why women join the AfD. Discussion of the influential ‘losers of modernisation’ thesis in *Section 1.3* has raised important questions regarding the extent to which the enduring socio-economic legacies of German reunification influence subjects’ support for the AfD today. An exploration of the impact of the ‘losers of modernisation’ on ideas surrounding

gender, feminism, and women's alleged 'turn' to the left in *Section 1.4* has led this thesis to query whether a conceptualisation of women as a homogenous voting bloc helps or hinders analysis in this context. Furthermore, the ways in which parties like the AfD appear to boost subjects' political efficacy vis-à-vis a number of high-profile sexual assaults committed by Muslim men requires further critical examination. In light of some PRR parties' seeming co-option of ideas surrounding gender equality, same-sex marriage, and LGBTQ+ rights, *Section 1.5* raises questions regarding the AfD's own stance on these issues and the ways in which these messages are received and interpreted by subjects, as well as the extent to which subjects can be said to tolerate violence, discursively or otherwise. Following the PRR's often cynical instrumentalisation of Christianity as a 'master frame,' *Section 1.6* asks whether the AfD's strategic instrumentalisation of the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis consolidates subjects' opposition to Islam in Germany.

In order to effectively address the core and supplementary research questions outlined in both the *Introduction* and *Chapter One*, this thesis will attempt to gain a deeper insight into subjects' motives, as well as the formulative experiences which have led to their AfD membership today. Accordingly, the chapter which follows will provide an extensive overview of the feminist poststructuralist approach taken by the thesis. It will critically engage with issues of reflexivity, agency, and 'giving' voice to subjects whose own potentially anti-egalitarian worldviews pose a distinct challenge to feminist researchers and the broadly emancipatory remit of feminist research. The chapter also pays close attention to the practical elements of the thesis such as the logistics of semi-structured interviewing, accessing relevant documentary source materials, and the translation of interview accounts. It also details the commitment of the researcher to conduct ethical and responsible research, and the challenges they have faced throughout the course of their research journey.

# Chapter Two

## Towards a feminist poststructuralist examination of women in the AfD

*Chapter One* outlined the relative paucity of qualitative research on the topic of why women support the PRR or broader far right in a given country context. Resultantly, this thesis makes the case that it is essential to reappraise how women come to identify with the PRR parties they support and, in an era of global political partisanship, continue to find their ideas appealing. This involves getting a better understanding of the relationship between gender, the PRR, and the women who support them; researchers must “see” both the *general*, i.e., socio-political contexts, language, culture, and history, as well as the *specific*, i.e., countries, groups, and sub-groups (Blee 2017, p. 191). This bridging of the general and specific is necessary if researchers are to deepen their understandings of how, why, and if gender matters in PRR ideology and subjects’ own understandings of their political activism (Ibid.). This chapter not only argues that a (re)turn to the qualitative can help to better unpack the intricacies of women’s political engagement in the context of their PRR support, but sets out how the research questions underpinning this research on the AfD can be answered effectively, i.e., why do women join the AfD and what are the contextual factors which make this support possible? This involves utilising an epistemological approach which centres women at the heart of its analysis, as well as adopting methods which facilitate meaningful communication with research subjects themselves.

In order to imbue the analysis presented in this thesis with epistemological and methodological richness, both its approach and concomitant methods strive to bridge the general and specific, as per Blee’s recommendation. In order to best achieve this, the thesis takes a feminist poststructuralist approach and utilises the methods most commonly associated with feminist research, i.e., interviewing as a means of capturing subjects’ lived experiences at particular moments in time, as well as a close reading of relevant documentary source materials. Given that the PRR and

far right in Germany have, until relatively recently, been relegated to the fringes of mainstream politics, the popularity of the AfD today is significant and makes it a compelling case study in and of itself. A close examination of the general conditions and specific factors which facilitate subjects' support for the party are best explored within the context of *one* case study, capturing the richness and thickness of the evidence base underpinning analysis throughout this thesis.

This thesis's focus on women is important. Firstly, current scholarly work on the topic has caused researchers to 'underestimate' the appeal and impact of the PRR on women; an assessment that recent political events have proven somewhat naïve given high levels of female support for the PRR across Europe and beyond, as explored in *Chapter One*. Secondly, this work has also obscured understandings of gender and political participation with its often-singular focus on male group members (Blee 1996, p. 681). By employing an approach and methods which facilitate a feminist investigation of the subject matter at hand, this thesis seeks to shed light on where female AfD members situate their own activism within dominant political discourses. This qualitative lens will help this thesis to gain a deeper insight into subject motivation as its methods pay "greater awareness" to both the internal working of the PRR, as well as the role that culture plays "in the meaning [subjects] attribute to their actions" (Toscano 2019, p. 2). At the core of the approach taken in this thesis is its problematisation of issues such as truth, social reality, and even the nature of subjectivity itself, unsettling dominant assumptions surrounding the "[illusory] centred, pre-existing political subject" (Edkins 1999, pp. 15, 41). With all this in mind, this thesis should be able to gain a valuable insight into the motivations of the women behind votes for the AfD at the ballot box.

This chapter first offers a rationale for its single case study approach. It then explores the epistemological and ontological foundations of the thesis, providing an insight into its adoption of a feminist poststructuralist approach, and how this thesis engages with tenets of gender to answer its core research questions. It then moves on to address the concomitant issues of researcher reflexivity, subject agency, and the intersections of these with gender, race, and class. The thesis's approach to recruiting participants and the benefits of a semi-structured interview method is then

discussed. The chapter moves on to examine the collection of relevant documentary source materials, and the use of Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA) as a means of interpreting these materials. Following on from this, the chapter then addresses important questions surrounding the validity, reliability, and generalisability of its approach, methods, and qualitative data collection. It then reflects on the ethical implications which arose as a result of these epistemological and methodological choices, as well as issues of power inherent in the translation process. Throughout this chapter as a whole, the challenges faced by the thesis, and their eventual resolution, are discussed and reflected upon.

## 2.1 Case study rationale

The strength of a case study approach lies in its ability to bridge the general and specific: this thesis investigates the resurgence of the PRR in Europe (i.e., the general), and how women in the German context negotiate their own understandings of their support for the AfD (i.e., the specific). This thesis in fact began life as a comparative study between the UK and Germany. This was for two primary reasons: firstly, both countries experienced political upheaval in light of the Brexit referendum in 2016 and the 2017 German federal election. Secondly, when this thesis was first conceived, there were a number of visible and high-ranking PRR women in both country contexts, but particularly in Germany where women such as Alice Weidel and Beatrix von Storch remain a core part of the AfD's national leadership to this day. Due to the logistical and pandemic-related challenges of recruiting UK participants (see: *Section 2.5* for more discussion on this), it was decided to proceed with the single case study of Germany, albeit with comparative elements that could still incorporate some of the UK findings that were collected if necessary. Upon reflection, this has proved advantageous for the thesis; its focus on one case allows for a deeper exploration of the German context, as well as the dynamics of issues within the party itself and how these might resonate with subjects. As a result, the thesis research model has proved feasible and rigorous, and has produced findings which provide an original contribution to the academic literature on the topic of women's engagement with the PRR.

Case studies are understood by this thesis as referring to research that focuses primarily on a single issue or case in contrast to research which seeks wider generalisability across numerous cases (Reinharz 1992, p. 164). The use of case studies, broadly speaking, is beneficial as it facilitates an in-depth investigation into specific phenomena which is typically a location, community, or organisation, with such investigations contributing to a greater understanding of these “individual, group, organisational, social [and] political” interactions (Bryman 2016, p. 61; Yin 2009, p. 4). Comparative case studies, or “paired comparisons,” are usually most associated with research seeking to test hypotheses; according to Klotz (2009), “most qualitative studies [end up falling] into the murky range of small-*n* studies” (pp. 53-55). Firstly, despite thesis changes, evidence shows that small-*n* studies can still have a significant impact on their respective fields; for example, Connell’s 1991 study on the construction of masculinity among young working-class men on the fringes of the labour market had only eight subjects. Similarly, Messerschmidt’s *Nine Lives: Adolescent Masculinities, the Body, and Violence* (2000) provides a complex insight into the lives of nine white working-class males and their engagement with sexual or assaultive violence as a masculine practice. Secondly, this thesis does not seek to test specific hypotheses; in this respect, the analysis presented here is heuristic, attempting to shine a light on a relatively underexplored topic. Given its focus on a single case study, then, the ‘trade off’ faced by this thesis is that its findings cannot be generalised across comparator countries, but this does not necessarily present a problem in terms of ensuring the reliability and validity of the thesis or undermine the empirical vigour of its methodological approach (see: *Section 2.9* for more discussion on this).

However, “cases are cases of something,” and it is important for researchers to clarify the purpose of their thesis, as well as its theoretical framework and rationale for case selection (Klotz 2009, p. 43). The German case is an object of interest in its own right following the election of the AfD to the Bundestag in 2017; this represents the first time since WWII that a PRR party has won seats in the German parliament, as outlined in *Introduction*. Additionally, the high visibility of women in the AfD makes this case study particularly compelling, given the party’s increasingly *völkisch* worldview. Appropriate case selection also depends on the ontological and

epistemological approach of the researcher as well as “the questions and concepts embedded in [their] theoretical presuppositions” (Ibid., p. 44). Given the feminist poststructuralist approach taken by this thesis, as well as the interdisciplinary nature of case study research, the case study method, according to Bennett and George (2005), proves especially useful to researchers studying the complex intersections of discourse and identity (p. 9). Additionally, case studies have been used by feminist scholars such as Enloe in her seminal work *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (2000) and Hyung-Sun Moon in *Sex Among Allies: Military Prostitution in US-Korea Relations* (1997), successfully demonstrating the critical role that women play in the construction and maintenance of international politics, regardless of their occupation or socio-economic status. Furthermore, scholarly work such as Pilkington’s *Loud and Proud: Passion and Politics in the English Defence League* (2016) demonstrates how a single case study can wield compelling insights into a given phenomenon. Having outlined the rationale for a single case study in this section, the chapter moves on to investigate how a feminist poststructuralist approach enables the thesis to critically engage with the subject matter at hand, centre women as research subjects in their own right, and facilitate meaningful critical reflection of the research process.

## 2.2 Feminist poststructuralism and gender

Researchers have traditionally relied upon quantitative epistemological and methodological approaches to discern the ‘truth’ about phenomena in the social world. This thesis, however, utilises a feminist poststructuralist approach which recognises that both the production of knowledge and subjects’ self-constitution is socio-culturally, politically, and historically contingent. This section begins by discussing the influence of feminist approaches on the thesis, moving on to explore the benefits of incorporating elements of poststructuralism in order to effectively answer the research questions at hand.

### 2.2.1 Feminist approaches

There are numerous strands of feminism and while feminists may not always view the social world through the same epistemological lens, they typically share the ontological view that gender is central to their worldview. Despite this shared

ontological viewpoint, it is very difficult for feminist researchers to provide a conclusive definition of 'feminism' when it is subject to so many competing gazes. Broadly speaking, feminism can be defined as the theory and practice of achieving equality between men and women; it is particularly concerned with the "theoretical articulation of the emancipatory aspirations of women," though there is some disagreement when it comes to discerning what in fact constitutes 'emancipation' and how 'women' as a social group can be defined (Hoffman 2001, p. 195). Feminism, however, "can [...] express itself through particular and diverse forms," including philosophical thought, theory and activism (Ibid., p. 194). This thesis utilises tenets of feminist theory to legitimise women's epistemological knowledge through its centering of women as subjects of research, not objects; this is a particularly important task given the androcentric origins of the social sciences. While the approach taken in this thesis does not subscribe to one strand of feminism (i.e., liberal, radical, Marxist, and so on), it broadly aligns to Harding's conception of feminist standpoint epistemology and argues that "the 'subjective' social position of women must be taken into account as a factor influencing the production of knowledge" (Hoffman 2001, p. 196; Harding 1991). Conceptualisations of feminism, however, cannot be 'converted' into convenient sets of empirical indicators; the methods most commonly associated with feminist research, interviewing, for example, are used to develop a meaningful insight into women's engagement with the AfD while recognising that knowledge is historically contingent. As the proceeding analysis chapters explore in greater depth, women's support for the AfD is situated in particular ways across time, space, and place.

Women are the central focus of this thesis, but feminist approaches are not the sole domain of researchers who identify as women nor those who identify as feminist. With this in mind, however, Ackerly (2009) posits that researchers who *do* identify as feminist are particularly well-suited to feminist research as they are attentive to power and its in/visibilities and the marginalisation facing women and disadvantaged groups, as well as committed to self-reflexivity and ongoing critical reflection when it comes to the appraisal of their epistemological and methodological choices (p. 28). Furthermore, feminist researchers are typically united in the view that gender is "pervasive" in global politics; it is a social construct which comes to represent



normative power relations (Locher and Prügl 2001, p. 116). Gender—“how women, men, and non-binary persons act according to feminine, masculine, or fluid expectations of men and women” (Davey *et al.* 2019, p. 4)—is one of the central concepts employed by this thesis and its investigation into the roles and motivations of female AfD members. Consequently, this researcher recognises the ‘pervasiveness’ of gender while acknowledging how “factors such as culture, personal preference, and time shape conceptions of gender,” making it “dynamic and highly context-specific” (Locher and Prügl 2001, p. 116). The analysis offered by this thesis thus draws attention to both the general *and* the specific, as outlined in the introduction to this chapter.

It is, however, beyond the scope of this thesis to provide a systematic gender analysis. Due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the fieldwork element of this thesis, it proved impossible to return to Germany following a first extensive period of two months in 2019; later attempts to recruit more subjects via Zoom proved unsuccessful (see: *Section 2.5* for more discussion on this). Despite these logistical challenges, the initial period of fieldwork helped to highlight the critical importance of gender-related issues which had not been sufficiently included in the original design of the thesis, i.e., the views and attitudes of male AfD members. Expanding its critical feminist lens, then, this thesis also examines the views, experiences, and party engagement of male AfD members using the evidence available at the time. This insight into the different positioning taken by men as well as women builds toward a gendered analysis. Documentary source materials—particularly the semi-autobiographical monographs of prominent male AfD elected representatives, both past and present, such as Björn Höcke and Bernd Lucke—gave some insight into the ways in which the AfD’s ideological and programmatic messages are interpreted by its male members and how this might compare with their female counterparts. This has allowed the thesis to examine the extent to which the women and men of the AfD operationalise understandings of, and position themselves in relation to, cornerstone party issues.

Some scholars have argued that feminism does not constitute a research method and therefore can only be regarded as a perspective, but, as Harding (1991) points

out, while there is “no single set of claims beyond a few generalities that could be called feminism [...] feminist discussions are both enriched and constrained by the different political, practical, and conceptual perspectives that they [feminist approaches] bring to bear on science, its beliefs, practices, and institutions” (pp. 1, 6). With all this in mind, the thesis has utilised an additional poststructuralist angle in order to effectively explore the contextual factors underpinning women’s decision to join the AfD, as the next sub-section outlines in greater depth.

### *2.2.2 Poststructuralist approaches*

Poststructuralism can be considered a complimentary epistemological and methodological counterpart to a feminist approach as it also strives to “expose discursive sites of power through [its] investigation into how power is produced, maintained, and reproduced in androcentric global institutions and systems” (Williams 2018, p. 21). As is the case with feminism, poststructuralism does not lend itself to easy definition; following Campbell (2007), it is understood by this thesis as “a critical [approach] which calls attention to the importance of representation, the relationship [between] power and knowledge, and the politics of identity in the production and understanding of global affairs” (cited in Hansen 2011, p. 358). The value of a dual epistemological approach such as this lies in its ability to unpack the relationship between discourse and power, as well as its attempts to understand where subjects locate themselves within dominant socio-cultural and political discourses. Subjects themselves are products of power, with power fundamentally linked to the construction, maintenance, and reproduction of discourses which emerge from particular socio-cultural, political, and historical conditions. This thesis recognises that the formation of discourse is not only linked to language but “institutionalised patterns of knowledge that govern the formation of subjectivity” (Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine 2017, p. 110). What can be said? By whom? To what extent are subjects able to think, feel, and act in certain ways within the context of party life?

If a feminist poststructuralist approach draws attention to what Ackerly (2009) calls the “unquestioned differences and inequalities that conceal the exercise of power” (p. 30), while typically giving marginalised groups a forum through which their

experiences can be ‘vocalised,’ how can this thesis reconcile giving women with potentially non-egalitarian views a platform? The thesis runs the risk of inadvertently privileging white, cisgender voices within the PRR as it is not able to canvas a more representative sample of subjects due to the nature of the research being undertaken. Despite this, the dual approach taken by this thesis is beneficial in three significant ways. Firstly, the thesis centres women as research subjects in their own right in comparison to studies which have been dominated by the “salient” image of white working-class men (Bows 2018, p. 169). Secondly, tenets of gender will be used to emphasise certain issues and interrogate dominant discourses surrounding women’s political subjectivity and their sometimes-contradictory engagement with the AfD’s ideological and programmatic remit. Lastly, a feminist poststructuralist approach consolidates the idea that women are important socio-political actors whose engagement with the social world has broader implications for global politics. This dual approach then, not only draws attention to the masculinist bias of social sciences, but also works to “unsettle the norms” which maintain and reproduce this bias (Zalewski 2007, pp. 303-304). It is only through attempting to understand where women in the AfD locate themselves in discourse that this thesis can adequately assess where they are headed and what consequences their activism might have for global politics. In order to facilitate this understanding, researchers must be prepared to reflect upon their own epistemological biases and critically engage with broader issues surrounding the exercise of power throughout the research process. As the next section outlines, this process of reflection is an integral component of a feminist poststructuralist approach that recognises the importance of both researcher and subject situatedness.

## 2.3 Reflexivity

At this stage, several important questions arise: How can researchers effectively investigate the relationship between power, identity, and subjectivity in ways that pay attention to the potential ‘real world’ impact of their research? How can researchers avoid bias in their work? Ackerly and True (2008) suggest that researchers can overcome potential issues through a close “attentiveness to the power of epistemology, boundaries, relationships, and the situatedness of the researcher” (p.

694). Observing these four commitments, posit the authors, can lead researchers to better reflect upon their chosen methodology, research questions, the methods which best facilitate data collection, and even what type of data is best suited to the research project at hand (Ibid.). This critical reflection on the part of researchers can take place at any stage of the research process and encourages a “feminist-informed research ethic” that constitutes a set of questions not “decisive answers”; a feminist research ethic, then, “is a commitment to inquiry about how we inquire” (Ibid., pp. 694-695). The proceeding discussion demonstrates how this thesis pays attention to the four commitments outlined above and how this attentiveness will strengthen its epistemological foundations.

Broadly speaking, an epistemology is a way through which researchers can distinguish between different ways of knowing; it is also a “belief system” that requires researchers to explore what constitutes “knowledge, evidence, and convincing argument, and how scholarship contributes to these” (Ackerly and True 2008, p. 695). As touched upon in the preceding section, feminist epistemologies challenge the androcentric origins of social science and knowledge production; this thesis, for example, and its dual feminist poststructuralist approach asks important questions surrounding context, change, situatedness, and power. The first commitment, an *attentiveness to epistemology*, does not necessarily mean privileging or accepting the narrative accounts of subjects at face value, but ‘locating’ these accounts in particular sociocultural, political, and historical discourses and critically engaging with the question of power, unpacking who gets to say what, when, and to what end.

Research, according to Ackerly and True (2008), “is often impoverished by the accepting of conventional boundaries that separate disciplines” (p. 697). As discussion in *Chapter One* demonstrates, for example, the four dominant assumptions that have guided scholarship on the topic of women and their engagement with the PRR or broader far right have led to substantial gaps in researchers’ understanding of this topic. This thesis takes a new approach which scratches beneath the surface of normative understandings of women’s political behaviour in this context, offering an insight not only into how and why women come

to support the AfD, but where and when. Furthermore, this thesis is an interdisciplinary one, placing particular emphasis on the establishment of dialogues between disciplinary fields, and realising the potential for the reinterpretation of phenomena in the social world (Lowe and Phillipson 2006, p. 167). This Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)-funded thesis falls broadly under the disciplinary remit of politics and international relations but demonstrates the malleability of *boundaries*, the second commitment, through its interdisciplinary engagement; this thesis also draws insights from history, sociology, and cultural studies. While the establishment of disciplinary boundaries can sometimes feel like “an inevitable part of knowledge creation” (Ackerly and True 2008, p. 697), the interdisciplinary approach taken here contributes to a broadening and deepening of understandings as to why women support the AfD in Germany.

The third commitment advocated by Ackerly and True (2008), an attentiveness to *relationships*, means that researchers should be “concerned with the ways in which social, political, and economic actions are interrelated with others’ actions and lives. Including the actions and lives of [...] research subjects” (p. 697). Neglecting to disentangle the interconnections between researcher and research subject may cause the former to overlook the dynamics of power within a given research relationship. While this researcher holds fundamentally different views to those of their subjects, they would be remiss if they did not recognise their own privilege as a white, cis-gender person. This almost certainly helped the thesis to recruit the subjects it did and facilitate rapport; at no point during their overseas fieldwork did the researcher feel unsafe or threatened by the AfD or its members. A researcher of colour or someone from a different background might have had a very different experience. Research is thus an exercise of disciplinary power, and this researcher is mindful that a re-examination of their epistemological and methodological privileges is an essential component of the research process.

A reflection on the fourth commitment, then, *the situatedness of the researcher*, helps this thesis to unpack not only the dynamics of researcher-research subject relationships, but “the relationships of power in which [researchers] are embedded” (Ackerly and True 2008, p. 698). This researcher recognises, for example, that they

are embedded in a relationship of power with an elite academic institution. Potential subjects may perceive this 'embeddedness' as a form of privilege or as representing the exclusive nature of academia; as Ackerly and True (2008) observe, researchers "also participate in the powerful projection of knowledge in the world" (p. 704), inadvertently or not. Furthermore, if feminist research is broadly informed by the accounts of "un-included" groups (Ibid., p. 700), this thesis runs the risk of giving the PRR in Germany a potentially prominent platform.

Research practices such as those described throughout this section have made a significant contribution to the development of approaches which encourage researchers to be more reflexive (Sampson *et al.* 2008, p. 921). This also helps to facilitate research designs that are "more conscious of power relationships and responsibilities in research, more sensitive to arguments about knowledge, [and] how it is 'created,' endorsed or identified, and by whom" (Ibid.). While a reflexive approach is not entirely exclusive to feminist researchers, it has had a strong influence on the development of qualitative research methods. However, according to Sampson *et al.* (2008), this adherence to tenets of feminist research may in fact lead researchers to focus too much on the impact of research on subjects while neglecting "their own emotional vulnerabilities"; emotional risk is, according to the authors, "an inevitable part of close research relationships" (pp. 929-930). Building upon the idea that emotions are intrinsic to the research process, Tyagi (2017) affirms that: "feminist research has made a strong case for emotionality as a legitimate part of not only the research process but also, as a valid addition to the data gathered" (p. 323). To this end, this researcher kept a diary during their time in the field not only to reflect upon matters pertaining to research but their own thoughts and feelings. Confronting one's emotions while in the field can help researchers to gain a critical insight into the phenomena at hand as well as lend an epistemological thickness to their subsequent analysis. While emotional risk cannot be entirely mitigated, the issue itself is an important one. Furthermore, there are some enduring questions as to how this researcher recognises the impact that PRR or far-right discourse has not only on themselves, but those groups typically targeted by these parties, groups, and movements. Establishing research practices that are attentive to matters of epistemology, boundaries, relationships, and researcher

situatedness substantively improves the quality of feminist scholarship while challenging established disciplinary traditions. Having discussed the importance of research reflexivity and how this is an essential component of a feminist poststructuralist approach in this section, discussion moves on to unpack ideas surrounding subject agency and how the thesis critically engages with subjects and their accounts.

## 2.4 The subject of agency

Viewing subjects through a critical lens, this thesis posits that subjects do not produce discourse, but are products of it. Subjects are in fact, as Kendall and Wickham (1999) observe, active in producing themselves in discourse in the sense that they are “subjected” to disciplinary power (p. 52). ‘Subjects’ differ from ‘individuals’; the former represents a “historically contingent phenomenon” (Ibid., p. 53), whereas the latter has been understood historically as intrinsically rational and ‘natural,’ as per Enlightenment-era thinking. Consequently, researchers employing critical methods seek to explore how subjects become the site upon which processes such as society, culture, history, and sexuality take place, and problematise the idea of the individual (Ibid.). This problematisation enables this thesis to recognise both the “perpetual nature” of history, as well as ongoing processes of discourse formation (Ibid., pp. 22-23, 24). As Sjoberg and Gentry (2015) point out, “people do not make choices independent of either people or social structures” (p. 138). These choices are typically “heavily” and/or “differentially constrained” by social structures and their concomitant expectations and one’s own position in socio-cultural and political life vis-à-vis gender, class, race, and so on (Ibid.; Hirschmann 1989). This thesis recognises subjects’ agency but in its problematisation of choice, contextualises subjects’ political choices within a social world which influences subjects, as well as the availability of choices made available to them within a particular discursive ecosystem.

While subject agency is a central tenet explored here, it is recognised that it is not enough to simply just ‘accept’ the agency of those AfD women interviewed for this thesis. Given the remit of this thesis and its in-depth investigation into the factors which have led women in Germany to join the AfD, there is a risk that it might

inadvertently downplay or undermine women's seeming tolerance for violence (see: *Chapter Four* for more critical discussion on this). Critiquing the notion of agency, Åhall (2012) posits that the question of how much agency subjects have in a given context rests on the assumption that subjects are "instrumental actors that confront an external political reality" (cited in Sjoberg and Gentry 2015, p. 147). Additionally, given that agency is, the "currency by which political subjects are often recognised in Western liberal thought" (Sjoberg and Gentry 2015, p. 149), it becomes incumbent on researchers to detangle the complex intersections of politics, power, gender, race, and class through which the articulation of subjects' agency is made possible in the first place. For example, some subjects believe that the lack of women of colour in Germany's federal and state parliaments is due to personal failings, rather than existing and systemic inequalities and are unable to confront their own privilege as white cis-gender women (see: *Chapter Five*).

With this in mind, the agendas of researchers and research subjects "[can] conflict in ways that shape the explanatory role of agency" (Blee 2018, p. 90). Blee (2018) notes that the oral histories of female KKK members in the 1920s reveal that some women attempted to mitigate their role in campaigns of racist violence by claiming that they were simply "swept along" with the tide of history (Ibid.). In contrast to this, female white supremacists in the 1980s-1990s described themselves as "highly agentic" in interviews with Blee (Ibid., p. 91). How agency is articulated by subjects, then, is complicated; researchers search for agency, or lack thereof, but subjects can and invariably will draw attention to their agency in different ways. This can lead researchers into a "preset direction" that merely reinforces their prior biases (Ibid.). The feminist poststructuralist approach taken by this thesis accepts subjects' narrativity as a form of knowledge. However, it recognises that these accounts are confined and do not allow for a broader generalisation of women's motives across different PRR and far-right parties or countries. In line with Sjoberg and Gentry's contention that ideas surrounding individual agency are sometimes examined uncritically within the broader scholarly literature on the topic (2015, p. 159), this thesis asserts that the importance of context—alongside its recognition of subjects as socio-culturally, politically, and historically situated—cannot be understated. Having outlined the feminist poststructuralist lens through which subjects' support of the AfD



is viewed in this section, the chapter moves on to outline how subjects were first recruited to the research study and reflects on some of the challenges posed by these recruitment efforts, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic.

## 2.5 Sampling

This thesis first employed a purposeful sample that allowed it to identify potential subjects based on their relevance to the overarching research question guiding analysis, i.e., why women join the AfD. For example, before overseas fieldwork commenced in 2019, formal letters and emails were sent to every woman AfD *Mitglied des Deutschen Bundestages* (Member of the German Bundestag, MdB), a selection of elected regional AfD *Mitglied des Landtages* (Member of State Parliament, MdL), the central AfD press office, local AfD branches, and associated organisations such as think-tanks. Yet, in the end, those recommendations from women to their peers and colleagues secured a greater number of interviews while in the field. Snowball sampling proved particularly useful in this instance due to what Crouse and Lowe (2018) describe as the “valuable and social interactional knowledge” that can be generated between subjects and those individuals who are referred to a researcher (p. 1532). After sending a letter to the central AfD press office, this was distributed among some members of the AfD mailing list by ‘Petra.’ As a result, women began to contact the researcher via email and phone, stating that they had received Petra’s email and were willing to be interviewed. These women evidently trusted Petra and some subsequent interviews were undertaken on this basis. This enabled the researcher to interact with both rank-and-file AfD members and some of the party’s elected representatives. However, the sending of an extremely formal German-language letter that complied with local letter-writing etiquette proved an important first step in this process.

This thesis was initially designed as a two-country case study comparison alongside the UK. Upon return from two months overseas fieldwork in Germany, it was this researcher’s intention to recruit UK interviewees in January 2020. However, this proved extremely difficult. As with German subjects, formal letters were sent out to a range of women, including some elected representatives of the Brexit Party (now Reform UK) and the UK Independence Party (UKIP), as well as organisations such as

the Britain First Movement. Initially, several interviews were arranged, and then rearranged numerous times, to accommodate potential subjects' prior commitments as well as events beyond their control (for example, weeks of inclement weather in February 2020 left many parts of the UK flooded). The one interview which did take place was an unsettling experience for the researcher; the participant was half an hour late, hostile to the idea of signing a consent form despite having been sent documentation twice via email, insisted on recording the interview themselves alongside the researcher, and used the allocated time to describe their various vendettas against former colleagues. Given later thesis changes, the data from this interview did not end up being used and the participant's personal data will be destroyed as per the timescale indicated in this researcher's application for ethical approval. Similarly, while other women in the UK appeared open to the idea of an interview, they refused to do so over the phone or Skype, with the rest refusing to participate altogether; follow-up emails did not receive a response. The researcher's visit to the 2019 UKIP National Conference also proved to be fruitless in terms of recruiting UK participants. This was a surreal experience overall, not least because of the bizarre array of key-note speakers, including media personality Katie Hopkins. Additionally, while the researcher had received permission from the UKIP press office to attend the event, they felt that their presence was being monitored by security staff. Lending weight to this feeling, the researcher's ticket to a Brexit Party event the following day was inexplicably cancelled and refunded by the event organisers. It became clear quite quickly that delegates of both events were hostile to the idea of talking to a researcher. With these logistical and methodological difficulties in mind, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent national lockdowns which followed in March 2020, this thesis was restructured into a single German case study with comparative elements.

Despite the necessary reorganisation of the thesis, questions surrounding how many subjects were in fact needed for a thesis to be 'successful' remained. As Bryman (2016) points out, it can be challenging to determine an appropriate number of subjects, especially if theoretical considerations guide selection (p. 416). However, this thesis is not deductive as it does not aim to develop new theories regarding women's political participation in the German context; it can be more accurately

described as heuristic as it shines a light on a relatively underexplored research topic. Given thesis changes and the logistical difficulties presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, an addendum was submitted to this thesis's ethical approval in July 2020 with the view to conduct *online* interviews with AfD members via Zoom as and when the opportunity might arise (see: *Appendix G*). Subsequently, a second call for subjects was distributed in September 2020 but was ultimately unsuccessful. In this researcher's view, this was likely due to the pressures of the pandemic as well as potential subjects' distrust of remote interviewing. As it is not the intention of this thesis to generalise across broader cases anyway, a close reading of the original nine interview transcripts and various relevant documentary sources thus form the bedrock of the analysis undertaken across the proceeding fieldwork chapters (see: *Appendix A* for more information on the subjects interviewed for this thesis and summaries of the topics discussed in each session). The following section demonstrates how this thesis's use of qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews have, in conjunction with its feminist poststructuralist approach, enabled it to effectively answer its core research question of why women join the AfD, as well as explore subjects' views on a range of concomitant issues.

## 2.6 Interviewing

A life histories approach (LHA) was considered by this thesis because it would potentially allow it to overcome some of the methodological "problems" posed by standard interview methods such as formal or semi-structured interviewing (Blee 1996, p. 687). While researchers are, as Mullings (1999) describes, "often haunted by the discipline's demands for accounts of the 'real' world that conform to the conventional criteria of validity, reliability, and objectivity found in quantitative methodologies" (p. 339), LHA allows researchers to facilitate a better understanding of phenomena in the social world and subjects' engagement with these. To this end, LHA allows researchers to understand what Blee (1996) refers to as "the sequence and patterning of [subjects'] life events" and enables an in-depth exploration of women's motivations and the meanings they attribute to their own actions (p. 688). However, LHA is not without its own set of limitations: as Scott (1998) points out, this approach can be an uncomfortable experience for subjects, particularly those who

may have experienced trauma or abuse, as the author discovered when conducting interviews with survivors of satanic ritual abuse (SRA) (par. 5.7). Subjects' recollections of events in their own lives will invariably be a "misrepresentation"; as Randall and Phoenix (2009) observe, language and the passage of time play a pivotal role in the "performance" of memory (pp. 126-127). Consequently, it is important for researchers to acknowledge the situatedness of subjects' accounts; this is "as important to the production of 'good' knowledge as acknowledging one's theoretical assumptions and describing the research methodology" (Scott 1998, par. 8.2). Despite this thesis taking a different direction in terms of interview format—a semi-structured interview approach is considered more appropriate, as will be discussed in proceeding paragraphs—this thesis still meaningfully engages with the principles of validity, reliability, and generalisability. Furthermore, the broad feminist poststructuralist approach of this thesis facilitates continual reflection of its epistemological and methodological practices.

During a period of overseas fieldwork in Germany in 2019, female members of the AfD were interviewed. This included both elected political representatives as well as rank-and-file members. While this 'sampling' potentially neglects a range of social movements and other fringe groups, this decision reflects the researcher's commitment to undertaking research in an ethical and professional manner, as well as acknowledging challenges regarding access, time, and expense. For example, one interview took place at the German Bundestag at a strict pre-arranged time, with the researcher having to pass through multiple layers of security, including having to surrender their passport to security staff until the interview had finished. Evidently, utilising an approach such as LHA would have been inappropriate given these constraints. However, the questions designed by the researcher elicited thoughtful responses from subjects and helped to shed some light on where some female AfD members situate their political activism within dominant socio-cultural and political discourse, as well as the contextual factors which facilitate their engagement with the AfD today. These questions ranged from simple icebreakers such as whether subjects were active in politics before they joined the AfD, to more complex questions surrounding AfD controversies or subjects' views on prominent news items (see: *Appendix B* for examples of interview questions).

Broadly speaking, interviews typically “yield rich insights into people’s biographies, experiences, opinions, values, aspirations, attitudes and feelings” and a semi-structured interview approach proves better suited to this thesis as it falls between structured and unstructured methods; questions are specified, but the researcher is able to probe beyond subjects’ responses and “seek both clarification and elaboration on the answers given” (May 2011, pp. 131-132, 134). For example, when subjects alluded to local issues or events in their responses, they were asked to clarify or explain what they were talking about in order to gain a better insight into the contextual factors which underpin their support for the AfD. However, as Bolger *et al.* (2018) posit, interviewing ‘elites’—for example, in this context, those subjects who are elected political representatives at either the federal or state level—“[is] characterised by a particular interaction structure; usually, interviews are seen as having a kind of unbalanced power relations” (p. 720). Such subjects are typically “well aware” of their own elevated positionality in terms of social class and socio-economic status and are “used to being ‘in charge’ and listened to by others” (Ibid.). Subjects who were, at the time of fieldwork in 2019, elected AfD representatives were often quick to point out how busy they were despite having agreed to the interview. Anke, for example, kept the researcher waiting for over an hour; her assistant had to send her messages over WhatsApp to remind her of the appointment.

The binary “implied” in insider/outsider debates is an unhelpful one as “it seeks to freeze positionalities in place and assumes that being an ‘insider’ or ‘outsider’ is a fixed attribute” (Mullings 1999, p. 340). No person, Mullings argues, can consistently remain an insider or outsider; researchers must seek “positional spaces” in which the situatedness of both the researcher and participant facilitates a level of trust and cooperation regardless of socio-cultural or socio-economic differences (Ibid.). This is, of course, easier said than done but making assumptions about subjects’ situated knowledge may lead to a breakdown in communication, and end researcher access (Ibid.). While researchers cannot “be fully located on one side or the other of the insider/outsider boundary” they can represent themselves as being “so located” in order to gain access to subjects, and thus the information they are seeking (Mullings 1999, p. 340). Such a strategy may involve researchers “deliberately” demonstrating

their “expertise” in order to gain the recognition and respect of subjects (Bogner *et al.* 2018, p. 720). Alternatively, researchers may also present themselves as ‘naïve’ or ‘inexperienced’ as “naïve questions stand a good chance of producing the most interesting and productive answers” and “make it possible to gain access to information that might not otherwise be revealed” (Ibid., p. 720). However, this so-called “pretence awareness”—what Glaser and Strauss (1967) describe as researchers feigning ignorance about what subjects say while at the same time promoting rapport—leads inexorably back to the question of how far subjects can be said to have given their informed consent when such tactics are used (cited in Duncombe and Jessop 2014, p. 111). This researcher felt that some degree of epistemological and logistical flexibility was required to establish trust and build rapport with subjects. To this end, it certainly helped that the researcher speaks German, and reassured those subjects who did not feel confident conversing in English. Furthermore, some subjects assumed that the researcher was unaware of broader political debates within Germany and for that reason tended to break down and simplify their explanations, albeit with their own spin on events. In addition to conducting interviews with female AfD members, this thesis has undertaken a critical reading of a range of documentary sources including political manifestos, press releases, online blog posts, semi-autobiographical monographs, and media portraits. The following section explores how this method has enabled this thesis to thicken its analysis of subjects’ motivations for joining the AfD and how these might compare to prominent AfD members such as Alice Weidel, Björn Höcke, and Alexander Gauland.

## 2.7 Analysing documentary sources

Documents are “a ubiquitous aspect of the formation and enactment of contemporary life” (Rapley and Rees 2018, p. 378); in this context, documentary sources have given this thesis an opportunity to ‘locate’ the policy positions of the AfD and examine how these compare to subjects’ own opinions, values, and experiences. In order to discern the veracity of documentary sources, Scott (1990) suggests four criteria that can be used by researchers:

1. *Authenticity*. Is the evidence genuine and of unquestionable origin?
2. *Credibility*. Is the evidence free from error and distortion?
3. *Representativeness*. Is the evidence typical of its kind, and if not, is the extent of its untypicality known?
4. *Meaning*. Is the evidence clear and comprehensible? (p. 6; Bryman 2016, p. 540).

These criteria are evidently a rigorous and useful tool for researchers using documentary sources, but in this context, sources like party manifestos, for example, are subject to competing interpretations. Supporters of a given party would invariably consider its manifesto to be authentic, credible, representative, and clear, as well as outline a party's, and presumably their own, views. The subjects interviewed for this thesis frequently alluded to the AfD's various manifestos and even the Grundgesetz, or Basic Law, when it came to defending or legitimising their position on certain topics. However, interview testimony soon revealed that subjects, while paying lip service to the AfD's stance on issues relating to the three emerging themes of national identity, Islam, and family politics, often privately held very different views on these matters. For example, while campaigning against same-sex marriage on behalf of the AfD, some subjects claimed to be allies to the LGBTQ+ community in Germany (see: *Chapter Five* for more in-depth discussion on this). While this is undoubtedly tricky epistemological terrain for researchers to navigate, the feminist poststructuralist approach used by this thesis is advantageous precisely because it problematises the notion of 'truth' and challenges normative modes of knowledge production. Furthermore, this approach enables the thesis to critically interrogate the subject positions inhabited by its subjects and the contradictions that were present in their interview accounts. Why, for example, would a person host a Syrian refugee in their own home but join an anti-Islam and anti-immigration party? Why would a lesbian join a party that is fundamentally antagonistic to the LGBTQ+ community? Are these seemingly antithetical positions representative of a false consciousness or cognitive dissonance? Or neither?

With these questions in mind, when it comes to the analysis of documentary sources such as political manifestos or official press releases, this process must be undertaken “carefully and critically” as these documents represent a “demonstration” of a certain type of power and may have been written to “mislead” certain groups of people” (Grant 2019, p. 61). Indeed, as the proceeding analysis chapters demonstrate, policies and their perceived solutions do not always toe the party line. Furthermore, AfD supporters more broadly can hardly be said to fully represent party interests despite their activism on behalf of the party itself; this is not a phenomenon restricted to the PRR or far right. To this end, in its analysis of both subjects’ accounts and relevant documentary sources, this thesis explores the ways in which events are constructed by female AfD members and allows for some comparison of these accounts with those recorded in official party documents such as manifestos, policy papers, and speech transcripts. Subjects often attempted to ‘flip’ the narrative on certain events; for example, many subjects were very keen to distance themselves from accusations that the AfD is *rechtspopulistisch* despite the party’s well-documented association with right-wing extremists. Some subjects went so far as to deflect the blame for right-wing terror attacks in Germany on left-wing party opponents, Antifa, and Muslims (see: *Chapter Four*).

Paying greater attention to these issues, then, researchers using documentary sources can better unpack the power relations, hidden meanings, or “calls to action” implicit in many documents (Grant 2019, p. 67). Furthermore, discussion in this section has demonstrated that talk and text are in fact subject to competing interpretations; while this thesis does not seek a singular ‘truth’ in subjects’ accounts of the factors which have contributed to their support of the AfD, it is interested in determining how these accounts align to party positions and where women position themselves in relation to these cornerstone party issues. In order to facilitate this, interview transcripts were uploaded to the qualitative analysis software NVivo where common themes were identified, organised, and coded for ease of interpretation. By identifying these common themes across an examination of the scholarly literature on the topic of women’s PRR support, as well as documentary sources and subjects’ interview accounts, this thesis gets a better idea of the factors that have motivated women to join the AfD as well as unpack some of the more contradictory aspects of



their political engagement in the German context. Subsequently, these dominant themes, national identity, Islam, and family policy, form the basis for the proceeding analysis chapters. In its deep dive into the contextual factors underpinning subjects' support of the AfD, this thesis utilises a Foucauldian-inspired method to better unpack where subjects position themselves in relation to a range of issues and the extent to which this positioning enables them to think, feel, and act in certain ways, as the next section outlines.

## 2.8 Foucauldian discourse analysis

FDA is influenced by the work of French philosopher and academic Michel Foucault and is concerned primarily with how talk and text underpin the construction of social life and the exercise of disciplinary power inherent in these processes. As Foucault (1981) observed in *The Order of Discourse*, “in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised, and redistributed by a certain number of procedures” (p. 51). In other words, what can be said and by whom is prohibited, and, as history has shown, “discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle, discourse is the power which is to be seized” (ibid., pp. 52-53).

Furthermore, power relations “exist in all human interactions and operate through rules of discourse [...] they sanction or prohibit ways of thinking and being-in-the-world and thereby establish and entrench social norms” (Rau *et al.* 2018, p. 345).

With this in mind, this section explores the benefits of using FDA, the thesis's broad utilisation of a six-stage FDA framework, and how feminist scholars may effectively negotiate Foucault's analytic 'blind spots' in relation to gender and the underlying androcentricity of his work.

### 2.8.1 *The benefits of FDA*

The inherent value of FDA lies in its wide applicability; it can be applied wherever meaning is found, and, according to Willig (2015), allows researchers to “[map] the discursive environment that people inhabit” (p. 55), as well as facilitate a meaningful exploration of the relationship between discourse, power, and subjectivity. From a Foucauldian point of view, discourses “facilitate and limit, enable and constrain what can be said, by whom, where and when” (Willig 2013, p. 130). Discourse is

understood by this thesis, following Parker (1994) as “sets of statements that construct objects and an array of subject positions” (p. 245). These constructions make certain ways of seeing and being-in-the-world possible, as well as subject positions, “which, when taken up, have implications for subjectivity and experience” (Willig 2013, *Ibid.*). Foucault described his framework as the history of “focal points of experience” which are studied along three axes: the *axis of knowledge*, “the rules that govern discursive practices that determine what is true or false”; the *axis of power*, “or the rationalities by which one governs the conduct of others”; and the *axis of ethics*, “or the practices through which an individual constitutes itself as a subject” (Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine 2017, p. 111). Crucially, as Kendall and Wickham (1999) point out, researchers using Foucauldian methods recognise that history itself is contingent: “when we say that [...] events are contingent, this is not the same as saying that that anything could have happened or did happen” (p. 6). An understanding of the socio-cultural and historical moments that make certain ways of seeing and being-in-the world possible is thus extremely important; *Chapter Three*, for example, investigates how the experiences of subjects who grew up in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) have had a tangible impact on their political activism today.

Discourses are implicated in the exercise of power and as Willig (2013) points out, “dominant discourses privilege those versions of social reality that legitimate existing power relations or social structures” (p. 130). For example, as explored in *Chapter Four*, while many of the AfD’s various claims regarding Islam and immigration are routinely debunked by academic and media commentators, the party have successfully commandeered mainstream narratives on these topics. Consequently, the anti-Islam and anti-immigration discourses propagated by the AfD and its members not only consolidates and reinforces existing structural inequalities, i.e., Islamophobia, xenophobia, and racism, but uphold and ‘legitimise’ the discourse itself; in other words, it becomes more and more difficult to challenge. FDA, then, is concerned with discourse, how it is constructed, and how it is then used by different actors. FDA can be applied to any instance of text or talk, which, for the purposes of this thesis, includes interview transcripts, manifestos, YouTube videos, policy documents, online blog posts, and press releases. However, one is not necessarily

restricted to the analysis of words; Parker (1992) suggests that researchers “consider all tissues of meanings as texts” (p. 7). Subsequently, FDA enables researchers to engage with a wide range of ‘texts’ which include, but are not limited to, “advertisements, fashion systems, stained glass, architecture, tarot cards and bus tickets” (Ibid.). Parker and the Bolton Discourse Network (1999) even suggest that discursive analyses can be conducted on cities and gardens (p. 8). The idea that time, space, and place can be explored through FDA has proven extremely valuable for this thesis, particularly in relation to issues surrounding national identity and the discursive spaces within which subjects’ support for the AfD has developed over time. It is, as Cresswell (2015) observes, within these places and spaces that subjects must “face, evaluate, and attempt to resolve problems and agendas on a daily basis” (p. 1). Not only are individuals’ “feelings and ideas concerning space and place [...] extremely complex,” they are also imbued with meanings in ways that “cannot always be studied through a field survey or map” (Tuan 1977, p. 19; Miller-Idriss 2020, p. 31). While ideas surrounding belonging and one’s homeland are not exclusive to the often-nativist ideologies of the PRR or broader far right, an exploration of the significance of time, space, and place in the German context is particularly significant. This relates primarily to the spatial baggage subjects sometimes carry in relation to key moments in their own lives, as well as historical events such as living in the GDR, German reunification or the dissolution of Prussia, as explored in greater depth throughout *Chapter Three*.

### *2.8.2 Willig’s six-stage FDA framework*

In order to begin analysis, researchers must select the discursive object bearing the closest relation to the research question(s) at hand, but this also means paying attention to the “problems” that, according to Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine (2017), make certain types of thought possible (p. 116). These ‘problems,’ then, often refer to historical events “in which objects and practices are made ‘problematic’ and therefore visible and knowable” (Ibid., p. 118). In the case of this thesis, it is, broadly speaking, women’s support of the AfD that can be considered ‘problematic,’ given dominant assumptions about women’s engagement, or lack thereof, with the PRR or broader far right, as explored in *Chapter One*. Consequently, assessing the socio-

cultural and historical conditions in which this support has been articulated over time and space is an essential task. However, as Willig (2013) observes, in order to generate answers to one's research question(s), researchers need to be clear about what kind of 'text' is available (p. 131). Is it an account or narrative? How was it produced and who can access it? How do subjects construct meaning in relation to a given topic? When it comes to selecting a "corpus of statements" to undertake FDA, Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine (2017) suggest a number of criteria: these include texts which construct a social problem, describe or explain how objects are constructed, and show "historical variability," i.e., how subject positions may change over time (p. 118). To this end, this thesis uses FDA to interpret both interview data and documentary sources to gain an insight into how the views of the AfD, its elected representatives, and subjects may have changed over time, and what this potentially reveals about the latter's party engagement today and where subjects situate themselves in relation to this.

In order to facilitate analysis, this thesis broadly follows Willig's six-stage FDA framework:

***Discursive constructions.*** The first step of this process is concerned with how discursive objects are constructed, and this is largely guided by the research question(s). Women's support of the AfD, broadly speaking, is the discursive object. The proceeding analysis will identify how this support is constructed across the corpus of statements that have been collected.

***Discourses.*** The second step of FDA aims to locate the various constructions of the discursive object (or subjects in this case) in wider discourses. Which socio-cultural or historical factors may have contributed to women's support of the AfD?

***Action orientation.*** The third step involves "a closer examination of the discursive contexts within which the different constructions of the object are being deployed" (Willig 2013, p. 132). In other words, researchers must explore what can be gained from constructing the discursive object (or subject) in a certain way, and what purpose this framing serves.

**Positioning.** The fourth step, “having [already] identified the various constructions of the discursive object [or subject] within the text, and having located them within wider discourses, [...] a closer look at the *subject positions* they offer [is required]” (Ibid.). This subject position identifies “a location for persons within the structure of rights and duties for those who use the repertoire” (Davies and Harré 1999, p. 35). Where do AfD women locate themselves within “networks of meaning”? (Willig 2013, p. 132).

**Practice.** The fifth step concerns itself with the relationship between discourse and practice. It requires “a systematic exploration of the ways in which discursive constructions and the subject positions contained within them open up or close down opportunities for action” (Ibid.). What are subjects located within a particular discursive construction able to say and do?

**Subjectivity.** The sixth and final step of FDA unpacks the relationship between discourse and subjectivity, and focuses primarily on “what can be felt, thought, and experienced from within various subject positions” (Willig 2015, p. 161). This part of the analysis is the most speculative, because, as Davies and Harré (1999) observe, “a person inevitably sees the world from the vantage point of that position and in terms of the particular images, metaphors, storylines, and concepts which are made relevant within the particular discursive practice in which they are positioned” (p. 35).

Using this framework as a guide, the proceeding analysis chapters explore the relationship between discourse, power, and what subjects think and feel, what they do, and the contextual factors that make this thinking and feeling possible within a German discursive ecosystem in relation to the three identified themes of national identity, Islam, and the AfD’s family politics.

### *2.8.3 Negotiating Foucault’s ‘blind spots’*

FDA can be seen as complementing the feminist poststructuralist approach taken by this thesis as it is similarly concerned with exposing discursive sites of power and how this power is produced, maintained, and reproduced within a given context. Scholars such as Phelan (1990) go so far as to suggest that the works of Foucault

are an essential counterpart to the continued development of feminist scholarship; Foucault is considered an ally to feminists, for example, because of his important work on sexuality (pp. 421-422). However, as Downing (2008) observes in her analysis of Foucault's work on nineteenth century French murderer Pierre Rivière, Foucault's work has a certain "blind spot" when it comes to issues of gender, and "a resistance to spotting the misogyny of underlying discourses" (p. 73). Rivière, who had murdered his mother, sister, and brother, subsequently produced an account of his crimes that allegedly left Foucault and his team spellbound by its "beauty" (Downing 2013, p. 3). This blind spot, then, is "especially notable given that other instances of power relations are so closely and expertly analysed" (Ibid.). As Sawicki (1996) observes, however, "many feminists have used Foucault's analysis of disciplinary power effectively to address the micropolitics of gender," giving the example of Bartky's work on the fashion/beauty complex in the US and the construction of a normative female identity (p. 164). Furthermore, in *The Subject of Murder: Gender, Exceptionality, and the Modern Killer* (2013), Downing herself utilises a Foucauldian approach to subjectivity in order to explore gendered discourses surrounding figures such as Marie LaFarge and Myra Hindley and the legitimization of an "ordinary/extraordinary" dichotomy which locates seemingly "exceptional" women on another realm of analysis altogether (p. 22). The gendered nature of these discursive portrayals betrays an assumption that women's violence is different and, as a consequence, more 'deviant' than their male counterparts. The works mentioned here give feminist researchers an idea as to how one can employ a Foucauldian method while simultaneously challenge its androcentricity. In its centering of women as research subjects in their own right, this thesis, using FDA, can unpack not only how female AfD members are constructed by dominant discourses, but how they construct themselves within these 'networks of meaning.' The following section moves on to explore ideas surrounding validity, reliability, and generalisability as they pertain to the feminist poststructuralist approach taken by the thesis and the methods used to explore the research questions at hand.

## 2.9 Validity, reliability, and generalisability

The feminist poststructuralist approach employed by this thesis finds “conventional social scientific practices objectionable” (Zalewski 2006, p. 50). Furthermore, while, as Damhuis and de Jonge (2022) point out, quantitative scholarly work on electoral support for the PRR and far right gives researchers an insight into the macro level issues that drive party engagement, for example, unemployment or immigration, these studies do not give a deeper insight into the micro-level issues that people navigate on a day-to-day basis (p. 1). This thesis, then, argues that a renewed turn to the qualitative is necessary in order to unpack what Fielding (1981) terms the “perennial” issue of subject motivation (p. 1). Accordingly, this thesis uses a range of qualitative methods to broaden and deepen understandings of why women support the AfD in Germany but argues that it is still possible for it to engage with the three principles most associated with the traditional sciences, i.e., *validity*, *reliability*, and *generalisability*.

**Validity:** The approach taken in this thesis is unable to “bestow legitimacy” on data, but indicates a way in which data—interviews, text, oral histories, and so on—can constitute knowledge, rather than just be considered a “source” of knowledge (D’Costa 2006, p. 139). A feminist poststructuralist approach can thus effectively contribute to “a collective, open and ongoing project in which dialogue and diversity are seen as significant strengths” (Ibid., p. 150). By conducting interviews with subjects, as well as analysing primary and secondary source materials in which male and female AfD members speak with their own ‘voice,’ this thesis enriches understandings of women’s political participation in the German context through its ongoing critique of claims to knowledge which privilege rationality and objectivity.

**Reliability:** This thesis centres women who support the AfD as research subjects in their own right, but a question inevitably arises: How will the researcher know if subjects are telling the ‘truth’ in their accounts of why they support the party? In overcoming this dilemma, this thesis employs epistemological and methodological tools which demonstrate how subjects’ accounts can be transformed into what Scott (1998) refers to as the “knowable” (pars. 1.2, 1.8). This involves drawing a distinction between the accurate reporting of subject accounts, after all, as Fielding (1981)

observes, researchers “must be prepared to let [subjects] give their own accounts” (p. 15), and the broader fact-checking of subjects’ empirical claims. The fact that most interview accounts were given in German, the foreign-language element of data collection adds another layer of epistemological complexity; this is expanded on in *Section 2.11*. This thesis recognises that subjects’ accounts are situated in certain socio-cultural, political and historical discourses which reflect how subjects “come to know, understand, and make sense of the social world” (Somers 1994 cited in Blee 1996, p. 687). These accounts remain confined, but offer an insight into the lives and formulative experiences of a select number of female AfD members.

**Generalisability:** This thesis, like many of the studies discussed in *Chapter One*, cannot make wider generalisations about the motivations of women who join PRR or far-right parties either in Germany or further afield. However, through its engagement with women themselves, as well as an in-depth analysis of AfD materials such as manifestos, press releases, and online blog posts, this thesis aims to shine a light on some of the prevailing assumptions regarding women’s support of the AfD. Additionally, by focusing primarily on the German case study, this thesis deepens its understandings of why women support the AfD by examining where they position themselves in relation to cornerstone party issues, and whether the women and men of the AfD operationalise understandings of AfD discourses to different ends. Having outlined how this thesis and its approach remain empirically rigorous in this section, the discussion which follows outlines how it is necessary to reflect extensively on a range of ethical issues which have arisen as a consequence of the epistemological and methodological choices taken by the researcher throughout their research journey.

## 2.10 Ethical considerations

Research on the PRR invariably raises several ethical issues, not least in relation to researchers’ potential mainstreaming of anti-egalitarian views. In the German context, the AfD’s so-called “cumulative radicalisation” (Bochum 2020, p. 29), has seen the party investigated by the German domestic intelligence services. The AfD’s subsequent monitoring by the BfV in 2021 due to their proven association with right-wing extremists raises some serious questions as to whether such a thesis would be



feasible today given this serious state of affairs. When this thesis was first conceived, these issues were somewhat on the periphery; for example, the leader of the AfD's youth organisation *Junge Alternative* (JA) in Lower Saxony had courted controversy in 2018 by declaring that Hitler had "no choice" but to invade Poland during WWII (Bellut 2018), but no formal action was taken. Additionally, the exclusionary remit and activities of Der Flügel (The Wing), a nationalistic faction within the AfD led by Björn Höcke and Andreas Kalbitz, soon fell under the watchful eye of the BfV, with the BfV announcing in 2020 that the group would be formally monitored by the German security services (see: *Chapter Four* for more on Der Flügel). The central party, however, nor its offshoots were subject to extended investigation at the time that overseas fieldwork took place in 2019. This section reflects upon the ethical challenges facing this thesis, providing an insight into the decisions taken by the researcher in this regard. This thesis received ethical approval from the Cardiff School of Law and Politics ethics committee (SREC) on 21 May 2019 (see: *Appendices C, D, E, and F* for examples of participant-facing documentation in both English and German).

The identification and selection of research subjects is an act of "epistemological power" on the part of researchers which can have a substantial impact on the wider thesis (Ackerly 2009, p. 34). To this end, Blee (2018) suggests that researchers reflect on whether their research should even "be done [and] when questions should not be asked to avoid further harm or trauma to societies" (p. 98). This encourages researchers to make a critical distinction between what is "ethically permissible" and what is "ethically right"; the latter requires researchers to not just act in accordance with what is expected of them by their funder and home institution, but to gain an appropriate level of insight into the possible impact of their research on subjects, subjects' personal and professional networks, and those groups vulnerable to far-right violence (Ibid.). In order to mitigate this issue, as well as reduce the risk of harm to the researcher, subjects, and society more broadly, this researcher chose to focus primarily on a political party that finds its current, albeit precarious, home under the PRR umbrella. For the most part, PRR parties typically operate within "the confines of the law" (Klandersman and Mayer 2006, p. 52). In theory, this reduces the 'risk' of harm to subjects and others and the likelihood that subjects will be belligerent or

disclose information concerning ongoing criminal investigations or terrorism. This, however, can never be entirely guaranteed. In the initial stages of the thesis, potential subjects were scoped from reliable and credible sources, including their Bundestag and Landtag parliamentary webpages, regional AfD branches, and associated organisations. This left a paper trail and gave the researcher some degree of accountability as a representative of Cardiff University. In order to reduce the likelihood that subjects' personal and professional networks would be negatively impacted by their involvement in the thesis, the researcher took the decision to anonymise all subjects, despite several women giving permission for their names to be used. While this is not fully synonymous with a feminist poststructuralist approach committed to centering women as research subjects in their own right, this decision was made due to the likelihood that the subjects who did not give their permission to be named would be identified by outside parties. Subjects' distinctive personal accounts would make them immediately recognisable to AfD members with a degree of inside information about the party and its regional branches. In signing the required consent form, subjects were also made aware of the risk of jigsaw identification, or the idea that their identity could be discerned from different parts of their accounts despite a pseudonym being in place.

Reflecting upon her experiences of interviewing girls and young women in a Hindu right-wing camp in 2013, Tyagi (2017) posits that researchers should also consider the impact of research undertaken in “antagonistic sites” upon their own identity (p. 334). While researchers cannot have a “remedy” for every situation that may arise during fieldwork, “a reflexive and self-critical methodological stance [...] can shed light on our own ideologies [...] making the thesis more honest and ethically sound” (Ibid.). Similarly, Sanders-McDonagh (2014) discusses the personal and professional challenges to researchers conducting “academic dirty work” (p. 241). Drawing upon her qualitative research on women's involvement with nationalist groups in the UK, the author posits that researching “unlovable” groups can render researchers “dirty workers” (Ibid.; Fielding 1981, p. 9). In other words, the “social taint” of engaging with individuals who hold challenging views can make it very difficult for researchers to construct positive identities within particular environments (Sanders-McDonagh 2014, p. 242). Compounding this situation further is the way that such individuals and

groups are perceived both within academia and by society at large, particularly given the fact that academics are routinely expected to “take sides” against certain groups in favour of more left-leaning causes (Ibid., pp. 242-243). However, being a part of a wider research network can help researchers to “legitimise the importance of a field of inquiry and help us acknowledge what is, and what is not, unique about the [PRR] in this political moment” (Massanari 2018, p. 5). This researcher reached out to scholars working on similar topics while in the field, as well as researchers working for prominent German anti-racist organisations. Additionally, the researcher is an active member of several online research networks including EthEx (The Ethics of Critical Research on the Extreme and Far Right). With all this in mind, researching the PRR and broader far right is important and remains a legitimate field of inquiry, not least given the resurgence of such groups and parties in recent decades and their subsequent popularity among voters across Europe and beyond.

Researchers who do not share the worldview of their subjects may find it difficult to establish rapport, or if they do, find it difficult to establish clear boundaries, especially when subjects can often be “convivial, friendly, and charming” (Sanders-McDonagh 2014, p. 243). In his seminal work on the UK NF, Fielding (1981) reflects that many of the NF members he interviewed were generally quite restrained, and very accommodating, but had witnessed an NF by-election candidate “happily” approve a member of the public’s attack on ethnic minorities and women (p. 9). During the course of her research, Sanders-McDonagh (2014) “somehow became publicly affiliated with one [...] group” which made it look as though she was a registered member of “one of the most extreme far-right organisations” (p. 246). This perceived association had the potential to cause serious damage to Sanders-McDonagh’s personal and professional relationships, particularly among a student cohort comprised primarily of individuals from ethnic minority backgrounds (Ibid., p. 247). Luckily, Sanders-McDonagh had substantial organisational support from her home institution and was able to rectify the situation before the damage became irreparable, though the association left her feeling “professionally and emotionally vulnerable” (Ibid., pp. 246-247). For reasons such as this, then, this thesis was registered with Cardiff University as ‘Security Sensitive’ on 21 January 2019 to safeguard the researcher against the threat of radicalization, as well as the risk that

the researcher's online activity would result in an investigation from external authorities.

All research involves particular types of 'cost'; as Renzetti and Lee (1993) posit, the "psychic costs" of studying challenging groups can take the form of shame, embarrassment, and even guilt (pp. 4-5). When speaking to others about their research, this researcher has experienced negative reactions from peers and colleagues who assume that because one studies a certain topic, one must support it. Questions of research validity generally revolve around two dominant themes: firstly, researchers must hold extreme views or sympathise with those who do to undertake such research, and secondly, any research done in this area must be conducted in order to debunk extremist ideology (Jipson and Litton 2000, p. 159). This researcher recognises that research is not value-free, and, furthermore, given that many academics choose to work alongside "powerless or exploited groups," research of 'unlovable' groups may well be considered controversial (Sanders-McDonagh 2014, p. 243). Reflecting on one's positioning thus becomes an essential task, as outlined in *Section 2.3*. The researcher's own situatedness has meant that they have been able to better explore the contextual factors which underpin subjects' decision to join the AfD and gain an insight into the development of subjects' political subjectivity over time, space, and place. This researcher's engagement with female AfD members has undoubtedly been very effective; this researcher takes the view that it is only through speaking to subjects directly that researchers can begin to gain an insight into the AfD's appeal to women and the contextual factors which make this support possible. However, this section has outlined the importance of reflecting on one's own ethical choices during the research process, as well as examining how this process may also benefit from researchers' own privilege(s). The following section extends discussion on these ethical choices in relation to the imbalance of power inherent in translating subjects' personal narratives for research purposes.

## 2.11 Translating language, translating culture

This thesis requires an element of foreign-language research. As an intermediate speaker of German, this researcher has accessed German-language primary and secondary documentary source materials, as well as conducted semi-structured

interviews with a sample of female AfD members *auf Deutsch*. This has enabled the researcher to capitalise upon their existing language skills to fulfil their obligation to both the programme of study at hand and the ESRC, the funders of this research. Subsequently, it became necessary to pay close attention to the potential epistemological and methodological challenges presented by cross-language research while undertaking overseas fieldwork in Germany in 2019. For example, one challenge concerned the clear and accurate translation of interview accounts given by subjects with strong regional accents, as well as navigating unsolicited phone calls from potential subjects; the latter being an unsettling scenario for many language learners. Furthermore, in their unpacking of the role and positionality of the researcher/translator, this researcher also found that they needed to reflect upon the ethical implications of transcribing, translating, and using PRR or far-right data and the power dynamics at play when translating subjects' accounts. Both types of issues are explored throughout this section.

From a logistical standpoint, language learning is an ongoing process regardless of one's proficiency and it is inevitable that one will make a mistake or feel insecure when conversing in another language. As Tremlett (2019) points out, this in fact presents researchers with an opportunity to reflect on the moments that make them anxious or embarrassed when it comes to their learning and use of foreign languages in the field (p. 113). For example, despite being a relatively proficient speaker of German, this researcher sometimes struggled to remember simple German terms and phrases during interviews and was very concerned about appearing unprofessional. However, these moments helped to break the ice with subjects, some of whom did not speak English very well and helped the researcher by correcting their mistakes or simplifying their explanations. Consequently, being able to laugh at oneself and not taking these difficulties to heart is an important but hard-learned skill. However, one's language skills cannot necessarily be equated with what is termed "cultural representation" or "cultural competence" (Resch and Enzenhofer 2018, p. 163). While speaking the language of subjects may facilitate communication, it does not mean that researchers can better relate to subjects in terms of their "education, participation and privileges, life experiences, religious or ideological positions, or the expression of cultural habits" (Ibid.). As researchers often use

English as a lingua franca, “the majority of research accounts are presented in English, giving the impression that the language bears little significance for interpretation” (Ibid., p. 161). Resultantly, there is a risk that researchers may not grasp the “finer points of communication” such as “irony, loaded words, and connotations” (Bolger *et al.* 2018, p. 722). To this end, several subjects told the researcher that they preferred to speak in German because they were unsure how to translate certain terms or ideas. A good example of this is *rechtspopulistisch* (see: *Section 1.1* for more discussion on how definitions vary on a country-to-country basis).

Alongside ‘cultural competence,’ several issues are raised in relation to data collection, fieldwork budgeting, and skills training (Bolger *et al.* 2018, p. 722). The most pertinent of these issues relates to the transcription and translation of interview data. For example, hiring translators or interpreters ad hoc is not without its own set of problems, particularly given that “there is a lack of established criteria by which one’s own and subjects’ linguistic and communicative competences might be assessed” (Ibid.). Additionally, and in line with the broad feminist poststructuralist approach taken by this thesis, additional questions arise relating to the ‘power’ of the researcher/translator to hold themselves accountable for the decisions made throughout the translation process. As Ergun (2021) posits, “in a world where differences are hierarchically coded and violently regulated,” how can researchers/translators unpack “heteropatriarchal regimen of truth”? (p. 114). This epistemological dilemma is compounded here, given the focus of this thesis on the lives and experiences of women who are not typically the focus of feminist research because of their political affiliations and, in some cases, anti-egalitarian beliefs. This thesis has attempted to mitigate this dilemma through its accurate reporting and translation of what subjects have told them; it is, after all, important to let subjects tell their own stories. However, some tension exists between this strategy of accurate reporting and translating of subjects’ accounts and the fact-checking of their broader empirical claims. On the one hand, there is no reasonable way to discern whether a subject’s retelling of a personal anecdote is ‘true’; to this end, a broad feminist approach recognises that knowledge is historically contingent, with subjects’ accounts representing “active processes of reflection and construction” (Scott 1998,

par. 7.1). On the other hand, as Zerilli (2020) observes, the falsehoods “consciously deployed” by PRR or far-right political actors in an era of global political partisanship means that it is vitally important to ‘problematise’ the issue of truth, and enable researchers to make a critical distinction between accurate reporting and simple fact-checking (pp. 7-8). In other words, who gets to tell the ‘truth’ and to what end? What is the impact of this on individuals and collectives?

Invariably, the translation of these accounts from German into English adds an additional layer of complexity to the research process, particularly when researchers/translators themselves are “constrained” by their own “geopolitical and inter/disciplinary situatedness” (Ergun 2021, p. 126). In attempts to further mitigate these dilemmas, the decision was taken by this researcher to transcribe and translate the interview data collected for this thesis themselves, given their in-depth knowledge of the case study at hand, as well as their extensive experience of living, studying, and travelling in Germany. While by no means a perfect solution nor a proxy for ‘cultural competence,’ this insight has enabled this thesis to expose what Haraway (1988) terms “the unexpected openings situated knowledge make possible” (p. 590), assess where women locate themselves in political discourse, and unpack the important contextual factors which make women’s support of the AfD possible today.

This proactive collaboration of the thesis with subjects themselves also helped the researcher to overcome some of these enduring issues. While interview questions were not typically sent in advance unless specifically requested by subjects, the researcher made sure to outline the topics the thesis was most interested in talking about, such as subjects’ views on society, politics, and culture. Subjects were sent a fully translated consent form and information sheet in advance of scheduled interviews and were encouraged to ask questions and contact the researcher accordingly. Some subjects were concerned about the wording of the consent form, particularly the section which outlines the commitment of the thesis to the PREVENT strategy in the UK and mandatory reporting of planned serious crime in Germany. Dagmar (2019), for example, quipped that she hoped she would not be reported to the authorities on charges of terrorism for expressing a non-mainstream view. While

the measures outlined here do not completely mitigate some of the broader issues surrounding 'cultural competence,' language proficiency, and the ethics of translation, it meant that subjects were aware of the aims and objectives of the thesis, the topics that might be broached during interviews, and how subjects' personal data would be used and stored. To date, no subjects have withdrawn their personal data from the thesis.

### *Conclusion*

The feminist poststructuralist approach taken by this thesis has been particularly advantageous; not only has it enabled the thesis to centre women as research subjects in their own right, it has facilitated a process of critical reflection of the researcher's practices and how their decisions can have wide-reaching epistemological and methodological implications in terms of conducting ethical and responsible research. While women who support the PRR or broader far right are not typically the focus of feminist research nor considered consonant with its often-emancipatory remit, this chapter has shown that a feminist poststructuralist approach can in fact facilitate a valuable, yet critical, insight into women's support of the AfD and the contextual factors which make this support possible. Furthermore, the feminist poststructuralist approach taken throughout this thesis challenges normative ideas surrounding the elicitation of so-called 'good' data and, as a result, recognises subjects' accounts as constituting *knowledge*, despite the inconsistencies and contradictions that sometimes emerge from these testimonies.

There is no "unique" feminist method (Tickner 2014, pp. 94-95), yet feminist researchers typically employ those methods most conducive to documenting the lived experiences of their research participants. Examined through a critical feminist poststructuralist lens, the semi-structured interview data and relevant documentary source materials which form the evidence base of this thesis has given it access to personal narratives which might have otherwise been lost among dominant political discourses which often privilege the voices of male politicians and other public figures. Not only has the approach taken by this thesis equipped it with the epistemological and methodological toolkit needed to explore subject motivations in this context, the methods used to collect this data have revealed additional avenues



of interest which broaden and deepen the analysis presented in this thesis. This has enabled it to effectively address both its core research question of why women join the AfD, as well as the supplementary research questions which have emerged from an examination of the scholarly literature (see: *Chapter One*), and the three emerging themes of national identity, Islam, and the AfD's *Familienpolitik*. Furthermore, by expanding its critical lens to include male voices, the thesis is able to unpack the diverse, and often gendered, ways in which the women and men of the AfD operationalise the party's ideological and programmatic messages to different ends. The proceeding analysis chapters are testament to both the strength of a single case study approach, as well as the epistemological approach and methods utilised by this thesis, giving it access to subjects in the field and enabling it to critically engage with their stories. The insights presented in the following chapters would not have been possible without talking to subjects directly.

Some scholars posit that research on women and the PRR is fundamentally flawed because of the alleged “feminist bias” of researchers, i.e., their idea that gender equality is a “normal” part of party politics and that “all women hold modern, or even feminist, views on gender” (Mudde 2007, p. 91). However, women's support for the PRR across Europe and further afield demonstrates the urgent need for researchers to engage with this topic in a different way. In addressing the thesis's core research question of why women join the AfD, as well as the supplementary research questions which emerged from a critical exploration of the scholarly literature, three analysis chapters (*Three, Four, and Five*) draw extensively upon subjects' interview testimonies and relevant documentary sources. *Chapter Three*, for example, explores how subjects ‘practice’ and understand issues relating to national identity, namely, Heimat—a term loosely translated as ‘home’ or ‘homeland’ with connotations specific to German culture and society—freedom, and belonging in the years following German reunification. *Chapter Four* investigates the complex and often performative intersections of subject agency, violence, and extremism as it relates to the topic of Islam. *Chapter Five* unpacks subject responses to tenets of the AfD's *Familienpolitik* as they pertain to ideas surrounding heteronormative families, same-sex marriage, and gender equality. While the idea that women's engagement with the PRR or broader far right reflects their evolving personal and political agency is

sometimes rejected by scholars (see, for example, Morgan 2001), this thesis as a whole explores the influence of time, space, and place in the development of women's political agency and subsequent AfD support, and sheds light on an underrepresented branch of scholarship on gender, political behaviour, and support for the PRR.

The chapter which follows investigates how issues relating to national identity appear to underpin subjects' support for the AfD. It explores the extent to which the AfD's strategic operationalisation of discourses relating to German reunification, Heimat, freedom of speech, and Germany's relationship with the EU resonate with subjects, and the ways in which subjects articulate their motivations vis-à-vis their own formulative experiences of living in the former East Germany.

# Chapter Three

## Heimat, freedom, and belonging: The multi-layered role of national identity in the AfD

### Introduction

The AfD's campaign slogan *Unser Land zuerst!* (*Our Country First!*) aptly demonstrates a way in which the party attempts to appeal to citizens' latent patriotism in the face of perceived existential threat (AfD Kompakt 2022). While this particular example relates to the rising cost of oil and gas in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, slogans such as *Unser Land zuerst!* have discursive power in an era of global political unrest in which ideas surrounding one's national identity have become highly stratified and heavily politicised. This does not represent, however, a new strategy for the AfD. This chapter critically interrogates the discursive strategies utilised by the AfD in relation to German national identity, particularly those surrounding reunification and the East German 'experience.' It explores how the AfD has used these strategies in its attempts to win electoral support from specific demographics, as well as the extent to which these tactics resonate with subjects.

Issues surrounding German national identity have been identified as a significant theme by this thesis. As Miller-Idriss (2008) points out, "national identities are powerful forms of membership" (p. 6). However, in contrast to the idea that national identities are based on "primordial or natural attachments," scholars today recognise that these attachments are not automatic, or a 'naturally' existing process (Ibid.; Geertz 1973). In other words, individuals come to be seen as sharing an "imagined sense of community with others who share customs, language, tradition, culture, or residence within a given set of borders" (Miller-Idriss 2008, p. 3; Anderson 1983). In this view, nations are conceptualised as "imagined communities"; while its members will likely never know, meet, nor hear of the majority of their fellow members, "in the

minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson 1983, p. 6). National identity is a contested, subjective concept, but it is broadly understood by this thesis as the ways in which subjects’ feelings of belonging are negotiated or ‘imagined’ in relation to the nation, as per Anderson’s 1983 thesis. However, while the idea that nations are ‘imagined communities’ holds purchase with scholars today, less attention has in fact been paid to the ways in which nations can be “reimagined” by their citizens (Miller-Idriss 2008, p. 6). In its understanding of German national belonging as a cultural practice, this chapter investigates how subjects understand and ‘practice’ national identity and negotiate their respective discursive ecosystems. Nuancing discussion further, three themes that emerged from both subjects’ interview accounts and relevant documentary sources seem particularly salient: Heimat, freedom, and belonging. These three themes structure discussion in this chapter as well as underpin its key argument that issues relating to national identity form the bedrock of subjects’ support for the AfD.

This chapter will show that subject testimonies point to a much more complex positioning in relation to their support of the PRR in the German context than previous commentators have accounted for. In contrast to scholarly literature which suggests that fear, resentment, and even shame are the emotions driving PRR and far right engagement more broadly (see: Betz 1994; Salmela and von Scheve 2017; von Beyme 1988), analysis shows that subjects utilise diverse affective repertoires in order to fulfil their personal and political objectives. Interview testimonies are particularly significant in the German context as they offer a compelling insight into what Veugelers (2020) refers to as the “emotional side” of PRR support (p. 317). These testimonies are characterised by emotions that range from anger and frustration to confidence and empowerment. This also reflects the observation that subjects’ “affective economies” demonstrate the crucial role that emotions play in the “surfacing” of individual and collective political imaginaries (Ahmed 2004, p. 117; Eklundh 2020). Taking this analysis further, the empirical evidence of this thesis as a whole shows that subjects’ membership of the AfD has enabled them to say, think, and do things that might have been impossible before, particularly for those who grew up in the former GDR. For these reasons, this chapter supports Grzebalska and

Zacharenko's observation that it is no longer possible for researchers to ignore the "empowering" effect that PRR engagement can have on subjects' personal and professional lives (2018, p. 89). However, unlike the existing literature, this chapter posits that subjects' support of the PRR in the German context is not necessarily characterised by a static ideological commitment to a given policy issue; for the most part, subjects articulate their motivations in an issues-based way, rather than an ideological way.

The chapter is comprised of five principal sections which explore AfD platforms relating to the identified themes of Heimat, freedom, and belonging, and subjects' responses to these. Firstly, this chapter investigates how the AfD's strategic operationalisation of discourses relating to German reunification and its enduring socio-economic legacies resonates with subjects who grew up in the former GDR. Secondly, it demonstrates that the AfD's strategy of deliberate provocation strikes a chord with subjects who experienced state repression in the GDR, as well as those who did not. Thirdly, this chapter explores how the AfD's attempted revitalisation of the concept of Heimat holds an emotional appeal for subjects in an age of global political partisanship. Fourthly, it reveals that while both prominent AfD figures and subjects view the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis as placing an intolerable strain on the German social welfare system, these discourses are understood and operationalised in different ways. Lastly, this chapter investigates the ways in which the AfD strategically propagates anti-EU discourses and the extent to which subjects toe a party line in this regard. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of how both individual and collective imaginaries intersect and facilitate subjects' AfD membership.

### 3.1 A reunified Germany's failure to bloom

This section argues that the AfD instrumentalises discourses commonly associated with German reunification to appeal to subjects of various ages, occupations, and backgrounds. It will analyse how the AfD attracts individuals who are negatively affected by socio-economic inequality in the East and the extent to which this strategy holds purchase with subjects, some of whom were born in the former GDR

states of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Brandenburg, Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt, and Thuringia. The context of subjects' everyday lives is imbued with often deeply personal and symbolic meaning and specific places become associated with certain individual and collective grievances. As the following paragraphs explore, these grievances are relentlessly exploited by the AfD in their attempts to bolster support in eastern Germany, an area where some citizens experience deep disappointment that their hopes for a better socio-economic and political future were not realised in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall.

One aspect of the AfD's strategizing in this regard concerns its successful co-option and assimilation of discourses associated with the *friedliche Revolution* (peaceful revolution) into broader party narratives. These discourses typically find provenance in East German cities like Leipzig where in 1989, protestors gathered every Monday night at the Nikolai Church before marching to chants of "We want out!" (Dale 2006, p. 6). While small in number, these events were highly emotionally charged; the simple act of protesting posed a distinct challenge to the GDR's "aura of omnipotence" (Ibid.). In the case of the AfD, prominent party figures of both past and present have attempted to reawaken citizens' latent revolutionary passions. For example, at a 2019 speech at an AfD *Volksfest* (folk festival) in Cottbus, an eastern German city on the German-Polish border, former Brandenburg state representative Andreas Kalbitz led the call to those who may have felt short-changed by reunification: "Those who took to the street in 1989 should not have to collect bottles to improve their miserable pensions!" (Kienholz 2020, p. 40). According to Kalbitz, the AfD is the only party capable of finally completing the *Wende*, i.e., ensuring eastern Germany's socio-economic prosperity (Ibid.).<sup>1</sup> At the same event in Cottbus, Björn Höcke, AfD party leader in Thuringia, announced that: "It feels like the GDR again, dear friends, and that's not why we created the peaceful revolution. We never want to experience that again – and we will not allow ourselves to be led into a new GDR!" (Ibid., pp. 40, 43). In an interview with *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ), former parliamentary co-leader Alexander Gauland established a false equivalence

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<sup>1</sup> *Die Wende* (turning point) is a term commonly used in Germany to refer to the events of the *friedliche Revolution*.

between erstwhile chancellor Angela Merkel and Erich Honecker, the communist leader of the GDR, going so far as to call for a “peaceful revolution” against Merkel herself as well as leading figures in the mainstream German political parties and media (Bauer and Fiedler 2021, pp. 61, 64). This is a discursive strategy similarly employed by groups such as Pegida (*Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes/Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the Occident*) (Volk 2020, p. 607). Pegida’s reference to historical events, their co-option of the spirit of the Monday Demonstrations, and their utilisation of the places and spaces that formerly fell under the remit of the GDR, in this case, Dresden, form part of their “contentious repertoire” amid attempts to legitimise their controversial political activism (Ibid.). At the height of their success in 2014, Pegida attracted crowds of up to 25,000 people to their Monday night marches (Virchow 2016, p. 541). The discursive strategies employed by prominent AfD figures such as Höcke, Kalbitz, and Gauland go some way to demonstrate how the AfD has secured its foothold in eastern Germany despite the fact that, for the most part, its elected representatives in the East have no direct experience of living in the GDR.

Höcke and Kalbitz have managed to establish successful political careers in the eastern German states despite growing up in West Germany (Kienholz 2020, p. 40). While Alexander Gauland was born in East Germany, he left before the Berlin Wall was erected. However, this experience of life in both Germanys has given Gauland a distinct electoral advantage: according to Sundermeyer (2018), Gauland has been able to “convert the [fears] of many people into political energy” in the face of the perceived indifference of the mainstream German parties when it comes to issues affecting the eastern states (p. 59). Gauland has reportedly “learned a lot [...] about the mentality and sensitivities of people who, unlike him, have been socialised behind a hermetically sealed border [...] in a largely homogenous society in terms of identity, origin, and culture” (Ibid., p. 58). In other words, Gauland has reached out to Germans in both East and West and become part of an “exclusive” group of politicians from across the political spectrum who have experienced life in both Germanys such as Angela Merkel, Bodo Ramelow, Joachim Gauck, and Frauke Petry, the first female leader of the AfD (Ibid.). Concordantly, Kalbitz and Höcke,

referred to as “*zugezogene Oassis*” (“stand-in Oassis”) by Kienholz (2020, p. 40), have been instrumental to the party’s success in the East. As these examples demonstrate, the AfD’s most outspoken elected representatives have become the ideal sounding boards for citizens and their articulation of local concerns.

Accordingly, despite having been born after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the party’s seeming willingness to stoke the fires of revolution struck a chord with former AfD member and subsequent whistle-blower Franziska Schreiber as she reports witnessing first-hand the socio-economic impact of reunification on those around her: “I don’t know child poverty from television, but rather from friends [...] I felt sorry for my playmates who grew up in real need. I got to know this new system as extremely unfair” (2018, p. 22). The AfD’s appropriation of the slogan “*Wir sind das Volk!*” (“*We are the People!*”) resonates with Schreiber, because like the protestors in 1989, the party is seemingly unafraid to stand up against what she formerly viewed as an omnipotent yet indifferent political elite:

We [the AfD] are on the right side against others. Us against them. Us against the system. We are in opposition to an incompetent establishment that rules over the heads of the masses (2018, p. 52).

Despite reporting that reunification did not have a negative impact on her own family, Schreiber says that her “impotent anger” was transformed into a feeling of “grim pacification and [a] renewed hope” that the AfD could enact meaningful political change in the East (ibid., pp. 19, 28). A close reading of Schreiber’s 2018 exposé *Inside AfD* also reveals that her party engagement was facilitated by her identification with former AfD leader Frauke Petry. Initially, Schreiber supported the *Freie Demokratische Partei* (Free Democratic Party, FDP) as they promised a fairer, simpler tax system that would benefit a hard-working population (2018, p. 23). However, just as the blooming landscapes outlined by West German chancellor Helmut Kohl failed to flourish, the new start promised by the FDP did not materialise; by entering into coalition with the CDU—a move described by Schreiber as a betrayal—the FDP was perceived as not only reneging on its key policy positions, but carelessly risking taxpayers’ money to bail out the Euro (2018, pp. 23-24).



Consequently, Schreiber began to ask herself some serious questions about the type of political party that could adequately respond to local concerns.

When the AfD eventually appeared on the political horizon, Schreiber (2018) describes meeting erstwhile party leader Frauke Petry with a reverence usually reserved for celebrities: “When I saw her up close, I was excited like a teenager who’d just met Lady Gaga” (p. 41). Like Lady Gaga, Petry was “a rockstar to me. [She] was matter of fact but not cold. Charming but not sleazy. Confident but not bitchy. I think I was a little bit in love with her” (Ibid.). Petry, who left East Germany before the events of 1989, is a chemist from Dresden with five children and appears to embody the traits that Schreiber associates with the strong-willed, educated, and politically engaged East German women in her life. Schreiber (2018) describes how her heroes “are the women from my mother’s side of the family. My great-grandmother was emancipated before most German women could even spell the word” (p. 21). Schreiber’s idolisation of Petry demonstrates the centrality of strong East German women to her feeling of belonging to a seemingly exceptional, albeit idealised, national collective. Unpacking this further, Ellen Kositzka, author and wife of far-right political activist and publisher Götz Kubitschek, observes in her 2018 polemic *Gender ohne Ende (Gender Without End)* that the GDR itself has become associated with pioneering a type of equality with profound implications for “women’s politics [...], gender-equitable raising of children, motherhood, and the role of women in business life” that other places have tried, and failed, to replicate (pp. 63, 65). With this in mind, Schreiber rejects the idea that gender equality has not been realised today: “Equal rights? I don’t know what feminists want. That’s a discussion from last century!” (2018, p. 22).<sup>2</sup> Concordantly, Frauke Petry embodies the idealised values and leitmotifs Schreiber associates with the former GDR, particularly in relation to the idea that East German women occupied an essential and privileged position

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<sup>2</sup> As Rosenfeld *et al.* (2004) point out, however, while East German women achieved greater equality when it came to participation in the labour market than their West German counterparts, “employed women in East Germany failed to achieve full gender parity, especially with regard to earnings, occupational integration, and the division of labour at home, even as late as the 1980s and even among younger cohorts” (p. 104). Additionally, Harsch (2015) notes discrepancies between the GDR’s “language of equality” and the indifference of state ministries in regard to “the domestic conditions and relations that so profoundly shaped [women’s] lives” (pp. 87, 99).

within the GDR ecosystem in contrast to female peers in the West. Petry, a woman who appears to have successfully balanced both political and family life while staying true to herself, became a role model to Schreiber, helping her to navigate the tricky epistemological terrain of contemporary political life. Schreiber's admiration of Petry shines a light on the importance of female role models for some subjects. The idea that the GDR was a beacon of equality resonates with those interviewed for this thesis: Anke (2019), for example, states that "women from the former GDR grew up with a high demand for equal rights and are therefore very self-confident." For those like Schreiber and subjects like Anke, their identity as East German *women* is central to their political activism today. However, gender does not appear to play a part in discussions surrounding other subjects' role models, as analysis will demonstrate.

A close reading of Schreiber's 2018 exposé *Inside AfD* gives this thesis an insight into the strategies utilised by the AfD vis-à-vis reunification and how it bolstered Schreiber's own feelings of belonging. It also reveals how the cult of personality surrounding some prominent party figures helps the AfD to attract new members from different backgrounds. The extracts discussed above confirm Skeggs' observation that identity claims articulated through "traumatic telling" are discursive power plays ultimately designed to generate a sense of "who can and cannot belong to the nation" (2009, pp. 19-20). The experiences of East Germans have even been compared to those with a "migration background" in that both demographics are seen as similarly affected by "social, cultural, and identificative devaluation" (Pates and Leser 2021, p. 49; Foroutan *et al.* 2019; Kubiak 2018). While, for example, Schreiber herself was not born until after the Berlin Wall fell, she nonetheless 'inherited' a sense of second-class citizenship by dint of being born in eastern Germany; this aspect of her identity would prove pivotal to her later engagement with the AfD. In this way, her account goes some way to illustrate the complex, embodied entanglements of agency and belonging, but the idea that identity and its associated components are not equally available to all has given the AfD a distinct electoral advantage in the so-called "post-traumatic" places and spaces in eastern Germany (Pates and Leser 2021, p. 23). However, as will be discussed in *Section 3.3*, the perceived 'symbiotic relationship' between people and place takes a decidedly

nativist turn within the context of the AfD's increasingly exclusionary and homogenous worldview. In contrast to the idea that those who support the PRR or far right more broadly are motivated solely by anger or resentment, this chapter will go on to show that, despite the contradictions inherent in subjects' contemporary political activism, the success of the AfD in the eastern states has enabled some subjects to say, think, and do things that were not possible during their lives in the GDR.

While the AfD has undoubtedly exploited and instrumentalised issues relating to reunification and its enduring socio-cultural, political, and economic legacies, the impact of the post-reunification period cannot be understated, particularly given that East Germany experienced deindustrialisation at a higher rate than any other post-communist country in the years following the dissolution of the Soviet Union (Roesler 1994, p. 505; Weisskircher 2020, p. 617). Prior to reunification, every piece of real estate in the GDR was considered *Volkseigentum* (public property), but following the creation of the *Treuhandanstalt* (privatisation agency) in 1990, East German assets were sold off as quickly as possible to facilitate the country's transition into a market economy (Pates and Leser 2021, p. 29; Roesler 1994, p. 505). Consequently, many non-competitive and heavily subsidised *Volkseigene Betriebe* (publically-owned enterprises) were sold to the highest bidder; often these were West German competitors (Weisskircher 2020, p. 617). Most East Germans did not have the financial means to mount a feasible resistance to privatisation and compounding this unfavourable situation further, wages in the eastern states have not kept pace with the other Bundesländer. According to subjects such as Elsa (2019), the issue is not necessarily that unemployment rates are higher, but that people "get less money for the same jobs" than their peers elsewhere in Germany. In Elsa's view, this is something former GDR citizens are used to: "In the GDR era, you didn't earn much, couldn't buy a lot [...] There were only a few trades that earned a lot. [...] A doctor earned less than a bricklayer." Elsa was politically active prior to joining the AfD and her political leanings today are in stark contrast to her past life in the GDR. Elsa joined the *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* (Socialist Unity Party of Germany, SED) when she was eighteen with "full conviction" having grown up in a

household that was “very red, very politically far left.” She later left the SED when she came to the personal realisation that the party “had nothing to do with democracy” and did not divulge whether she had been a member of any other party between leaving the SED in 1982 and joining the AfD in 2014. While Elsa’s initial interest in the AfD stemmed from her concerns about the Euro and its perceived socio-cultural and political amalgamation of Europe’s member states, the impact of reunification and the material conditions facing residents in her constituency inform her day-to-day political activism. She reports that: “Economically [home state] is still very much left behind [...] although residents are all very hardworking. [...] A lot of land has simply been taken away. In some rural areas there are no bus connections, no doctors.” Inge (2019), a subject born in the former GDR, echoes this: “Thirty years after the peaceful revolution, the fall of the Berlin Wall, people in East Germany have been taken for a ride. They have been forgotten.” According to Funke (2020), the mainstream German parties were perceived as focusing primarily on “lighthouse projects” in the years following reunification while *die neuen Bundesländer* (the new German states) experienced a further decline in confidence in relation to the credibility and willingness of those in power to tackle problems in the East quickly and decisively (p. 88). The empirical evidence of this thesis consolidates the idea that for some East Germans, the ‘blooming landscapes’ promised by West German chancellor Helmut Kohl simply did not materialise.

Socio-economic inequality in eastern Germany today remains a salient issue for subjects like Elsa and Inge, but the lack of freedom experienced by some subjects during their life in the GDR gives this thesis an additional insight into the factors driving their AfD engagement today. With regard to socio-economic inequalities, these do not only concern material realities and they are not a single party issue. As Petra Köpping, SPD Minister for Social Affairs and Social Cohesion in Saxony writes in her 2018 book *Integriert doch erstmal uns! Eine Streitschrift für den Osten* (*Integrate Us First! A Polemic for the East*), not only have the socio-economic problems facing East Germans been “neglected [...] swept under the carpet,” their life experiences have been systematically “devalued” (p. 12). Köpping (2018) explains that “the feelings and experiences of the *Nachwendezeit* [post-reunification era] hang like a millstone around the neck of many people in the East. And this is

passed onto children and grandchildren, although [they] may not have been aware of either the GDR or its direct aftermath” (p. 15); this is aptly outlined by Franziska Schreiber in 2018’s *Inside AfD*. Figures released by the Federal Government Commissioner for the New Federal States in 2021 also reveal that, in economic terms, the five eastern German states trailed the Western states by 18 percent in 2020, thirty years after reunification (Deutsche Welle 2021). With regard to issues surrounding freedom, or lack thereof, subjects report that living in the GDR had a tangible impact on both their interpersonal relationships, personal freedoms, and subsequent political engagement, as Petra’s testimony aptly demonstrates. During her interview, Petra (2019) expressed deep regret at having never met her grandmother who lived in West Germany: “I could only write letters to my grandmother in [home state]. [...] She died and I never met her in person because there was a border between us [...]” Resultantly, while Petra reports that she was “relatively unpolitical” growing up, her resentment toward the GDR and the perceived absence of opportunity under the regime began to manifest:

[...] My parents could speak perfect French. Young people speaking a foreign language fluently [...] I find it fascinating. I never had the opportunity. I lived in a country that robbed me of my freedom.

In response to state repression, Petra describes how she once spoiled her ballot when voting: “I went there [voting booth] once and crossed everything out with a ruler and pen. [...] I never wanted to vote again, but after the fall of the Berlin Wall, I said, “free elections and free country.”” While commentators like Funke (2020) posit that “learned helplessness and [...] a general sense of detachment from democracy” leads some East Germans to vote for the AfD (p. 87), Petra’s testimony points to a much more complex positioning; given her experiences of living in the GDR and the missed opportunities this represents, i.e., meeting relatives in the West and freedom of movement, it is democracy and its associated freedoms that Petra ultimately wants to protect through her AfD membership. Through its engagement with subjects themselves, as this example shows, this thesis has gleaned a deeper insight into the person behind the vote at the ballot box in comparison to quantitative studies investigating women’s electoral support of the PRR more broadly. It also shines a

light on the non-linear development of subjects' political agency across time and space, as the interview extracts discussed here demonstrate.

The three identified themes of Heimat, freedom, and belonging act as lenses for this chapter's examination of subjects' lived experiences and how these experiences may underpin their decision to join the AfD today. In its attempts to broaden and deepen its understanding of why women specifically support the AfD, subjects were asked a series of ice-breaker questions during their interviews, including whether they had a political role model or prominent figure they admired. In light of the fact that the majority of women interviewed for this thesis reported that they were born in the former GDR, this line of questioning gives the thesis an opportunity to further unpack subjects' formative influences and the extent to which these may intersect with the three themes outlined above. Some subjects including Gabi, Ingrid, and Gisela reported that they did not have any political role models. While she does not identify a particular person, Anke reports that she likes her politicians to have a "business-like style," and particularly enjoys speeches by fellow economists Jörg Meuthen and Alice Weidel. Inge reveals that Helmut Schmidt, SPD politician and former chancellor of West Germany was her political role model: "He was always very straight, very honest, always went his own way. [...] We don't have that anymore." Elsa admires prominent party figures such as parliamentary co-leader Alice Weidel, deputy party leader Beatrix von Storch, and MdEP (*Mitglied des Europäischen Parlaments*) Jörg Meuthen despite her claim that the party deters intellectuals and attracts people "who don't have much to lose." Petra reports that her political role model is a former CDU politician: "There are very few people I really admire and there is a CDU politician who has made an impression. [...] This is Wolfgang Bosbach. I think he's just phenomenal. He's a very upright, honest, and argumentative man. I thought he was great. Still great today." Additionally, despite her admission that her family hosted a young refugee from Syria, Petra admires Beatrix von Storch, deputy AfD leader, who, incidentally, was also born in West Germany: "I think she's absolutely great, such a brave woman. She is just great [...] She is also quite normal, just a very

personable and upright woman who clearly expresses her opinion.”<sup>3</sup> In contrast to Franziska Schreiber’s assertions, this evidence suggests that gender does not appear to influence subjects’ choices when it comes to role models; the diverse array of figures mentioned by subjects are lauded primarily for their perceived tenacity, no-nonsense attitude, and ability to ‘get the job done’ regardless of political affiliation. Uniting all of these viewpoints, however, is subjects’ opinion that politicians today are unable to tackle important issues in the same way as ‘before.’ This lends credence to Kinnvall’s concept of “subjective deprivation,” i.e., the idea that the inability of mainstream political figures to exercise effective “emotional governance” results in subjects feeling underprivileged and underrepresented and thus eager to look elsewhere for political fulfilment (2015, p. 526). Evidence here shows that subjects have drawn inspiration from a diverse range of figures from across the political spectrum in their search for a political alternative which responds adequately to their localised concerns. Furthermore, these examples underpin one of this chapter’s arguments that subjects support of the AfD is not necessarily characterised by a static ideological commitment to party policy or its ideological standpoint.

Empirical studies of post-reunification German national identity demonstrate that, in some cases, East German respondents tend to “avoid claims to an exclusive identity category and instead [emphasise] more local senses of attachment” (Gallinat 2008, p. 665). The interview testimonies featured here takes this analysis further and suggests that subjects’ AfD membership has enabled them to instrumentalise the use value of their own sense of East Germanness to draw attention to the issues which affect them and their broader constituents. Through the AfD, subjects have been able to accumulate social and political capital, a commodity that, for some, was previously in short supply, as Elsa and Petra outline vis-à-vis their experiences of growing up in the GDR. For Elsa, her political engagement comes at a great personal cost: she revealed during her interview that she had been disowned by her children for joining the AfD and is no longer allowed to see her grandchildren. However, Elsa remains

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<sup>3</sup> In the early days of the refugee crisis, von Storch was heavily criticised for supporting then-leader Frauke Petry’s suggestion that German border guards have the right to gun down refugees “if necessary” (Deutsche Welle 2016). Von Storch later conceded that “the use of firearms against children is not permitted [...] Women are a different matter” (Ibid.).

steadfast in her conviction that she has done the right thing: “It is very depressing [...] but I have a goal, I know why I’m doing it. [...] In theory I joined the AfD for my grandchildren.” Elsa positions herself as someone who is willing to take great personal risks in the pursuit of her political goals, just like the democracy protestors who took to the streets against the GDR in 1989. These risks are two-fold: Elsa is not only estranged from her family, an issue that evidently causes her a great deal of emotional distress, but also at the perceived risk of attack from both a press unsympathetic to the AfD’s political remit as well as left-wing opponents of the party. In line with Berlant’s concept of “cruel optimism” (2011, pp. 1-2), Elsa’s activism puts her at a distinct disadvantage when it comes to the successful negotiation of her personal and political interests. In other words, the remit of the AfD’s political project makes it difficult for subjects to attain the transformations they strive for. Despite the tangible disadvantages of her AfD membership, the party is perceived by Elsa as the only one that can effectively represent the interests of ordinary citizens.

The idea that the AfD is the only party to have meaningfully engaged with the eastern states, as well as its co-option of the East German ‘experience,’ appears to underpin its electoral success in the East: the party won 21.9 percent of the vote share in the former GDR states of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Brandenburg, Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt, and Thuringia in the pivotal 2017 federal election (Federal Returning Officer 2017; Weisskircher 2020, p. 614). While the AfD has capitalised upon the perceived East-West divide in some of its regional campaigns, for example, *Wende 2.0* or *The East Rises Up*, scholars like Weisskircher (2020) posit that “it [the AfD] can hardly be described as a regionalist party centred on recognition for the East, devolution, or even autonomy” (p. 617). Furthermore, as Quent (2019) points out, there are fewer eligible voters across the East German states than in North-Rhine Westphalia; measured in absolute terms, the majority of AfD voters live in the West (p. 232). This section has explored how the enduring impact of reunification on the eastern states gives the AfD an opportunity to set itself apart from a political mainstream which, historically, has failed to invest in the East, emotionally or otherwise.



The empirical evidence presented in this section suggests that the AfD's instrumentalisation of revolutionary discourses resonates with subjects given their experiences of living in the GDR. This section has also shown how the AfD's most outspoken members have become ideal sounding boards for subjects and their articulation of local concerns despite the fact that some of these figures have little or no experience of living in the GDR. However, this section finds that subjects' support of the AfD is not characterised by a static ideological commitment; in contrast to party ideologues, they articulate their motivations in an issues-based way which reflects local concerns and their own formulative experiences. The analysis presented here gives a valuable insight into the micro level issues which drive PRR engagement in the German context and outlines the importance of investigating not only *how* and *why* women support the AfD, but *where* and *when* this support can be located. The following section moves on to explore the AfD's stance on freedom of speech and the ways in which this resonates with subjects, some of whom experienced state repression in the former GDR.

### 3.2 Perceived challenges to freedom of speech

The previous section explored how the AfD and its prominent members in the eastern states strategically operationalise discourses relating to German reunification to win support among the disillusioned and formerly disenfranchised. This section extends discussion on the identified themes of Heimat, freedom, and belonging, and makes the argument that the overrepresentation of East Germans among the broad church of AfD supporters is due in part to the party's political strategizing and willingness to push the boundaries of acceptable public discourse in an era of global political partisanship.

Despite having little socio-political capital during their life in the GDR, some individuals from the eastern states have been propelled from political obscurity to representing the party at the federal and state level in a very short period of time. For example, Tino Chrupalla, Alexander Gauland's successor and the first East German party chairperson, used to work as a painter and decorator. Having joined the AfD in 2015, Chrupalla ascended through the ranks of the Görlitz branch in Saxony, and assumed his current position in the AfD-Fraktion Bundestag in 2021 (Deutscher

Bundestag n.d.). In terms of subjects, Dagmar, Gabi, and Anke enjoy successful careers as elected AfD representatives in their respective state parliaments. Anke, for example, joined the AfD in 2013, became chairperson of her regional branch in 2014, and was elected into her state parliament in 2019. Party representatives from relatively humble backgrounds have helped the AfD to foster the appearance of democratic legitimacy and alleged fulfilment of their pledge to return power to 'ordinary' people. However, this is not necessarily an organic development; in a leaked strategy paper, the AfD outlined five key voter groups to be targeted in the run up to the 2017 federal election. These included Eurosceptics, citizens with liberal conservative values, protest voters, non-voters, and workers and unemployed citizens in "precarious areas" (Schwarz 2020, pp. 43-44). It is suggested in this chapter that non-voters with an interest in politics were perceived by the AfD as holding the key to its eventual success in the eastern states. Concordantly, this strategy appears to resonate with subjects like Elsa who, despite attempting to rationalise the potential implications of the AfD's 'rough edges,' reflects upon how the current "political situation" sees East Germans painted in an unfavourable light in the press. To Elsa, this is reminiscent of life in the GDR where images of socio-cultural and political life were carefully stage-managed to obscure the realities of citizens' everyday lives. As Fulbrook (1995) confirms, "the regime [in the GDR] sought to achieve the appearance of popular support and consensus: it sought to claim nearly 100 per cent support for its policies. The party allegedly ruled on behalf of an eternally grateful, if subordinate *Volk*" (p. 29). The crucial difference between then and now, according to Elsa, is that East Germans were free to interpret and unpack state messages in particular ways, as well as access alternative forms of media:

[...] Growing up in the GDR, we [had] a press that only wrote what it wanted. At that time, we followed the press very carefully. We could always read between the lines or watch Western TV.

In Elsa's view, those East Germans who do not toe the mainstream line today are accused of not understanding democracy. However, Elsa paints her own image of East Germans as recalcitrant non-conformists with a vested interest in direct democracy given their experiences of living in the GDR. The idea that East Germans

are somehow predisposed to anti-authoritarianism is further consolidated in a 2021 tweet by Tino Chrupalla who boasts that “East Germans have a sceptical, distant, and critical attitude towards politics [...] That’s a good thing because this attitude characterises committed democrats.” As Schwarz (2020) points out, among the AfD’s nine alleged *Kompetenzfelder* (fields of expertise), issues such as national identity, immigration, and Islam rate prominently (p. 44). To this end, the AfD have been able to emphasise similarities between their so-called *Kompetenzfelder* and divisive social issues that appeal to the broader electorate.

Bochum (2020) observes that in an age of heightened political partisanship, the AfD have also repeatedly called upon its members to be “deliberately and repeatedly politically incorrect” (p. 25). According to the AfD itself, reaction to this provocation is considered advantageous as “the more they [the mainstream parties] try to stigmatise the AfD because of provocative words or actions, the more positive it is for the profile of the party. No one gives the AfD more credibility than its political opponents” (Meisner 2017). This tactic resonated with former AfD member Franziska Schreiber who describes how meeting like-minded people at her local party branch was an intoxicating and life-affirming experience: “Every discussion was loud and heated [...] It was a complete ruckus [...] Anything could be said, nobody had to hide their opinion. No one paid attention to political correctness” (p. 45). Schreiber positions herself as someone swept up in an exciting new political movement that she believed had the potential to make a tangible difference to the lives of people around her. However, Schreiber would later attempt to distance herself from the radicalised element of the AfD: “As chairperson, I tried to moderate the extremists among *die Kerlen* [the guys] but too much back-chat would have distanced me from the rank-and-file. I didn’t see that I didn’t belong to this group at all” (2018, p. 51). Reflecting Blee’s observation that, historically, some women on the American right have asserted a lack of agency in order to mitigate their role in campaigns of racist violence (2018, p. 91), Schreiber attempts to distance herself from the real-world consequences of the AfD’s rhetoric in the German context.

This discussion however, demonstrates that discourses relating to freedom of speech, or perceived lack thereof, resonates with subjects like Elsa who were born in

the former GDR. Similarly, Dagmar reports that her disillusionment with mainstream politics, as well as the alleged lack of ideological diversity in the media, underpinned her support for the AfD. She reveals that: “The AfD is, at the moment, the only party which has different perspectives on various political issues than the mainstream. The other parties in Germany are too mainstream.” However, it was not simply a case of deciding on “points A, B, or C” when it came to the factors that led to Dagmar’s decision to join the AfD but rather, a drawn-out process which drew on her “*Erfahrungsschatz*” (“wealth of experience”). She explains that: “I’ve been here for fifty-eight years, and my life has been pieced together like a mosaic: a certain attitude, a certain opinion, and the feeling that this political *Meinungskorridor* is getting narrower. [...] It’s a very bad feeling when you can no longer express your opinion freely.” Loosely translated, *Meinungskorridor* means ‘opinion corridor’ but like many German terms has a deeper, implicit meaning that is difficult to convey in English. Like the Overton Window, *Meinungskorridor* is used as a metaphor to describe the policies and political attitudes acceptable to the political mainstream at a given time.

This ‘narrowing’ of the *Meinungskorridor*, however, began long before the emergence of the AfD. Dagmar reflects that:

I grew up in the GDR and at some point, also started saying “don’t say that.” I was involved with the Evangelical Church in Germany and at that time I was certainly not revolutionary but very critical of the regime. [...] The division in society [today] is very clear. Parents start to tell their children, “Don’t say that, don’t go there, don’t tell anyone what we say at home.”

Living under these repressive conditions appears to have impacted significantly on the development of Dagmar’s political subjectivity and her subsequent distrust of mainstream media and politics. As Fulbrook (1995) points out, the totalising nature of the GDR regime cannot be underestimated, as no element of socio-cultural and political life was left unmonitored: “By the late 1980s, the GDR had more unofficial informers, informal spies, and paid officials of the secret police than the terroristic Third Reich ever enjoyed” (p. 45). While Dagmar concedes that Germans enjoy more or less unfettered freedom of expression today in comparison to the past, she

believes that her association with the AfD leaves her vulnerable to exclusion and even repression: “If you say certain things, you are categorised. You are no longer a person, just someone from the AfD.” Just as she experienced living under the weight of state repression in the GDR, Dagmar sees herself as being similarly disadvantaged due to her membership of the AfD. Dagmar is unable to reconcile the fact that the AfD deliberately undermines trust in Germany’s democratic institutions with her own experiences of party life and like her peers in the PRR or far right more broadly is perhaps “unable to accept that their ideas are simply not welcome or supported, rather than censored” (Mondon and Winter 2020, pp. 77-78), as the following paragraphs explore further.

The idea that AfD supporters face certain socio-political repercussions because of their party membership is one that also holds purchase with Gabi (2019), who was born in the West and subsequently established a political career in the East. She claims that: “[...] There are many people who are afraid to be open about their opinion [and] express their opinion openly. There are many people who are afraid to say that they voted for the AfD.” Gabi recalls the case of an organic food supplier and AfD supporter in an eastern state who had their products boycotted because of their party association:

[...] It cannot be that because someone is an AfD member, they are exposed to repression, being disadvantaged. People tell us that they would like to become members, but they are afraid of disadvantages for themselves, their families, and their companies if they are self-employed, and that simply cannot be.

This particular case has also struck a chord with other subjects. Elsa goes so far as to liken the situation to the boycott of Jewish businesses in Nazi Germany: “It’s kind of like when we didn’t buy from the Jews during the Nazi era. The AfD is really fought against.” This is an analogy shared by Inge, a retiree whose primary motivation for joining the party was because of a perceived breakdown in law and order: “There is already so much hatred and so much violence against us [AfD members] everywhere. Don’t buy from Jews, Jews out, don’t buy from the AfD [...] It is dangerous in my opinion.” In a crass comparison to the plight of the Jews during

WWII, both subjects and the unnamed local business owner are positioned as martyrs to an undefined free speech cause. Evidence here shows how some subjects attempt to draw a false equivalence between AfD opponents and the Nazis in efforts to paint themselves and the AfD in a more positive light; this is probably designed to elicit sympathy from observers in response to backlash to the party's desire to redefine the boundaries of acceptable public discourse, freedom of speech and, as this section will demonstrate, Germany's contemporary memorialisation culture.

In an age of partisan politics "it is common to hear free speech supporters demand debates on topics such as whether the Holocaust really took place, or whether climate change is indeed a reality" (Mondon and Winter 2020, p. 76). Furthermore, while so-called free speech defenders claim that they "do not necessarily believe the reviled and discarded alternative, [...] bad ideas should be challenged and defeated in the 'marketplace of ideas,' rather than censored" (Ibid.). Reflecting this observation, interview testimony reveals that some AfD members rationalise their stance on hot-button issues by attempting to present alternatives to commonly accepted explanations. For example, Dagmar reports that when she undertakes outreach work at schools, she encourages children to ask questions and keep an open mind about different topics. At face value, this is not particularly problematic advice. However, in Dagmar's view, there may be "other aspects" to a debate that are being withheld or ignored; there are, allegedly, two sides to *every* story. When it comes to climate change, for example, or *Klimahysterie* (climate hysteria) as Dagmar refers to it, in her view: "Trees are being planted everywhere to help with CO<sup>2</sup>, but there are scientists who say, "please don't plant trees everywhere. We need land for insects." This claim is difficult to substantiate without explicit reference to the relevant empirical study; many of the nine subjects interviewed for this thesis relied upon the citation of various unnamed statistical studies to justify and legitimise their opposition to Islam following the 2015, Syrian refugee crisis, as *Chapter Four* explores in greater depth.

In relation to subjects' idea that AfD members in particular are prevented from exercising their right to freedom of expression in an era of global political partisanship, Dagmar, Elsa, and Gabi also claim that political education today has a

left-wing bias yet position themselves as defenders of an amorphous free speech. This reflects Mondon and Winters' observation that free speech advocates rarely define the concept in concrete socio-legal terms nor acknowledge its limitations or its unequal distribution in society today (2020, p. 77). Even if free speech meant that an individual could, in theory, say whatever they wanted at any given time, there are limits as to what is considered acceptable in practice, even if the right to free expression is enshrined in a country's law, as is the case in Germany. Article 5 of the *Grundgesetz* (Basic Law) states that: "Every person shall have the right to freely express and disseminate his opinions in speech, writing and pictures, and to inform himself from generally accessible sources. Freedom of the press and freedom of reporting by means of broadcasts and films shall be guaranteed. There shall be no censorship" (Deutscher Bundestag 2021). Crucially, however, these freedoms do not "release one from loyalty to the constitution" (Ibid.). With this in mind, evidence shows that subjects transform their own understandings of their political engagement and its broader repercussions by simply disregarding the more unpalatable aspects of AfD discourse. Dagmar asserts that "populism belongs to politics" and that political discourse itself is simply a matter of "nudging, framing, and wording." Despite using the unscientific and obfuscating term *Klimahysterie* to describe her climate change scepticism, for example, Dagmar positions herself as a victim of disinformation rather than a proponent of it. Despite the alleged benefits of her AfD membership and the party's defence of freedom of speech, Dagmar reports that she must exercise some caution when undertaking official party duties: "We often have to work in secret because a lot of people are damaged by [their proximity to the AfD]. If you get seen with the AfD, there goes the shitstorm, often along with your career." Similarly, Anke claims that anyone who does not agree with mainstream views on a range of issues is subject to the *Nazikeule* (Nazi cudgel); in other words, they are accused of being Nazi sympathisers by opponents.

Given that some prominent AfD members attempt to downplay or 'rehabilitate' aspects of German history which pose provocative and uncomfortable questions about Germany's *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coming to terms with the past) and the role of memorialisation culture today, this comparison is hardly surprising. At a 2018 conference, former parliamentary co-leader Alexander Gauland dismissed the

Nazis and the Third Reich as “just bird shit in more than 1,000 years of successful German history” (Deutsche Welle 2018a). At a 2017 event in Dresden, Björn Höcke provoked controversy when he referred to the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin as a “monument of shame” (Rosellini 2019, p. 107). However, in contrast to male party ideologues such as Höcke and Gauland, it is unclear how far the women interviewed for this thesis subscribe to the view that Germany today should simply ‘move past’ its role in WWII, although evidence suggests that the idea of celebrating contemporary national achievements without shame or fear of condemnation appears to resonate with them. Petra, for example, is firm in her conviction that Germany has a historical responsibility in relation to its actions in WWII but states that, “I didn’t start a world war, my parents didn’t start a world war.” Similarly, Anke says that she does not want to see Germany ‘reduced’ to the Third Reich: “Germany is more!” Gisela (2019) posits that, instead of reducing everything to Hitler, Germans can afford to feel more positive about their contribution to the world: “I think there’s a lot to be proud of. [...] We have become a great democracy, a great country.” Taking a more measured tone in relation to Germany’s *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* than male counterparts, subjects appear somewhat at odds with the party’s strategy of provocation at any cost; the idea that subjects align with Nazis past or present by dint of their association with the AfD elicits a strong and negative emotional response. However, while subjects might not personally share the view taken by Björn Höcke that, for example, infamous German Holocaust denier Ursula Haverbeck has the ‘right’ to speak her mind (Krohn 2016), they nonetheless play an active role in this discursive ecosystem through their dissemination of disinformation relating to issues such as climate change.

As subject testimony has revealed, subjects’ refusal to critically reflect upon their role in the contemporary free speech debate sees them locate themselves as ‘outside’ of politics altogether. Additionally, evidence shows that in contrast to some prominent male AfD figures, women take a more moderate tone when discussing Germany’s memorialisation culture. However, because of their experiences in the GDR, some subjects appear to consider themselves beyond reproach when it comes to their own role in the propagation and dissemination of disinformation relating to hot-button issues such as climate change or Holocaust denial, as Dagmar’s testimony illustrates.



Despite the sometimes-ambiguous nature of subjects' engagement with issues relating to free speech, evidence here gives this chapter a vital insight into how subjects respond to the AfD's strategizing in this regard. Continuing discussion on the three identified themes, the section which follows explores the extent to which the AfD's attempts to (re)define what makes one a 'real' or 'authentic' German resonates with subjects following the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis.

### 3.3 The emotional appeal of Heimat

Having shown in the previous section how the AfD's shrewd operationalisation of discourses relating to freedom of speech and Germany's contemporary memorialisation culture resonate with subjects, this section examines the AfD's attempts to reinvigorate the concept of Heimat. It argues that some prominent AfD members strategically emphasise a set of values which they brand as intrinsically German following the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis and the threat allegedly posed to a distinctly German way of life by incoming refugees.

In *Nie Zweimal in denselben Fluss (Never in the Same River Twice)* (2018), Thuringia AfD party chair Björn Höcke provides readers with an intimate glimpse into his childhood, education, and the formative political experiences that have shaped his engagement with the AfD today. Inspired by the philosophy of Heidegger, issues surrounding place, space, and the nativist idea that a certain people belong to a certain land underpins Höcke's political activism in this context. Resultantly, Höcke (2018) describes his worldview as "a fresh and happy paganism" (pp. 62, 79). In Höcke's view, the evocative German landscape has inspired poets, artists and composers, the perceived progenitors of German cultural life, throughout the centuries: "Nowhere else in Germany, perhaps with the exception of Harz and Kyffhäuser [towns in Thuringia], is the local world of legends and visible mythology as dense – think of Lorelei, *Lohengrin*, or the *Nibelungenlied*" (p. 23).<sup>4</sup> Consolidating his idea that exceptional people come from exceptional places, Höcke states that "if you

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<sup>4</sup> Lohengrin is a character in Wolfram von Eschenbach's 13<sup>th</sup> century Arthurian romance *Parzival*. *Nibelungenlied (Song of the Nibelungs)* is a medieval epic poem written in the 12<sup>th</sup> century by an anonymous author. Both tales concern chivalrous knights who must overcome the odds to win the hearts of their beloved, reflecting the popularity of the courtly love literary trope of the time which emphasised chivalry and nobility in all one's endeavours.

look at the biographies of the German poets and thinkers, you will find that almost all of them live in the country or in small towns” (p. 33). As Kamenetsky (1972) points out, the utilisation of German folklore as a discursive political tool is not a new one; in the context of the Third Reich, for example, this tactic represents efforts by the Nazis to consolidate the “spiritual value” of certain aspects of traditional heritage and concomitant traits they came to associate with certain demographics (p. 228). In other words, the Nazis viewed the peasant classes as the “natural” embodiment of sacred cultural information and agrarian tradition (Ibid.). Reflecting this, the exceptionality of the German people is, in Höcke’s view, not limited to just poets and thinkers; while the Nazis located the spiritual origins of its *Volk* in the peasant population, Höcke outlines how ordinary, ‘authentic’ Germans and the banal exceptionality of their everyday lives form the bedrock of his *Weltanschauung* (life philosophy). For example, despite never having lived in Prussia—it was formally dissolved in 1947—the stories told to Höcke by his East Prussian grandparents have had a profound impact on the development of his personal and political subjectivity:

I come from a displaced family from East Prussia. The stories of my grandparents made me aware of the human tragedy of war [...] as well as the elementary importance of Heimat (2018, pp. 23, 39).

Höcke (2018) identifies strongly with the values he has come to associate with his grandparents, namely, hard work and remaining stoic and uncomplaining in the face of adversity (p. 38). Crucially, Höcke’s emphasis on the fundamental interconnectedness of people and place is not, in his case, simply strategic: it is wholly ideological and reflects Forchtner’s observation that within a nativist ecosystem, “organisms [can only] be understood in terms of their embeddedness in an interdependent system” (2019, p. 286). To this end, Höcke has called for the “*Re-Preußifizierung Deutschlands*” (“re-Prussification of Germany”), and despite being born in West Germany, has identified the eastern German states as the perfect site upon which to “build [...] strongholds [and] repopulate them with ‘real Germans’” (Polke-Majewski 2016; Pates and Leser 2021, p. 97). As proceeding paragraphs reveal, given the lack of emotional and socio-economic investment in East Germany, the eastern states and their latent potential have become important ideological

discursive and physical sites upon which Höcke can develop his vision of a new world.

In Höcke's vision, women and men have a particular role to play; this is also probably informed by his experiences of staying with his grandparents as a child and his subsequent valorisation of life in the German countryside. In Höcke's world, his grandmother was "the mistress of the house" and his grandfather "the lord of the field" (2018, p. 35). The women of the family would congregate in the kitchen while the men laboured outside (Ibid.). While this gendered division of labour was certainly not unique to Prussia and endures today, to Höcke, this arrangement gave family life its vibrancy and represents in his mind how things *should* be in order for one to live a happy and fulfilling life: "It was real family life, full of hustle and bustle – but that's exactly what I liked as a child, there was always something going on" (Ibid.).

Furthermore, discussion here suggests that by dint of his East Prussian heritage, Höcke considers himself an 'ideal' subject; in order to protect one's Heimat, an 'ideal' subject must reify the values and norms associated with a broader, albeit imagined, collective. It could be argued that Höcke also attempts to revitalise the idea that a singular, exceptional male figure can hold the fate of a nation in his hand, someone akin to a German Adam. Drawing on the sense of exceptionalism embodied by the European settlers who arrived in a seemingly empty New World in the sixteenth century, the Adamic myth describes how the world, and therefore history, can be restarted under "fresh initiative, in a divinely granted second chance for the human race, after the first chance had been so disastrously fumbled in a darkening world" (Lewis 1955, p. 5).<sup>5</sup> Nativist ideas surrounding authenticity and belonging are utilised by Höcke in his pursuit of an idealised and racialised future. While Höcke does not want to 'forget' history altogether, he 'reimagines' a 'new' history for Germany where certain aspects of being German are valorised and protected. Höcke's evocative and

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<sup>5</sup> R.W.B Lewis developed the Adamic myth in *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (1955). Underpinning the myth is the idea that the New World not only allowed European puritan colonists to escape religious persecution but provided them with a *tabula rasa* upon which they could project their "prelapsarian images of natural perfection" (Smaje 2000, p. 147). Unsurprisingly, the existence of Native American populations was incidental to these grand nation-building efforts. Adam (or, the authentic American) represents an "individual emancipated from history, happily bereft of ancestry, untouched and undefiled by the usual inheritances of family and race; an individual standing alone, self-reliant, and self-propelling, ready to confront whatever awaited him with the aid of his own unique and inherent resources" (Lewis 1955, p. 5).

almost sensual descriptions of an idealised German homeland, seeming obsession with German romanticism, and preoccupation with Prussian values form the bedrock upon which his ideas surrounding Heimat are constructed. To this end, the ‘virgin’ territory and seemingly untapped potential of the eastern German states provides Höcke with the figurative territory needed to realise this new history.

Ideas surrounding Heimat also resonate with subjects; to Elsa, Heimat represents a set of shared values which encompass people, places, and even Germany’s autochthonous flora and fauna. However, in her view, these values and the solidarity they inspire can only exist within a limited space: “When more and more people flock to Germany who need help, the system breaks.” The ‘symbiotic relationship’ between people and the environment they live in not only reinforces a traditional understanding of Heimat where people and places have exerted a mutually beneficial influence over one another across time and space, but facilitates the emergence of an ‘ideal’ subject in response to existential threats. The implication here is that unless the ‘right’ people attend to the habitat in question, it can be lost, compromised, or fatally overwhelmed by outsiders, i.e., in this instance, by the large number of Syrian refugees accepted by the German government in 2015. Heimat is not only embodied in what Miller-Idriss (2020) terms one’s “sacred geographies” (p. 34), but its cultural imaginaries and what subjects *imagine* collective life to look like. These symbolic “rituals,” then, seek to “inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour” which inform this ‘symbiotic relationship’ between people, space, and place (Boym 2001, p. 42), but while it is clear in Elsa’s case that the concept of Heimat acts as a kind of cultural touchstone, she concedes during her interview that her home state has relatively few refugees in comparison with other Bundesländer. Elsa’s testimony reflects the idea that subjects can routinely engage in “nationalist practices” in order to make ‘legitimate’ political claims within the context of national belonging (Hage 1998, p. 68). This process involves assuming an idealised image of a particular place or space, positioning oneself within this place or space as a member of a dominant but seemingly threatened group, and establishing a discursive link between a racialised other and their ‘invasion’ of one’s homeland (Ibid., pp. 68-70). Indeed, while Elsa has little personal experience of living near or interacting with refugees on a regular basis, she nonetheless regards them as a threat to her idealised conception

of Heimat and her role within it. Despite these epistemological inconsistencies, the interview testimony included in this thesis finds that Elsa's political engagement today enables her to accumulate socio-political capital, a commodity that for some subjects was previously in short supply due to the disenfranchisement they experienced while living in the GDR.

Similarly, subjects such as Anke also reference Heimat, but posit that it is the hard work and resilience of Germans which ultimately sets them apart from other nationalities. In Anke's view, the young men arriving from Syria could learn a lot from the *Trümmerfrauen* (rubble women) who helped to rebuild Germany in the aftermath of WWII:

[...] the young men who come here should go back to their homeland, muck in, and rebuild just as our *Trümmerfrauen* did after the war. [...] Someone told me that they are sitting on Ku'damm [Kurfürstendamm, Berlin] drinking coffee. [...] I have a different idea. If I love my country, then I also have to fight for it.

The idea that refugees today are unwilling or even unable to better their own situation is antithetical to the worldview of those subjects like Anke for whom hard work and fortitude define the German 'experience.' Anke explained that she worked as an economist in the GDR as a trader with foreign currencies. As a child, Anke was active in various GDR youth organisations: she was a *Jungpionier* (Young Pioneer), a *Thälmannpionier* (Thälmann Pioneer), and a member of the *Freie Deutsche Jugend* (Free German Youth, FDJ), respectively. During her interview, Anke quipped that she is "a trained GDR citizen." As Marx Ferree (1995) observes, the GDR itself "was built upon the principles that all citizens had a right and a duty to work" (p. 11), but Anke credits her enjoyment of work and her belief that work defines a person to the values of her "very Prussian" mother, namely, punctuality, orderliness, cleanliness, and reliability. These values also strike a chord with subjects such as Elsa and Gabi. While, for example the stereotype of German *Pünktlichkeit* (punctuality) is often ridiculed, it represents a lived "reality" for Elsa. In Gabi's view, it is the Prussian qualities of "buildability, punctuality, and reliability" that have seen Germany endure as a nation. For Gabi, getting a German passport is one thing—"one can get a passport relatively quickly these days"—but it is really a question of the depths to

one's *Heimatverbundenheit* (national pride). Gabi's testimony implies that if outsiders cannot belong physically through dint of legal German citizenship, they also cannot belong in an emotional or spiritual sense by becoming a part of the broader cultural imaginary. Conversely, while subjects like Inge report that she is "not sad" to call herself German, she disregarded the question of whether she was proud of her nationality as "nonsense" (*Blödsinn*). Similarly, Petra found the same question "amusing." Importantly, and in contrast to Höcke, however, Anke operationalises discourses surrounding Prussian values and traditional gender roles in a very different way. For Höcke, these values are associated with an intrinsic or 'natural' order, i.e., strictly codified social roles determined by biological difference. For Anke, Prussian values represent a tradition of strong, plain-speaking women who have taken control of their lives during difficult times. While Anke does not describe herself as a feminist, she reported growing up in an environment where women were self-sufficient and she supports a woman's right to carve her own niche in the world: "If [women] want to be housewives, that's okay, but if they're anything like me, they [will] take their lives into their own hands and enjoy a good education." The evidence in this section demonstrates that male and female members of the AfD appear to respond to the concept of Heimat in different ways; while Höcke determines that the fate of one's nation lies in the hands of an exceptional and 'ideal' male subject, Anke describes how Germany was rebuilt in part by the collective efforts of women following WWII. Where Anke invokes Prussian values to celebrate her independence, autonomy, and fortitude in the face of adversity, Höcke advocates a return to a traditional gender order, reflecting his idolisation of his East Prussian grandparents and the roles he perceives they played in order to maintain an idealised status quo.

Extrapolating from interview testimony, the concept of Heimat resonates with subjects. However, it shows that some male and female AfD members operationalise these discourses in distinctly gendered ways which reflect their own formulative experiences. Male party ideologues such as Björn Höcke frame their motivations in grand terms, i.e., as part of a romanticised nation (re)building project in which a strong man takes the fate of the nation into his own hands, subjects position themselves within this discursive ecosystem in an altogether different way. To Anke,

for example, her lived experiences of growing up in the aftermath of WWII have empowered her to forge her own path in life with hard work and determination. In a reaction that contrasts with this, Höcke sees the revitalisation of Heimat as an opportunity to 'restore' Prussian values and leitmotifs that many German citizens would not recognise today; these "newly recreated practices of national commemoration" offer Höcke and others like him a means to re-establish "social cohesion, a sense of security, and an obedient relationship to authority" (Boym 2001, p. 42), but they do not appear to resonate with subjects despite their affection for, and resonance with, aspects of Heimat. Uniting these different standpoints, however, is subjects' desire for order, stability, and clear boundaries. Just as the discourses explored throughout this section suggest that racialised others threaten a distinctly German way of life, the following section extends discussion by exploring how the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis is perceived by the AfD and subjects as placing an intolerable pressure on the German social welfare system.

### 3.4 Germany's humanitarian responsibilities

The previous section demonstrates that attempts on the part of prominent AfD figures to reinvigorate the concept of Heimat hold an emotional resonance with some subjects, particularly those for whom their Prussian heritage is extremely important. Deepening discussion as it pertains to the themes of Heimat, freedom, and belonging, this section shows that while the AfD and subjects appear to share understandings of refugees, they operationalise these discourses in distinct ways. This section will unpack subjects' views on Germany's adherence to national and international legal norms regarding the protection of refugees and the extent to which these may differ with that of AfD heavyweights such as Alice Weidel and Björn Höcke.

It was a rejection of the so-called "Brussels bureaucracy" and a desire for direct democracy that united early AfD adherents (Sundermeyer 2018, p. 119). This is confirmed by erstwhile party leader Bernd Lucke in his 2019 exposé *Systemausfall* (*System Failure*): "[the founding of the AfD] was a protest against EU politics and the federal government [...] none of this [hostility toward Islam] was in the 2013 manifesto" (pp. 4, 148). As outlined in the *Introduction*, the AfD began life as a

Eurosceptic party; in stark contrast to the party's position on the topic today, its 2013 *Wahlprogramm* outlined only three principal policy goals regarding immigration: firstly, priority must be given to skilled immigrants; secondly, a Canadian-style immigration law that would prevent "disorderly immigration" must be implemented; and lastly, "seriously politically persecuted" people must be granted refuge in Germany (p. 4). Commentators posit that the AfD were, at this stage, offering supporters more than just an alternative to the EU; some even suggest that neoliberals and national conservatives were collaborating with the explicit aim of founding a right-wing party (Friedrich 2019, p. 50). Following Lucke's departure, the AfD's stance on a range of issues took an increasingly nationalistic turn following the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis. The discursive strategies employed by the AfD in relation to this not only centre attention on homogenous conceptualisations of identity, but racialised otherness, reflecting Breeze's observation that readers come to understand phrases such as "the people" as referring implicitly to a person of German ethnicity (2019, p. 93). The inference being, then, that non-Germans do not belong.

This inference finds broader historical provenance in the citizenship policies of the Prussian state; as Miller-Idriss (2008) outlines, citizenship was determined via "*jus sanguinis* (based on blood) principles, rather than through *jus soli* (based on birthplace or territory)" (p. 31). Reflecting Sundermeyer (2018), this section argues that, in the case of the AfD, the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis also helped the party to revive its flagging fortunes following the unceremonious departure of former leader Bernd Lucke and a subsequent loss of a fifth of its membership (pp. 42-43). Figures show that, at its founding in 2013, the AfD had 17,687 members, and in 2014 it had 20,728 (Niedermayer 2018). Post-Lucke, the AfD's membership dropped to 16,385 members, but increased to 25,015 (2016) and 27,621 (2017) in the years following the Syrian refugee crisis (Ibid.). Discussion here suggests that the AfD's strategic instrumentalisation of the refugee crisis helped the party to regain its footing at a time when its future was uncertain. Resultantly, the discursive strategies employed by the AfD to consolidate its position vis-à-vis incoming refugees sees it pit 'the people' against a totalising Muslim 'other' in a clash akin to a biblical battle, as the party's 2019 *Eurowahl* manifesto describes:



Europe is largely shaped by Greco-Roman antiquity, Judaism and Christianity, the Enlightenment, and human rights. In the spirit of freedom, the rule of law, and democracy, we want to preserve this Europe permanently for ourselves and our descendants. We will defend Europe against an Islam that, on the basis of the Koran and Sunna, is incompatible with the basic European principles of law, freedom, and democracy and claims to rule as an all-inclusive religion and wants to enforce Sharia law (p. 51).

In this way, the AfD constructs an explicit discourse whereby ‘native’ or ‘autochthonous’ Germans are favoured in contrast to those arriving to Germany from Muslim-majority countries. This in turn generates “a vague but uncomfortable sensation that it is “native” Germans whose existence is under threat” (Breeze 2019, p. 93). This contention is aptly reflected in a number of provocative AfD election posters depicting white pregnant German women and the slogan “*“Neue Deutsche?” Machen wir selber*” (“*“New Germans?” We make them ourselves*”) (Brady 2017). Furthermore, and in contrast to Breeze’s assertion that the PRR today does not use overtly racist language or, in the German context, Nazi-era terms like *Völk* (p. 93), evidence in this section will show that prominent AfD members such as Björn Höcke continue to push the boundaries of acceptable public discourse vis-à-vis refugees and their status in German society. However, this inflammatory stance does not appear to be shared by the women interviewed for this thesis, as this discussion will show.

Just as the discourses explored in *Section 3.3* suggest that racialised others threaten a distinctly German way of life, Alice Weidel, AfD parliamentary co-leader draws attention to the economic consequences of “uncontrolled” migration in her 2019 book *Widerworte: Gedanken über Deutschland (Talking Back: Thoughts about Germany)* (p. 128). Those individuals perceived as unwilling to ‘assimilate’ into a pre-determined cultural and national imaginary are seen as simply wanting to take advantage of Germany’s comparatively generous social welfare system and thus threaten the stability of the German economy: “For a large number of migrants from poorer and non-European regions, [...] arriving in the German welfare state is already the goal: it enables a life on a level that could never be achieved in the country of

origin on their own” (pp. 130, 132). According to Weidel (2019), an “uncontrolled [...] and arbitrary expansion” of these existing systems invariably leads to “exploitation” (p. 128). Weidel (2019) goes on to claim, as per statistics released by the Bundesagentur für Arbeit (Federal Employment Agency) for the year 2018, that over fifty-five percent of the 4.3 million *Harz-IV* (unemployment benefit) claimants in 2018 had a “migration background” (Ibid.). As Mudde (2019) points out, the idea that the “fruits of the national economy should first and foremost (if not exclusively) come to the benefit of [one’s] ‘own people’” is not new; welfare chauvinism is a defining ideological feature of right-wing parties across Europe today (pp. 174-175). Additionally, given that evidence in *Section 3.1* has shown that issues relating to socio-economic inequality have motivated some subjects to join the AfD, the idea that the German state is no longer supporting its own citizens due to the influx of refugees holds purchase with subjects. Ingrid (2019) asserts that: “If it would be possible, I would say, “okay, everybody can come, we can help everybody,” but we don’t have the resources, we don’t have the money, we don’t have places for people to live. We can’t afford it anymore.” This view is echoed by Elsa who states that: “If we spend fifty, sixty billion a year on refugees, at the same time, pensioners can’t retire. [...] Germany says it has no money for its pensioners.” Pensioners are not the only group affected; according to Anke, “We also have child poverty [...] And the way we are tackling it now—open borders and social security systems where only a fraction of citizens pay in—that can’t go well.” Subjects like Gisela report that while they were initially put off by the AfD’s singular focus on EU reform, she later came to regard them as the only party capable of dealing effectively with the refugee crisis and concomitant issues of law and order. Here evidence shows how Alice Weidel and subjects share understandings of refugees and the ensuing impact of their arrival in Germany on the country’s social welfare system. The proceeding analysis shows that, for the most part, subjects believe that Germany has a humanitarian responsibility to help those in need. This is in stark contrast to party ideologues like Björn Höcke who, in his echoing of Nazi-era discourses, likens incoming refugees to animals. Given Höcke’s seeming adherence to a racially homogenous and biologically essentialist worldview, as discussed in *Section 3.3*, evidence suggests that there is a distinct gender dimension to this difference in viewpoints. However, it

is not necessarily generalisable across a broader cohort of AfD members comprising of both prominent figureheads like Höcke, and 'ordinary' members.

Given his family history and the formulative experiences of 'authentic' Germans like his grandparents, Björn Höcke (2018) claims to "fully understand" the plight of "real" refugees (p. 39), although he does not elaborate on how the authenticity of refugees' accounts could be realistically determined. While he reports feeling moved by these stories of displacement, he is "upset by the rather brazen demands of many migrants who have come here [to Germany]. The situation was completely different for the Germans who had been expelled [from East Prussia]" (p. 40). Drawing on the discourse that it is the hard work and resilience of Germans that sets them apart from others, Höcke (2018) asserts that, in comparison to the "soldiers of fortune" who come to Germany today, the East Prussians displaced following WWII made themselves useful by undertaking any work they could find so that they did not become a burden on their communities as "*unnütze Fresser*" ("useless eaters") (pp. 40-41). Höcke's statement here reflects Nazi-era discourses vis-à-vis the biologically and culturally-determined ways in which the socio-economic utility of certain demographics were identified. Like "*Lebensunwertes Leben*" ("life unworthy of life"), 'useless eaters' was a term used by the Nazis to identify people with severe medical conditions as well as physical or learning disabilities. It is estimated that 250,000 adults and children with disabilities were systematically murdered as part of Aktion T4, the state-mandated involuntary euthanasia programme (Holocaust Memorial Day Trust 2023). In the same way that the Nazis attempted to rationalise that Aktion T4 victims were like animals "who neither recognised nor cared for their environments" (Friedlander 1996, p. 96), in his use of the noun *Fresser*, Höcke not only denigrates refugees, but, in his turn of phrase, reduces them to animals. In German, the infinitive *fressen* is typically used in conjunction with animals, not humans; in other words, animals *fressen* (feed) and humans *essen* (eat). To this end, Höcke (2018) sees no socio-cultural or economic incentive to "simply distribute the economic values that we Germans have worked for [given] the plundering of our social welfare system [and] destruction of our communities" (p. 40). Here it is demonstrated that some prominent male AfD figures utilise *völkisch* discourses surrounding post-war national identity and German cultural heritage to outline their opposition to immigration in the

wake of the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis. In a reaction which contrasts with subjects, party members like Höcke have little sympathy for refugees whereas the majority of subjects appear more accepting of global norms surrounding humanitarian assistance and giving aid to those in need, as the following paragraphs explore. This purported advocacy of refugee rights comes with certain caveats; some subjects question, for example, whether Germany is spending its humanitarian aid effectively and assert that it would be better spent in refugees' country of origin.

Interview testimony reveals that the majority of subjects were not opposed to refugees and asylum-seekers in the broader sense. They did, however make a clear distinction between those granted the right to remain in Germany and those individuals who had their application for asylum rejected. In the case of the latter, some subjects assert that such individuals should be forced to leave Germany immediately. While, as discussed in *Section 3.3*, the idea of Heimat resonates with subjects such as Elsa and appears to inform her perception that 'the system' is overwhelmed with newcomers, she asserts that the right to asylum is one of Germany's most important laws: "every person who is threatened by war [...] must find safety and security in Germany." In Elsa's view, this right to asylum, as mandated for EU member states by Article 18 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, does not mean that individuals are entitled to 'abuse' the system, i.e., refuse to leave the host country if their application for asylum has been rejected. These discourses have been instrumentalised by the AfD in attempts to consolidate both their opposition to the CDU's 'failed' open-border policy, as well as appeal to the gender-based interests of its members following a series of high-profile sexual assaults perpetrated by Muslim men against white German women (see *Chapter Four* for more discussion on this). In Elsa's view, if the 'rules' had been strictly enforced in the first place, several young German girls would not have lost their lives. Like Elsa, Petra asserts that there is "no question" that Germany has a responsibility to help others in need. In contrast to the accounts of prominent AfD members explored in this section, Petra positions herself as someone who not only has a responsibility for herself and her family, but the society in which she lives: "Of course I have responsibility for other people. I am not an individual completely independent of everything." However, like Elsa, she makes a distinction between those with the legal right to remain in

Germany and those without. Additionally, the idea that Germany is not administering its humanitarian aid effectively resonates with Petra who posits that despite the massive amounts spent on overseas development projects, “they [refugees] still come.” Despite appearing to advocate the use of military force under certain circumstances, Petra rejects the idea of a *Festung Europa* (Fortress Europa), a military propaganda term co-opted by white supremacists and the global Identitarian movement today: “It sounds very brutal.” Given her visceral physical and verbal reaction to the idea that refugees are “still coming” to Germany during her interview (“yuk!”), it is unclear whether it is the wording or the implication of *Festung Europa* that is ultimately distasteful to Petra.

Like Petra, Gisela asserts that financial aid would be better spent in refugees’ country of origin: “We have a lot of money here. [...] I do believe that whomever has a lot, can also give a lot. But I don’t think the path we are currently taking is the right one. [...] Syrians shouldn’t have to travel across Europe. [...] One hundred Euros can do a lot more there than here.” Similarly, Gabi concurs that “development aid in these poor countries must be designed in a way that countries can build their own economy and become independent of [European] or German companies.” Anke states that there are “various possibilities,” namely, “helping people to help themselves,” just as the Germans had to rebuild their country in the aftermath of WWII. Such a strategy is not without its own set of complexities; Petra asks: “of course, one hundred Euros in Cameroon or Somalia is worth a lot more. [But] how do you give the money? And who do you give the money to? It is very complex.” While Ingrid claims to understand the rationale behind individuals’ decision to leave their home country—she came to Germany as a refugee herself—she insisted that Germany could not just open its borders to just “anyone”: “A lot of them lie. They destroy their passports so we don’t know who is here. We can’t get rid of them anymore.” As Ahmed (2004) observes, “according to the logic of this discourse, it is always possible that one might not be able to tell the difference [between fraudulent and genuine cases], and that they may pass into our community” (p. 122). While Ingrid reports feeling sympathy for those arriving from Syria, she makes a crucial distinction between her experiences and those of newcomers: one of her parents is German. Reflecting historical citizenship debates which place particular emphasis “on an ethnic connection to others that

share the same culture, Heimat, and language” (Miller-Idriss 2008, p. 47), the implication here is that Ingrid has more of a biological and cultural ‘right’ to come to Germany than others without a *jus sanguinis* citizenship claim. For Inge, issues surrounding law and order prevail; Germany’s intake of refugees “must be properly regulated.” She recalls that when Germany accepted refugees from the former Yugoslavia during the Balkans conflict, “it was orderly.” This is in stark contrast to today where, in Inge’s view, distinctions between migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers have become increasingly blurred. Subjects’ invocation of the law provides them with the means to voice their concerns about incoming refugees without sounding overtly discriminatory; in this way, the legitimacy of the AfD’s various platforms regarding these issues is reinforced. For example, Anke states that “Article 16a in the Grundgesetz actually says that only politically persecuted people should get asylum in Germany. Mrs Merkel has extended this to everyone.” During her interview, Elsa went so far as to provide this researcher with a copy of the Grundgesetz so that they could check for herself that the AfD operated within the confines of the law.

Taking these examples together, this section has demonstrated that while subjects appear to share understandings of incoming refugees to Germany as placing an intolerable strain on the German social welfare system with prominent AfD members, they operationalise these discourses in a different way to party heavyweights. To this end, subjects appear to support national and international legal mechanisms designed to protect refugees in stark contrast with AfD figures Alice Weidel and Björn Höcke who appear to locate their opposition to refugees in discourses which consolidate the AfD’s increasingly *völkisch* worldview. On the other hand, as the following section will investigate in greater depth, the blame for Germany’s perceived ‘disintegration’ following the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis is laid squarely at the feet of supranational institutions like the EU by both prominent AfD members and subjects.

### 3.5 The perceived bureaucratic overreach of the EU

The preceding section established that the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis is seen by both prominent AfD members and subjects as placing intense pressure on the German social welfare system, ostensibly to the detriment of hardworking German citizens. Expanding discussion on the impact of the refugee crisis on the German economy and society more broadly, this section investigates the extent to which the discourses propagated by the AfD concerning the EU's perceived fiscal mismanagement and 'meddling' in everyday German life resonates with subjects. It makes the case that the EU is regarded by subjects as fatally undermining German national interests in light of both the 2008 global financial crisis and events of 2015.

Writing in her 2019 book *Widerworte*, AfD parliamentary co-leader Alice Weidel posits that the freedoms enjoyed by Germans today must be defended from the totalising projects of supranational organisations such as the EU (p. 7). In Weidel's view, every German should be "keenly aware" of where things lead when rulers—in this case, the unelected bureaucrats of the EU—appear to overturn laws and bend them in their own favour (p. 7). In this way, Weidel constructs a discursive link between the EU and the former Nazi state. According to Weidel (2019), the established German parties have "looted" the nation state and "in the process gutted the constitution, the separation of powers, and democratic institutions to the bare façade" (p. 16). For Weidel, the power 'given' to the European "superstate" by the German political elite has come at the expense of the nation, its people, and as a result, its decisions relating to the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis has changed Germany "more strongly and more radically than any other decision before" (2019, p. 17). This rhetoric is strongly echoed in a 2018 speech made at Hambach Castle in Rhineland-Palatinate by former AfD parliamentary co-leader Alexander Gauland, further fuelling the discursive fight against the perceived hegemony of the EU and its alleged disregard of German national sovereignty. Hambach Castle was no doubt chosen as the venue for this event because of its association with the 1832 *Hambacher Fest* (Hambach Festival) and the German democracy movement of the early nineteenth century. Decrying the loss of national "cohesion" in the wake of the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis, Gauland states that:

The European nations lose more [...] of their inner cohesion through the immigration of culturally alien, uneducated, and often illiterate people whose religious and moral values differ significantly from ours [...] The sovereignty of nation states is gradually being delegated to Brussels. Nations and nation states are to be gradually abolished in the service of the highest ideals. They want to drive out the community feeling from people in order to finally dissolve them in large metropolitan areas populated by unrelated individuals, of which the left and neoliberal unifiers dream about in absurd unanimity (2019, pp. 18-19).

Here Gauland reinforces the nativist discourse that a racialised other does not, and cannot, 'belong' to the nation in either a physical or emotional sense. To Alice Weidel, the AfD is seen as "[...] the last chance we have to save Germany" (p. 8). In this way, discourses surrounding EU hegemony and the AfD's fight against its bureaucratic system of governance reflects Richards' 2013 concept of 'emotional governance'; the idea that political parties such as the AfD shape and exploit the national emotional climate in relation to the EU. To this end, prominent political figures can, as Kinnvall (2015) observes, "shape the emotional climate on a national and international level" (p. 522). This process often involves the valorisation of an idealised past and a linear reading of history (Ibid.). In the case of the AfD, the party positions itself discursively as the only party that can break the perceived stranglehold that the EU holds over German socio-cultural, political, and economic life. As this chapter demonstrates as a whole, the AfD's strategic instrumentalisation of issues relating to the identified themes of Heimat, freedom, and belonging resonate with subjects disillusioned with mainstream politics. However, within the context of this section, while subjects express frustration at the idea that the EU has too much power over everyday German life, evidence shows that they do not echo the apocalyptic rhetoric espoused by leading AfD figures in this regard.

Discussion so far has demonstrated that AfD representatives of past and present such as Alexander Gauland and Alice Weidel call for a decisive move away from supranational integration toward national independence, and fundamentally reject the idea of a "single" European identity (Galpin 2017, p. 3). With characteristic provocation, Björn Höcke (2018) refers to supporters of supranational integration as



*“Flavus-Deutschen”* (“Flavus Germans”) (p. 276). Just as he attempts to reinvigorate the idea that ‘Germaness’ is embodied in specific ‘authentic’ people, Höcke utilises one of Germany’s most prominent origin myths, the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest in 9 CE, in order to evoke the ‘soul’ of the nation in the fight against EU socio-cultural and economic hegemony. As legend has it, three Roman legions met defeat at the hands of a motley alliance of Germanic tribes led by Arminius, a former Roman general with Germanic heritage. Arminius (or ‘Hermann’ as he later became known) was duly recognised as Germany’s first national hero (Crossland 2009). The myths surrounding Arminius (or ‘Hermann’) largely fell out of fashion following WWII when they became “contaminated” by the militant nationalism that led to the rise of Hitler and national socialism (Ibid). Flavus, Arminius’ brother, however, remained loyal to Rome and was thus condemned as a traitor. As Kinnvall (2015) observes, “one of the key internal enemies in much [PRR] discourse is the elite, often described in terms of ‘traitors’” (p. 523). The implication here, then, is clear: ‘traitors’ to the German nation (i.e., those who support supranational integration) have upended ‘normality’ at the whim of the invasive powers of the EU. Just as the Germanic tribes defeated the Romans against all odds, Höcke (2018) suggests that “the new Romans [...] will find a hard nut to crack in these Teutonic Asterixes and Obelixes!” (p. 253; Pates and Leser 2021, p. 97). The German political mainstream who enabled this ‘invasion,’ as well as the ‘invaders’ themselves, are too far beyond the possibility of reform; their collusion has led to Germany’s “historical disintegration” on a seemingly epic scale (Höcke 2018, p. 262). In Höcke’s view, the ultimate responsibility for this ‘disintegration’ lies, however, with the CDU who encouraged and facilitated a relationship with the EU throughout their time in government: “The old parties, the CDU above all, are responsible for [...] the multicultural revolution that is now to end the history of our people” (Polke Majewski 2016). Reflecting the idea that PRR parties like the AfD utilise a linear view of history in attempts to consolidate its ‘emotional governance,’ the mainstream parties come under fire for colluding with the ‘enemy.’

The empirical data collected for this thesis suggests that issues relating to the EU and its perceived mismanagement of the 2008 global financial crisis resonate with subjects. Reflecting the centrality of this chapter’s identified themes of Heimat, freedom, and belonging, the following analysis also demonstrates how the EU is

simultaneously regarded by subjects as holding Germany's purse strings, as well as undermining its socio-cultural traditions and regional idiosyncrasies. Regarding Germany's economic health, some subjects report that the "*Eurorettungsschirm*" ("Euro rescue package")—the measures taken by the EU and its member states to bail out insolvent states—was among the primary motivating factors behind their decision to join the AfD. For Anke, an economist by trade, the root of the problem is that the different currency areas of Europe "do not fit together economically." The decision to bail-out insolvent countries is considered altogether mystifying to Anke given the legal protocols in place to prevent EU member states from assuming one another's debt, i.e., Article 125 of the Maastricht Treaty. The Treaty states that: "A Member State shall not be liable for or assume the commitments of central governments, regional, local or other public authorities, other bodies governed by public law, or public undertakings of another Member State, without prejudice to mutual financial guarantees for the joint execution of a specific project" (EUR-Lex 2021). In Anke's view, "these contracts have been massively violated. I expected governments to be lawful. [...] I was so shocked that when the next elections were due, I said, I had two options. Either I'd invalidate my certificate [...] or I would join a new party."<sup>6</sup> Anke's invocation of the Maastricht Treaty is a useful discursive tool; she can locate her concerns about the EU in discourses relating to the legality of the financial crisis without sounding discriminatory or overly reactionary. She demarcates the issues as one ultimately linked to matters of ontological security; Germany is perceived as continuing to 'routinise' relations with the EU even when such relations are considered harmful to the overall 'health' of the nation. Having formerly been a member of both the CDU and FDP, Anke joined the AfD in 2013. In contrast to the life-or-death scenarios described by Gauland, Weidel, and Höcke, subjects Anke and Elsa outline their concerns in terms of how broader EU initiatives have impacted on local industry in their home states. Like the unwieldy implementation of the Eurozone, the EU is seen by Anke as trying to enforce a "politically decreed coal phase-out" without paying due care and attention to how

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<sup>6</sup> It is assumed here that Anke is referring either to her accountancy qualification or the license needed to practice as an accountant in Germany.

such a decision might affect both people and places. Similarly, while Elsa believes that “the EU is a great thing [...] in its founding, origins, and original role,” it has overreached significantly when it comes to the administration of everyday German life. It is not right, in Elsa’s view, that “the EU decides what schoolchildren [in Germany] eat for lunch.” She reports that “we are for a Europe in which each country retains its individuality. [However] countries give too much power to the EU.” In contrast to prominent AfD members, subjects like Ingrid want to preserve the economic union and its financial incentives. However, she states that “we don’t want the European Union to decide if our [crisps] are too dark or not, or how long the coffee machine is working or not. We want to decide that in our country.” For subjects such as Inge, her problem with the EU began long before Syrian refugees arrived in Germany (“that came later”). Reflecting Höcke’s contention that Germany has been deceived or tricked by so-called *Flavus-Deutschen*, both to the detriment of its economy as well as a distinctly German way of life, Inge describes the EU as “a Moloch [...] a bureaucratic monster” that “squeezes” Germany for more revenue in order to bail-out other member states with seemingly little return for German citizens. Furthermore, the use of the term ‘Moloch’ warrants further unpacking here not only because of its antisemitic undertones, but the idea that the EU has usurped Germany’s national sovereignty. In the Hebrew Bible, Moloch, or Molech, is “a netherworld deity to whom children were offered by fire for some divinatory purpose” (Heider 1999, p. 585). Moloch is also described as “a foreign deity who was at times illegitimately given a place in Israel’s worship as the result of the syncretistic policies of certain apostate kings” (Augustyn 2020). While it is unclear whether ‘Moloch’ is deployed here by Inge as an explicitly antisemitic trope, a discursive link is nonetheless established between ‘Moloch’ and the idea that the EU is greedy or money-grabbing. As the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) (2021) point out, “one of the most prominent and persistent stereotypes about Jews is that they are greedy and avaricious [...] They are seen as both relentless in the pursuit of wealth and also as stingy misers determined not to let any money slip from their grasp. They are imagined to exert control over the world’s financial systems.” Such discourses have come to prominence once again following events at the 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia in the US when hundreds of young men bearing torches

chanted “Jews will not replace us” (Miller-Idriss 2020, p. 63). At any rate, the idea that the EU has ingratiated itself into all aspects of German socio-cultural, political, and economic life and is attempting, in the eyes of subjects, to amalgamate the distinct cultures of the EU member states into a single entity is one that resonates with subjects like Inge and is reflected in the discourses utilised by prominent AfD members. Evidence presented here shows that subjects perceive the EU as willing to sacrifice individuality for uniformity across its member states in order to fulfil its totalising socio-political and economic projects, thus jeopardising subjects’ feelings of belonging and potentially destabilising the idea of Heimat itself.

While senior AfD figures such as Alexander Gauland, Alice Weidel, and Björn Höcke have called for a move away from supranational integration, this idea ultimately does not appeal to subjects. When asked if they thought the prospect of a ‘Dexit’ was likely, subjects Elsa and Inge brushed off the suggestion. Elsa reports wanting to stay in the EU, albeit with more citizen input and more ‘respect’ shown by the EU for the cultural traditions of different member states. Inge says that she is committed to EU reform and ensuring that member states comply with the EU constitution. Having started life as an explicitly Eurosceptic party, it is little surprise that the EU remains a point of contention for the AfD. However, evidence here gives this thesis a valuable insight into how subjects respond to these cornerstone issues and the ways in which the women and men of the AfD operationalise these discourses in different ways. While subjects appear to share understandings of the EU with prominent male and female AfD members, they outline their concerns via the real-world impact they believe that EU-led initiatives have had on their local communities, a prominent example being the phase out of fossil fuels in areas which have traditionally relied upon the coal industry for jobs. This confirms, in part, one of the core arguments of this chapter, i.e., that subjects articulate their motivations for joining the AfD in an issues-based way, not an ideological one.

### *Conclusion*

Reflecting discussion of gender and the ‘losers of modernisation’ thesis in *Section 1.3*, this chapter demonstrates that it is very important for researchers to not only pay close attention to subjects’ own accounts, but to ‘locate’ these accounts within

particular moments in time. This has enabled this chapter to effectively investigate how, why, and where subjects' formulative socio-cultural and political experiences have come to influence their decision to join the AfD today. This underscores the argument of this thesis as a whole that subjects' engagement with politics today cannot be understood without reference to the private. The subject accounts explored in this chapter are complex, diverse, and characterised by a range of competing emotions; while these accounts are not and cannot be precise replicas of subjects' memories or past pivotal events, it is important to untangle the contradictory intersections of gender, political subjectivity, and the AfD's instrumentalisation of hot-button issues to examine how both individual and collective imaginaries enmesh and facilitate subjects' engagement with the PRR in the German context.

The analysis shows that subjects are not "simply hostages to fortune" (Macklin 2020, p. 3). Issues surrounding the identified themes of Heimat, freedom, and belonging underpins subjects' desire to 'return' to idealised places and spaces in the face of contemporary political upheaval. In a global political culture where static concepts of national identity are highly politicised by the PRR and far right more broadly, it is necessary "to redirect attention back to what people actually say about themselves" (Cohen 2000, p. 5; Gallinat 2008; pp. 670-671). The empirical evidence base of this thesis supports the idea that the development of subjects' political subjectivity and their subsequent political engagement is not a linear process. AfD members are thus recognised by this thesis as "socially embedded agents, both individuals and collective actors [who] make choices constrained by their separate and joint histories and informed by their ethical and political judgements" (Marx Ferree 2018, p. 15). While the evidence indicates that prominent AfD members and subjects share 'understandings' of a given topic, for example, the status of Syrian refugees in Germany, the two groups operationalise these discourses in different ways; in contrast to party ideologues, subjects do not appear to exhibit a firm ideological commitment to the AfD's increasingly homogenous and exclusionary worldview – local issues appear more salient. None of the women interviewed for this thesis reported supporting the PRR or far right prior to joining the AfD. This chapter also extends discussion first presented in *Section 1.3.2* regarding the intersections of

gender, race, and class in the post-modernisation era in its critical exploration of the issues most important to subjects, including post-reunification socio-economic deprivation in the eastern German states. However, while subjects articulate their motivations via local concerns and their own formulative experiences, they appear to instrumentalise the ‘use value’ of their newfound social and political capital, i.e., in some cases, their own ‘East Germanness.’ In other words, subjects deploy their ‘East Germanness’ to accrue meaning and value in a mainstream political system which is perceived as having failed to routinely engage with the eastern states and address the enduring socio-economic legacies of reunification.

Subjects’ strategic instrumentalisation of their own affective repertoires in the German context lends weight to Grzebalska and Zacharenko’s idea that “it is no longer feasible to ignore the empowering effects of participation in the right-wing project” (2018, p. 89), as touched upon in the introduction to this chapter. To this end, the chapter shows that the AfD’s shrewd mobilisation of hard-to-reach demographics has had a tangible impact on the development of subjects’ political subjectivity, as compelling interview testimony has revealed. For those subjects born in the former GDR, for example, their AfD membership has enabled them to say and do things that might have been unthinkable in a past life. The next chapter continues this discussion as it relates to the AfD’s strategic instrumentalisation of discourses relating to the perceived physical threat posed by Islam and Muslim men following a spate of high-profile sexual assault cases. It explores where subjects position themselves in relation to this issue, and the extent to which male and female subjects operationalise their understandings of Islam and Muslim men to different ends.

# Chapter Four

## “No-one can accuse the AfD of any militant activities”: The AfD, Islam, and violence

### Introduction

The previous chapter demonstrated that subjects utilise diverse affective repertoires to fulfil their political objectives in relation to the identified themes of Heimat, freedom, and belonging. The evidence showed that the use value of subjects' newfound socio-political capital has enabled them to make political claims and articulate perceived existential threats. Extending discussion on subjects' discursive articulation of threat, this chapter explores how the AfD strategically instrumentalises fears surrounding acts of physical violence committed by Muslim men, the ways in which subjects respond to this, and whether there is a gendered angle to these responses. Following a spate of high-profile sexual assaults perpetrated by Muslim men against German women and subjects' continued conflation of Islam with extremism, physical violence relates, in this context, to sexual violence and acts of Islamist extremism.

Just as the use value of subjects' identities has 'allowed' them to say and do things that were unthinkable in a past life, their AfD membership enables them to articulate the legitimacy of their security concerns vis-à-vis a racialised Muslim other through a range of discursive strategies. This reflects Philipsen's observation that subjects' often performative relationship with politics has afforded them authority and legitimacy in political climates where they may have otherwise been "unauthorised" to speak out (2021, p. 149; Butler 1997, p. 157). Expanding this observation, the chapter investigates the extent to which these discursive strategies not only facilitate subjects' political engagement but deflect attention away from their own entanglements with violence and extremism, discursive or otherwise. For the purposes of the discussion at hand, violence is broadly defined here as "the

commission of violent acts motivated by a desire, conscious or unconscious, to obtain or maintain political power” (Moser 2001, p. 36). The central argument of this chapter is that subjects’ contradictory practices underpin their engagement with the AfD in this regard. Furthermore, this analysis outlines how gender appears to influence subjects’ articulation of existential threat, as well as the constitution of subjects themselves. For example, Muslim men are immovably positioned by subjects as the perpetrators of sexual violence and/or terrorist attacks, whereas German women are typically positioned as the primary victims of this violence. The analysis provides an insight into the perspectives of both male and female AfD members, giving this thesis and the wider scholarly literature a further fresh insight into where subjects ‘locate’ themselves in political discourse and the contextual factors that underpin their support of the PRR in Germany.

This chapter is comprised of five sections which unpack the complex, performative intersections of agency, violence, and extremism to broaden and deepen the investigation of this thesis into why female subjects have joined the AfD. This chapter first unpacks the extent to which the AfD’s instrumentalisation of public outrage in the wake of high-profile sexual violence cases such as *Der Fall Susanna* (The Case of Susanna) resonate with subjects. Secondly, it explores how the AfD and subjects manipulate official government statistics in attempts to provide an empirical foundation for their claims concerning the alleged innate proclivity of Muslim men to commit sexual violence. Thirdly, it demonstrates that as well as flying the banner for German victims of gender-based violence, the AfD and subjects seek to ‘rescue’ Muslim women from so-called harmful cultural practices over which they (Muslim women) are perceived as having little to no personal agency. Fourthly, this chapter unpacks how subjects appear unable to critically reflect upon how the AfD’s incendiary rhetoric regarding Islam contributes to political polarisation, the erosion of community cohesion, or the party’s alleged influence on right-wing extremists. Lastly, the fifth section reveals how subjects claim to eschew violence yet simultaneously reinforce a discursive link between Muslims, left-wing opponents, and right-wing extremists. The sections that follow facilitate a deeper understanding of the important contextual factors which make subjects’ engagement with the AfD possible and focus



specifically on the identified theme of Islam and the perceived threat posed by Muslim men to white German women and the security of the German nation.

## 4.1 Sexual violence and white German women

This section explores how female subjects become active agents in the discursive articulation of threat in relation to Muslim men as well as their attempts to convince diverse audiences of what they see as an existential threat. It will analyse the extent to which this instrumentalisation resonates with subjects and how these discourses appear to be articulated in distinct ways by male and female AfD members. This section makes the case that the AfD and subjects have instrumentalised discourses relating to a series of high-profile sexual assaults perpetrated by Muslim men against German women.

In 2018, a fourteen-year-old girl from Mainz, Susanna F., was raped and murdered by her twenty-two-year-old refugee boyfriend, Ali B.<sup>7</sup> Despite being named as the prime suspect in the case, B. managed to procure papers for himself and his family and returned to Iraq under a false name (Bennhold 2018b). The more details that emerged about the perpetrator, “the more it looked as though authorities had committed a remarkable string of blunders”; B.’s application for asylum had been rejected and he had been implicated in the assault of a policewoman, robbery, and the rape of an eleven-year-old girl (Mounk 2019). Ali B. would eventually be retrieved and brought back to Germany to face trial by the Head of the German Federal Police and a squadron of anti-terror officers. In a similar case, more than 4,000 demonstrators gathered in Kandel, Rhineland-Palatinate, in 2018 following the murder of Mia, killed in 2017 by her ex-boyfriend Abdul (Berg 2019, p. 79). Protesting under the banner *Kandel ist überall* (*Kandel is Everywhere*), Mia’s death became the “political symbol of the supposedly flawed migration and refugee policy of the German government” to those opposing the CDU’s approach to immigration (ibid.). The cases of Susanna F.—or *Der Fall Susanna* as it came to be known—and Mia follow another high-profile incident which saw hundreds of women sexually assaulted by some 1,500 Muslim men at a 2015 New Year’s Eve party in Cologne

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<sup>7</sup> In Germany, both victims and perpetrators of crime are referred to by their first name and the first initial of their surname for privacy reasons.

(Smale 2016). Resultantly, the so-called *Willkommenskultur* (*welcome culture*) promoted by the German government toward incoming refugees came under an intense amount of scrutiny, with “mainstream media outlets, politicians, and anti-Muslim pundits [...] quick to classify the events as an attack on ‘Western’ emancipation and freedom” (Sprengholz 2021, p. 489). Reports of sexual violence and theft allegedly committed by groups of North African men were in stark contrast to the images of crowds of Germans cheering the arrival of refugees at the country’s major train stations in 2015 (Kosnick 2019, p. 172). It is precisely the public backlash to these incidents that the AfD has harnessed and weaponised to back up its claim that Islam and Muslim men pose a distinct threat not only to the physical integrity of the German nation, but also to white German women.

While this chapter focuses primarily on the role of Islam in the AfD and subjects’ construction of physical threat, immigration remains an important focal point for parties across the broader political spectrum. Prominent examples of this can be found in the UK in the run-up to the 2016 EU membership referendum and include the Conservative Party’s “Go Home” van campaign and the Labour Party’s “Controls on Immigration” party conference merchandise (Stocker 2017). As Stocker (2017) points out in relation to the case of the UK, the modest successes and “benign” acceptance of the PRR by the political mainstream demonstrates that Islamophobic and anti-immigration sentiment is no longer exceptional in normative political discourse (p. 14). Islamophobia is defined here as the “socially constructed and reproduced prejudice against Islam as a religion, culture, and way of life” (Kallis 2015, p. 28). However, in the German context, discursive overlap between Muslims and immigration is sometimes unavoidable given how discourses surrounding immigration and Islam are often enmeshed; scholars have observed that a perception of “cultural sameness” vis-à-vis Muslims of all backgrounds becomes increasingly salient to parties like the AfD (Sprengholz 2021, p. 488; Yilmaz 2015, p. 37). Muslim men in particular are perceived as carrying the “burden of representation”; in other words, in the minds of the AfD and its supporters, immigrants come to be associated with Muslims, and vice versa (Kosnick 2019, p. 179; Sprengholz 2021, p. 488; Yildiz 2009). Furthermore, “the framing of sexual harassment in Europe as imported by immigrant populations and as linked to some

generalised notion of Arab culture is powerful” and “makes possible the kind of racist rhetoric that reproduces and reinforces a European sense of self as defender and protector of human rights (notably women’s rights and the rights of minorities)” (Abdelmonem *et al.* 2016). As this chapter explores in greater depth, Muslims and immigrants have become discursively entangled in the rhetoric espoused by the AfD in relation to Muslims and sexual violence in the German context; this refers primarily to the party’s ideas surrounding the alleged innate violent proclivities of Muslim men and the ‘inevitable’ threat they pose to white German women following several high-profile sexual assault cases.

The AfD have successfully instrumentalised public outrage in response to the events outlined above in order to consolidate their broader Islamophobic and anti-immigration agenda. In response to *Der Fall Susanna*, the AfD Kreisverband in Dresden (2018) declared in a press release that: “The Susanna F. case is not an isolated [one], but the sad continuation of a series of serious crimes committed by asylum seekers of unknown origin in our country. The responsibility lies with the Merkel government.” The branch went on to describe Susanna F. as “the victim of Merkel’s imported beasts” (*ibid.*). No stranger to controversy in this regard, some of the AfD’s most prominent representatives have openly deployed racist and dehumanising language to describe Muslims; a striking example is offered by André Poggenburg, former state AfD chairperson for Saxony-Anhalt. In a speech marking Ash Wednesday in 2018—a day where German politicians of all stripes participate in a “roast” where they “are allowed to push [political] rhetoric to the limits of fairness – and sometimes beyond” (Chase 2019)—Poggenburg depicted Germans of Turkish origin as “fatherless vermin” and “camel drivers” (Reuters 2018). Poggenburg also demanded that Germany’s Turkish community “go off where they belong far, far, beyond the Bosphorus to their mud huts and polygamy” (Reuters 2018). Attempting to characterise this attack as “political satire” in the spirit of Germany’s post-carnival Ash Wednesday tradition, Poggenburg eventually resigned from the AfD, ostensibly to “ease pressure” on the party following widespread political and media criticism (Deutsche Welle 2018b). As Sterphone (2020) observes, the AfD’s deployment of these racialised discursive repertoires serves ultimately to both outline existential threats to German “national character” as well as warn others about the dangers of

so-called *Parallengeschaften* (*parallel societies*) in which a perceived, and distinctly German, *Leitkultur* is replaced by something “unrecognisable” (p. 39). This observation is reflected in relation to *Der Fall Susanna* and the AfD’s view of all Muslim men as posing a seemingly innate threat to white German women and Western European values and culture, as proceeding paragraphs will explore.

Following Susanna F.’s murder, AfD MdB Thomas Seitz brought the case before the Bundestag and, in a speech that was meant to be about House Rules of Procedure, demonstrated silently for one minute, reportedly in memory of the murdered girl (Berg 2019, p. 85). Seitz was expelled from the session, with the AfD later posting a video on Twitter with the provocative title “Minute of Silence for Susanna: Revealing Reaction of the Other Parties,” thus commanding a degree of control over the ensuing media response as a direct result (Ibid.). Similarly, the official AfD Facebook page regularly posts images with sensationalist accompanying messages. For example, following the assault of a young girl by a man from Niger, the AfD posted: “When does it finally end? 9-year-old abused at former barracks” (AfD 2019a), Similarly, “Afghans are said to have raped girls (13, 16)!” followed in the wake of an assault allegedly perpetrated by an Afghan refugee (AfD 2019b). In discursive terms, this works to “confirm” knowledge of the “sexual danger” that allegedly emanates from Muslim men and elicits a visceral emotional response from its target audience (Kosnick 2019, p. 174). The perpetrators depicted in these images are typically foreign, an immigrant or refugee, and always Muslim. Furthermore, the victims of these crimes are usually described as ethnically German. The violence embedded in these messages, and the AfD’s establishment of a discursive link between Muslim men and sexual violence, consolidates the party’s stance that Muslim men are willing and enthusiastic participants in what party co-leader Alice Weidel calls “the molecular internal war against women” (2019, p. 119). Through their reporting on social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook, parties like the AfD are able “[to] directly address their sympathisers [...] and position themselves as the voice of ‘the people’ in staged proximity to ‘their own people’ and their concerns” (Reisigl 2012, p. 154). Alice Weidel declares that: “The fact is, without the influx of a hundred thousand Muslim migrants in the last few years, countless women would have been spared harassment, abuse, and mistreatment” (2019, p. 116). The AfD’s

externalisation of the perceived threat from Muslim men legitimises their demands for the total exclusion of Islam from German society. However, a cursory examination of the criminal prosecution statistics collated by the Federal Statistical Office of Germany for the years 2014, 2015, and 2016 does not support Weidel's claim. Data derived from GENESIS-Online reveals, for example, that more German defendants were convicted of sexual abuse against children and rape over the three-year period in question than foreign defendants (Federal Statistical Office 2022).<sup>8</sup> Consequently, the AfD's claims regarding the threat posed to German women by Muslim men are underpinned by fallacious arguments that cannot be empirically verified. As outlined in *Chapter Two* (see: Section 2.11 *Translating language, translating culture*), while the feminist poststructuralist approach taken by this thesis is not necessarily concerned with exposing an innate or singular 'truth' as it pertains to subject accounts, in an era of post-truth politics, the AfD's deliberate misrepresentation of government crime statistics matters, as discussion here shows.

Despite its lack of veracity, the AfD's 'othering' of Muslim men has a strategic logic; as Oztig *et al.* (2020) demonstrate in relation to the PRR in France, Netherlands, and Germany, parties' "Islamophobic populism" helps them to maximise votes among those voters who believe that Islam is 'incompatible' with Western European values as well as 'weaken' their political opposition in the eyes of the public (p. 448). Central to this strategy is the construction of Muslims as 'other' by "attributing negative meanings to Islam and also using discursive practices which justify exclusionary practices against Muslims" (Ibid., p. 449). This is reflected in relation to the AfD's strategic operationalisation of discourses which portray Muslim men as sexual deviants who, in the eyes of subjects, 'deserve' to be excluded from German culture and society because of the threat they pose to German women. Additionally, the evidence shows that this resonates with subjects who frame these cases as the logical endpoint of government policy regarded as being more concerned with opening Germany's borders to strangers than protecting its own citizens. This is not necessarily surprising; scholarly literature suggests that women appear to support

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<sup>8</sup> According to the Federal Statistical Office (2022), the category of 'foreigner' includes stateless individuals as well as individuals stationed in Germany on behalf of foreign militaries. No further breakdown of the ethnicities of either German or foreign defendants is provided.

PRR parties like the AfD “for by and large the same reasons as men: opposition to immigration and concerns about crime and insecurity” (Mudde 2019, p. 161; Coffé and Bolzendahl, 2020). However, this chapter extends this observation by exploring subjects’ contradictory practices in relation to these issues. Furthermore, while the perceived failure of the mainstream parties in relation to crime and insecurity has fuelled AfD narratives that they are better able to represent ‘the people’ and their interests than a seemingly indifferent political elite (Breeze 2019), the evidence suggests that while subjects appear to share concerns relating to crime and insecurity, discourses relating to these topics are operationalised by men and women in different ways. In female subjects’ responses to these cases, women come to embody a nation ‘violated’ by an invasive Muslim other. In an interesting contrast, prominent male AfD representatives see themselves as being ‘called’ to defend the socio-cultural and political hegemony of a male-dominated nation. This discourse echoes the gendered binary referred to by Elshtain (1987) as the Just Warrior/Beautiful Soul dichotomy; women become inextricably associated with the ‘innate’ feminine traits of care-giving and peacekeeping while men fulfil their masculine citizen-warrior duties by fighting in wars and protecting state interests, simultaneously becoming both the victims and causes of war (p. 180; Sjöberg and Gentry 2015, p. 2). While, following cases such as *Der Fall Susanna* or the 2015 Cologne attacks, this gendered discourse is not exclusive to the AfD, the idea that the physical integrity of a feminine body politic can only be maintained through a (re)assertion of a patriarchal masculinity appears to hold purchase with some subjects.

Commenting on *Der Fall Susanna*, subjects such as Elsa posit that, “He [Ali B.] had no right to be in Germany. All these girls could have lived.” Gabi questioned the logic of *Frauenschutzzonen* (women protection zones) installed to protect women at public events in the aftermath of the 2015 Cologne attacks, as the following extract demonstrates:

There is a big difference between feeling safe and being safe. If more police are needed for public events, be it Christmas markets, festivals, New Year’s Eve, other things [...] This clearly shows that security isn’t there. We all pay our taxes.

Furthermore, according to Gabi, this failure to protect German women exposes the perceived *Bankrotterklärung* (bankruptcy) of the German government: “Why do I need a *Frauenschutzzone* if everything is okay?” The need to protect white German women from Muslim perpetrators of sexual violence also resonates with subjects like Ingrid who state that: “We want to help women who have suffered sexual abuse, but we always said when this migration crisis started, it’s dangerous for all people. [...] It’s dangerous for us because we don’t know who is coming.” When asked by the researcher whether the AfD would also support Muslim women who are victims of sexual violence, Ingrid replied, “Of course.” However, she did not elaborate on how this might work in practice. Gisela muses that, “It is difficult [...] in every society there is crime. More people are coming who are not allowed to be here. [...] With more migration, comes more crime. And with more rape, at least we can focus on helping women.” Tatjana Festerling, former founding member of the AfD Fraktion in Hamburg and the first Pegida candidate to run for political office in Dresden, claims that Muslim refugees have declared “[a] sex jihad [...] against blonde, white women” in the wake of the 2015 Cologne attacks (Hebel 2015; Shuster 2016). As these extracts effectively demonstrate, in the eyes of subjects, white German women come to bear the physical consequences of the German government’s open-border policy. In line with Hansen’s broad assertion that “the actions of the body are integral to the constitution of its identity” (2000, p. 302), this section argues that women’s bodies also have a particular role to play in the German context. German women’s abused bodies are essential physical and discursive tools by which the nation itself can be conceptualised in gendered terms by subjects; a physical attack on white German women is perceived by some subjects as an attack on a ‘feminine’ body politic, as the following paragraphs explore in greater depth. Furthermore, Festerling’s claim that a jihad, or religious war, is now being waged against white German women highlights how some subjects make an explicit discursive connection between Muslim men and Islamist extremism.

The idea that the German nation and its people are under physical attack in the years following events in Cologne is not one confined to the AfD. In “The Mob Has Raped Us All,” a 2016 opinion piece by conservative journalist Uwe Schmitt for *Die Welt*, the events that transpired in Cologne are framed discursively as nothing less than “[the]

“mutilation of the German nation” (Boulila and Carri 2017, p. 288). Schmitt (2016) states that while he was not even in Cologne on the night in question, he feels particularly aggrieved as “it is my tolerance, developed and defended over decades, that has been abused.” Given that the German government has generously afforded refugees the means to start a new life in the country, the implication here is that the perpetrators of the Cologne attacks have ‘betrayed’ the paternal benevolence of their hosts. The ‘betrayed’ nation is thus menaced by the perceived threat posed by Muslim men and political institutions seen as unable, or unwilling, to do anything about it. Furthermore, the Cologne attacks are framed as the failure of German men to protect their ‘assets’ from a racialised Muslim ‘invader.’ Schmitt (2016) goes on to state that: “It may be that my anger is even more irrepressible because I am the father of three daughters.” The idea that German women are under attack from Muslim men also appears to resonate with prominent German figures on the left of the political spectrum; Boulila and Carri (2017) note the case of journalist, founder of German feminist journal *EMMA*, and alleged “vocal refugee sceptic” Alice Schwarzer (p. 288). Schwarzer—who referred to the Cologne attacks as the New Year’s Eve “Gang-bang-party”—has stated that the CDU’s open-door policy is “too liberal” and that refugee men pose a distinct threat to “German feminist achievements” (Boulila and Carri 2017, p. 288; Schwarzer 2016). While commentators such as Schmitt and Schwarzer share the view that Muslim men pose a threat to German women, these discourses are operationalised in different ways. As Boulila and Carri (2017) observe, for Schwarzer, the Cologne attacks are framed as an assault on a post-feminist “European modernity,” whereas for Schmitt, the attacks are construed as an assault on the physical “assets” of white German men, i.e., white German women (p. 288). With regard to the latter, given that, historically, the state and its security functions have been “deeded to us through gendered images that privilege masculinity” (Tickner 1992, p. 42), the idea that states are gendered social bodies sees the Cologne attacks constructed by Schmitt as an assault not only on the German people but a ‘feminine’ body politic which requires the paternalist protection of a male ‘head.’

In the case of the AfD, the idea of a feminine body politic in need of paternalistic protection from a foreign invader finds purchase among some of its elected



representatives. In *Die Vergewaltigung Europas (The Rape of Europa)*, the first chapter of *Make Europe Great Again*, a 2021 book by Petr Bystron, AfD MdB for Bavaria, the author muses that it is ironic that Europeans “have chosen the name of a woman [Europa] for our continent” (p. 15). In Bystron’s view, the continent of Europe is fundamentally physically weak and vulnerable to ‘invasion’ just like its namesake (Ibid.). Further demonstrating the singular importance of myths, legends, and ancient German history to some male AfD members, Bystron draws discursive inspiration from the Europa myth. As outlined in Ovid’s retelling of this myth in his *Metamorphoses*, Europa, a Phoenician princess, was captured by Zeus, taken to Crete, and raped (Humphries and Reed 2018, pp. 54-57). The rape of Europa “[forms] part of Greek mythology’s way (or rather, various, contested ways) of explaining relations between people and colonisations” (Ibid., p. 408). Consequently, the founding of the Minoan civilisation in the wake of Europa’s mythical ordeal is regarded by some historians as the progenitor of a broader European civilisation; Durant (1939), for example, writes that “in the history of civilisation, Crete was the first link in the European chain” (p. 21). To Bystron, a continent founded through an assertion of male violence—an intrinsic part of the standard repertoire of prevailing ideas surrounding masculinity—is once again under threat from (another) violent usurper and requires extraordinary measures to ensure its survival (2021, p. 15). This includes a reaffirmation of Western European culture and values, by force, if necessary; drawing on the historical example of how Frankish and Aquitaine troops defeated invading Muslim armies during the Battle of Tours in 732 CE, Bystron (2021) is confident that Western European civilisation will once again prevail in the face of existential threat (p. 15). In his work on the significance of Norse-Germanic mythology in the contemporary German far-right, Schuppener (2021) posits that it is not unusual for groups to “invoke” history in order to fulfil objectives relating to identity construction, claims to legitimacy, and the “elaboration” of socio-cultural traditions (xiii). However, it is somewhat unusual for these groups to refer to events that happened thousands of years ago—or not at all—in attempts to confer legitimacy and authority onto their contemporary political activism (Ibid.). The significance of a particular German history features prominently in Bystron’s account as evidenced by his mention of the Battle of Tours and his mythologisation of the

European continent is a discursive attempt to consolidate the legitimacy of his position vis-à-vis the perceived, contemporary threat posed by Muslim men, as well as reflect an intrinsic or 'natural' social order in which dominant male figures prevail. This analysis thus extends Schuppener's observation by unpacking the central role gender plays in male subjects' seeming reliance on ancient history, myths, and legends to consolidate the 'exceptionality' of Western European culture and values, and the essentialised roles that men and women appear to inhabit within this discursive ecosystem.

As this analysis demonstrates, longstanding ideas surrounding hegemonic masculinity have a particular role to play. In the German context, these ideas have long been identified by scholars such as Miller-Idriss (2016) as "a key part of national dominance" (p. 204), and this is observed here in the case of the AfD. In contrast to the testimonies of female subjects and their emphasis on the threat posed to women's bodies by Muslim refugees, prominent AfD figures such as Björn Höcke outline how masculine bodies are important physical and discursive sites through which threat and insecurity is articulated and potentially resolved. In *Nie Zweimal* (2018), Höcke states that:

I am firmly convinced that men will wake up and become aware of their special responsibility for the whole. Our future depends on the question of male honour and dignity (pp. 111-112).

According to Höcke, one major cause of today's "political misery" is that there are no longer enough "hands-on men" to stand up for their country beyond the scope of work, family, and holidays (Ibid., p. 112). However, other, more exceptional men "have the strange urge to take care of everything" (Ibid.). Höcke's statements contribute to what Connell (2014) refers to as the formation of a gendered standard upon which "real men" are defined (p. 8). Subsequently, the existential danger posed by the racialised enemies of the German nation and its people can only be countered through the reassertion of a white, patriarchal masculinity. Furthermore, Höcke's extracts demonstrate how discourses surrounding male disempowerment and woundedness facilitate the "mystification" of the patriarchal state and its inexorable

shaping of socio-cultural and political institutions as well as its regulation of “acceptable” forms of social activities and individual and collective identities (Peterson 1992, p. 45; Kimmel 2003; 2007; 2018). Here Höcke both exploits and quells discursive—and literal—male fears of emasculation and attempts to consolidate men’s place in a changing world through his valorisation of masculinity and reaffirmation of a traditional gender order. In Höcke’s view, the physical and moral integrity of a distinctly feminine German body politic is intrinsically linked to an overhaul of politics in which strong men take centre stage. As Sauer (2020) points out, “the right-wing interpellation of the ‘little man in the streets’ is part of a masculinist identity politics, which includes the promise that a charismatic leader might increase the self-confidence of subordinated masculinities” (p. 30). This strategy may also attract women who find “new forms of agency in masculinist gender constellations” (Ibid.; Coffé and Bolzendahl 2020, pp. 127-129). Some of the AfD members interviewed for the thesis exhibited a strong interest in the ‘typically’ male domains of law, order, crime, security, and terrorism (Dolan 2014, p. 97; Elsa 2019; Gabi 2019; Inge 2019; Verba *et al.* 1997). While subjects such as Inge and Anke went to lengths to describe themselves as emancipated and independent women who live life on their own terms, the gender stereotypes explored in this section retain discursive power when it comes to the consolidation of the AfD and subjects’ opposition to Islam.

This section has demonstrated how subjects are active agents in the discursive articulation of physical threat as it pertains to Muslim men. At face value, there are no fundamental differences between women and men’s concerns about crime and insecurity, and gender is not necessarily a salient motivating factor. However, gendered discourses relating to these issues are in fact operationalised by subjects themselves in different ways: in female subjects’ view, for example, Woman comes to embody a nation, or, following Bystron’s analogy, a continent, consistently threatened by an invasive and sexually deviant other and requires male protection. In contrast, men are called upon to defend the socio-cultural and political hegemony of the white androcentric state as well as its physical ‘assets,’ i.e., the bodies and reproductive capabilities of white German women. Furthermore, the evidence reveals the singular

importance of myths, legends, and ancient German history for some male AfD members in their attempts to consolidate the ‘exceptionality’ of the German nation and its people in the face of existential threat. The German government is one intended audience for the AfD and subjects’ discursive articulation of insecurity in this context as it is seen as having failed—and continues to fail—white German women in the face of Muslim men’s alleged proclivity for sexual violence. In this way, subjects want to be seen as doing something about the issue of sexual violence, an issue they perceive the government to be ‘sweeping under the carpet,’ as the next section explores in greater depth.

## 4.2 The misrepresentation of official crime statistics

Having unpacked subjects’ responses to high profile cases of sexual violence committed by Muslim men in the preceding section, this section explores subjects’ strategic wielding of statistics in attempts to give their underlying arguments more credibility. This section makes the argument that subjects attempt to manipulate official crime statistics relating to alleged proclivity of Muslim men to commit sexual violence as they try to affirm their authority and legitimacy as actors new to the political stage.

In a press release, Stephan Brandner (2018), former member of the AfD Fraktion in Thuringia and now deputy chairperson of the AfD in the Bundestag, makes the claim that the crime statistics for that year have “strange, inexplicable gaps” when it comes to the classification of homicides. According to Brandner, the deaths of Susanna F. from Mainz and Mia from Kandel should be classified as ideologically or religiously motivated given the ethnicity and assumed religiosity of their murderers. In Brandner’s view, these “incredible, disguised or concealing statistics, just like the reporting based on them, leads to a further loss of trust in such lists and in the rule of law” (Ibid.). The accusation on the part of the AfD is that the German government deliberately misrepresents its official statistics in relation to crimes perpetrated by Muslims, thus rendering the government untrustworthy in the eyes of the AfD and its members. This rhetoric is echoed by parliamentary co-leader Alice Weidel (2019) who states that: “When citizens resign themselves and no longer go to the police because reports appear to be a pointless waste of time [...] and cannot be included

in the statistics, this does not contradict the suspicion of state failure, but confirms it” (p. 111). Additionally, the empirical reality that the majority of arrivals in Germany in fact obey the law, is, according to Weidel

[...] so banal and self-evident that it is basically superfluous. This non-argument does not eliminate the statistically-proven, significantly higher crime rate of asylum seekers when it comes to sexual offences when compared to other foreigners and locals (2019, p. 116).

To this end, following the gang-rape of a fourteen-year-old girl in Ulm by five refugees, the AfD-Fraktion Bundestag submitted an *Antrag* (motion) in 2019, demanding to know, among other things, the nationality of non-German rape suspects in the years following the arrival of Syrian refugees in Germany (AfD-Fraktion Bundestag 2019). The issue of sexual violence is characterised as the exclusive domain of Muslim men; in this way, the AfD and subjects are able to frame their ‘own’ culture as equality-orientated and pro-women’s rights and the culture of the ‘other’ is devalued and demarcated as antithetical to the norms and values of Western European society.<sup>9</sup> Even when deliberately misinterpreted to serve the AfD’s broader anti-Islam agenda, the citation of statistics and various unnamed studies is appealing to subjects as they attempt to consolidate their claims with discursive authority and legitimacy, albeit with varying degrees of success.<sup>10</sup> This is demonstrated by subjects such as Dagmar who claimed during her interview that her

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<sup>9</sup> The tactic of posing as the protectors of women and children to target Muslim communities and other ethnic groups is one shared by the PRR and the far right more broadly. A notable recent example can be located in the UK following a child sexual exploitation (CSE) scandal in Rotherham, South Yorkshire. It is estimated that at least 1,400 vulnerable children were sexually exploited by gangs of predominantly Pakistani-heritage men (Jay 2014). One of the most shocking aspects of the case was the perceived institutional failure of the police and local authorities to adequately address the many complaints that had been made. The Rotherham case was quickly instrumentalised by groups like the English Defence League (EDL) who held marches and demonstrations targeting Asian communities in the Rotherham area, fermenting moral panic about so-called ‘Muslim grooming gangs,’ the perceived Islamisation of the UK, and the ‘risk’ posed to white British women by Islam and its teachings (Bows 2018, p. 174).

<sup>10</sup> The AfD does not only cherry-pick data in relation to sexual violence and the ethnicity of its perpetrators. In one 2019 publication, for example, *What It’s Really Like in Germany: Facts Instead of Fake News*, the AfD Fraktion in Hessen cites the FES, a prestigious political research foundation. One finding claims that 52 percent of Germans think that there is too much immigration (AfD-Fraktion Hessen 2019, p. 3). However, it is very unclear which figures are derived from the FES report in question. The AfD’s excessive exaggeration, polarisation, and disinformation makes it even harder to discredit such publications, particularly if the studies cited, however erroneously, are held in high regard by the public.

views regarding the perceived *Bevölkerungsexplosion* (population explosion) are “scientifically backed” by a 2003 bestseller allegedly written by a renowned researcher from Bremen University, a “Professor Heinz.” However, extensive online searches and correspondence with a senior colleague in Germany did not provide any evidence of the existence of this book (Arzheimer 2020).

Nonetheless, the majority of subjects relied upon the citation of various unnamed statistical studies to justify and thus legitimise their opposition to Islam in the years following the Syrian civil war and the arrival of millions of refugees to Germany. Ingrid stated that:

If you look at the statistics, crimes against women rise [after 2015]. And if you look at who is responsible, what ethnicity is behind them, we have a problem with migrants around here. [...] They come from a country where women don't count as real people [...] We have our women and children raped. Ten years old, twelve years old. Gang-raped by migrants. There was a chance to prevent this.

When, during Ingrid's interview, it was suggested to her by the researcher that sexual violence was a reality for many German women long before the 2015 refugee crisis, she appeared to demur but then insisted that it didn't happen “in the same dimension.” Following Vieten's assertion that “ideologically loaded messages” relating to otherness reinforce racialised binaries (2016, p. 622), evidence here demonstrates that subjects such as Ingrid appear to entrench a discursive boundary between native German women (i.e., the primary victims of Muslim aggression) and non-native Muslim men (i.e., the primary perpetrators of sexual violence). This is a discourse shared by other far-right groups: writing in an online blogpost, Anne Marie Waters, leader of the For Britain Movement makes an implicit link between gender-based violence, Islam, and immigration. She writes:

There is nothing complicated about the characteristics of these rape gangs, a child could tell them, they're all Muslims. Across Europe rape gangs are comprised of Muslims. Women and girls have been brutally attacked in Europe by men from Morocco, Libya, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Egypt, Iraq, and elsewhere in the Muslim world (2020).

Just as subjects like Ingrid downplay the pervasiveness of sexual violence pre-2015 Syrian refugee crisis, Waters and others like her have little to say about members of their own cohort exposed as paedophiles, for example, or the institutional failures inherent in the decades-long cover-up of abuse within the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in relation to the late Jimmy Savile (Hind and Vesty 2016). However, one does not have to scratch too deeply beneath the surface of Ingrid's statements to expose their empirical fallaciousness; the way in which sexual violence is reported in Germany has changed since 2015.

While this change was instigated following events in Cologne, "the [...] overdue revision of rape law based on the principle of 'no means no'" has long been a priority for campaigners (Sprengholz 2021, p. 489). Formerly, a rape survivor would have to "prove" that the perpetrator either "threatened or actively used violence, or exploited a situation from which the victim could not escape, for instance, by trapping them in a room from which they could not leave" (Eddy 2016). Consequently, the strict requirements for filing complaints of sexual violence meant that few cases were reported and fewer prosecuted; only one in ten cases were reported and only eight percent of cases that made it to court resulted in a conviction (Ibid.). The Cologne case, in part, instigated a much-needed change to the law in this regard, ultimately exposing the fact that Germany has one of the worst records in Europe when it comes to protecting women from sexual violence, regardless of the ethnicity or religious beliefs of the perpetrator; indeed, marital rape was not criminalised in Germany until 1997 (Ibid.). Nonetheless, the AfD's co-option of discourses relating to gender equality and women's rights, as well as claims that their statements are backed-up by empirical data, function ultimately as an effective vehicle for their Islamophobic campaigns.

The AfD's instrumentalisation of these high-profile cases of sexual assault in the construction, maintenance, and reproduction of an explicitly anti-Islam discourse was not entirely denied by some subjects. Gisela concedes that these cases have strengthened the AfD's position on the topic, but asserts that this instrumentalisation ultimately serves an important and seemingly magnanimous purpose: "[...] If you look at it from a marketing perspective, it plays into our thesis. [...] But no one wants

women to be raped, or children, or men. Or that people are murdered. Nobody wants that.” When asked during her interview whether the AfD had instrumentalised cases such as *Der Fall Susanna* to serve its own purposes, Elsa claims that “We [the AfD] cannot instrumentalise anything.” According to Elsa, the AfD regularly issues press releases but these, in her view, do not command a lot of public interest. Additionally, the AfD and subjects’ preoccupation with the alleged threat posed by Muslim men sees them deflect attention away from sexual misconduct within party ranks. Former AfD member Franziska Schreiber (2018) writes that while the “cultural relativism” entrenched in party doctrine has led to the racist idea that Muslim men rape because they are “predisposed” to, accusations of sexual harassment levelled against a male AfD party member were swiftly swept under the carpet (pp. 97-98). These accusations are wholly refuted by subjects such as Ingrid who state that: “A lot of the things she [Schreiber] wrote about the AfD are nonsense.” Furthermore, Ingrid retorts that: “I was never sexually harassed in the AfD. On the contrary, we have guys who treat us like women, open doors for us, help us with our coats, who wait until we sit, until they sit.” Following Sauer’s 2017 conceptualisation of ethnomasochism (p. 12), this extract effectively demonstrates how the AfD deflects criticism of its own practices by propagating the idea that a group’s (i.e., white German women) suffering is caused exclusively by the patriarchal practices of a racialised other. The AfD continues to frame itself discursively as equality orientated and pro-women’s rights despite statements from some of its most prominent representatives decrying broader equality initiatives such as the *Frauenquote*.

The evidence presented in this section demonstrates that subjects, some of whom were not active in politics prior to their AfD membership, have been able to ‘intervene’ in security discourses in relation to the perceived threat posed by Muslim men. As touched upon in the introduction, just as subjects’ desire to accumulate socio-political capital has seen them instrumentalise the ‘use value’ of this capital to achieve specific political objectives, subjects’ ‘interventions’ here expose their discursive struggle for authority and legitimacy. Despite the distinctly elite background of the AfD itself—it was initially marketed as a *Professoren Partei* (Professors’ Party) (Schwarz 2020, p. 33)—the party’s electoral success has made it possible for subjects to construct and articulate discursive threat vis-à-vis Muslim



men. To this end, this section shows how the AfD and subjects utilise statistics and data, formerly the domain of a perceived academic elite, to their distinct advantage in order to legitimise their political claims in this context. The evidence shows that this is a popular strategy for both male and female AfD members. The AfD makes a point of perpetuating an anti-elite discourse which resonates with subjects because of their belief that they have been excluded from mainstream political life. Philipsen's position that in order to make the transition from "normal politics" to the so-called "extraordinary" subjects require the authority and legitimacy to do so is thus confirmed here (2021, p. 151). Evidence reveals how the potential for political change in the view of the AfD and subjects is entrenched in the performativity of their attempts to 'securitise' white German women in the face of the existential threat posed by Muslim men. Performativity is understood here "not as the act by which a subject brings into being what she/he names, but rather, as that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains" (Butler 1993, xii). Additionally, the AfD's electoral success at both the state and federal level and its related public platforms and subsequent wide reach has significantly contributed to subjects' efforts to establish themselves as legitimate actors on the German political stage. Extending discussion on subjects' views on the role of Islam in German culture and society today, the section which follows goes on to demonstrate how the AfD and subjects train their securitising lens on Muslim women, propagating the femonationalist idea that Muslim women also need 'saving' from the perceived patriarchal practices of Islam.

### 4.3 The quest to save Muslim women from Muslim men

Having investigated in the previous section how the AfD and subjects instrumentalise statistics and data to reinforce their claims that sexual violence is the 'exclusive domain' of Muslim men, this section will explore the ways in which this binary is operationalised by the AfD and subjects to further consolidate their Islamophobic socio-cultural and political agenda, as well as the extent to which this rhetoric resonates with subjects. It argues that the AfD and subjects discursively entrench a gendered and racialised binary distinctions between 'enlightened' German women and 'oppressed' Muslim women in order to fulfil their political objectives.

Like their counterparts in the PRR and far-right more broadly, the AfD have played upon the perceived dichotomy between Germany's supposedly 'enlightened' women and 'oppressed' Muslim women to make the case that the latter need to be rescued from Muslim men and the patriarchal practices of Islam, most notably in relation to the wearing of the burka or niqab. A prominent example of this is the AfD's 2017 campaign placard which depicts several white women in bikinis and the slogan, "Burkas? We prefer bikinis" (Micallef 2017). The implication here is that gender relations are more "advanced" in the West and must be "taught" to Muslim women whose agency is allegedly imperilled by Islam (Farris 2017, p. 7). Echoing these broad sentiments, the AfD argue that 'allowing' Muslim women to be fully veiled in public is "tantamount to a permanent demonstration that our society is unwilling to oppose an ideology that discriminates against women" (AfD-Fraktion Bundestag 2018a). Furthermore, the AfD state that: "The full veil is an expression of the suppression of female self-determination [...] the gender-specific discriminatory ideology behind the veil therefore fundamentally violates human dignity" (Ibid.). Ellen Kositzka, author and far-right activist, writes in *Die Einzelfalle: Warum der Feminismus ständig die Straßenseite wechselt* (2016) that as a result of the patriarchalism "inherent" in Islamic religion and culture, "women's rights [go] down the drain" (pp. 105-106). The title itself is an interesting—albeit confusing—play on words which requires some unpacking for ease of analysis. At face value *Die Einzelfalle* can be interpreted as *The Isolated Case*, as in, feminists over emphasise certain 'isolated' cases in order to consolidate what Kositzka and her peers regard as feminists' generalising statements about men and their perceived misogyny. In order to maintain this façade of credibility, feminists must then continually 'switch' their stance on a range of issues (*die Straßenseite wechselt*) to keep up with their own claims in this regard (Adamik 2023).

Sharing Kositzka's view that Islam does not promote women's rights, AfD parliamentary co-leader Alice Weidel (2019) writes that "the independent woman with equal rights today has no place in Islam. [...] Strict believers cannot stand it when a woman leaves the subordinate position assigned to her by the collectivist ideology of Islam which presumes to regulate social and private life down to the smallest detail" (p. 118). The idea that Islam has a place in Western European values

and culture is rejected by both Kositzka and Weidel; for Weidel, Germany's perceived appeasement of Islam is "poison" for both integration and coexistence efforts (Ibid., p. 122). Similarly, Kositzka (2016) writes that the Left's alleged attempts to reconcile the "retrograde ideology" of Muslims with their own "progressive utopia of gender equality" indicates that they have already "surrendered" to Islam (pp. 109-111). The AfD also establishes discursive links between Muslim women and terrorism; as well as representing women's oppression at the hands of Islam, the burka and niqab are, according to the party, "the uniform of Salafism and Islamism" (AfD-Fraktion Bundestag 2018a). Not only do Muslim women pose a threat to Western European norms and values, but also its security. Elaborating on this further, the AfD claim that religious dress is "practically an invitation to religious fundamentalists and Islamist extremists to further ideological and cultural expansion" (Ibid.). In the AfD's view, the banning of the burka and niqab would ultimately work to protect the individual right of freedom of Muslim women, internal security, and the goal of ensuring social coexistence (Ibid.). In contrast to his female colleagues in the Bundestag, however, Björn Höcke posits that debates surrounding Islamic dress codes are increasingly moot and merely work to deflect attention away from a more pressing issue:

If we want to see fewer hijab or burka wearers on our streets [...], then, in my opinion, it is the wrong strategy to deprive these women of their clothing customs. We should think about reducing the number of Muslims living here (2018, p. 197).

The crux of the issue, in Höcke's view, is making it "unmistakeably clear to the Muslims that their religious way of life does not fit our occidental European culture and that we don't want to live according to Sharia law" (2018, p. 197). In a poorly conceived attempt to discern whether Höcke's "elemental problem" with Islam stems from the actions of individuals or collectives, Höcke's interviewer Sebastian Hennig asks him: "To put it quite crudely [...], it is the *Kuffnucken* that are the problem not Islam, the *Kanacken* and not the Koran?" Höcke responds, "Those are your words, not mine" (Höcke 2018, pp. 197-198). The evidence that will follow demonstrates that the AfD and some of its most prominent members and associates broadly instrumentalise the bodies of Muslim women to make the argument that not only do

women need to be liberated from the confines of Islam for their own good, but simultaneously represent a profound security threat to the German nation.

Broadly speaking, this rhetoric appears to resonate with subjects like Anke who insist that: “These immigrants, they come from a different culture. In some places that doesn’t go down well with German women because we are self-confident, we do our own thing, [...] and we are well-educated.” Toeing the party line, Gabi insisted that the AfD’s well-documented opposition to burkas, niqabs, and other bodily markers of Muslim socio-cultural and religious identity is due to their wish that all women in Germany are ‘free’ to live their lives as they wish: “We just want women to strengthen their freedom, be free to develop themselves. One has that right in Germany.”

Additionally, Gabi claims that the mainstream German parties do not broach this type of issue and welcome Muslim newcomers to the country wholesale without thinking about the potential gender implications. At an event to mark International Women’s Day at her local parliament, Gabi says that she confronted an elected representative from a different party about this: “I asked why she doesn’t talk about the fact that many [Muslim] women are raped in the refugee shelters. [...] It is a phoney policy to say, yes, all refugees can come here, but then put women in communal accommodation. Isn’t it possible that women who also flee [Syria] are raped there?”

This evidence confirms that the AfD, its affiliates, and subjects themselves, like the global PRR and far right more broadly, deploy tenets of what Farris (2017) terms femonationalism; in other words, the exploitation of feminist issues by nationalist actors and the scapegoating of Muslim men under the guise of gender equality (p. 4).

Distinguishing the AfD’s femonationalism from that of its counterparts in Europe and countries such as the US and Brazil, however, is the extent to which it broadly echoes Nazi-era racist discourse. As Steizinger (2018) points out, “[...] a racist anthropology was at the core of Nazi ideology. [...] Images like the ‘Jewish parasite’ and the murderous policy that this ‘enemy’ of the German people demands were an essential part of the perpetual flow of propaganda in daily life” (p. 140). A good example of this with regard to the AfD and its adoption of femonationalist tenets can be found in *Section 4.1*, and the AfD’s description of Muslim men as Merkel’s ‘imported beasts.’ As the following paragraphs explore in greater depth, the AfD does not shy away from courting controversy in its offensive and racist descriptions

of Muslims and the threat they allegedly pose not only to its people but German culture and society.

When it comes to the idea that Muslim women also need to be rescued from the patriarchal practices of Muslim men, the AfD maintain and reproduce divisive dichotomies informed by racist stereotypes despite their alleged commitment to gender equality and women's rights. This is part of a broader global trend which has gathered momentum in the aftermath of 9/11; the wars fought in Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001 and 2003 respectively were framed discursively by US Republican politicians as missions to "liberate" Muslim women from Muslim men (Farris 2017, pp. 2-3). The AfD continue to disseminate offensive stereotypes about 'uncivilised' Muslims, and this is aptly reflected in a children's colouring book commissioned by the AfD Fraktion in North Rhine-Westphalia in 2019. The book depicted offensive images of burka-wearing women at a swimming pool, as well as racist caricatures of figures with over-pronounced facial features wearing swimming caps decorated with bones (Staudenmaier 2020). The poolside scene also depicted a crying sun and a banner over the pool which reads: "We have to carry the can for this" (Ibid.). The colouring book debacle is another instance in the long history of the AfD's various provocations and exposes just how deeply their Islamophobic and anti-immigration rhetoric has permeated everyday political discourse.

The evidence has shown that the perceived failure of the German government to be seen to respond appropriately to instances of sexual violence perpetrated by Muslim men compounds subjects' support in this context. As a result of this, the AfD can frame itself as the only reasonable alternative to a seemingly indifferent political mainstream. Furthermore, the AfD position themselves as being wholly unafraid of broaching taboo or culturally insensitive topics, such as gender-based violence within Muslim communities in Germany. Gender is integral to these discursive efforts, as well as the AfD and subjects' constitution of other subjects. Butler (1997) observes that not only do discourses have the power to "regulate" bodies, but through repetitive 'performances,' form them (p. 157; Philipsen 2020, p. 149). This analysis confirms this in relation to the AfD; Muslim women are also positioned as victims of Muslim men, but in contrast to their 'enlightened' German counterparts, are regarded

as lacking personal and political agency. While this view is not necessarily unusual in terms of the broader themes inherent in contemporary PRR and far right activism, this discussion reveals that the narrative portrayal of agency-less Muslim women not only reinforces a binary distinction between ‘enlightened’ and ‘oppressed’ but further obscures the structural inequality inherent in subjects’ own society (Hadj-Abdou 2010, p. 118). However, issues surrounding this ‘structural inequality’ does not strike a chord with subjects who seemingly buy into the AfD’s “post-feminist” narrative that German women have already achieved equality with their male counterparts, albeit within an imagined, and undoubtedly exclusionary, “German heartland” (Sprengholz 2021, p. 487; Boulila and Carri 2017, p. 286). According to subjects such as Petra, for example, women in Germany already have “all the freedom [they] could wish for.” Additionally, subjects repeatedly attempt to draw a discursive distinction between the behaviour of foreign men and Germans; this is evidenced in part by subject Ingrid’s insistence that sexual violence is the exclusive domain of Muslim men. The section which follows moves on to investigate the ways in which the AfD and subjects draw a false equivalence between Muslim men, left-wing party opponents, and terrorist attacks proven to have been conducted by right-wing extremists.

#### 4.4 The complex intersections of agency and extremism

The preceding sections have shown that the AfD and subjects instrumentalise discourses relating to sexual violence and Muslim men. This section broadens and deepens its investigation into the AfD and subjects’ seeming preoccupation with Islam by showing that they deny or downplay right-wing extremism within party ranks, despite compelling evidence to the contrary. It makes the case that subjects are unable—or even unwilling—to critically reflect upon their own positioning in relation to the AfD’s own entanglements with right-wing extremism or their own ‘ideological flexibility.’

As Kruglanski *et al.* (2020) point out, Germany has in fact had “a long and unbroken history of right-wing movements, whether in the form of political parties, subcultural

groups, or loose networks of individuals” (p. 8).<sup>11</sup> And while the AfD is keen to absolve itself of any responsibility that its Islamophobic and exclusionary rhetoric is said to have had on the actions of right-wing extremists in Germany today, it is the activities of prominent AfD members and affiliates in the eastern states that have come under intense scrutiny from the German domestic intelligence services.<sup>12</sup> According to a 2021 report from the BfV, 33,300 right-wing extremists were active in Germany in 2020; this is an increase from 32,080 in 2019; the BfV estimates that 13,000 of these right-wing extremists are “violence-orientated” (p. 10). This number now includes members of the AfD’s official youth branch JA and Der Flügel (The Wing), a nationalistic faction within the party led by Björn Höcke and Andreas Kalbitz. While Kalbitz has since been expelled from the AfD and Der Flügel, he was identified by Thomas Haldenwang, Head of the BfV, as part of a delegation of German neo-Nazis that attended a 2007 Golden Dawn rally in Athens (Oltermann 2020). JA fell under the watchful eye of the BfV when the latter concluded that the group’s political ideas came to revolve around the maintenance of the so-called “ethnic purity of the German people and excluding people of other ethnicities” (BfV 2021, p. 17). A

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<sup>11</sup> The most infamous example of extremist violence in a reunified Germany concerns the NSU, as touched upon in the introduction to this thesis. Comprised primarily of two men, Uwe Mundlos and Uwe Böhnhardt, and one woman, Beate Zschäpe, the NSU embarked on a thirteen-year (1998-2011) spree of violence and murder during which they specifically targeted individuals of different ethnicities. During this period, the trio also committed a series of bank robberies and in 2004, detonated a nail bomb in a predominantly Turkish district of Cologne (Graef 2018, p. 517; Koehler 2016). The fact that “ethnic Germans” were behind the attacks, “motivated by their hate of non-white minorities and the political establishment” sent shockwaves throughout Germany (Graef 2018, p. 509). As the facts surrounding the NSU case became clearer, the most “immediate” questions all centred on the state’s seeming inability to have detected the NSU earlier or connected its crimes to a burgeoning far-right scene (McGowan 2014, p. 204). This devastating institutional failure was described by Angela Merkel as a “disgrace” (Hillebrand 2019, p. 38).

<sup>12</sup> Historically, violence against refugees and asylum seekers has been commonplace in post-unification Germany, particularly in the East where minority groups in the deindustrialised towns and cities of the former GDR began to experience what Bangel (2019) refers to as “day-to-day right-wing terror.” The 2020-2021 Mitte Studie, an annual survey conducted by Bielefeld University and FES that explores the prevalence of prejudice, extreme right-wing and anti-democratic attitudes at the centre of German society, postulates that support for right-wing extremist attitudes is pervasive in the eastern states of Brandenburg, Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt, and Thuringia despite the low proportion of foreigners in these areas (Rees *et al.* 2021, p. 117). However, while sharing a similar number of AfD voters and a low proportion of foreign residents with its eastern counterparts, respondents from Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania exhibit lower levels of tolerance for right-wing extremist attitudes (Ibid.). While the contributing authors of the Mitte Studie find that the AfD and its supporters have contributed to the propagation of the myth of “*Überfremdung*” (“foreign infiltration”) in the East, they state that it is still necessary to take a deeper look at the “regional connections” and local contexts which facilitate these attitudes (pp. 115, 118).

prominent example of this relates to Lars Steinke, former leader of JA in Lower Saxony, who claimed in 2018 that Hitler was “forced” to invade Poland (Bellut 2018). Similarly, while Der Flügel describes itself as “[a] resistance movement against the further erosion of Germany’s identity” (Bernhard 2019), it faced BfV monitoring in 2020 for violating “[the] characteristic features of a free democratic basic order, human dignity, democracy, and the rule of law” (BfV 2021, p. 16; Oltermann 2020). Despite Der Flügel formally disbanding in 2021, the BfV reports that the group is still active and continues “[to] seek influence within the AfD to advance [its] political agenda” (BfV 2021, p. 17). Concordantly, Der Flügel claim that twenty to thirty percent of AfD members support its increasingly homogenous and exclusionary remit (Ibid.). For example, in the aftermath of a 2020 Islamist terror attack in Nice, France, Der Flügel reportedly accused all Muslims of having “a greater propensity for violence and terrorism simply by virtue of their ethnicity, religion, and culture” and considered them “entirely incompatible” with other faith communities (BfV 2021, p. 17). The BfV’s monitoring of the AfD and its affiliates has gone some way to expose the deep network of right-wing extremist groups and individuals across Germany, some of whom operate relatively openly and under the guise of democratic legitimacy.<sup>13</sup>

The real-world consequences of this rhetoric are hard to ignore. Walter Lübcke, pro-refugee president of the CDU in Kassel, for example, was murdered in his garden in June 2019 by Stephan E., a right-wing extremist. In the wake of the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis, Lübcke had publically called for “a welcoming stance” toward those arriving in Germany and having received numerous death threats before his murder, was likely targeted for his support of the Merkel government’s open-border policy (Bochum 2020, p. 1; Johnson 2019). E. had a twenty-year history of involvement with neo-Nazi groups, attempted in 1993 to detonate a pipe bomb at a home for asylum seekers, and while in prison, assaulted a foreign prisoner (Bartsch *et al.* 2019, p. 16). It was later revealed that E. had donated €150 to the AfD Fraktion in Hessen, writing in the note to payee: “Gott segne euch” (“God bless you”) (Ibid.). In October 2019,

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<sup>13</sup> Following a period of fieldwork in Germany in 2019, it came to light that one of the AfD members interviewed for this thesis was associated with Der Flügel, though this was not disclosed during the interview nor were the group subject to extended investigation by the BfV at that time.



Stephan B. livestreamed his attempted attack on a synagogue in the East German town of Halle while congregants observed Yom Kippur. When B. could not shoot his way into the synagogue, he shot and killed two passers-by. There is no known link between B. and the AfD, however; upon his arrest, he insisted that he was driven by his own xenophobic and antisemitic beliefs (Witting 2019). In February 2020, Tobias R. killed nine people at two shisha cafés in Hanau, Frankfurt am Main, and later killed his mother and then himself (Welt 2020). In a video that has subsequently been removed from the internet, R. spoke of his desire to see certain groups, i.e., those from Asia, North Africa, and Israel “completely destroyed” (ibid.). Subsequently, opposition politicians in the Bundestag accused the AfD of being “[the] intellectual arsonists” behind the attack (Witting 2019). MdB Michael Roth (SPD) faced legal action after referring to the AfD as “the political arm of right-wing terrorism” (Roth 2019). Despite the AfD branding these claims “[a] shabby and disgusting instrumentalisation of this monstrous crime” (Connelly and McKernan 2020), the party did little to temper its own xenophobic rhetoric. Instead of laying the blame for Walter Lübcke’s murder squarely at the feet of the perpetrator, AfD-Bundestagabgeordnete Martin Hohmann declared that: “If not for the illegal opening of the borders with the uncontrolled, continual mass arrival of migrants, Lübcke would still be alive” (Suyak 2019). Additionally, campaign posters for AfD candidates in Hessen and Lower Saxony denounced shisha bars, the site of the deadly Hanau attacks, as both dens of criminality (“Gang rape in the shisha bar! More Syrians and Iranians arrested”) and a public health risk (“Poisonings in shisha bars: [...] they must be shut down!”) (Gösta Beutin 2020). The cases detailed above have raised many serious questions about how inclusive and safe Germany really is for minority groups, as well as the citizens who support them.

Despite the AfD’s neat categorisation of its perceived existential enemies, its elected representatives vehemently reject the implication that the AfD, and by extension, they themselves, are right-wing extremists. In what are probably attempts to rehabilitate his public image, erstwhile party leader Bernd Lucke writes in *Systemausfall* (2019) that: “As its main founder and its best-known face for a long time, I saw the AfD as an opportunity for political renewal, because the established parties appeared unsuccessful and their content rigid” (p. 148). Furthermore, Lucke

(2019) observes that today, “a considerable part of the party is under the influence of right-wing extremist ideas [...]” (Ibid.). Despite being the alleged architect of the AfD’s so-called ‘cumulative radicalisation,’ Björn Höcke contends in *Nie Zweimal* (2018) that he is not “exclusively” conservative: “It’s just one facet of my political self-image” (p. 58). Despite having written a lengthy book which outlines his romanticised vision of a *völkisch* national project, Höcke muses that he is “probably too naïve and inexperienced in the field of political communication to be considered a shrewd provocateur” (p. 90). Consequently, Höcke attempts to deflect attention away from his own entanglements with the banned and now allegedly defunct group Der Flügel and accusations that he regularly liaises with right-wing extremists. Alice Weidel writes in *Widerworte* (2019) that instead of “acting as a loyal trustee of the common goods and contractually limiting immigration,” the German government and its representatives have “[stigmatised] the justified rebellion of citizens against the squandering of their common goods with the absurd accusation of right-wing radicalism” (p. 131). In Weidel’s view, the accusation that one is *rechtspopulistisch* if they do not support the government’s immigration policies and perceived ‘embrace’ of “foreign culture” is a convenient way to ‘denounce’ critics (p. 125). This appears to resonate with subjects; the idea that the AfD and its members have come to be associated with right-wing extremism is categorically rejected, as the following extracts demonstrate:

**Researcher:** A couple of weeks ago, a member of the Bundestag [Michael Roth] called the AfD ‘the political arm of right-wing terrorism.’ How do you feel about being labelled right-wing extremist or right-wing populist? Is that fair?

**Anke:** No! That is not fair. These are the last twitches of the old parties. They have a hard time opposing our arguments. [...] The Nazi cudgel always works in Germany. With our past, that [tactic] is, first and foremost, primitive, I have to tell you, and secondly, it doesn’t correspond to the facts. I am more of the alternative middle class.

Similarly, subjects such as Petra report that: “Well, it’s not fair at all. [...] No-one can accuse the AfD of any militant activities. What’s shocked me is that it’s seriously accepted in public discussion. It’s incredible.” Echoing Petra’s sentiment, Inge states

that: “It’s wrong and I don’t think it’s fair. [...] I am openly insulted as a Nazi. [...] Where this insult and hatred comes from [...] it shows that it comes from the left-wing populists or communists.” Similarly, Gabi states: “that [the label] is absolutely unacceptable and an absolute cheek.” Conversely, some subjects appeared to regard this as a type of discursive political game in which both left and right participate. Gisela comments that: “I think it’s a game both sides play. We are on the right. Whoever is on the left is extreme. [...] I don’t think right-wing populism is good either, because when you say we’re populist, you mean something else.” Similarly, in email correspondence, Lena (2020) stated that: “Populism itself has no political direction. It is a political tool. Accordingly, there are populists in all camps equally.” Dagmar dismissed the accusation that the AfD are *rechtspopulistisch* as just “framing.” Ingrid posits that, “The only reason they [other parties] do that [call the AfD *rechtspopulistisch*] is because we’re a danger to these old systems, to the parties. [...] And the easiest way to get rid of us is to say, “they are Nazis,” and you don’t discuss anything with the Nazis, and you don’t agree with the Nazis.” Here subjects are found to be complicit in maintaining the AfD’s strategy of plausible deniability vis-à-vis accusations that the party, and by extension, subjects, have right-wing extremist sympathies. While, as the next section demonstrates, subjects claim to eschew violence, their unwillingness to confront or denounce controversial party figures within the AfD exposes their tacit acceptance of violence, discursive or otherwise.

In her seminal work on women in racist groups in the US, Blee (1996) observes that that some of the recruits she interviewed “selectively disregarded” certain aspects of groups’ ideology or agendas that were “at variance with their personal goals or allegiances” (p. 693). As this research on the AfD has shown, subjects strategically adopt positionalities that least threaten their understandings of the social world and their own place within it. As Blee (1996) notes, such “ideological flexibility” allows women to engage with groups “whose goals and agendas—largely forged by the beliefs of male racist leaders—are not fully consonant with the lives and relationships of women recruits” (p. 694). This is reflected here in relation to the women interviewed for this thesis: the idea that subjects, in the eyes of opponents, are Nazis or right-wing extremists by dint of their AfD membership is met with outrage by

subjects themselves, probably partly because of the impact such an accusation, with its particular connotations, would have on subjects' lives and that of their families. Despite this, however, subjects remain aligned to the broader ideological and programmatic goals of the AfD, with some, like Elsa, seemingly willing to pay a steep personal price for her political engagement in this context, as was touched upon in the previous chapter. Facilitating subjects' 'ideological flexibility' is their strategy of blaming certain social groups for the rise of extremist violence in Germany today, as the next section explores in greater depth.

## 4.5 Women's tolerance of violence

The previous section outlined how subjects attempt to negotiate the complex entanglements of agency and violence in the face of accusations that the AfD and they themselves are *rechtspopulistisch*. Extending this discussion, this section will interrogate subjects' positioning in this regard and disentangle their unwillingness to challenge prominent party figures, instead laughing off their actions as inconsequential faux pas. It argues that while subjects' fear of interpersonal violence is sometimes exploited by some party opponents, subjects in turn further attempt to mitigate personal risk by blaming Muslims and left-wing opponents for the rise in extremist violence in Germany today.

According to AfD parliamentary co-leader Alice Weidel, it is the alleged innate *Gewaltaffinität* (violent propensity) of Muslims that has increased the risk of Islamist terrorism in Germany, further consolidating the idea that Muslim men are rapists and a pre-disposed terror threat (Berg and Muschel 2017). This appears to resonate with subjects, some of whom, like Inge, believe that the 'problem' of right-wing extremism is exaggerated by the media: "It's all hatred and agitation against the AfD." In Inge's view, the "main problem" is what she refers to as "Islamism" and goes on to make the bizarre claim that there are towns in the UK "where no English people live" and that Kent is overrun by Islamist extremists. Similarly, Ingrid states that: "Today, we have a problem with security. We have terrorism here, Islamic terrorism." She would attempt to construct a discursive equivalence between right-wing, left-wing, and Islamist extremism by saying that, "[...] left terrorism, right terrorism, I don't care if I get shot by a crazy left guy or right guy, the people have the feeling that the

government can't protect them anymore." Furthermore, Ingrid accuses the mainstream parties of leveraging the Halle attack to cast blame on the AfD: "Funny thing is, [...] if it's a right-wing terrorist, then it's the AfD and we have a problem. [...] If something like that is done by a Muslim, it's not Muslims, we don't have a problem." Elsa shared this view, complaining that cases of Islamist extremism are underreported in Germany.<sup>14</sup> She cited the case of a Syrian man in Limburg, Hessen, who had stolen a truck and rammed parked cars. However, it was not clear in this case whether the man, who had previously worked as a truck driver in Syria, had any terroristic motives; his relatives told journalists that he was "*komisch im Kopf*" (funny in the head) following his experiences during the Syrian Civil War and his subsequent substance misuse (Höll 2019). Having made the somewhat erroneous claim that Muslims exhibit a certain *Gewaltaffinität*, the AfD and subjects strategically deflect attention away from their dalliances with violence with their additional scapegoating of left-wing opponents, or so-called Antifa. In the view of some subjects, such groups pose a bigger threat to democracy than the AfD and its right-wing associates. In email correspondence to the researcher, Lena states that "left-wing extremism" is one of the biggest problems facing Germany today. When asked whether the AfD is, in part, responsible for the mainstreaming of exclusionary right-wing populist rhetoric, Lena writes, "I disagree. We are experiencing a [...] left-wing extremist mainstream in Germany." However, she does not back up this claim with any empirical evidence or additional contextualisation. Subjects make an implicit discursive connection between Antifa and physical violence, similar to how Muslim men are seen as embodying a distinct security threat to both people and place, as explored earlier in the chapter. The structural violence inherent in the stance of the AfD and subjects in relation to this stance is understood by this thesis as a form of violence perpetrated by socio-political institutions (i.e., political parties like the AfD) which cause significant harm to others by preventing them from fully 'accessing'

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<sup>14</sup> As well as right-wing extremism and terrorism, the BfV extensively monitors a diverse range of security threats. These include: left-wing extremism; Islamist extremism and terrorism; foreign security threats (excluding Islamist extremism); the intelligence activities (espionage, cyber-attacks, and other activities) of foreign powers; the security of classified information; and the Scientology organisation (BfV 2021). The latter is not recognised as a religion in Germany. Scientology is considered to engage in coercive cult-type practices and pursue economic and political goals that run counter to the values enshrined in the Grundgesetz.

public and political life (Galtung 1969, p. 175). This could take the form of inequality or an unequal distribution of power, for example, sexism and racism. In the context of the discussion at hand, this refers primarily to the AfD's attempts to exclude Muslims from all aspects of German culture and society because of their ethnicity and religious beliefs.

While, for the most part, the women interviewed for the thesis claim to be appalled by the right-wing extremist attacks outlined in the previous section, some attempt to shift the blame away from the proven perpetrator onto left-wing party opponents. For example, in relation to the attack in Halle that had taken place a few weeks prior to Inge's interview, she claimed that "[right-wing extremists] didn't kill anyone. He was a left-wing economist. He killed two innocent people. I thought it was bad but it wasn't a right-wing extremist [that did it]." In her view, "right-wing extremism hasn't been a problem [in Germany] for twenty or thirty years." Similarly, while Elsa claimed that "these right-wing radicals must be fought with all strength and power," she went on to use the case of the 2018 riots in Chemnitz, Saxony, to deflect attention away from the AfD's increasing association with right-wing violence. Chemnitz experienced days of rioting by neo-Nazis, football hooligans, AfD supporters and "so-called concerned citizens" following the murder of a Cuban-German man, Daniel H., by two asylum seekers from Iraq and Syria (Der Spiegel 2018, p. 10). She makes the strange claim that "[...] the Left organised and celebrated, celebrated the death of a person. In our culture you don't celebrate when someone dies, you mourn. There are cultures in the world where people sing and dance when someone dies, but not in Germany." Elsa is probably referring here to the *Wir Sind Mehr* (We Are More) event held a month after the Chemnitz riots during which 65,000 people attended a free concert against "xenophobia, racism, fascism, homophobia and the fucking AfD," with donations collected for the victim's family and anti-racist and anti-fascist projects in Saxony (Brandau 2018). Elsa makes a similar claim when it comes to the Halle synagogue attack and the subsequent *HalleZusammen* (Halle Together) event held "to send a strong message against antisemitism, xenophobia, and right-wing extremism" (Deutsche Welle 2019). To this end, subjects like Elsa position themselves as a voice of reason in response to broader criticism of the AfD and its alleged connections to right-wing extremists.

A common view among subjects is that left-wing extremism poses a greater threat to civil society than that of right-wing extremism, with some reporting to have experienced physical violence or intimidation at the hands of Antifa themselves. The veracity of subjects' claims that they were physically assaulted by Antifa, however, cannot be formally verified. A recurrent theme in interviews was a sense among subjects that they, and by extension, the AfD, are under constant threat of physical attack by their enemies. Subjects such as Inge insist that, "right-wing extremism is a bad thing, but I know that left-wing extremism is a hundred times worse [...] Our cars were torched. We are under attack." Similarly, Elsa describes how anti-fascist groups in her local area have torched sites of unpopular construction projects, vandalised AfD members' cars, and pelted their offices with animal waste. She also claims to have been physically assaulted while out canvassing for the AfD, incurring a significant injury in the process. As a result of her experiences, Elsa refers to Antifa as "just a left-wing terror scene." The threat of physical violence and intimidation is partly why Anke, a subject in her seventies, is hesitant to volunteer at AfD stalls: "Antifa came with twenty men and there were three of us, so it's no longer fun." Commenting on this issue in *Inside AfD* (2018), former AfD member Franziska Schreiber recalls how "three dozen men" descended upon an AfD election stand she was volunteering at in 2017:

A man in a black mask [grabbed] a sugar shaker from the table of the Café Lukas, next to which we [had] set up, and [hurled] the misappropriated projectile in my direction (2018, p. 18).

Following this incident, Schreiber came to regard Antifa as "even more dangerous than the neo-Nazis" and pledged to "fight these people who claim that we, the AfD, are the gravediggers of democracy and freedom, while out attacking innocent citizens. On that day, I turned into a radical anti-Antifa" (2018, pp. 19-20). Subjects such as Petra also describe their unequivocal opposition to Antifa after being harassed by "red fascists" at an annual event held to commemorate victims of the Third Reich. She reports that: "[They] attacked me personally, shoving and shouting, insulting me [...] I think I was photographed a hundred times by Antifa photographers." Just as the AfD is regarded by its opponents as the so-called

'political arm of right-wing terrorism,' Petra sees some opposition members as part of the broader 'problem' of left-wing extremism. Following her encounter with Antifa, Petra makes the claim that a prominent member of Die Linke (the Left) "stood by and just let it happen." Petra wonders whether "[the individual] found it acceptable that political opponents were shoved, kicked, and yelled at while engaging in silent commemoration." The perceived failure of the state and its elected representatives to address, or be willing to address, subjects' security concerns in this regard leads to specific security performances. Reflecting Björn Höcke's contention that "in opposition to the Right, the Left enjoy the freedom to do whatever they like" (2018, p. 91), Schreiber (2018) writes, "when I read reports on right-wing extremists, I always ask the question: why is that so reported on but so little about left-wing violence?" (p. 20). Subjects thus attempt to shore up legitimacy by being seen to do something about which the government or civil society more broadly allegedly has little interest in, i.e., 'vocalising' the threat of left-wing extremism.

The idea that women actively and routinely engage in political violence is not a new one, particularly in relation to ethno-national conflict and terrorism (Alison 2009; Bloom 2011; Gowrinathan 2021; Hamilton 2007; Pearson *et al.* 2020; Skaine 2006). A renewed focus on this participation comes at a time when gender has been at the forefront of global politics for a number of years (Sjoberg and Gentry 2007, p. 2). While there is a wealth of literature on women, terrorism, and political violence, there is a relative paucity of information relating to women's involvement in non-terrorist groups, though there are some notable exceptions (for example, Blee 1991, 2001). In stark contrast—and as first outlined in *Section 1.5.1* and discussions surrounding women's political interest—the scholarly literature on electoral support for the far right more broadly suggests that female voters have historically exhibited lower levels of tolerance for violence than their male peers (Mudde 2019, p. 161). The evidence presented here, however, suggests that former AfD member Franziska Schreiber in particular actively accepted violence as a means with which to fight back against her perceived existential enemies. At the height of her AfD fervour, for example Schreiber recalls that she felt that "neither politics nor civil society will stop violent, uninhibited left-wing extremism. We'd have to take that into our own hands and I won't be a coward, I told myself" (2018, p. 19). Ultimately, Schreiber does not



elaborate on the ways in which she will have to ‘take things into her own hands’ but nonetheless, discursive and physical boundaries between subjects and a perceived dangerous other, in this instance, Antifa, are maintained and reproduced. Her seeming tolerance of violence, whether physical or structural, raises some serious questions about the limits to what AfD members will accept while in the pursuit of their political goals. To this end, following Sjöberg and Gentry (2015), there is no evidence to suggest that “women’s capacity for violence is any less than, or different from, men’s” (p. 3). However, these ‘choices’ must be contextualised within “an interdependent and constraining social world which influences both the identity of the self and the availability of choices that self has” (Ibid., p. 148), as this thesis as a whole has attempted to demonstrate so far. Schreiber would later attempt to deflect attention away from the burgeoning right-wing extremist element within the AfD by claiming that she was simply swept up in the moment. The women interviewed for the thesis also appear willing to tolerate the violence of others in the party, as the following paragraphs will explore in greater depth.

Interview testimony suggests that some subjects are seemingly unwilling to challenge problematic, and powerful, party figures such as Björn Höcke. In the following extract, Ingrid appears to laugh off Höcke’s transgressions as inconsequential faux pas and relativises his actions by drawing an equivalence between his case and that of an SPD politician accused of downloading child pornography:

**Researcher:** Last year, the JA faced monitoring by the BfV. How can the AfD ensure that potential links to right-wing extremism aren’t being made?

**Ingrid:** Yes, we have some guys in the party. They are the minority, but they are pretty loud. And if they say some things, like, what are they doing?

**Researcher:** So, that’s not party policy?

**Ingrid:** [Not] party policy. And if Mr Höcke says something, everybody says, “Oh my God.” You can be sure I was ripping my hair out. And that’s the majority of the

party [...] We have some people who are problematic, but every party has that [...] in the SPD, there's a child pornography guy. He's still a member of the SPD.<sup>15</sup>

Additionally, in moves to downplay Höcke's connections to right-wing extremists, Ingrid claims that, despite compelling evidence to the contrary, the AfD is the only party who wanted to ban the neo-Nazi group Combat 18 Deutschland: "We want to ban them. I'm sure the parties [in the Bundestag] will say no. And then they come to us and say, "but you [the AfD] are the problem." No, we are not the problem." However, a 2020 press release from the Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat (Federal Ministry of the Interior, BMI) details how this move has been a priority following the murder of Walter Lübcke and the Halle synagogue attack as a part of its "six-point programme to intensify the fight against right-wing extremism" (BMI 2020). When asked about the problem of right-wing extremism in the AfD, subjects such as Gabi insist that the party has introduced stringent measures to ensure that extremists of any stripe cannot join the AfD, citing the use of a *Unvereinbarkeitsliste* (incompatibility list).<sup>16</sup> Others like Gisela conclude that, ultimately, it is difficult to expel problematic members from the AfD as "in Germany, we have the Party Law and it regulates precisely that if someone is a member of a political party, you cannot simply throw him out." Furthermore, the individual in question can take legal action against the party, and as a result, "it takes two or three years for a person to be kicked out." While erstwhile AfD leader Frauke Petry took steps to oust Höcke from the party in order to make the party *koalitionsfähig* (capable of forming a coalition) in the lead up to the 2017 federal election, this attempt was summarily rejected by the AfD. The subsequent alignment of party heavyweights such as Alexander Gauland and Alice Weidel with Höcke and those to the 'right' of

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<sup>15</sup> Having rose to prominence for heading the parliamentary investigative committee into the NSU case, Sebastian Edathy (SPD) was charged on seven counts of possessing child pornography (The Local 2014).

<sup>16</sup> The list comprises of five principal sections: foreign extremism, right-wing extremism, left-wing extremism, Islamist extremism, and Scientology (AfD 2022a). While, at the time of writing, several regional Pegida factions are on the *Unvereinbarkeitsliste*, the founding Dresden branch is not. Nor is the *Institut für Staatspolitik* (Institute for State Politics, IfS), a right-wing think tank founded by right-wing extremist Götz Kubitschek; Alexander Gauland, Alice Weidel, and Björn Höcke have all given guest lectures at the annual IfS summer school.

the party was perceived as a significant factor in the ‘cumulative radicalisation’ of the AfD.

Parliamentary co-leader Alice Weidel posits that people with “very different motives” have joined the AfD: “They don’t join the Pirate Party because they aren’t attractive—they don’t have any power” (Luyken 2017). The exercise of subjects’ agency in this context is a form of power; the evidence presented here suggests that subjects learn to ‘play’ the same game they accuse political opponents of and, in this way, are then able to access modes of organisation—i.e., a legal political party and its associated structures—that help to constitute the ‘use value’ elements of their identities. Viewed through a Foucauldian lens, subjects are “complicit” in constructing themselves vis-à-vis dominant socio-cultural, political, and economic discourses and to a certain extent, “internalise and identify” the discourses which describe them (Downing 2013, p. 25). As a result, subjects “self-represent and self-police” in highly stratified ways (Ibid.). The availability of subject positions within certain discourses, however, cannot fully explain the emotional “investment” subjects make within a discursive construction and their attachment to the subject positions made available to them (Willig 2013, p. 137). A pertinent example of this is Elsa’s continued emotional ‘investment’ in the AfD despite being disowned by her family as result of her party membership. Despite overwhelming evidence that the AfD has become increasingly radicalised since its founding in 2013, this evidence confirms Jeffrey and Troman’s idea that not only can the performative element of subjects’ socio-political identities and discursive practices give them a sense of political “satisfaction,” but enables them, at times, to strategize and manipulate discourse in order to negate the “subjective affect” they have upon themselves and others (2011, p. 499). In this context, this observation relates primarily to enduring questions surrounding right-wing extremism and subjects’ tacit, or even active, support of violence. These questions have the discursive power to ‘disrupt’ the empowering discourses inherent in subjects’ accounts as to why they joined the AfD in the first place, as touched upon in the preceding chapter. Consequently, subjects participate in something akin to what Zerubavel (2006) refers to as a “conspiracy of silence” (p. 2). In other words, subjects agree to ignore or downplay an issue that all are aware of so as not to jeopardise their political objectives, or indeed their political standing if they are newly

elected party representatives. In this way, subjects are able to create a more harmonious image of party life and their own role within this codified structure through discursive omission or “dialogic repression” (Billig 1999, p 101), i.e., that which is not said.

### *Conclusion*

The AfD has managed to commandeer mainstream political narratives relating to Islam in Germany. The move has allowed the AfD to reinforce its core narrative that it has a legitimate stake—or even an authoritative voice—in German political life despite its various policy failures and enduring *Unkoalitionsfähigkeit* (inability to form coalitions). The party’s strategic exploitation of issues relating to Islam is comparable to methods implemented by its counterparts across Europe and beyond. As outlined in *Section 1.6* and discussion relating to the relationship between gender, religiosity, and support for the PRR, the role of Islam in German culture and society has proven a significant area of investigation for this thesis. As discussion throughout this chapter has shown, the party’s strategic instrumentalisation of Islam following the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis and several high-profile sexual violence cases clearly strikes a chord with subjects, thus indicating that the physical threat allegedly posed by Muslim men is a primary motivating factor behind their AfD membership. The AfD’s strategic construction of a racialised Muslim other resonates with subjects and underpins the latter’s discursive struggle for political authority and legitimacy, as well as exposes their strategic ‘ideological flexibility’ in the face of accusations relating to right-wing extremism.

Individuals typically “strive” for cognitive equilibrium (Knobloch-Westerwick and Meng 2009. p. 426); put simply, they try to avoid interpersonal conflict through their selective reinterpretation of information relating to their personal preferences and/or political affiliations. The central argument of this chapter is that subjects’ ‘contradictory practices’ underpin their engagement with the AfD and this has been realised in the analysis presented here. Reflecting Miller’s contention that women are not afforded the space to become fully realised political subjects if their engagement with violence is ignored (2000, p. 14), this analysis scratches beneath the surface of

dominant assumptions regarding women's political behaviour and challenges the prevailing idea that women are averse to violence, discursive or otherwise.

As the analysis in this chapter has shown, the "organising momentum" of the contemporary PRR and broader far right reflects its ability to accommodate some "ideological dissent" amongst adherents (Blee 1996, pp. 697-698). With this in mind, the chapter which follows extends discussion of subjects' sometimes-contradictory engagement with the AfD, unpacking their responses to tenets of the party's *Familienpolitik* as they relate to ideas surrounding heteronormative families, same-sex marriage, and gender equality.

# Chapter Five

## *Genderwahn! The AfD's Familienpolitik*

### Introduction

*Chapter Four* demonstrated that subjects employ a range of discursive strategies to legitimise their security concerns in relation to a racialised Muslim other. Additionally, the analysis revealed that while these strategies appear to resonate with subjects, they simultaneously attempt to deflect attention away from their own tolerance for violence. Just as the racialised and gendered bodies of Muslim men and white German women are operationalised by the AfD as physical and discursive tools by which an idealised German nation can be (re)imagined, this chapter extends discussion of this as it relates to the identified theme of the AfD's *Familienpolitik* (family policy). It explores the discursive strategies deployed by the AfD to win support, where subjects position themselves in relation to this identified theme, and whether male and female subjects respond differently to topics which fall under the broad *Familienpolitik* umbrella. While the AfD and subjects advocate minimal government interference in the private lives of German citizens, the evidence collected here will show that they attempt to realise their political goals through their discursive subjugation of citizens' bodies, i.e., the biopolitical idea that white German women are obliged to have more children to facilitate the realisation of an idealised and racially homogenous social body. However, despite the AfD and subjects maintaining a façade of political unity on certain topics—for example, on the benefits of the traditional family unit of father, mother, and children—the evidence reveals that in private, some subjects appear to eschew core tenets of the AfD's *Familienpolitik* altogether. The argument is made in this chapter that while subjects may have an ambivalent relationship with aspects of the AfD's *Familienpolitik*, they ultimately benefit from the party's attempted (re)consolidation of heteronormative power relations as white, cis-gender women, enabling them to further accrue socio-cultural and political capital and advance their own personal and political objectives.

In their empirical study of the ‘family-friendly’ policies enacted by the PRR in Poland and Hungary, Grzebalska and Pető (2018) posit that gender is in fact the “symbolic glue” binding the PRR’s ideological and programmatic demands (p. 165).<sup>17</sup> From the valorisation of the heteronormative family unit as the primary mode of social organisation, their anti-choice and pro-natalist stance, opposition to sex and relationship education, and rejection of same-sex marriage, Dietze and Roth (2020) similarly observe the PRR’s “obsession with gender and sexuality” (p. 7). The evidence presented in this chapter identifies similar findings in relation to the AfD in Germany but also shines a light on the ambivalent relationship some subjects have in relation to cornerstone party issues such as same-sex marriage and LGBTQ+ rights. Ostensibly, the concept of gender is rejected by the AfD and its counterparts in Poland, Hungary, and elsewhere as it challenges the essentialist idea that biological differences between men and women reflect an intrinsic or ‘natural’ social order. As outlined in *Chapter Two*, gender is defined by this thesis as “how women, men, and non-binary persons act according to feminine, masculine, or fluid expectations of men and women” (Davey *et al.* 2019, p. 4). Gender, and by extension, Western feminist ideals, are regarded by the AfD as a destabilising ‘ideology’ with tangible consequences for normative power relations.<sup>18</sup> In the eyes of subjects, the increasingly widespread acceptance of gender diversity and the perceived fragmentation of traditional gender roles threatens the socio-cultural and political hegemony of white, heteronormative Germans who monopolise socio-political capital and its associated benefits. This raises important questions for the thesis as to whose interests are represented by such ‘norms’: the idea that the fragmentation of traditional roles has usurped white cis-gender individuals from their ‘rightful’ place as the holders of social power holds traction among subjects.

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<sup>17</sup> Poland’s Law and Justice, for example, have introduced a child benefit programme which offers families an “unconditional” monthly cash transfer of 120 EUR “for every second and subsequent child” until the age of eighteen (Grzebalska and Pető 2018, p. 167).

<sup>18</sup> Following Connell (1987), ‘normative’ is understood not as a definition of ‘normality,’ but rather, a definition of what the “holders of social power” are prepared to accept (p. 52). ‘Gender ideology’ is used as an umbrella term for a range of issues relating to gender and sexuality, including, gender studies, feminism, the *Frauenquote*, reproductive healthcare, and LGBTQ+ rights (Schminke 2020, p. 61).

This chapter is made up of three principal sections. The chapter first explores the ways in which the traditional family unit provides the moral and biological bedrock upon which the AfD's vision of a society rests free from gender, feminism, and the perceived marginalisation of the heteronormative family. Secondly, despite the AfD's dissemination of the idea that demands for marriage equality pose a distinct threat to families, this chapter examines how subjects critically engage with these discourses and the extent to which they resonate with subjects' own lives and experiences. Lastly, while gender and its concomitant issues appear to form the bedrock of the AfD's *Familienpolitik*, this chapter engages with the idea that a critical reassessment of what in fact constitutes 'women's issues' for AfD members is necessary. The following sections will unravel the intricate entanglements of gender, equality, and women's political participation in the German context as they relate to the identified theme of the AfD's *Familienpolitik*.

## 5.1 The centrality of the heteronormative family

Given that subjects often do not live their own lives in ways which reflect party doctrine, this section will analyse the extent to which subjects toe a party line in relation to the AfD's *Familienpolitik* and what this may reveal about their political engagement in this context. It makes the argument that the AfD and subjects instrumentalise discourses which valorise heteronormativity in their discursive attempts to persuade German women to have more children.

Like its counterparts in countries such as Poland and Hungary, the AfD has consistently centred the idea of the heteronormative family as the "germ cell of society" (*Keimzelle der Gesellschaft*) since its entry into political life in 2013 (AfD *Wahlprogramm* 2013). Under the leadership of founding party member Bernd Lucke, the AfD initially described the state promotion of families as an "investment," neatly reflecting the AfD's then-preoccupation with the impact of the 2008 global financial crisis on the German economy and social welfare system. Following Lucke's departure in 2015, the AfD's stance on a range of issues relating to the traditional family, gender roles, and LGBTQ+ rights have become framed in increasingly nationalistic terms, as touched upon in the introduction to this thesis. However, support for the traditional family model of father, mother, and children is not unique



to the AfD; it is a cornerstone programmatic and ideological issue for conservative and religion-affiliated parties across Europe and beyond (Akkerman 2015; Blee and Cresap 2010).<sup>19</sup> The idea that a so-called gender ideology, and by extension, Western conceptualisations of feminism, undermines the moral and biological bedrock upon which an idealised nation is constructed is reflected in the discourse of the PRR and far right more broadly. Furthermore, PRR parties with parliamentary majorities in their respective countries have the power to change or amend equality laws to further entrench their anti-gender and anti-feminism platforms. In Hungary, for example, the Fidesz/*Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt* (Christian Democratic People's Party, KDNP) coalition government have taken legislative steps to counter 'gender ideology' and feminism by enshrining additional protections for heteronormative families in the Hungarian constitution. This includes removing sexual orientation from the list of protected characteristics in anti-discrimination legislation and banning the teaching of gender studies at Hungarian universities (Félix 2018, p. 118; Mudde 2019, pp. 156-157). In the essentialist world view propagated by Fidesz/KDNP, women and men have particular roles to play, but as scholars have pointed out, the desire to categorise individuals on the basis of biological sex to fulfil specific social roles is both historically and culturally contingent (Yuval-Davis 1997, p. 9; Foucault 1980). In contrast to the Hungarian case, Windwehr and Fischer (2021) observe that German family policy more broadly has moved away from a "traditional male bread winner" social welfare model in recent decades in attempts to recreate the successes of their Scandinavian counterparts vis-à-vis increasing female participation in the workforce and achieving gender parity (p. 189).

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<sup>19</sup> This rhetoric is deeply rooted in the contemporary political landscape of the broader German far-right. For example, since its creation in 1964, the NPD has come to incorporate openly national socialist tenets, including its views on the role of women (Kruglanski *et al.* 2020, p. 14). While, according to Fangen and Lichtenberg (2021), the NPD have attempted to downplay this association in recent years, the party emphasises the 'naturalness' of the heteronormative family unit and gender roles in its *Arbeit, Familie, Vaterland* (*Work, Family, Fatherland*) manifesto: "The family is the smallest natural community within the nation, and is responsible for passing on values and traditions" (p. 81; NPD 2019). Despite a seemingly active women's caucus, including *Gemeinschaft Deutscher Frauen* (Society of German Women, GDF) and *Ring Nationaler Frauen* (Circle of Nationalist Women, RNF), NPD women are, according to Röpke and Speit (2010), largely regarded by male NPD members as "dray horses" who are expected to fulfil their biological "obligation" as wives and mothers regardless of their place within party hierarchy (loc. 2013). While women form the biological bedrock of the NPD's essentialised worldview, they evidently play a subordinate role in party politics, aside, that is, from helping the NPD moderate its so-called "sleazy" image (Röpke and Speit 2010, loc. 2013).

The evidence presented here will show that the AfD is trying to revitalise the idea that a male breadwinner and female stay-at home parent is preferable to the perceived dangers of ‘outsourcing’ childcare to strangers as well as being common-sense; after all, in the eyes of subjects, it is only ‘natural’ for women to want to become mothers and stay at home to look after their children and for men to be the breadwinners.

Both male and female elected AfD representatives enthusiastically espouse the idea that one parent staying at home to look after children is of vital importance to the development of a healthy and meaningful family life. For example, in an online blog post, Gerd Kögler, former member of the AfD Bayern Landesvorstand, outlines his position on a range of family-related issues: reflecting the party line that the family is “the nucleus of every society,” he advocates “as much freedom and family as possible, as little state as necessary” (n.d.).<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless, the German government has its own particular role to play; in Kögler’s view, it must do more to encourage women to have children (Ibid.). To this end, he argues that a three-year benefit equivalent to the last yearly income of the parent staying at home would mean that child-raising can “take place again where it naturally belongs, in families” (Ibid.). For Kögler, this would drastically reduce the need for *Fremdbetreuung*; children would no longer need to be looked after by strangers at day-care facilities and in close proximity to “children with behavioural problems” (*verhaltensauffälligen Kindern*) (Ibid.). Reflecting these sentiments, author and AfD associate Ellen Kositzka posits that it is ultimately a question of dignity; in her 2018 polemic *Gender ohne Ende*, Kositzka concedes that while pecuniary “political manoeuvring” has its reason and justification –after all, children have never been as expensive as they are today—children should not be perceived by society as a “millstone around one’s neck” (p. 38). However, the idea that women in Germany should have more children is not simply a matter of quantity, i.e., how many children individual women can physically have, but the ‘quality’ of these children; evidence suggests that the AfD’s proposed financial

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<sup>20</sup> During an interview with *Frankenpost*, Kögler, a long-time proponent of a more right-wing conservative and middle-class AfD, claimed that the BfV’s proposed observation of the AfD was in fact an “opportunity” to prove that the party is not right-wing extremist (Trapp 2022). Accused of further damaging the party’s reputation by colleagues in Bavaria, Kögler left the party citing their allegedly discriminatory exclusion policy as well as for the sake of his “self-esteem” (Ibid.).

incentives would be used selectively for groups for whom higher fertility is particularly desirable, i.e., so-called ‘autochthonous’ Germans.

Expanding his position on the topic of family, Gerd Kögler (n.d.) states that “with a current fertility rate of around 1.4 children per woman, we need an activating family policy [*aktivierende Familienpolitik*] that will create a climate in our country again in which people are happy to father children and enjoy raising them.” In Kögler’s view, immigrant families cannot help to solve Germany’s so-called demographic crisis because of “the many problems that come with [immigration]” (Ibid.). While Kögler does not elaborate on what these problems might be, he concludes his blog post by outlining his commitment to “the traditional family and Western Christian culture” (Ibid). Similarly, reflecting the idea that only ‘ethnic’ Germans can revitalise the perceived decline in national birth-rates—as well as enthusiastically extolling the virtues of motherhood in a video recorded for Mother’s Day in 2016—AfD MdL Katrin Ebner-Steiner declares that:

We [the AfD] appreciate the work you [mothers] do for society because without children, our country has no future and without German children, Germany has no future (Ebner-Steiner 2016).

Like Kögler, Ebner-Steiner, a mother of four, outlines her commitment to the AfD’s *Familienpolitik* on her personal website and wants to encourage more young people to start a family without having to worry about navigating a work-life balance (Ebner-Steiner 2022). The idea of an ‘activating family policy’ is wholeheartedly embraced by some male and female elected AfD representatives like Kögler and Ebner-Steiner, but other prominent party members are markedly less enthusiastic about the prospect. For example, *Welt* (2018) reports that now-former AfD co-chair Jörg Meuthen rejected Frauke Petry and Björn Höcke’s proposal that a three-child family should be the party’s preferred social model, stating instead that “I don’t believe in active population policy.” Long considered a party moderate, Meuthen stepped down as party co-chair in 2021 and in early 2022, announced his plans to leave the party altogether stating that the AfD’s “democratic foundations” were not solid enough (Deutsche Welle 2022b). Nonetheless, the evidence here confirms Butler’s observation that children in fact become “a dense site for the transfer and

reproduction of culture” which carries within it the “implicit norms of racial purity and domination within the strictly codified environment of heteronormativity (2002, p. 22). This is further evidenced by Kögler’s desire to preserve “Franconian-Bavarian dialects and culture” and his plea to “[...] sing (German) songs again!” in order to counteract what he perceives as the fatal encroachment of a totalising Islam on regional tradition (n.d). In their discursive attempts to convince parents that it is better to have more children, and then choose to stay at home to look after them, these elected AfD representatives privilege essentialised racial norms, as well as the expectations which emerge from normative understandings of human sexuality such as the idea that it is ‘natural’ for women to want children. To this end, they play their part in securing and maintaining the socio-cultural, political, and economic hegemony of a so-called autochthonous demographic for the benefit of future generations.

In a bid to formally consolidate the AfD’s stance on traditional families and the purported benefits of one parent staying at home, the AfD-Fraktion Bundestag submitted a motion to the German parliament in 2018 demanding an investigation into the possible psychological impact that early childcare has on children. In their citing of a US study, the AfD argue that children can become argumentative, beat other children, and even lose the bond established with their mothers as a result of being sent to day-care at too young an age (AfD-Fraktion Bundestag 2018b). According to the AfD in North Rhine-Westphalia, not only would additional financial incentives alleviate the socio-economic stresses that many families experience, the freedom for one parent to stay at home with their children would be of immense psychological benefit to children themselves:

Early childhood education arises from the emotional attachment to the primary caregivers. Due to pregnancy and lactation, this is initially the mother, lovingly supported and accompanied by the father. Thus, on the basis of growing basic trust in the child, this formation of the mind and heart is a prerequisite for a healthy mental and physical development [...] (AfD NRW n.d.).

This position is consolidated in the latest iteration of the AfD’s manifesto, 2021’s *Deutschland aber normal (Germany, but normal)*: outside child care is seen by the

party as posing a profound developmental risk to children (AfD 2022b). In order to mitigate this, the AfD reaffirms its plan to introduce a childcare allowance for parents or grandparents for the first three years of a child's life (Ibid.). Furthermore, these financial incentives also serve to reduce the number of abortions carried out in Germany each year; the AfD states on its website that: "Unborn children have a right to life. [...] The AfD wants to prevent fears [about the future] by providing concrete help for families in all situations" (AfD 2022b). Following the US Supreme Court's decision in June 2022 to overturn *Roe v. Wade* – American citizens' constitutional right to access abortion services – deputy AfD leader Beatrix von Storch posted a tweet celebrating the decision: "A good decision [...] The Supreme Court sends a signal of hope for unborn life which radiates to the whole West" (von Storch 2022). Ostensibly, while the AfD began its rightwards trajectory under the leadership of Frauke Petry, elected representatives like Beatrix von Storch, an affluent and fervent anti-abortion campaigner with national and international links to fundamentalist Christian organisations and business figures alike, are instrumental to its success today (Sundermeyer 2018, p. 119). This gives the AfD an additional strategic advantage when it comes to the party keeping its finger on the pulse of global political developments.

While the AfD and its various representatives extol the 'naturalness' of one parent staying at home to care for their children, it is unclear whether they are referring to the male or female parent; the AfD typically use the plural 'Ihnen' in their manifestos and campaign materials. Similarly, Gerd Kögler refers to 'parents' and 'family' in his online blog post. To former AfD member Franziska Schreiber, this is something of a "poisoned chalice"; in her view, the AfD does not want to see *parents* at home, and certainly not the father (2018, p. 100). In Schreiber's view, this is underpinned by the AfD's

[...] naïve hope, if not the belief, that [the husband] can concentrate on his career, which makes him happier, and [the wife] can take care of the children, which makes her happier as the economy is much too exhausting and cruel for women. Two happy people stay together, they do not divorce. And that, in turn, serves the well-being of children (2018, p. 101).

In contrast to the central party's linguistic ambiguity on this matter, the AfD's branch in North Rhine-Westphalia outlines in no uncertain terms its vision for the role women should play in the implementation of their family policies: "[...] The ideal place for a small child to be looked after is on mummy's lap" (n.d.). There is no elaboration, however, on what daddy's role might be, beyond the tacit insinuation that he will be out working to support his growing family. Within the German context, the AfD's desire to 'return' to a more traditional way of life and its concomitant gender roles has a discursive heritage in the Nazi-era policy of *Kinder, Küche, Kirche* (Children, Kitchen, Church).<sup>21</sup> As Koonz (1987) writes in her seminal work on women and the family during the Third Reich, child-raising was rewarded by the Nazi state and women were encouraged to leave the workforce to free up jobs for men (p. 56). This would have held some emotional appeal to Germans who felt short-changed as a result of the human and economic catastrophes of preceding decades and encouraged them to, as Koonz (1987) puts it, "dream about building a new life on the mythical bedrock of a natural hierarchy" (Ibid.). This contention is reflected here; subjects today advocate a 'return' to a traditional gender order which, in theory, fulfils an alleged desire for normalcy. Given the Nazi obsession with physical wellbeing, so-called *Rassenhygiene* (race hygiene), and their strictly codified systems of socio-political classification, it is little surprise that healthy (yet heavily regulated) bodies which fulfilled their biological obligation to have children came to represent how bodies should *naturally* be in order to maximise their utility in the Nazi social body.

The accusation that the AfD, like the engineers of the Nazi state, in fact degrade men and women and want to turn the latter into passive "baby machines" (*die Gebärmaschinen*), is routinely rejected by AfD-Fraktion Bundestag member Nicole Höchst in a 2018 interview with *Welt*. Nonetheless, the AfD continues to outline its biopolitical national project through its strategic dissemination of the idea that the German nation is facing moral and biological 'decay'; these ideas have come to be physically embodied by some of the AfD's most prominent female members, both

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<sup>21</sup> The European Institute for Gender Equality (2022), shows that for the year 2020, only 43 percent of German women were in full-time employment compared to 60 percent of their male peers. Furthermore, women work on average for 37 years, four years less than men. This suggests that life in contemporary Germany embraces some degree of tradition when it comes to women's employment and the duration of their working life.

past and present. A pertinent example of this is former AfD leader Frauke Petry's very public pregnancy. Petry, now a mother of five, emphasised her pregnancy through the wearing of an extremely tight dress at the AfD's 2017 party conference (Dietze 2020, p. 158). Subsequent election posters showed the erstwhile leader posing with her new-born baby son Ferdinand under the slogan "And what is your reason to fight for Germany?" (Ibid.; Amman 2017). The discursive implications here are two-fold: firstly, the AfD frames itself as the only party that cares about the future of Germany, so much so that its own leaders do not shirk their 'duty' when it comes to having more children, in comparison to prominent political figures such as former Chancellor Angela Merkel who is child-free. Subjects such as Ingrid quipped during her interview that women with five or six children are more likely to get elected as AfD MdBs or MdLs: "Normally, if you listen to people who introduce themselves because they want to get elected, it's always "my name is so and so, I'm 40 years old, I have five children, I have six children."'" The empirical validity of this claim is unclear, however.<sup>22</sup> Secondly, the AfD have not only expanded the frame of motherhood to incorporate socio-political and economic concerns but also the so-called demographic race. This is formally consolidated by the AfD's proposal to pay German women to have more children, as well as its pseudo-scientific attempts to 'prove' that the traditional family model yields the most tangible benefits for both mothers and children. The idea that other women should have more children is framed as a rational political decision considering the perceived, and in the eyes of subjects, rapidly encroaching, existential 'threat' facing white German families.

The perceived lack of investment in families on the part of the German government, as well as the innate lack of recognition for stay-at-home mothers in German society

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<sup>22</sup> At the time the AfD emerged in 2013, its total membership comprised of 16 percent women, and 84 percent men (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung 2017). Email correspondence with the AfD Press Office in 2020 confirmed that 17 percent of the AfD's members are women, reflecting information that is already in the public domain. Information about the gender breakdown of a party's membership is only collected when it is first registered (BpB 2017). Consequently, up-to-date figures are not publically available. However, data from federal and regional elections offer a comprehensive breakdown of voter demographics. A 2017 report from Der Bundeswahlleiter (Federal Returning Officer), reveals that 9.2 percent of women and 16.3 percent of men voted for the AfD nationally, making it the first right-wing populist party to be elected to the German parliament since WWII. Correspondingly, a total of 7.8 percent of women and 13 percent of men voted for the AfD in the 2021 federal election (Der Bundeswahlleiter 2021).

more broadly, resonates with subjects, who, for the most part, agree that there should be better financial incentives for families. Reflecting the AfD's contention that money should not prevent people from having children, Gabi states that "real financial support" is needed, especially when young couples are deciding to not have children due to socio-economic insecurity. In Gabi's view, "children are what's beautiful about our society. [...]" and in order for society to continue existing, it is "necessary" for couples to have children. Subjects such as Ingrid reiterate that money should not impede couples' desire to have children: "We just want people to have more children. [...] Not decided against children because they don't have any money. That's [...] so sad."<sup>23</sup> When asked her thoughts about women in the AfD who do not toe the party line in this regard, Ingrid revealed that she herself does not have children, but this apparently does not affect her standing within the party. For Dagmar, it is a matter of helping women to make an informed choice: "Mothers must simply be able to decide. That is, of course, determined by the demands [in one's life]. [...] We can create a balance between the two things [staying home and working]." Reflecting the AfD's rhetoric regarding the purported psychological benefits of mothers raising their children at home, Dagmar also claims that it is scientifically proven that children have a stronger connection to their mothers when they stay at home for longer and allegedly suffer separation anxiety (*die Trennungsangst*) when parted. While Inge scoffed at the idea of extended maternity leave—"What more do the Muttis want?"—she too believes that there are psychological benefits to mothers staying home for longer: "[...] It is psychologically proven that the child is shaped very importantly [in their early years]." According to Gabi, regardless of whether one is a "housewife, a career woman, a professor, kindergarten teacher, or a politician," the AfD "stand up very strongly for women's freedom, in the sense that women can make their choices [in relation to staying home or returning to work]." While like Dagmar and Gabi, Petra advocates choice, she questions whether it is feasible for women to have "everything": "I don't know, a

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<sup>23</sup> According to the Bundesamt für Soziale Sicherheit (Federal Office for Social Security) (2020), mothers are entitled to fourteen weeks of paid maternity leave. Parents are also entitled to a monthly child benefit payment (*Kindergeld*) of €219 for their first child, with this amount increasing incrementally with each new child until they turn eighteen, as per the Bundesagentur für Arbeit (Federal Employment Office) (2020).



big family with a lot of children, a career, [...] travel all over the world, and be independent [...] Having everything at the same time is not possible.” Petra says that compromise is often necessary:

Basically, you have to keep making decisions throughout life. Say, in this phase [of life], my career is important to me, I won’t go travelling, I’ll get married, and wait another five years until I’ve established myself professionally [before having children]. [However] people tell me it’s important to have children and I want to take *proper* care of them [italics added].

In the eyes of subjects such as Petra, women are caught in something akin to an epistemological double-bind; on the one hand, women are told they can achieve anything they put their minds to, and on the other, face immense pressure to start a family before it is too ‘late.’ Ultimately, economic realities often see parents returning to work earlier than they would perhaps like.

Reflecting further on this, subjects like Gisela concede that one must return to work when there is rent to pay or a car to run but asserts that women staying at home would mean more money for families overall: “As mothers, we want to stay at home for longer. You would get more money and for longer [under an AfD *Familienpolitik*].” Only one of the women interviewed for this thesis gave an indication of what role a father might play when it comes to childcare, albeit a cursory one: Dagmar reports that, for example, “I could always afford to stay at home because my husband earned enough money. For me, it wasn’t a question [of being able to afford it] at all.” Aside from being breadwinners, it remains unclear how else a father might contribute to his own child’s development beyond material concerns and the further consolidation of heteronormative power relations. While at odds with the AfD’s stated commitment to keep families together, Ingrid insists that: “We need to help women. If the father leaves, we need to help the women.” As evidence presented here reveals, while subjects advocate minimal state interference in citizen’s day-to-day lives, they believe that the central government should do more to financially support those women who want to stay at home for longer following the birth of their children or start a family of their own. Interview testimony reveals that while subjects broadly

agree with the idea that German women should receive financial incentives to have more children, this is in contrast to the views of party ideologues, framed discursively as a choice women must make themselves rather than a biological imperative or obligation. Subjects, as white cis-gender women, invariably benefit from the AfD's idea to give families this extra money, but, in some cases, do not live their own lives in ways which reflect party doctrine in this regard. This is aptly demonstrated by Ingrid's assertion that while she has no children of her own, nor seemingly wants any, it is imperative for others to step up to the task. In the meantime, Ingrid has established a successful political career within the AfD, making recommendations as to how other women should live their lives. This further strengthens the core argument of this chapter that subjects benefit from the AfD's attempted (re)consolidation of heteronormative power relations regardless of whether they fully buy into the issue at hand or choose not to follow their party's advice or the position they express during interviews. The following section extends discussion of this as it relates to subjects' ambivalence on the AfD's stance on same-sex marriage.

## 5.2 Same-sex marriage debates and performative allyship

The previous section found that while the AfD's strategic valorisation of heteronormativity and ideas surrounding the traditional family resonate with subjects, subjects ultimately advocated choice for women when it comes to starting a family. Expanding discussion of the identified theme of *Familienpolitik*, this section will investigate the ambivalent relationship some subjects appear to have with the AfD's stance on these issues and the ways in which they attempt to rationalise their own role in the consolidation of the AfD's anti-LGBTQ+ platforms. It argues that while subjects do not necessarily toe the party line when it comes to the issue of same-sex marriage and LGBTQ+ rights, they ultimately benefit from the AfD's strategic operationalisation of discourses which maintain and reproduce divisions along gender, race, and class lines.

The AfD takes a decidedly hard-line stance when it comes to issues which concern the LGBTQ+ community such as same-sex marriage or gay couples adopting children. However, its stance is not necessarily new or unique when situated among the wider constellation of PRR parties and their respective anti-LGBTQ+ positions. A

central tenet of the rhetoric utilised by the PRR across Europe and further afield is the idea that LGBTQ+ people pose a threat not only to the wellbeing and safety of children but the socio-legal integrity of the heteronormative family. In 2020, for example, the Fidesz/KNDP coalition government passed a law effectively banning same-sex couples from adopting children in Hungary (BBC 2020). It is now enshrined in the country's constitution that parents must raise their children in a "conservative spirit" and asserts that "Hungary defends the right of children to identify with their birth gender and ensures their upbringing based on our nation's constitutional identity and values based on our Christian culture" (Ibid.).<sup>24</sup> As touched upon in the preceding section, the traditional family model promoted by the AfD underpins subjects' advocacy of a 'return' to a traditional gender order wherein women and men fulfil a range of biologically determined roles. Concordantly, the AfD (2022b) attempt to consolidate their pro-family position in 2021's *Deutschland aber normal (Germany but normal)* by defining exactly what—and whom—they are referring to when talking about families:

The AfD is committed to the family as the nucleus of our society. It consists of father, mother, and children. Family means security, care, home, love, and happiness. This value and reference system is passed on from generation to generation.

Furthermore, the party makes an implicit discursive connection between the perceived breakdown of the traditional family model and the left-wing 'ideologies' it believes are responsible for undermining this:

From the left-green side, however, the institution of the family is discredited out of ideological motivation to replace it with other models. [...] We demand the restoration of the special protection of the family guaranteed by the Basic Law (Ibid.).

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<sup>24</sup> Other pertinent examples include Poland, Brazil, and the US. In 2020, Polish president Andrzej Duda declared that "LGBT ideology" poses more of a threat to family life than communism (Human Rights Watch 2020). Further afield, Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro reportedly said that he would prefer for his own son to die in an accident than be gay (Mudde 2019, p. 153). In 2017, former US president Donald Trump declared on Twitter that: "[the] United States Government will not accept or allow [transgender individuals] to serve in any capacity in the U.S. Military [sic]" (Phillipps 2019).

Echoing this, former AfD leader Alexander Gauland outlines his opposition to same-sex marriage in an online blog post on the basis that, in his view, heterosexual marriage forms the necessary bedrock upon which women and men can fulfil their essential reproductive obligations:

Marriage for all is fundamentally wrong [...] Only families with children can secure the future of our society, our social security systems, and our economy. [...] We [the AfD] see marriage as part of the tradition of Western Christian culture [...] For thousands of years, marriage between a man and a woman has represented [something] worth striving for (n.d.).

Gauland's blog post outlines how he perceives the socio-cultural and historical significance of heterosexual marriage, and how this has become discursively entangled with ideas surrounding the singular importance of heteronormative families and their physical embodiment of a particular set of socio-legal values. In a 2017 blog post titled *Ehe für Alle – Ehe für niemand (Marriage for All – Marriage for No-one)*, the AfD in Bavaria develops this discourse further, viewing same-sex marriage as an attack on the “constitutional status” of heterosexual marriage and the “special protection” it is afforded by Germany's Grundgesetz. According to the Bundesamt für Justiz (Federal Office of Justice) (n.d.), Article 6 (1) of the Grundgesetz states that: “Marriage and family are under the special protection of the state order.” Article 6 (2) states that “The care and upbringing of children is the natural right of their parents and their primary duty” (Ibid., n.d.). If the legal basis of heteronormative family life is threatened in such an insidious way, the AfD-Fraktion Bayern ask contrarily:

What comes next? The marriage of bisexual trios? [...] Marriage to children? [...] Will there soon also be marriages to pets in times of changing values? If “protection for the love of all” supersedes “protection for marriage between a man and a woman,” why is marriage still necessary? (2017)

During her tenure, former leader Frauke Petry dismissed same-sex marriage as an “ideological experiment” (Glaser *et al.* 2018, p. 27). According to a FES report, Kay Nerstheimer, a former AfD member of the Berlin state legislature, described gay

people as a “degenerate species” (Ibid.). The complexities and contradictions of LGBTQ+ life in the AfD is most aptly demonstrated by the example of Alice Weidel, party co-leader. Despite identifying as a lesbian and sharing two adopted children with her Sri-Lankan heritage partner, Weidel voted against the legislation of same-sex marriage in 2017 (Hockenos 2017).<sup>25</sup> When asked during a 2017 interview with *Südwest Presse* whether her same-sex relationship fits in with the AfD’s emphasis on heteronormative families, Weidel retorts that there is no inherent contradiction in this: “Why should one contradict the other? I have a very liberal attitude [...] The AfD accepts the legal status of registered civil partnerships, but first and foremost wants to support families appropriately” (Berg and Muschel 2017). When asked by *Welt* (2018) why she is not a member of the FDP because “she is a lesbian, [avoids] racist vocabulary, and represents neoliberal positions [within the AfD],” Weidel reportedly rolled her eyes and said: “Not again.” The relative visibility of high-ranking LGBTQ+ members like Alice Weidel gives the AfD a strategic advantage in that it makes the party look more progressive than it really is and puts it above suspicion of perpetuating homophobia despite the offensive views of some elected AfD representatives. This confirms Dietze’s observation that women like Weidel both “perform modernity by their very existence” as well as bring “something extra” to party life, namely, her impressive career as an economist with Goldman Sachs (2020, p. 156). However, as this section explores, like Weidel, prominent LGBTQ+ figures within the AfD regard their sexuality, and in the case of transgender AfD members, their gender identity, as largely incidental to their broader political activism.

While registered life partnerships only give same-sex couples in Germany around ninety percent of the same benefits afforded to heterosexual couples, some prominent LGBTQ+ AfD figures appear to support the party’s stance on ‘traditional’ families, i.e., that of father, mother, and children. Alexander Tassis, spokesperson for the Alternative Homosexuals, asserts that: “We’re not seeking equality [...] It doesn’t have to be the same [as heterosexual marriage]” (Staudenmaier 2017). Echoing this, ‘Julia’ told Wielowiejski (2020) that

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<sup>25</sup> Incidentally, the AfD is opposed to the right of adoption for LGBTQ+ couples on the grounds that, according to AfD Bundestag representative Nicole Höchst, gay men are more likely to be paedophiles than their heterosexual counterparts (Glaser *et al.* 2018, p. 27).

It's not true that the AfD is a homophobic party, but what is important to us is that same-sex couples shouldn't be given special treatment, they shouldn't be privileged in any way, and marriage between a man and a woman should be a guiding principle (p. 137).

This is also reflected in an interview with Sybill de Buer, a transgender woman and AfD candidate for the 2020 mayoral election in Burghausen, Bavaria. She explains that; "We are an open and tolerant party [...] What counts for us is what we think politically and not what we have in our underwear" (RTL.de 2020). It is also presumptuous, claims de Buer, to assume that just because she is transgender, that she would automatically align with the Greens or Die Linke (Ibid.). In fact, the term 'transgender' is too liberal for de Buer; she maintains that there are only men and women, in this way reinforcing the party's core policy message that a so-called gender ideology marginalises natural differences between men and women (Ibid.). Similarly, in a 2018 online blog post, Nico Wittmann, transgender man and former Bezirksverordneter of the AfD-Fraktion Tempelhof-Schöneberg, railed against the "intolerance inside the LGBTI scene" in relation to a queer.de article in which Wittman's political engagements were allegedly misrepresented (Wittman 2018). He goes on to say that "one is tolerated as long as one blows the same political horn" (Ibid.). Both de Buer and Wittman assert that their gender identity is incidental to their AfD engagement; there are, in the minds of the AfD and its LGBTQ+ members, greater issues at stake.

As this discussion has outlined, LGBTQ+ party figures such as Alice Weidel, Alexander Tassis, Sybill de Buer, and Nico Wittmann have established successful political careers at various rungs of the party ladder. However, it is far from clear whether the AfD's alleged support for the LGBTQ+ community represents a broader ideological shift in attitudes toward sexual diversity. As Wielowiejski (2020) observes, this 'support' is typically in response to issues perceived by the AfD as posing a political threat, namely, the increasing social acceptance of gender diversity and elites' alleged embrace of Islam (pp. 136, 140). The AfD is not alone in this regard: the PVV in the Netherlands, for example, outline their commitment to "defend essential parts of our culture: the freedom of homosexuals and the equality of men

and women” (PVV 2010, p. 33). However, this claim runs parallel to the idea that the Netherlands, in the eyes of the PVV, is under “severe pressure” from so-called Islamisation, cultural relativism, and “hatred” of the West (Ibid.). In the case of the AfD, evidence suggests that Islam and its perceived impact on aspects of German socio-cultural life are of primary concern to LGBTQ+ members like Tallis who view the AfD’s various anti-Islam campaigns as “necessary for survival” (Staudenmaier 2017). Similarly, Alice Weidel dismisses the same-sex marriage debate as “insignificant” in the face of Germany’s “swamping by foreigners” and is quoted on the AfD’s official Facebook page scoffing at the idea of “marriage for all while the country is being Islamised” (Glaser *et al.* 2018, p. 27). Where the previous chapter finds that the AfD engages in what Farris (2017) calls femonationalism—the idea that right-wing parties, groups, and organisations adopt tenets of women’s rights in their opposition to Islam—the evidence here suggests this extends to the deployment of LGBTQ+ rights discourses in the German context. Adding another layer of complexity to the debate at hand, the AfD’s strategic adoption of a pro-LGBTQ+ position serves to both consolidate its anti-Islam platform and reinforces the idea that the party engages in *homonationalism*, i.e., the ways in which parties present their nation as LGBTQ+ friendly in contrast to other countries where homosexuality may be criminalised and LGBTQ+ people brutally persecuted.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, this counters Fangen and Lichtenberg’s assertion that homonationalism is *not* a pervasive feature of the rhetoric espoused by the German far right more broadly (2021, p. 82); the evidence shows that the AfD plays off its *Familienpolitik* against the rights and interests of LGBTQ+ people vis-à-vis immigration. For example, former AfD MdL for Hamburg Harald Feineis declared that

We are the only party that is brave enough to call out the root causes for the fast-increasing numbers of verbal or violent attacks against homo-, inter-, and transsexuals [sic] by their name: the largely uncontrolled mass migration of fanatic

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<sup>26</sup> First outlined in 2007’s *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* by Jasbir Puar, the concept of homonationalism is used to unpack “the complexities of how “acceptance” and “tolerance” for gay and lesbian subjects have become a barometer by which the right to and capacity for national sovereignty is evaluated” (Puar 2013, p. 336).

Muslims from patriarchal clan-societies with strongly homophobic tendencies (AfD Kompakt 2018; Daddow and Hertner 2019, p. 6).

However, despite the AfD's concern that the rights of LGBTQ+ people are under threat from an allegedly omnipresent Islam, this does not extend to Muslim LGBTQ+ people. When the state parliament of Saxony-Anhalt debated whether Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria could be declared "safe countries of origin" when assessing the claims of LGBTQ+ asylum seekers, for example, AfD MdL Andreas Gehlmann called for homosexuality to be punished by imprisonment in Germany (Denkler 2016). In an interview with *Südwest Presse*, Alice Weidel describes how she feels unsafe walking around Berlin with her female partner: "Honestly, I will not walk in Berlin-Neukölln with my partner because then we are 100 percent at risk. We are dealing here with religious homophobia, which worries me greatly" (Berg and Muschel 2017). However, despite the AfD's strategic consolidation of discourses relating to the perceived threat of Islam to the safety of LGBTQ+ people, the party remains indifferent to the day-to-day issues which affect the LGBTQ+ community in Germany. As this analysis will show, these discourses broadly resonate with subjects. However, these discourses are operationalised in different ways by subjects who, at times, appear to have an ambivalent relationship with aspects of the AfD's stance on the issue of same-sex marriage.

The idea of the traditional family model of father, mother, and children resonates with the women interviewed for the thesis. For example, Petra explains that she "is of the firm opinion that this classical model [of father, mother, and children] is the model par excellence because society exists and wants to continue to exist." However, Petra also believes that it is important for "gays and lesbians [to] have the freedom to live as they want. It is terrible when people have to hide, lie, and pretend. Terrible." Similarly, Dagmar iterates that "A family to me is a man, a woman, and a child." Echoing Petra, however, Dagmar believes that families can also be comprised differently to the heteronormative family model promoted by the AfD: "[A family can be] a child and two men, [and also] two women and a child. It is still a family. Even a single woman with a child." When asked her views on LGBTQ+ relationships, Anke declared: "Like Old Fritz [Prussian King Frederick the Great], I always say, live and let



live!” While, ostensibly, campaigning against same-sex marriage on behalf of the AfD, Ingrid responded to questions surrounding the party’s seemingly contradictory stance on LGBTQ+ rights in an unexpected way:

**Researcher:** Do you think it’s a bit of a contradiction that the AfD doesn’t support same-sex marriage but has gays and lesbians in the party?

**Ingrid:** That’s something different. We’ve always said that marriage is something special. That’s in our Grundgesetz, our constitution. The family needs special support. That’s a mother, a father, and a child. [...] I personally don’t care who people marry. [...] It’s hard for me because I am not on the same page with my party on that issue.

**Researcher:** So, you have your independent thoughts [on the topic]?

**Ingrid:** [Laughs] I have my independent thoughts and I express them because, like I said, I don’t care whom is marrying whom. I want these couples to have children if they can care for them.

Conversely, Gabi states that “[LGBTQ+ relationships] are a private matter. If someone does not want a family but wants to live together with a same-sex partner *without* children, then that is a private matter [italics added].” While, according to Gabi, there are different interest groups active in the AfD, they do not “belong” (“*gehören*”).<sup>27</sup> The idea that LGBTQ+ people are a fixture of AfD life yet do not (or cannot) influence party policy in any meaningful way is reflected by subjects like Gisela who, when asked by the researcher if she thought that the AfD accepts diversity (*die Vielfalt*), replied that:

[Diversity] is a difficult term. We accept a lot. There are two terms; there is acceptance and there is tolerance. Everything is fine as long as it follows the rules. [...] Personally, I think some [party members] don’t accept, but they tolerate.

Gisela goes on to claim that while the AfD pushes the traditional family model, the party also accepts different arrangements: “We want to say that it is better when two

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<sup>27</sup> A precise number of LGBTQ+ AfD members cannot be formally verified. Rafael (2017) suggests that the two prominent LGBTQ+ working groups within the party have been dissolved in recent years (Daddow and Hertner 2019, p. 6).

[heterosexual] people raise children, so we're pushing that, but everything else is fine." Similarly, Inge muses during her interview that "if you choose a different lifestyle, it's okay, but it can't be the guiding principle [*die Leitlinie*]." While, as Blee (1996) posits, a degree of 'ideological dissent' among group members can be expected, strict adherence to a party line is not a requisite for "ideological transformation" (p. 693). This observation is reflected here; interview testimonies reveal a multidimensionality of subject positions in relation to LGBTQ+ rights and same-sex marriage. Subjects forge rational connections between themselves and the ideological and programmatic goals of the AfD through their broad acceptance of the idea that heterosexual marriage is singular and therefore requires special legal protections. However, as long as campaigns for marriage equality do not challenge or attempt to usurp the sanctity of this convention, it is seemingly accepted by subjects as a so-called 'alternative' to heterosexual marriage.

At first glance, figures like Weidel, Tassis, de Buer, and Wittman give the impression that the AfD accepts and supports the LGBTQ+ community in Germany. However, neither the party nor its prominent LGBTQ+ figures advocate on behalf of LGBTQ+ constituents and the issues relevant to the LGBTQ+ community. This discussion has shown that some AfD members regard homosexuality as an aberration and something completely antithetical to a 'healthy' and meaningful family life, as aptly demonstrated by Kay Nerstheimer's absurd claim that gay people are a 'degenerate species,' or Nicole Höchst's belief that gay men are more likely to be paedophiles than their heterosexual counterparts. Conversely, interview testimony reveals that some subjects take a more ambivalent stance on the topic; most subjects believe in the AfD's promotion of a traditional family model but do not want to see LGBTQ+ people disadvantaged or persecuted by dint of their sexual orientation. The fact that some subjects appear to have an indifferent, or even, antagonistic, relationship with cornerstone party issues poses researchers with a distinct epistemological challenge when it comes to discerning the factors driving subjects' engagement with the PRR and far right more broadly. However, testimony also reveals that, in this context, subjects do not challenge the blatant homophobia of their colleagues and attempt to deflect their own complicity in the production, maintenance, and reproduction of anti-LGBTQ+ discourse by making token statements about LGBTQ+ colleagues and

claiming to be good allies to minority groups. For example, Ingrid proudly holds AfD parliamentary co-leader Alice Weidel up as an example of how the party embraces diversity: “If [LGBTQ+ people] work hard, they will be elected [to the AfD], I am sure. I mean, Alice Weidel is our boss. [...] She knows her thing. She is our economic girl.” Ingrid herself has established a successful political career by toeing the party line on same-sex marriage and has benefited considerably from the AfD’s strict maintenance of a heteronormative and racially homogenous status quo as a white, cis-gender woman. Dagmar went to lengths during her interview to demonstrate that she is not homophobic by alluding to her best friend in the AfD, a person she describes as a “raving queen” (“hochgradig schwul”). When the observation was made that there appears to be some contradictions between party doctrine and members’ own lives, Dagmar insisted that it is simply a matter of interpretation: if only her gay friend was there, he could set the record straight. Dagmar’s unnamed gay friend reportedly—and somewhat conveniently—does not believe that his same-sex relationship has the same ‘value’ as a heterosexual union. For this reason, same-sex relationships are described by Dagmar as just another “alternative life philosophy.” Furthermore, Dagmar takes care to describe her friend as coming from an “intact” family; in this way, her friend’s homosexuality is not considered the result of ‘bad’ parenting but entirely incidental.

The AfD’s cynical pathologisation of LGBTQ+ individuals and families denies the reality of many children and young people raised by same-sex parents and further consolidates the idea that LGBTQ+ families are somehow less ‘real’ or ‘natural’ than their heterosexual counterparts. Traditional families and heterosexual marriage thus become prominent ideological sites from which the AfD’s *Familienpolitik* can be articulated and transmitted to its desired audience. Additionally, the idea that the rights and interests of LGBTQ+ party members can be utilised in the AfD’s fight against Islam also finds traction among subjects. For example, Ingrid insisted that the AfD had “no problem” with transgender members, in fact

We have [...] transgender people in our party [...] They’re speaking for the AfD [...] “I’ve had so many problems getting to where I am now, and now I’m a woman, I’m happy. The last thing I want is a hijab over my face now—if Islam is on the rise

here in Germany—where women’s rights are not respected anymore.” They are a voice for us. Absolutely no problem in our party.

She goes on to state that “If you have problems with your government because you’re homosexual and you’re going to jail there or you’re tortured, then you have the right to stay in Germany.” Ingrid’s testimony reflects how the AfD and its members attempt to position themselves and Germany discursively as pro-LGBTQ+ in contrast to predominantly Muslim countries in which homosexuality may be illegal and punished severely. However, where interview testimony throughout this section has revealed that some subjects have what appears to be an ambivalent relationship with aspects of the AfD’s stance on same-sex marriage and LGBTQ+ rights, it also exposes their strategic decision to ignore or downplay the entrenched homophobia of their colleagues. This dual positioning has, in some cases, helped subjects to establish successful political careers within the AfD, as the examples of Ingrid and Dagmar show. The following section goes on to demonstrate that while the AfD’s rejection of broader equality initiatives such as the *Frauenquote* resonates with subjects who attribute their professional successes to their own hard work and fortitude in the face of adversity, they nonetheless collectivise on the issues which affect their own demographic, namely, white cis-gender women.

### 5.3 Women as gender-conscious political actors

Preceding sections have explored subject positions relating to the AfD’s *Familienpolitik*, namely, the revitalisation of the idea of the traditional family and its concomitant gender roles, LGBTQ+ rights, and the issue of same-sex marriage. This section will unpack the extent to which subjects engage with equality debates and assess whether a broader assessment of what ‘women’s issues’ mean to AfD members is in fact necessary. It argues that broader equality initiatives such as the *Frauenquote* are rejected by subjects who want to be recognised instead for their hard work and professional achievements.

Like its counterparts elsewhere, the AfD is vehemently opposed to gender mainstreaming, a policy designed to “[ensure] that gender perspectives and attention to the goal of gender equality are central to all activities—policy development,

research, advocacy/dialogue, legislation, resource allocation, and planning, implementation and monitoring of programmes and projects” (UN Women n.d.).<sup>28</sup> These initiatives are wholly embraced by the EU and other supranational bodies like the United Nations (UN). However, they are perceived by the AfD and subjects as exerting an unacceptable level of power over the domestic policies of member states. At direct odds, for example, with the EU’s commitment to making sure that “public interventions [are] more effective and [ensure] that inequalities are not perpetrated” (European Institute for Gender Equality 2021), the AfD believes that individuals should be judged solely by merit when it comes to employment and taking public office, regardless of sex or gender. Both female and male elected AfD representatives’ rail against the perceived unfairness of the *Frauenquote*, with the former framing the initiative as one that in fact devalues women’s hard work and professional experience. For example, according to deputy AfD leader Beatrix von Storch (2020), gender quotas are “anti-performance, discriminatory, and [contrary to] the principle of democracy.” Furthermore, in von Storch’s view, quotas for executive boards restrict political competition, represents a “drastic interference” with subjects’ freedom of choice and are an expression of “radical feminist ideology” (Ibid.). Similarly, in a 2020 blogpost written for the AfD-Fraktion Bundestag website, Alice Weidel believes that “[...] A statutory quota for women on company boards is a slap in the face for all women who pursue a career based on their own performance and qualifications. [...] This patronising state interference is unreasonable.” While claiming somewhat contrarily in a Facebook post that he would be in favour of introducing “a 100% quota for professional competence as a prerequisite for government work” instead of a *Frauenquote*, AfD Thuringia leader Björn Höcke went on to tweet a picture of former German chancellor Angela Merkel, former CDU

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<sup>28</sup> Even the historically conservative CDU have endorsed broader equality initiatives in recent years. While this is not referred to as a *Frauenquote*, but rather, a “quorum,” it has largely been successful at recruiting women to high-level positions at the federal level as well as expanding parental leave and approving reform which has liberalised access to abortion (Wiliarty 2010, pp. 1-2, 178). While reluctant to endorse sweeping gender equality legislation, the CDU approved plans to introduce “binding quotas” that would see 30 percent of CDU government and MdB positions filled by women in 2021, 40 percent in 2023, and 50 percent in 2025 (Deutsche Welle 2020). Additionally, in an unusually candid interview with *Zeit Online*, former chancellor Angela Merkel states that she does not want to solicit “false praise” in relation to calling herself a feminist in comparison to the women she admires like journalist Alice Schwarzer or social reformer Marie Juchacz, but notes that “parity in all areas just seems logical to me” (Hensel 2019).

Minister of Defence Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, and President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen with the caption “Three reasons against a women’s quota [in the CDU]” (Höcke 2020a; 2020b). Heiner Merz, an AfD MdL in Baden-Württemberg, went so far as to declare that such policies only benefit “unqualified, dumb, lazy, ugly, and disgusting women; the good, hard-working, and adequately qualified ones have found and will always find their way [in life]” (Muschel 2018). In 2021’s *Deutschland aber normal* manifesto, the AfD write that not only does the *Frauenquote* perpetuate discrimination, but also consolidates the idea that women can only live a full and meaningful life by having a professional career (AfD 2022b), thus undermining fundamental biological differences between women and men, devaluing the “indispensable” family unit, and “unsettling” the alleged innate heteronormative identity of children (AfD Eurowahl 2019, p. 67). The extracts explored here demonstrate that the AfD conveniently disregards the persistent structural and institutional inequalities that make it difficult for women and members of minority groups to get a foot on the political ladder. Furthermore, Merz’s explosive diatribe against the *Frauenquote* exposes the misogyny at the heart of the AfD’s opposition to gender equality initiatives and demonstrates in part its consolidation of male political hegemony. As preceding paragraphs show, this misogyny is discursively operationalised by female party figures to supplement their own opposition to gender equality initiatives.

The idea that women face structural inequalities at all is roundly rejected by AfD-Fraktion Bundestag member Nicole Höchst. In a plenary session to commemorate International Women’s Day in 2018, she argued that: “The structural discrimination of women is like a Yeti; everyone talks about it, but no one has ever seen it” (Deutscher Bundestag 2018). In Höchst’s view, measures designed to implement gender equality may in fact have the opposite effect: “[...] Speaking of Equality Officers, we [the AfD] reject the idea of an instrument for the systematic discrimination of men” (ibid.). In a 2018 interview with *Welt*, Höchst reports that she only hires men for her office in the Bundestag and constituency office in Rhineland-Palatinate, ostensibly in protest at the unfavourable conditions facing working mothers, as outlined in the first section of this chapter. Preceding chapters demonstrated that the AfD and its associates employ a variety of discursive strategies in their attempts to relate to

ordinary German citizens and the issues which matter to them. Concordantly, Ellen Kositzka (2018) asks, what do “Otto Normal und Lise Müller” care about so-called gender ideology and the academic feminism of the ivory tower, anyway? (p. 9). In her view, one only has to look in their neighbours’ living room to determine that everyday life follows “familiar patterns” (Ibid.). The modern “misconceived” view of feminism which places women with careers on a pedestal above the essential everyday work of mothers and housewives is roundly condemned by the AfD (Bochum 2020, p. 24). This discourse has historical precedence, as former NS-Frauenschaft leader Gertrud Scholtz-Klink told Claudia Koonz in *Mothers in the Fatherland*:

You young women think you can tell average housewives they have wasted their lives. You presume to inform *them* their world is empty. And *then* you expect them to follow you gratefully. Take it from me, you have to reach them where their lives are—endorse their decisions, praise their accomplishments. Start with the cradle and the ladle. That’s what we did (1987, xxv).

Echoing this sentiment, the AfD and subjects position themselves as both the gatekeepers of a certain way-of-being in the world as well as contemporary agents of change, albeit agents seemingly intent on reviving a way of life many people would not recognise nor wish to participate in today. This discussion confirms Dietze’s observation that women’s emancipation is regarded by the PRR today as “dictated” by feminists and the elite powers they allegedly represent (2020, p. 149). Gender equality initiatives like the *Frauenquote* are perceived as an elite norm that one must adapt to “[if] one wants to count as an acceptable and self-confident woman” in contemporary society (Ibid., p. 151). This so-called “emancipation fatigue” (Dietze 2020, p. 147) is not restricted to the AfD, however. In the US context, female Tea Party supporters interviewed by Arlie Russell Hochschild (2016) complained about so-called “feminazis” trying to “force” women to be the same as men (p. 23). One of Russell Hochschild’s interviewees said that “[...] liberals think that bible-believing Southerners are ignorant, backward, rednecks, losers. They think that we are racist, sexist, homophobic, and maybe fat” (Ibid.) Prominent anti-feminist activist and former CDU member Birgit Kelle (2013) declares that: “I’m fed up with apologising. Because feeling at least a little bit bad is minimum for a housewife and mother in Germany”

(p.10). In her 2017 memoir *Ein Deutsches Mädchen: Mein Leben in einer Neonazi-Familie* (*A German Girl: My Life in a Neo-Nazi Family*), former extremist Heidi Benneckenstein recalls how she believed that being a stay-at-home mother was not only a worthy endeavour, but represented a relatively modern idea:

[...] The left-wingers bad-mouthed the childcare allowance as *Herdprämie* [premium for cooking] or *Gluckengehalt* [clucking hen salary] but I liked the idea. I found it contemporary, even modern. A woman who is rewarded for staying home and looking after her children. Why not? (p. 123; Dietze 2020, p.158).

Before leaving the neo-Nazi scene in Germany altogether, Benneckenstein (2017) remembers viewing 'modern' emancipated women as "completely devoid of any identity [...]. For me, they were the victims of their own egotistical life plans and demands" (p. 122). While Benneckenstein has turned over a new political leaf in recent years, her memoir demonstrates that women's desire to start a family is not necessarily incompatible with her broader political activism; Dietze (2020) refers to this as "new maternalism," the idea that women can simultaneously facilitate "a new (retro-)modernity" and succeed in the political sphere (p. 158). Similarly, in her study of female Tea Party supporters in the US, Deckman (2016) observes how the idea of motherhood as a political act is wholly in keeping with a rich heritage of conservative activism (p. 17). Like its counterparts in Germany and the US, the AfD has successfully leveraged anti-feminist and anti-gender equality discourse in its attempts to (re)consolidate heteronormative power relations. As interview testimony will reveal, this strategy resonates with subjects who believe that a failure to get ahead in one's life is due primarily to one's own behaviour, thus exposing the fallacious idea that one only needs to work hard to succeed in a desired field regardless of one's own race or ethnicity. This works to confirm Farris' observation that "[a] vague, mainstream idea of gender equality can quite easily be used opportunistically by [...] parties to contribute to the consolidation of the nationalist project" (2017, p. 8). Extending this observation, this section makes the case that while the AfD and subjects cynically operationalise equality discourses to consolidate their broader political objectives, a critical reassessment of what 'women's issues' means to individual AfD members is needed in light of the factors driving their own



engagement with the AfD and their often-contradictory engagement with cornerstone party issues.

Just as initiatives like the *Frauenquote* are seen as regressive by male and female AfD representatives, it is similarly rejected by subjects. For example, Ingrid states that: “I don’t want to be a person who is elected just because [I’m] a woman.” Instead, she would like to be recognised for the hard work it has taken to get her where she is professionally today. For Ingrid, questions surrounding equality of opportunity are moot at best and posits that the gender of candidates for political office does not factor into her way of thinking: “We have other parties who’ve said, “okay, there has to be a man and a woman.” [...] [In contrast] the best person is going to lead us [the AfD]. If this is two guys, it’s two guys. If it’s two women, it’s two women. We don’t care about that.” Similarly, Gisela reveals that she does not support the idea of a *Frauenquote*, reflecting Ingrid’s sentiment that women’s achievements and political participation are devalued by the arbitrariness of the quota system:

I’m also against the *Frauenquote*, because it says, for example, that 40 percent [of an organisation’s members] must be women. To that I say, I don’t want to choose women or men, I want to choose the best. [...] I don’t want to be elected because of a quota, because then I am devalued. I want to be chosen because I’m good.

In line with other subjects, Gabi responds that: “We [the AfD] explicitly oppose this gender [quota]. Fifty percent women or fifty percent men in politics [...] I think this whole gender thing [*Gendersache*] harms women [...]” According to Gabi, both male and female AfD members are fully involved in the development of policy within the party itself: “Whether it’s women or men, one has the opportunity to work on the [party] programme and the goals of the AfD because we are very democratically orientated at the grassroots level. And with our party conference, members can make suggestions for programmatic development.” However, the idea that women themselves need to be more proactive in seeking political opportunities without the assistance of a *Frauenquote* holds purchase with subjects who believe that it is not structural inequalities which prevent women from seeking political office but an

innate lack of confidence seemingly unrelated to a persisting and systematic inequality of opportunity.

Expanding on the issue on women's confidence further, Ingrid reports that: "We [women] know we are good, but we don't say that. I see a lot of women who don't have the courage to [...] say, 'I'm here, I want to be voted in at the Bundestag.'" In Ingrid's view, while it is unfortunate that there are not more female AfD representatives, she believes that a quota demanding 50 percent women would ultimately be reductive as "We don't have 50 percent of women in politics who want to be something." Similarly, Gisela says, "I think it's important to take women by the hand. You always have to say, 'You're good, come on, do it.'" The idea that women and men face different but intersecting issues is problematic for Gisela who says that: "I always find it difficult when [people] say, 'it's just a problem for women, it's just a problem for men.'" Gisela reports that she has personally "never had a problem at work because I'm a woman or anything. I think there's equality today, but it wasn't like that thirty years ago." Similarly, subjects like Gabi argue that "You don't need a quota to be successful as a woman. Self-confident, good womanhood doesn't need a quota." She does not, however, elaborate on what might constitute 'good womanhood.' When asked by the researcher about her thoughts on the biggest problems facing women in Germany today, Inge says, "Well, as a woman I've never had any problems. I think women in Germany and everywhere [else] take themselves too seriously." Evidence reveals that there is a distinct lack of critical reflection in relation to the structural inequalities that may prevent or dissuade women from running for office or taking a more active role in political life. When asked if she thought that women of colour faced additional barriers to effective political participation, Ingrid concedes that: "I think it's a problem. I think the prejudices are there." However, she did not appear able to reconcile the idea that institutional racism has a tangible impact on people's lives, instead framing the issue as one relating to an individual's behaviour rather than as a result of historically entrenched racism and intersecting socio-cultural, political, and economic factors: "I also think that [women of colour's] perception is like, I don't have a chance. That's how they grow up. They don't have the courage like white women, probably. It's like, of course we can do it. Black man, white man, of course we can do it." However, despite her

admission that parties in the Bundestag need to do more to attract women candidates across the board, Ingrid insists that a *Frauenquote* is not a reasonable first step to ensure adequate representation.

When asked if equality between women and men already exists and if they identified as feminist, subjects responded in a number of different ways. Petra insists that, as a woman in Germany today, “You have all the freedom you could wish for. I think that’s great. I have three daughters and I’m happy that each of them has many options, [...] basically, they can do anything they like.” While Anke does not identify with the broader feminist movement or its “exaggerations,” she concedes that she has benefitted from tenets of gender equality: “There are some things [relating to feminism] that I don’t really like, this gender language, that’s not really my thing.” However, having had the opportunity to run for public office under an AfD mandate, she reflects that “[...] I’m a very self-confident, emancipated woman who is very much in favour of equality. [...] This aspect of equality is incredibly important to me, otherwise I wouldn’t be sitting in the state parliament today.” Despite subjects’ ambivalent relationship with certain aspects of the AfD’s *Familienpolitik*, the idea that Western conceptualisations of feminism and the broader gender equality movement are imposed on subjects against their will by both the government and a global liberal elite appears to resonate with subjects, as Dagmar’s testimony demonstrates:

**Dagmar:** The question is, what does equal mean? We have equal rights anyway, we have laws [...] Never in my life have I thanked anyone for it, it always went without saying for me. For me, it’s such a typical example of ‘soft law.’ A nice English term.

**Researcher:** Soft power?

**Dagmar:** Exactly. Over twenty-five years, from the UN to the EU and the individual EU countries, this [equality legislation] will be enacted via guidelines, i.e., no laws that have gone through a parliament democratically in an individual country.

Similarly, when asked about her positioning in this regard, subjects such as Inge claim to eschew all “-isms” including feminism, instead advocating for “[a] free society without the –isms, without populism.” Here, Inge makes an explicit discursive

link between the totalising project of populism in its many guises and the broader feminist movement. Like Dagmar, she does not believe that decision-making processes regarding gender equality are democratic: “Free democracy does not work in Germany. This parliamentary democracy works a little better in [the UK]. I don’t know if there is a solution in Germany.” Conversely, Ingrid states that she is interested in “women’s issues” because “of course, I am a woman.” However, like Anke, she does not buy into feminism’s ‘exaggerations’: “[However] these discussions, like we don’t have the same chances, we don’t get the same pay the guys do. We poor women. I don’t share that view.” Seemingly eschewing the perceived elitism of Western feminism and broader issues of gender equality, subjects are complicit in attempts to reframe these debates to not only make them more palatable for the AfD’s broader audience but to better reflect their own interests as white cis-gender women.

In her work on conservative women’s movements in the US, Schreiber (2014) posits that there is a broader tendency on the part of researchers to conflate “women’s issues” with those most closely associated with tenets of Western feminist activism, namely, campaigns for reproductive rights, LGBTQ+ rights, and gender equality (p. 276). This observation is confirmed here in relation to subjects; many reject the idea that inequality exists and as a result, it is a non-issue to them. Mudde (2007) posits that the “erroneous” assumption that all women hold modern feminist views betrays researchers’ “preoccupation” with PRR ideology, particularly the idea that the PRR regard women as child-bearers first and foremost, and not active political subjects in their own right (p. 92), as first touched upon in *Chapter Two*. Deckman’s work on female Tea Party supporters in the US has shown that women “challenge the political discourse about what in fact constitutes “women’s issues”” (p. 16). One specificity of the US context, for example, is that many Tea Party women believe that the right to bear firearms is an essential component of their political identity and consider it a natural extension of their role as “protectors of the family,” thus expanding understandings of their Second Amendment rights (*Ibid.*, p. 18). In the German context, despite subjects’ sometimes-contradictory positioning on a range of issues, this thesis acts as an important reminder that women are far from politically homogenous. While the evidence indicates that issues surrounding national identity,

Islam, and family politics are the primary drivers behind subjects' engagement with the AfD, the women interviewed for this thesis hold a diverse range of political interests, including the perceived decline of the German car industry, the *Energiewende*, and European politics. However, in what McRobbie (2009) refers to as 'double entanglement,' the testimonies explored here also suggest that some subjects simultaneously benefit from historical feminist achievements—for example, universal suffrage, the right to one's own money, the opportunity to pursue a career in the field that one wishes, and so on—yet participate in the production, maintenance, and reproduction of an anti-feminist discourse. To this end, subjects claim to have emancipated themselves from both the patriarchal strictures of party politics, as well as successfully negotiated their personal lives without facing any kind of adversity or discrimination because of their sex or gender. This may well be true, but by simply accepting subjects' claims that gender equality has already been achieved in this context, this chapter runs the risk of inadvertently consolidating the idea that individual choice represents what Schreiber (2014) describes as “a proxy for feminism” (p. 277). After all, not all advocacy undertaken by women for women is feminist or egalitarian in scope. As Rommelspacher (2001) points out, historical demands for *Ebenbürtigkeit der Geschlechter* (equality of the sexes) are not restricted to women to the left of the political spectrum but differ primarily in that demands for equality from activists on the right have traditionally been rooted in “antisemitism and scientific racism,” as well as discourses surrounding the alleged primacy of the Nordic races (p. 215; Meyer 2016, p. 147). While, as Deckman (2016) observes in her study of Tea Party women, “being racist is likely not something that most people would openly recognise let alone admit” (p. 255), interview testimonies reveal that subjects are seemingly unable to recognise the complex interplay of power and politics through which the articulation of their own political agency is made possible in the first place. This gendered and racialised interplay has a profound impact on women's political opportunities, whether they choose to recognise it or not. Just as the AfD and its prominent members attempt to redefine normative modes of social organisation to align with their ideological and programmatic agenda, analysis shows that the party has mobilised a broad array of women with the potential capacity to upend dominant assumptions about their

political behaviour in the German context. Subjects are empowered to redefine and make sense of their political interests in line with their own lives and experiences, as well as remake political networks that work to their own personal and professional advantage. The evidence presented here confirms this section's core argument that a reassessment of what constitutes 'women's issues' for AfD members is necessary in order to gain a meaningful insight into the factors which drive their political engagement today.

### *Conclusion*

The interview testimonies discussed throughout this chapter give this thesis an insiders' view as to how the AfD's *Familienpolitik* is perceived by individual AfD members at the coalface of party life in contrast to official party documents such as manifestos and other publically available materials. Expanding on discussion in *Section 1.4.1* surrounding the idea that all women hold feminist views, this chapter draws attention to the 'variance' between the AfD's 'governing ideologies' and subjects' own lives and experiences, as well as destabilised the idea that all women share similar (or the same) political interests vis-à-vis feminism and gender equality. This evidence has shown that subjects often have an ambivalent relationship with tenets of issues relating to traditional families, same-sex marriage, and broader questions surrounding gender equality. For example, while subjects such as Ingrid campaign against same-sex marriage on behalf of the AfD, she believes that it's better for children to have a loving and stable home no matter the sexual orientation of parents: "[...] It is something if you have a mother and a father; I think it's better for the children if they have a male influence growing up [...] but if it's not possible, it's not possible. [...] That's how life is." Downing (2018) describes this type of defection from the party line as an "identity category violation," i.e., the idea that an individual's "political affiliations or personal actions are at odds with the perceived normative characteristics of the group to which they are ascribed" (p. 369). However, this chapter finds that while some degree of 'ideological diversity' is part and parcel of everyday party politics—it is, after all, unlikely that members of any political party would toe the party line completely—subjects ultimately benefit from the AfD's attempted revitalisation of heteronormative power relations and concomitant modes

of social organisation which privilege white cis-gender men and women. The multidimensionality of subject positions on the topics discussed throughout this chapter challenge not only dominant assumptions surrounding women's political engagement in the German context, but how feminism is perceived by different actors. Nonetheless, this chapter shows, following Schreiber (2014), that subjects are "gender-conscious political actors" who collectivise on behalf of like-minded peers on a range of issues central to their own worldview (p. 276). Consequently, it is imperative that feminist researchers recognise the 'ideological diversity' of their research subjects; women's engagement with the PRR and far right more broadly does not exist in a vacuum. This thesis as a whole has expanded its critical feminist lens to pay attention to the specificities of the German context to better unpack why subjects say and do the things they do, where and when they came to support the AfD, and the socio-cultural and political capital they gain as a result of their political engagement, despite the epistemological uncertainty that often accompanies their testimonies.

# Conclusion

The surprise result of the 2017 German federal election saw the *rechtspopulistisch* AfD win over 90 seats in the Bundestag, Germany's federal parliament. Given that, since the end of WWII, the PRR and far right more broadly have not achieved the five per cent of votes needed to secure representation in German federal and state parliaments, this represents a major turning point in post-war German politics. In an era of global partisan politics, this development has led to much speculation and debate relating to the demographics who appear to find the ideas of the AfD appealing. The resurgence of the PRR has also caused researchers to reassess normative assumptions about women's political behaviour, given women's instrumental role in the election of PRR parties and candidates across Europe and beyond. This thesis set out to investigate the factors underpinning women's decision to join the AfD, as well as challenge the idea that women in general do not find the ideas of the PRR appealing. The election of the AfD has given this thesis a unique opportunity to explore why certain women have found a political home in the AfD at a time when socio-political and economic disillusionment is seemingly at an all-time high.

In addressing its central research question of why women felt compelled to join the AfD, this thesis found that their support for the party is complex, multidimensional, and often contradictory. By identifying the specificities in subjects' accounts, the analysis shows that subjects negotiate their understandings of issues relating to national identity, Islam, and the AfD's *Familienpolitik* within an intrinsically German discursive ecosystem. A number of supplementary research questions also emerged from the critical literature review in *Chapter One*. These relate primarily to the socio-economic impact of German reunification on subjects; the extent to which the AfD's strategic instrumentalisation of high-profile sexual assault cases perpetrated by Muslim men resonates with subjects and consolidates their opposition to Islam; the ways in which male and female AfD members receive and identify with the AfD's ideological and programmatic messages; and how the AfD's stance on feminism, gender equality, and LGBTQ+ rights is reflected in subjects' accounts of their own



political activism and interests. Exploring each of the three identified themes in greater depth, the analysis chapters which followed sought to shed light on underexplored aspects of women's engagement with the AfD in Germany. *Chapter Three* began by investigating how subjects' understandings of Heimat, freedom, and belonging intersect with their formative experiences of growing up in the GDR, freedom of speech, and Germany's enduring socio-economic partnership with the EU, and shone a light on the importance of time, space, and place. *Chapter Four* explored how subjects navigate the complex—and often contradictory—entanglements of agency, violence, and extremism, and the ways in which these understandings inform their attitudes toward Islam in the wake of the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis. *Chapter Five* demonstrated the extent to which subjects relate to tenets of the AfD's *Familienpolitik* and how subjects often 'tailor' AfD policy in this regard to make it consonant with their own lives and experiences.

The research questions identified throughout the course of this thesis, as well as its broad gender approach, have enabled it to effectively investigate the contextual factors underpinning subjects' support for the AfD and extract two key findings. Firstly, this research on the AfD demonstrates that women have a clear and often historically-rooted idea of what motivated them to join the party. This finding is important as it pertains to the existing scholarly literature on the topic of women's support of the PRR; it shows that, in this context, women are cognisant in the political choices that they make and are not simply an 'add on' to men already involved with the AfD or incidental to party life. Furthermore, it appears that women are not reducible to their AfD support; this support manifests, adapts, and even deviates, in different ways across a diverse range of contexts and in response to a multitude of issues, both past and present. In contrast to the idea that Woman has an essentialised character and is predisposed to peace and a maternal outlook (Gilligan 1982), gender scholars have long pointed out that women as a class of people do not fit into clear and empirically convenient categories (Deckman 2016; Diamond 1995; Downing 2018; Elshtain 1987; Schreiber 2013). Secondly, this thesis shows that the contextual factors underpinning women's support of the AfD are pivotal to this discussion. After all, "[One's locality] harbours a complex of informal institutions that are sedimentations of past practices, belief patterns, and power relations" (Veugelers

2020, p. 309). In other words, women's AfD support does not exist in a vacuum. This finding consolidates the vital importance of situating subjects' AfD support within particular socio-cultural, political, and historical discourses, as well as discerning where subjects position themselves within these networks of knowledge.

With regard to the first core finding of this thesis, the analysis shows that women are able to clearly articulate what motivated them to join the AfD when given the opportunity to do so and also reflect extensively on this decision. In contrast to the idea that women demonstrate lower levels of political interest than their male peers—an issue regarded as a “well-rehearsed political fact” by scholars (Campbell and Winters 2008, (p. 53)—interview testimony tells a different story. While some subjects reported that they were not politically active prior to joining the AfD, they have maintained an interest in politics. In some cases, subjects did not have the opportunity to participate in party politics until later in life. While, as explored in *Chapter One*, women are thought to be less interested in politics, less well-informed, and less efficacious than their male peers (Verba *et al.* 1997), this analysis shows that subjects held a diverse range of opinions on a variety of political issues and were able to talk about these at length during their interviews. This thesis makes the case that it is important to examine the myriad ways in which subjects ‘do’ and engage with politics depending on their personal circumstances and the resources available to them at the time. For example, while Dagmar reported that she was not overtly politically active during her life in the former East Germany, she explained that she was involved with the Evangelical Church in Germany, an organisation which played an instrumental role in organising peaceful protests against the GDR regime. This experience was one of many that led Dagmar to eventually join the AfD and outlines the many different ways women engaged with politics, even if they did not perceive it as such.

Subjects appear to have made considered and weighed-up decisions when it came to joining the AfD, despite the tangible disadvantages that sometimes arose as a result of their new-found political engagement. Elsa's revelation that she is no longer allowed to see her grandchildren because she joined the AfD is one of the most compelling examples of this. While these findings are not generalisable across a

broader range of contexts, this thesis shows that it is worth drilling down into women's motivations in order to gain a deeper insight into the development of their political agency and subsequent AfD support. These findings also challenge dominant perceptions of how PRR women should act, as well as what constitutes 'women's issues' to individual female AfD members, as *Chapter Five* explored in greater depth. Researchers' tendency to conflate 'women's issues' with those most commonly associated with Western feminist ideas obscures analysis in the context and misses an opportunity to explore the issues most important to individual women (Schreiber 2014, p. 276). The assumption, then, that women have a "true essence" suggests that their political character is "irreducible, unchanging, and therefore constitutive of a given person or thing" (Fuss 1989 cited in Schreiber 2002, p. 215). *Chapter Five* demonstrates that many of the women interviewed for this thesis regard themselves as removed from broader debates surrounding gender equality and feminism despite benefitting from the hard-fought successes of historical feminist activism. This thesis thus acts as an important reminder that women are far from politically homogenous and invites researchers to reflect upon their own epistemological biases when it comes to exploring women's support of the PRR. With all this in mind, this thesis does not claim to have all the answers when it comes to women's identification with the AfD. It does, however, show that some subjects have been able to make peace with their choices and themselves despite the impact of their new-found political engagement on their personal networks. While Elsa was upset at being estranged from her family, she has, in her view, a rational political vision worth fighting for.

The more contradictory aspects of subjects' accounts have posed a distinct epistemological challenge to this thesis and its broader analysis; as Jerolmack and Khan (2014) observe, "what people say is often a poor predictor of what they do" (p. 178). Subjects' seemingly erroneous statements, however, have contributed to discussion in significant ways. *Chapter Four*, for example, shows that while subjects attempt to pin the blame for extremist attacks in Germany on left-wing opponents and Muslims, they sometimes actively support the use of violent tactics when it comes to the fulfilment of their own political goals. As outlined in the *Introduction*, the case of Birgit Malsack-Winkemann and her alleged central role in the failed coup to

overthrow the German Reichstag in 2022 is an extreme but particularly compelling example of this. However, subjects' tacit or even active acceptance of the use of violence—as aptly demonstrated by Franziska Schreiber's account in *Chapter Four*—is particularly striking. This aspect of women's political engagement and the additional layers of complexity that they present has enabled this thesis to offer a deeper insight into their motivations, as well as paint a picture of subjects as whole human beings with a capacity to act in ways which can be seen as benefitting their own personal and political agendas. This particular finding not only challenges dominant ideas surrounding women's alleged non-violence, but exposes the destabilising epistemological assumption that Woman thinks, feels, and acts in union, regardless of context or what individual women might actually believe. In their use of gender, feminist scholars have long challenged the masculinist underpinnings of the social sciences (Schreiber 2013, p. 475); it is not the intention of the thesis, however, to form some kind of false equivalence between women and men's political behaviour vis-à-vis their capacity for violence, discursive or otherwise. Rather, it nuances debate and draws attention to women's 'ideological flexibility' in ways which are critical and shed new light on their support for the AfD in Germany.

The second core finding of this thesis underlines the argument that where and when women come to support the AfD matters as just as much as how and why. *Chapter Three*, for example, shows that while the 'sacred geographies' of the eastern German states are often used as pawns in the AfD's discursive battle with the political mainstream, the party's strategic instrumentalisation of the East German 'experience' strikes an emotional chord with subjects. This is in contrast to the 'losers of modernisation' thesis which found prominence in the years following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and the idea that the profound socio-economic changes which ensued during this period predominantly affected a male blue-collar workforce. While it is an empirical reality that millions of East Germans found themselves unemployed as a result of broader reunification efforts (Bennhold 2018a; Köpping 2018), this research on women's support for the AfD today shows that subjects, many of whom came of age in the former GDR, share concerns with male peers about unemployment, the decimation of traditional industry, and lack of social infrastructure in a post-industrial eastern Germany. The findings of this thesis demonstrate that not

only do women continue to grapple with the enduring socio-economic legacies of German reunification today, but that their support for the AfD is highly context-specific and cannot be understood without reference to formulative moments in history and their own experiences across time, space, and place. Furthermore, and in response to the uncritical suggestion that the overrepresentation of working-class men in the relevant scholarly literature is due primarily to “some unwritten law” (Betz 1994, p. 142), this thesis shows that some female AfD supporters have always had a stake in politics, but, in some cases, did not have the opportunity to engage with politics in a way that was consonant with their own lives and circumstances.

The importance of time, space, and place, the spatial baggage subjects appear to carry in relation to key moments in Germany’s history, and the country’s subsequent socio-political and economic transformation(s) are cross-cutting themes which manifest in different ways across the thesis. From issues surrounding Germany’s *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coming to terms with the past) and its contemporary memorialisation culture, the country’s humanitarian role in the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis, the pervasiveness of right-wing extremism in the eastern German states, and subjects’ identification with, and valorisation of, an often-idealised German past, this research on the AfD has shown that context matters. Women’s support for different aspects of the AfD’s ideological and programmatic remit appears sometimes as a reaction to a wider political situation; this is particularly evident in relation to the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis and enduring questions over what makes one German in a changing world, as outlined in *Chapters Three and Four*. Subjects’ longing for tenets of Heimat—that particularly German sense of home or homeland—offered this thesis an additional insight into the ways in which nostalgia “for either for the nation’s past glory or at least for the stability and normality that preceded the epoch of great changes” informed their political activism today (Boym 2001, p. 66). Furthermore, while this thesis does not “assume” that the “success, persistence, or failure” of the PRR in a given context has a single cause or that these causes operate in isolation from one another (Veugelers 2020, p. 311), it has endeavoured to isolate the specificities in subjects’ accounts to shed new light on aspects of women’s support for the AfD. The existence of the AfD itself is not an isolated or singular phenomenon given Germany’s long and chequered history of post-WWII PRR and far-right

mobilisation, but its electoral successes across all sixteen federal states has broken a political, and even existential, *cordon sanitaire* in relation to the increasingly normalised role of the PRR in post-war German society. Given Germany's particular history, this has warranted further investigation.

The approach taken by this thesis as a whole builds upon the work of scholars for whom the lived experiences of their research participants form an essential component of their analysis despite participants' 'unlovable' status as members of the PRR, far right, or Islamist groups (Fielding 1981; Pilkington 2016; Pearson 2019). This thesis has deliberately avoided taking an approach which homogenises subjects' experiences and the ways in which they find the ideas of the AfD attractive and applicable to their own lives and experiences, despite the contradictions inherent in some of their accounts. The thesis has also tried to avoid condemning these experiences and recollections, instead offering a snapshot of women's political engagement at particular moments in time. While, as explored in *Chapter Two*, some tension exists between research of this type and the potential, albeit inadvertent, mainstreaming of the PRR and broader far right, any researcher "who wants to gain some understanding of [subjects' motivations] should listen carefully to what [subjects] themselves say about their actions and motivations" (Kellan 1998, p. 47). Portraying supporters of the PRR as political outsiders unworthy of analysis is detrimental to the study at hand; they are, after all, part and parcel of how routine politics takes place today. In contrast to the scholarly work explored throughout *Chapter One*, this thesis takes the view that women's political participation does not begin and end at the ballot box and the casting of a vote for a particular party. In order to successfully interrogate the resurgence of the PRR today, this thesis argues that it is important to talk to those who facilitate this. Women's political behaviour is not static; research on this topic should reflect this dynamism.

While researchers have come to rely on statistical analysis to "reflect" reality or some approximation of it (Desrosières 2001, p. 339), this thesis has taken a different approach. To this end, the feminist poststructuralist approach used by this thesis has allowed it to broaden and deepen its understandings of women's engagement with the AfD. Through its recognition that subject accounts are not just a *source* of

knowledge and data but in fact *constitute* it, this thesis has been able to ‘access’ the narratives behind the ‘numbers’ and glean a valuable insight into the person behind the vote at the ballot box. This has facilitated an in-depth investigation into the micro-level issues that people deal with on a day-to-day basis and offers a different perspective on women’s support for the PRR in the German context. *Chapter Three*, for example, shone a light on the affective repertoires some subjects adopt to grapple with their own sense of Germanness in the years following reunification. *Chapter Four* demonstrated how subjects deploy positionalities that least threaten their place on the German political stage vis-à-vis the AfD’s proven association with right-wing extremists. *Chapter Five* revealed how subjects negotiate understandings of gender equality, Western ideas of feminism, and the ways in which they redefine these issues to benefit their personal and professional lives. This also demonstrates how a single case study approach can wield important insights into the ‘perennial’ issue of subject motivation. In its deep dive into the German context, this thesis has provided a valuable insight into what subjects think and feel, what they do, and the contextual factors which make this thinking and feeling possible.

These important insights were made possible through direct engagement with subjects themselves and the use of semi-structured interviews. This method proved to be an invaluable one as it not only presented subjects with an opportunity to tell their own stories but enabled the thesis to access AfD ‘voices’ which may have otherwise flown under the radar or got ‘lost’ in normative discourses surrounding women’s political behaviour. In contrast to prominent AfD members such as Alice Weidel and Björn Höcke who regularly polemicise in Germany’s federal and state parliaments, correspond with their thousands of followers on social media platforms, and have their semi-autobiographical monographs snapped up by mainstream publishers, the women interviewed for this thesis have had little opportunity for their voices to be heard. Concordantly, subjects were encouraged to reflect upon the formulative experiences which underpin their AfD engagement during their interviews, and they in turn appeared keen to talk despite potentially making themselves vulnerable in the process. Despite describing how their AfD membership has empowered them to say and do things which might not have been possible for them before, subjects often worried about the impact of this engagement on their

broader social networks. Gisela, for example, explained that she was afraid her son's nursery would treat him differently if the staff found out she was a member of the AfD. This kind of insight would not have been possible without speaking to subjects directly. The use of semi-structured interviews has thus enabled the thesis to dig deeper into women's motivations for joining the AfD, as well as provided subjects with a forum in which they could—sometimes tentatively—express themselves and tell their own stories. The extent to which these interviews were a positive or empowering experience for subjects remains unclear, however. This impression is largely due to subjects' lack of engagement with the thesis post-fieldwork, as well as their concerns relating to the potential repercussions of their AfD membership, as outlined here.

The findings which emerged from semi-structured interviews conducted with female AfD members expose the gendered source base of this thesis, particularly when compared to the documentary sources used to examine the thoughts, feelings, and opinions of male AfD members. Björn Höcke's *Nie Zweimal* (2018), for example, outlines a vision of a Germany in which 'strong men' take leadership roles to enact latent visions of a racially homogenous social body. Despite the inflammatory, offensive, and often deeply concerning undertones of this account, Höcke's popularity—and marketability—has only grown stronger. In contrast to his female peers, Höcke does not appear to face any tangible disadvantages as a result of his AfD membership; he is, in fact, celebrated and rewarded for his political participation despite the various controversies he is embroiled in. The gendered nature of the evidence base for this thesis does not disadvantage it or render its findings any less empirically rigorous; the broad gender angle taken by the thesis has enabled it to identify and explore the issues most important to both male and female AfD members. It has also facilitated a deeper insight into how the AfD's ideological and programmatic messages are operationalised in different ways by women and men. The analysis has not only revealed where female subjects position themselves in relation to these messages, but how ideas surrounding hegemonic masculinity play a part in the (re)imagining of German socio-cultural and political imaginaries for prominent male AfD members. Women are and remain the central focus of this research on the AfD, but it has to be recognised that gender analyses are not



restricted solely to women; the patriarchalism inherent in the ideologies of the PRR and broader far right also regulate and stratify the experiences and behaviours of its male adherents. *Chapter Four*, for example, demonstrated that the strength and virility associated with 'exceptional' masculine bodies act as an important physical and discursive tool for the resolution of the perceived 'fatal encroachment' of Islam on German culture and society. While, as outlined in *Chapter Two*, it was impossible for the thesis to undertake a systematic gender analysis, it has nonetheless been able to offer compelling insights into the contextual factors underpinning individuals' AfD membership and the discursive ecosystems they inhabit.

This research on the AfD has opened up two important avenues for future scholarly work on women's engagement with the PRR both in Germany and further afield. While this thesis highlights the significance of a single case study approach and its inclusion in the broader scholarly literature, a cross-country case study would give further important insights into the ways in which people receive, process, and act upon the ideological and programmatic messages of the PRR in other contexts. A cross-country analysis seems all the more pressing when the PRR and far right continue to make significant electoral gains across Europe, as the examples of Sweden and Italy outlined in the introduction to the thesis demonstrate. There is still much work to be done by researchers in assessing where and when this support for the PRR has developed and evolved across time, place, and space, and how this might compare with Germany or elsewhere. As this thesis shows, subjects' support of the AfD is historically contingent and they also appear to operationalise AfD discourses in a different way to that of prominent male members. Future scholarly work could expand on the findings presented in this thesis and incorporate semi-structured interviewing with male and female party members into their methodological approach wherever feasible. This type of 'close-up' research is particularly important given that much scholarly work on this topic tends to "distance" itself from those involved, usually by means of "pathologizing theoretical frameworks" (Pearson 2019, p. 1253; Blee 2007; Pilkington 2016). Despite the challenges this thesis has faced over the past three years, the broad feminist poststructuralist approach it employs shows how such an endeavour is not only

possible, but that it has resulted in a tangible and meaningful insight into the motivations of female AfD supporters in Germany.

This thesis has utilised a Foucauldian-inspired research method which has enabled it to unpack the relationship between discourse, power, and subjectivity as it relates to women's support of the AfD in Germany today. Resultantly, it shows how subjects locate themselves within specific discourses, as well as outlines how they are empowered to think, feel, and act in certain ways as a result of this positioning. However, these findings invite a deeper reflection on the topic at hand; to this end, future work may find value in exploring the concept of biopower, or the ways in which human bodies and populations are "subject, used, transformed, and improved" by disciplinary power (Foucault 1977, p. 136; Lemke *et al.* 2011). As this research on the AfD has shown, the party, its most prominent members, and subjects have attempted to realise their political goals through their discursive subjugation of human bodies and populations, i.e., an idealised and racially homogenous social body. As first outlined in *Chapter Four*, this can be evidenced by subjects' often erroneous use of official government statistics to underpin their claims that Muslims do not and cannot belong to the German nation in either a physical or emotional sense. In the AfD's construction of a racialised Muslim other, Muslim bodies become subject to the party's attempts to organise and regulate German culture, society, and politics. This also demonstrates how racism underpins biopower and how this in turn deepens social "fissures" designed to divide what is imagined by the AfD and its adherents to be a racially homogenous biological "whole" (Lemke *et al.* 2011, p. 41). Given the racism and Islamophobia inherent in the doctrines of the PRR across Europe and beyond, a deeper exploration of the concept of biopower would provide researchers with another means of systematically deconstructing the relationship(s) between the discursive practices of the PRR, the wider socio-cultural structures and institutions in which these practices can be situated, and how these practices are inexorably shaped by disciplinary power, i.e., how institutionalised networks of knowledge 'condition' societies and those that reside within them.

At the epistemological and methodological heart of this thesis sits the researcher's conviction that subjects have a right to be listened to. Women's voices are

underrepresented in the scholarly literature on PRR engagement and are often dismissed by academic and media commentators as irrational, stupid, or even as copying men when it comes to voting for the 'wrong' party or candidate (Williams 2018). However, this raised important questions relating to the practical and ethical implications of interviewing AfD members, as well as reconciling the broadly emancipatory remit of feminist research with the subject matter at hand. While subjects' interview accounts form the primary evidence base of this thesis, it has become necessary to 'problematise' issues such as national identity, truth, so-called 'women's issues,' and ideas surrounding individuals' choice and agency. This problematisation helped to facilitate a "hermeneutic process [of] interpreting, moving between and reinterpreting" of subject accounts and has enabled this thesis to "transform" what are often regarded as truths or facts into assumptions (Alvesson and Sandberg 2013, p. 59). This does not, however, mean that subjects' accounts are somehow exempt from critical engagement and thus removed from this process. As this thesis as a whole has shown in great depth, subjects' self-reported attitudes and behaviours can fundamentally conflict at times; in other words, what subjects say and what subjects go on to do, can be two very different things (Jerolmack and Khan 2014, p. 178). *Chapter Five*, for example, explored how subjects claim to be allies to the LGBTQ+ community in Germany, yet do little to challenge the blatant homophobia of their party colleagues. Researchers' assumption that there is a consistency to what their participants say and do may lead them to inadvertently give members of the PRR a potentially prominent platform from which to disseminate their anti-egalitarian worldview.

Expanding upon the two core findings of this thesis, if researchers want to find out what drives people to join the PRR in a given context, they should be prepared to directly engage with their research participants, as well as reflect extensively on their own research practices, positionalities, and potential epistemological biases. The approach taken by this thesis demonstrates that it is possible to critically engage with subject testimonies in a meaningful and responsible way, yet adhere to the feminist commitment to let subjects tell their own stories and make a meaningful scholarly contribution to the topic of women's support for the PRR in the German context.

# Appendix A

## Interviewee Summaries

### **Interview with Ingrid, 16 October 2019:**

The interview focused on Ingrid's prior political engagement and the factors which led to her not only becoming a member of the AfD, but her burgeoning career within the party itself as one of its elected representatives at the federal level. The issues most pressing to Ingrid revolved primarily around terrorism (both left- and right-wing, and Islamist), the socio-economic implications of the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis on German culture and society, and more recognition for stay-at-home mothers. She also touched upon the reasons for women's lack of confidence in political life, as well as her support for same-sex marriage.

### **Interview with Gisela, 21 October 2019:**

The interview explored how Gisela's desire for more law and order in the wake of the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis led her to leave the CDU and join the AfD. During her interview, Gisela touched upon a range of issues, but reported that migration, the social status of stay-at-home mothers, and the traditional family model are among the most important to her. She also outlined her opposition to the *Frauenquote*, and discussed the alleged difficulty of expelling problematic members of the AfD following a series of party controversies.

### **Interview with Elsa, 23 October 2019:**

The interview examined Elsa's experiences of growing up in the former GDR and how this has influenced her political activism today. She discussed the socio-economic problems facing her home state following German reunification and the legacy of under-employment and lack of social provisions in rural areas. Alongside this, Elsa outlined her strong opposition to so-called Antifa and blamed left-wing opponents of the AfD for social unrest in Germany. She also touched upon issues surrounding the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis and its impact on the German social welfare system.

**Interview with Inge, 25 October 2019:**

The interview focused primarily on Inge's interest in matters relating to law and order and how this has seemingly been eroded in recent years in Germany. Inge also grew up in the former GDR and has been political from a young age. The most pressing issues for Inge revolved around the Euro and the EU's bailout of insolvent member states during the 2008 global financial crisis. She also outlined her views on the AfD's traditional family model, women's self-confidence, and discussed the political implications of an attack on a Halle synagogue in October 2019 by a right-wing extremist.

**Interview with Dagmar, 6 November 2019:**

The interview explored the formulative experiences which led to Dagmar's AfD membership. Having grown up in the former GDR and experienced state repression first hand, many of the most important issues to Dagmar revolved around the perceived threat to freedom of speech. Dagmar described her complicated relationship with so-called mainstream media and appeared to engage in conspiratorial thinking relating to matters of climate change and popular opposition to the AfD. She also expressed concerns about Germany's perceived declining birth-rates, and outlined her support for stay-at-home mothers.

**Interview with Anke, 12 November 2019:**

The interview with Anke examined her experiences of growing up in the former GDR and her subsequent long and varied political career. In Anke's view, the most important problems facing Germany today revolve around the mismanagement of the Euro, the decline of the fossil fuel industry in her home state, and the impact of the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis on German culture and society. She also outlined her views on the importance of women's education, demonstrating strength in the face of adversity, and standing up to one's critics.

**Interview with Gabi, 12 November 2019:**

The interview focused on Gabi's primary interest in women, families, and the perceived impact of the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis on German culture and society. She also expressed concerns about perceived restrictions on freedom of speech and her belief that democracy is under threat from a seemingly omnipotent political elite. Alongside this, Gabi discussed her desire to see more couples starting families of their own, the perceived lack of governmental support for German families, and the idea that Germany has done enough when it comes to supporting refugees and/or asylum seekers.

**Interview with Petra, 14 November 2019:**

The interview with Petra explored the topics most important to her, namely, family and education. Throughout her interview, Petra discussed her experiences of living in the former GDR and how the lack of opportunities for young people under the regime has had a significant impact on her life and relationships with her wider family. Petra also discussed her opposition to migration, the impact of the *Energiewende* on traditional industry in Germany, and the compromises many women are forced to make when it comes to decisions about their careers and starting a family.

**Email correspondence with Lena, 7 January 2020:**

Lena very briefly outlined her views on issues relating to the threat of left-wing extremism and rising crime rates, as well as the idea that the AfD is the only true opposition party in Germany currently.

# Appendix B

## Examples of Interview Questions

What first interested you in the AfD?

Were you political growing up?

Do you have any political influences or role models?

In your opinion, what are the biggest problems facing Germany today?

In your opinion, what are the biggest problems facing women in Germany today?

In your opinion, what does it mean to be German today?

Do you think that Germany has a humanitarian responsibility to accept refugees?

Are you proud to be a member of the AfD?

A member of the Bundestag described the AfD as 'the political arm of right-wing terrorism.' How do you feel about being called right-wing extremist or right-wing populist? Is that fair?

What do you think about women or men in the AfD who are not in 'traditional' relationships? Is that a problem for you or does the AfD accept diversity?

The AfD have publically supported parents whose daughters were raped and killed by their refugee boyfriends. Does the AfD fight for all women who are victims of sexual violence, or is it fair to say that the AfD has instrumentalised these cases in their campaign against mass immigration?

# Appendix C

## Information Sheet for Participants (EN)

*Ethical approval for this project was initially given on 21 May 2019. Following an addendum (see: Appendix G), this was updated on 29 July 2020 to reflect a change in the date that participants could withdraw their data from the project. The forms presented here reflect the latter date.*



TITLE OF RESEARCH: *Assessing the role and motivations of women in the populist radical right in the UK and Germany*

RESEARCHER: *Katherine Williams*

CONTACT DETAILS: Cardiff School of Law and Politics  
Cardiff University  
Law Building  
Museum Avenue  
Cardiff CF10 3AX  
Email Address: *williamskj8@cardiff.ac.uk*

### Who is doing the research?

*Katherine Williams (student), Dr. Claudia Hillebrand and Professor Hanna Diamond (supervisory team).*



### **What is the purpose of the research?**

*To uncover the reasons why women support populist radical right parties in the UK and Germany.*

*The research is being undertaken for a PhD thesis, as well as other potential outputs or publications, such as academic journals, and conferences.*

### **Who is being invited to participate?**

*Women who are members of populist radical right parties in the UK and Germany.*

*Relevant academics, practitioners, and politicians.*

### **What is the type of information gathered during interviews?**

*Individuals' motivations for joining populist radical right parties in the UK and Germany; personal background; political beliefs; views on society and culture.*

### **What happens if I wish to withdraw?**

*Participants can withdraw from the project at any time, and participants who wish to withdraw their data from the research project after an interview has taken place can do so up until **1 May 2021**.*

### **Confidentiality and privacy: what will happen to my data?**

*Participants can consent to be named in the research project should they wish to do so. If participants would prefer to remain anonymous, their data will be anonymised and pseudonyms used. In both cases, participants' data will be securely kept as per Cardiff University's Data Retention Policy - no less than the end of the project + 5 years, or at least 2 years post-publication. Destruction of personal data will take place on **30 September 2026**.*

### **Are there any circumstances in which my personal data could be disclosed?**

*While it is the intention of this study to guarantee participants' anonymity and confidentiality, there are situations where this will not be possible. Participants must be aware of the following:*

- In the U.K, and under the Terrorism Act (2000), and the PREVENT Strategy (Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015), both researcher and participant are legally obliged to report knowledge of and information on terrorist activity to the police;*
- While there is no general obligation ('generelle Meldepflicht') on individuals to report crimes in Germany, a failure to inform authorities about a planned serious crime ('Nichtanzeige') is an offense according to German law (Para. 138 StGB);*
- If information is disclosed which suggests a risk of serious harm to the participant or to others, the researcher will inform the relevant authorities;*
- If participants disclose information about third parties, there may be a legal obligation to report activities undertaken by these third parties for the reasons detailed above.*

*Participants are reminded that they reserve the right to withdraw from the project at any time, and without consequence provided there is no disclosure of the kind noted above. As detailed*

above, if participants wish to withdraw their personal data from the study after an interview has taken place, they can do so up until **1 May 2021**.

<b>Additional Contact Information</b>	
Researcher's Supervisors	<p><i>Dr. Claudia Hillebrand</i> <i>School of Law and Politics</i> <a href="mailto:hillebrandc@cardiff.ac.uk">hillebrandc@cardiff.ac.uk</a></p> <p><i>Professor Hanna Diamond</i> <i>School of Modern Languages</i> <a href="mailto:diamondh@cardiff.ac.uk">diamondh@cardiff.ac.uk</a></p>
Cardiff School of Law and Politics Research Ethics Committee (SREC)	<p>This project has received ethical approval from the Cardiff School of Law and Politics Research Ethics Committee (SREC) on <i>29/07/2020</i> (Internal Reference: <i>SREC/190219/06</i>).</p> <p>The Cardiff School of Law and Politics Research Ethics Committee (SREC) can be contacted at:</p> <p>School Research Officer Cardiff School of Law and Politics Cardiff University Law Building Museum Avenue Cardiff CF10 3AX</p> <p>Email: <a href="mailto:LAWPL-Ethics@cardiff.ac.uk">LAWPL-Ethics@cardiff.ac.uk</a></p>

# Appendix D

## Information Sheet for Participants (DE)



ARBEITSTITEL: *Rollen und Motivationen von rechtspopulistischen Frauen in Großbritannien und Deutschland*

DIE FORSCHERIN: *Katherine Williams*

ADRESSE: Cardiff School of Law and Politics  
Cardiff University  
Law Building  
Museum Avenue  
Cardiff CF10 3AX  
E-Post: williamskj8@cardiff.ac.uk

### Wer forscht?

*Katherine Williams (die Forscherin), Dr. Claudia Hillebrand und Professor Hanna Diamond (die Leiterinnen).*

### Was ist der Zweck der Forschung?

*Zu untersuchen, warum Frauen die Rechtspopulismus in Großbritannien und Deutschland unterstützen.*

*Die Forschung wird sowohl für meine Doktorarbeit als auch für andere akademische Zwecke durchgeführt.*

## Wer nimmt teil?

*Frauen und Männer, die Mitglieder von rechtspopulistischen Parteien in Großbritannien und Deutschland sind.*

*Relevantes AkademikerInnen, PolitikerInnen, und Praktiker.*

## Welche Informationen werden während das Interview gesammelt?

*Die Rolle und Motivationen von Frauen und Männer, die Mitglieder von rechtspopulistischen Parteien in Großbritannien und Deutschland sind; persönliche Hintergrund; politisches Glaubungen; die Ansichten des Frauen und Männer auf Gesellschaft und Kultur.*

*Die Meinungen nach AkademikerInnen, PolitikerInnen und Praktiker.*

## Was passiert, wenn ich mich aus dem Interview zurückziehen möchte?

*Die TeilnehmerInnen können das Projekt jederzeit verlassen. Die TeilnehmerInnen, die nach einem Interview ihre persönlichen Daten aus dem Projekt entfernen möchten, können dies bis zum **1. Mai 2021** tun.*

## Die Vertraulichkeit und der Datenschutz: Was passiert mit meinen Daten?

*Die TeilnehmerInnen können ihre Zustimmung geben, zu namentlich in das Projekt genannt werden. Wenn die TeilnehmerInnen anonym bleiben möchten, werden ihre persönlichen Daten anonymisiert und Pseudonyme werden benutzen.*

*Die persönlichen Daten der TeilnehmerInnen werden gemäß der Richtlinie zur Vorratsdatenspeicherung an der Universitäts Cardiff sicher gespeichert – nicht weniger als das Ende des Projekts (+ fünf Jahre) oder mindestens zwei Jahre nach Veröffentlichung der Doktorarbeit. Die persönlichen Daten der TeilnehmerInnen werden am **30. September 2026** zerstören.*

## Gibt es Umstände, unter denen meine persönlichen Daten offengelegt werden könnten?

*In diesem Projekt soll die Anonymität und Vertraulichkeit der TeilnehmerInnen gewährleistet werden. Es gibt jedoch Situationen, in denen dies nicht möglich ist.*

- In Großbritannien verpflichtet der Terrorism Act (2000) und die PREVENT Strategy (Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015) die Forscherin und die TeilnehmerInnen, Kenntnis von Terrorismus an staatliche Behörden zu melden.*
- Individuen sind generell nicht verpflichtet, Straftaten in Deutschland zu melden („generelle Meldepflicht“). Es ist jedoch eine schwere Straftat laut Para. 138 StGB, ein geplantes schweres Verbrechen nicht zu berichten („Nichtanzeige“).*
- Wenn die TeilnehmerInnen Informationen offenlegen werden, dass negative Auswirkungen auf die Forscherin und anderen haben, muss die Forscherin die Polizeibehörde informieren.*

- Wenn die TeilnehmerInnen Informationen über dritte Person enthüllen, kann es eine gesetzliche Vorschrift sein, Aktivitäten von Dritten aus den oben beschriebenen Gründen zu berichten.

Die TeilnehmerInnen werden daran erinnert, dass sie jederzeit das Projekt ohne Konsequenz verlassen können, vorausgesetzt, es gibt keine Offenbarung der oben genannten Art. Wie oben, die TeilnehmerInnen, die nach einem Interview ihre persönlichen Daten aus dem Projekt entfernen möchten, können bis zum **1. Mai 2021** tun.

<b>Zusätzlicher Kontakt Informationen</b>	
Die Leiterinnen der Forscherin	<p><i>Dr. Claudia Hillebrand</i>  <i>School of Law and Politics</i>  <a href="mailto:hillebrandc@cardiff.ac.uk">hillebrandc@cardiff.ac.uk</a></p> <p><i>Professor Hanna Diamond</i>  <i>School of Modern Languages</i>  <a href="mailto:diamondh@cardiff.ac.uk">diamondh@cardiff.ac.uk</a></p>
Cardiff School of Law and Politics Research Ethics Committee (SREC)	<p>Diese Projekt hat am <i>29/07/2020</i> (Internal Reference: <i>SREC/190219/06</i>) die ethische Zustimmung des Cardiff School of Law and Politics Research Ethics Committee (SREC) erhalten.</p> <p>The Cardiff School of Law and Politics Research Ethics Committee (SREC) kann unter der folgenden Adresse kontaktiert werden:</p> <p>School Research Officer  Cardiff School of Law and Politics  Cardiff University  Law Building  Museum Avenue  Cardiff CF10 3AX  Großbritannien</p> <p>Email: <a href="mailto:LAWPL-Ethics@cardiff.ac.uk">LAWPL-Ethics@cardiff.ac.uk</a></p>

# Appendix E

## Consent Form for Participants (EN)



TITLE OF RESEARCH: *Assessing the role and motivations of women in the populist radical right in the UK and Germany*

RESEARCHER: *Katherine Williams*

CONTACT DETAILS: Cardiff School of Law and Politics  
Cardiff University  
Law Building  
Museum Avenue  
Cardiff CF10 3AX  
Email Address: *williamskj8@cardiff.ac.uk*

### **Research Overview**

*The re-emergence of the populist radical right comes at a time when political and social dissatisfaction is at an all-time high across Europe and beyond. Brexit, the election of Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) to the Bundestag, and even the election of Donald Trump to the U.S. presidency, do not necessarily indicate extremism as such, but nonetheless represent a major turning point in world politics. This leads us to question what it means to be a citizen in an ever-changing world, and how women shape our political landscapes – as evidenced by female voting statistics and the increased visibility of women in the populist radical right today. My research aims to uncover the reasons why women are attracted to populist radical right parties. The research being undertaken for a PhD thesis, as well as other potential outputs or publications, such as academic journals, and conferences.*

## Involvement in Research

As per the advice of the Economic and Social Research Council, researchers are expected to abide by the guidelines set out by the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) Code of Conduct. Researchers are to make sure that research involving human participants, human material, or personal data complies with all ethical and legal requirements of applicable guidelines (Para. 3.7.1 UKRIO CoC).

The dignity, rights, safety and well-being of participants is the primary concern of this research project.

The information and insights you share will be recorded in this research. If you agree, interviews will be recorded *via a digital recording device*. Data will be stored on a registered Cardiff University computer that will be password controlled, and will be used for research purposes only. You will only be identified in the research if you give consent for this to happen. Destruction of personal data will take place on **30 September 2026**. Participants who wish to withdraw their data from the research project after an interview has taken place can do so up until **1 May 2021**.

The researcher intends to present and publish the research results at academic conferences and in academic publications such as journals. The research is funded by *the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)*.

## Anonymity

Participants may:

- A.) Consent to be named;
- B.) Request that the researcher takes steps to protect their anonymity with the use of a pseudonym. However, participants understand that a risk of jigsaw identification remains.

**Please tick your preferred option:**

- I consent to be named in this research project
- I wish to remain anonymous, and for the researcher to assign a pseudonym, though I understand that the risk of jigsaw identification remains.

## Jigsaw Identification

Jigsaw participation relates to the ability of individuals to identify interview participants through the piecing together of two or more snippets of information – like putting together a jigsaw. There is a risk, then, that information given by participants may result in them being identified by outside parties, potentially adversely affecting their personal or professional lives.

## Disclosure of Personal Information

While it is the intention of this study to guarantee participants' anonymity and confidentiality, there are situations where this will not be possible. Participants must be aware of the following:

- In the U.K, and under the Terrorism Act (2000), and the PREVENT Strategy (Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015), both researcher and participant are legally obliged to report knowledge of and information on terrorist activity to the police;
- While there is no general obligation (*'generelle Meldepflicht'*) on individuals to report crimes in Germany, a failure to inform authorities about a *planned* serious crime (*'Nichtanzeige'*) is an offense according to German law (Para. 138 StGB);
- If information is disclosed which suggests a risk of serious harm to the participant or to others, the researcher will inform the relevant authorities;
- If participants disclose information about third parties, there may be a legal obligation to report activities undertaken these by third parties for the reasons detailed above.

Participants are reminded that they reserve the right to withdraw from the project at any time, and without consequence provided there is no disclosure of the kind noted above. As detailed above, if participants wish to withdraw their personal data from the study after an interview has taken place, they can do so up until **1 May 2021**.

## Interview Consent Form

I understand that my participation in this project will involve an interview about *why women support the populist right in the UK and Germany*.

I understand that participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason. Following an interview, I understand that I can withdraw my personal data from the research project up until **1 May 2021**.

I understand that I am free to ask any questions at any time. If for any reason I experience discomfort during participation in this project, I am free to withdraw.

I understand that I can consent to be named in this research project, should I wish to do so.

I understand that I can consent to remain anonymous in this research project, should I wish to do so, and the information I provide will be held anonymously, such that only the interviewer can trace this information back to me individually. The data will be stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act (2018).

I understand that my personal data will be destroyed on the **30 September 2026** should I take part in the project.

I understand that my anonymity cannot be guaranteed due to the risk of jigsaw identification.

I understand that if I disclose information relating to terrorist activity or planned serious crime my interview will be terminated, and the relevant authority contacted.



Please indicate whether you agree with the following statements, please initial box:

	Initials
I have read and understood all the information provided, and have received adequate time to consider all the documentation.	
I have been given adequate opportunity to ask questions about the research.	
I am aware of, and consent to the written and/or digital recording of my discussion with the researcher.	
I consent to the information and opinions I provide being used in the research.	

**Interviewee Declaration**

I consent to participate in the study conducted by *Katherine Williams*, Cardiff School of Law and Politics

Signature:

Print Name: ..... Date: .....

<b>Additional Contact Information</b>	
Researcher's Supervisor	<p><i>Dr. Claudia Hillebrand</i>  <i>School of Law and Politics</i>  <a href="mailto:hillebrandc@cardiff.ac.uk">hillebrandc@cardiff.ac.uk</a></p> <p><i>Professor Hanna Diamond</i>  <i>School of Modern Languages</i>  <a href="mailto:diamondh@cardiff.ac.uk">diamondh@cardiff.ac.uk</a></p>
Cardiff School of Law and Politics Research Ethics Committee (SREC)	<p>This project has received ethical approval from the Cardiff School of Law and Politics Research Ethics Committee (SREC) on <i>29/07/2020</i> (Internal Reference: <i>SREC/190219/06</i>).</p> <p>The Cardiff School of Law and Politics Research Ethics Committee (SREC) can be contacted at:</p> <p>School Research Officer  Cardiff School of Law and Politics  Cardiff University  Law Building  Museum Avenue  Cardiff CF10 3AX</p> <p>Email: <a href="mailto:LAWPL-Ethics@cardiff.ac.uk">LAWPL-Ethics@cardiff.ac.uk</a></p>

# Appendix F

Consent Form for Participants (DE)



ARBEITSTITEL: *Rollen und Motivationen von rechtspopulistischen Frauen in Großbritannien und Deutschland*

DIE FORSCHERIN: *Katherine Williams*

ADRESSE: Cardiff School of Law and Politics  
Cardiff University  
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## **Forschungsübersicht**

*Das Wiederauftreten der Rechtspopulisten erfolgt zu einem Zeitpunkt, an dem die politische und soziale Unzufriedenheit in ganz Europa und darüber hinaus auf einem Höchststand ist.*

*Der Brexit, die Wahl von Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) zum Bundestag und auch die Wahl von Donald Trump zum US-Präsidenten weisen nicht unbedingt auf Extremismus als solchen hin, aber stellen einen wichtigen Wendepunkt in der Weltpolitik dar.*

*Eines der überraschendsten Elemente dieser Entwicklung in der Weltpolitik ist die Unterstützung von Frauen für rechtspopulistischen Parteien. Dies führt mich zu der Frage, was es bedeutet, BürgerInnen in der Welt zu sein und wie Frauen unsere politischen Landschaften gestalten.*

*Meine Forschung zielt darauf ab, die Gründe aufzudecken, warum Frauen von rechtspopulistischen Parteien angezogen werden. Die Forschung wird sowohl für meine Doktorarbeit als auch für andere akademische Zwecke durchgeführt.*

### **Ihre Beteiligung an der Forschung**

Diese Forschung wird finanziert von dem *Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)*. Nach den Empfehlungen des ESRC wird von den Forschern erwartet, dass sie die Richtlinien des UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) einhalten. Die Forscher müssen sicherstellen, dass die Forschung mit menschlichen Teilnehmern, menschlichem Material oder personenbezogenen Daten allen ethischen und rechtlichen Anforderungen der geltenden Richtlinien entspricht (Abs. 3.7.1 UKRIO CoC).

Die Würde, die Rechte, die Sicherheit, und das Wohl des ForschungsteilnehmerInnen ist die Hauptsorge des Forschung.

Die Informationen und Einblicke, die Sie teilen, werden in dieser Forschung aufgezeichnet. Wenn Sie damit einverstanden sind, werden die Interviews *über Zoom aufgezeichnet*. Die Daten werden auf einem registrierten Cardiff University-Computer gespeichert, der passwortgeschützt ist und nur zu Forschungszwecken verwendet wird. Sie werden in diesem Projekt nur identifiziert, wenn Sie Ihre Einwilligung geben. Die persönlichen Daten der TeilnehmerInnen werden am **30. September 2026** zerstören. Die TeilnehmerInnen können das Projekt jederzeit verlassen. Die TeilnehmerInnen, die nach einem Interview ihre persönlichen Daten aus dem Projekt entfernen möchten, können dies bis zum **1. Mai 2021** tun.

Die Forscherin beabsichtigt, Forschungsergebnisse auf Konferenzen und in akademischen Publikationen wie Zeitschriften zu präsentieren und zu veröffentlichen.

### **Die Anonymität**

Die TeilnehmerInnen können

- A. einwilligen, ihre Namen in das Projekt zu nutzen;
- B. verlangen, anonym zu sein. In diesem Fall, wird die Forscherin ein Pseudonym geben. Die TeilnehmerInnen verstehen jedoch, dass es ein Risiko der De-Anonymisierung gibt (siehe unten).

**Bitte kreuzen Sie Ihre bevorzugte Option an:**

- Ich willige ein, dass mein Name in diesem Projekt benutzt wird.
- Ich wünsche, anonym zu bleiben. Ich verstehe, dass die Forscherin ein Pseudonym geben wird. Ich bin mir des Risikos der De-Anonymisierung bewusst.

## De-Anonymisierung

Im Zuge der Anonymisierung werden Daten so verändert, dass die Person nicht reidentifiziert werden kann. Dennoch kann das Restrisiko einer De-Anonymisierung von der Forscherin nicht gänzlich ausgeschlossen werden. Bestimmte Personen könnten Zusatzwissen haben oder einzelne Informationen aus verschiedenen Quellen in der Studie so verbinden, dass der absolute Schutz durch Anonymisierung nicht gewährleistet werden kann.

## Die Offenlegung der persönlichen Informationen

In diesem Projekt soll die Anonymität und Vertraulichkeit der TeilnehmerInnen gewährleistet werden. Es gibt jedoch Situationen, in denen dies nicht möglich ist.

- In Großbritannien verpflichtet der Terrorism Act (2000) und die PREVENT Strategy (Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015) die Forscherin und die TeilnehmerInnen, Kenntnis von Terrorismus an staatliche Behörden zu melden.
- Individuen sind generell nicht verpflichtet, Straftaten in Deutschland zu melden („generelle Meldepflicht“). Es ist jedoch eine schwere Straftat laut Para. 138 StGB, ein geplantes schweres Verbrechen nicht zu berichten („Nichtanzeige“).
- Wenn die TeilnehmerInnen Informationen offenlegen werden, dass negative Auswirkungen auf die Forscherin und anderen haben, muss die Forscherin die Polizeibehörde informieren.
- Wenn die TeilnehmerInnen Informationen über dritte Person enthüllen, kann es eine gesetzliche Vorschrift sein, Aktivitäten von Dritten aus den oben beschriebenen Gründen zu berichten.

Die TeilnehmerInnen werden daran erinnert, dass sie jederzeit das Projekt ohne Konsequenz verlassen können, vorausgesetzt, es gibt keine Offenbarung der oben genannten Art. Wie oben, die TeilnehmerInnen, die nach einem Interview ihre persönlichen Daten aus dem Projekt entfernen möchten, können bis zum **1. Mai 2021** tun.

## Die Einverständniserklärung

Ich erkläre mich damit einverstanden, dass meine Informationen zur Studie über die Rolle von Frauen im Rechtspopulistischen Parteien in Großbritannien und Deutschland genutzt werden.

Ich verstehe, dass mein Teilnahme freiwillig ist, und ich kann jederzeit das Projekt ohne Konsequenz verlassen.

Ich verstehe, dass ich nach dem Interview meine persönlichen Daten aus dem Projekt entfernen kann, und dies bis zum **1. Mai 2021** tun kann.

Ich verstehe, dass ich Fragen stellen kann. Wenn ich aus irgendeinem Grund Unbehagen verspüre, weiß ich, dass ich das Interview verlassen kann.

Ich verstehe, dass ich mein Name im Rahmen des Projektes genutzt werden kann, wenn ich meine Einwilligung gebe.

Ich verstehe, dass ich anonym bleiben kann, wenn ich das möchte. Meine persönlichen Daten werden anonym gespeichert und ich weiß, dass nur die Forscherin mich identifizieren kann. Die Daten werden gemäß den Richtlinien des britischen Data Protection Act (2018) gelagert und hält sich an die Grundprinzipien der Datenschutz-Grundverordnung (DSGVO).

Ich verstehe, dass meine persönlichen Daten am **30. September 2026** zerstört werden.

Ich verstehe, dass meine Anonymität nicht garantiert werden kann. Das liegt an der Gefahr von De-Identifizierung.

Wenn ich Informationen über Terrorismus oder ein geplantes schweres Verbrechen in Großbritannien oder Deutschland offenlege, verstehe ich, dass das Interview abgebrochen wird, und die Forscherin die Polizeibehörde zu informieren hat.

**Bitte geben Sie an, ob Sie mit den folgenden Aussagen einverstanden sind:**

	<b>Initialen</b>
Ich habe alles gelesen und die Informationen verstanden. Ich habe genug Zeit erhalten, diese Blätter zu lesen.	
Ich habe die Gelegenheit erhalten, Fragen über das Projekt zu stellen.	
Ich verstehe und gebe meine Zustimmung, dass mein Gespräch mit der Forscherin schriftlich oder aufgezeichnet wird.	
Ich gebe meine Einwilligung, dass meine Stellungnahmen in diesem Projekt genutzt werden dürfen.	

## Erklärung des TeilnehmerInnen

Ich gebe meine Einwilligung, in diesem Projekt von *Katherine Williams* (Cardiff School of Law and Politics) teilzunehmen.

Unterschrift:

Name (Druckbuchstaben): .....

Datum: .....

<b>Zusätzlicher Kontakt Informationen</b>	
Die Leiterinnen der Forscherin	<i>Dr. Claudia Hillebrand</i> <i>School of Law and Politics</i> <a href="mailto:hillebrandc@cardiff.ac.uk">hillebrandc@cardiff.ac.uk</a>  <i>Professor Hanna Diamond</i> <i>School of Modern Languages</i> <a href="mailto:diamondh@cardiff.ac.uk">diamondh@cardiff.ac.uk</a>
Cardiff School of Law and Politics Research Ethics Committee (SREC)	Diese Projekt hat am <i>29/07/2020</i> (Internal Reference: <i>SREC/190219/06</i> ) die ethische Zustimmung des Cardiff School of Law and Politics Research Ethics Committee (SREC) erhalten.  The Cardiff School of Law and Politics Research Ethics Committee (SREC) kann unter der folgenden Adresse kontaktiert werden:  School Research Officer Cardiff School of Law and Politics Cardiff University Law Building Museum Avenue Cardiff CF10 3AX Großbritannien  Email: <a href="mailto:LAWPL-Ethics@cardiff.ac.uk">LAWPL-Ethics@cardiff.ac.uk</a>

# Appendix G

## **Addendum to Ethical Approval**

*Submitted on 9 July 2020, and approved on 29 July 2020.*

### **Mitigating Risks of Remote Interviewing**

**Katherine Williams (C1735785)**

**(SREC/190219/06)**

As with the semi-structured interviews I have already conducted, participants' informed consent remains of utmost importance. I will send potential participants the consent form and information sheets via email, and ask that they read these documents carefully and return a signed copy to me, also via email. I will encourage potential participants to ask any questions or express any concerns at any point before, during, or following an interview. I will ask participants to reaffirm their informed consent at the beginning of the remote interview. While I do not plan to send out a list of questions prior to an interview, I will of course do so if requested by the participant.

It might be difficult to discern individuals' authentic identity online, but I will mitigate this risk by distributing my formal interview request through previously established, and official, channels. In this way, my request will reach registered party members. Similarly, potential participants can check my university credentials if they so wish and be reassured as to my identity as a researcher. In the German context, I am already known to the AfD, having conducted interviews with some of its members during a period of overseas fieldwork in 2019.

Participants are made aware in both the consent form and information sheets that they reserve the right to withdraw their personal data from the study after an interview has taken place up until **1<sup>st</sup> May 2021**. Destruction of participants' personal data following the conclusion of the project will take place on **30 September 2026**; both dates are reiterated throughout the consent form and information sheet.



Despite some past interviewees giving this research project permission to use their real names, I later took the decision to anonymise all participants. I made this decision because of the risk that those who did not give their permission could potentially be identified by outside parties due to their distinctive personal accounts. I will also extend this anonymization to remote interviewees. Participants can provide their own pseudonym, but if they do not, I will choose a pseudonym for them. In the past, I have chosen pseudonyms from the list of the most popular German baby names in the decade that participants were born.

While it is the intention of this project to guarantee participants' anonymity and confidentiality, there are situations where that will not be possible. In the consent form, I make participants aware of the risk of jigsaw identification, the potential legal consequences of disclosing personal information, and the responsibility of both researcher and participant to uphold the PREVENT strategy in the UK, and report planned serious crime in Germany. This information will remain the same for remote interviewees. Participants will be reminded that they can withdraw from the study at any point and without consequence, provided they do not disclose information pertaining to terrorism, planned serious crime, or the illegal activities of third parties.

I will use the Cardiff University Zoom platform to conduct remote interviews. The participant will not have to install any additional software to take part, the session will be password protected to mitigate the risk of outside interference, and the interview can be securely recorded. In signing the consent form, participants agree for the interview to be recorded, and I will ask them to reaffirm this consent at the beginning of their interview. If for some reason, Zoom is unavailable, I will explore Skype for Business or Microsoft Teams as viable alternatives. Interview data will then be stored on my Cardiff University OneDrive cloud which is password protected. Digital copies of the consent form and information form will also be stored on OneDrive. Back-up copies of this documentation will be kept on an encrypted electronic storage device.

Subsequent research findings may be presented at academic conferences or published in academic publications such as peer-reviewed journals. This is made clear in all participant-facing documents.

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