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Gender and family rhetoric on the German far right

KATRINE FANGEN  AND LISANNE LICHTENBERG

ABSTRACT Historically, the family and, more generally, gender policies have been a central issue in both nationalist and far-right rhetoric. This holds particularly for Germany, where the so-called male-breadwinner model and the rhetoric of *Kinder, Küche, Kirche* (children, kitchen, church) have a long tradition. At the same time, Germany's National Socialist past confers a negative connotation on notions of the family as a continuation of the nation. In this article, Fangen and Lichtenberg examine the family policies and views on gender roles, as well as the views on Muslims, of politicians from two German far-right parties and their youth organizations, as well as one German anti-immigrant social movement organization. Their study, based on press releases, party programmes and social media posts, adds to the growing literature on the importance of gender in nationalist and far-right politics in general, and in far-right critiques of Islam in particular. Their specific contribution is a detailed focus on the similarities and differences in various organizations on the German far right, as well as an analysis that draws on concepts such as femonationalism and, in a similar vein, Rogers Brubaker's notion of civilizationism.

KEYWORDS anti-immigration, far-right, gender, Germany, rightist feminism

Historically, the family and, more generally, gender policies have played a central role in nationalist and far-right rhetoric.¹ Support for traditional families and gender roles has also been, and continues to be, important for conservative and Christian political parties and movements. In addition, while there are differences between the welfare policies of various European countries, Germany, at least until recently, has in general supported traditional family and gender roles with their so-called male-breadwinner welfare model.²

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- 1 Kathleen M. Blee and Kimberly A. Creasap, 'Conservative and right-wing movements', *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 36, 2010, 269–86; Tjitske Akkerman, 'Gender and the radical right in Western Europe: a comparative analysis of policy agendas', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 49, no. 1–2, 2015, 37–60.
- 2 Jana Windwehr and Torben Fischer, 'The limits of change: German family policy and the dynamics of policy transfer 2009–2017', *German Politics*, 16 June 2020 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/09644008.2020.1770228>>.

2 Patterns of Prejudice

In recent years, however, we have increasingly seen arguments that put women's rights at the centre of conservative, Christian and far-right critiques of Muslims and Islam, thus linking to a more mainstream discourse in which Islam is seen as patriarchal. Sara Farris labels this tendency 'femonationalism', pointing to how arguments in favour of women's rights are 'used' to support nationalist political projects.³ The tendency to use women's rights as an argument against Islam is not just limited to the far right, but is seen more widely across the political spectrum,⁴ although the nationalist undertone of this rhetoric is less muted in far-right political parties.

Recently, a number of anthologies and special issues of journals on the importance of gender and the family for the politics of the far right and for right-wing populism have been published.⁵ Indeed, there has been a growing recognition that gender and family are not only central but also constitutive of the far right and the populist right. Gabriele Dietze and Julia Roth even speak of the 'obsession with gender and sexuality' of such parties and movements.⁶ Even though there are now a number of studies that analyse the importance of family and gender to the rhetoric and politics of far-right parties and organizations, there is little research that compares the views of populist far-right parties with respect to gender issues, despite the fact that gender issues are important for the ideological profile of these parties. A study by Tjitske Akkerman reveals similarities, but also differences, in the treatment of gender issues by populist far-right parties in six different European countries,⁷ whereas we will compare five different organizations within one country, Germany. This country is particularly interesting as it is the world's second-most-popular destination country for immigrants after the United States and, compared to the figures for other European countries, the number of far-right, racially motivated acts of violence is

- 3 Sara Farris, 'Femonationalism and the "regular" army of labor called migrant women', *History of the Present*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2012, 184–99.
- 4 Jane Freedman, 'Women, Islam and rights in Europe: beyond a universalist/culturalist dichotomy', *Review of International Studies*, vol. 33, no. 1, 2007, 29–44; Aleksandra Lewicki and Yasemin Shooman, 'Building a new nation: anti-Muslim racism in post-unification Germany', *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2020, 30–43.
- 5 See, for example, Michaela Köttig, Renate Bitzan and Andrea Petö (eds), *Gender and Far Right Politics in Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2017); 'Normalisierung neoreaktionärer Politiken', a special issue of *Feministische Studien*, vol. 36, no. 2, 2018; Gabriele Dietze and Julia Roth (eds), *Right-Wing Populism and Gender: European Perspectives and Beyond* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag 2020).
- 6 Gabriele Dietze and Julia Roth, 'Right wing populism and gender: a preliminary cartography of an emergent field of research', in Dietze and Roth (eds), *Right-Wing Populism and Gender*, 7–21 (7).
- 7 Akkerman, 'Gender and the radical right in Western Europe'. See also Susi Meret and Birte Siim, 'Gender, populism and politics of belonging: discourses of right-wing populist parties in Denmark, Norway and Austria', in Birte Siim and Monika Mokre (eds), *Negotiating Gender and Diversity in an Emergent European Public Sphere* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2013), 78–96.

high, particularly since Germany's reunification in 1990.⁸ Instead of focusing on the violent far right, however, we want to analyse political discourses in far-right parties and organizations that are legal, reach a significant number of people, have a certain political influence and are known to the general public, namely far-right political parties (Alternative für Deutschland and the Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands) and their youth organizations, as well as a German movement-like far-right organization (the Identitäre Bewegung Deutschland).

The following research question guides our analysis: in what ways do these parties and organizations manage the tension between, on the one hand, their commitment to traditional understandings of gender and family and, on the other, their instrumental invocation of women's rights and gender equality in the context of their anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim agenda? We analyse gender-related themes such as images of the family and gender roles, opposition to gender ideology, protection of German women, images of Muslim men and women, and the (instrumental) support for women's rights.

Far-right parties in Germany

Unlike in other Western European countries, far-right parties in Germany did not play a significant role on the national level until recently. This changed with the founding of the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD, Alternative for Germany) in February 2013.⁹ In its first phase, the main agenda of this party was criticism of EU monetary policy. However, following a split in 2015, it shifted focus and became increasingly anti-immigrant and moved further to the right.¹⁰ The split happened when the founder of AfD, Bernd Lucke, who represented the classical left wing, chose to leave the party in order to form another party called ALFA. After this, the AfD became more openly right wing.¹¹ One crucial division between the neoliberal faction that left the party and the nationalist-conservative faction that remained

8 Gideon Botsch, 'From skinhead-subculture to radical right movement: the development of a "national opposition" in East Germany', *Contemporary European History*, vol. 21, no. 4, 2012, 553–73.

9 Carl C. Berning, 'Alternative für Deutschland (AfD)—Germany's new radical right-wing populist party', *ifo DICE Report*, vol. 15, no. 4, 2017, 16–19.

10 Rüdiger Schmitt-Beck, 'The Alternative für Deutschland in the electorate: between single-issue and right-wing populist party', *German Politics*, vol. 26, no. 1, 2017, 124–48; Robert Grimm, 'The rise of the German Eurosceptic party Alternative für Deutschland, between ordoliberal critique and popular anxiety', *International Political Science Review*, vol. 36, no. 3, 2015, 264–78.

11 Julian M. Hoerner, 'The rise in the AfD after Cologne poses a serious challenge for Merkel's policy on refugees' (blog), 27 January 2016, available on the LSE website at <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2016/01/27/the-rise-of-the-afd-after-cologne-may-force-merkel-to-change-course-on-refugees> (viewed 18 March 2021).

was their opposing views on the social movement organization *Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes* (Pegida, Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the West).¹² Pegida organized marches in Dresden every Monday evening during 2014, sometimes with more than 10,000 participants. In January 2015, attendances reached a peak with up to 25,000 participants.¹³ The neoliberal faction of the AfD opposed Pegida, whereas the nationalist-conservative faction sympathized with them.

Angela Merkel's welcoming refugee policy since 2015, with its slogan 'Wir schaffen das' (We can do this), has been seen as an important reason why the AfD began to attract increased support.¹⁴ The party constructs concepts of 'the enemy' by warning against uncontrolled mass immigration, foreign refugees and the loss of national identity.¹⁵ In addition, a number of critical events contributed to the party's growth, including the Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris in January 2015 and, not least, the incidents that occurred on New Year's Eve in December 2015 when hundreds of women in Cologne and Hamburg were sexually harassed by men of predominantly North African immigrant background. This episode was followed by a fierce debate in the mainstream media that was marked by stereotypical images of dangerous Muslim men;¹⁶ consequently, as Julian Hoerner argued, this 'suddenly brought the AfD's rhetoric close to the mainstream of public debates in Germany'.¹⁷

The party has held its position as the third largest in Germany since the 2015 regional (Landtag) election, achieving the same result in the September 2017 Bundestag election.¹⁸ Two years after the last federal election, in 2019, the party ended up as the second largest in three of the sixteen regional elections (Brandenburg, Saxony and Thuringia), winning over 20 per cent of the

12 Andreas Kemper, 'AfD, Pegida and the new right in Germany', in Giorgos Charalambous (ed.), *The European Far Right: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, Prio Cyprus Centre Report, no. 2 (Oslo: Prio 2015), 43–8.

13 Sebastian Stier, Lisa Posch, Arnim Bleier and Markus Strohmaier, 'When populists become popular: comparing Facebook use by the right-wing movement Pegida and German political parties', *Information, Communication & Society*, vol. 20, no. 9, 2017, 1365–88.

14 Maximilian Conrad and Hugrud Adalsteinsdottir, 'Understanding Germany's short-lived "culture of welcome"', *German Politics and Society*, vol. 35, no. 4, 2017, 1–21.

15 Julika Förster, Lars Geiges, Alexander Hensel and Robert Pausch, *Die AfD vor den Landtagswahlen 2016: Programme, Profile und Potenziale* (Frankfurt am Main: Otto Brenner Stiftung 2016).

16 Julia Schuster, 'A lesson from "Cologne" on intersectionality: strengthening feminist arguments against right-wing co-option', *Feminist Theory*, 28 April 2020 <<https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700120921077>>.

17 Hoerner, 'The rise in the AfD after Cologne poses a serious challenge for Merkel's policy on refugees'.

18 Christian Martin, 'Electoral participation and right wing authoritarian success: evidence from the 2017 federal elections in Germany', 9 April 2018, available at SSRN <<https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3159320>>.

vote.¹⁹ Junge Alternative für Deutschland (JA, Young Alternative for Germany) is the official youth organization of the AfD.²⁰

Far less acceptable among the mainstream is the Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (NPD, National Democratic Party of Germany), which has been a far-right party ever since its foundation in 1964. The ideological profile of the party shifted during the 1990s from historical National Socialism to more contemporary concerns, such as unemployment, economic problems of the welfare state and social problems in general.²¹ The party is openly anti-constitutional and promotes both racism and antisemitism.²² Its political and electoral success as well as its membership figures have fluctuated, with its especially successful years being in the 1960s, just after its foundation, and in the early 2000s. Since the latter period, the party has seen a 'steady downward trend'.²³ Since 2016, the NPD has not been represented in any German Landtag. Still, it remains the most important and largest far-right party in Germany in terms of membership.²⁴ The Junge Nationalisten (JN, Young Nationalists) is its official youth organization.²⁵

The Identitäre Bewegung Deutschland (IBD, German Identitarian Movement) is comparatively new. This social movement organization was founded in October 2012 as an offshoot of the French organization Génération Identitaire.²⁶ The domestic intelligence service in Germany classifies the IBD as right-wing extremist and is keeping it under observation owing to the organization's violation of the principle of democracy, which includes the right to free participation of all citizens.²⁷ The IBD regards itself as an

19 Manés Weisskircher, 'The strength of the far right in Eastern Germany', *Political Quarterly*, vol. 91, no. 3, 2020, 614–22.

20 See the website of Junge Alternative at <https://netzseite.jungealternative.online> (viewed 18 March 2021).

21 Bernd Sommer, 'Anti-capitalism in the name of ethno-nationalism: ideological shifts on the German extreme right', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 42, no. 3, 2008, 305–16.

22 Benjamin Low, 'The centre cannot hold: reflections on militant democracy in Germany', *Trinity College Law Review*, vol. 16, 2018, 136–58.

23 Valérie Dubslaff, 'Women on the fast track: gender issues in the National Democratic Party of Germany and the French National Front (1980s–2012)', in Köttig, Bitzan and Petö (eds), *Gender and Far Right Politics in Europe*, 159–73 (158).

24 Landesamt für Verfassungsschutz Baden-Württemberg, 'Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (NPD)', n.d., available at www.verfassungsschutz-bw.de/Lde/Startseite/Arbeitsfelder/Nationaldemokratische+Partei+Deutschlands+_NPD_ (viewed 18 March 2021).

25 See the website of Junge Nationalisten at <https://junge-nationalisten.de> (viewed 18 March 2021).

26 Samuel Salzborn, 'Renaissance of the new right in Germany? A discussion of new right elements in German right-wing extremism today', *German Politics and Society*, vol. 34, no. 2, 2016, 36–63.

27 Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, '"Identitäre Bewegung Deutschland" (IBD)', 2019, archived version available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20210109203619/www.verfassungsschutz.de/de/arbeitsfelder/af-rechtsextremismus/zahlen-und-fakten-rechtsextremismus/identitaere-bewegung-deutschland-2019> (viewed 23 March 2021).

extra-parliamentary opposition and does not seek political power, unlike the AfD and the NPD. Another difference is that the IBD is rather single-issue-oriented: it emphasizes the protection and maintenance of German national identity, and the restriction of immigration.

Although differing in their political and ideological orientations, political influence and size, all these organizations can be regarded as belonging to the German far right. Furthermore, from time to time they support the same political campaigns, as in March 2018 when they all were represented at a political demonstration under the slogan 'Kandel is everywhere!' The background for this demonstration was the murder in Kandel of a fifteen-year-old girl, Mia, by her ex-boyfriend Abdul. The murder was made into a political symbol for what was seen as the German government's flawed migration policy, since the perpetrator had come to Germany after fleeing Afghanistan.²⁸

In our examination of party programmes, websites and information leaflets, we have been struck by the centrality of family politics, opposition to gender ideology and the importance of gender images in these organizations' construction of differences in relation to Muslims and Islam. The centrality of gender to far-right ideologies is a trend that is also found in other European countries, as well as in the United States.²⁹ In fact, gender and family issues constitute about one-third of the content of the political programmes of European right-wing populist parties.³⁰

Gender issues on the far right

The growing research field examining the role of gender issues on the far right includes studies of the gender of party leaders,³¹ of those who vote for far-right parties,³² as well as gender images in far-right

28 Lynn Berg, 'Between anti-feminism and ethnicized sexism: far-right gender politics in Germany', in Maik Fielitz and Nick Thurston (eds), *Post-Digital Cultures of the Far Right: Online Actions and Offline Consequences in Europe and the US* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag 2019), 79–91.

29 Kathleen Blee, 'Afterword: next steps in the study of gender and education in the radical right', *Gender and Education*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2017, 276–9; Niels Spierings and Andrej Zaslove, 'Conclusion: dividing the populist radical right between "liberal nativism" and traditional conceptions of gender', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 49, no. 1–2, 2015, 135–62.

30 Andreas Kemper, *Keimzelle der Nation? Familien- und Geschlechterpolitische Positionen der AfD – Eine Expertise* (Berlin: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung 2014).

31 Susi Meret, 'Charismatic female leadership and gender: Pia Kjærsgaard and the Danish People's Party', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 49, no. 1–2, 2015, 81–102.

32 Eelco Harteveld, Wouter van der Brug, Stefan Dahlberg and Andrej Kokkonen, 'The gender gap in populist radical-right voting: examining the demand side in Western and Eastern Europe', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 49, no. 1–2, 2015, 103–34; Tim Immerzeel, Hilde Coffé and Tanja van der Lippe, 'Explaining the gender gap in radical right

discourses.³³ The latter studies find that far-right parties and groups incorporate liberal arguments about gender equality into their anti-immigration agendas. Muslims and Islam are considered to be misogynistic and gender-unequal, which is why they are seen as a threat to western societies and values like female emancipation.³⁴ Value-based dividing lines are constructed, resulting in an idea of the incompatibility of cultures.³⁵ Although they use women's rights arguments, many far-right parties remain highly conservative, and their commitment to gender equality can be regarded as solely instrumental.³⁶ However, there are important differences between such parties, and a dividing line is seen between parties that adhere to nationalist gender ideologies and those that support neoliberal gender ideologies; and the parties and organizations we are studying fall into the former category.³⁷ The concept of femonationalism was developed to describe the more general tendency to use arguments against Islam in the name of women's rights, thus uniting entities as different as feminist bureaucrats ('femocrats'), neoliberal introductory programmes for refugees, left-wing feminists and right-wing populist politicians.³⁸ However, the latter utilize such arguments more instrumentally, to legitimize their arguments against Muslim immigration and Muslims in general. A typical argument in the rhetoric of populist right-wing politicians is that, in general, western societies are 'over and done with' feminism since women have already achieved equal rights; however, women's rights are threatened by the influx of Islam.³⁹

voting: a cross-national investigation in 12 Western European countries', *Comparative European Politics*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2015, 263–86; Niels Spierings and Andrej Zaslove, 'Gendering the vote for populist radical-right parties', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 49, no. 1–2, 2015, 135–62.

- 33 Tjstke Akkerman and Anniken Hagelund, "'Women and children first!' Anti-immigration parties and gender in Norway and the Netherlands', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 41, no. 2, 2007, 197–214; Akkerman, 'Gender and the radical right in Western Europe'; Stefanie Mayer, Edma Ajanovic and Birgit Sauer, 'Intersections and inconsistencies: framing gender in right-wing populist discourses in Austria', *NORA—Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, vol. 22, no. 4, 2014, 250–66; Ulrike Vieten, 'Far right populism and women: the normalisation of gendered anti-Muslim racism and gendered culturalism in the Netherlands', *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, vol. 37, no. 6, 2016, 621–36.
- 34 See also Sara Farris and Catherine Rottenberg, 'Introduction: righting feminism', *New Formations: A Journal of Culture/Theory/Politics*, vol. 91, no. 3, 2017, 5–15.
- 35 Vieten, 'Far right populism and women'.
- 36 Akkerman, 'Gender and the radical right in Western Europe'.
- 37 Sarah L. de Lange and Liza M. Mügge, 'Gender and right-wing populism in the Low Countries: ideological variations across parties and time', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 49, no. 1–2, 2015, 61–80.
- 38 Sara R. Farris, *In the Name of Women's Rights: The Rise of Femonationalism* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press 2017).
- 39 Sarah Bracke, 'From "saving women" to "saving gays": rescue narratives and their dis/continuities', *European Journal of Women's Studies*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2012, 237–52 (238).

Indeed, these parties are not feminist per se; some of them are even anti-feminist, arguing for traditional gender roles and family values.

Methodology

Like Akkerman, we were interested in source materials that represent the voices of the parties and the organizations we are investigating.⁴⁰ We have therefore analysed press releases, party programmes, day-to-day political commentaries and social media posts that deal with gender-related issues. As for the latter material, we have chosen posts and comments that were published by the main organization, by its leaders or by local leaders. This material to some extent reflects tensions within each party, and we supplement this material with references to earlier studies that highlight such tensions. Our source material is easily accessible and open to the public.

Akkerman points out that external party documents are most representative of party positions although they only present the outward face of the party. Since populist radical-right parties have been accused of speaking with a forked tongue, she argues that it is important to include internal documents as well.⁴¹ Our material consists of both external documents, such as party programmes and *Facebook* posts. Although the latter posts are public, it can be argued that they are addressed to an internal audience to a greater extent than the external documents. In general, every document published by the chosen groups that have dealt with gender issues has been considered relevant and used as data.

The process of gathering source material followed the model of theoretical sampling, meaning that the gathering and the analysis of data took place simultaneously during the research process.⁴² To identify relevant data, we looked initially at online material, using the search function to find texts that dealt with gender-related issues and that were appropriate as representations of the groups' views and convictions. Material that either implicitly or explicitly incorporated gender themes—for example, images of a family, employment of women, women's rights, gender equality, same-sex marriages or gender-based violence—was categorized and coded. Again following theoretical sampling, the collection of further data was based on the questions as to whether the material enabled us to formulate or check hypotheses about the construction of gender images, and whether it provided explanations regarding the research question. All quotations used have been translated from German to English by the authors.

40 Akkerman, 'Gender and the radical right in Western Europe'.

41 Ibid.

42 Barney Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, 'Theoretical sampling', in Barney Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, *Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (London and New York: Routledge 2017), 45–78.

In order to limit the volume of data, our analysis mainly used texts produced and published in the period 2015–17, when the media and the general public started to talk about the ‘refugee crisis’ because of the increasing numbers of refugees coming to Europe and Germany. However, we have also checked material that was posted online since that time, in order to see whether there have been any important changes of opinion during this later period.⁴³

Conservative and nationalist family images and gender roles

Gender images promoted in far-right discourses are closely linked to attitudes regarding the family.⁴⁴ In nationalist far-right parties, such as those we are studying, the family is seen as important for the stability and continuation of the nation. Support of traditional family policies is also typical of conservative and Christian parties more generally, although the far right uses more explicit ethnonationalist rhetoric.⁴⁵

The emphasis on the family’s importance for the continuity of the nation is clearly seen in the family policies of the parties and organizations we have studied. In its party programme, the AfD expresses concern about the ‘disappearance’ of ‘normal, medium-sized families’ and the fact that, as a consequence, the ‘indigenous population’ is shrinking. Restricting immigration is seen as important for countering the trend of the shrinking German (in an ethnic sense) population. The party proposes to convert the Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend (Federal Ministry of Families, Seniors, Women and Youth) into a ‘Bundesministerium für Familie und Bevölkerungsentwicklung’ (Federal Ministry of Families and Population Development). The role of this ministry would be ‘to coordinate and promote population development according to scientific criteria’.⁴⁶ What this implies is not specified in the party programme. However, the AfD emphasizes that it is solely the native German population that needs to increase its birth rate and oppose immigration as a way of counteracting

43 Lisanne Lichtenberg collected the data for the period from 2015 to 2016, and Katrine Fangen checked websites and *Facebook* posts for more recent posts.

44 See, for example, Johan Nordensvard and Markus Ketola, ‘Nationalist reframing of the Finnish and Swedish welfare states: the nexus of nationalism and social policy in far-right populist parties’, *Social Policy & Administration*, vol. 49, no. 3, 2015, 356–75; and Francesca Scrinzi, ‘Caring for the elderly in the family or in the nation? Gender, women and migrant care labour in the Lega Nord’, *West European Politics*, vol. 40, no. 4, 2017, 869–86.

45 Michael Minkenberg, ‘The policy impact of church–state relations: family policy and abortion in Britain, France, and Germany’, *West European Politics*, vol. 26, no. 1, 2003, 195–217.

46 AfD, *Programm für Deutschland. Wahlprogramm der Alternative für Deutschland für die Wahl zum Deutschen Bundestag am 24. September 2017* (Berlin: AfD 2017), 37 available on the AfD website at www.afd.de/wahlprogramm (viewed 18 March 2021).

falling birth rates.⁴⁷ Thus, not only does the party emphasize national origins, it also promotes a ‘pure’ German nation, and thereby a *völkisch*-nationalist ideology,⁴⁸ advocating a *völkische* family and gender policy based on traditional gender roles and a complementary, biologically based gender order.⁴⁹

The party holds that stable families are important for prosperity and social peace. It also calls for a family policy that would support families with many children, and make it possible for one parent to stay at home to take care of them. The AfD favours private parental care for children under three years old, and supports the idea of state aid for parental care to enable parents to choose freely between employment and parental leave. In addition, it would implement a policy that supports ‘the unborn life’ by making it easier for ‘life-saving adoption’ instead of abortion.⁵⁰

The NPD also supports the creation of a more family-friendly and child-oriented environment in Germany in order to counteract ‘a catastrophic population change in an ageing Germany’.⁵¹ In contrast to the AfD, however, the NPD offers more specific ideas for maternal support such as an income for mothers, and the recognition of private childcare with regard to the calculation of pensions.⁵² Interestingly, these are also one-time feminist concerns regarding the need to recognize women’s care work.⁵³ Even though the NPD seems to be concerned about the financial disadvantages experienced by many mothers in Germany, it espouses traditional gender roles and refers to mothers solely in the context of childcare and the household, whereas the AfD states that its goal is to ensure that a parent (without specifying the gender) who has taken care of children at home can return to work after the childcare is no longer required.

Even though all five organizations we have studied support a conservative family policy, the rhetoric of the IBD and the NPD is more explicitly ethno-nationalist, sometimes even with clear racist connotations. The IBD argues that the family is the second-highest level of community and kinship, ‘the

47 AfD, ‘“Neue Deutsche?” Machen wir selber’, 1 September 2017, video available on the AfD TV channel on *YouTube* at www.youtube.com/watch?v=KdGtKgDyzVQ (viewed 18 March 2021).

48 Hans-Jürgen Puhle, ‘Conservatism in modern German history’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 13, no. 4, 1978, 689–720.

49 Juliane Lang, ‘Feindbild Feminismus: Familien- und Geschlechterpolitik in der AfD’, in Stephan Grigat (ed.), *AfD & FPÖ: Antisemitismus, völkischer Nationalismus und Geschlechterbilder* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft 2017), 61–78.

50 AfD, *Programm für Deutschland*.

51 NPD, *Arbeit, Familie, Vaterland: Das Partei Programm der Nationaldemokratischen Partei Deutschlands*, 2nd edn (Berlin: NPD 2013), 12, available on the NPD website at https://npd.de/Parteiprogramm_NPD.pdf (viewed 18 March 2021).

52 NPD, ‘Familie’, available on the NPD website at <https://npd.de/themen/familie> (viewed 18 March 2021).

53 Marilyn Power, ‘Social provisioning as a starting point for feminist economics’, *Feminist Economics*, vol. 10, no. 3, 2004, 3–19.

people' being the highest level, and one of the organization's main aims is 'the struggle for the preservation of the ethnocultural conditions for the survival of the peoples of Europe'.⁵⁴ The way in which it refers to the people (*das Volk*) gives a nod to National Socialism. However, being aware of such associations, IBD states that this ideology rightfully has been defeated.

The NPD was openly National Socialist in the past.⁵⁵ In recent years, however, the party has attempted to downplay this association. In its manifesto, it is stated that the family is the smallest natural community within the nation and is responsible for passing on values and traditions. Indeed, the family is the 'bearer of the biological heritage [and] . . . the nucleus of the nation'.⁵⁶ Furthermore, the NPD sees the family as the origin of the German people and the state.⁵⁷ The NPD makes it clear that a family consists of a man, a woman and children, and excludes other concepts. It also emphasizes the 'naturalness' of traditional gender roles: it is natural for women to give birth and become mothers. Typically for conservatism, it emphasizes the family as a 'microsociety' that provides children with their cultural and spiritual heritage.⁵⁸

The organizations examined here all stress the importance of the continuation of society, not only with regard to families but also in the context of marriage. Heterosexual marriage is regarded as the necessary basis for reproduction and, in general, same-sex marriages are strongly opposed. Alexander Gauland, former leader of the AfD, understands marriage 'in the tradition of the Christian-Occidental culture that still shapes the people of Europe', and argues that heterosexual marriage has been 'a central societal element for thousands of years'.⁵⁹ He stresses the cultural and historical significance of marriage and presents heterosexual marriage as an integral part of German values. On the website of AfD Bayern, we find a more radical view, presenting same-sex marriages as utterly abnormal and absurd, on the same level as polygamy, child marriages and marriage to objects.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, Alice Weidel, who was one of the AfD's two leading candidates in the 2017 election, is a lesbian and, together with her partner, has adopted

54 IBD, 'Von der Notwendigkeit politischer Aktivist zu sein', 28 July 2017, available on the IBD website at www.identitaere-bewegung.de/blog/von-der-notwendigkeit-politischer-aktivist-zu-sein (viewed 19 March 2021).

55 Low, 'The centre cannot hold'.

56 NPD, *Arbeit, Familie, Vaterland*, 12.

57 Ibid.; Nira Yuval-Davis, 'Gender and nation', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 16, no. 4, 1993, 621–32.

58 Claudia Winkler, 'Women and conservatism after the sexual revolution', *Society*, vol. 42, no. 3, 2005, 18–24.

59 Alexander Gauland, 'Die Entscheidung für die Ehe für alle ist ein schwerer gesellschaftlicher Fehler und gesetzeswidrig', n.d., available on the AfD website at www.afd.de/alexander-gauland-die-entscheidung-fuer-die-ehe-fuer-alle-ist-ein-schwerer-gesellschaftlicher-fehler-und-grundgesetzwidrig (viewed 19 March 2021).

60 AfD Bayern, '"Ehe für alle" – Ehe für niemand', 23 July 2017, available on the AfD Bayern website at www.afdbayern.de/ehe-fuer-alle-ehe-fuer-niemand (viewed 19 March 2021).

two children. In addition, an article by Patrick Wielowiejski shows that some members of the party's youth division (interviewed by Wielowiejski) are more ambivalent towards homosexuality. They stated that they were not against homosexuals per se, but rather thought homosexuals should be viewed as an aberration and not be given preferential treatment.⁶¹

Both the NPD and the IBD are more extreme than the AfD in their views on homosexuality. The IBD regards heterosexual marriage as the 'germ cell of the family and society', as it ensures the creation of new life.⁶² Additionally, it presents same-sex marriage as 'an attack on the family', as it destroys family and marriage.⁶³ Similarly, Ronny Zasowk, deputy chairman of the NPD, is opposed to homosexual couples adopting children: such couples pose a risk to the well being and development of children, who need to grow up with both a female and a male attachment figure, embodying different role models. Only heterosexual couples can offer an intact, normal family life to their children.⁶⁴

Accordingly, we do not see much of the so-called 'homonationalism' in these parties and organizations. Jasbi Puar's concept of homonationalism points to the way nations are depicted as 'gay-friendly' and, in this way, are opposed to more backward nations where homosexuals are persecuted and discriminated against.⁶⁵ By contrast, the organizations we are studying here all have in common that they support traditional gender roles and see homosexuality as an aberration. Interestingly, the youth sections of the two political parties promote the most conservative and traditional image of women. For example, the JA states that men should treat women in a polite and respectful manner. The group holds that men and women have equal rights even though they are different; this equality, however, does not mean similarity, which is why the group encourages men to be chivalrous towards women.⁶⁶ The JN, too, emphasizes gender difference: 'Our women like to be women, just as our men naturally like to be men!'⁶⁷ The JN stresses

61 Patrick Wielowiejski, 'Identitäre Schwule und bedrohliche Queers', *Feministische Studien*, vol. 36, no. 2, 2018, 347–56.

62 IBD, 'Hier der Bericht unserer Gefährten aus Schwaben zur "Demo für alle"!', 15 October 2015, formerly available on the IBD website at <https://blog.identitaere-bewegung.de/hier-der-bericht-unserer-gefaehrten-aus-schwaben-zur-demo-fuer-alle> (viewed 9 November 2020, currently unavailable but copies can be requested from the authors).

63 Ibid.

64 Ronny Zasowk, 'Nein zur Homo-Ehe!', 29 June 2017, available on the NPD website at <https://npd.de/nein-zur-homo-ehe> (viewed 19 March 2021).

65 Jasbi Puar, 'Rethinking homonationalism', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 45, no. 2, 2013, 336–9.

66 JA, 'Die Junge Alternative hält gerne die Tür auf!', 16 February 2017, available to Facebook users only (copies available on request to the authors) on the JA's Facebook page at www.facebook.com/jafuer.de/photos/a.131308147059728/612379418952596 (viewed 20 August 2020).

67 JN, 'Natürliche Geschlechterrollen statt Genderexperimente!', 29 July 2017, available on the JN website at <https://junge-nationalisten.de/allgemein/natuerliche-geschlechterrollen-statt-genderexperimente> (viewed 19 March 2021).

gender difference and that it is natural for men and women to prefer stereotypical, gender-based roles. The group distances itself from feminist claims that gender roles are socially and culturally shaped, and that there are men and women who do not enjoy fulfilling the roles society ascribes to them. The JN explains that the ‘wehrhafte’ (able-bodied) German woman stands by her man’s side: as mother or companion, at difficult times and in times of danger.⁶⁸ Beyond that, the JN strongly emphasizes the female role of mother. The group calls women the ‘holy source of German strength’ and explains that motherhood ‘is not a woman’s degradation: it raises women to immortality’: it seems to be both an honour and a duty to give birth.⁶⁹ The article in which the latter quote appeared, published on International Women’s Day 2017 by the ‘boys of JN Saxony’, presents the group’s views on women’s rights and feminism, and alleges that women’s initial fight for equality, emancipation and the right to vote can now be regarded as having been successfully completed.

Even though the JN claims that it does not oppose the general idea of International Women’s Day, it sees contemporary feminism as contradictory. It criticizes feminists for welcoming ‘Islamist’ refugees who force their women to wear full-body veils in Germany. The group calls feminists’ fight for self-determined abortion regulations inhumane, and blames them for supporting the demise of German society. International Women’s Day is deemed an ‘unnatural day of struggle’.⁷⁰ Furthermore, the group rejects the idea that gender is socially constructed. While the JN declares that it generally supports the initial basic idea of feminism, it regards the feminist struggle as completed, since the objective of gender equality has been achieved in Germany. Any further feminist demands are regarded as being unnatural, elitist and unnecessary.

Therefore, although these groups are not explicitly anti-feminist, they are also not particularly concerned about feminism and, in addition, they are clearly in opposition to so-called gender ideology, as we will see in the next section.

Opposition to gender ideology

Opposition to ‘gender ideology’ exists in many countries,⁷¹ where it functions as a cause that unites conservative and right-wing populist forces.⁷²

68 JN, ‘Frauen und Femen’, 8 March 2017, available on the JN website at <https://junge-nationalisten.de/allgemein/frauen-und-femen> (viewed 19 March 2021).

69 Ibid.

70 Ibid.

71 Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte, *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against Equality* (London and Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield 2017).

72 Eszter Kováts, ‘Questioning consensus: right-wing populism, anti-populism, and the threat of “gender ideology”’, *Sociological Research Online*, vol. 23, no. 2, 2018, 528–38; Elizabeth S. Corredor, ‘Unpacking “gender ideology” and the global right’s antigender counter movement’, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 44, no. 3, 2019, 613–38.

'Gender ideology' functions as an umbrella term for gender studies, gender quotas, abortion and LGBTI rights.⁷³ In Germany, protests against gender mainstreaming in school curriculums have been widespread and have included initiatives supported by conservative politicians, right-wing political parties, right-wing movements and religious groups, as well as social movement organizations like Pegida.⁷⁴ In 2014, 'Demo für alle' (demonstrations for all) were organized under the slogan 'Marriage and family first! Against gender ideology and the sexualization of our children!', and a prominent member of the AfD played a central role in organizing them.⁷⁵ According to the AfD, gender ideology 'marginalizes naturally given gender differences and calls sexual identity into question'.⁷⁶ The idea is that children are in danger of identity confusion, and there is an underlying fear that natural hierarchies and boundaries, such as the male–female distinction, will be blurred.⁷⁷

The IBD, for its part, alleges that gender ideology calls into question the natural order.⁷⁸ The idea that gender is socially and culturally shaped is rejected: differences between men and women can only be ascribed to biology. By referring to the idea of a 'naturally given' order, the IBD promotes a clear, fixed distinction between female and male gender roles and traits. Furthermore, both the AfD and the IBD regard gender ideology as 'unscientific'. According to the AfD, gender ideology contradicts scientific, biological findings as well as the practical experience of many generations.⁷⁹ The IBD calls gender ideology a 'sick Zeitgeist',⁸⁰ which aims to manipulate and transform society with its 'pseudo-scientific findings'.⁸¹ Promotion of the gender order as a social construct is presented as an artificial, totalitarian project that is politically forced on 'normal' people. The IBD in particular stresses that promotion of gender ideology is confusing, as it threatens individuals' gender identity.⁸²

73 Imke Schminke, 'Sexual politics from the right: attacks on gender, sexual diversity, and sex education', in Dietze and Roth (eds), *Right-Wing Populism and Gender*, 59–74.

74 Caterina Rohde-Abuba, Stefan Vennmann and Tatjana Zimenkova, 'The destruction of the heterosexual family? The discourse of opponents of the gender mainstreaming educational curriculum in Baden-Württemberg, Germany', *Sexuality & Culture*, vol. 23, no. 3, 2019, 718–36.

75 Schminke, 'Sexual politics from the right', 63.

76 AfD, *Programm für Deutschland*, 40.

77 Schminke, 'Sexual politics from the right', 65.

78 IBD, 'Die Genderideologie, mehr Alchemie als Wissenschaft', 29 May 2015, formerly available on the IBD website at <https://blog.identitaere-bewegung.de/die-genderideologie-mehr-alchemie-als-wissenschaft> (viewed 20 August 2020, currently unavailable but copies can be requested from the authors).

79 AfD, 'Familie/Bevölkerung', n.d., available on the AfD website at www.afd.de/familie-bevoelkerung (viewed 22 March 2021).

80 IBD, 'Die Genderideologie, mehr Alchemie als Wissenschaft'.

81 Ibid.

82 Ibid.

The AfD objects to all measures aimed at implementing gender ideology, including gender quotas, gender studies, gender-neutral language or campaigns for 'equal pay'.⁸³ Regarding gender quotas, the AfD argues that the use of such a form of affirmative action to prevent discrimination against women in the labour market is unfair and is not an appropriate means of promoting gender equality, as it creates other kinds of discrimination.⁸⁴

With their conservative political views on gender, the AfD, the IBD and the NPD distance themselves from feminism, which they see as 'threatening' traditional, familiar gender roles. They offer a political home to people who fear the loss of clear, fixed roles and identities that give them stability. Indeed, the fear of gender ideology is related to an authoritarian notion of society as a social order constituted by natural hierarchies, where the idea of gender diversity is seen as a threat. This corresponds to their opposition to a multicultural society and shows 'how much the idea of diversity is charged with fear'.⁸⁵

Protection of German women

In contrast to what have been depicted as left-wing concerns about protecting Muslim women from patriarchal and misogynistic practices by Muslim men, the far-right groups studied here are instead concerned about protecting *German* (implicitly non-Muslim) women from assaults and possibly rape by male Muslims.⁸⁶ This protectionist discourse is also seen elsewhere in the far right,⁸⁷ for example in the 120 Decibel campaign that was a response to the MeToo campaign and was motivated by the assumption that there is a 'lack of media attention to European victims of migrant predators [and] to the lack of attention to the deeply rooted, pervasive fabric of sexual harassment culture in general'.⁸⁸ European women are depicted as 'forgotten', thereby giving legitimacy to the far-right groups 'that pretend to amplify women's voices'.⁸⁹

On the one hand, gender equality is represented by the AfD as a positive quality of German society, enabling women to enjoy a free, self-determined

83 AfD, *Programm für Deutschland*, 40.

84 AfD, *Grundsatzprogramm der Alternative für Deutschland: Leitanspruch der Bundesprogrammkommission und des Bundesvorstandes*, 30 April–1 May 2016, available on the AfD website at www.afd.de/wp-content/uploads/sites/111/2016/03/Leitanspruch-Grundsatzprogramm-AfD.pdf (viewed 22 March 2021).

85 Imke Schminke, 'Sexual politics from the right', 65.

86 Farris, *In the Name of Women's Rights*, 40–56.

87 Lars Erik Berntzen, *Liberal Roots of Far Right Activism: The Anti-Islamic Movement in the 21st Century* (London and New York: Routledge 2020).

88 Giuliana Sorce, 'Sounding the alarm for right-wing #MeToo: "120 Dezibel" in Germany', *Feminist Media Studies*, vol. 18, no. 6, 2018, 1123–6 (1125).

89 *Ibid.*, 1125.

life in Germany.⁹⁰ On the other, however, the party gives the impression that incidents of sexual harassment and sexual attacks against women have increased greatly since the beginning of the 'asylum crisis', threatening the free, gender-equal life of German women.⁹¹ Accordingly, the AfD raises the question of how German women can be protected from asylum-seekers who regard them as 'fair game'.⁹² Interestingly, the expression 'fair game' (*Freiwild*) is also used several times by the NPD and the JN, often in reference to the incidents that took place in Cologne on New Year's Eve 2015. Using similar catchwords to describe women's situation in Germany, the organizations construct an image of hunted victims who live under permanent threat and can never feel safe.

The group IBD Mecklenburg-West Pomerani also refers to the situation for women in Germany as 'increasingly insecure' and issues the demand: 'Protect our women! Safeguard our borders!'⁹³ The IBD thus suggests not only that German women are permanently in danger and need to be protected, but also that the threat comes from outside Germany's borders. Furthermore, the group claims that many women have already adapted their habits to the insecure situation, such as by wearing less revealing clothes and avoiding certain areas. To enable women to defend themselves, several local IBD and JN groups have distributed free pepper sprays to women,⁹⁴ and the AfD asks whether women should no longer go out without an escort or whether a curfew for women should be imposed for their protection.⁹⁵

The demand for the protection of women holds strong parallels with nationalistic and patriotic narratives that feminize the nation.⁹⁶ Protecting

90 AfD, 'Zeit für Veränderungen, Zeit für die AfD!', 22 January 2016, available to Facebook users only (copies available on request to the authors) on the AfD Facebook page at www.facebook.com/alternativ fuerde (viewed 5 February 2019).

91 AfD, 'Wir sagen: Nein! Straffällig gewordene Asylbewerber, die Grundrechte anderer Menschen verletzt, sind auszuweisen!', 12 October 2015, available to Facebook users only (copies available on request to the authors) on the AfD Facebook page at www.facebook.com/alternativ fuerde/photos/a.542889462408064/1016866841676988 (viewed 24 August 2020).

92 Ibid.

93 IBD, 'Schützt unsere Frauen! Sichert unsere Grenzen!', 15 May 2017, formerly available on the IBD website at <https://blog.identitaere-bewegung.de/schuetzt-unsere-frauen-sichert-unsere-grenzen> (viewed 9 November 2020); IBD, 'Aktion für Aufklärung und Selbstschutz', 29 July 2017, formerly available on the IBD website at <https://blog.identitaere-bewegung.de/aktion-fuer-aufklaerung-und-selbstschutz> (viewed 24 August 2020). The IBD website is currently unavailable but copies of both blogs can be requested from the authors.

94 IBD, 'Schützt unsere Frauen! Sichert unsere Grenzen!'; IBD, 'Aktion für Aufklärung und Selbstschutz'; JN, 'Unsere Frauen sind kein Freiwild', 16 March 2017, available on the JN website at <https://junge-nationalisten.de/allgemein/unsere-frauen-sind-kein-freiwild-2> (viewed 22 March 2021).

95 AfD, 'Wir sagen: Nein!'.

96 Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias (eds), *Woman-Nation-State* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 1989).

women from immigrants is claimed to be necessary to preserve the 'purity' of the nation.⁹⁷ Apart from the references to sexual attacks and violence by male immigrants, however, sexism, sexual harassment and domestic violence against women are not mentioned at all in the discourses we examined.

Images of Muslim men

The far right in Europe could be said to be exploiting gender parity to further its anti-immigrant agenda by presenting sexism and patriarchy as the nearly exclusive domain of the Muslim Other.⁹⁸ However, this representation of Muslim men can also be seen in a wider section of the political spectrum. In Germany, such stereotypical images have a long history that is rooted partly in Germany's colonial history, as well as in its National Socialist past and the subsequent division of Germany into two states. According to Katherine Pratt-Ewing, this 'troubled history' has led to a preoccupation with maintaining the country's democratic self-image, and gender equality is represented in the constitution as one of the main ideological sites for the articulation of democratic values.⁹⁹

One particular incident that led to a mainstreaming of negative stereotypes of Muslim men among the German public was the previously mentioned episode that took place on New Year's Eve 2015 in Cologne, when groups of young men sexually assaulted and robbed women and girls.

Every day, women and homosexuals in particular are oppressed, innocently convicted and killed in Islamic countries. Due to the mass migration from these countries, this way of thinking is being imported into our country. . . . The leading media keep utterly silent about sexual assaults by perpetrators from the immigrant milieu nor do they point out their real cause: the misogynistic cultural origins of these young, single men, who have come as pseudo-refugees in the past two years and who have led to the explosion in rape statistics in Western Europe.¹⁰⁰

Additionally, the group warned that asylum-seekers bring their aberrant world-views and values to Germany, thereby posing a threat to German

97 Christina Ho, 'Muslim women's new defenders: women's rights, nationalism and Islamophobia in contemporary Australia', *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol. 30, no. 4, 2007, 290–8.

98 Farris and Rottenberg, 'Introduction: fighting feminism'.

99 Katherine Pratt Ewing, *Stolen Honor: Stigmatizing Muslim Men in Berlin* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press 2008), 5.

100 IBD North Rhine-Westphalia, 'Gedenken an die Opfer des islamischen Patriarchats', 26 November 2017, archived version available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20200203170518/https://identitaere-nrw.de/2017/11/26/gedenken-an-die-opfer-des-islamischen-patriarchats> (viewed 23 March 2021).

women who become the potential victims of these 'rapist' Muslim newcomers.

The same arguments about male asylum-seekers and Muslims can be found in documents published by the NPD:

The assaults committed by Arab, Turkish and North African men against women have long been the order of the day throughout the country. . . . Owing to mass immigration, not only are foreign conflicts imported into Germany, but also a completely alien image of women. In the countries of origin of many immigrants, women have to submit to men; therefore, many immigrants regard German women as fair game.¹⁰¹

It is assumed that immigrant and Muslim men commit sex crimes because of the values inherent in their religion. The NPD even published a brochure on Islam in which it asked whether Islam belongs in Germany. In a section about the position of women in Islam, the NPD concluded that the oppression of women contradicts gender equality and proves how greatly Muslim and German world-views differ. The JN, too, links increased sexual violence against women and children to immigration, and points to refugees from the Balkans, Africa and Arab countries as the perpetrators.

The far-right organizations studied here systematically construct negative images of male asylum-seekers and Muslims based on their cultural origin, presenting them as a threat to German women, German society and German values. Although Jörg Meuthen, the national spokesman of the AfD, and IBD Bayern condemn sex crimes in general, regardless of the origin of the perpetrator, it is striking that male Muslim immigrants are held responsible for all gendered violence against women in Germany.¹⁰²

These far-right organizations draw a clear dividing line regarding cultural origins and religious affiliations. The social identity category 'male' is not presented in isolation from 'cultural origins'. Dietze refers to such representations as ethnosexism or the culturalization of gender, arguing that someone has a problematic or backward sexuality because of his or her cultural origin so that cultural origin is regarded as the crucial explanatory factor.¹⁰³ The

101 Ronny Zasowk, 'Unsere Frauen sind kein Freiwild!', 9 June 2017, available on the NPD website at <https://npd.de/2017/06/unsere-frauen-sind-kein-freiwild> (viewed 23 March 2021).

102 AfD, 'Wer schützt endlich unsere Frauen?', 9 February 2017, available to Facebook users only (copies available on request to the authors) on the AfD Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/alternativfuerde/posts/1390079777689024> (viewed 24 August 2020); IBD, 'Identitärer Protest in Traunstein (Bayern)!', 24 April 2016, archived version available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20200930165139/https://blog.identitaere-bewegung.de/identitaerer-protest-in-traunstein-bayern> (viewed 23 March 2021).

103 Gabriele Dietze, 'Ethnosexismus: Sex-Mob-Narrative um die Kölner Sylvesternacht', *Movements: Journal für kritische Migrations- und Grenzregimeforschung*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2016, 177–86.

concept of 'ethnosexism' aims to show how gender and cultural origin are closely interwoven, and how their intersection may lead to new forms of discrimination.

The gender images in these far-right discourses imply that other cultures, Islam in particular, are inherently sexist, misogynistic, primitive, gender-unequal and generally inferior. Germany, by contrast, is presented as a gender-equal and generally superior country. Indeed, the AfD emphasizes gender equality and women's right to self-determination as important German achievements and values.¹⁰⁴ Strikingly, the discourses examined for this study imply a stereotypical and generalized view of patriarchy, misogyny, gender-based violence and homophobia, as these phenomena are solely ascribed to Muslim men.

Drawing such implicit distinctions between 'us' and 'them', or 'our(s)' and 'their(s)', is typical of national populist movements. As described by Rogers Brubaker, the opposition is constructed between insiders — 'people like us' — and outsiders who threaten our way of life.¹⁰⁵ There are also internal outsiders who, 'even when they are citizens of the state, are not seen as belonging to the nation'.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, in right-wing populist rhetoric there is a nationalization of gender equality, in the sense that it is defined as a 'unique national', but also 'a European value'.¹⁰⁷ Gender inequality, on the other hand, is defined as being 'their' problem. Furthermore, Muslim women are constructed as victims, whereas western women are threatened with sexual assaults by Muslim men.¹⁰⁸

Images of Muslim women

Discourses about the oppression of Muslim women are in use well beyond the far right. There have been heated debates in Europe over the banning of the Muslim headscarf (hijab), and a law was passed by the French National Assembly in 2004 that made it illegal to wear it in public schools. The discourse surrounding such policies 'is often framed in terms of a defence of the rights of Muslim women against the patriarchal order'.¹⁰⁹ As pointed out by Martin Reisigl and Ruth Wodak, the Muslim headscarf

104 AfD, 'Einer der Gründe, weswegen muslimische Männer Frauen vergewaltigten', available to Facebook users only (copies available on request to the authors) at www.facebook.com/alternativ fuerde (viewed 6 February 2019).

105 Rogers Brubaker, 'Between nationalism and civilizationism: the European populist moment in comparative perspective', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 40, no. 8, 2017, 1191–226 (1192).

106 Ibid.

107 Ibid., 1203.

108 Ibid.

109 Freedman, 'Women, Islam and rights in Europe', 29.

serves as a collective symbol that is open to several interpretations, including the reading as a symbol of sexist oppression of Islamic women, as a symbol of the acceptance of this male suppression by the suppressed, and, in general, as a symbol of the cultural and religious difference of Moslems.¹¹⁰

This concern about Muslim women is also seen in far-right discourses.¹¹¹ In the presentation of Muslim women, their inferior status vis-à-vis men is highlighted, as symbolized through their use of headscarves or full-body veils like burkas and niqabs. The far-right organizations' representation of such clothing plays a crucial role in the construction of a certain image of Islam. The AfD in particular is concerned about Muslim veils as symbols of gender inequality. Former party leader Gauland states that 'the headscarf . . . stands for the oppression and inferiority of women. It is thus diametrically opposed to the values of our Christian-occidental culture. . . . Headscarves as a form of veiling are as little a part of Germany as Islam itself.' Furthermore, he regards Muslim headscarves as an 'alien and backward symbol'.¹¹² Thus, the party uses Muslim headscarves to prove how much Muslim culture differs from German values, which include gender equality and women's right to self-determination. Muslim women are constructed as oppressed, demeaned victims of their misogynistic religion.

These far-right organizations use these arguments regarding gender equality and a woman's right to self-determination to call for a ban on the Muslim headscarf. In this way, they present themselves as progressive saviours of oppressed Muslim women who need to be liberated from religiously and culturally based rules and regulations. Islam is portrayed as misogynistic, backwards and traditional, whereas German culture is presented as gender-equal, emancipated and superior.¹¹³

Additionally, Muslim veils take on great symbolic meaning in far-right discourses, embodying the misogynistic, backwards evil that threatens western civilization. Conflicts about values, cultures and religion are projected on to the female body, which becomes the locus of power struggles. Furthermore, veiled Muslim women become the symbol of the ultimate Other, presented as a homogeneous group because additional social categories of identification like social class or education are overlooked.¹¹⁴

110 Martin Reisigl and Ruth Wodak, *Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetorics of Racism and Antisemitism* (London and New York: Routledge 2001), 26.

111 Ho, 'Muslim women's new defenders'.

112 Alexander Gauland, 'Kopftücher gehören nicht in Erziehungsstätten', 29 November 2016, available on the AfD website at www.afd.de/gauland-kopftuecher-gehorenenicht-in-erziehungsstaetten (viewed 23 March 2021).

113 Ina Kerner, 'Alles intersektional? Zum Verhältnis von Rassismus und Sexismus', *Feministische Studien*, vol. 27, no. 1, 2009, 36–50.

114 Ruth Wodak, *Politik mit der Angst: Zur Wirkung rechtspopulistischer Diskurse* (Vienna and Hamburg: Edition Konturen 2016).

Conservative gender views and instrumental support of women's rights

The peculiar juxtaposition of conservative attitudes when it comes to classic gender equality policies with, at the same time, more liberal rhetoric regarding gender equality is typical not just of the German far right but also of the far right in other European countries.¹¹⁵ Gender roles and family politics are issues through which populist radical-right parties can 'showcase the core elements of their ideology'.¹¹⁶ Even though they support women's rights, these parties also very explicitly embrace traditional family structures and strongly oppose contemporary forms of feminism that support same-sex marriage, reproductive rights and gender ideology.¹¹⁷ In this sense, there is a tension between what might seemingly appear as liberal positions and more conservative ones when it comes to family politics.¹¹⁸

When we examine the manoeuvring of the German far-right organizations between using women's rights arguments against Islam on the one hand, and supporting traditional gender roles on the other, it seems that they have a hard time finding a rightful place in the continuum between liberalism and conservatism. Germany's far-right parties appear to have a more instrumental take on the issue of gender equality than, say, right-wing populist parties in Scandinavia, where gender equality is a value that is explicitly embraced.¹¹⁹ It seems that it is convenient for German far-right parties to draw on the gender-equality argument when positioning their policies against Muslims and Islam whereas, in their more general family policy, the traditional emphasis is more pronounced. When unpacking the specific women's rights that they support, there are some arguments common to all five organizations. One is that women should not be seen as free game: they have the right to feel safe when walking through the streets at night, and they have the right to wear short dresses. Furthermore, they have the right to receive support from society in their role as mothers. However, women can also take part in the battle. At a demonstration by the IBD in 2018, women were in the front line shouting 'We are the true feminists!'¹²⁰ But the content of this feminism is to protect women from the hordes of foreign men who threaten women's security, and to protect the value and

115 Spierings and Zaslove, 'Conclusion: dividing the populist radical right between "liberal nativism" and traditional conceptions of gender'.

116 Niels Spierings, 'Why gender and sexuality are both trivial and pivotal in populist radical right politics', in Dietze and Roth (eds), *Right-Wing Populism and Gender*, 41–58 (52).

117 Dietze and Roth, 'Right-wing populism and gender', 7.

118 Brubaker, 'Between nationalism and civilizationism', 1202.

119 Meret and Siim, 'Gender, populism and politics of belonging'.

120 Maria Fiedler, 'Rechte Schwestern ganz vorn', *Der Tagesspiegel*, 28 February 2018, available at www.tagesspiegel.de/themen/agenda/frauen-bei-der-identitaeren-bewegung-rechte-schwestern-ganz-vorn/21005940.html (viewed 23 March 2021).

respect of women who take care of children and the household. In the blog *Radikal Feminin*, this feminism is at the same time defined as anti-feminism to demonstrate that the traditional roles of men and women are absolutely not outdated.¹²¹

Therefore, when we return to the research question set out at the beginning of this article, it becomes evident that these parties manage the tension between support for women's rights and traditional family policies by proposing their own definition of what support for women's rights means. In addition to an ideology centred around the protection of women's safety and women's roles as housewives and mothers, this is defined along ethnonationalist lines: it is a celebration of the German woman. By emphasizing supposedly naturally endowed, biologically based gender roles, the German far right strengthens traditional female roles like those of mother, housewife and caregiver. Moreover, these organizations legitimize their political aim of restricting immigration by referring to security measures held to be necessary because of the alleged threat emanating from male Muslims. Inherent in this argumentation is an ethnonationalist view: German culture is presented as superior when it comes to women's rights, while Islam and non-western cultures are portrayed as primitive, misogynistic, patriarchal and inferior. Muslim immigrants bring with them their own alien, gender-unequal values to Germany. References to Christianity are here used as part of a civilizationist discourse on the backwardness of Islam, in which the underlying argument is that Christian-Occidental culture is threatened by Islamization. Evidently what is at stake here is not a belonging to Christianity in itself. Rather, as Brubaker aptly puts it, it is 'a matter of belonging rather than believing, a way of defining "us" in relation to "them" . . . Crudely put, if "they" are Muslim, then "we" must, in some sense, be Christian.'¹²² The rhetorical use these parties make of Christianity, as Brubaker argues, is cultural rather than religious; likewise, the support for women's rights can similarly be seen as a cultural act rather than a feminist one.

By presenting Muslims from non-western cultures as a threat to German women and values, far-right groups aim to prevent them from settling in Germany. Given the overlapping discourses on gender and immigration, these far-right organizations position themselves in politically disputed issues about cultures and values. By doing so, they seek to appeal to voters and gain political power.


Our analysis of the AfD, the NPD and the IBD reveals slight differences with regard to political orientation and how extreme their political views are. Even though the NPD is directly linked historically to the NSDAP

121 For *Radikal feminin*, see its video 'Erstes Video: Frauen und der Kinderwunsch', 18 February 2018, available to *Facebook* users only (copies available by request to the authors) at www.facebook.com/radikalfeminin (homepage only viewed 5 April 2021).

122 Brubaker, 'Between nationalism and civilizationism', 1199.

(National Socialist German Workers' Party) and the AfD is a more current party with a much broader agenda that has over a short period of time become the third-strongest party in Germany, the AfD and the NPD construct quite similar gender images and have many common political demands when it comes to family policies. Furthermore, both the AfD and the NPD seem more moderate than their youth groups, which take more radical stands. This can probably be explained by their different tasks and legal statuses. Political parties like the AfD and the NPD depend on voter support, while the JA, the JN and the IBD primarily look to appeal to young adults.

The German far right supports women's rights in order to promote anti-immigration positions, while at the same time it generally holds conservative views on gender, a situation that parallels trends seen in similar parties and organizations in other European countries.¹²³ Like some other far-right parties in Europe, Germany's far-right parties and movements exaggerate cultural differences to draw a dividing line, especially regarding Muslims, who are often explicitly presented as a threat. They present German culture from a Eurocentric perspective and as superior, emphasizing the view that different cultures are basically incompatible. Despite this ethnonationalist position, there are in general many similarities between the views of German far-right parties and organizations on gender differences and family policies and those of other religious and conservative groupings. Further research is needed into the links between these different political and religious factions and their views on the same gendered policy issues.

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123 Akkerman, 'Gender and the radical right in Western Europe'; Akkerman and Hage-
lund, "'Women and children first!'"